

War-weary Libyans view virus lockdown as another inconvenience

Author:

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TRIPOLI: Already tired of the tribulations of war, Libyans in the capital Tripoli are reluctant to respect intensified lockdown measures introduced on Friday to forestall coronavirus.

The round-the-clock curfew was flagged by the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) on Wednesday night and will apply for 10 days in areas under its control, although people are allowed to shop on foot between 7 a.m. and noon.

An earlier curfew had forbidden only nighttime movement. Driving is now banned.

Data from authorities shows 49 people have so far tested positive for coronavirus in the country.

Hassan, a 52-year-old who only gave his first name, ignored the restrictions as he drove to fill water containers, while artillery boomed in the distance. "I don't have a choice," he said. "With my back pain, I can't carry all this on foot" for 500 meters – the distance from his house to the well at the neighborhood mosque.

The capital's water supply has been cut since April 6 by an armed group in a region to the south under the control of Khalifa Haftar, the eastern-based strongman who has been fighting to seize Tripoli, the seat of the GNA, since last April.

Ahead of the driving ban, long queues formed outside petrol stations on Thursday. And while Tripoli's usual traffic has reduced, there are still cars on the road, particularly in the suburbs where there are few police to enforce the lockdown.

"There is nearly nothing around us, without a car we can't do the shopping, especially to buy cooking gas, milk or water containers ... only the bakery is within 500 meters of us," said Abdel Alim Al-Abded, who lives with his wife and three children on a family farm on the southeastern outskirts of Tripoli. With sheep, chickens, and outdoor space, the family has all the meat, eggs and vegetables they need. But most Libyans are not this self-sufficient and many have not received government salaries and pensions for months.

Meanwhile, the curfew has resulted in long queues outside stores, raising transmission risks. In the suburb of Janzour east of the capital, more than 100 men, women and children waited outside the only neighborhood bakery on Friday.

Baker Jamal Al-Nafati struggled to enforce social distancing requirements on his customers.

HIGHLIGHTS

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its control.

- **Data from authorities shows 49 people have so far tested positive for coronavirus in the country.**

“We are trying to bake more bread early in the morning,” he said. “But because of the health risks four of my employees have quit, leaving me with only three guys to do the work.”

He continued: “It’s difficult. I hope that opening hours for bakeries will be extended to reduce these queues.”

While most Libyans consider the lockdown another frustration on top of existing wartime difficulties, for a privileged few it represents a chance to stretch their legs unhindered by traffic.

Hallouma, a retiree who only gave her first name, is finally wearing the trainers she bought years ago but never wore. Accompanied by her son “for more security,” she said she was “profiting from the lockdown by going for a walk ... it’s something rare for us.”

Four young women wearing bright clothes said they had the same idea. “I never go out on foot, even to buy something from the corner store,” said one.

“But with the curfew, we can be sure we won’t be harassed by men in cars,” said another.

Acknowledging limited compliance with the lockdown, the GNA Health Ministry reminded citizens of the rules on Saturday, warning of fines for those who ignored them.



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Face masks help Syrian Kurd refugee family integrate in France
Houthis slammed for abducting former Yemeni culture minister

[Houthis slammed for abducting former Yemeni culture minister](#)

Sun, 2020-04-19 23:30

AL-MUKALLA: Armed men associated with the Iran-backed Houthi militia on Sunday abducted a former Yemeni culture minister from his home in Sanaa, his son said.

Whadhah Al-Ruwaishan wrote on Facebook: "(A) Houthi group abducted my father half an hour ago." No further details were given and the Houthis have not commented on the abduction allegation.

Khaled Al-Ruwaishan, who is a well-respected writer and poet, has criticized the Houthis' power grab, its crackdown on dissidents and its military expansion across Yemen.

He has more than 93,000 followers on Twitter, 400,000 followers on Facebook and is seen as one of the most respected Yemeni intellectuals who is equally critical of Houthis and their opponents.

