

# Ghost town Beirut: Troops patrol streets in virus curfew crackdown

Mon, 2020-03-23 03:24

BEIRUT: Troops patrolled deserted city streets and army helicopters circled Beirut on Sunday as Lebanese people were warned to "prepare for the worst" from the coronavirus outbreak.

Soldiers set up roadblocks and military aircraft broadcast loudspeaker messages urging people to obey official instructions and stay at home as the number of virus cases rose by 18 to 248.

The crackdown was necessary because "some people are not complying with the necessary preventive measures to protect their relatives, families, friends, community, and even their neighbors," Interior Minister Mohammed Fahmi said.

"We must save ourselves, our families and our country before it is too late. We must prepare for the worst while maintaining hope and faith that we will overcome this crisis by doing the right thing."

Saudi Arabia reported 119 new virus cases on Sunday, raising the total to 511. Health Ministry spokesman Mohammed Abdelali said 72 of the new patients were Turkish, and were under quarantine in Makkah after being in direct contact with another Turkish national who was already infected.

More than 4,000 people were under quarantine, Abdelali said. "We are starting to see more cases linked to interactions ... we advise everyone to stay home."

In the UAE, Emirates airline initially said it was halting all passenger operations by Wednesday, but said later that some flights would continue as long as borders remained open and there was passenger demand. Cargo flights will also operate.

"We find ourselves in a situation where we cannot viably operate passenger services until countries reopen their borders, and travel confidence returns," chairman Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum said.

Three luxury hotels operated by the developer Emaar in the Downtown Dubai area, which is popular with tourists, have stopped taking bookings. The UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, announced an additional economic stimulus of 16 billion dirhams, bringing the total to 126 billion dirhams (\$34.3 billion).

Elsewhere in the Gulf, Oman on Sunday banned public gatherings, limited staffing at state entities, closed currency exchanges and banned the publication or distribution of newspapers and magazines.

Kuwait imposed a partial curfew and extended a work suspension for two weeks. Some supermarkets are allowing only 50 shoppers at a time.

Qatar, where 481 coronavirus cases have been reported, has introduced checkpoints to enforce a ban on public gatherings. There are fears for the health of tens of thousands of migrant workers under quarantine, effectively locked into a densely populated district southwest of Doha, known as the Industrial Area. No one is allowed to leave.

Amnesty International warned that cramped conditions there were putting the workers at risk, and called for “access to health care, including preventive care and treatment for everyone affected, without discrimination.”

In Iran, the regional hotspot of the virus outbreak with more than 21,000 cases of infection and 1,685 deaths, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said his country would never accept medical aid from “American liars, manipulators, impudent and greedy ... charlatans.”

Iran, which is struggling to contain the outbreak, has so far received medical equipment or financial aid from Azerbaijan, Britain, China, France, Germany, Japan, Qatar, Russia, Turkey and the UAE.



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Lebanon told to 'prepare for the worst' as virus cases rise  
Army patrols Malaysian streets after coronavirus spike

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# [UAE suspending all passenger flights to curb spread of coronavirus](#)

Author:

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DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates announced on Monday it will temporarily suspend all passenger and transit flights amid the novel coronavirus outbreak.

The Emirati authorities "have decided to suspend all inbound and outbound passenger flights and the transit of airline passengers in the UAE for two weeks as part of the precautionary measures taken to curb the spread of the COVID-19," reported the official state news agency, WAM.

It said the decision – which is subject to review in two weeks – will take effect in 48 hours, adding: "Cargo and emergency evacuation flights would be exempt."

The UAE, whose international airports in Abu Dhabi and Dubai are major hubs, announced on Friday its first two deaths from the COVID-19 disease, having reported more than 150 cases so far.

Monday's announcement came hours after Dubai carrier Emirates announced it would suspend all passenger flights by March 25.

But the aviation giant then reversed its decision, saying it "received requests from governments and customers to support the repatriation of travelers" and will continue to operate passenger flights to 13 destinations. Emirates had said it will continue to fly to the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Australia, South Africa, the United States and Canada.

"We continue to watch the situation closely, and as soon as things allow, we will reinstate our services," said the airline's chairman and CEO, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum.

Gulf countries have imposed various restrictions to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus pandemic, particularly in the air transport sector.

The UAE has stopped granting visas on arrival and forbidden foreigners who are legal residents but are outside the country from returning.



