

Stranded Yemenis in plea for help after Houthi lockdown

Author:

Sat, 2020-03-21 01:25

AL-MUKALLA: Thousands of Yemenis have been left stranded in the central province of Baydha and the southern province of Dhale after a Houthi militia lockdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Iran-backed Houthis, who control most of heavily populated northern Yemen, including Sanaa, circulated an order on March 16 telling local transport companies to halt travel to and from the territories for two weeks to prevent the spread of the virus.

In the order, the militants said that they wanted to stop the virus spreading via travelers from "neighboring countries," a reference to thousands of Yemeni Umrah pilgrims and expatriates who recently crossed into Yemen through the Wadaa border crossing with Saudi Arabia.

Amateur videos on social media showed thousands of Yemenis crowding outside two Houthi checkpoints in the Afar region in Baydha and Qa'ataba in Dhale. Travelers said that the Houthis left them in the open without proper sanitation or water and food. Other images showed elderly people, women and children seeking shelter under buses and vehicles.

Local transport companies have been forced to halt travel from government-controlled areas to Sanaa and other northern provinces in order to prevent congestion at Houthi checkpoints.

A bus official in Sanaa told Arab News on condition of anonymity that his company will stop carrying travelers from southern Yemen to Sanaa until the Houthi restrictions are lifted.

According to the official, the rebels have claimed they will send 100 health workers to test travelers at the checkpoints.

"We will wait for some time before resuming trips," he said.

HIGHLIGHT

Travelers said that the Houthis left them in the open without proper sanitation or water and food.

On social media, Yemenis strongly criticized the Houthi travel restrictions, warning that thousands of stranded people are at risk of falling ill if they are left in open quarantine for days.

"The unhygienic Houthi quarantine will lead to a humanitarian catastrophe and hasten the spread of coronavirus," Jamel Aiz Addin, Yemen state TV director, said on Twitter on Thursday.

"They are holding those who return in areas with no water, medicine, food, shelter or health services," he added. "Where are the social organizations and WHO?"

Yemen's Health Minister Dr. Nasser Baoum said on Thursday that the King Salman Center for Relief and Humanitarian Work (KSRelief) has sent urgent medical assistance worth \$3.5 million to help war-torn Yemen cope with the spread of coronavirus.

The official Saba news agency said that the aid includes testing kits, sanitizers, drugs and protective equipment such as masks and gloves.

Yemen Prime Minister Maen Abdul Malik Saeed last week appealed for help from KSRelief and WHO after the country exhausted its supply of testing kits on thousands of Yemenis returning from abroad.

While Yemen has yet to record a single case of coronavirus, the internationally recognized government has closed schools, shut down land crossings, and stopped flights to and from the country.

On Friday, authorities in the southeastern province of Hadramout halted cultural activities and celebratory gatherings such as weddings. However, mosques and markets are still bustling with people.



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Egypt fights deadly virus with a healthy dose of humor Jordan imposes strict 4-day curfew after citizens ignore virus warnings

Egypt fights deadly virus with a healthy dose of humor

Author:

Sat, 2020-03-21 01:17

CAIRO: As Egypt joins the global battle against coronavirus, Egyptians have adopted a tried-and-tested method for dealing with a crisis – making fun of it.

Coronavirus may be the No. 1 issue on Egyptians' minds, but many are discovering that humor is the best medicine to combat the illness.

On Friday, the official number of coronavirus cases in the country climbed to almost 300, with seven deaths. However, some fear the actual number of cases may be much higher.

Instead of showing fear and anxiety, many Egyptians have resorted to sarcastic comedy on social media.

Minister of Health Hala Zayed became a favorite target of online satire after she wore a medical mask incorrectly, giving the impression that the country's top health official does not understand basic health safety rules.

Facebook messages also mocked Zayed for visiting China last month, with some saying she was delivering an Egyptian vaccine and others that she wanted to bring the virus home with her.

The jokes did not stop there. Some said that corona was simply the name of the popular chocolate brand in Egypt.

Others suggested that since the virus originated in China, it won't last long since all Chinese products have a limited shelf life.

One woman shared a post saying: "The world is almost coming to an end and here I am stuffing vine leaves."

As virus cases surged in Egypt and the Ministry of Health offered instructions on virus protection using ethyl alcohol, someone tweeted a dialogue between comedians Mohamed Saad and Hassan Hosni: "Are you crying because you don't have ethyl alcohol? No, I'm crying because I put my hands on my face."

Another tweet: "My wife made cheese with Dettol. Delicious." Social media users shared a video showing Egyptian actresses making fun of the virus. These included Zeina, who appeared in a video during the Luxor African Film Festival, which was canceled due to the pandemic.

BACKGROUND

Minister of Health Hala Zayed became a favorite target of online satire after she wore a medical mask incorrectly, giving the impression that the country's top health official does not understand basic health safety rules.

Zeina posted an updated video on her Instagram account saying that she was terrified and wasn't taking the viral threat lightly.

After the Egyptian government suspended schools and universities, and closed shops, restaurants and malls overnight, sarcasm was directed at the state of marital relationships. Divorce rates will surge because husbands and wives will be at home together, some claimed. "I see that all those who wanted to die and were thinking of committing suicide are now walking around with alcohol and face masks," said one Twitter user.



