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The UK is poised to allow fully vaccinated travelers from the EU and US to avoid quarantine when they arrive in England, according to newspaper reports.

Ministers are expected to discuss the isolation exemption at a Covid Operations meeting on Wednesday, according to the BBC.

But they said a decision on whether to proceed will not necessarily be taken.

Downing Street and the Department for Transport declined to comment on newspaper reports the government would go ahead with the plan.

Since July 19, fully vaccinated UK residents have been allowed to travel to and from countries on the government's amber list without quarantining on their return. However, this right was denied to those who were inoculated outside the UK.

Under new suggested rules, the government will recognize vaccine credentials issued specifically in the EU and US, including the EU's digital COVID-19 certificate.

The travel industry has been pushing for a relaxation of quarantine rules for travelers from the EU and US after completing a trial of checking the vaccination status of passengers.

British Airways, Virgin Atlantic and Heathrow Airport wanted to demonstrate that vaccination status could be checked away from the border and allow safe entry to the UK from countries on the amber list.

The companies said 99 percent of documents were verified correctly during the 10-day trial, which involved about 250 fully-vaccinated participants from the US, the Caribbean and Europe, traveling to Heathrow.

Two passengers had their credentials rejected, the companies said: one because their vaccination was completed less than 14 days before travel, and the other because of a discrepancy between the name on the passport and on the vaccine card.

Under current rules, other countries are granted a "traffic light" status for arrivals - red, amber or green. The vast majority of countries, including the US and many European countries including Spain, Italy and Germany, are on the amber list.

Ennahda calls for dialogue to resolve Tunisia's political crisis

Tunis, Tunisia – Tunisia's largest political party has called for dialogue to resolve the political crisis, changing tact after initially urging MPs and its supporters to protest outside parliament in the capital Tunis on Monday.

In a statement published on Tuesday, the Islamist Ennahda party reiterated that they considered President Saied's decision to suspend parliament and sack the prime minister as "unconstitutional", but took a more conciliatory approach, calling on Saied to reverse the measures.

Tunisia, touted as a success story of the 2010 Arab Spring revolutions, is facing deep political uncertainty after the president froze parliament for 30 days and fired Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi amid rising COVID cases and a faltering economy.

Mechichi on Monday night announced he would hand over responsibility to whomever the president chooses "to avoid any further blockage at a time when the country needs to join forces to get out of this crisis situation on all levels".

Saied's decisions came after anti-government protests took place across the country, prompted by the government's mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis but also rooted in the country's economic stagnation, rising living costs and frustration with a political class embroiled in infighting.

The president's decision was met with jubilation, with tens of thousands of Tunisians hitting the streets across the north African nation. The Ennahda party flags were burnt and the party offices were targeted in some parts of the country.

Initially, Rachid Ghannouchi, the speaker of parliament and leader of Ennahda, called on MPs and supporters to stage a sit-in outside parliament denouncing the president's "coup" after many MPs were denied access to parliament by the army on Monday.

A couple of hundred protesters gathered on Monday; however, the turnout was limited and mixed, with groups there to support the president's decision and others to oppose the move.

"They moved to a position of containment, not opposition as it was in the first place," said Hamza Meddeb, analyst at the Carnegie Middle East Centre, adding that the number of supporters that came out was lower than Ennahda had hoped.

"Confrontation in the streets would be costly and bloody and will delegitimise them so they are choosing political channels but keeping their position to reject the decision," he told Al Jazeera.

On Monday, the president decreed a night-time curfew from 7pm to 6am local time and a ban on gatherings of more than three people, which means that protesters could risk confrontation with security forces. **Aljazeera**

UK spares key workers quarantine as staff shortages bite

The United Kingdom's government has announced it will ease coronavirus quarantine rules for thousands more essential workers in an attempt to end staff shortages that are hobbling parts of the economy.

About 26 million Britons have downloaded a health service phone app that "pings" people to tell them to self-isolate for 10 days if they come into close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19.

With the UK recently recording tens of thousands of new virus cases a day, the system has led to a so-called "pingdemic" during which rates of employee absence for restaurants and a swathe of other businesses have soared and gaps on some supermarket shelves have appeared.

Starting August 16, anyone who has been fully vaccinated will be able to take daily coronavirus tests rather than self-isolating.

Last week, the government said food and transport workers, border staff, police and firefighters could opt for the daily tests.

Late on Monday, it expanded that system to include more jobs including, rubbish collectors and prison staff as well as people working in the armed forces.

The government said 2,000 sites would be set up to meet the increased demand for tests.

One person who has been "pinged" by the app is Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who had to self-isolate after Health Secretary Sajid Javid tested positive this month.

Johnson's 10-day spell in isolation ended at midnight on Monday.

Johnson said he understood people's frustration, but urged them to "stick with the programme."

"We do need to use the tools that we have. Self-isolation is the one that we've got. I urge people to do it," he said.

