

Abu Dhabi shuts tourism, cultural venues

Sun, 2020-03-15 00:25

DUBAI: Abu Dhabi announced on Saturday it was shutting major tourism and cultural venues, including the Louvre Abu Dhabi museum and the Ferrari World theme park, from March 15-31, as Arab states in the Gulf stepped up measures against coronavirus.

The latest announcement was made in tweets by the Abu Dhabi Government Media Office. Abu Dhabi is the capital and largest emirate in the UAE.

The UAE Civil Aviation Authority also announced a suspension of all flights from and to Lebanon, Turkey, Syria and Iraq, starting March 17 until further notice.

Dubai said it was canceling all events planned in March and asked hotels not to host wedding celebrations during this period.

A number of shops have voluntarily closed in Dubai to contribute to the containment efforts.

Gulf Arab states have stepped up measures to contain the coronavirus outbreak, with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait taking the most drastic decisions by canceling all international flights.

The UAE will suspend all visa issuance, except to foreign diplomats, starting on March 17, the official news agency WAM reported, citing immigration authorities.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a group of six oil-rich Arab countries, has reported nearly 850 coronavirus infections, mostly people who had traveled to Iran or who were contaminated by them. No death has been reported in the GCC.

Oman, which has the lowest number of infection in the region at 20, announced on Saturday a one-month closure of schools and educational institutions, a precaution taken by other GCC states.

Qatar confirmed on Saturday 17 new infections, bringing the total number of people diagnosed with the disease to 337, the highest in the GCC, followed by Bahrain, 211, and Kuwait, 104. Gulf health authorities have intensified pleas to the population to avoid gatherings, carrying out campaigns to sanitize public places.

"I urge you by God to stay at home," said Kuwaiti Health Minister Basel Al-Sabah on state TV.



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Syria death toll 384,000 after nine years of warUK reiterates desire for two-state solution

[Syria death toll 384,000 after nine years of war](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-03-15 00:05

BEIRUT: At least 384,000 people have died in Syria, including more than 116,000 civilians, since the war began in March 2011, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Saturday.

Sparked by deadly repression of peaceful pro-democracy protests, the conflict has drawn in outside powers in a complex war involving opposition factions, militant groups and foreign interests.

As the war enters its 10th year, the regime of Bashar Assad now controls more than 70 percent of Syrian territory, thanks to the military support of its allies Russia, Iran and Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

The conflict is the “worst manmade disaster since World War II,” the UN human rights chief declared in 2017.

The war has destroyed the economy and caused more than 11 million Syrians to flee their homes.

According to the Observatory, which relies on a network of sources in Syria, the latest death toll includes about 22,000 children and 13,000 women.

At least 129,476 regime soldiers, allied forces and militiamen have died, according to the Britain-based war monitor, including 1,697 members of Hezbollah.

Nearly 57,000 opposition figures have died, as well as 13,624 members of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which spearheaded the US-backed campaign against Daesh, the Observatory said.

The Observatory tallied 67,296 deaths among militants loyal to Daesh or to Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, an alliance led by a former Al-Qaeda affiliate that dominates the last opposition enclave in the Idlib region in the northwest.

FASTFACTS

- **The war has destroyed the economy and caused more than 11 million Syrians to flee their homes.**
- **The latest death toll includes about 22,000 children and 13,000 women.**

The death toll included 421 unidentified victims.

After recent regime advances, Idlib province is the last battleground between regime forces, and the militants and their allies.

Damascus launched an offensive to take the region in December, causing close to 1 million people to flee, according to the UN, before Ankara and Moscow negotiated a cease-fire earlier this month.

NGOs continue to denounce human rights abuses by the Syrian regime, including lethal chemical attacks, torture and arbitrary arrest.

Tens of thousands of people have been subject to forced disappearances by the government or a myriad of armed groups, NGOs report.

The war has destroyed infrastructure and crucial sectors of the economy including the oil industry.



