

Egypt denies destroying ancient Islamic cemeteries to build bridge

Author:

Tue, 2020-07-21 01:22

CAIRO: The Egyptian government on Monday denied claims circulating on social media that ancient Islamic cemeteries and artifacts were being destroyed to make way for a bridge-building project.

Antiquities dating back five centuries in Cairo's City of the Dead were among treasured items online posters said had been wrecked.

However, in a statement, head of the Islamic, Coptic and Judaic Antiquities Sector, Osama Talaat, said that the rumors were "completely untrue" and images of tombs that had appeared on social networking sites were not historic registered monuments.

He added that although the pictured tombs were from more recent times, the secretary-general of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities had still ordered the formation of a scientific technical committee to examine the tombstones and look into the possibility of displaying some of them in museums.

An online campaign, launched on Facebook, has been critical of the scheme to build a bridge through the Mamluk Desert Cemetery.

Activist and journalist Khaled Abdel-Hadi said that the Mamluk tombs were part of Egypt's world-famous Islamic architecture and destroying them would be to erase key aspects of the country's history.

Archaeologist Hisham Auf pointed out that the cemeteries being demolished to make way for the bridge were in an archaeological site registered since 2009 and as such it was against the law to damage them.

He said the cemeteries dated back to the 1920s and contained the bodies of pashas, former Egyptian prime ministers, and members of the Egyptian intelligentsia who fought during the Egyptian Revolution of 1919 against British occupation.

BACKGROUND

Archaeologist Hisham Auf pointed out that the cemeteries being demolished to make way for the bridge were in an archaeological site registered since 2009 and as such it was against the law to damage them.

This, he noted, "made the area a part of modern history as well as ancient history. The region as a whole went through changes, all of which were against the law as this tampered with Egyptian history and Egypt's international pledge to UNESCO.

"It is true that during the construction of the Salah Salem Road during the time of (Egyptian) President Gamal Abdel Nasser parts of graves were removed, but this does not legitimize what is happening now and does not mean anything in the debate about the graves."

Auf added: "We were informed only 10 days ago of the decision to demolish. It was an official report and was conducted by the person responsible for my mother's family tombs in El-Ghafir, in which its two-room reception and large vacant space will be destroyed.

"As the tombs are on a side street, the cemeteries themselves are still safe. I don't know if we have to move the remains of the dead. The state did not provide us with alternate graves."

He said some people had been able to arrange for remains to be moved but others were struggling. "My great grandfather had bought a second cemetery in the same area, but he donated it. This second cemetery will most likely end up being destroyed and no one will move any of the bones located there."

He said that to date there had been no offer of compensation.

"This is not a process of moving the graves. This is the demolition of the graves, which is untenable behavior. I am disgusted by the attempts to defend this sad day in the history of Cairo," Auf added.



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Egyptian family stunned after father 'returns from dead' Egypt's foreign minister in show of support for Palestinians in Ramallah

[No new COVID-19 cases at 14 Egyptian isolation hospitals](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-07-21 00:14

CAIRO: There have been no new coronavirus cases in the past three days at 14 Egyptian hospitals designated for the isolation of patients.

The announcement comes during a decline in the number of cases in Egypt in recent days.

Around 600 new cases are being reported daily, with deaths ranging between 50 to 60, according to Egypt's Ministry of Health.

As of July 19, 4,302 people have died from the disease and 87,775 have been infected since the outbreak began in the country in February.

The hospitals that reported no new cases were El-Nujaila and El-Alamein hospitals in Marsa Matrouh governorate near the Libyan border, as well as El-Gomhoria, Sheikh Zayed and Heliopolis in Cairo.

Three hospitals in Ismailia city on the Suez Canal declared that they, too, were free of coronavirus cases: Abu Khalifa Hospital, Ismailia General Hospital and Sadr Hospital. In Menoufia governorate, north Cairo, Shebin El-Koum and Berket El-Sabaa General Hospital and Bagour General Hospital reported the same trend.

Abu Qir Central Hospital in Alexandria also said it had no new cases.