Israeli defence minister to share findings on NSO with France

Israel's defence minister will share on Wednesday the initial findings from a government assessment of NSO Group exports with France, whose president was allegedly among targets of spyware sold by the private Israeli spyware company.

President Emmanuel Macron's phone was on a list of targets that were possibly under surveillance by Morocco, which used NSO's Pegasus software, according to France's Le Monde newspaper. The French leader has called for an investigation.

Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz's office said he would fly out to meet French counterpart Florence Parly for talks about Lebanon's governance crisis and Iran's nuclear diplomacy.

"He (Gantz) will also update the minister on the topic of NSO," the office said in a statement on Tuesday.

Gantz's ministry, which oversees commercial exports of cyber-surveillance technologies, is part of a high-level task force assessing allegations about Pegasus that were published last week by 17 media organisations, led by the Paris-based non-profit journalism group Forbidden Stories.

The media organisations said Pegasus had been used in attempted and successful hacks of smartphones belonging to journalists, government officials and human rights activists.

NSO has rejected the reporting, saying it was "full of wrong assumptions and uncoroborated theories".

Pegasus is intended for use only by government intelligence and law-enforcement agencies to fight terrorism and crime, the company said.

Israel's top-rated Channel 12 TV news said Gantz would tell his French host that, if the Israeli assessment finds abuse of Pegasus by the Moroccans, they could be cut off from the system.

Israeli officials did not comment on that report. Gantz's ministry and NSO declined to identify countries that own Pegasus.

One Gantz aide told Reuters that it would take "weeks" for the government's NSO assessment to be completed.

Asked if the Defence Ministry might increase oversight of NSO exports, the aide said: "The oversight's fine. There are totally different issues here." The aide would not elaborate. NSO has said it does not know the specific identities of people against whom clients use Pegasus, but that if it receives complaints it can acquire the target lists and unilaterally shut down the software for any clients found to have abused it. **Reuters**

Saudi Arabia to ban citizens who break COVID travel rules from traveling for 3 years

Saudi Arabia will ban its citizens from traveling abroad for 3 years if they break COVID-19 travel rules, the Ministry of Interior announced on Tuesday.

There have been reports of citizens traveling to prohibited countries, according to the Saudi Press Agency, which led authorities to impose a travel ban for 3 years in addition to hefty fines.

The ministry also clarified that the travel ban remains in place for countries with uncontrolled COVID-19 outbreaks and includes direct travel or transits via other countries.

Authorities also warned all travelers to be cautious while traveling, regardless of their destination. People are urged to take extra precautions against the spread of the virus and to avoid unstable areas.

Earlier this month, Saudi Arabia announced it was barring its citizens from direct or indirect travel to the UAE, Ethiopia, and Vietnam without obtaining prior permission, according to a statement from the Kingdom's interior ministry.

Travel is also banned to or transit at a number of other countries including Afghanistan, Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Pakistan, South Africa, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.

Authorities had also announced that starting on August 9, citizens will need two COVID-19 vaccine doses before they can travel outside the Saudi Arabia.

The decision was made based on new waves of infection globally, new mutations, and the "low efficacy of one vaccination dose against these mutations," a ministry statement said. **Alarabiya**

Germany explosion in industrial park kills two, several missing

An explosion in a German industrial park on Tuesday killed at least two people and injured 31, setting off a fierce blaze that sent a pall of smoke over the western city of Leverkusen. Several people were still missing.

Emergency services took three hours to extinguish the fire at the Chempark site, home to chemicals companies Bayer and Lanxess, that flared up after the blast at 9:40 a.m. (0740 GMT), park operator Currenta said.

"My thoughts are with the injured and with loved ones," said Chempark chief Lars Friedrich. "We are still searching for the missing people, but hopes of finding them alive are fading," he added.

Police said five of the 31 injured people were affected seriously enough to need intensive care.

"This is a tragic moment for the city of Leverkusen," said Uwe Richrath, mayor of the city, which lies north of Cologne.

The area and surrounding roads were sealed off for much of the day.

Police told residents living nearby to stay indoors and shut doors and windows in case there were toxic fumes. Currenta said locals should also turn off air conditioning systems while it measured the air around the site for possible toxic gasses.

Chempark's Friedrich said it was not clear what had caused the explosion, which led to a fire starting in a tank containing solvents.

"Solvents were burned during the incident, and we do not know precisely what substances were released," Friedrich added. "We are examining this with authorities, taking samples."

Sirens and emergency alerts on the German civil protection agency's mobile phone app warned citizens of "extreme danger".

Leverkusen is less than 50 kilometer (30 miles) from a region hit last week by catastrophic floods that killed at least 180 people. More than 30 companies operate at the Chempark site in Leverkusen, including Covestro, Bayer, Lanxess and Arlanxeo, according to its website.

Bayer and Lanxess in 2019 sold Chempark operator Currenta to Macquarie Infrastructure and Real Assets for an enterprise value of 3.5 billion euros ($4.12 billion).