

Lebanon relaxes coronavirus restrictions by opening seaside promenades, restaurants

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Sun, 2020-05-03 22:02

BEIRUT: People in Lebanon will be able to go for walks on the seaside promenades along the Lebanese coast starting Monday, provided they commit to wearing masks and maintaining safe distances. This move comes following a ban imposed since March 15 due to the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Lebanon on Sunday reported four new cases, two of whom had returned from Guinea.

Lebanon will enter its second week of relaxed measures, with restaurants allowed to resume receiving customers until 9 p.m., provided they do not offer hookah services, which spread COVID-19. Barbers will be allowed to reopen salons for pre-booked appointments.

Protesters are violating measures by continuing to take to the streets and staging sit-ins against the corrupt government. A number of protesters in Tripoli raised a banner on which they wrote: "You are the thieves and you are the disease."

The Lawyers' Committee to Defend Protesters claimed that a number of activists who had been arrested by the security forces last week have been tortured. The committee protested "enforced disappearance."

The committee said in a statement that the military prosecution released six detainees, including a child, who were arrested in Sidon. According to the committee, "some of the detainees confirmed that they were subjected to beatings and torture by the intelligence branch through various means, especially via electrocution," and some detainees had to be hospitalized upon their release.

Attention has been drawn to the invitation extended by President Michel Aoun to political and parliamentary leaders for a meeting in the Baabda Palace on Wednesday. During the meeting, Aoun will brief the participants about the reform plan approved by the government that represents Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, the Free Patriotic Movement and their allies.

The Future Movement's parliamentary bloc announced on Sunday that it will not attend the meeting.

It said that "the natural place for briefing the parliamentary blocs on the government's reform program is the parliament." It warned of "political and legal practices and advisory opinions that cross the lines of the constitution to establish the concept of a presidential system at the expense of the parliamentary democratic system."

Former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora expressed fears over "practices that are taking place and actually leading to the weakening of the prime minister's

position and pushing toward giving all power to the president.” He stressed that “this is against the constitution.”

Siniora warned of parties “trying to tighten their grip on the state and control it.” He talked about “pressure exerted by sectarian, confessional and militia movements and parties that have taken control of the government.”

He said: “The economic plan prepared by the government of Hassan Diab lacks what contributes to addressing the problems and the possibility of implementing reform measures, especially in terms of strengthening social protection networks.”

He added: “How can the government restore the confidence of the Lebanese and friends in the world if it does not respect the law and has not yet issued the judicial formations prescribed by laws?

“And how can the government gain confidence when it has not yet been able to address the chronic power problem?”

Siniora highlighted that “Lebanon is part of the Arab world and has no interest in a position, axis, or dispute (that impacts its relationship) with the Arab region and the world.”



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Economic worries trump coronavirus pandemic fears in Lebanon
Coca-Cola fizzles out in Lebanon with economic downturn

Egyptian circus performer brings lions home

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Sun, 2020-05-03 20:54

CAIRO: The Egyptian government has ordered the shutting down of the National Circus to counter the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Following the closure, Ashraf El-Helw, 26, who belongs to the famous lion taming El-Helw family thought of a new idea to entertain people: He decided to bring his lions home.

El-Helw transported the lions using his own jeep. Once home, he allocated a special space for them to live and performed with them. The performance was shot on video by El-Helw and posted on his official Instagram account.

"The show was easy since I usually hold lots of performances and take part in entertainment shows and pranks that depend on lions. I grew up with lion cubs at home," he said.

Although he now trains his animals at home, El-Helw admits it is not easy.

"Changing the venue was rather hard for the animals because they are used to the circus.

"The family encouraged me to hold an online performance via social media.

However, they did not expect me to be in such good control of the situation because it was the first time to have the lions at home."

When El-Helw posted videos of the home performance he was naturally asked about having lions inside the house. He said it was unsafe for the animals to be in the house "because they need special care and attention and a special way of dealing with them that is different from dealing with household pets."

El-Helw added that he had thought of the idea of performing at home with the lions after becoming bored due to the lockdown. He said he felt the animals were also bored after live performances were halted because of the pandemic.

"I rehearsed many times before the show at home," El-Helw said, adding: "In the beginning, the lions felt the surroundings in the house were strange, but eventually they started interacting with me."

"The family owns about 50 animals," El-Helw said. "When the virus crisis erupted, the family divided the animals into groups. Some of them are in the National Circus while others are in the ranch" on the Cairo-Alexandria desert road.

He said he has decided to hold future performances in the ranch since the venue is better-equipped than his home.

Zaghloul Khedr, a researcher at the Animals Health Institute, shared concern over El-Helw's videos. He said that they could encourage people to buy wild animals and raise them at home, "which is very dangerous."

He added: "It is very hard to trace the trade of wild animals in Egypt since the deals are done behind closed doors and come in various forms and prices."

Khedr said that some animals are sold for thousands of dollars.

He said there were special ranches for breeding tigers and lions and that some are licensed to sell the big cats internationally in circuses, but not to individuals.

A source in the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture told Arab News that the ministry was the only body authorized to issue licenses for sheltering and breeding wild animals.

