

Egypt fights deadly virus with a healthy dose of humor

Author:

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CAIRO: As Egypt joins the global battle against coronavirus, Egyptians have adopted a tried-and-tested method for dealing with a crisis – making fun of it.

Coronavirus may be the No. 1 issue on Egyptians' minds, but many are discovering that humor is the best medicine to combat the illness.

On Friday, the official number of coronavirus cases in the country climbed to almost 300, with seven deaths. However, some fear the actual number of cases may be much higher.

Instead of showing fear and anxiety, many Egyptians have resorted to sarcastic comedy on social media.

Minister of Health Hala Zayed became a favorite target of online satire after she wore a medical mask incorrectly, giving the impression that the country's top health official does not understand basic health safety rules.

Facebook messages also mocked Zayed for visiting China last month, with some saying she was delivering an Egyptian vaccine and others that she wanted to bring the virus home with her.

The jokes did not stop there. Some said that corona was simply the name of the popular chocolate brand in Egypt.

Others suggested that since the virus originated in China, it won't last long since all Chinese products have a limited shelf life.

One woman shared a post saying: "The world is almost coming to an end and here I am stuffing vine leaves."

As virus cases surged in Egypt and the Ministry of Health offered instructions on virus protection using ethyl alcohol, someone tweeted a dialogue between comedians Mohamed Saad and Hassan Hosni: "Are you crying because you don't have ethyl alcohol? No, I'm crying because I put my hands on my face."

Another tweet: "My wife made cheese with Dettol. Delicious." Social media users shared a video showing Egyptian actresses making fun of the virus. These included Zeina, who appeared in a video during the Luxor African Film Festival, which was canceled due to the pandemic.

BACKGROUND

Minister of Health Hala Zayed became a favorite target of online satire after she wore a medical mask incorrectly, giving the impression that the country's top health official does not understand basic health safety rules.

Zeina posted an updated video on her Instagram account saying that she was terrified and wasn't taking the viral threat lightly.

After the Egyptian government suspended schools and universities, and closed shops, restaurants and malls overnight, sarcasm was directed at the state of marital relationships. Divorce rates will surge because husbands and wives will be at home together, some claimed. "I see that all those who wanted to die and were thinking of committing suicide are now walking around with alcohol and face masks," said one Twitter user.



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Egypt facilitates evacuation of citizens from Kuwait
Egypt closes cinemas, theaters to contain coronavirus spread

[UAE announces first two deaths from coronavirus](#)

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Fri, 2020-03-20 20:38

CAIRO: The UAE health ministry announced on Friday its first two deaths from coronavirus, UAE official news agency WAM said. The two deaths are for cases that suffered from previous health conditions, the agency said.



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UAE establishes hotline to help holders of valid residence permits abroadMost Saudi Arabia, UAE residents 'scared' of coronavirus: poll

[Controversy in Lebanon as Israeli agent is flown to US](#)

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By SARAH EL DEEB | AP

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Fri, 2020-03-20 17:00

BEIRUT: Foreign Minister Nassif Hitti on Friday summoned the US Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea over the transportation of Israeli agent Amer Al-Fakhoury from the US Embassy in Awkar to the US.

Hitti's office said that the minister listened to Shea give "an explanation about the circumstances of Amer Al-Fakhoury being transferred abroad from the US Embassy."

A US military helicopter landed at the embassy on Thursday before leaving and flying out to sea.

US citizen Al-Fakhoury had taken refuge in the embassy on Monday, after Lebanon's military court dropped charges of "killing and torturing detainees at Khiam prison in the South during the Israeli occupation before the year 2000" against him.

The court said that charges against him were dropped because the statute of limitations had expired, which meant that 20 years had passed since the crimes took place without anyone filing a complaint against him.

The helicopter was able to fly in due to an agreement signed by the US and Lebanon in 1982, allowing US planes to "enter Lebanese airspace and land on its territory without revealing the nature of the mission."

Al-Fakhoury was arrested in September 2019 at Beirut airport while returning from the US after he had fled to Israel when the occupation forces withdrew from Southern Lebanon.