El-Madina Hospital in Luxor governorate in Upper Egypt and the Red Crescent Hospital in the eastern region north of Cairo also have no new cases.

Amani Mukhtar, a professor of preventive medicine in Egypt, attributed the decline to the possibility that the country had passed the peak of the pandemic.

She said there were several reasons for the decline, the main one being the weakening of the cell because of the nature of viruses. She described the viruses as mutating and that there was a lot of research being conducted on the weakening of the virus.

Mukhtar said the second reason for the decline in cases was because of

preventive measures that have helped reduce the number of cases.

Precautionary measures taken by the state and which the public is being constantly urged to follow, as well as the mandatory wearing of face masks in public places, might have prevented the virus from spreading further.

The expert said that most people had acquired immunity. Research suggests that the body, after being infected with the virus, will gain immunity for two to six months.

Hossam Hosni, head of the scientific committee to combat coronavirus in Egypt, said that the decrease in the number of daily reported cases was expected.

He praised the isolation hospitals that no longer had any COVID-19 cases, as well as the efficiency of medical teams in hospitals, and said the commitment of citizens to wear face masks would lead to an even bigger decrease in newly reported cases.

“Looking at the cost of private hospitals, we must praise the Egyptian state, which is providing treatment to those able and unable to afford it,” he told Arab News. “When it comes to prevention of the coronavirus we have committed to precautionary measures. Taking vitamin C and zinc from their natural sources, such as fruits and vegetables, has also helped.”

He said that not every coronavirus patient who recovered could donate plasma without several specific conditions, among which is a recovery period ranging from 14 to 30 days, and excluded chronic kidney disease patients and those who took cortisone.

Severe cases or those with chronic illnesses did not recover using blood plasma, he added.

“There is news about the possibility of a second wave of the coronavirus, but there is no scientific evidence to back it up. And there is no scientific evidence to back up what is reported about the possibility of the virus disappearing from Egypt within a month’s time.”

Hosni said it would take a few months until Egypt reached zero coronavirus cases but, until then, the reported cases would continue to decrease.

Jihan El-Assal, vice-chair of the Scientific Committee to Combat the Novel Coronavirus at the Ministry of Health, said that Egypt had passed the peak stage of the virus and that the number of infections was declining. But she also said that nobody could predict when the country would reach zero cases.

El-Assal stressed the importance of people committing to the government’s precautionary measures during the upcoming period in order to eventually reach zero cases.

She added that there had been a strong willingness from the public to adhere to safety guidelines since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak.

She said people had become more aware and therefore resorted to healthcare providers if they experienced any COVID-19 symptoms which, in most cases, range from mild to moderate and were treated by isolating at home, with a decrease in critical cases.



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Egypt's foreign minister in show of support for Palestinians in Ramallah
Egypt parliament approves possible intervention in Libya

[Turkey faces rise in brain drain over political and economic concerns](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-07-21 00:14

ANKARA: Dr. Ahmet Erdi Ozturk, lecturer at London Metropolitan University, has lived abroad for nine years. He even married and had a child, miles away from his home country and parents. He always maintains that "it is emotionally very hard to be a member of the diaspora."

When asked, however, whether he would be willing to return to Turkey to an academic post with a higher wage, he politely declines, saying, "There is no stability and predictability even in the academic sphere, let alone in politics."

Recently, several foreign academics who were called from abroad to teach at Sehir University in Istanbul found themselves jobless and hopeless after the university, founded by Turkey's former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, was shut down by an overnight presidential decree. The decree followed a longtime dispute between Davutoglu and his ex-ally President Recep Tayyip Erdogan after the former founded his own breakaway Future Party.

An expert on Turkish politics as well as diaspora studies, Ozturk said that people were becoming increasingly disappointed with the widespread nepotism in the country, especially after the economic deterioration.

Ankara's opposition-affiliated Mayor Mansur Yavas recently announced a list of those who were unfairly employed in the municipality during his predecessor's time, government-aligned controversial figure Melih Gokcek.

"Democracy is something that influences daily life," Ozturk told Arab News. "Young citizens are losing their hopes of finding a job based on their merits if they don't know any high-ranking people. Many people feel that even their basic freedoms are being taken away from them."