Activists have linked the abduction to his most recent Facebook post about a Yemeni poet who praised the courage of fighters in Marib who foiled a Houthi military offensive.

"These verses should become the morning anthem in every Yemeni school," Al-Ruwaishan told fellow poet Amer Al-Souaidi in a Facebook post on Saturday.

In another post, on April 15, Al-Ruwaishan criticized Yemeni traders inside Houthi-held Sanaa and the rebel government for not giving financial assistance to thousands of laborers who lost their jobs in the aftermath of flash floods that had hit Sanaa.

"In Houthis' time, people's hearts died and were petrified," he said in the post, which attracted thousands of likes and hundreds of comments.

His abduction caused an outcry on social media where dozens of current and former ministers, journalists, writers, and Al-Ruwaishan's admirers condemned the Houthis and demanded his immediate release.

BACKGROUND

Khaled Al-Ruwaishan, who is a well-respected writer and poet, has criticized the Houthis' power grab, its crackdown on dissidents and its military expansion across Yemen.

Mohammed Askar, the Yemeni human rights minister, urged the UN to intervene.

"I condemn in the strongest terms the Houthi militia's arbitrary detention of Khaled Al-Ruwaishan. I call upon human rights organizations and the UN Yemen envoy to pressure the militia to unconditionally release him," he tweeted.

Ahmed ben Daghar, a former prime minister and an adviser to Yemen's president, said that the Houthis had committed a "folly" by detaining an outspoken Yemeni writer, predicting that the rebels' suppression of opposition voices would trigger a revolution against their rule.

Mohammed Al-Maswari, a lawyer and activist who escaped Houthi arrest and assassination when he was in Sanaa, said he had predicted the militia would throw Al-Ruwaishan behind bars sooner or later.

"I said Al-Ruwaishan would not be safe from them," Al Maswari said on Twitter.

Anonymous Twitter accounts describe Al-Ruwaishan as a "traitor" who collaborated with the group's enemies.

The Houthis have escalated their crackdown against opponents since the beginning of the year by sentencing to death dozens of lawmakers, government ministers, and army commanders.

Earlier this month, a court run by the Houthis sentenced four journalists to death after accusing them of espionage, a move that provoked national and international uproar.



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Shot by Houthis, Yemeni government liaison officer in Hodeida dies
Yemenis stranded abroad demand rescue flights

[Egyptian singers spread gratitude, hope amid pandemic](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-04-19 22:15

CAIRO: In support of health care workers fighting on the frontlines against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), Egyptian singers are expressing their gratitude by doing what they do best – singing.

Crooner Medhat Saleh recorded a video of his song “The People in the White Coat.” Written by Omar Taher and composed by Aziz Shafei, the video attracted thousands of viewers on social media and YouTube.

Saleh said he was happy to make the song in collaboration with composer Shafei. In a phone-in with a TV talk show, Saleh sent a message to doctors: “You are in our hearts and we are thankful for your efforts.”

Shafei posted a comment under the video of the song on YouTube, referring to the song as a “small dedication” to “our beloved doctors and medical teams.”

Saleh also sang “Egypt’s White Army” in honor of the medical teams battling against the pandemic.

The song was written by Amir Taema and composed by Khaled El-Guindy and Yasser Maguid. The video was directed by Hana Hafez.

Famed singer Hany Shaker, head of the Musicians Union, thanked health care workers, saying that the “white army” in Egypt was making history not only in their country but all across the Arab world. He also hailed Egyptian Minister of Health Hala Zayed, as well as the police and army for their efforts in countering the virus.

Shaker, who rose to fame in the 1970s, recently released the new song “Pray for Egypt” on his official YouTube account. The song features lyrics by Ahmed Sheta and music by Walid Mounir.