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Emirates suspends flights to more cities over coronavirus fears, closing routes to 111 destinations  
Emirates asks pilots and cabin crew to take unpaid leave

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## [Iraq extends curfew in Baghdad to contain disease](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-03-23 01:32

BAGHDAD: Iraq's government has extended a curfew on travel in and out of Baghdad until March 28 as part of strict measures to prevent the coronavirus from spreading, it said in a statement.

It said it had also decided to extend a ban on all inbound and outbound flights from the country's airports until March 28.

Under the curfew imposed on March 17 no persons can travel into or out of Baghdad.

At least 230 cases of coronavirus have been confirmed so far in Iraq, the Health Ministry said on Sunday, and 20 people have died.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Jordan earlier ordered all shops to close and all people to stay off the streets until at least Tuesday, when it plans to announce specific times for shopping.

Authorities have already arrested 392 people accused of violating the curfew, said Amer Sartawi, a spokesman for the Public Security Directorate.

He warned that anyone violating the orders would face legal action.

Several countries in the Middle East have closed schools, universities and nonessential businesses.

Many are threatening fines or jail time to those caught violating the decrees. Egypt announced that all museums and archaeological sites, including the famed pyramids at Giza, would be closed from Monday until the end of March.

## **BACKGROUND**

**At least 230 cases of coronavirus have been confirmed so far in Iraq, the Health Ministry said on Sunday, and 20 people have died.**

Mostafa Waziri, head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said authorities would disinfect all sites during the closure.

Egypt also announced the temporary suspension of Friday prayers and other congregations in all mosques.

The Coptic Orthodox Church canceled all services and wedding parties, and said funeral processions would be limited to family members of the deceased.

The most populous Arab nation is home to more than 100 million people.

Cairo, the capital, is one of the most densely populated cities on earth, with more than 20 million residents. Most people only experience minor flu-like symptoms from the coronavirus and recover within a few weeks, but the virus is highly contagious and can be spread by those who appear well.

It can cause severe illness, including pneumonia, in some patients, particularly the elderly and those with underlying health problems.



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Will the ravaging disease slow world's conflicts – or intensify them? Lebanon told to 'prepare for the worst' as virus cases rise

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## [French charity MSF deploys treatment center in Iran](#)

Mon, 2020-03-23 01:25

PARIS: Medical charity MSF is setting up a 50-bed emergency center to treat severe COVID-19 cases in Iran, the French organization said.

A team of nine MSF intensive care medics will staff the facility on the grounds of the Amin hospital in the central province of Isfahan, the charity said, as Iran grapples with the worst outbreak of coronavirus in the region. "The size of the COVID-19 epidemic in Iran is particularly worrying," MSF said.

France is already contributing to a package of medical aid for Iran alongside Britain and Germany, amid signs that the global fight against the coronavirus could help ease some diplomatic tensions.

In recent days, Tehran freed a French academic in a prisoner swap that also saw the release of an Iranian engineer held in France.

Iran on Sunday announced 129 new deaths, raising to 1,685 the official death toll in one of the worst-hit countries along with Italy and China.

Health Ministry spokesman Kianouche Jahanpour said more than 1,028 new cases had been recorded in the past 24 hours and a total of 21,638 people had now tested positive for the virus.

The US offer to help Iran in its fight against the new coronavirus pandemic is strange, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a televised speech on Sunday.

Washington has offered humanitarian assistance to the Middle Eastern country most affected by the coronavirus.

Tensions between the two countries have been running high since 2018, when US President Donald Trump exited Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with six world powers and reimposed sanctions that have crippled the Iranian economy.

"Several times Americans have offered to help us to fight the pandemic. That is strange because you face shortages in America. Also you are accused of creating this virus," said Khamenei, an anti-US hard-liner who has the final say in Iran.

## NUMBER

**1,685 – Iran on Sunday announced 129 new deaths, raising to 1,685 the official death toll in one of the worst-hit countries along with Italy and China.**

"I do not know whether it is true. But when there is such an allegation, can a wise man trust you and accept your help offer? ... You could be giving medicines to Iran that spread the virus or cause it to remain permanently." Frictions increased when Trump ordered a US drone strike that killed the top commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Qassem Soleimani, on Jan. 3. Iran retaliated by hitting US targets in Iraq on Jan. 8.

"Our No. 1 enemy is America. It is the most wicked, sinister enemy of Iran ... its leaders are terrorists ... Liars and charlatans," said Khamenei. Iranian authorities have blamed US sanctions for hampering its efforts to curb the outbreak and President Hassan Rouhani has urged Americans to call on their government to lift sanctions as Iran fights the coronavirus.

China, a party to Iran's nuclear deal, has urged the US to lift sanctions on Iran immediately amid Tehran's response to the coronavirus outbreak.

