

Iran says virus cases surpass 150,000

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TEHRAN: Iran said its caseload of novel coronavirus infections passed the grim milestone of 150,000 on Sunday, as the country struggles to contain a recent upward trend.

The government has largely lifted the restrictions it imposed in order to halt a COVID-19 outbreak that first emerged in mid-February.

But the health ministry has warned of a potential virus resurgence with new cluster outbreaks in a number of provinces.

Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said 2,516 new cases were confirmed across the country in the past 24 hours, bringing the total to 151,466.

Infections have been on a rising trajectory in the Islamic republic since hitting a near two-month low on May 2.

Jahanpour said the virus had claimed another 63 lives over the same period, raising the overall toll to 7,797.

So far the government has reimposed a lockdown only in Khuzestan province on Iran's southwestern border with Iraq.

It remains "red", the highest level on Iran's colour-coded risk scale.

Experts both at home and abroad have voiced scepticism about Iran's official figures, saying the real toll could be much higher.



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[Private schools and universities in Lebanon are in economic crisis](#)

Sat, 2020-05-30 22:59

BEIRUT: The future of thousands of Lebanese students is at stake as private educational institutions assess their ability to continue operations in the next academic year, due to the economic crunch facing Lebanon.

"If the economic situation continues, private schools will be forced to close down for good, a move that will affect more than 700,000 students, 59,000 teachers and 15,000 school administrators," said Father Boutros Azar, secretary-general of the General Secretariat of Catholic Schools in Lebanon, and coordinator of the Association of Private Educational Institutions in Lebanon.

Over 1,600 private schools are operating in Lebanon, including free schools and those affiliated to various religion societies, Azar said.

The number of public schools in Lebanon, he added, is 1,256, serving 328,000 students from the underprivileged segment of society and 200,000 Syrian refugee students.

"The number of teachers in the formal education sector is 43,500 professors and teachers – 20,000 of them are permanent staff and the rest work on a contract basis," Azar said.

This development will also have an impact on private universities, whose number has increased to 50 in the past 20 years.

Ibrahim Khoury, a special adviser to the president of the American University of Beirut (AUB), told Arab News: "All universities in Lebanon are facing an unprecedented crisis, and the message of AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri, a few weeks ago, was a warning about the future of university education in light of the economic crisis that Lebanon is facing."

Khoury said many universities would likely reduce scientific research and dispense with certain specializations.

“Distance education is ongoing, but classes must be opened for students in the first semester of next year, but we do not yet know what these classes are.”

Khoury added: “Universities are still following the official exchange rate of the dollar, which is 1,512 Lebanese pounds (LBP), but the matter is subject to future developments.”

Lebanese parents are also worried about the future of their children, after the current school year ended unexpectedly due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Dr. Tarek Majzoub, the minister of education and higher education, ended the academic year in public schools and gave private schools the right to take a call on this issue.

He said: “The coming academic year will witness intensification of lessons and a review of what students have missed.”

But what sort of academic year should students expect?

Differences have developed between school owners, parents, and teachers over the payment of tuition fees and teachers’ salaries.

Azar said: “What I know so far is that 80 percent of the Catholic schools in Lebanon will close their doors next year unless they are financially helped. Some families today are unable to pay the rest of the dues for the current year either because their breadwinners were fired or not working, while others do not want to pay dues because schools remain closed due to the pandemic.

“Lebanese people chose private schools for their children because they trusted them for their quality – 70 percent of Lebanese children go to private schools. Today, we are facing a major crisis, and I say that if education collapses in Lebanon, then the area surrounding Lebanon will collapse. Many Arab students from the Gulf states receive their education in the most prestigious Lebanese schools,” he added.

“What we are witnessing today is that the educational contract is no longer respected. It can be said that what broke the back of school owners is the approval by the Lebanese parliament in 2018 of a series of ranks and salaries that have bankrupted the state treasury and put all institutions in a continuous deficit.”

Those in charge of formal education expect a great rush for enrollment in public schools and universities, but the ability of these formal institutions to absorb huge numbers of students is limited.

Majzoub said that his ministry was “working on proposing a law to help private schools provide a financial contribution for each learner within the available financial capabilities or grants that can be obtained.”

The undersecretary of the Teachers’ Syndicate in Private Schools, former

government minister Ziad Baroud, said: “The crisis of remaining student fees and teachers’ salaries needs to be resolved by special legislation in parliament that regulates the relationship between all parties – teachers, parents, and schools – and takes into account the measures to end teachers’ contracts before July 5.”

Baroud spoke of “hundreds of teachers being discharged from their schools every year based on a legal article that gives the right to school owners to dismiss any teacher from service, provided that they send the teacher a notification before July 5.”

H said it should be kept in mind that thousands of teachers have not yet received their salaries for the last four months, and some of them had received only 50 percent or even less of their salaries.

Khoury said: “The AUB received a loan from the late Prime Minister Rashid Karami at the beginning of the 1975 Lebanese civil war to keep it afloat. In the 1990s, the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri provided aid and grants to the universities. Today, no one can help universities.”

