

Yemen's government accuses Houthis of covering up coronavirus outbreak

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1589795476061037000

Mon, 2020-05-18 08:42

ADEN: Yemen's government accused its Houthi foes of covering up a big outbreak of coronavirus in areas they hold and the United Nations warned that the country could suffer a "catastrophic" food security situation due to the pandemic.

The Aden-based government also called for urgent global assistance to help Yemen's war-ravaged health sector deal with the coronavirus.

The World Health Organization (WHO) says the virus is spreading undetected among the population in the country, divided between the government in the south and the Iran-aligned Houthi militia based in the north.

The conflict between the Arab coalition, which includes Saudi Arabia, and the Houthis has already caused what the United Nations describes as the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with about 80 percent of Yemen's population reliant on aid and millions facing hunger.

The government has reported 128 infections and 20 deaths linked to the coronavirus across nine of Yemen's 21 provinces. The Houthis, who hold most large population centers, have only announced four cases with one death, all in the capital Sanaa.

"Reports on the ground indicate a large number of coronavirus cases in areas under the Houthis' control and hiding this information is completely unacceptable," Minister of Local Administration Abdul Raqib Fath told a news conference on Sunday.

He urged the WHO and the international community to pressure the Houthis about declaring cases.

The Houthi movement, which ousted the internationally recognized government from Sanaa in late 2014, denies the charges. On Saturday, its health minister announced two more infections and said the ministry was following all suspected cases, without providing a number.

The WHO says it has been advising local authorities throughout Yemen, where testing capacity is limited, to report cases in order to secure resources, but that the decision to do so rests with a country's leaders.

Sources had told Reuters that both sides have not fully disclosed the extent of the pandemic in a country already plagued by other diseases.

The Aden-based government's health minister said Yemen urgently needed financial assistance and protective gear for health workers in addition to ventilators, polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and swab test equipment.

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said on Monday hunger could spread drastically due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"That situation could be really catastrophic if all the elements of worst case scenarios come to be but let's hope not and the UN are working on avoiding that," senior FAO regional official Abdessalam Ould Ahmed told

Reuters.

The United States said on May 6 it would provide \$225 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) for Yemen, including for reduced operations in the north.

The WFP had said it would halve aid in Houthi-held areas from mid-April over donor concerns that the group is hindering aid deliveries, a charge it denies.

The UN envoy to Yemen said on Thursday that significant progress has been made toward cementing a temporary truce prompted by the coronavirus pandemic and to pave the way for a resumption of stalled peace talks.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Yemen](#)

[Saudi Arabia](#)

Fighting rages in Yemen's Abyan province Arab Coalition says Yemen's Southern Transitional Council prevents coastguard from doing job

[Wear a mask or face jail in Qatar](#)

Author:

Gregory WALTON | AFP

ID:

1589741108487346100

Sun, 2020-05-17 17:54

DOHA: Qatar on Sunday began enforcing the world's toughest penalties of up to three years' in prison for failing to wear masks in public, in a country with one of the highest coronavirus infection rates.

More than 32,000 people have tested positive for COVID-19 in the tiny country – 1.2 percent of the 2.75 million population – although just 15 people have died.

Only the micro-states of San Marino and the Vatican have had higher per-capita infection rates, according to the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control.

Violators of Qatar's new rules will face up to three years in jail and fines of as much as \$55,000.

Drivers alone in their vehicles are exempt from the requirement, but police erected checkpoints across the capital Doha on Sunday evening to check compliance by motorists.

Most customers gathered outside money lenders on Banks Street wore masks, while others produced a face covering when asked.

"From today it's very strict," said Majeed, a taxi driver waiting for business in the busy pedestrian area, who wore a black mask.

Heloisa, an expat resident, saw the steep penalties as "a bit of a scare tactic."

Wearing a mask is currently mandatory in around 50 countries, although scientists are divided on their effectiveness.

Authorities in Chad have made it an offense to be unmasked in public, on pain of 15 days in prison. In Morocco, similar rules can see violators jailed for three months and fined up to 1,300 dirhams (\$130).

Qatari authorities have warned that gatherings during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan may have increased infections.

Abdullatif Al-Khal, co-chair of Qatar's National Pandemic Preparedness Committee, said Thursday that there was "a huge risk in gatherings of families" for Ramadan meals.

"(They) led to a significant increase in the number of infections among Qataris," he said.

Mosques, along with schools, malls, and restaurants remain closed in Qatar to prevent the disease's spread.

But construction sites remain open as Qatar prepares to host the 2022 World Cup, although foremen and government inspectors are attempting to enforce social distancing rules.

Officials have said workers at three stadiums have tested positive for the highly contagious respiratory virus. Masks have been compulsory for construction workers since April 26.

A 12-strong team of masked laborers kept their distance from one another as they worked under baking sun on a road project in Doha's blue-collar Msheireb district on Sunday.

Tens of thousands of migrant workers were quarantined in Doha's gritty Industrial Area after a number of infections were confirmed there in mid-March, but authorities have begun to ease restrictions.

