

Beirut virus strategy 'stoking panic, guilt'

Author:

Sat, 2020-03-14 23:59

BEIRUT: Health officials in Lebanon fear a warning campaign against coronavirus may backfire if growing numbers of victims conceal their illness to avoid being quarantined.

As the number of virus cases in the country neared 100, Dr. Abdul-Rahman Al-Bizri, an infectious diseases specialist and member of the Health Ministry's crisis committee, told Arab News that government awareness campaigns "kept people at home," but also meant some were afraid to visit designated medical centers for fear of being held in isolation.

Al-Bizri's comments came as the Lebanese Council of Ministers prepared to hold an emergency session on Sunday where it is expected to declare a state of emergency to check the spread of the virus.

Three people are reported to have died from the infection in Lebanon. The global death toll is now over 5,400, with more than 142,000 confirmed cases in 123 countries, according to the World Health Organization.

Al-Bizri said that he expects Lebanon to witness a further rise in the number of infections, though it was impossible to say how many people would fall victim to the illness.

He urged people to stay at home wherever possible to reduce the burden on health institutions if the number of infections jumped significantly.

As of noon on March 14, the Health Ministry reported 93 coronavirus cases at the Rafik Hariri Governmental University Hospital in Beirut and other university hospitals.

Al-Bizri told Arab News that the government crisis committee had recommended that quarantine be carried out in homes to reduce pressure on hospitals.

His warning that many people feared that they would be stigmatized or forced to spend weeks in hospital if they fell ill prompted several politicians to issue statements saying the disease "is not a disgrace."

MP Rola Tabsh, from the Future Movement bloc, said: "As a result of the wrong approach, coronavirus patients and their families have been feeling guilty and afraid. Fear is pushing citizens to ignore the symptoms and hide them from doctors."

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Three people are reported to have died from the infection in Lebanon.**
- **The Health Ministry reported 93 coronavirus cases at the Rafik Hariri Governmental University Hospital in Beirut and other university hospitals.**

"Coronavirus is not a disgrace. The disgrace is in hiding symptoms, leaving

oneself and others at risk of infection. I call for social solidarity.”
Leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, MP Gebran Bassil, said: “Infections and diseases are not a stigma. We are all vulnerable. Reporting the symptoms and performing the necessary laboratory tests and quarantine is a duty and a right.”

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah told supporters on Friday night that “no patient should be covered up.”

“The infected person must disclose his condition and whoever knows must not cover up for him. Quarantine is obligatory. Protecting oneself and the family is a religious obligation,” he said.

Air traffic at Rafic Hariri International Airport has declined steadily after flights to Lebanon were suspended except from Greece, Geneva, Brussels and Istanbul.

With land crossings to and from Syria due to be closed from Monday, Syrian travelers returning via Lebanon are likely to face problems.

Closure of transport links prompted Minister of Economy Raoul Naama to reassure people that food supplies are secure.

“Food and consumer goods are in abundance and will not be lacking in the market,” he said. “People should not rush to buy more goods than they need.”



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Lebanon to declare emergency after a severe stormUK reiterates desire for two-state solution

UK reiterates desire for two-state solution

Author:

daniel fountain

ID:

1584211814606202100

Sat, 2020-03-14 21:51

LONDON: Britain on Friday renewed its commitment “to working to help advance a negotiated two-state solution that delivers peace for both Israelis and Palestinians.”

In one of his first meetings with an Arab representative since being appointed as the UK’s joint minister of state in the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development, James Cleverly met with the head of the Palestinian Mission in the UK, Husam Zomlot.

“Post-Brexit Britain has become a much more relevant actor for peace-making in the Middle East, in the absence of a US role or contribution because (President Donald) Trump has discredited the situation,” Zomlot told Arab News.

Thank you Rt Hon [@JamesCleverly](#) for the candid and hopeful first conversation. I look forward to working with you to advance the Palestinian-UK growing relations, and achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. <https://t.co/PG7XKbBgW3>

– Husam Zomlot (@hzomlot) [March 12, 2020](#)

“I consider my first meeting with the minister to be important and strategic, and kneeling toward progress in peace-making in the Middle East and upgrading the growing Palestinian-UK bilateral relations.”

Zomlot said he really “appreciated the opportunity to meet the minister early on in his tenure,” and their strategy is to enhance bilateral relations so the UK can have a bigger role in the Middle East peace process.