Last Thursday, the Lebanese parliament adopted a proposal submitted by the leader of the Future Parliamentary Bloc, Bahia Hariri, to allocate LBP300 billion to the education sector to help it mitigate the effects of COVID-19.



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Egypt COVID-19 cases could be '10 times higher' than reported figures

Author:

Sat, 2020-05-30 23:03

CAIRO: An Egyptian doctor has caused controversy over the number of coronavirus cases in the country by saying the real numbers may be up to 10 times higher than the reported figures.

Dr. Adel Khattab, a member of the Higher Committee for Viruses affiliated with the Ministry of Higher Education, made these remarks in an interview with Egyptian Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Khaled Abdel-Ghaffar.

Khattab said COVID-19 cases in Egypt could hit 40,000 in just a few days. The Egyptian Health Ministry figures say that, as of Friday, the number of confirmed cases was 22,082 with 879 deaths.

Khattab said the number of infections recorded daily only reflected the cases reported to authorities. He said there were many patients with mild symptoms who went untested for the virus and, therefore, were unregistered.

He said the actual number of cases was expected to reach 10 times the number of reported cases, mainly due to socializing during the Eid Al-Fitr holidays.

The increase in cases would be prevalent among those who returned to the provinces for the holiday, then left for work and the disease would mostly be spread through people who have contracted the virus without showing symptoms, also known as silent carriers or asymptomatic.

Khattab explained that the danger lay with people who were asymptomatic.

Abdel-Majid Ibrahim, a doctor at a quarantine hospital in Egypt, said that Khattab was drawing on foreign research. A German-conducted study showed that one out of every five infected people failed to show any symptoms and therefore became a silent carrier of the virus, which could infect four out of five individuals, he explained.

"The daily numbers shared by the Ministry of Health may be based on speculation," he told Arab News. "There are no numbers or figures other than those announced by the ministry – 1,200 daily cases reported on Friday, May 29, making the total cases reported in the country over 22,000."

The government has begun paving the way for "coexisting with coronavirus" including imposing a fine of EGP4,000 (\$235) on anyone out in public or a private crowded place not wearing a facemask. People will not be permitted to enter any facility, government-owned or otherwise, without wearing masks. The

same applies to public and private transport. Malls and shops will be allowed to reopen all week, starting from Saturday.

Several Egyptian officials have said the country must end its lockdown soon and people must resume work to prevent the economy from collapsing.

Egyptian Minister of Religious Endowments Mohamed Mokhtar Gomaa announced that a plan to reopen places of worship was ready. Mosques and churches in Egypt have been closed and religious rituals have been suspended since March.

Gomaa said the plan would be presented to a coronavirus crisis management committee headed by the prime minister next week.

The Egyptian president's advisor on health and prevention, Dr. Mohamed Awad Taj El-Din, predicted that coronavirus infections in the country would reach their peak in two weeks.

He called for all of the country's institutions to work together "to survive the crisis safely."



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Egypt orders the wearing of face masks in public Egyptian doctors call for more facilities to handle pandemic

Death of Algerian girl in 'faith healing' sparks outcry

Author:

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ALGIERS: A ten-year-old girl who died in eastern Algeria while undergoing faith healing appeared to suffer "blows and burns," a prosecutor said, sparking angry reactions online after the arrest of a man.

The public prosecutor in Guelma, 500 kilometers (310 miles) east of the capital Algiers, announced a 28-year-old man had been arrested on Thursday after the death of the girl "who was abused during a Ruqya (faith healing) to which she was subjected in her family home."

The prosecutor did not disclose why the girl was subjected to the Ruqya, a practice often performed with the intention of treating the sick, "driving out a demon," providing protection from "the evil eye" or curing infertility. According to the prosecutor's statement, cited by local media, the girl died after being taken to hospital in Guelma.

"The girl's body bore signs of blows and burns," the statement said.

The public prosecutor ordered an autopsy and an investigation into the child's death, the statement said.

While faith healing is permitted in Islam because it is performed using the word of God – through recitation of the Qur'an – many note the practice can lead to abuse, particularly of those with mental health issues.

Algerians took to social media in fury over the death of the girl in a "torture session" at the hands of an "executioner," with many also decrying a lack of media coverage of the tragedy.

"Are we going to pretend for a long time not to see... the 10-year-old girl tortured and killed...?" asked journalist Akram Khariief, the director of the MENA Defense website, on his Facebook page.



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[Egypt's El-Sisi: Foreign interference in Libya threatens stability in region](#)

Sat, 2020-05-30 19:48

LONDON: Foreign interference in Libya threatens stability and security in the north Africa region, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said on Saturday.

Putting an end to illegal foreign interventions in Libya and the chaos caused by criminal groups and terrorist militias is necessary, El-Sisi said during a telephone call with French President Emmanuel Macron.

Both presidents agreed that they were keen to see a political solution reached in Libya that would pave the way for a return of security and stability in the country.

They added that this could be achieved through implementing the outcomes of the Berlin process and supporting the efforts of the UN to achieve peace in Libya.



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