

# Egyptian singers spread gratitude, hope amid pandemic

Author:

Sun, 2020-04-19 22:15

CAIRO: In support of health care workers fighting on the frontlines against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), Egyptian singers are expressing their gratitude by doing what they do best – singing.

Crooner Medhat Saleh recorded a video of his song “The People in the White Coat.” Written by Omar Taher and composed by Aziz Shafei, the video attracted thousands of viewers on social media and YouTube.

Saleh said he was happy to make the song in collaboration with composer Shafei. In a phone-in with a TV talk show, Saleh sent a message to doctors: “You are in our hearts and we are thankful for your efforts.”

Shafei posted a comment under the video of the song on YouTube, referring to the song as a “small dedication” to “our beloved doctors and medical teams.”

Saleh also sang “Egypt’s White Army” in honor of the medical teams battling against the pandemic.

The song was written by Amir Taema and composed by Khaled El-Guindy and Yasser Maguid. The video was directed by Hana Hafez.

Famed singer Hany Shaker, head of the Musicians Union, thanked health care workers, saying that the “white army” in Egypt was making history not only in their country but all across the Arab world. He also hailed Egyptian Minister of Health Hala Zayed, as well as the police and army for their efforts in countering the virus.

Shaker, who rose to fame in the 1970s, recently released the new song “Pray for Egypt” on his official YouTube account. The song features lyrics by Ahmed Sheta and music by Walid Mounir.

Egyptian folk singer Mohamed Adawya and Moroccan singer Jannat released “Our Country’s Heroes,” with lyrics by Tamer Hussein and music by Aziz Shafei. It was directed by Akram Farouk and produced by political party Mostaqbal Watan (Future of a Nation). The song hails the doctors in hospitals working side by side with the army and the police in battling the pandemic.

Adawya said that he did not expect the song to be such a hit. He added that he was happy to be able to make this “humble contribution,” which he described as a “gift to the warriors who are directly fighting the virus across the country and risking their lives.” He recorded and shot the song in less than 24 hours.

Cairo-based Moroccan vocalist Samira Said released the song “Crazy Reality” on her official social media accounts and on YouTube. She said that she

recorded the song only a few months ago and found the present time to be good opportunity to release it.

The song's Lebanese director Nedal Hany said the video was shot in 14 hours in Said's home in Cairo.

Around 12 such songs have been released in Egypt so far and experts predict that these nationalistic refrains will be around for quite some time.

Many singers across the Arab world also released similar songs, including Lebanese artists Marwan Khoury and Ragheb Allama and Emirati singer Hussein El-Jasmy.

Yasmine Farrag, a professor of art critique at the Arts Academy, dubbed these releases "songs of the situation," saying that the phenomenon of responding to major events or catastrophes – such as pandemics or wars – was not new.

"Those who produce such songs do not aim to add them to their traditional musical repertoire. They also do not expect that people will continue to listen to these songs for a long time since they are linked to particular events," Farrag said.

She explained that social media contributed to a great extent in promoting such songs and believed this to be a positive aspect. She added that there were other types of creative productions, which she called "spontaneous songs" and which were performed by non-professionals within the same context, reflecting the people's awareness of the severity of the situation. However, Farrag said these songs often did not gain the same media attention.



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## [Lebanese optimistic as number of coronavirus cases decline](#)

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Sun, 2020-04-19 21:04

BEIRUT: The number of new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases in Lebanon fell on Sunday with only one infection reported, raising the total number to 673. The number of fatalities remains 21.

Lebanese Interior Minister Mohamed Fahmy announced that the night-time curfew will start an hour later, at 8 p.m. instead of 7 p.m. The decision follows an extension in the opening times of supermarkets and restaurants that offer home delivery.

Health ministry teams continue to carry out random virus tests in Baalbek, Zahle, Tripoli, and Akkar. A similar campaign was carried out in Beirut, parts of Mount Lebanon and the south.

"The results of these tests are expected to help verify the possibility of societal infections and unannounced cases, to determine the course of the pandemic in Lebanon, and decide the steps to be taken," Health Minister Hamad Hassan said.

Dr. Abdul-Rahman Al-Bizri, an infectious diseases specialist and member of the Health ministry's crisis committee, said that "the number of cases is declining and this is an important indication. We went through a period in which the number of cases increased and we started to descend the pyramid. If the number continues to decrease, this means that we are in control of the pandemic in Lebanon and it will be encouraging to alleviate the restrictions imposed on people."

Dr. Al-Bizri said: "We will not apply herd immunity because we followed harsh measures. This may lead to a gradual reopening of the country."