He was recognized and spent months at one of Lebanon's hospitals during his arrest, since he suffers from advanced cancer.

SPEEDREAD

US citizen Al-Fakhoury had taken refuge in the embassy,, after Lebanon's military court dropped charges of 'killing and torturing detainees at Khiam prison in the South during the Israeli occupation before the year 2000' against him.

Activists accused Hezbollah of being "an accomplice of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) to release Al-Fakhoury."

This necessitated the appearance of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah on TV on Friday night to clarify its position.

The head of the court that released Al-Fakhoury, Brig. Gen. Hussein Abdallah, announced his resignation on Friday morning.

"Out of respect for my oath and military honor, I am resigning from heading the military court, where the application of the law equals the release of an agent, the pain of a captive and the betraying of a judge," he said.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab tweeted: "The crime of being an informant for the Israeli enemy cannot be forgotten. The rights of martyrs and liberated prisoners do not fade in heaven's justice by the passage of time."



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US man accused of human rights violations freed in Lebanon
Lebanese judge orders retrial of Lebanese-American

Hundreds of Bahrainis stuck in Iran as evacuation plans stall

Author:

Fri, 2020-03-20 03:20

DUBAI: Hundreds of Bahraini pilgrims are stranded in Iran, the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in the Middle East, as Bahrain struggles to evacuate its citizens from a country with which it has no diplomatic ties.

Jamal, who has been in Mashhad with his wife and daughter since early February, told Reuters he was awaiting news of repatriation plans after a government-chartered flight was delayed last Thursday and again this Thursday.

"Yesterday we were ready to leave and then at the last moment they said the flight was canceled without any explanation," the 62-year-old man, who declined to give his last name, said by telephone from his hotel.

Bahrain said the company from which its Health Ministry had leased an airplane to conduct a second repatriation flight had backed out and authorities were seeking alternatives "as soon as possible," state news agency BNA said on Wednesday.

There are no direct flights between Bahrain and Iran, where the death toll from the coronavirus now exceeds 1,200.

Bahrain repatriated 165 people last week on an Omani airplane. Authorities have said around 85 of them have so far tested positive for the virus.

Many Bahrainis go to Iran via Oman and Dubai on pilgrimage to Mashhad and Qom, where the outbreak in Iran began.

Bahraini national Reda Ali said his elderly father had died on pilgrimage in Mashhad last week from a heart attack. He now fears for his 75-year-old mother, who he said has pre-existing conditions, and for his brother.

"I fear a lot for those (pilgrims) ... Most are old or retired people," he told Reuters from Bahrain, voicing concern about the availability of medicine in Iran, which has been hit by Western sanctions.

"Many families in Bahrain fear for the unknown fate of their families," he said.

Bahraini authorities have tasked a foundation under the Justice and Islamic Affairs Ministry to cover the costs of nationals stranded abroad, BNA said.

Bahrain, which has reported 269 coronavirus cases, most of them linked to travel to Iran, has criticized the Islamic Republic for not stamping Bahraini

citizens' passports.

For Jamal, the priority is to return home.

"We remain in our rooms most of the time, we are fine. It's just the anxiety of what's happening in Iran and all the delays of our evacuation."



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Stocks spike as central banks throw kitchen sink at virusUS fast-tracking antimalarials to treat coronavirus

[Most Saudi Arabia, UAE residents 'scared' of coronavirus: poll](#)

Fri, 2020-03-20 02:26

DUBAI: Despite the relatively small number of confirmed diagnosis of coronavirus in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE, a majority of residents (64 percent and 61 percent respectively) are scared of contracting the disease.

At least that is what data from a tracker created by the global research firm YouGov suggests.

The ongoing tracker captures public sentiment around the new coronavirus in

21 countries and illustrates how different regions are reacting to the rising number of infections globally.

The pneumonia of unknown cause was first detected in Wuhan, China, and reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) Country Office in China on Dec. 31.

The outbreak was declared a “public health emergency of international concern” on Jan. 30. By March 7, the global number of confirmed cases had surpassed 100,000.