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Iraq officials: Rocket attack hits base housing US troops
Lebanon to declare emergency after a severe storm

[Beirut virus strategy 'stoking panic, guilt'](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-03-14 23:59

BEIRUT: Health officials in Lebanon fear a warning campaign against coronavirus may backfire if growing numbers of victims conceal their illness to avoid being quarantined.

As the number of virus cases in the country neared 100, Dr. Abdul-Rahman Al-Bizri, an infectious diseases specialist and member of the Health Ministry's crisis committee, told Arab News that government awareness campaigns "kept people at home," but also meant some were afraid to visit designated medical centers for fear of being held in isolation.

Al-Bizri's comments came as the Lebanese Council of Ministers prepared to hold an emergency session on Sunday where it is expected to declare a state of emergency to check the spread of the virus.

Three people are reported to have died from the infection in Lebanon. The global death toll is now over 5,400, with more than 142,000 confirmed cases in 123 countries, according to the World Health Organization.

Al-Bizri said that he expects Lebanon to witness a further rise in the number of infections, though it was impossible to say how many people would fall victim to the illness.

He urged people to stay at home wherever possible to reduce the burden on health institutions if the number of infections jumped significantly.

As of noon on March 14, the Health Ministry reported 93 coronavirus cases at the Rafik Hariri Governmental University Hospital in Beirut and other university hospitals.

Al-Bizri told Arab News that the government crisis committee had recommended that quarantine be carried out in homes to reduce pressure on hospitals.

His warning that many people feared that they would be stigmatized or forced to spend weeks in hospital if they fell ill prompted several politicians to issue statements saying the disease "is not a disgrace."

MP Rola Tabsh, from the Future Movement bloc, said: "As a result of the wrong approach, coronavirus patients and their families have been feeling guilty and afraid. Fear is pushing citizens to ignore the symptoms and hide them from doctors."

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Three people are reported to have died from the infection in Lebanon.**
- **The Health Ministry reported 93 coronavirus cases at the Rafik Hariri Governmental University Hospital in Beirut and other university hospitals.**

"Coronavirus is not a disgrace. The disgrace is in hiding symptoms, leaving oneself and others at risk of infection. I call for social solidarity."

Leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, MP Gebran Bassil, said: "Infections and diseases are not a stigma. We are all vulnerable. Reporting the symptoms and performing the necessary laboratory tests and quarantine is a duty and a right."

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah told supporters on Friday night that "no patient should be covered up."

"The infected person must disclose his condition and whoever knows must not cover up for him. Quarantine is obligatory. Protecting oneself and the family is a religious obligation," he said.

Air traffic at Rafic Hariri International Airport has declined steadily after flights to Lebanon were suspended except from Greece, Geneva, Brussels and Istanbul.

With land crossings to and from Syria due to be closed from Monday, Syrian travelers returning via Lebanon are likely to face problems.

Closure of transport links prompted Minister of Economy Raoul Naama to reassure people that food supplies are secure.

“Food and consumer goods are in abundance and will not be lacking in the market,” he said. “People should not rush to buy more goods than they need.”



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Lebanon to declare emergency after a severe stormUK reiterates desire for two-state solution

[UK reiterates desire for two-state solution](#)

Author:

daniel fountain

ID:

1584211814606202100

Sat, 2020-03-14 21:51

LONDON: Britain on Friday renewed its commitment “to working to help advance a negotiated two-state solution that delivers peace for both Israelis and Palestinians.”

In one of his first meetings with an Arab representative since being

appointed as the UK's joint minister of state in the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development, James Cleverly met with the head of the Palestinian Mission in the UK, Husam Zomlot.

"Post-Brexit Britain has become a much more relevant actor for peace-making in the Middle East, in the absence of a US role or contribution because (President Donald) Trump has discredited the situation," Zomlot told Arab News.

Thank you Rt Hon [@JamesCleverly](#) for the candid and hopeful first conversation. I look forward to working with you to advance the Palestinian-UK growing relations, and achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. <https://t.co/PG7XKbBgW3>

– Husam Zomlot (@hzomlot) [March 12, 2020](#)

"I consider my first meeting with the minister to be important and strategic, and kneeling toward progress in peace-making in the Middle East and upgrading the growing Palestinian-UK bilateral relations."

