

Starvation looms for Morocco's horses as tourism collapses

Mon, 2020-08-10 01:06

MARRAKECH: Abdenabi Nouidi sold his favorite horse for \$150 to help feed the others on the team that pulls tourists in carriages through the buzzing streets of Marrakech, and he is still scared about the future for the others. The prospect of starvation looms for carriage horses and other animals normally used in Morocco's tourist mecca., since visitors have vanished during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Society for the Protection of Animals Abroad, or SPANA, says hundreds of Morocco's carriage horses and donkeys are threatened amid the collapsing tourism industry. They are among the estimated 200 million horses, donkeys, camels and elephants worldwide providing various livelihoods for over a half-billion people.

The North African kingdom closed its doors to outsiders after the first virus case was confirmed March 2. It also recently issued a ban on domestic travel to eight cities, including Marrakech.

Thousands of people in the city depend on the carriage horses for their livelihood. A single horse carriage in Marrakech supports four to five families, including owners, drivers and stable boys, driver Abdeljalil Belghaoute said.

He spoke from his carriage, waiting in a line near the famed Jemaa El-Fnaa Square, hoping that someone would want a ride.

'If you have a shop, you can close it. If you sell goods, you store them. But imagine having ... horses who need to eat, drink and get medical care,' said Abdeljalil Nouidi.

For two decades, the four Nouidi brothers have taken tourists on sightseeing jaunts in horse-drawn carriages. Now they have empty pockets and mouths to feed, both at home and at the rundown complex outside Marrakech where drivers stable their horses.

The brothers were forced to sell seven of their horses in July. Abdenabi Nouidi's favorite, Cocotte, was among them.

"This is not something I can easily forgive myself for," he said, recalling a promise he made to Cocotte 15 years ago to keep him forever.

The Nouidi brothers say their horses are visibly nervous and know an abrupt change in their lives may be coming. With no carriage work, the horses' routine has been disrupted, feed is running low and stablemates are leaving for good.

SPANAs helped carriage owners provide the basics for their horses when the COVID-19 pandemic reached Morocco. It delivered three months' worth of feed to almost 600 horses in the city and the neighboring town of Ait Ourir during the country's lockdown.

"It became very clear to us when the lockdown was first imposed that many of Marrakech's working animals would need our help or face a dire outcome," said the head veterinarian at SPANA's Marrakech center, Hassan Lamrini.

NUMBER

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The center, in a working-class neighborhood, is a mecca for the city's thousands of working animals. Since 1988, the team of vets and technicians have cared for donkeys, mules and horses free of charge.

Lamrini said the center has treated an increasing number of cases of colic, an abdominal pain that causes complications in the digestive system, often due to malnutrition. Colic can be fatal.

"There is not much in the world that matters to me more than caring for these animals. They are my entire life," said Boujamaa Ninich, who has dedicated 50 years to working with SPANA. He spends weeks on end sleeping in a little room at the center to ensure the animals are cared for after dark.

"They give so much to their owners. There is so little that we can give back,' he said.

Marrakech was nearly at a standstill on a recent visit. The Jamma El Fnaa Square, a vast area with hawkers, food vendors and snake-dancers, was nearly deserted.

"Only tourism can save us from this catastrophe we're facing," said Belghaoute, the carriage driver hoping for a fare.

The Moroccan government earlier this year launched a social media campaign to encourage citizens to explore their country, but spiking numbers of COVID-19 cases led to the travel ban for eight of the country's top tourist cities. Authorities counted 28,500 infections and 435 deaths as of Thursday, but experts say all counts in all countries understate the true toll of the pandemic, due to limited testing, missed mild cases and other factors.

"The longer this goes on, horses and families will struggle to survive. We're really scared by how bad this can get," Belghaoute said.



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Morocco sees travel mayhem after snap movement restrictions
Morocco shuts down major cities after spike in coronavirus cases

[Ethiopia says Renaissance Dam negotiations resuming Monday](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-08-09 22:48

CAIRO: Negotiations about the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will resume on Monday, Ethiopia's state news agency reported the country's Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman as saying.

Talks among Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan about the controversial multi-billion dollar project have made little progress in resolving outstanding issues.

Egypt and Sudan both fear that the dam, which is being built about 15 km from the Ethiopian border with Sudan, could cause water shortages. Sudan is also concerned about the structure's safety.

Ethiopia's Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman Ambassador Dina Mufti said that

the country could not sign an agreement that stipulated the passage of specific quotas of water from the dam to the downstream countries.

