

Algerian medics fear new infections as borders to reopen

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1622204519561389400

Fri, 2021-05-28 12:04

ALGIERS: Algerian medics fear next week's reopening of national borders will trigger a new surge in COVID-19 cases despite health measures, as people living abroad rush home to see family.

The borders have been mostly closed since the global pandemic struck in early 2020, marooning thousands of Algerians working overseas and separating families with dual nationality but helping to protect against a more serious infection rate.

"I am afraid of a likely increase in cases after the opening. Risks are high because of the variants," said Wafa, a doctor working at a private clinic in Algiers who asked not to give her family name when criticizing state policy. Algeria, an oil producer, closed its borders and suspended flights in March 2020 when the global pandemic struck, only reopening them to humanitarian flights from France between January and March this year before another wave of infection began.

In total, Algeria has registered 126,000 coronavirus cases and 3,300 deaths. It will reopen the borders again on June 1 to flights from France, Tunisia, Spain and Turkey, but not to Gulf states where many Algerians also live and work.

The government briefly decided to postpone the resumption of flights but then changed its mind, while adding additional restrictions.

"We can open partially as long as we follow the conditions, including a PCR test and a five-day confinement upon arrival," Mohamed Yousfi, head of Algeria's infectious diseases organization told Reuters.

He warned that there was still a risk, however. "We have found out that some persons who tested negative in France ended up being infected a couple of days after getting into Algeria," Yousfi said.

Foreign firms, including in the energy sector, have complained because they were unable to bring staff and even top managers into Algeria, according to a foreign manager who works in the oil sector and is based in Algiers.

For thousands of Algerians stuck abroad, the government decision to partially reopen is a relief, even if some complained about having to pay to spend five days at an approved hotel in Algeria after landing.

"It's great news, more than a year blocked in France. Definitely happy to go home," said Douadi Azouz an Algerian living in Lille, by phone.

"It will cost big money as I must pay the PCR test as well as the five days at a hotel, but it doesn't matter really," he said.

Algeria said the plan includes five daily flights from each country with which direct links were restored. Algerians based in the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf countries were not happy to be excluded.

"I am angry. I am homesick. Hopefully they will program a flight for us

soon,” said Zoheir Cheikh, speaking from Dubai.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Coronavirus](#)

[Algeria](#)

Algeria remembers victims of French rule
Algerians stranded for 3 weeks in Paris airport

[Turkey's Erdogan inaugurates major new mosque in heart of Istanbul](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1622201224761139000

Fri, 2021-05-28 11:16

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan inaugurated an imposing new mosque in Istanbul on Friday, fulfilling a decades-old goal of his and stamping a

religious identity on the landmark Taksim Square in the heart of the city. The Taksim mosque and its 30-meter-high dome loom symbolically over a monument to the foundation of the Turkish republic by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, whose staunchly secular legacy has been eroded by nearly two decades of Erdogan's rule.

Erdogan waved to the crowd which gathered in the square before entering the mosque for Friday prayers.

Construction of the mosque began in February 2017 in a project championed by Erdogan, a devout Muslim, and his Islamist-rooted AK Party, but which was beset for decades by court battles and public debate.

Officials on Friday shared on Twitter a video showing Erdogan in 1994, the year he became Istanbul mayor, pointing from the top of a building toward the area where he said he would build the mosque, the exact spot where it now stands.

It is one of many construction projects with which Erdogan has left his mark on Turkey, including a huge hilltop mosque overlooking the Asian side of Istanbul. Last year he reconverted into a mosque the city's Hagia Sophia, for centuries the world's largest church before being turned into a mosque and museum in turn.

Supporters of the Taksim project argued there were not enough Muslim places of worship close to one of the city's busiest hubs. Opponents saw it as a bid to impose a religious tone on the square, featuring a cultural center dedicated to Atatürk which was demolished and is being rebuilt.

The mosque complex, with two towering minarets, will be able to host as many as 4,000 worshippers and includes an exhibition hall, a library, car park and soup kitchen, state-owned Anadolu news agency said.

Pro-government newspapers hailed the new mosque. Aksam's headline mocked critics who fear creeping religiosity: "It looks great. A mosque was built in Taksim and neither has sharia law come, nor has the republic collapsed," it said.

The inauguration also coincides with the date when protests began just 100 meters away in Gezi Park, before growing into massive protests against Erdogan's government which spread across Turkey in June 2013.

The Gezi protests began on May 28, 2013 after demolition work began in one corner of the park the previous evening, knocking down a wall and some trees, drawing a small group of protesters who camped out at the site.

The anniversary of the protests is generally marked on May 31, when the protests escalated. In June of that year, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in demonstrations against a plan to build a replica Ottoman barracks on Gezi Park.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

Turkey condemns Greek reaction to Hagia Sophia prayers
Turkey's cultural wars at full gallop with reconversion of historic church

[Egyptian social startup on a mission to get clean water flowing in Africa](#)

Thu, 2021-05-27 21:51

CAIRO: Access to clean, safe drinking water is one of the greatest challenges facing people in many parts of the world.

