

[UAE officially asks to postpone Expo 2020 Dubai](#)

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Sat, 2020-04-04 13:56

DUBAI: The UAE has officially requested to postpone the start of the Expo 2020 Dubai until October next year due to the coronavirus pandemic, the body that oversees the world fair said Saturday.

Dubai had hoped to attract some 25 million visits to the multi-billion-dollar, six-month event, which was scheduled to launch October 20 this year. "The government of the United Arab Emirates has formally requested the postponement of World Expo 2020 Dubai," the Paris-based Bureau International des Expositions said in a statement.

"Following consultations with the BIE, participating countries and key stakeholders, the UAE has proposed 1 October 2021 – 31 March 2022 as the new opening dates of Expo 2020 Dubai."

The UAE government also requested approval to continue using Expo 2020 Dubai as the event's official name.

The BIE said it would hold a virtual meeting on April 21 to discuss "options for a change of dates."

"The request of the UAE government has been sent following in-depth discussions by the Expo 2020 Dubai steering committee with the organizer and the BIE on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic," said the statement.

"A final decision on a change of dates can only be made by a two-thirds majority vote of BIE member states."

Dubai, known for hosting hundreds of conferences annually, has already scrapped a string of cultural and entertainment events in recent weeks over the spread of the deadly disease.

Expo 2020 organizers said on Monday they had recommended a one-year postponement due to the pandemic.

"Many countries have been significantly impacted by COVID-19 and they have therefore expressed a need to postpone the opening of Expo 2020 Dubai by one year," Expo 2020 Dubai director-general Reem Al-Hashimi said in a statement.

"The UAE and Expo 2020 Dubai have listened. And in the spirit of solidarity and unity, we supported the proposal to explore a one-year postponement."

The UAE has reported 1,505 COVID-19 cases and 10 deaths. It has enforced extensive lockdown measures to curb the spread of the disease including an ongoing nighttime curfew.



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Dubai Expo team member tests positive for COVID-19

[Iran escaped prisoners back in jail amid coronavirus epidemic](#)

Author:

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Sat, 2020-04-04 14:55

DUBAI: Most of the 70 inmates who escaped from a prison in western Iran last month are now back in jail, Iranian authorities said on Saturday, even though about 100,000 prisoners have been granted temporary release due to the coronavirus epidemic.

Iranian media have reported unrest in several prisons in the country, including the March 27 mass escape from the facility in Kurdistan province.

The judiciary's Mizanoline website said some of the inmates had been captured by security forces, while others returned on their own to the prison in the city of Saqqez.

United Nations human rights spokesman Rupert Colville on Friday voiced concern over a possible coronavirus outbreak in prisons in Iran and other countries.

Iran – the Middle East country worst-hit by the epidemic – has already granted temporary release to about 100,000 inmates to curb prison overcrowding and ease fears of the virus' spread.

The Health Ministry said on Saturday 158 more coronavirus patients had died in the past 24 hours, bringing the total death toll to 3,452. The total number of cases reached 55,743.

In a rare comment in Britain's Guardian newspaper, Tehran Mayor Pirouz Hanachi said US sanctions were crippling Iran's fight against the coronavirus.

"As a result (of sanctions), the ability of my colleagues and I to provide the health, logistical and other essential infrastructure necessary to combat the disease has been drastically reduced. We experience this loss every day, and it can be counted in people that would not have died," Hanachi said. Separately, the foreign ministry accused US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo of "medical-terrorism" through the sanctions, which have hit vital sectors such as oil and banking.

"Undisputed fact: US 'diplomats' have long been in the business of coups, arming terrorists," ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Twitter on Saturday. "But @SecPompeo ... and his masters have taken the 'job' to a whole new level: #Medical_terrorism."

Pompeo and other US officials have stressed that humanitarian supplies are exempt from sanctions Washington reimposed on Tehran after President Donald Trump abandoned Iran's 2015 multilateral deal to limit its nuclear program. However, broader US sanctions deter many US and global firms from humanitarian trade with Iran.

