

Al-Azhar grand imam threatens legal action against those who insult prophet

Author:

Mon, 2020-11-09 23:56

CAIRO: The grand imam at Egypt's top religious authority promised to prosecute those who insult Prophet Muhammad.

Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayyeb, who is the most senior cleric at Al-Azhar, made the remark after meeting the French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian.

"We will track those who insult our noble prophet in international courts, even if we spend our whole life doing that," the sheikh said on Sunday.

"We refuse to describe terrorism as Islam. Everyone should stop using that description immediately because it hurts the feelings of Muslims around the world, and it is a description that contradicts the truth that everyone knows."

Le Drian was visiting Egypt at a time of increased tension following French President Emmanuel Macron's comments on Islam. The European leader had described the religion as a "faith in crisis all over the world" and defended the publication of cartoons mocking the prophet.

Le Drian, in a press conference with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry, expressed his country's "deep respect" for Islam and that Muslims in France were part of the nation's history and identity.

In his meeting with the sheikh he said that France believed in the importance of Al-Azhar and the grand imam in calling for tolerance and moderation.

"We must fight with the great Al-Azhar against hate and delusions of extremists."

Al-Tayyeb described Le Drian as the "voice of reason and wisdom" and welcomed his statements. "Muslims around the world reject terrorism that acts in the name of religion and they affirm the innocence of Islam and its prophet from any terrorism."

Terrorists did not represent Muslims and Muslims were not responsible for terrorists' actions, he added.

"We wanted the officials in Europe to be aware that what is happening does not represent Islam and Muslims, especially since Muslims are the ones who pay the price for this terrorism more than others.

"Transgressions exist among the followers of every religion and in the various systems. If we say that Christianity is not responsible for the New

Zealand incident, then we must also say that Islam is not responsible for the terror of those who fight in its name,” he said, referring to the Christchurch mosque shootings of 2019.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi received Le Drian and the French ambassador to Cairo.

El-Sisi stressed the urgent need to uphold the values of coexistence and tolerance among all religions and to extend bridges of understanding.



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France FM in Egypt affirms ‘deep respect for Islam’ France proposes ‘European Act’ to fight terrorism, tighten borders

[Lebanon heading for total lockdown as health sector buckles](#)

Mon, 2020-11-09 23:36

BEIRUT: Lebanon is expected to head into a total lockdown again as the health

sector buckles under the pressure of soaring coronavirus cases, with the head of a doctors' syndicate warning that the spread of the disease among medical professionals meant there would be nobody left to treat infected patients. The Supreme Defense Council meets on Tuesday, under the chairmanship of President Michel Aoun, to take decisive action about a lockdown in light of increasing complaints from doctors and hospital owners that their resources have been depleted.

On Monday, the total number of people infected with the virus was more than 95,000, with daily rates sometimes exceeding 2,000, while the number of deaths has reached 725.

The number of COVID-19 cases during the first week of November alone hit 13,000, while the total number of cases in October exceeded 42,000 cases, the highest number recorded since the virus was first detected in Lebanon in February.

Sharaf Abu Sharaf, who heads the Doctors' Syndicate, warned: "Lebanon's continued abandonment of taking strict measures to contain the spread of coronavirus will mean that no one will remain to treat those infected with the virus in hospitals."

He said 17 doctors were in intensive care units, three doctors had died, and that 100 doctors were under home quarantine.

Mirna Doumit, who is head of the Order of Nurses in Lebanon, said the number of people infected in the medical and nursing body had reached 1,500.

On Monday it was announced that the director of Tripoli Governmental Hospital was infected with coronavirus.

Hariri Governmental Hospital specializes in receiving coronavirus cases. Its general director, Dr. Firas Al-Abyad, said that one infection in every 125 in Lebanon led to death and that this figure rose to one in 10 among the elderly.

"Lebanon will enter a new phase of complete lockdown," he predicted.

"Without a complete lockdown, the economic situation will worsen in light of the spread of the virus."

But the idea of a complete lockdown for two weeks, or even a month, has provoked a negative reaction among the Lebanese public. The consensus is that a lockdown is useless without a clear strategy for the next steps.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lebanon's Supreme Defense Council meets on Tuesday to take decisive action about a lockdown.**
- **On Monday, the total number of people infected with the coronavirus was more than 95,000.**
- **The number of COVID-19 cases during the first week of November alone hit 13,000.**
- **The total number of cases in October exceeded 42,000.**

Dr. Abdul Rahman Bizri, an infectious disease specialist and member of the emergency committee on coronavirus, said that the trend on Tuesday was to lock down.

"But we do not know the duration or procedures that will accompany the closure, and the goal is to give the medical and nursing staff a chance to catch a breath," he told Arab News.

"There are many reasons for the state's inability to confront the virus in its second wave and not being prepared for it. The hospital sector is 80 percent private and 20 percent public."

The private hospital sector during the first wave was just a bystander, he added.