But the US sent Iran a blunt message this week: The spread of the virus will not save it from US sanctions that are choking off its oil revenues and isolating its economy.

Khamenei, who canceled his annual speech for Persian new year from Mashhad on March 20 because of the outbreak, said Iran would triumph over the virus.

Iran "has the capability to overcome any kind of crisis and challenges, including the coronavirus outbreak," said Khamenei, who called on people to stay at home. While many Iranians avoided traveling during the Persian new year holiday, police said millions have defied warnings issued by officials to avoid unnecessary trips aimed at curbing the spread of the virus.

The office of Tehran's governor said all shopping centers will be closed in the capital from Sunday.

"Only pharmacies and shops that provide essential goods will remain open in Tehran," Iranian state TV reported.



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[Medical charity MSF](#)

Will the ravaging disease slow world's conflicts – or intensify them? New curbs in West Bank as first Gaza virus cases confirmed

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## [Will the ravaging disease slow world's conflicts – or intensify them?](#)

Mon, 2020-03-23 01:22

NEW YORK: Syria, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, the Sahel ... with the great powers focused intently on the COVID-19 virus, will armed conflicts across the world decrease in severity or intensify? Experts as well as diplomats at the UN say there is a serious risk of the latter.

For guerrilla fighters and extremist groups, "it's a clear godsend," said Bertrand Badie, a specialist in international relations at France's Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po).

When the “powerful become powerless,” he said, one can see “the revenge of the weak over the strong.”

In recent days, some 30 Malian soldiers were killed in an attack in northern Mali blamed on terrorists, without drawing any sharp reaction from the Security Council.

In Libya, and Syria’s Idlib region – the object of intense diplomatic attention before the coronavirus stole the spotlight – fighting continues. Evoking the “potentially devastating impact of #Covid-19 in #Idlib and elsewhere in Syria,” the UN undersecretary-general for political affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, called on Twitter for all parties to show restraint. “If anyone – incredibly – still needed a reason to stop the fighting there,” she added, “this is it.”

Up to now, these countries have not been afflicted by Covid-19 on the scale seen in China, South Korea or Europe. But the virus carries the potential, once it reaches into poor and conflict-ridden countries, of having a devastating impact.

In the absence of concerted assistance from abroad, the UN fears “millions” could die.

The pandemic will not necessarily favor any particular group of belligerents, one diplomat noted, because the ravaging disease has been “uncontrollable.” “The pandemic could lead to a worsening of conflicts, with the risk of exacerbating the humanitarian situation and population movements,” he said. But the pandemic might also sap the will of the belligerents and their ability to fight in coming months, some experts said.

“Throwing their troops into battle will expose both states and violent nonstate groups to contamination, and thus to potentially catastrophic losses of human life,” said Robert Malley, president of the Washington-based International Crisis Group.

He believes that the virus “will very certainly diminish the capacity and will of states and of the international system – the UN, regional organizations, refugees, peacekeeping forces – to dedicate themselves to the resolution or prevention of conflicts.”

It will also throw up a whole set of new obstacles, he said, complicating access to conflict zones, making it harder to organize negotiations in neutral countries, and diverting financial investments to the fight against the coronavirus.

“What government would want to invest in the pursuit of peace in Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, the Sahel or elsewhere when it is facing an economic, social and political crisis almost without precedent?” he asked.

With the news media obsessively focused on Covid-19, Malley said, “these conflicts, however brutal and violent they may be, will for many people become unseen and unheard.”

At the UN, which has been struggling to respond as best it can, diplomats insist that their efforts to monitor regional crises and conflicts will continue, even if the international organization has sharply curbed its schedule of meetings.

“We intend to ensure that #UNSC plays its vital role in maintaining global peace and security,” Britain’s interim ambassador to the UN, Jonathan Allen, wrote on Twitter. “Covid-19 is the major global focus, but we have not forgotten about Syria, Libya, Yemen.”

But Richard Gowan, a New York-based specialist in UN matters, expressed some

doubt.

“Security Council diplomats say that it is hard to get their capitals to focus on UN issues,” he said.

Among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with human rights issues, like Human Rights Watch, concern is growing that whole areas of action are falling by the wayside.

One example: diplomats say the much-awaited and repeatedly delayed publication of a UN summary report on the bombing of hospitals in Syria – originally due at the beginning of the year – is now not expected before April, at the earliest.



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Germany's Angela Merkel in quarantine after meeting doctor who tested positive for coronavirus  
Quake strikes north of Zagreb, damages buildings