

# Egyptian circus performer brings lions home

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Sun, 2020-05-03 20:54

CAIRO: The Egyptian government has ordered the shutting down of the National Circus to counter the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Following the closure, Ashraf El-Helw, 26, who belongs to the famous lion taming El-Helw family thought of a new idea to entertain people: He decided to bring his lions home.

El-Helw transported the lions using his own jeep. Once home, he allocated a special space for them to live and performed with them. The performance was shot on video by El-Helw and posted on his official Instagram account.

"The show was easy since I usually hold lots of performances and take part in entertainment shows and pranks that depend on lions. I grew up with lion cubs at home," he said.

Although he now trains his animals at home, El-Helw admits it is not easy.

"Changing the venue was rather hard for the animals because they are used to the circus.

"The family encouraged me to hold an online performance via social media.

However, they did not expect me to be in such good control of the situation because it was the first time to have the lions at home."

When El-Helw posted videos of the home performance he was naturally asked about having lions inside the house. He said it was unsafe for the animals to be in the house "because they need special care and attention and a special way of dealing with them that is different from dealing with household pets."

El-Helw added that he had thought of the idea of performing at home with the lions after becoming bored due to the lockdown. He said he felt the animals were also bored after live performances were halted because of the pandemic.

"I rehearsed many times before the show at home," El-Helw said, adding: "In the beginning, the lions felt the surroundings in the house were strange, but eventually they started interacting with me."

"The family owns about 50 animals," El-Helw said. "When the virus crisis erupted, the family divided the animals into groups. Some of them are in the National Circus while others are in the ranch" on the Cairo-Alexandria desert road.

He said he has decided to hold future performances in the ranch since the venue is better-equipped than his home.

Zaghloul Khedr, a researcher at the Animals Health Institute, shared concern over El-Helw's videos. He said that they could encourage people to buy wild animals and raise them at home, "which is very dangerous."

He added: "It is very hard to trace the trade of wild animals in Egypt since the deals are done behind closed doors and come in various forms and prices."

Khedr said that some animals are sold for thousands of dollars.

He said there were special ranches for breeding tigers and lions and that

some are licensed to sell the big cats internationally in circuses, but not to individuals.

A source in the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture told Arab News that the ministry was the only body authorized to issue licenses for sheltering and breeding wild animals.

According to the ministry's website, the General Authority for Veterinarian Services issues private licenses for wild animal ranches including lions, tigers, and cheetahs. The ranches are licensed following the approval of the environment and interior ministries.

Conditions include sending a special committee from the authority to draft reports on the location of the ranch, which must be 500 meters away from urban communities. Moreover, special committees are set up to examine the ranch in terms of safety rules and regulations and meeting health and environmental standards.

Dina Zulfakkar, an animal rights activist and board member of the Giza Zoo, told journalists that bringing wild animals into homes was a violation of the law. She added that the video posted by El-Helw on social media "gives the wrong impression regarding how dangerous lions can be."

El-Helw started dealing with animals, especially lions, at the age of six when he started taking part in circus rehearsals. He said he ditched a promising career as a footballer for Al-Ahly because of his passion for the circus.

Before he started performing under the big top, El-Helw learned how to deal with animals, how to care for them and also understand their nature.

The El-Helw family has been in the circus business for more than 100 years. Ashraf El-Helw's grandmother, Mahasen, was the first Arab female lion tamer. El-Helw, Egypt's youngest lion tamer, is the grandson of famed lion tamer Mohamed El-Helw who died after being mauled by a lion inside a cage in 1972.



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## [Daesh prisoners riot again in northeast Syria](#)

Author:

Associated Press

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Sun, 2020-05-03 15:52

BEIRUT: Militants from the Daesh group rioted in a northeast Syrian prison Sunday, a month after similar violence at the facility allowed four extremists to escape, an opposition war monitor and a Kurdish activist collective said.

Kurdish forces sent reinforcements to the prison in the eastern Hassakeh province and US military helicopters flew overhead, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, and North Press Agency, a media platform operating in the Kurdish-administered areas. Kurdish authorities currently operate more than two dozen detention facilities scattered across northeastern Syria, holding about 10,000 Daesh fighters. Among the detainees are some 2,000 foreigners whose home countries have refused to repatriate them, including about 800 Europeans.

Further details were not immediately available on the size of the riot, and it was not clear if the unrest was triggered by concerns about the coronavirus's potential spread in the prison.

In late March, two days of riots broke out at the same facility when former Daesh members began knocking down doors and making holes in the walls between cells. Four prisoners escaped but were caught a day later.

The riots were put down by the Kurdish-led, US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces. Afterward, the SDF's top commander Mazloum Abdi urged the home countries of foreign fighters to find a solution for the prisoners. The riot was one of the most serious uprisings by the prisoners since Daesh was defeated a year ago, when the SDF seized control of the last sliver of land controlled by the extremists in eastern Syria.

A resurgence of Daesh attacks in both Syria and Iraq has raised concerns that the militant group is taking advantage of governments absorbed in tackling the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing slide into economic chaos.

Last month, the US-led coalition said it had handed over hygiene and medical supplies to detention facilities across northeastern Syria, such as hand-washing stations, disinfectant wipes, face masks and examination gloves.

One coronavirus death was reported in Kurdish-held areas of Syria in April. The central government in Damascus has registered 43 cases and three deaths.



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## [Jordan lifts all curbs on economic activity in latest easing of lockdown](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sun, 2020-05-03 15:33

AMMAN: Jordan said on Sunday it had lifted all restrictions on economic activity in the latest easing of coronavirus lockdown rules to help jump-start the cash-strapped economy.

Jordan has in the last two weeks been lifting restrictions to allow businesses back to work, but with lower levels of staff and strict social distancing and hygiene guidelines.

Meanwhile, Jordan's cash-strapped economy is expected to contract around 3% in 2020 due to the impact of the coronavirus, the country's finance minister said on Sunday.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), which last March approved a four-year \$1.3 billion programme with the kingdom, had expected Jordan's economy to grow around 2.1% in 2020 then gradually rise in the next few years to 3.3%. "The impact of the big economic blow that hit the local economy has been deep and this will continue," Mohammad Al-Issis said in remarks on state television.



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Jordan to deploy 16 repatriation flights for stranded citizens

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# [Egypt reports 15 military casualties in Sinai recently](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sun, 2020-05-03 13:46

CAIRO: Egypt's military said on Sunday that 15 of its men had died or been wounded in operations in the Sinai Peninsula recently, and that 126 suspected militants had been killed.

The military publishes updates on its operations in Sinai every few months, without giving a specific time frame.

The statement came three days after the military said 10 personnel were killed or wounded in an attack near Bir Al-Abd in North Sinai. Daesh claimed the attack.

The Interior Ministry later said 18 suspected militants had been killed in a shootout near Bir Al-Abd.

Militants loyal to Daesh are active in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula, where Egypt has been battling an insurgency for years.

Human rights organizations accuse Egypt of carrying out extrajudicial executions, forced evictions and collective punishment as part of the crackdown.

The military has denied such accusations, saying it takes the lives of civilians into consideration during operations.



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## [Turkey pouring Syrian militants into Libya, says human rights body](#)

Sat, 2020-05-02 21:10

LONDON: Turkey continues to send Syrian mercenaries to Libya and several have died in clashes with Khalifa Haftar's forces, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Saturday.

The observatory said 26 militants have recently been killed in fighting, bringing the death toll of Turkish-backed Syrian mercenaries in Libya to 249.

The monitor added that there are 7,400 Turkish backed mercenaries in Libya, some of whom are not Syrian.



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