"But now, with the reduction in the capacity of the public sector to receive patients in government hospitals, what is required of the private sector has become the performance of the public sector job. How can this be done in light of the state's inability to pay its accumulated bills to private hospitals?"

He stressed that a complete lockdown, if it happened, would be of no benefit unless it was accompanied by a clear plan for the phased reopening of Lebanon.

"Otherwise, the randomness that the state practiced in the first stage and may practice at this stage may increase the disaster rather than mitigate it."

The health minister, Hamad Hassan, told a news conference on Monday that a complete lockdown was an opportunity for the health sector to "gather its strength and raise the readiness that was long overdue."

The partial closure that was followed during the previous period did not give the desired result, he said.

The president of the Syndicate of Private Hospitals, Suleiman Haroun, said that 30 hospitals were capable of receiving coronavirus patients, while 100 others were not ready.

"The internal design of about 60 percent of these hospitals does not allow for isolating a ward or floor and establishing a separate entrance for coronavirus patients, and then there is a shortage of nursing staff, in addition to the financial difficulties. Some hospitals can barely continue."

Lebanon has in recent weeks isolated towns and villages that recorded an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, while educational institutions have adopted blended learning to reduce the spread of the virus.

Bechara Asmar, head of the General Labor Union, feared that the results of a complete lockdown would be catastrophic for workers and the economy.

"The devastating repercussions on the Lebanese economy must be discussed if the decision of a total lockdown is made. How are workers going to be compensated?"

Lebanon is suffering from a severe economic and financial crisis that has caused high unemployment rates and rising living costs due to the collapse of the Lebanese pound and low levels of infrastructure.

Economic bodies announced their "absolute rejection" of any possible government decision to shutter Lebanon for four weeks to confront the outbreak, warning of "enormous negative repercussions" for closing the private sector that could not be contained at social and economic levels. They called for "a careful study" of the measures that would be taken to confront the pandemic in light of the "harsh conditions" that Lebanon and its national economy was going through.

Pierre Al-Achkar, head of the Syndicate of Hotel Owners in Lebanon, said:

"The complete lockdown decision in Lebanon is taken without a specific plan

or study, while we see in other countries the concerned authorities provide a package of aid and implement several measures to reduce the negative aspects of the lockdown.”

He added that the tourism sector had been in “intensive care” since the Beirut Port explosion of Aug. 4.



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Lebanon's Bassil rejects US sanctions as unjust and politically motivated
Lebanon's president seeks evidence behind US sanctions on son-in-law

[Jordan faces virus-era elections in crisis mode](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-11-09 01:22

AMMAN: Voters in coronavirus-battered Jordan go to the polls on Tuesday in an election focused on the Arab country's economic crisis which has been heightened by the devastating pandemic.

Resource-poor and dependent on foreign aid, in particular from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), public debt in the small country of 10 million people – which is also hosting more than 1 million Syrian refugees – exceeds 100 percent of its GDP.

And unemployment was running at 23 percent in the first quarter of 2020.

"This vote is different, with people in greater distress because of the epidemic," said Oraib Rintawi of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies. Coronavirus has claimed more than 1,180 lives from over 104,800 cases in Jordan, according to Health Ministry data.

However, Rintawi doubted there would be a high turnout because "most Jordanians think parliament plays a marginal role in the political system," as the formation of governments in the Hashemite kingdom is not party-based or dependent on the outcome of the vote.

There have been some calls on social media to postpone the elections, but the government has said the vote will go ahead.

Parliament was already dissolved in late September ahead of the vote, and under the law new elections must be held within four months.

Jordanian Minister of Political and Parliamentary Affairs Musa Al-Maaytah insisted on Friday it would be better to hold the vote now than in a few months' time.

"Economic, political and social life must continue," he added.

King Abdullah last month named veteran diplomat Bisher Al-Khasawneh as prime minister ahead of the vote, after parliament reached the end of its term.

"People will vote along tribal lines, for a candidate from their clan or for representatives who will provide them with services," not for political reasons, Rintawi told AFP.

Some 4.5 million people eligible to vote will cast their ballots for candidates to fill 130 seats in parliament, 15 of them reserved for women, from a field of 1,674 candidates running on 294 lists.

Security forces are also expected to fan out across the country's 1,880 polling stations.

NUMBER

4.5m people eligible to vote will cast their ballots for candidates to fill 130 seats in parliament, 15 of them reserved for women.

But virus curbs banning gatherings of more than 20 people have put paid to traditional shows of patronage such as candidates' tents offering Arabic sweets and coffee.

The Islamic Action Front, political branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and the main opposition force in Jordan, has vowed "to work to defend people's rights, dignity and livelihood, and to confront corruption."

Also in the running for four-year terms in parliament are representatives of the country's main tribal clans, independents, leftists and a large number of wealthy businessmen.

Jordan has taken an economic hammering from COVID-19 with some \$3 billion lost in vital tourism revenues in the first nine months of 2020.