Ethiopia's proposal confirmed its commitment to taking into account the concerns of the downstream countries about droughts that may occur in the future, according to Mufti.

He told a media briefing that Ethiopia was anticipating such concerns and was taking droughts into account and dealing with them, adding that Ethiopia had also confirmed in its proposal that it would continue the stages of filling the dam and not address the issue of sustainable sharing of the Nile's water.

"Water sharing is not limited to the three countries, there are Nile Basin countries that you must be involved with," Mufti said.

He expressed Ethiopia's hope that the negotiations would be successful and that an agreement about the rules for filling the dam would be reached as soon as possible, as he stressed his country's commitment to continuing negotiations to resolve outstanding issues.

Last week Egypt and Sudan announced the suspension of meetings about the Renaissance Dam and plans to hold "internal consultations on the Ethiopian bid" instead after the release of a letter presented by Ethiopia's water minister, including draft guidelines and rules for filling the dam. Egypt confirmed that the Ethiopian letter contradicted what was agreed upon in the meetings headed by the water ministers.

Mohamed Nasr Allam, former Egyptian minister of irrigation and water resources, slammed Ethiopia and the African Union's handling of the current negotiations.

"The recent Ethiopian statements confirm Addis Ababa's insistence on obtaining a share of the Blue Nile water, deducting from the two downstream countries' shares, and that it will not sign an agreement to operate the Renaissance Dam," he told Arab News. "Ethiopia is behaving like a hostile country and is not ashamed of that, and the time has come for Egypt and Sudan to act accordingly.

"The African Union is incapable. My personal belief is that the last stop of the peace process is the Security Council," he said. "Hopefully the case will be referred to international arbitration while stopping the construction of the dam or issuing a decision to respect the old agreements. With the help of international experts, we can reach rules to reduce harm to Egypt and Sudan, whether in filling or operating the dam."

Muhammad Mursi, former assistant foreign minister, said the time had come for Egypt to return to the UN Security Council once more given Ethiopia's position on the dam.

Mursi described Mufti's statements as "revealing and indicative" even though there was nothing new in them.

"(His statement) reaffirms that Ethiopia is continuing in its defiance and

refusal to recognize any rights for Egypt and Sudan, other than what Ethiopia offers us and according to its estimates and interests and without any written commitment.”

The main dilemma with Ethiopia was its refusal to recognize Egyptian rights to the Nile’s waters, he added, and its refusal to sign any document of a mandatory nature with Egypt and Sudan to monitor any control or restrictions on Ethiopia’s complete freedom to build dams and to benefit from the waters of the Blue Nile in the manner that it did.

He believed that the process of filling and operating the dam reservoir was neither the main obstacle nor the most significant in these negotiations.

“We have no other peaceful alternative but to return to the Security Council, after we gave one opportunity after another to solve the problem within Africa, and prior to that dozens of opportunities over many years in the direct bilateral or tripartite framework negotiations,” he said.



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Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia begin new talks over disputed dam Ethiopia, Egypt reach ‘major common understanding’ on Nile dam

Turkey drives Muslim Brotherhood campaign against Egyptian and Greek maritime demarcation

Sun, 2020-08-09 22:46

CAIRO: Turkey has sought help from the Muslim Brotherhood in Qatar and Ankara for its campaign against the Egyptian and Greek demarcation of their respective maritime borders.

The campaign began when the Turkish Foreign Ministry announced that it considered the agreement between Cairo and Athens “null,” and that the area covered by it fell within the scope of Turkey’s interests, claiming it “violated Libyan maritime borders.”

It also came amid the backdrop of controversial Turkish energy exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean.

“It is surprising that such statements and allegations were made by a party that does not know the agreement and its details,” Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Ahmed Hafez, tweeted of Turkey’s stance.

The Turkish statement was followed by a series of attacks from the Muslim Brotherhood on social media, criticizing agreement and accusing Egypt of plotting against Turkey.

Dozens of Brotherhood websites launched from Turkey shared fabricated reports and photos attacking the agreement.

Various experts and officials refuted the allegations made by the sites and social media accounts, which claimed that the agreement between Egypt and Greece to demarcate the borders gave a green light to the Israeli gas pipeline, EastMed, to export gas to Europe through Cyprus and the Greek island of Crete to the mainland.

According to former Egyptian Assistant Foreign Minister Mohamed Hegazy, the reason for Turkey’s anger was that after this deal, as well as the signing of the border demarcation agreement between Greece and Italy, Turkey no longer had a maritime entrance point to Libya in line with the rules of international law.