According to the ministry's website, the General Authority for Veterinarian Services issues private licenses for wild animal ranches including lions, tigers, and cheetahs. The ranches are licensed following the approval of the environment and interior ministries.

Conditions include sending a special committee from the authority to draft reports on the location of the ranch, which must be 500 meters away from urban communities. Moreover, special committees are set up to examine the ranch in terms of safety rules and regulations and meeting health and environmental standards.

Dina Zulfakkar, an animal rights activist and board member of the Giza Zoo, told journalists that bringing wild animals into homes was a violation of the law. She added that the video posted by El-Helw on social media "gives the wrong impression regarding how dangerous lions can be."

El-Helw started dealing with animals, especially lions, at the age of six when he started taking part in circus rehearsals. He said he ditched a promising career as a footballer for Al-Ahly because of his passion for the circus.

Before he started performing under the big top, El-Helw learned how to deal with animals, how to care for them and also understand their nature.

The El-Helw family has been in the circus business for more than 100 years. Ashraf El-Helw's grandmother, Mahasen, was the first Arab female lion tamer. El-Helw, Egypt's youngest lion tamer, is the grandson of famed lion tamer Mohamed El-Helw who died after being mauled by a lion inside a cage in 1972.



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Egypt sphinxes moved to Tahrir SquareEgypt reports 15 military casualties in Sinai recently

[Daesh prisoners riot again in northeast Syria](#)

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Sun, 2020-05-03 15:52

BEIRUT: Militants from the Daesh group rioted in a northeast Syrian prison Sunday, a month after similar violence at the facility allowed four extremists to escape, an opposition war monitor and a Kurdish activist collective said.

Kurdish forces sent reinforcements to the prison in the eastern Hassakeh province and US military helicopters flew overhead, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, and North Press Agency, a media platform operating in the Kurdish-administered areas. Kurdish authorities currently operate more than two dozen detention facilities scattered across northeastern Syria, holding about 10,000 Daesh fighters. Among the detainees are some 2,000 foreigners whose home countries have refused to repatriate them, including about 800 Europeans.

Further details were not immediately available on the size of the riot, and it was not clear if the unrest was triggered by concerns about the coronavirus's potential spread in the prison.

In late March, two days of riots broke out at the same facility when former Daesh members began knocking down doors and making holes in the walls between cells. Four prisoners escaped but were caught a day later.

The riots were put down by the Kurdish-led, US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces. Afterward, the SDF's top commander Mazloum Abdi urged the home countries of foreign fighters to find a solution for the prisoners. The riot was one of the most serious uprisings by the prisoners since Daesh was defeated a year ago, when the SDF seized control of the last sliver of land controlled by the extremists in eastern Syria.

A resurgence of Daesh attacks in both Syria and Iraq has raised concerns that the militant group is taking advantage of governments absorbed in tackling the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing slide into economic chaos.

Last month, the US-led coalition said it had handed over hygiene and medical supplies to detention facilities across northeastern Syria, such as hand-washing stations, disinfectant wipes, face masks and examination gloves.

One coronavirus death was reported in Kurdish-held areas of Syria in April. The central government in Damascus has registered 43 cases and three deaths.



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Syrian tycoon Makhoul says security forces are arresting his employees

[Jordan lifts all curbs on economic activity in latest easing of lockdown](#)

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Sun, 2020-05-03 15:33

AMMAN: Jordan said on Sunday it had lifted all restrictions on economic activity in the latest easing of coronavirus lockdown rules to help jump-start the cash-strapped economy.

Jordan has in the last two weeks been lifting restrictions to allow businesses back to work, but with lower levels of staff and strict social distancing and hygiene guidelines.

Meanwhile, Jordan's cash-strapped economy is expected to contract around 3% in 2020 due to the impact of the coronavirus, the country's finance minister said on Sunday.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), which last March approved a four-year \$1.3 billion programme with the kingdom, had expected Jordan's economy to grow around 2.1% in 2020 then gradually rise in the next few years to 3.3%. "The impact of the big economic blow that hit the local economy has been deep and this will continue," Mohammad Al-Issis said in remarks on state television.



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Jordan opens private schools with restricted working hours
Jordan to deploy 16 repatriation flights for stranded citizens

[Egypt reports 15 military casualties in Sinai recently](#)

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Sun, 2020-05-03 13:46

CAIRO: Egypt's military said on Sunday that 15 of its men had died or been wounded in operations in the Sinai Peninsula recently, and that 126 suspected militants had been killed.

The military publishes updates on its operations in Sinai every few months, without giving a specific time frame.

The statement came three days after the military said 10 personnel were killed or wounded in an attack near Bir Al-Abd in North Sinai. Daesh claimed the attack.

The Interior Ministry later said 18 suspected militants had been killed in a shootout near Bir Al-Abd.

Militants loyal to Daesh are active in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula, where Egypt has been battling an insurgency for years.

Human rights organizations accuse Egypt of carrying out extrajudicial executions, forced evictions and collective punishment as part of the crackdown.

The military has denied such accusations, saying it takes the lives of civilians into consideration during operations.



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Amnesty reports chilling details of Egypt press crackdown