He added that it would be nearly impossible to "win back" that generation in the short term, as young professionals are choosing to leave altogether in what amounts to a brain drain for the country.

Turkey witnessed a 2 percent increase in its number of emigrants in 2019, compared to the previous year.

A total of 330,289 people left the country last year, according to recent official data from the state-run Turkish Statistical Institute. About 40.8 percent of those who emigrated from Turkey were between the ages of 20-34.

Seren Selvin Korkmaz, executive director of the Istanbul Political Research Institute, said recent studies showed that young people were leaving Turkey mainly for better working conditions and living standards, job opportunities and freedom.

"Migration becomes an exit strategy from everyday struggles. In the country, youth unemployment is more than 25 percent. Many of these young people are still financially dependent on their families or are working for low wages," Korkmaz told Arab News.

Under these conditions, she explained, young people do not envision a future for themselves.

"I think this creates a 'violence of uncertainty' for them. In addition to unemployment, authoritarian tendencies in the country – including social media bans and threats to freedom of thought – impact the youth and make them worry for their future," she added.

SODEV, a Turkish foundation, recently asked young people between the ages of 15 and 25 whether they would live abroad if given a chance.

Almost half of those who identify as supporters of the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) government said they preferred to live abroad – a sign which, experts think, shows they have lost their faith in the country's future.

According to this same survey, released in May, 70.3 percent of respondents believe that a brilliant young Turk would never be promoted professionally in the country if he or she did not have any political and/or bureaucratic "connections."

According to Korkmaz, the current young generation in Turkey is in a much more precarious position compared to their parents.

"They do not have job security. Education under the AKP's neoliberal policies is not a guarantee for upward mobility anymore. Also, professional identity, based on the harmony between the education one receives and the job he or she performs, is eroding in the country," she said.

"Young people feel disappointment after graduation. They are hopeless, and current political parties and actors are unable to attract them," Korkmaz added.

Experts say that recent government threats to further control platforms like YouTube, Twitter and Netflix have triggered much anger, especially from Generation Z – those born between 1995 and 2015 – who see social media as one of the last remaining bastions of freedom in the digital age.

In the upcoming 2023 parliamentary elections, young voters are expected to make up 12 percent of the electorate and are therefore considered a critical element that politicians in the country have to consider.



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Turkey moves toward social media restrictions
Blow to Erdogan as US boots Turkey out of F-35 strike fighter program

[Did UN chief's global ceasefire call boost the coronavirus fight?](#)

Tue, 2020-07-21 00:01

DUBAI: Since a deadly coronavirus outbreak in China's Wuhan city late last year began to spread to the rest of the world, most of humanity has had no choice but to cope with the blows of a pandemic without a vaccine.

While the crisis has affected people's lives, cutting across political and geographical boundaries, few groups have proved more vulnerable than the world's large population of displaced and dispossessed living in conflict zones.

At the same time, the wellbeing of billions of people hangs in the balance, with unemployment rates projected to soar and potentially affecting the lives of 1.6 billion "informal economy" workers worldwide.

The international community has seldom faced such a perfect storm of challenges in living memory.

“The pandemic exacerbates so many of the world’s problems – war, racial and economic inequalities, gender inequality, poverty and more,” Kerry Anderson, writer and political risk consultant, told Arab News.

Several countries in the Middle East were already lagging behind in socioeconomic development due to conflict, drought, political unrest or environmental degradation.

With the advent of the pandemic, however, they had to quickly take on mankind’s latest common enemy: The novel coronavirus.

In response to the unfolding crisis, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for a worldwide cease-fire in March, urging parties to lay down their weapons.



Houthi fighters in Yemen’s capital Sanaa have not ratcheted down their rhetoric despite rising coronavirus cases. (AFP/File Photo)

In an emotional appeal, he warned: “It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives.”

He pointed out that vulnerable groups such as women, children, people with disabilities, the marginalized, displaced and refugees typically pay the highest price during any conflict. They were now at risk of suffering “devastating losses” due to the pandemic, he said.

