

How are Egyptians dealing with the coronavirus?

Author:

Tue, 2020-04-14 00:34

CAIRO: Egyptians are taking different approaches towards dealing with the coronavirus disease.

There are those who follow the government's instructions and that of the Ministry of Health to a tee, so much so that they seem obsessed.

There is also an indifferent lot, probably the majority of the country's 100 million people, who deal with the spread of the virus nonchalantly, due to either lack of awareness of the severity of the pandemic or the nature of the Egyptian character, which believes in fate.

A third category is obligated to deal with the virus due to the nature of their profession or their economic circumstances.

"I haven't seen the streets for the past month except to get the most basic necessities," Mohamed Abdel-Karim, a journalist, told Arab News.

"Be very careful in dealing with others in the supermarket and other stores. I fear for my children and my wife, and we take great care regarding safety and hygiene at home," Abdel-Karim said.

"I think that the UAE has suspended selling newspapers because it may contribute to spreading the virus. In Egypt this did not happen," Abdel-Karim said. He called on newspapers in Egypt to suspend printing, saying that only websites should publish news. "When the crisis is over, print newspapers can return," Abdel-Karim said.

"I am anxious, and what I see in the world obliges me to be extra careful in fear for my life and my children," Abdel-Karim said. "I go out every day to the market to buy the needs of the home," Zeinab Wafik, 48, a housewife, said. "Everyone in my neighborhood goes out like I do. I see some people wearing face masks but the majority do not.

"How long one lives is in the hands of God. If God wants someone to get hurt, He will not wait for the virus, and if He wants to take a soul, then He will," Wafik said.

"I always wash and clean whatever I buy from the market. There is absolutely nothing new in what I do. I don't know about ethanol. I use chlorine, similar to many of my neighbors," a mother of three said.

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SPEEDREAD

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With the increasing number of people infected with the coronavirus in Egypt, the government is applying strict measures to prevent crowding but there are millions of Egyptians, given the nature of their work, who are forced to work in cramped conditions.

"I have to walk the streets every day in search of my livelihood," deliveryman Ahmed Al-Najdi said.

Al-Najdi said that if he stays at home, he and his children will not find someone to feed them.

He called on the government to support the poor by exempting them from bills and debts, and to provide more financial support to help them overcome the crisis.

"We disinfect the restaurant, we wear hand and face guards, and carry ethyl alcohol bottles with us, and yet some customers are scared of dealing with us," Al-Najdi said.

Dr. Suzy Ibrahim, head of the infection control team at Al-Zawya General Hospital in Cairo, suggested moderation when dealing with the spread of the virus, stressing that people should not be overly afraid of the pandemic.

"The fear must be controlled because it greatly affects immunity," Ibrahim said.

"The most important thing is to prepare the immune system to deal with this virus in case of an infection, God forbid, and that is by playing sports, getting a good amount of sleep, eating healthily and avoiding fear because it weakens the immune system."

By Saturday, the Health Ministry had the total number of coronavirus cases in Egypt at 1,939, with 146 deaths recorded.

Meanwhile, Egypt's chief prosecutor late Sunday ordered 23 people to remain in detention for 15 days pending an investigation into blocking a road to a cemetery in a Nile Delta village to prevent the burial of a physician who died from the coronavirus. Public Prosecutor Hamada El-Sawy described preventing her burial as a "terrorist act."



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Gaza opens Egypt crossing to returnees despite virus
Son of Egyptian coronavirus victim doctor recalls terror of mob attack

[Lebanese politicians split over economic rescue efforts](#)

Tue, 2020-04-14 00:20

BEIRUT: Lebanese politicians are divided on how to best rescue the country's economy, which has been in freefall for months.

Parties disagree about the implementation of reforms requested by foreign countries in order to provide support.

The coalition government was formed in January after almost 100 days of widespread public protests about the state of the economy, corruption, high unemployment and a lack of basic services. The majority of ministers belong to Hezbollah and its allies.

Opposition parties, especially the Future Movement headed by former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, object to the way the government is dealing with the country's financial freefall.

Hezbollah and the Amal Movement oppose an IMF bailout, which could be a way to ease the crisis.

One suggestion, from the Lazar Financial Advisory Company, proposed a plan on ways to develop the Lebanese economy. It advised the government to confiscate bank deposits in return for shares to depositors, in addition to other measures related to the banking sector.

FASTFACT

Lebanese people stood on their balconies on Sunday and sang the national anthem ahead of the 45th anniversary of the civil war.

But the grand mufti of the Lebanese Republic, Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian, the highest religious authority of the Sunni community in Lebanon, rejected the idea. "We must take lessons from the experiences that the country has gone through," he said. "What we are witnessing now in Lebanon is an economic war to illegally take away people's bank deposits, while on the other hand there is public money that was looted and we know nothing about it ... citizens should not be the victims."

