

Jordan steps up efforts to provide for basic needs of 10m living under virus curfew

Author:

Tue, 2020-03-24 01:26

AMMAN: The Jordanian government on Monday announced a series of programs to help ease conditions for 10 million people living under a round-the-clock coronavirus curfew.

Minister of media affairs, Amjad Adaileh, said pharmacies had been allowed to make free home deliveries of medicines, along with bread and water, and bakeries had been given the green light to restart work from Tuesday morning. Through the initiatives, more of which will be introduced over the coming days, officials are hoping to prevent a repeat of the panic buying witnessed in supermarkets before the curfew was imposed on Saturday.

Jordan currently has 127 confirmed cases of the COVID-19 disease.

Around 70,000 students have begun distance learning using a curriculum broadcast on Jordan's sports satellite station as well as online.

Government officials expected the curfew to remain in place for some time and appealed for Jordanians to adjust their lifestyles appropriately.

Samar Muhareb, director of the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) legal aid organization, told Arab News that the government's plan of supplying basic humanitarian needs was necessary due to the large number of people affected.

"But from our experience in dealing with the Syrian crisis, after you deal with basic needs you need to address other needs or else you will be faced with social unrest.

"All of sudden you will find problems of people with aching teeth, or smoking addicts that have run out of cigarettes, and this might turn normally peaceful people into beasts if these issues are not dealt with."

Muhareb pointed out that the Jordanian government needed to be transparent with the public over dealing with the outbreak.

SPEEDREAD

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"In an emergency you begin with providing emergency protection and support and after protection you need to work on the need to identify the needs and begin a distribution plan that can help address the public's need to cope

with the long-term emergency,” she added.

It was only a matter of time before “the government must open up the banks and get money into people’s hands,” Muhareb said.

Linda Al-Kalash, executive director of Tamkeen for legal aid and human rights, told Arab News: “I hope the government doesn’t plan to provide cash or other support only for Jordanian citizens.

“There are 3 million people who are non-Jordanians including foreign laborers, refugees, and Palestinians without citizenship that live in the country and are equally affected by this epidemic.”



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Former Lebanese minister May Chidiac tests positive for coronavirus
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[Former Lebanese minister May Chidiac tests positive for coronavirus](#)

Tue, 2020-03-24 01:05

BEIRUT: Former Lebanese minister May Chidiac said she has tested positive for the coronavirus and is undergoing treatment after returning from France last

week.

“After I returned from the French capital, Paris, last week, I had some symptoms similar to the symptoms of the coronavirus infection, so I immediately moved into home quarantine,” her media office said in a statement on Facebook.

The statement also said that Chidiac underwent medical examinations at Hotel Dieu Hospital last Saturday to confirm the cause of the symptoms.

“The results appeared on Monday and they were positive, so they confirmed that I had coronavirus. Then I went to the hospital immediately for treatment. I note that my condition is not critical, and I will soon join the list of people recovering from the coronavirus,” the statement added.

Chidiac, also a former journalist and political presenter, survived an assassination attempt on Sept. 25, 2005. She was appointed minister of state for administrative development in former prime minister Saad Hariri’s final cabinet in 2019.



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Israel right-wing parties boycott parliament re-opening

Author:

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Mon, 2020-03-23 20:58

JERUSALEM: Israeli right-wing parties backing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu boycotted the re-opening of parliament Monday to protest what they called the "dictatorial" conduct of their centrist rivals.

The dramatic move came after a year of political turmoil that saw three inconclusive elections, and as Netanyahu has imposed strict legal and security measures to deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party accused the centrist Blue and White, led by ex-military chief Benny Gantz, of breaching standard practice in parliament, the Knesset, following March 2 elections.

The row centered on whether Gantz would use his bloc's slight majority of lawmakers to shape the composition of a powerful parliamentary committee.

Noting the "severe health crisis" – with 1,442 confirmed coronavirus cases in Israel – Likud accused Blue and White of "hate-driven, dictatorial and destructive conduct."

The election early this month saw the anti-Netanyahu parties claim a narrow lead of 62 seats.

Right-wing and ultra-Orthodox factions that back the caretaker premier claimed 58.

Gantz was last week tasked with forming a government, something that had proved impossible following the last two votes given deep divisions within the anti-Netanyahu camp.

There was no guarantee Gantz would fare better this time.

Monday's spat centered on the key arrangements committee, which is responsible for forming other parliamentary committees.

When the new Knesset was sworn in last Monday, lawmakers failed to agree on the committee's composition, which is traditionally negotiated among different Knesset factions.