By 2015 the UN's Millennium Development Goals had succeeded in reducing by half the number of people without such access, but many still suffer as a result of poor sanitation services and lack of treated drinking water, especially in rural communities.

According to a 2019 report from the World Health Organization and the UN Children's Fund, about 2.2 billion people worldwide do not have safely

managed drinking water, 4.2 billion go without safe sanitation services and 3 billion lack basic hand-washing facilities.

In Egypt, one of the nations facing a potential crisis, it is predicted that the share of water per person will decrease by 2025. Water Will, a social startup founded in Cairo in 2019, aims to address these challenges.



Many people globally still suffer as a result of poor sanitation services and lack of treated drinking water, especially in rural communities. (Supplied)

“We wanted not just to help people in rural communities but also empower them to help themselves,” said co-founder and CEO Mohannad Hesham, 29. “Through the new startup, they can turn from beneficiaries to customers and purchase the filters that would solve their water problems without waiting for help from anyone.”

Through its Buy Me Filter initiative, Water Will aims to provide clean water to rural communities in Egypt and other parts of Africa.

“After a year of research and development, we came up with the ceramic water filter, a sustainable solution made out of natural materials and treated with nanoparticles,” Hesham said.

The filter is designed to eliminate the impurities, odors, bacteria and heavy minerals that are often found in the water available to residents of rural communities. Priced at 320 Egyptian pounds (\$20), it is several times cheaper than the alternatives.



Through its Buy Me Filter initiative, Water Will aims to provide clean water to rural communities in Egypt and other parts of Africa. (Supplied)

“We traveled to Kenya and manufactured the filter ourselves in a factory there, and we distributed it to 500 families,” Hesham said. The team then returned to Egypt to establish a factory and acquire the necessary business permits.

Officially launched in late 2020, Buy Me Filter aims to distribute hundreds of filters in Kenya and Egypt in the months ahead. The way it works is simple: Individuals, groups or organizations can visit the Buy Me Filter website and purchase one or more filters to donate to rural communities in the two countries.

“We’re also launching a premium filter in 2021,” Hesham said. “Rather than just donating a filter for others, you can buy a premium filter for yourself, and a ceramic filter will be donated to a poor family in rural communities.”

Water scarcity on a global level

- * 2.2bn – People with no access to safely managed drinking water.
- * 4.2bn – People without safe sanitation services.
- * 3bn – People who lack basic hand-washing facilities.

Water Will also enters into partnerships with small and micro businesses and foundations in the areas it serves, training them to market and sell the filters.

“(This) ensures the spread of the product in these communities and also creates business opportunities there,” Hesham said.

More than 50 percent of Egyptians live in rural communities and more than 30 percent are below the poverty line. As a result, access to more-expensive water-filtration systems is a luxury many cannot afford.

“Even if people in those communities purchase multi-stage water filters, the cost of regularly changing the filter candles will be too high given how bad the water is,” Hesham said.



Water Will also enters into partnerships with small and micro businesses and foundations in the areas it serves, training them to market and sell the filters. (Supplied)

The Water Will ceramic filter, on the other hand, is designed to last for two years without any additional costs.

Because many business accelerators and investors take a greater interest in the tech sector than social startups, finding support initially was difficult for Hesham and his team.

They overcame this challenge by raising money from friends and families, which was used to create a prototype they entered in startup competitions to raise more capital.

In the coming years, Buy Me Filter aims to compete in more urban markets with its premium filter by leveraging the sustainability of the product.



In the coming years, Buy Me Filter aims to compete in more urban markets with its premium filter. (Supplied)

“By 2025, we also want to have our first fully owned factory outside of Egypt in Africa, so we can keep the costs of our filters low for rural communities,” Hesham said.

He said it is important for businesses that aim to make a social impact to generate profits and added: “We need many companies to work in this field so we can come up with more solutions for water problems, which are bound to increase in the years to come.”

** This report is being published by Arab News as a partner of the Middle East Exchange, which was launched by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region.*



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Egypt](#)

[Africa](#)

[water](#)

[water security](#)

[water scarcity](#)

[startups](#)

[Editor's Choice](#)

Can tech advances solve arid Middle East's water scarcity problem? Water security a global issue as 2 billion worldwide lack access to clean water

[Amnesty International report highlights Houthi mistreatment of abductees](#)

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1622140542253600700

Thu, 2021-05-27 21:40

AL-MUKALLA: Amnesty International has accused the Iran-backed Houthi militia of arbitrarily abducting hundreds of journalists, human rights defenders and religious minorities, holding them in solitary confinement and dirty prisons, torturing them and using them as leverage during peace talks.

In a 34-page report released on Thursday, the international rights group said that since early 2015, the Houthis have snatched hundreds of journalists, political opponents and members of the Baha'i religious minority and thrown them into small and unhygienic prisons where they were physically and psychologically tortured.

The report went on to claim that the prisoners were denied medication and sufficient food and banned from contacting their families.