Egyptian folk singer Mohamed Adawya and Moroccan singer Jannat released “Our Country’s Heroes,” with lyrics by Tamer Hussein and music by Aziz Shafei. It was directed by Akram Farouk and produced by political party Mostaqbal Watan (Future of a Nation). The song hails the doctors in hospitals working side by side with the army and the police in battling the pandemic.

Adawya said that he did not expect the song to be such a hit. He added that he was happy to be able to make this “humble contribution,” which he described as a “gift to the warriors who are directly fighting the virus across the country and risking their lives.” He recorded and shot the song in less than 24 hours.

Cairo-based Moroccan vocalist Samira Said released the song “Crazy Reality” on her official social media accounts and on YouTube. She said that she recorded the song only a few months ago and found the present time to be good opportunity to release it.

The song’s Lebanese director Nedal Hany said the video was shot in 14 hours in Said’s home in Cairo.

Around 12 such songs have been released in Egypt so far and experts predict that these nationalistic refrains will be around for quite some time.

Many singers across the Arab world also released similar songs, including Lebanese artists Marwan Khoury and Ragheb Allama and Emirati singer Hussein El-Jasmy.

Yasmine Farrag, a professor of art critique at the Arts Academy, dubbed these releases “songs of the situation,” saying that the phenomenon of responding to major events or catastrophes – such as pandemics or wars – was not new.

“Those who produce such songs do not aim to add them to their traditional musical repertoire. They also do not expect that people will continue to listen to these songs for a long time since they are linked to particular

events,” Farrag said.

She explained that social media contributed to a great extent in promoting such songs and believed this to be a positive aspect. She added that there were other types of creative productions, which she called “spontaneous songs” and which were performed by non-professionals within the same context, reflecting the people’s awareness of the severity of the situation. However, Farrag said these songs often did not gain the same media attention.



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Bats besiege Egyptian village causing coronavirus panic Egyptian actress Yasmine Sabri gets married to businessman Ahmed Abou Hashima

[Lebanese optimistic as number of](#)

coronavirus cases decline

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BEIRUT: The number of new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases in Lebanon fell on Sunday with only one infection reported, raising the total number to 673. The number of fatalities remains 21.

Lebanese Interior Minister Mohamed Fahmy announced that the night-time curfew will start an hour later, at 8 p.m. instead of 7 p.m. The decision follows an extension in the opening times of supermarkets and restaurants that offer home delivery.

Health ministry teams continue to carry out random virus tests in Baalbek, Zahle, Tripoli, and Akkar. A similar campaign was carried out in Beirut, parts of Mount Lebanon and the south.

"The results of these tests are expected to help verify the possibility of societal infections and unannounced cases, to determine the course of the pandemic in Lebanon, and decide the steps to be taken," Health Minister Hamad Hassan said.

Dr. Abdul-Rahman Al-Bizri, an infectious diseases specialist and member of the Health ministry's crisis committee, said that "the number of cases is declining and this is an important indication. We went through a period in which the number of cases increased and we started to descend the pyramid. If the number continues to decrease, this means that we are in control of the pandemic in Lebanon and it will be encouraging to alleviate the restrictions imposed on people."

Dr. Al-Bizri said: "We will not apply herd immunity because we followed harsh measures. This may lead to a gradual reopening of the country."

With regard to the random tests that are taking place, Al-Bizri said: "These tests provide us with a picture of the status of the infections that occurred and not what will occur. Their results do not mean any change in the current data."

Bakeries on Sunday backed down on their decision to suspend distribution of bread to supermarkets and shops due to "high distribution cost."

Bakeries had said they would raise the price of a loaf of bread delivered to shops and supermarkets to LBP 1,750 (\$1.16) – in bakeries a loaf costs LBP 1,500.

Bakery owners retracted their decision after pressure from the Ministry of Economy and regional municipalities. Had it been implemented, the higher price would have added to the worries of the Lebanese.