But Blue and White declared it would put the issue to a majority vote.

Knesset speaker Yuli Edelstein, a Likud member and Netanyahu ally, scheduled the vote for Monday.

Hours before the chamber was due to re-open, Likud announced its boycott, saying it would not take part in the "disgraceful process."

Gantz's bloc voted despite the boycott, creating an arrangements committee that will see Knesset business move forward, including the formation of a new body to tackle the coronavirus.

Gantz accused Netanyahu of trying to "paralyze the Knesset," in a speech to a near empty chamber on Monday.

Netanyahu has repeatedly called for Gantz to join him in a unity government, with the premier's job rotating between them, and President Reuven Rivlin has backed such calls amid the pandemic.

Israel has imposed severe restrictions to contain coronavirus, including banning non-essential movements.

Netanyahu had also enlisted the Shin Bet internal security agency to track possible virus carriers through their mobile phones – without a court order. That move triggered outrage over alleged national security over-reach, with the supreme court ruling last week such surveillance could not go ahead without Knesset oversight.

The committee tasked with overseeing the Shin Bet, the foreign and defense committee, was scheduled to be formed in the coming days.

A dispute also escalated over the powerful job of Knesset speaker.

Likud has argued that its member and Netanyahu loyalist Yuli Edelstein should remain as speaker until a new government is formed.

Blue and White asked the supreme court to weigh in. On Monday, judges told Edelstein he had two days to schedule a vote for a new speaker.

Edelstein rejected what he described as the court's "ultimatum," saying it was not the role of judges to set the Knesset agenda.

Blue and White in a statement warned Edelstein that he would be "shamefully remembered" for defying the court.

Netanyahu is also facing criminal corruptions charges, allegations he denies, but which could soon leave him vulnerable: MPs who oppose him have backed legislation that would bar anyone under criminal indictment from serving as prime minister.



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Netanyahu challenger Gantz chosen to form new Israeli government
Netanyahu accused of exploiting virus crisis

[Algeria imposes curfew in capital](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Mon, 2020-03-23 18:52

TUNIS: Algeria will impose a curfew to combat the coronavirus in the capital Algiers from 7pm-7am and a full lockdown in the town of Blida, center of the worst outbreak in the country, with both measures starting on Tuesday and lasting for 10 days.

The measures, to be enforced by the army, were announced in a statement by the presidency on Monday and residents of Blida will be able to receive food and other staples by delivery, it said.



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[Gaza virus cases attended conference in Pakistan](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Mon, 2020-03-23 15:59

GAZA: Gaza's first two confirmed coronavirus patients attended a conference with 250,000 Muslims in Pakistan last month that went ahead contrary to government advice, an official and family members said Monday.

Pakistani authorities had urged the cancelation of the five-day Tablighi Ijtema congregation, or Tablighi Jamaat in Arabic, hosted annually near Lahore.

But organizers from the conservative Sunni Muslim evangelical movement ignored government advice to postpone.

It was unclear where the two Palestinians – who returned to Gaza from Pakistan via Egypt earlier this month – contracted COVID-19.

But a statement from the Palestinian embassy in Islamabad said the two attended the event which took place “despite the warning of the Pakistani authorities against conferences.”

Omar Al-Tabatibi said his 79-year-old grandfather Mohammed and friend Amer Doghmosh had attended the Lahore event.

Previous statements from health officials had misidentified the men as being between 30 and 40.

“My grandfather learnt about the conference by chance from a friend while he was in Pakistan so he wanted to attend,” Tabatibi said.

After returning from Pakistan his grandfather stayed several days in Egypt before taking the long journey overland to Gaza, Tabatibi said.

“Maybe my grandfather caught corona in Egypt and not Pakistan, no one knows,” he added.

He said the family had already been subjected to abuse on social media and in person since the news broke.

“My little brother went to a games shop today and the owner told him to go home as his grandfather has corona.”

Gaza's health ministry said the two men were placed in quarantine immediately after crossing into Gaza and did not mix with the population.

It described them as being in stable condition.

Omar said his grandfather has pre-existing conditions of high blood pressure

and diabetes.

“I spoke to him last night on the phone and he told me he was ok and is recovering,” he said.

The United Nations has warned that a COVID-19 outbreak in Gaza could be disastrous, given the high poverty rates and weak health system in the coastal strip under Israeli blockade since 2007.



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Will the Gaza Strip be able to cope with a COVID-19 outbreak?