Four months on, did Guterres's appeal make any difference to the lives of the people he had in mind?

To Anderson, cease-fires are important tools, but they must be followed up with action. A preliminary cease-fire is an "essential" but "temporary" approach, "not a solution to a conflict," she said.

"A pandemic-related truce would help buy time to mitigate the effects of the virus in some of the world's most vulnerable places. However, both the pandemic and the causes and consequences of conflict are likely to outlast a cease-fire."

To develop longer-lasting solutions (such as definitive cease-fires), the international community must use this moment to build a more "cooperative approach to entrenched problems," Anderson said.

In other words, a pause in fighting only presents an opportunity to pursue more durable diplomatic solutions to a conflict.

"It's a window of opportunity to provide humanitarian aid, and an opportunity to try to both prepare for and mitigate the spread of coronavirus," Anderson said.

Guterres's plea to "silence the guns" and raise "the voices for peace" resonated worldwide. Eleven countries mired in protracted conflicts agreed to observe a cease-fire, and 170 signatories endorsed the appeal by June.

FASTFACT

70

Number of non-state actors, civil society networks, organizations that endorsed UN chief's global cease-fire call.

On the face of it, they supported the UN chief's call to silence all guns and stand united against the world's first pandemic in decades.

But as Guterres himself noted later, the support for his cease-fire call was nominal in some countries, and "there was still a distance between declarations and deeds in many countries."

In some of the most volatile parts of the world, namely the Middle East and North Africa, the appeal of cease-fires proved fleeting.

Reports of airstrikes and clashes between rival sides poured in from Libya, Iraq and Yemen, while the health-care situation deteriorated further in war-torn Syria.

In Yemen, reeling from the world's worst humanitarian crisis, a two-week cease-fire proposed by the Saudi-led coalition backing the UN-recognized

government went into effect on July 9.

But just days after the agreement, seven children and two women died in an incident that marked the start of a fresh round of tit-for-tat attacks that have defied the UN's appeals for a cease-fire.



UN chief Guterres has urged combatants to lay down their weapons and focus on the 'true fight of our lives.' (AFP/File Photo)

Laura Petrache, a senior adviser to the Paris-based Migrant Integration Lab, said Yemen is in "urgent" need of a pause in the fighting in view of the increasing coronavirus cases in the war-torn country.

She views a cease-fire as a "perfect opportunity" to end the conflict as well as contain the COVID-19 outbreak.

"Less than 50 percent of Yemen's hospitals and clinics are operational, and most lack qualified staff, medicine and often electricity," she told Arab News.

Another country where the UN's cease-fire call has failed to make a dent in the violence level is Libya.

On July 4, overnight strikes destroyed military equipment when they struck Al-Waitya in Tripoli's outskirts, a base that had just fallen to Turkey-backed forces.

The attack took place even though both the Turkey-aligned Government of National Accord (GNA) and the rival east-based Libyan National Army had

publicly welcomed the UN's cease-fire call, according to Petrache.

One place where a cease-fire appears to have largely held is in Syria's Idlib province, even though the situation there remains "fragile," said Anderson.

"Idlib has seen its first confirmed COVID 19 case (in July), raising serious concerns about the potential for the virus to spread through a region overcrowded with Syrians displaced by war," she added.



Kurdish-majority northeastern Syria is one of the many conflict zones vulnerable to COVID-19's ravages. (AFP/File Photo)

The UN estimates that Syria's public-health infrastructure, devastated by war, requires \$10 billion in aid to combat the impact of conflict and the pandemic.

"Further fighting would only exacerbate an already dire situation and undermine any efforts to address the pandemic," Anderson said, adding that it is vital that key border crossings are kept open for humanitarian aid to pass through.

For over a month now, an eerie calm has prevailed in the Gaza Strip, marking a sharp departure from the usual flare-ups in the besieged Palestinian territory.

"There has been no official cease-fire, but Israel and Palestine have put aside their disputes and made joint efforts to fight COVID-19," said Petrache.

However, attacks have been reported at checkpoints in the West Bank as

tension remains high over the Israeli government's threat to annex parts of the occupied territory.