Meanwhile state media quoted President Hassan Rouhani as saying that state support for businesses hit by the coronavirus outbreak would be restricted to enterprises that give assurances not to lay off workers.

Rouhani has said 75% of a total budget allocation of about 1,000 trillion rials to address the pandemic would include grants and low-interest loans to enterprises affected by COVID-19.

The total allocated amount is worth some \$6 billion at the rial's free market exchange rate of about 166,000 rials per dollar. But the government may decide to allocate some of the funds at the official rate of 42,000 which is used to subsidise food and medicine.



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UN 'horrified' as young offender dies in Iran after guard beating

[Egypt postpones launch of mega projects to 2021 due to coronavirus](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1586011376615968000

Sat, 2020-04-04 14:40

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi on Saturday postponed the launch of mega-projects including the Grand Egyptian Museum and moving civil servants to a planned new capital city to 2021 from 2020 due to the coronavirus outbreak, the presidency said.

The new museum had been due to open later this year, while the first group of civil servants was to be transferred to the government district in the new administrative capital in June.

El-Sisi's government has said it wants to start running Egypt from the new city, 45 km (28 miles) east of Cairo, as soon as the middle of 2020. But the \$58 billion project has struggled to raise funds and faced other challenges after some investors pulled out.



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[Earthquake shakes Lebanon and Syria](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-04-03 23:49

BEIRUT: A small earthquake in the eastern Mediterranean was felt across parts of Lebanon and Syria on Friday.

“Residents in Beirut, Zgharta, Batroun, Tripoli and Akkar felt an earthquake

that lasted for several seconds,” Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency said.

The earthquake measured 4.7 on the Richter Scale at a depth of 20 kilometres, some 65 kilometres from the coastal city of Latakia, Syria’s state news agency SANA reported.

The shaking was felt in Latakia Tartous, Hama, Homs, and Aleppo.



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[Why the bidet is making a comeback in coronavirus-stricken West](#)

Fri, 2020-04-03 23:40

WASHINGTON, DC: As the number of COVID-19 cases in the US continues to swell, a declared national emergency and state-wide lockdowns have led to a run on all kinds of products, from face masks and hand sanitizers to bottled water and canned food.

Turning into something of a holy-grail product, toilet paper has become the symbol of panic buying, the new normal in consumer behavior.

Across the US, throngs of patrons are tearing through supermarket aisles, loading toilet paper into overfull shopping carts.

Companies that help supply this everyday paper product were caught flat-footed, as stockpiling has led to shortages resulting in whole aisles being wiped clean.

“The hallmark of a crisis is loss of control, the sense that you have no say over how your life will evolve,” said Adam Alter, author of the marketing book “Irresistible” and a professor at New York University’s Stern School of Business.

“One way to take back that control is to find it in places where it still happens to be available, particularly in how you spend your money and the kinds of things you acquire,” he added.

“Toilet-paper hoarding makes sense when you consider that in many – but certainly not all – cultures, there’s no obvious alternative to toilet paper. It serves a purpose that people consider a necessity, and once people begin to hoard toilet paper, they send a signal that the product is scarce and so those necessary needs might not be met.”

FASTFACTS

- 57 Toilet-paper sheets used daily by avg. American
- 36 billion Toilet-paper rolls used by Americans yearly
- 15 million Trees lost to US toilet-paper consumption
- 253,000 Tons of bleach used in making toilet paper for US

The White House issued a statement urging Americans to ease up on stockpiling: “Supply chains in the United States are strong, and it is unnecessary for the American public to hoard daily essentials.”

The American Forest and Paper Association said in a statement: “Rest assured, tissue products continue to be produced and shipped.”

Such reassurances have fallen on deaf ears. No matter how quickly toilet paper is replenished, it is not staying on shelves for long. The supply chain is strained and production has reached capacity.

That has motivated desperate Americans to look for alternatives, and “very few exist that won’t clog your pipes,” said Alter.

A growing number of people are turning to an Old World device that has finally begun to gain traction in the US: The bidet.