With regard to the random tests that are taking place, Al-Bizri said: "These tests provide us with a picture of the status of the infections that occurred and not what will occur. Their results do not mean any change in the current data."

Bakeries on Sunday backed down on their decision to suspend distribution of bread to supermarkets and shops due to “high distribution cost.”

Bakeries had said they would raise the price of a loaf of bread delivered to shops and supermarkets to LBP 1,750 (\$1.16) – in bakeries a loaf costs LBP 1,500.

Bakery owners retracted their decision after pressure from the Ministry of Economy and regional municipalities. Had it been implemented, the higher price would have added to the worries of the Lebanese.

Greek Orthodox Archbishop Elias Odeh, in an Easter sermon in Beirut, demanded that the government to “lift Lebanon out of its crisis without the citizens having to pay the price of the mistakes and quarrels of their rulers.”

Odeh reminded the officials of the popular uprising six months ago “because they could no longer tolerate exploitation.” He called on the government to “implement the real reforms that it had promised, which will satisfy the people, not the political class and (political) parties.”



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Coronavirus lockdown brings Lebanon’s migratory birds up close

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# Turkey's coronavirus cases highest in Middle East

Author:

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1587317403395392100

Sun, 2020-04-19 16:18

ANKARA: Turkey's confirmed cases of coronavirus have shot above 82,000, the highest figure in the Middle East including Iran.

It ranks fourth among East Mediterranean countries in terms of death toll and total cases, with rates increasing each day. Turkey has more confirmed cases than China, according to data from the John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

More than 2,000 people have died so far in Turkey and 11,976 have recovered.

Treatment and medicine for COVID-19 patients, as well as protective gear and testing, have become free of charge in public hospitals and medical centers.

Travel restrictions in and out of 31 cities have been extended for another 15 days. All public gatherings are banned in the country. All schools and universities are closed, and all international flights are suspended.

People under the age of 20 and above the age of 65 have not been allowed to leave their homes for a while. The government imposed a two-day curfew for the second consecutive weekend and only state officials, journalists and logistics employees were exempt.

Turkey's Ministry of Interior banned the opposition-run Mersin municipality in the south from distributing free bread to people, even though the city is one of 31 municipalities under lockdown due to the coronavirus contagion risk.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) criticized such municipalities for creating a parallel structure.

"These municipalities act in a socially sensitive way," Sengul Hablemitoglu, a social services expert from the European University of Lefke, told Arab News. "It cannot be seen as a rivalry against the government."

A country-wide lockdown is not expected for the time being because of government concerns about the economy. But main opposition parties want tougher measures to contain the spread of the disease.

A group of 13 countries including Canada, Brazil, Turkey, Italy, and Germany

used a joint statement to call for global cooperation against the devastating economic impact of the pandemic. It urged working with all countries to coordinate on public health, travel, trade, economic and financial measures in order to “minimize disruptions and recover stronger.”

The Turkish government is expected to borrow more and print more money or rescue some critical companies amid the economic shock that has hit sectors hard, especially tourism, food and beverage, transport and export-dependent industries. It is set, for the first time, to give its sovereign wealth fund a green light to buy some strategic private firms in distress.

The Turkish Central Bank is also holding talks with its foreign counterparts on swap lines to tackle the economic costs of the quarantine restrictions.

Political analyst Nezhir Onur Kuru, from Koc University in Istanbul, said world leaders who prioritized cooperation benefited from increased approval ratings. It was a different story in Turkey, however.

“In Turkey the divergence between the ruling government and some municipalities have triggered political fault lines,” he told Arab News. “The victories of the opposition-run municipalities in Turkey during the March 2019 elections should not be forgotten, as people fervently voted for opposition candidates in these municipalities due to the feeling of being unjustly treated. This is the same for the ongoing frictions in managing the social impact of the pandemic.”

Istanbul has an increasing number of confirmed coronavirus cases, prompting Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu to call for a city-wide lockdown.

Imamoglu, who is from the main opposition Republican People’s Party, defeated his AKP rival twice last year in mayoral races. Once in the poll and then again in a re-run. It was considered to be a significant warning from the city’s electorate, who felt dissatisfied with previous AKP-affiliated administrations.

Kuru added that the friction between the opposition and government was endangering relief measures at the expense of citizens.

Meanwhile a mobile tracking app, designed by the Turkish Health Ministry and cellphone operators that is accessible through the Google Play Store, has raised concerns that it may abuse people’s personal data. It sends automated messages to people diagnosed with the virus and gives the option to track people’s movements on the map.