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Egypt facilitates evacuation of citizens from Kuwait
Egypt closes cinemas, theaters to contain coronavirus spread

[UAE announces first two deaths from coronavirus](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1584739739945389700

Fri, 2020-03-20 20:38

CAIRO: The UAE health ministry announced on Friday its first two deaths from coronavirus, UAE official news agency WAM said. The two deaths are for cases that suffered from previous health conditions, the agency said.



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UAE establishes hotline to help holders of valid residence permits abroad
Most Saudi Arabia, UAE residents 'scared' of coronavirus: poll

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Author:

By SARAH EL DEEB | AP

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Fri, 2020-03-20 17:00

BEIRUT: Foreign Minister Nassif Hitti on Friday summoned the US Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea over the transportation of Israeli agent Amer Al-Fakhoury from the US Embassy in Awkar to the US.

Hitti's office said that the minister listened to Shea give "an explanation about the circumstances of Amer Al-Fakhoury being transferred abroad from the US Embassy."

A US military helicopter landed at the embassy on Thursday before leaving and flying out to sea.

US citizen Al-Fakhoury had taken refuge in the embassy on Monday, after Lebanon's military court dropped charges of "killing and torturing detainees at Khiam prison in the South during the Israeli occupation before the year 2000" against him.

The court said that charges against him were dropped because the statute of limitations had expired, which meant that 20 years had passed since the crimes took place without anyone filing a complaint against him.

The helicopter was able to fly in due to an agreement signed by the US and Lebanon in 1982, allowing US planes to "enter Lebanese airspace and land on its territory without revealing the nature of the mission."

Al-Fakhoury was arrested in September 2019 at Beirut airport while returning from the US after he had fled to Israel when the occupation forces withdrew from Southern Lebanon.

He was recognized and spent months at one of Lebanon's hospitals during his arrest, since he suffers from advanced cancer.

SPEEDREAD

US citizen Al-Fakhoury had taken refuge in the embassy,, after Lebanon's military court dropped charges of 'killing and torturing detainees at Khiam prison in the South during the Israeli occupation before the year 2000' against him.

Activists accused Hezbollah of being "an accomplice of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) to release Al-Fakhoury."

This necessitated the appearance of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah on TV on Friday night to clarify its position.

The head of the court that released Al-Fakhoury, Brig. Gen. Hussein Abdallah, announced his resignation on Friday morning.

"Out of respect for my oath and military honor, I am resigning from heading the military court, where the application of the law equals the release of an agent, the pain of a captive and the betraying of a judge," he said.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab tweeted: "The crime of being an informant for the Israeli enemy cannot be forgotten. The rights of martyrs and liberated prisoners do not fade in heaven's justice by the passage of time."



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US man accused of human rights violations freed in Lebanon
Lebanese judge orders retrial of Lebanese-American

Hundreds of Bahrainis stuck in Iran as evacuation plans stall

Author:

Fri, 2020-03-20 03:20

DUBAI: Hundreds of Bahraini pilgrims are stranded in Iran, the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in the Middle East, as Bahrain struggles to evacuate its citizens from a country with which it has no diplomatic ties.

Jamal, who has been in Mashhad with his wife and daughter since early February, told Reuters he was awaiting news of repatriation plans after a government-chartered flight was delayed last Thursday and again this Thursday.

"Yesterday we were ready to leave and then at the last moment they said the flight was canceled without any explanation," the 62-year-old man, who declined to give his last name, said by telephone from his hotel.

Bahrain said the company from which its Health Ministry had leased an airplane to conduct a second repatriation flight had backed out and authorities were seeking alternatives "as soon as possible," state news agency BNA said on Wednesday.

There are no direct flights between Bahrain and Iran, where the death toll from the coronavirus now exceeds 1,200.

Bahrain repatriated 165 people last week on an Omani airplane. Authorities have said around 85 of them have so far tested positive for the virus.

Many Bahrainis go to Iran via Oman and Dubai on pilgrimage to Mashhad and Qom, where the outbreak in Iran began.

Bahraini national Reda Ali said his elderly father had died on pilgrimage in Mashhad last week from a heart attack. He now fears for his 75-year-old mother, who he said has pre-existing conditions, and for his brother.

"I fear a lot for those (pilgrims) ... Most are old or retired people," he told Reuters from Bahrain, voicing concern about the availability of medicine in Iran, which has been hit by Western sanctions.

"Many families in Bahrain fear for the unknown fate of their families," he said.

Bahraini authorities have tasked a foundation under the Justice and Islamic Affairs Ministry to cover the costs of nationals stranded abroad, BNA said.

Bahrain, which has reported 269 coronavirus cases, most of them linked to travel to Iran, has criticized the Islamic Republic for not stamping Bahraini

citizens' passports.

For Jamal, the priority is to return home.

“We remain in our rooms most of the time, we are fine. It’s just the anxiety of what’s happening in Iran and all the delays of our evacuation.”



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Stocks spike as central banks throw kitchen sink at virusUS fast-tracking antimalarials to treat coronavirus