

Algeria says France to return remains of 24 resistance fighters

Author:

AFP

ID:

1593702170714340800

Thu, 2020-07-02 14:20

ALGIERS: Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune on Thursday said France will return the remains of 24 resistance fighters who were killed during its colonization of the North African country.

"Within a few hours Algerian military planes will fly in from France and land at the Houari Boumediene international airport with the remains of 24 (members) of the popular resistance," Tebboune said during a military ceremony.

Tebboune said some of the remains belonged to "leaders" of the resistance movement who were killed in the 19th century fighting against France which occupied and ruled Algeria for 132 years.

In his speech, Tebboune said these resistance fighters "had been deprived of their natural and human right to be buried for more than 170 years."

One of the leaders whose remains are to be returned is Sheikh Bouzian, who was captured in 1849 by the French, shot and decapitated.

The remains of two other key figures of the resistance – Bou Amar Ben Kedida and Si Mokhtar Ben Kouider Al Titraoui – are also among those expected back in Algeria.

The country won independence from France in 1962 after eight years of bitter war that left some 1.5 million Algerians dead.

Emmanuel Macron, the first French president to be born after the war, made his first official visit to Algeria in December 2017, announcing that he came as a "friend" despite France's historically prickly ties with its former colony.

At the time he told news website Tout sur l'Algerie that he was "ready" to see his country hand back the skulls of Algerian resistance fighters.

Algerian and French academics have long campaigned for the return of 37 skulls held at the Musee de l'Homme in Paris.

In December 2019, Macron said that "colonialism was a grave mistake" and called for turning the page on the past.

During his presidential election campaign Macron had created a storm by calling France's colonization of Algeria a "crime against humanity."



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Ex-Bouteflika allies handed heavy jail terms in Algeria graft trial

[Jordan announces smoking crackdown in coronavirus fight](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-07-02 18:07

AMMAN: Jordan has extended a ban on cigarettes in closed public spaces to all forms of smoking, citing the fight against COVID-19 in a country with one of the world's highest smoking rates.

"In order to protect the health and safety of citizens, especially given the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, smoking of all forms (cigarettes, electronic cigarettes and shisha) is banned in closed public places," the health ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

The World Health Organization has long ranked Jordan's 10 million inhabitants among the world's biggest smokers.

The Guardian last month published figures showing that the kingdom had surpassed Indonesia to have the highest smoking rates in the world, with more than eight out of 10 men regularly smoking or otherwise consuming nicotine. Citing the WHO, the health ministry said that "smokers and passive smokers are more vulnerable to being infected by COVID-19, with stronger symptoms." Jordan has registered 1,133 cases of the COVID-19 illness, including nine deaths.

The kingdom introduced a cigarette ban in public places in 2008, but the new regulations cover electronic cigarettes and shisha waterpipes popular in the region.

However they only apply in "fully closed" public areas.

"The decision doesn't bother me much because I don't smoke arghileh (shisha) in closed places," said waterpipe enthusiast Khaled Al-Shamhuri.

"The smoking ban in public places is old but wasn't enforced."

Coffee shop employee Hassan Al-Shadfan said the new rules would "negatively affect us."

"The cafe is a closed space and most clients don't just come to eat or drink tea and coffee, most smoke arghileh," he said.

But Ahmad Rubbaa, owner of a cafeteria selling cigarettes, was less concerned.

"A smoker is a smoker wherever they are, no law can stop them," he said.

"I don't think this will affect tobacco sales."



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Jordan injects \$705.2m into its private sectorJordan green lights entertainment activities in resorts

[Iran to compensate downed passenger plane victims' families: Sweden](#)

Thu, 2020-07-02 16:50

STOCKHOLM: Sweden said Thursday that Iran had agreed to compensate the families of the foreign victims of a Ukrainian passenger plane that was shot down outside Tehran in January.

The Boeing 737 aircraft was struck by two missiles and crashed shortly after taking off from Tehran airport on January 8, killing all 176 people on board. The Islamic republic admitted days later that its forces accidentally shot down the Kiev-bound jetliner.

"We have signed an agreement of mutual understanding that we will now negotiate with Iran about amends, compensation to the victims' next of kin," Sweden's Foreign Minister Ann Linde told news agency TT, in a statement confirmed by her press secretary to AFP.

Linde said the agreement had been reached after negotiations with Iran and the countries with citizens among the victims.

While it was still unclear what sums would be paid out, Linde said there was "no doubt" that Iran would follow through on the compensation.

Among the victims, many were Iranian-Canadians, but there were also victims from Sweden, Britain, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, including the nine crew members.