Dr. Tariq Majzoub, the minister of education and higher education, said that Lebanon was facing a great ordeal as a result of the influence of “particular interests over the supreme public interest.”

The squabbling came as Lebanese people emerged from their homes on Sunday evening to stand on their balconies and sing the national anthem ahead of the 45th anniversary of the civil war. The civil war started on April 13, 1975, and lasted for 15 years.

NGO Farah Al-Ataa urged people to go to their balconies because April 13 was behind them and they should unite for a better Lebanon.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lazar Financial Advisory Company proposes a plan on ways to develop the Lebanese economy. It advises the government to confiscate bank deposits in return for shares to depositors, in addition to other measures related to the banking sector. But the grand mufti rejects the idea.**
- **Lebanese education minister says the country is facing a great ordeal as a result of the influence of ‘particular interests over the supreme public interest.’**

But political activist Dr. Ziad Abdel Samad said Lebanese society did not share the same perception about the war’s outcome. “Within the war generation there are those who got the lesson and want to build a civil state, and those who insist on committing the same mistakes,” he told Arab News.

The political elite was not ready to relinquish its interests and gains, he added, and its practices were no better than those who were in power during the war. “It will not relinquish these gains and its performance proves that. It obstructed judicial reforms because it wants to keep its control over the judiciary, for it does not want to tackle the issue of looted money, nor to set a regulating authority for electricity.”

Within the war generation, there are those who want to build a civil state, and those who insist on committing the same mistakes.

Dr. Ziad Abdel Samad, Lebanese political activist

Protests have stopped because of a coronavirus lockdown, with people only allowed out for essential purposes. There are also severe restrictions on movement.

Samad said more pressure was needed and that people would have to wait for a new wave of revolution. “This time it will be different and I hope that it does not turn violent. The people who protested in the streets are waiting for the actions and reforms of the new government, but it seems that those in power did not learn the lesson.”



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Lebanon scrambles to fight pandemic, as cases reach 619
Lebanon puts Bcharri town under lockdown as stranded nationals return

[Turkish interior minister's rejected resignation hints at deepened rifts](#)

Tue, 2020-04-14 00:14

ANKARA: The shocking resignation of Turkey's contentious Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu on late Sunday has revealed the ongoing rifts within the Turkish government regarding measures taken against the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

But his resignation, which was rejected by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is especially crucial considering the political risk he could pose to the president's leadership.

Soylu, who has been in his post since 2016, resigned after the panic sparked by Friday's abrupt announcement of a two-day curfew in 31 cities soon before midnight.

He asked for forgiveness for the crisis management failure as crowds rushed to bakeries, gas stations and groceries despite social distancing measures – a move that was harshly criticized by opposition parties.

Taking responsibility for the chaos on Friday night, his unconventional self-critical statement is rare for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), where almost nobody resigns by admitting a political mistake.

“Emerging consensus is that Soylu’s resignation was more of a preemptive strike against his enemies who wanted him to be sacked by Erdogan over the curfew fiasco,” political analyst Amberin Zaman tweeted.

As one of Erdogan’s closest confidants, the resignation of Soylu demonstrated intra-government frictions and hinted at the need for managing deepened battles within the state apparatus amid the COVID-19 epidemic.

Soylu has reportedly been at loggerheads with Erdogan’s son-in-law, Berat Albayrak, who is the finance minister. Daily Sabah, a Turkish newspaper owned by a businessman close to Albayrak, tweeted that he resigned over “botched” announcement of curfew Friday night after which 250,000 people flooded shops and bakeries.

For some other analysts, Erdogan made a tough choice regarding this resignation because if he accepted this decision, Soylu might establish his own party or join another nationalist party within the parliament, further weakening the ruling party.

The AKP has already lost a significant part of its constituency after two other breakaway factions were formed within the last year.

Before joining the AKP, Soylu was also known for his harsh criticisms of Erdogan. Being originally from the Black Sea region and seen by many as a possible successor to Erdogan, he has his own power base with the backing of several Islamist and nationalistic segments of Turkish society.

In northern city of Rize, considered a bastion of the AKP, a citizen threatened to commit suicide over his resignation but decided not to after police convinced him that the resignation wasn’t accepted. Crowds in Istanbul’s conservative neighborhoods also celebrated Erdogan’s decision to reject the resignation with car convoys and whistles.

Soylu tweeted that he was humbled by support of the nation and president, and pledged to “continue work in the service of the nation” in his first statement after the incident.

Soner Cagaptay, author of “Erdogan’s Empire: Turkey and the Politics of the Middle East,” said that Erdogan’s policies have been guided since 2013 by a philosophy which he borrowed from Islamist thinker Necip Fazil Kısakurek, who once said: “Don’t let a brick fall off the defensive wall.”

Cagaptay told Arab News: “His ministers serve until Erdogan fires them. If he lets one minister resign for a failure of duties, he has to face a barrage of requests for others to resign, so better to keep everybody in their position.”