Despite the reduction in violence in parts of the world since the onset of the pandemic, the condition of children in conflict situations continues to be a cause for concern.

The cease-fires during the pandemic, if adhered to, are predicted to protect 250 million children.

"There's going to be a generation of people who have suffered severe loss, now known as 'human devastation syndrome,' due to the absolute refusal of combatants to uphold any recognized standards of behavior during war," Kimberly Gleason, associate professor at the American University of Sharjah, told Arab News.

"Unfortunately, the conflicts in Libya, Syria and Yemen involve a heavy flow of foreign fighters. So although it looks as though COVID-19 hasn't spread significantly there yet, fighters coming from countries with known coronavirus epidemics can easily infect local populations."

Gleason also worries about the repercussions of the practice of targeting health facilities in war zones by combatants, which the Middle East has witnessed in recent years.

"Every additional day that these conflicts drag on, and every health-care worker who is lost to COVID-19 or conflict, is a tax on future economic recovery," she said.

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UN chief renews call for global cease-fire to tackle coronavirus
Arab coalition deploys monitors to oversee Yemen cease-fire with separatists
UN denounces recent escalation in Yemen, says threatens cease-fire
Turkey-Russia cease-fire negotiations for Libya: Any hope for durability?

[Egypt's foreign minister in show of support for Palestinians in Ramallah](#)

Tue, 2020-07-21 00:06

AMMAN: Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri ended a two-day visit to Jordan and Palestine with a visit to the Palestinian presidential headquarters in Ramallah on Monday.

Nabil Shaath, senior adviser to the Palestinian president, said the visit followed a Sunday phone call between President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and President Mahmoud Abbas.

“The Egyptian position in opposition of the (West Bank) annexation and in support of Palestinian rights is well-known,” Shaath told Arab News. “But the physical presence of the Egyptian official sends a strong message to Palestinians and the world that Egypt is in total sync with the Palestinians.”

After the visit Shukri and Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad Malki held a press conference to reiterate the strength of Palestinian-Egyptian relations and their opposition to Israel’s annexation plans.

Oraib Rantawi, head of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies, said the visit to Ramallah was meant to have been part of a show of support by both Jordan and Egypt.

“The earlier plan was that Shukri and Jordan’s Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi make the trip together, but Shukri was unable to join Safadi on that trip because of sensitive regional talks regarding the Nahda dam,” he told Arab News.

Ofer Zalzburg, a senior analyst with the International Crisis Group, said that the visit by Shukri was a blow to Israel.

“Cairo’s public condemnation of Israeli unilateralism in Ramallah is a blow to (Benjamin) Netanyahu’s narrative that Israel’s Arab partners are indifferent toward annexation if not desirous of it,” he told Arab News.

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Ofer Zalzburg, Senior analyst

The importance of this visit clearly showed the high level of Egyptian coordination with Ramallah and Amman, he added.

Jordan’s official Petra news agency said that King Abdullah II reiterated that any unilateral Israeli measure to annex lands in the West Bank was unacceptable as it would “undermine the prospects of achieving peace and stability in the region.”

While in Jordan, Shukri said that El-Sisi was looking forward to a trilateral summit between Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq to try and discuss ways to achieve better regional cooperation.

Petra reported that efforts to reach “political solutions to regional crises” were also discussed.

Analysts said that the regional crises were a reference to the situation in Libya.

Rantawi said that the earlier visit to Amman had more than one item on the agenda.

“Jordan’s relationship with Turkey has improved in recent months and I am told that Egypt was hoping that his majesty can help defuse the current Egyptian-Turkish tensions over Libya.”

In other Palestinian-related issues, the governor of Jerusalem, Adnan Ghaith, was arrested for the 17th time since being appointed to his position two years ago.

Police raided Ghaith’s home in the city’s Silwan neighborhood on Sunday and took him into custody, the Wadi Hilweh Information Center said in a statement.

An Israeli judge decided on Monday to extend his detention to seven days in prison.

It is unclear why he was arrested and what the reason was for the extended remand.



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Egypt parliament approves possible intervention in Libya Trump, Biden urged to

show balance in Palestine-Israel policies