HIGHLIGHT

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He added that the UN secretary-general had refused to deposit the maritime

agreement that Turkey concluded with the Fayez Al-Sarraj government in Libya, and that Libya's Parliament had not adopted it.

The agreement between Egypt and Greece comes two months after the latter signed its agreement with Italy regarding the demarcation of the exclusive economic zone between the two countries in the Ionian Sea, in a first step that nullified the agreement between Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Al-Sarraj.

Regional security expert Muhammad Jumaa said in statement to the Masrawy website: "The Turkish allegations are based on its non-recognition of Cyprus and consequently the lack of recognition of its maritime borders. It believes that Cyprus is very close to its borders and recognises its limits of influence in the Mediterranean, so Turkey wants to bypass Cyprus as if it does not exist, as it sees that Libya is 2,000 nautical miles away from it."

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said that this agreement allowed Egypt and Greece to move forward in maximizing the utilization of the resources available in their exclusive economic zone, especially oil and gas reserves, and opened new horizons for more regional cooperation in the energy field in light of the two countries' membership in the East Mediterranean Gas Forum.

"The demarcation of the maritime border between Egypt and Greece cancels the agreement of Turkey and the Al-Sarraj government, as it covers some of the areas covered by that agreement. Greece respects international law, unlike Turkey, which is acting in hostility with Egypt," Clianeth Kyriakides, a professor of security and strategic studies, said.

Under the agreement, Egypt will be able to explore for oil and gas in the western economic zones located on the maritime borders with those of Greece. It will also give the right to Egypt and Greece to search and explore in the eastern Mediterranean, and strengthen the bilateral relationship between Cairo and Athens.



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Erdogan: Turkey resumes energy exploration in east Mediterranean

[COVID-19 test required for foreigners to enter Egypt](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-08-09 22:35

CAIRO: The Egyptian government has banned entry into the country without proof of having had a PCR test for the coronavirus from this Saturday.

The test must come back with a negative result no more than 72 hours before entering the country, according to the Egyptian Cabinet announcement.

It said that the decision applies only to non-Egyptian foreigners. The decision excludes Arab and foreign tourists arriving on direct flights to Sharm El-Sheikh, Taba, Hurghada, Marsa Alam and Marsa Matrouh airports, as well as transit passengers to those airports.

Ahmed Mustafa, a journalist who specializes in aviation affairs, said that the decision was not applied as soon as it was issued because of pre-prepared flight schedules with reservations dating back a month. It was necessary to give passengers a grace period and the decision would come into effect from Aug. 15 so that people had time to be tested.

Mustafa said that most countries were dealing with passengers in the same way and following World Health Organization guidelines, especially after the increase in infections in a number of countries such as Spain.

He said that the decision would also not be applied to tourists coming to coastal governorates but it was forbidden for them to travel from their cities to Cairo without the test.

Mustafa added that the PCR analysis would not exempt passengers from the need to take other precautionary measures, including measuring temperatures.

Elizabeth Shaker, a member of the Health Affairs Committee in the Egyptian House of Representatives, praised the government's decision, saying that Egypt had responded to the awareness campaigns, and the indicators of the pandemic's decline confirmed this.

She said that the government's decision preserved the health of citizens in general, and that most countries had taken the same approach by banning all arrivals unless they presented a PCR analysis.

"This decision will also have positive benefits on tourism and the national economy as it will attract a large number of tourists to Egypt because of the safety measures that it applies," she said.

A few days ago, Counselor Nader Saad, a spokesman for the Egyptian Cabinet, said that the health and epidemiological situation was under control. He explained that visitors in tourist governorates would not be allowed to leave them, and visitors to Cairo or any other governorate must obtain a virus-free certificate.

"Egypt is not the first country to implement this decision. The UAE preceded it when it announced that all those coming to its lands must undergo a coronavirus examination, in addition to conducting it at the country's airports," Saad said.

Saudi Arabia had earlier announced that it would not allow the entry of citizens from several countries, including Egypt, unless they were carrying the negative results of test analyzes. The UAE also announced that all arrivals, including citizens, residents, visitors and transit passengers, must undergo a PCR examination before entering the country.

The official spokesperson for the Kuwaiti government, Tariq Al-Mezerm, announced that the Cabinet had decided to compel all airlines flying to Kuwait to request a PCR analysis for each passenger at his own expense, confirming that they were free from the coronavirus before boarding the plane.