Cagaptay said this resignation is a sign of deep divisions inside the Palace, but Erdogan ultimately would not allow them to surface and he will not let any other ministers to resign from now on.

“If he allows anyone to leave, his entire cabinet and himself could come under fire. The winner yesterday was Erdogan’s survival instincts for not letting a brick fall off the wall,” he added.

Transport Minister Cahit Turhan was recently removed from his post following criticism for holding a tender for the Canal Istanbul megaproject amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

“For some time, there were intra-party factional fights between groups linked to Albayrak and Soylu as the two most powerful ministers in the cabinet.

“Soylu’s resignation is a sign that these rifts could no longer be suppressed amid the worsening COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey, especially in light of the curfew controversy on Friday evening,” Berk Esen, a political analyst from Ankara’s Bilkent University, told Arab News.

“Soylu may have preempted strong criticism coming from his rivals by resigning to compel Erdogan to declare support for his interior minister, lest Erdogan risk creating a political crisis,” he said.

He added that Soylu has a strong base within the state security apparatus and enjoys high popularity in nationalist circles – including the AKP’s main political ally, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) – due to his aggressive tactics against the pro-Kurdish HDP.

“With Erdogan’s open support on Sunday evening, Soylu has elevated himself above all other cabinet ministers and strengthened his position immensely. He is now a force to be reckoned with and demonstrated that he has the support of the MHP.

“The pandemic has already uprooted Turkish politics and will probably weaken the AKP in the coming weeks. Whether or not Soylu can spare himself from the crisis is to be seen,” Esen said.



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Turkish president rejects minister’s resignation over virusErdogan aide
‘urged judges to free Iranian drugs lord’

Gulf Air to repatriate stranded Bahrainis from Iran

Author:

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DUBAI: Bahrain said on Monday that state-owned Gulf Air has begun flying to Iran to repatriate Bahrainis stranded there due to the coronavirus crisis, the first direct flights between the two countries in four years.

More than a thousand Bahrainis, most of them pilgrims visiting Shi'ite Muslim religious sites, have been stranded for more than two months in the Islamic Republic, which is the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak in the Middle East.

There have been no direct flights since January 2016 between Bahrain and Iran, which have no diplomatic ties and long-standing differences. Manama alleges Tehran has stoked unrest in the island state, a charge Iran denies.

Bahrain, which has recorded 1,348 coronavirus cases and six related deaths, has struggled to find other airlines willing to fly to Iran and has managed to repatriate only a few hundred people, prompting criticism by some citizens.

Bahrain's initial cases of the coronavirus were among Bahrainis returning from Iran via third countries, which caused Manama to rebuke Tehran over not stamping their passports.

"Gulf Air has begun operating direct flights to Iran to expedite the safe return of citizens," Bahrain's government said in a statement.

Gulf Air cancelled most of its services in mid-March due to the spread of the virus, but is still flying to and from London, Paris, Frankfurt and Manila, the statement said.

The airline has carried out repatriation flights from the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey, it added.

Other Gulf Arab states are using their national carriers to bring citizens back home.

Kuwait said on Monday it would start another repatriation process next week for 50,000 Kuwaitis around the world. Last month Kuwait said it had flown home more than 2,700 citizens.



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Bahrain's Gulf Air suspends dozens of routes due to coronavirus¹⁹⁶ Saudis stranded in Bahrain over coronavirus pandemic return home

[Gaza opens Egypt crossing to returnees despite virus](#)

Author:

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Mon, 2020-04-13 16:15

RAFAH: Gaza's Hamas-run government on Monday temporarily re-opened the border crossing with Egypt, shut due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, to allow hundreds of Palestinians to return.

One-way traffic into the coastal enclave through the Rafah crossing would be allowed for the coming four days, Gaza's interior ministry said.

All those returning would be put into compulsory 21-day quarantine which

could be extended, interior ministry spokesman Iyad Al-Bozm said. So far, only 13 COVID-19 infections have been confirmed in Gaza, all from people returning to the territory or those in contact with them while in quarantine. But the Strip, under an Israeli-imposed blockade since 2007, is one of the most densely-populated territories on earth and has a struggling health system. Hamas has imposed a series of measures including closing markets, schools and mosques. Gaza, ruled by the Islamist group since 2007, had run out of COVID-19 testing kits last week but the World Health Organization delivered 480 kits on Sunday. At the Rafah arrivals hall on Monday, returning residents were met by dozens of police officers, doctors and nurses wearing protective medical equipment. Among the returnees were students and people who had been outside Gaza for treatment for other diseases, said doctor Mohamed Abu Salamieh. The Rafah border crossing with Egypt is the only exit from Gaza apart from into Israel.





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Israeli casualties in a bomb explosion at the border fence with Rafah in Gaza