

Iran's Revolutionary Guards 'psychologically torturing' Zaghari- Ratcliffe by blocking clemency

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LONDON: British-Iranian aid worker Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is being subjected to "psychological torture" by the Iranian regime as her hopes of being granted clemency were dashed yet again, her husband said. Zaghari-Ratcliffe, 41, spent last week having nightmares whilst she waited to discover her fate on Friday, Richard Ratcliffe said. "There's no news today," was all she was told.

"It is fair to say that what Nazanin has gone through amounts to psychological torture," he told the Observer.

"The supreme leader [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei] has granted clemency to everyone who meets certain criteria. Nazanin meets the criteria," Ratcliffe added. However, there is a dispute between the judiciary, who are trying to uphold the law, and the Revolutionary Guard, the aid worker's lawyers told Ratcliffe.

The uncertainty has left Zaghari-Ratcliffe "deflated", "unsettled" and desperate to see her five-year-old daughter, Gabriella, in England, Ratcliffe said.

"The Revolutionary Guard have had no problem making a mockery of Iranian law," he said. "But this is the first time we've had a situation where not only is the Iranian foreign ministry, behind closed doors, trying to solve this for diplomatic purposes, but also the judiciary are trying to solve this case."

In mid-March, Zaghari-Ratcliffe was temporarily released from Tehran's notorious Evin prison for two weeks along with thousands of other prisoners in a bid to contain the rapid spread of coronavirus in Iran. The furlough was extended until May 27.

However, her hopes of being granted clemency were dashed for the second time in a week on Friday when she was informed that a decision had not been made. Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a project manager with the Thomson Reuters Foundation, has served nearly four of her five-year sentence.

She convicted of plotting to overthrow Iran's clerical establishment, a charge her family, the foundation and its news subsidiary Reuters deny. She was arrested in April 2016 at a Tehran airport as she headed back to Britain with her daughter after a family visit.



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UK envoy urged to visit Zaghari-Ratcliffe on furlough
British-Iranian woman Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe temporarily released from Tehran jail

[Egypt receives more stranded citizens amid coronavirus pandemic](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-05-31 15:19

DUBAI: Egypt continues to repatriate stranded citizens from coronavirus hotspots at the country's Marsa Alam International Airport, local daily Egypt Today reported.

The airport has received over 10,000 citizens and operated more than 60 flights by EgyptAir and Air Cairo airlines since operations began in April. Repatriated Egyptians arrived from more than 36 countries globally after

coordination between ministries and the tourism industry, and provided hotels to host the Egyptians for a one-week quarantine, a source said. Over 8,000 Egyptians left hotels after completing their obligatory quarantine period, and after the duration was lowered to one week, more citizens were discharged, medical sources said. Earlier on Thursday, the airport received a repatriation flight arriving from Abu Dhabi, carrying 245 citizens. Meanwhile, Egypt has prepared plans to reopen churches in the country amid the coronavirus outbreak while following precautionary measures to prevent the virus spread, Head of the Evangelical community in Egypt Andrea Zaki said. The committee is expected to submit its proposal during the council's next available meeting, she added.



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Egypt COVID-19 cases could be '10 times higher' than reported figures
Egypt's El-Sisi: Foreign interference in Libya threatens stability in region

Iran says virus cases surpass 150,000

Author:

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Sun, 2020-05-31 11:07

TEHRAN: Iran said its caseload of novel coronavirus infections passed the grim milestone of 150,000 on Sunday, as the country struggles to contain a recent upward trend.

The government has largely lifted the restrictions it imposed in order to halt a COVID-19 outbreak that first emerged in mid-February.

But the health ministry has warned of a potential virus resurgence with new cluster outbreaks in a number of provinces.

Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said 2,516 new cases were confirmed across the country in the past 24 hours, bringing the total to 151,466.

Infections have been on a rising trajectory in the Islamic republic since hitting a near two-month low on May 2.

Jahanpour said the virus had claimed another 63 lives over the same period, raising the overall toll to 7,797.

So far the government has reimposed a lockdown only in Khuzestan province on Iran's southwestern border with Iraq.

It remains "red", the highest level on Iran's colour-coded risk scale.

Experts both at home and abroad have voiced scepticism about Iran's official figures, saying the real toll could be much higher.



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Iran suggests up to 225 killed in November protestsUK, France, Germany
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[Private schools and universities in Lebanon are in economic crisis](#)

Sat, 2020-05-30 22:59

BEIRUT: The future of thousands of Lebanese students is at stake as private educational institutions assess their ability to continue operations in the next academic year, due to the economic crunch facing Lebanon.

"If the economic situation continues, private schools will be forced to close down for good, a move that will affect more than 700,000 students, 59,000 teachers and 15,000 school administrators," said Father Boutros Azar, secretary-general of the General Secretariat of Catholic Schools in Lebanon, and coordinator of the Association of Private Educational Institutions in Lebanon.

Over 1,600 private schools are operating in Lebanon, including free schools and those affiliated to various religion societies, Azar said.

The number of public schools in Lebanon, he added, is 1,256, serving 328,000 students from the underprivileged segment of society and 200,000 Syrian refugee students.

"The number of teachers in the formal education sector is 43,500 professors and teachers – 20,000 of them are permanent staff and the rest work on a contract basis," Azar said.

This development will also have an impact on private universities, whose number has increased to 50 in the past 20 years.

Ibrahim Khoury, a special adviser to the president of the American University of Beirut (AUB), told Arab News: "All universities in Lebanon are facing an unprecedented crisis, and the message of AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri, a few weeks ago, was a warning about the future of university education in light of the economic crisis that Lebanon is facing."

Khoury said many universities would likely reduce scientific research and dispense with certain specializations.