Campaigning for the legislative elections was also forced to switch to videos posted on social media platforms, especially Facebook.

Saleh Al-Armouti, a former deputy, put the focus squarely on economic hardships in a campaign video.

"Our poor country can no longer feed itself because of the hegemony" of the IMF, he said.

Official statistics show the poverty rate has increased to 15.7 percent, a rate which the World Bank forecasts will rise sharply because of the novel coronavirus.



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Jordan to reimpose night curfew after parliamentary elections
Israeli army destroys Palestinian village in Jordan Valley

[UAE records 1,111 new COVID-19 cases](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-11-09 00:25

DUBAI: The UAE on Sunday recorded 1,111 new COVID-19 cases and no deaths. The Ministry of Health and Prevention said the total number of cases since the pandemic began has reached 142,143, with the death toll stood at 514. The ministry added that 683 people recovered over the previous 24 hours, bringing the total number of recoveries to 138,291. Meanwhile, a joint study between Dubai Economy and Visa expected the UAE'S e-commerce sector to be "on the verge of distinct levels of continuous growth during the coming period, coinciding with the increasing demand among consumers for electronic payment options, and the awareness of merchants of the need to enhance their electronic presence during the coronavirus pandemic." The study said that continuous growth in the UAE's e-commerce sector, supported by a boom in digital payments, showed that 49 percent of the survey's respondents said they had been doing more online shopping since the pandemic started. It also said that the UAE would see more growth in the e-commerce sector and an increase in digital payments as changes in government policies, entrepreneurship and consumer behavior were expected to continue. "The multi-party approach and strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors represent a fundamental pillar in supporting companies and accelerating the growth of e-commerce in the UAE," Dubai's economic authority said on Twitter. Elsewhere in the region, Kuwait recorded 538 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total to 131,743. The death toll reached 811 after three new fatalities were registered.

تعلن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 538 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 687 حالة شفاء، و 3 حالات وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 131,743 حالة pic.twitter.com/7JDnmGMAFP

– (@KUWAIT_MOH) [November 8, 2020](#) وزارة الصحة – الكويت –

Oman's Health Ministry said its total number of cases had reached 118,140 and the death toll was 1,301.

[#Statement](#) No. 221

November 8, 2020 pic.twitter.com/skA0r77bcw

– وزارة الصحة – عُمان (@OmaniMOH) [November 8, 2020](#)

In Bahrain, 192 new infected cases were confirmed, and the death toll stands at 329 after no deaths were reported in the previous 24 hours.

Out of 9832 COVID-19 tests carried out on 8 November 2020, 192 new cases have been detected among 86 expatriate workers, 103 new cases are contacts of active cases, and 3 are travel related. There were 237 recoveries from [#COVID19](#), increasing total recoveries to 81000 pic.twitter.com/6mjUq0kGqk

– مملكة البحرين | وزارة الصحة (@MOH_Bahrain) [November 8, 2020](#)



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Saudi Arabia's virus recovery rate inches higher as numbers settle, 1,161 new COVID-19 cases in UAE as death toll reaches 505

[UAE's Hope Probe expected to complete Mars orbit in February](#)

Sun, 2020-11-08 23:56

DUBAI: The UAE's Hope Probe is expected to reach its planned orbit around Mars in around three months from now, Vice President and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid announced on Sunday.

The Hope Probe has 189 million kilometers remaining and is planned to complete its orbit around Mars on Feb. 9, 2021 at 7.42 p.m. local time. Hope has so far covered 60 percent of its journey, equivalent to 290 million kilometers over 111 days since it was launched on July 20.

"We will celebrate the arrival of the first Arab mission to Mars," Sheikh Mohammed tweeted.

The Hope probe has completed its last trajectory correction maneuver after travelling 290 million km into space in 111 days. We officially announce Hope probe will arrive to Mars on Feb. 9, 2021 at 7:42pm UAE timing. We will celebrate the arrival of the first Arab mission to Mars

– HH Sheikh Mohammed (@HHShkMohd) [November 8, 2020](#)

Dubai's Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed said: "The Hope Probe mission is the culmination of a 50-year journey, which began in 1971. It also marks the beginning of another 50 years that will bring about major achievements based in the fields of science, knowledge and innovation."

"Our nation does not have the word impossible in its dictionary," he added. With Hope's arrival, the UAE will become the fifth nation to reach the Red planet – following the United States, Soviet Union, India, and the European Space Agency.

The Probe is a step by the UAE to become a knowledge-exporting country.

The Hope Probe has successfully completed its third and final trajectory correction maneuver today – another major milestone in its journey to [#Mars](#). The maneuver is to ensure that the probe continues directly targeting Mars' capture orbit. [#HopeMarsMission](#) [#HopeProbe](#) pic.twitter.com/dwaMI7bGkJ

– Hope Mars Mission (@HopeMarsMission) [November 8, 2020](#)



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Mars Hope probe completes first major milestone on journey to red planet