

Protests erupt in Jordan after COVID-19 hospital deaths scandal

Via [Reuters](#)

AMMAN (Reuters) – Protests erupted across many of Jordan’s cities and provincial towns against the government’s coronavirus restrictions, a day after oxygen ran out at a state hospital leading to the deaths of at least six COVID-19 patients, witnesses said on Sunday.

Hundreds of people spilled into the streets in defiance of a night curfew in the northern city of Irbid and several other provincial cities including a neighbourhood in the capital and the city of Salt. Protesters also gathered further south in Karak city and the port city of Aqaba.

“Down with the government. We don’t fear coronavirus,” hundreds of youths chanted in Irbid where outrage at the hospital scandal combined with anger over tighter restrictions that include extending a night curfew to stem a major surge of infections driven by a more contagious variant of the virus.

Jordan’s economy has been particularly hard hit by the shutdowns aimed at containing the virus with unemployment surging to a record 24 % and poverty deepening. It witnessed its worst contraction in decades last year.

Demonstrators who blamed the government for worsening economic conditions also called for an end to draconian emergency laws enacted at the start of the pandemic last year used to limit civil and political rights.

Prime Minister Bisher al Khasawneh fired the health minister and said he bore full responsibility for the initial deaths of

six coronavirus patients that exposed gross negligence in the state health system when medical staff failed to act after oxygen ran out for two hours.

King Abdullah visited the hospital in Salt, a city west of the Jordanian capital of Amman, in a move officials said was intended to defuse tensions. Anger with the authorities over worsening living standards, corruption has in the past triggered civil unrest in Jordan.

The authorities detained the hospital head and their aides Saturday evening with officials saying another three deaths could be linked to the rupture in oxygen supplies.

"I am here because of the catastrophe. We want to put on trial those responsible for this and then bring down the government," said Ahmad Hiyari, a demonstrator near Salt hospital among hundreds of angry residents.