Khal said that most new cases were among migrant workers, although there has

been a jump in infections among Qataris. He said the country had not yet reached the peak of its contagion.

Rights groups have warned that laborers' cramped living conditions, communal food preparation areas and shared bathrooms could undermine social distancing efforts and speed up the spread of the virus.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Coronavirus](#)

[Qatar](#)

Qatar's migrant workers 'beg for food' amid coronavirus outbreak
Qatar coronavirus infections top 30,000

[Outcry in Algeria after pregnant doctor dies of virus](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1589733201976989100

Sun, 2020-05-17 15:49

ALGIERS: The death of a pregnant Algerian doctor from the COVID-19 disease after she was denied maternity leave has sparked an uproar and prompted the dismissal Sunday of a hospital director.

Health Minister Abderrahman Benbouzid sacked the director of the Ras El Oued hospital in eastern Algeria after Wafa Boudissa succumbed to COVID-19, a source close to the case told AFP.

The 28-year-old doctor was eight months pregnant and worked at the IC surgery unit of the hospital when she died on Friday.

She had asked the hospital chief, who was not named, for early maternity leave, but he refused to let her take any time off.

Colleagues of the victim had backed her request and signed a petition in solidarity, one of them said.

Benbouzid on Saturday ordered an investigation into the death of Boudissa and, in an unprecedented move, tasked the inspector general of the health ministry to head the probe.

The source close to the case said that anyone found directly responsible for her death could face trial for negligent homicide.

State television meanwhile broadcast footage showing Benbouzid visiting the hospital and then Boudissa's family home to offer his condolences.

In the footage, Benbouzid said he could not comprehend why a pregnant woman was forced to work, while Boudissa's co-workers denounced those behind her death.

A presidential decree released at the onset of the novel coronavirus pandemic had stated that pregnant women and those raising children were among individuals allowed to take exceptional leave from work.

According to officially declared figures, Algeria has registered 6,821 cases of coronavirus, including 542 deaths, since February.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Algeria](#)

[doctor](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Algeria starts coronavirus test kits production
Algeria mobilizes prisoners to make coronavirus protection gear

[Iran summons ambassador over possible US measures against Venezuela shipment](#)

Sun, 2020-05-17 19:11

LONDON: Iran summoned the Swiss ambassador, who represents US interests in the Islamic Republic, over possible measures Washington could take against an Iranian fuel shipment to Venezuela, the Mehr news agency reported. A senior official in US President Donald Trump's administration told Reuters

on Thursday the United States was considering measures it could take in response to Iran's shipment of fuel to crisis-stricken Venezuela. The oil sectors of Iran and Venezuela, members of OPEC, are both under US sanctions. The Trump administration official declined to specify the measures being weighed but said options would be presented to Trump. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi passed on a message to the ambassador on Sunday warning against any US threat against the Iranian tankers, according to a report on the foreign ministry website. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also wrote a letter to UN chief Antonio Guterres warning that any American measures against the fuel shipment would be dangerous, illegal and a form of piracy, according to the report on the foreign ministry website. At least one tanker carrying fuel loaded at an Iranian port has set sail for Venezuela, according to vessel tracking data from Refinitiv Eikon on Wednesday, which could help ease an acute scarcity of gasoline in the South American country. Venezuela is in desperate need of gasoline and other refined fuel products to keep the country functioning amid an economic collapse under socialist President Nicolas Maduro. Venezuela produces crude oil but its infrastructure has been crippled during the economic crisis.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

[US](#)

[Venezuela](#)

East Syria strikes kill 7 Iran-backed fighters: MonitorIran sentences French academic to 6 years in prison

Pirates attack tanker Stolt Apal off Yemen

Sun, 2020-05-17 18:15

DUBAI: Stolt Tankers said its vessel the Stolt Apal was attacked by pirates 75 nautical miles off Yemen's coast on Sunday. Stolt Tankers said six armed pirates approached the vessel in two speedboats.

[#Breaking](#) Reports that a U.K. flagged product tanker STOLT APAL attacked in the GoA IRTC westbound transit corridor at position 13° 43N 050° 37.4E Unconfirmed reports of an RPG launched against the vessel. More updates: <https://t.co/avKFIonWGV>
[pic.twitter.com/y6ZacoBJwh](https://t.co/y6ZacoBJwh)

– Dryad Global (@GlobalDryad) [May 17, 2020](#)

“After multiple warning shots were fired by the armed guard team aboard Stolt Apal, the skiffs opened fire on the ship. The armed guard team returned fire, disabling one skiff and ending the pursuit,” Stolt Tankers said.

“The bridge area sustained minor damage from bullets but there were no injuries, no pollution and no cargo impacted on Stolt Apal. A coalition warship responded and Stolt Apal has resumed her voyage.”

Maritime security firm Dryad Global said it was the ninth reported incident in the Gulf of Aden this year.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Yemen](#)

[Gulf of Aden](#)

[Mukalla](#)

Yemenis stranded in India call to be repatriated as fear of infection rises
Yemenis head to countryside to avoid COVID-19 restrictions