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Egypt COVID-19 cases could be '10 times higher' than reported figures
Egypt orders the wearing of face masks in public

[Is France helping Lebanon, or trying to reconquer it?](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-08-09 01:03

PARIS: It was almost as if Emmanuel Macron forgot that Lebanon is no longer a French protectorate.

Visiting explosion-ravaged Beirut this week, France's leader comforted distraught crowds, promised to rebuild the city and claimed that the blast pierced France's own heart. "France will never let Lebanon go," Macron said. "The heart of the French people still beats to the pulse of Beirut."

His critics denounced the overtures as a neocolonialist foray by a European leader seeking to restore sway over a troubled Middle Eastern land – and distract from mounting problems at home. A meme circulating online dubbed him Macron Bonaparte, a 21st century Emperor Napoleon.

But Macron's defenders – including desperate Beirut residents who called him "our only hope" – praised him for visiting gutted neighborhoods where Lebanese leaders fear to tread, and for trying to hold Lebanon's politicians accountable for the corruption and mismanagement blamed for Tuesday's deadly blast.

Macron's visit exposed France's central challenge as it prepares to host an international donors conference for Lebanon on Sunday: How to help a country in crisis, where French economic ties run deep, without interfering in its internal affairs.

"We are walking on the edge of a precipice. We have to aid, support and encourage the Lebanese people, but at the same time not give the impression that we want to establish a new protectorate, which would be completely stupid," said Jack Lang, a former French government minister who now heads the Arab World Institute in Paris. "We must find new, intelligent solutions to aid the Lebanese."

France's ties with Lebanon reach back at least to the 16th century, when the French monarchy negotiated with Ottoman rulers to protect Christians – and secure influence – in the region. By the time of the 1920-1946 French mandate, Lebanon already had a network of French schools and French speakers that survives to this day – along with France's cozy relationships with Lebanon's power brokers, including some accused of fueling its political and economic crisis.

HIGHLIGHT

Macron's defenders – including desperate Beirut residents who called him 'our only hope' – praised him for visiting gutted neighborhoods where Lebanese leaders fear to tread

A surprising online petition emerged this week asking France to temporarily restore its mandate, saying Lebanon's leaders have shown "total inability to secure and manage the country."

It is widely seen as an absurd idea – Macron himself told Beirut residents on Wednesday that "it's up to you to write your history" – but 60,000 people have signed it, including members of France's 250,000-strong Lebanese diaspora and people in Lebanon who said it is a way to express their desperation and distrust of the political class.

Aside from a show of much-needed international support, many in Lebanon viewed Macron's visit as a way to secure financial assistance for a country wracked with debt.

The French leader also managed to bring the divided political class together, if briefly. In a rare scene, the heads of Lebanon's political factions – some of them still bitter enemies from the 1975-1990 civil war – appeared together at the Palais des Pins, the French Embassy headquarters in Beirut, and filed out after meeting Macron.

But to many, the visit was seen as patronizing. Some lashed out at the petition and those celebrating "France, the tender mother."

One writer, Samer Frangieh, said Macron gathered the politicians as "schoolchildren," reprimanding them for failing to carry out their duties.

There were other, more subtle jabs against France's show of influence. While Macron was touring neighborhoods torn apart by the explosion, the health minister in the Hezbollah-backed government toured field hospitals donated by Iran and Russia, major power players in the region.

"I get the people who want the mandate. They have no hope," said Leah, an engineering student in Beirut who did not want her last name published out of concern for political repercussions. She spoke out strongly against the idea, and against those who see Macron as Lebanon's "savior."

She said that risks worsening Lebanon's divisions, as Maronite Christians and French-educated Muslims embrace Macron while others lean away. "He hasn't resolved his issues with his country, with his people. How is he giving advice to us?" she asked.

In Paris, Macron's domestic political opponents from the far left to the far right warned the centrist leader against creeping neocolonialism, and extracting political concessions from Lebanon in exchange for aid.

"Solidarity with Lebanon should be unconditional," tweeted Julien Bayou, head of the popular Greens party.

Macron himself firmly rejected the idea of reviving the French mandate.

"You can't ask me to substitute for your leaders. It's not possible," he said. "There is no French solution."

But he made a point of noting that he plans to return to Lebanon to verify that promised reforms are being undertaken on Sept. 1, the 100th anniversary of the declaration of Greater Lebanon – and the beginning of French rule.



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charter flight to bring home citizens from Lebanon