“The first meeting was an indication of the significance the UK places on Palestine peace-making, and was a very important first step in engaging with the minister in the very important journey toward achieving progress and achieving these goals,” he added.

Zomlot, who previously headed the Palestinian Mission in Washington, said the

Palestinian issue has “become an international priority again,” especially in light of Trump’s proposed Middle East peace plan that was announced in January.

Cleverly, who has close links with the Conservative Friends of Israel group, tweeted that he discussed UK-Palestinian relations and “hopes for Middle East peace” in his meeting with Zomlot.

Several hours later, Cleverly tweeted that he also met Israel’s ambassador to the UK, Mark Regev, and reiterated Britain’s “desire for peace based on a negotiated two state solution, leading to a safe and secure Israel, alongside a sovereign Palestinian state.”



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Don't reject new Trump peace plan, Palestine's Abbas urged

[Lebanon to declare emergency after a](#)

severe storm

Author:

daniel fountain

ID:

1584208816796029300

Sat, 2020-03-14 21:01

BEIRUT: Lebanese people experienced terror on Thursday night when a severe storm ravaged mountain and coastal regions, uprooted trees, caused floods and destroyed cars, refugee tents and public statues.

Several flights were diverted to Larnaca and Antalya airports after strong winds made landings at Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport impossible.

The frightening weather conditions came on top of the novel coronavirus outbreak in the country.

Social media users described their experience as they stayed at home in line with the government's directives aimed at limiting the spread of the virus. "Lebanon is flying" was the second most trending hashtag after "Stay home". Users switched from mocking the situation to sensing its gravity.

"Here comes nature's wrath after the unemployment, dollar, Eurobonds, banks and imported coronavirus crises. The night of strong easterly winds uprooted trees, damaged buildings and affected people. Disasters, disasters and the greatest disaster of all is the dark horizons. May God protect what is left of Lebanon," tweeted former minister, Akram Chehayeb.

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the country has exceeded 80, and includes an employee of the Ministry of Health.



“The infected employee works in the Ministry’s central administration. The virus was transmitted to her by one of her relatives,” the Ministry of Health announced, noting that “we are taking all the necessary measures to isolate her, identify those who were in contact with her inside and outside of the

Ministry and make sure they self-quarantine at home.”

“A civil or public health emergency might be announced. The people should expect an increase of 20 cases in a single day in Lebanon,” said the Health Minister, Hamad Hassan. He denied the claims that the Ministry is concealing the actual number of cases.

60 hospital beds have been prepared at Rafik Hariri University Hospital (RHUH), which is dedicated to coronavirus-infected patients, to handle the expected increase in cases.



The head of the Lebanese Forces, Samir Geagea, blamed the government for the worsening situation, noting that “the government should adopt a so-called ‘automatic quarantine’ after failing to close air, land and sea crossings and take the necessary measures to prevent the spread of the virus.”

The Association of Banks in Lebanon announced that banks will be closed for sterilization from Saturday, while the Minister of Education and Higher Education, Tarek Al-Majzoub, extended the closure of schools and universities for an additional week. This decision will be accompanied by efforts to set up emergency programs to finish the educational curricula and make up for the lost lessons. Worshipers stayed away from Friday prayers out of fear of transmission.

The storm caused great damage as it uprooted pine and oak trees along the roads of Mount Lebanon, broke the windows of homes and shops, destroyed parked cars, flooded roads, sent bricks flying from the roofs of houses and caused a power cut when some electricity poles fell, which also disconnected cellphone lines in the affected areas.

The 120 kilometers per hour winds destroyed highway billboards and crops,

which doubled the losses of farmers who are already struggling.

Some post-storm tweets considered that Friday the 13th and the destruction of a statue of Mary in the storm were very bad signs.







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Egyptians fight stormy weather with humor Death toll at 21 as Egypt storms, flooding enter second day

[Iran reports 85 new virus deaths](#)

Sat, 2020-03-14 02:02

TEHRAN: Iranian forces will clear the streets nationwide within 24 hours and all citizens will be checked for the new coronavirus in a bid to halt its spread, the military said Friday.

A newly formed commission has been charged with overseeing the “emptying of shops, streets and roads” within that time frame, armed forces chief of staff Maj. Gen. Mohammad Bagheri said.

“During the next 10 days, the entire Iranian nation will be monitored once through cyberspace, by phone and, if necessary, in person, and those suspected of being ill will be fully identified.”

The measures were brought into force after Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered the armed forces to lead the battle against the new coronavirus.