The coronavirus pandemic is evolving fast. Community transmission is currently spreading throughout several countries and is expected to expand quickly in the coming days.

Clearly, time is of the essence in the fight against the coronavirus. On March 17, Dr. Poonam Khetrpal Singh, WHO’s Asian regional director, said: “We need to be geared to respond to the evolving situation with the aim to stop transmission of Covid-19 at the earliest to minimize the impact of the virus.

“Urgent and aggressive measures are the need of the hour. We need to act now.”

As of Thursday, the John Hopkins University global Covid-19 tracker had put the number of active cases in Saudi Arabia at 232. The Kingdom’s Ministry of Health said eight people had recovered.

For the UAE, the tracker reported 87 active cases and another 26 cases of recovery.

Majorities of respondents in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE said they are “very scared” or “fairly scared” about contracting the coronavirus, according to the YouGov survey.

On the other hand, 30 percent of respondents said they are “not very scared” or “not at all scared.”

Among the genders, a higher number of women than men in the two countries are fearful of contracting coronavirus infection (66 percent versus 60 percent).

The widespread level of fear possibly explains why the vast majority of people in Saudi Arabia and UAE are taking precautions.

The most common precaution has been to improve personal hygiene, such as washing hands more frequently or using sanitizer, which three-quarter of residents (76 percent) are doing.

Almost as many (73 percent) are avoiding crowded places. Roughly half the survey respondents are refraining from touching objects in public (57 percent) and many are wearing a face mask in public (37 percent).

Witnessing the wide-scale frenzy around the outbreak, a quarter of respondents have stockpiled supplies in their house, although a majority (68 percent) have chosen not to.

Analysis of the data shows that despite the extensive global coverage and the widespread proactive government measures in place in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE, there are still pockets of the population that could do more to stay up to date with the latest guidance.

While 88 percent of respondents said that they were undertaking additional preventative measures to protect themselves from the virus, 5 percent of those surveyed had no awareness of the pandemic.

Those who stated that they had not previously heard of “coronavirus”, “Wuhan Virus” or “Covid-19” were most likely to be aged 18-24, single and male.

An additional 3 percent of those surveyed said that they were aware of the virus but it had not changed their behaviors.

A third of the respondents in the Kingdom and the UAE aged 45 or older (34 per cent) said they are either “not very scared” or “not at all scared” about getting infected.

The optimism and confidence illustrated in those aged over 45 possibly correlates with the fact that they are taking the right measures to protect themselves.

According to WHO’s Dr. Singh: “Simple public health measures are critical. Practicing hand hygiene, covering your cough and sneeze, and practicing social distancing cannot be emphasized enough.

“This alone has the potential to substantially reduce transmission.”

The YouGov data show that 80 per cent of those aged over 45 in Saudi Arabia and the UAE are following this advice.

In contrast, just 69 percent of 18-24-year-olds in both countries report taking additional measures to wash their hands.

In the two countries, 80 percent of residents over the age of 45 are taking additional precautions to avoid crowded places and 70 percent of people aged 18-24 report avoiding crowded places.

Across the two countries, the vast majority (70 percent) feel well-informed about what to do if they suspect they have coronavirus.

At the same time, 18 percent of all respondents feel that they do not have enough information, with young adults being especially likely to feel this way (24 percent of 18-24 years old respondents).

Beyond Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Malaysia had the highest number of people (83 percent) concerned about contracting the virus, followed by the

Philippines and Thailand, according to the YouGov study.

In China, where the virus is now reported to be under control, 66 percent of residents report being fearful of contracting the virus.

In Italy, the center of the European outbreak, 66 percent people are fearful of contracting the disease.

The view of residents in the US and UK is more positive, with just 38 percent and 34 percent respectively reporting that they have concerns.

By Thursday, the US had 9,415 cumulative confirmed cases of Covid-19, according to Johns Hopkins data.

In the coming days, as YouGov tracks the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on consumer attitudes and behaviors in the Middle East, Arab News will be continuously reporting on the findings.



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