The next two weeks may see virus cases peak in Turkey.



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## [Yemenis stranded abroad demand rescue flights](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-04-18 23:14

AL-MUKALLA: Hamoud Hassan was supposed to have left India in mid-March with his sick brother after doctors told him that the surgeries his sibling needed would cost \$54,000.

"We decided to leave India to collect the money, spend Ramadan with our families and return," he told Arab News. "Also, my brother's health improved

after taking drugs.”

But their plan to leave never got off the ground after Yemen last month halted flights in and out of the country to stop the spread of coronavirus. The decision left thousands of Yemenis stuck in India, Egypt, Jordan, and other countries. Hassan lives in Saudi Arabia, while his brother lives in Yemen. Both want to leave India.

The abandoned nationals have appealed to their government to arrange repatriation flights as they are running out of money and food. “Our only demand is returning home,” said Hassan. “Do they want us to die here? We do not mind staying in quarantine in the desert at home. I also want to go back to my family in Saudi Arabia.”

A crumbling health system in war-torn Yemen led thousands of its citizens to seek treatment overseas. But some have been forced into borrowing money from friends and relatives while abroad after spending what they had on food and healthcare.

“We moved to a new, cheaper flat and borrowed \$20 from one person and another \$50 from another,” Mutaher Hassan, a Yemeni patient who traveled with three others to Egypt last year for a liver transplant, told Arab News. “All hospitals here have been closed due to the disease. My mother and brother want to return home very soon. We spend our time praying, eating and sleeping.”

He urged the government to evacuate them quickly as his friends in Egypt and relatives in Yemen and Saudi Arabia had stopped funding him. “Everyone is suffering from financial problems, even my relatives in Saudi Arabia,” he added.

Yemen also closed land crossings with Saudi Arabia and Oman, leaving hundreds of Umrah pilgrims in the Kingdom. Yemen recorded its first case of coronavirus on April 10, and health officials warned that large repatriations would lead to the spread of the disease amid chronic shortages of medical supplies and quarantine centers.

Omer Hassan, who traveled with his mother to the UAE in February for treatment, was planning to fly back to Yemen to prepare for his wedding. “I see myself much luckier than many stranded patients in Egypt and other places since at least I live here with relatives,” he told Arab News from Abu Dhabi. “But I want to go home to furnish my house.”

Another Yemeni man, called Omer, was in Egypt and said that he stayed indoors most of the time. “I booked a flight after recovering from surgery,” he told Arab News. “Now, I have to limit my errands in order not to spend money.”

Several Yemenis stuck in Egypt and India who spoke to Arab News said they preferred being quarantined in Yemen rather than living with no money or help abroad.

Yemen’s internationally-recognized government is considering several options to address the problem, such as sending urgent financial assistance or asking



them to bring medical reports showing they were not infected with coronavirus.

“We are under huge pressure to address this issue,” a senior government official told Arab News on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief reporters. “One of the options is wiring \$2 million to the stranded people.” He added that the number of stranded Yemenis was around 10,000. “We do not want the disease to spread in Yemen. At the moment we prefer sending the money before moving to the other options.”

The Yemeni government might also ask host countries to test Yemenis and supply them with a medical report. Those who test negative would be allowed to return. Buses would ferry them from airports to their homes, the Yemeni government official said.

But some Yemeni provinces that host functioning airports, such as Hadramout and Aden, reject the idea of repatriating Yemenis before putting them in quarantine, fearing the rapid spread of coronavirus. “It is true that there is a strong opposition to the idea of bringing back the stranded people soon,” the official said.

“We do not even want to live in a hotel in India,” Hamoud Hassan said. “The government should be using the money for buying fuel for the planes that would carry us. \$200 would not solve our problems.”



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## Israel accuses Hezbollah of “provocative” activity

Author:

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Sat, 2020-04-18 17:38

JERUSALEM: Israel on Saturday accused the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah of “provocative” activity along the Lebanese-Israeli frontier and said it would complain to the UN Security Council.

In a statement, Foreign Minister Israel Katz accused Hezbollah of multiple attempts to breach the border Friday night.

He said Israel “thoroughly condemns” the incident and expects the Lebanese government to prevent such threats.

On Friday night, the Israeli military fired flares along the volatile frontier after signs of a possible border breach. It said it later found damage to the separation fence in three locations.

Israel and Hezbollah fought a month-long war in 2006 that ended in a stalemate. Under a UN-brokered truce, Hezbollah is barred from conducting military activity along the frontier.

There was no immediate comment from the Iranian-backed militant group.



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