The graphic report is based on interviews with 12 former abductees who were released last year following a successful prisoner swap between the Yemeni government and the Houthis. "Detainees lacked adequate access to food, medical care, clean water, sanitation and accommodation. Some were subjected to solitary confinement for 20 days solely for requesting more food from the authorities and going on hunger strike," the report said.

A former abductee told the international organization that the Houthi-run Political Security Office kept him disappeared for five months despite promising to question him for a few hours when he was arrested.

"When the Political Security Office knocked at my door asking me to go with them for a few hours for a couple of questions, I did not think of saying goodbye to my family. I didn't know that I would only speak again with them after five months," the anonymous detainee said, according to the report.

The report highlighted several informal and formal detention facilities controlled by the Houthis such as the Criminal Investigation and Political Security Office, the National Security Bureau and Hasaba police station, Al-Thawra pre-trial detention facility in the capital, Saref Prison in Beni Hashish in Sanaa province and Shamlan prison in Hodeidah.

The rebels harshly beat detainees inside prisons or during investigations to force them to admit to committing crimes such as working with Israel or the Arab coalition.

A member of the Baha'i community in Yemen said that the Houthi interrogators and security forces beat him with steel rods, an AK-47 rifle and other objects.

"During the interrogation, they would beat me non-stop until I could no longer scream. Sometimes they would wake me up from my sleep for interrogation. I fainted twice during the interrogation mainly because I was psychologically tired and without any food," the Baha'i member said.

"We were tortured repeatedly only for asking them for water and food. They used to cut off the electricity at night and keep us in the dark as punishment, they would come in the cell and beat us with cables."

The Houthis have exploited judicial authorities in areas under their control to punish their opponents through long trials where defendants were left to defend themselves, according to the report.

The interviewed abductees and lawyers described the trials at the Specialized Criminal Court and the Court of Appeals in Sanaa as merely "political theatrics," claiming that judges snubbed their demands for legal

representation. They added that judges neglected to investigate incidents of torture and their confessions being extracted under duress.

Shortly after releasing them following a deal, the Houthis immediately expelled the former detainees from their territories and sent the Baha'is into exile, rejecting appeals from some abductees to visit their families in northern Yemen, the report said.

"The (Houthi) authorities allowed us to call our families when we reached the airport ... I begged them (the authorities) to allow me to see my father but they didn't. He is 80 and I won't be able to see him again. That was the hardest thing in my life, leaving my father behind," a member of the Baha'i community was quoted as saying.

The rights group has warned the Houthis against using thousands of currently incarcerated political opponents as a bargaining chip in any negotiations with the Yemeni government.

"With negotiations ongoing, Amnesty International urges the Houthi authorities not to use detainees for political leverage and to immediately release all individuals arbitrarily detained on account of their opinion, expression, political affiliation, and conscientiously held beliefs," the organization said.

Yemeni human rights activists and officials said the Amnesty International report has confirmed well-known information about human rights abuses committed by the Houthis.

Fatehia Al-Mamarie, director of the provincial office of the Ministry of Human Rights in the western province of Hodeidah, demanded the international community and the UN name and shame the Houthis and pressure them to release detainees.

"This is a positive step toward exposing the Houthi crimes and displaying its true image to the international community," Al-Mamarie told Arab News on Thursday.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Amnesty international](#)

[Houthis](#)

[Yemen](#)

Arab coalition: Rumors of UAE forces on Yemen's Socotra, Perim islands not true
Saudi deputy defense minister receives US, UN envoys for Yemen

[UAE opens Holocaust memorial exhibition](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-05-27 21:19

DUBAI: The UAE has opened a Holocaust memorial exhibition, the first of its kind in the Middle East.

The display aims to raise awareness among Dubai's residents and tourists of the horrors of Nazi Germany's extermination of Jews and other minorities.

The exhibition explores the chain of events leading up to the Holocaust and

includes a special tribute to Arabs who defended and saved Jews.

The opening on Wednesday at the Crossroads of Civilizations Museum was attended by Israel's ambassador to the UAE Eitan Naeh and Peter Fischer Germany's Ambassador to the UAE.

"As a leading cultural institution in the UAE, it is very important to us that we focus on educating people about the tragedies of the Holocaust because education is the antidote to ignorance," museum founder Ahmed Obeid Al-Mansoori said.

The UAE's Chief Rabbi Yehuda Sarna said: "My wife's family was saved from the Holocaust by an Arab doctor, Mohamed Helmy. His example – this exhibit – reminds us that we must rise to the challenge of combating extremism as neighbors, as friends."

The museum follows an agreement between Israel and the UAE last year for the Emirates to become only the third Arab state to establish full relations with Israel.

Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco followed with similar US-brokered agreements.

"Who would have dreamt 70 or 80 years ago that an Israeli ambassador and a German ambassador would sit here together, in an Arab country, visiting a Holocaust remembrance exhibition," Ambassador Naeh said.

*With AFP



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Holocaust Memorial](#)

[Holocaust](#)

[Dubai](#)

[UAE](#)

[Israel](#)

[Crossroads of Civilizations Museum](#)

Holocaust-based film 'Resistance' to screen at Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Film Festival
Muslim World League chief leads delegation to Auschwitz for Holocaust memorial