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Bahamas Announces 8-Hour Curfew; Most Businesses to Suspend Operations for 11-day Period in Response to Coronavirus

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Freiburg, a city in Germany, under curfew

NASSAU, BAHAMAS — The Bahamas government Thursday announced an eight hour curfew, while businesses, with limited exceptions, have been called upon to suspend their operations for an 11-day period as the country rolled out more measures to deal with the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Prime Minister Dr. Hubert Minnis told a news conference that the new orders, which go into effect from Friday, are designed to save lives.

The move comes less than 24 hours after Governor-General Cornelius A. Smith issued the “proclamation of emergency” giving the Minnis administration “the necessary and emergency powers to aggressively combat the COVID emergency”

Minnis told reporters that the curfew will be imposed from 9.00 pm to 5.am (local time) each night with exceptions approved by the Commissioner of Police.

He mandated that all establishments, institutions, businesses, offices, stores and organizations suspend operations to the general public except for wholesale or retail grocery stores and farmers’ markets; doctors’ offices, hospitals or medical facilities; pharmacies; gas stations; medical supply establishments; hotels; banks; commercial ports and related businesses; airports; laundromats; drive thru or take away food vendors, and construction companies.

The government said that subject to that order, all other establishments, institutions, businesses or offices inclusive of the public service, as may be authorized by the respective permanent secretary, shall work from home and such establishments, institutions, businesses or offices shall maintain only essential staff for the performance of core functions.

Businesses that are exempt will only be allowed to operate between 6.00 am and 5.00 pm and banks will be allowed to remain open from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm.

Prime Minister Minnis also announced that under the new orders, no one can host or attend a private party that includes any person from outside of the immediate household of the house occupant; a recreational or competitive sporting event; a wedding which hosts 10 or more people other than the bride, bridegroom, official witnesses and the marriage officer. The orders also make similar arrangements for a funeral.

Minnis also banned the use of public bus transportation; mail boat, sailing inter-island, except for transport of freight; or inter-island private commercial sea transport that is nonessential.

The orders do not affect the armed forces, waste and sanitation workers, hospital and medical staff; or other sectors encompassing the provision of electronic communications, including print and electronic media.

Additionally, the orders do not prohibit religious or educational instruction, worship or other activity by electronic or virtual means; or prohibit individual attendance at a church for private individual prayer while maintaining social distancing.

Any person, company or organization that contravenes any order given is liable upon summary conviction to a fine not exceeding US\$10,000 or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 18 months or to both.

On Wednesday, Minnis told Parliament that the proclamation of emergency took effect on Tuesday, and that the new emergency measures “we are enacting are to save lives and to protect our country.

“We live in an open, free democratic society. Our freedoms and right are protected by and enshrined in our Constitution. Our Founders included in the Constitution the legal provision to allow the Governor General to make proclamations of emergency.

“The measures we seek to invoke through these regulations derive from the authority bestowed by our supreme civic law,” Minnis said.

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