They are the most stringent to be imposed in Iran to combat what is the one of the world's deadliest outbreaks of COVID-19 outside China.

The country on Friday reported that the novel coronavirus claimed another 85 lives, its highest single-day toll since the first deaths were announced on Feb. 19.

In all, the Health Ministry says 514 people have been killed by the illness out of 11,364 confirmed cases of infection.

Several politicians and officials in the nation of 80 million people have been infected, with some dying from the illness.

The latest suspected case of infection was Ali Akbar Velayati, who advises Iran's supreme leader on foreign policy.

Velayati fell ill with "mild symptoms" on Wednesday and has been placed in quarantine, according to Tasnim news agency.

Separately, Sudan on Friday reported its first confirmed coronavirus case, a man who died on Thursday and had visited the UAE in the first week of March. The man, in his 50s, died in the Sudanese capital Khartoum, the Health Ministry said in a statement.

Sudan on Thursday stopped visa issuance and flight services to eight countries including Italy and neighboring Egypt over fears of the coronavirus outbreak. Bus trips to Egypt have also been suspended.

Kenya and Ethiopia also announced their first confirmed cases of coronavirus, as East Africa, which has so far been unscathed by the global pandemic, scaled up emergency measures to contain its spread.

HIGHLIGHTS

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- **The latest suspected case of infection was Ali Akbar Velayati, who advises Iran's supreme leader on foreign policy.**

In Kenya, a 27-year-old Kenyan woman tested positive for the virus on Thursday in Nairobi, a week after returning from the US via London. She was in a stable condition and recovering, Health Minister Mutahi Kagwe told reporters.

"We wish to assure all Kenyans that the government will use all the resources available to fight coronavirus," he said, as the government rolled out a raft of new containment measures.

The government had traced all the contacts of the patient since she arrived back in Kenya on March 5, he said.

"At the moment, there is absolutely no need for panic and worry," he said. Kenya, with a population of 50 million people, saw a spree of panic buying among the middle-class in Nairobi supermarkets, in the wake of the announcement.

Meanwhile Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous nation with over 100 million people, said a 48-year-old Japanese man who had arrived in the country on March 4 from Burkina Faso was confirmed to have contracted the virus.

“He is undergoing medical follow-up and is in a stable condition. Those who have been in contact with this person are being traced and quarantined,” the Health Ministry said in a statement.

Burkina Faso only confirmed its first case on Tuesday – a couple returning from France – and the Japanese patient had been in that country since Feb. 24.

Ethiopian Health Minister Lia Tadesse said three other patients were in isolation.

Other countries in the region have been rolling out their own measures.





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Coronavirus sparks fear as cases continue to rise across the Middle East Amid coronavirus chaos, Corona is not the best brand name. Or is it?

Egyptians fight stormy weather with humor

Author:

Sat, 2020-03-14 00:47

CAIRO: Weather forecasts warned of a wave of aggressive wind and rain from Thursday to Saturday (March 12-14). Consequently, the government gave people the day off on Thursday and advised them to not leave their houses unless absolutely necessary.

Stuck in their residences for the duration of the storm, some even without electricity or water, Egyptians combated the situation the only way they know how – with humor.

Citizens took to Facebook to share the humorous sights they witnessed on the streets during the heavy rains.

In the flooded streets cars created waves as they moved around. This was caught in a video that quickly went viral as people searched for entertainment. Even with water up to its windshield, the driver was still determined to get to his destination.

Another video was of shop owners and salesmen at a small supermarket “fishing” in the ocean created by the gathered rainwater. The man fishing can be seen extracting a fish using his fishing rod and his colleagues are cheering him on. The video was captioned “Weather forecast: 0, Egyptians: 1,” – as Egyptians refuse to surrender to the bad weather.

Among the most memorable videos was one initially shared on TikTok and then on Facebook. It was of a woman using the heavy rains to wash her coffee mug amid the water cuts. A series of memes were also shared, such as one of a sea of rainwater leading up to one of the pyramids of Giza. The image was accompanied by the caption: “The Nile is back near the pyramids, like the days of the pharaohs.”

Another image was of a man in a diving suit, preparing to dive, and it was captioned “Do you want anything other than the yogurt mom?”

The videos and memes are solid proof of Egyptian’s ability to find humor in all the bad situations.



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Death toll at 21 as Egypt storms, flooding enter second day13 injured in Egypt train accident amid heavy rain