“Distance education is ongoing, but classes must be opened for students in the first semester of next year, but we do not yet know what these classes are.”

Khoury added: “Universities are still following the official exchange rate of the dollar, which is 1,512 Lebanese pounds (LBP), but the matter is subject to future developments.”

Lebanese parents are also worried about the future of their children, after the current school year ended unexpectedly due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Dr. Tarek Majzoub, the minister of education and higher education, ended the academic year in public schools and gave private schools the right to take a call on this issue.

He said: “The coming academic year will witness intensification of lessons and a review of what students have missed.”

But what sort of academic year should students expect?

Differences have developed between school owners, parents, and teachers over the payment of tuition fees and teachers’ salaries.

Azar said: “What I know so far is that 80 percent of the Catholic schools in Lebanon will close their doors next year unless they are financially helped. Some families today are unable to pay the rest of the dues for the current year either because their breadwinners were fired or not working, while others do not want to pay dues because schools remain closed due to the pandemic.

“Lebanese people chose private schools for their children because they trusted them for their quality – 70 percent of Lebanese children go to private schools. Today, we are facing a major crisis, and I say that if education collapses in Lebanon, then the area surrounding Lebanon will collapse. Many Arab students from the Gulf states receive their education in the most prestigious Lebanese schools,” he added.

“What we are witnessing today is that the educational contract is no longer respected. It can be said that what broke the back of school owners is the approval by the Lebanese parliament in 2018 of a series of ranks and salaries that have bankrupted the state treasury and put all institutions in a continuous deficit.”

Those in charge of formal education expect a great rush for enrollment in public schools and universities, but the ability of these formal institutions to absorb huge numbers of students is limited.

Majzoub said that his ministry was “working on proposing a law to help private schools provide a financial contribution for each learner within the available financial capabilities or grants that can be obtained.”

The undersecretary of the Teachers’ Syndicate in Private Schools, former

government minister Ziad Baroud, said: “The crisis of remaining student fees and teachers’ salaries needs to be resolved by special legislation in parliament that regulates the relationship between all parties – teachers, parents, and schools – and takes into account the measures to end teachers’ contracts before July 5.”

Baroud spoke of “hundreds of teachers being discharged from their schools every year based on a legal article that gives the right to school owners to dismiss any teacher from service, provided that they send the teacher a notification before July 5.”

H said it should be kept in mind that thousands of teachers have not yet received their salaries for the last four months, and some of them had received only 50 percent or even less of their salaries.

Khoury said: “The AUB received a loan from the late Prime Minister Rashid Karami at the beginning of the 1975 Lebanese civil war to keep it afloat. In the 1990s, the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri provided aid and grants to the universities. Today, no one can help universities.”

Last Thursday, the Lebanese parliament adopted a proposal submitted by the leader of the Future Parliamentary Bloc, Bahia Hariri, to allocate LBP300 billion to the education sector to help it mitigate the effects of COVID-19.



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Lebanon has scant chance of getting IMF aid, Geagea says

Egypt COVID-19 cases could be '10 times higher' than reported figures

Author:

Sat, 2020-05-30 23:03

CAIRO: An Egyptian doctor has caused controversy over the number of coronavirus cases in the country by saying the real numbers may be up to 10 times higher than the reported figures.

Dr. Adel Khattab, a member of the Higher Committee for Viruses affiliated with the Ministry of Higher Education, made these remarks in an interview with Egyptian Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Khaled Abdel-Ghaffar.

Khattab said COVID-19 cases in Egypt could hit 40,000 in just a few days. The Egyptian Health Ministry figures say that, as of Friday, the number of confirmed cases was 22,082 with 879 deaths.

Khattab said the number of infections recorded daily only reflected the cases reported to authorities. He said there were many patients with mild symptoms who went untested for the virus and, therefore, were unregistered.

He said the actual number of cases was expected to reach 10 times the number of reported cases, mainly due to socializing during the Eid Al-Fitr holidays.

The increase in cases would be prevalent among those who returned to the provinces for the holiday, then left for work and the disease would mostly be spread through people who have contracted the virus without showing symptoms, also known as silent carriers or asymptomatic.

Khattab explained that the danger lay with people who were asymptomatic.

Abdel-Majid Ibrahim, a doctor at a quarantine hospital in Egypt, said that Khattab was drawing on foreign research. A German-conducted study showed that one out of every five infected people failed to show any symptoms and therefore became a silent carrier of the virus, which could infect four out of five individuals, he explained.

"The daily numbers shared by the Ministry of Health may be based on speculation," he told Arab News. "There are no numbers or figures other than those announced by the ministry – 1,200 daily cases reported on Friday, May 29, making the total cases reported in the country over 22,000."

The government has begun paving the way for "coexisting with coronavirus" including imposing a fine of EGP4,000 (\$235) on anyone out in public or a private crowded place not wearing a facemask. People will not be permitted to enter any facility, government-owned or otherwise, without wearing masks. The

same applies to public and private transport. Malls and shops will be allowed to reopen all week, starting from Saturday.

Several Egyptian officials have said the country must end its lockdown soon and people must resume work to prevent the economy from collapsing.

Egyptian Minister of Religious Endowments Mohamed Mokhtar Gomaa announced that a plan to reopen places of worship was ready. Mosques and churches in Egypt have been closed and religious rituals have been suspended since March.

Gomaa said the plan would be presented to a coronavirus crisis management committee headed by the prime minister next week.

The Egyptian president's advisor on health and prevention, Dr. Mohamed Awad Taj El-Din, predicted that coronavirus infections in the country would reach their peak in two weeks.

He called for all of the country's institutions to work together "to survive the crisis safely."



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Egypt orders the wearing of face masks in public Egyptian doctors call for more facilities to handle pandemic