Zomlot said he really "appreciated the opportunity to meet the minister early on in his tenure," and their strategy is to enhance bilateral relations so the UK can have a bigger role in the Middle East peace process.

"The first meeting was an indication of the significance the UK places on Palestine peace-making, and was a very important first step in engaging with the minister in the very important journey toward achieving progress and achieving these goals," he added.

Zomlot, who previously headed the Palestinian Mission in Washington, said the Palestinian issue has "become an international priority again," especially in light of Trump's proposed Middle East peace plan that was announced in January.

Cleverly, who has close links with the Conservative Friends of Israel group, tweeted that he discussed UK-Palestinian relations and "hopes for Middle East peace" in his meeting with Zomlot.

Several hours later, Cleverly tweeted that he also met Israel's ambassador to the UK, Mark Regev, and reiterated Britain's "desire for peace based on a negotiated two state solution, leading to a safe and secure Israel, alongside a sovereign Palestinian state."



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Don't reject new Trump peace plan, Palestine's Abbas urged

[Lebanon to declare emergency after a severe storm](#)

Author:

daniel fountain

ID:

1584208816796029300

Sat, 2020-03-14 21:01

BEIRUT: Lebanese people experienced terror on Thursday night when a severe storm ravaged mountain and coastal regions, uprooted trees, caused floods and destroyed cars, refugee tents and public statues.

Several flights were diverted to Larnaca and Antalya airports after strong winds made landings at Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport impossible.

The frightening weather conditions came on top of the novel coronavirus

outbreak in the country.

Social media users described their experience as they stayed at home in line with the government's directives aimed at limiting the spread of the virus. "Lebanon is flying" was the second most trending hashtag after "Stay home". Users switched from mocking the situation to sensing its gravity.

"Here comes nature's wrath after the unemployment, dollar, Eurobonds, banks and imported coronavirus crises. The night of strong easterly winds uprooted trees, damaged buildings and affected people. Disasters, disasters and the greatest disaster of all is the dark horizons. May God protect what is left of Lebanon," tweeted former minister, Akram Chehayeb.

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the country has exceeded 80, and includes an employee of the Ministry of Health.



“The infected employee works in the Ministry’s central administration. The virus was transmitted to her by one of her relatives,” the Ministry of Health announced, noting that “we are taking all the necessary measures to isolate her, identify those who were in contact with her inside and outside of the

Ministry and make sure they self-quarantine at home.”

“A civil or public health emergency might be announced. The people should expect an increase of 20 cases in a single day in Lebanon,” said the Health Minister, Hamad Hassan. He denied the claims that the Ministry is concealing the actual number of cases.

60 hospital beds have been prepared at Rafik Hariri University Hospital (RHUH), which is dedicated to coronavirus-infected patients, to handle the expected increase in cases.



The head of the Lebanese Forces, Samir Geagea, blamed the government for the worsening situation, noting that “the government should adopt a so-called ‘automatic quarantine’ after failing to close air, land and sea crossings and take the necessary measures to prevent the spread of the virus.”

The Association of Banks in Lebanon announced that banks will be closed for sterilization from Saturday, while the Minister of Education and Higher Education, Tarek Al-Majzoub, extended the closure of schools and universities for an additional week. This decision will be accompanied by efforts to set up emergency programs to finish the educational curricula and make up for the lost lessons. Worshipers stayed away from Friday prayers out of fear of transmission.

The storm caused great damage as it uprooted pine and oak trees along the roads of Mount Lebanon, broke the windows of homes and shops, destroyed parked cars, flooded roads, sent bricks flying from the roofs of houses and caused a power cut when some electricity poles fell, which also disconnected cellphone lines in the affected areas.

The 120 kilometers per hour winds destroyed highway billboards and crops,

which doubled the losses of farmers who are already struggling.

Some post-storm tweets considered that Friday the 13th and the destruction of a statue of Mary in the storm were very bad signs.







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Egyptians fight stormy weather with humor Death toll at 21 as Egypt storms, flooding enter second day