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Iran to send black boxes of downed Ukraine jet to FranceIran says black boxes of downed Ukraine plane of 'no help'

[Iran says coronavirus deaths top 11,000](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Thu, 2020-07-02 11:28

TEHRAN: Iran's death toll from the novel coronavirus passed 11,000 on Thursday, the health ministry said, as the country struggles to contain the Middle East's deadliest outbreak of COVID-19.

Official figures have shown a rising trajectory in fatalities and new confirmed cases in recent months, after Iran reported a near-two month low in daily recorded infections in early May.

"In the past 24 hours, we lost 148 of our compatriots due to infection with COVID-19," health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on state TV. That brings Iran's overall death toll to 11,106, she added. She also raised the country's coronavirus caseload to 232,863, with 2,652 new confirmed cases in the past day. "Unfortunately, the number of hospitalizations is increasing in most of the country's provinces," Lari said. The resurging overall numbers have seen some previously largely unscathed provinces classified as "red" – the highest level on Iran's color-coded risk scale – with authorities allowed to reimpose restrictive measures if required. They include Bushehr, Hormozgan, Kermanshah, Khuzestan, Khorasan Razavi, Kurdistan, and West and East Azerbaijan, all located along Iran's borders.



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Iran behind attacks on Saudi oil sites, UN report finds Saudi envoy calls for extension of UN arms embargo on Iran

WHO: Middle East at 'critical threshold' in coronavirus numbers

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Wed, 2020-07-01 19:59

CAIRO: The World Health Organization warned Wednesday the Middle East was at a decisive moment in the fight against the coronavirus, with cases surging as countries ease lockdown measures.

"We are at a critical threshold in our region," the WHO's Middle East head, Ahmed Al-Mandhari, said in an online press conference.

According to figures published by the global health body on Wednesday, the 22 countries from Morocco to Pakistan had recorded 1,077,706 novel coronavirus cases and 24,973 deaths.

Mandhari said passing a million infections marked a "concerning milestone" and urged countries to strengthen their health care systems.

"The number of cases reported in June alone is higher than the total number of cases reported during the four months following the first reported case in the region on 29 January," he said.

He attributed the rise in confirmed cases to increased testing, the easing in recent weeks of lockdown measures and weakened health infrastructure in conflict-hit countries.

Over 80 percent of all deaths in the region were reported in five countries – Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia – according to the WHO.

Iran, which has been struggling to contain the Middle East's deadliest outbreak, on Monday recorded its highest single-day COVID death toll of 162.

It now has a recorded a total of 230,211 infections and 10,958 deaths.

Official figures have shown a rising trajectory in new confirmed cases since early May, when Iran hit a near two-month low in daily recorded infections.

The Islamic republic gradually lifted restrictions from April to try to reopen its sanctions-hit economy.

In neighboring Iraq, authorities have refused to reimpose strict lockdown measures, even as hospitals across the country, battered by years of war, have been swamped in recent weeks.

While the virus had spread relatively slowly for months, on Wednesday the number of recorded cases surpassed 51,000 including more than 2,000 deaths.

Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country with 100 million inhabitants, has officially reported 68,000 cases and around 3,000 deaths from the COVID-19 disease.

On Wednesday, authorities reopened the famed Giza pyramids after a three-month closure, a day after resuming international flights as part of efforts to restart the vital tourism industry.

Lebanon, battling an economic crisis and public unrest alongside the novel coronavirus, reopened the Beirut airport after months of closure.

The small eastern Mediterranean state has recorded some of the lowest infection and mortality rates in the Middle East: 1,800 cases and just 34

deaths.

In contrast, neighboring Israel saw a jump of about 15 percent in case numbers in the last week to over 25,500 on Wednesday, according to government figures.

The West Bank too was hit by a sharp spike in infections, with the Palestinian Authority on Wednesday announcing a five-day lockdown across the territory.

Total confirmed coronavirus infections in the territory more than doubled within a week to 2,636 following the easing of previous restrictions.

In Qatar, residents cautiously returned to beaches on Wednesday as the Gulf nation, with one of the world's highest per-capita infection rates and tough penalties for failing to wear masks in public, continued to reopen.

WHO officials at the virtual meeting urged governments to prepare more intensive care beds and emergency wards.

Mandhari urged individuals to be "cautious and vigilant" as lockdowns and curfews were eased, and to follow protocols recommended by health authorities.

"Easing of lockdowns does not mean easing of the response or easing of social responsibilities," he said, warning cases could rise as public spaces reopen "even in countries where the situation now seems to be stabilizing."

He also called for global solidarity.

"We have to face this pandemic as one government and one community," he said.



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