Toilet paper is not staying on supermarket shelves for long and production has reached capacity, motivating customers to look for alternatives. (AFP)

A bidet, popular in the Middle East and parts of Asia, is a bowl designed to be sat on or a water hose for the purpose of washing after using the loo.

During the past couple of months, various bidet manufacturers have been struggling to cope with skyrocketing demand.

“Due to the increase of bidets sales, many items are on backorder or out of stock with all of the main suppliers in the industry,” said hellotushy.com, a company that brands itself as a “team of crusaders, fighting for clean bums and reduced global wastefulness ... and ultimately turning people into born-again bidet lovers.”

According to Jason Ojalvo, CEO of Tushy, “Things started ramping up on March 9 and hit an insane high on March 13. We had a few days where we sold over \$500,000 a day, including a day where we hit \$1 million in sales.”

Born in France in the 1600s, the bidet took centuries before arriving at its present-day version.

Americans were first introduced to the bathroom fixture during World War II. American troops stationed in Europe would often see bidets in the bathrooms of brothels, and so came to associate them with sex work.

Given the country’s puritanical past, the returning troops were reluctant to introduce the device to their homeland. It became associated with sin, French hedonism and sexuality.

The device continued to evolve and morph into different variations, including a mini-shower attachment connected to the toilet.



The demo Toto toilet is seen on Jan. 8, 2016 at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nevada. (Photo by Rob Lever / AFP)

The popularity of the plumbed bidets spread in Western Europe, the Middle East and Asia, as well as Latin America.

The device is still ubiquitous in Italy, Argentina and many other places, even though it is disappearing from the country where it was created.

In the 1960s, the American Bidet Co. took another run at making the bidet more acceptable to Americans by adding a spritzing function to the seat.

The original inventor, Arnold Cohen, wanted to change the "habits of a nation, weaning us off" toilet paper.

Although he installed thousands of those seats all over New York, the result was a fiasco.

"Advertising was a next-to-impossible challenge," Cohen said. "Nobody wants to hear about Tushy Washing 101."

He gave up and left for Japan, a nation that actually listened to his message.

"Since the late 1800s, we have been led to believe that toilet paper does the

job,” Miki Agrawal, the founder of Tushy, told Arab News via email.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

“But all it does is cost us money every month (to the tune of billions of dollars per year if you add us all together), kills millions of trees per year, and causes chronic infections and disease down there.

“I mean, would you jump into your shower, NOT turn on the water, and start wiping down your body with dry paper?

“People would call you crazy! So why are we doing that to the dirtiest part of our body? It’s time to upgrade our toilet habit from dry toilet paper to a precise stream of clean water.”

For his part, Jim Ace, a senior campaigner and action manager at STAND.earth, cautioned: “It’s important to keep in mind that not everyone has access to clean water, so for some people, bidets simply can’t be part of the solution right now.

“But where possible, bidets are an affordable, environmentally responsible alternative to toilet paper that destroys forests and harms wildlife.

“Our current public-health and economic crisis has motivated Americans to look for alternatives.



A woman carries groceries and toilet paper in New York City. (Photo by Angela Weiss / AFP)

“Charmin toilet paper can cost more than \$1 a roll, while portable bidets can cost less than \$10 and bidet attachments can cost less than \$50.

“Countries around the world already use bidets, and in the US they’re starting to make economic – and environmental – sense.”

Over a year ago, STAND.earth sounded the alarm over the havoc toilet paper was wreaking on the environment.

Largely made of fresh-cut trees, toilet paper involves chopping down globally important forests such as the Boreal in Canada, which has declined more than 9 percent since 2000 from logging.

Toilet paper harms wildlife, causes soil erosion and requires lots of energy, water and chemicals to produce, which in turn pollutes our air, water and climate.

“Wiping our bottoms with fiber made from trees makes no environmental sense,” Ace said. “We’re literally flushing our forests.”



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Coronavirus: 'Worst yet to come' for countries in conflict, says UN chief