Greek Orthodox Archbishop Elias Odeh, in an Easter sermon in Beirut, demanded that the government to "lift Lebanon out of its crisis without the citizens having to pay the price of the mistakes and quarrels of their rulers."

Odeh reminded the officials of the popular uprising six months ago "because they could no longer tolerate exploitation." He called on the government to "implement the real reforms that it had promised, which will satisfy the people, not the political class and (political) parties."



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Dollar exchange rate in Lebanon reaches record high
Coronavirus lockdown brings Lebanon's migratory birds up close

[Turkey's coronavirus cases highest in Middle East](#)

Author:

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ANKARA: Turkey's confirmed cases of coronavirus have shot above 82,000, the highest figure in the Middle East including Iran.

It ranks fourth among East Mediterranean countries in terms of death toll and

total cases, with rates increasing each day. Turkey has more confirmed cases than China, according to data from the John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

More than 2,000 people have died so far in Turkey and 11,976 have recovered.

Treatment and medicine for COVID-19 patients, as well as protective gear and testing, have become free of charge in public hospitals and medical centers.

Travel restrictions in and out of 31 cities have been extended for another 15 days. All public gatherings are banned in the country. All schools and universities are closed, and all international flights are suspended.

People under the age of 20 and above the age of 65 have not been allowed to leave their homes for a while. The government imposed a two-day curfew for the second consecutive weekend and only state officials, journalists and logistics employees were exempt.

Turkey's Ministry of Interior banned the opposition-run Mersin municipality in the south from distributing free bread to people, even though the city is one of 31 municipalities under lockdown due to the coronavirus contagion risk.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) criticized such municipalities for creating a parallel structure.

"These municipalities act in a socially sensitive way," Sengul Hablemitoglu, a social services expert from the European University of Lefke, told Arab News. "It cannot be seen as a rivalry against the government."

A country-wide lockdown is not expected for the time being because of government concerns about the economy. But main opposition parties want tougher measures to contain the spread of the disease.

A group of 13 countries including Canada, Brazil, Turkey, Italy, and Germany used a joint statement to call for global cooperation against the devastating economic impact of the pandemic. It urged working with all countries to coordinate on public health, travel, trade, economic and financial measures in order to "minimize disruptions and recover stronger."

The Turkish government is expected to borrow more and print more money or rescue some critical companies amid the economic shock that has hit sectors hard, especially tourism, food and beverage, transport and export-dependent industries. It is set, for the first time, to give its sovereign wealth fund a green light to buy some strategic private firms in distress.

The Turkish Central Bank is also holding talks with its foreign counterparts on swap lines to tackle the economic costs of the quarantine restrictions.

Political analyst Nezhir Onur Kuru, from Koc University in Istanbul, said world leaders who prioritized cooperation benefited from increased approval ratings. It was a different story in Turkey, however.

“In Turkey the divergence between the ruling government and some municipalities have triggered political fault lines,” he told Arab News. “The victories of the opposition-run municipalities in Turkey during the March 2019 elections should not be forgotten, as people fervently voted for opposition candidates in these municipalities due to the feeling of being unjustly treated. This is the same for the ongoing frictions in managing the social impact of the pandemic.”

Istanbul has an increasing number of confirmed coronavirus cases, prompting Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu to call for a city-wide lockdown.

Imamoglu, who is from the main opposition Republican People’s Party, defeated his AKP rival twice last year in mayoral races. Once in the poll and then again in a re-run. It was considered to be a significant warning from the city’s electorate, who felt dissatisfied with previous AKP-affiliated administrations.

Kuru added that the friction between the opposition and government was endangering relief measures at the expense of citizens.

Meanwhile a mobile tracking app, designed by the Turkish Health Ministry and cellphone operators that is accessible through the Google Play Store, has raised concerns that it may abuse people’s personal data. It sends automated messages to people diagnosed with the virus and gives the option to track people’s movements on the map.

The next two weeks may see virus cases peak in Turkey.



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