

Deadly virus delays Egyptians' travel plans

Tue, 2020-03-10 02:48

CAIRO: The global spread of the deadly coronavirus has delayed travel plans for thousands of Egyptians.

Long, and at times unruly, queues have formed outside the public health laboratories in Cairo for tests for the virus.

Among those waiting to see if they are free of COVID-19 infection was 30-year-old Mahmoud, who needs to get to Saudi Arabia where he is due to start a new job as an electronics programmer.

He had spent 1,000 Egyptian pounds (\$64) to undergo the test, which Saudi Arabia has demanded visitors to the Kingdom take to ensure they are not carrying the killer virus.

Egypt has so far recorded 55 cases of the coronavirus with one reported death, a German male aged 60 who died on Sunday.

Mahmoud, who is from the Egyptian capital, will have to wait four days to find out the results of his test which was taken following the Saudi decision to suspend flights between Egypt and the Kingdom.

"I don't know what to do. The job I landed is my dream position so that I can ensure a future, a home, a wife and children. I don't know how long the Saudi decision will last and I don't know what to do with this virus that dashed my dreams," Mahmoud said.

FASTFACT

Egypt has stepped up action to contain the coronavirus in the popular tourist destination of Luxor following an outbreak of the disease on a River Nile cruise ship.

Another person waiting for a test in Cairo was 40-year-old Ehab, who was on a two-week vacation as the coronavirus outbreak gained momentum in Egypt and the Kingdom.

Saudi Arabia on Sunday announced it was shutting down all classes in schools and universities as part of measures to contain the spread of the virus.

"I think the Saudi procedures will end after the disease is brought under control, but the question is whether it is so difficult for the Egyptian Ministry of Health, even once, to start recording travelers' data electronically instead of the present situation in which health awareness is nonexistent," Ehab said.

Magdy El-Adawy, who is in his late 20s, said the outbreak had temporarily scuppered his plans to join his friends working in Kuwait.

"I have a law degree and have worked in several law firms in Egypt, but I have always dreamt of traveling. My friends succeeded in going to Kuwait, and I communicate with them daily through popular chatting apps. They came close to finding me a work contract there, but God curse the coronavirus, it ruined

my plans,” he added.



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Egyptian engineer gets 15 years over deadly locomotive crash
Egypt reports death of German national, its first from coronavirus

[Lebanese parliament shut due to coronavirus fears](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-03-10 02:39

BEIRUT: Lebanon's parliament has decided to close MPs' offices and postpone parliamentary meetings for one week amid the spread of coronavirus in the country, said Health Minister Hamad Hassan, with 41 confirmed cases.

A Health Ministry source said: "The new cases in Lebanon, including three children, were the result of contact with those who were already infected in the country."

Dr. Abdul Rahman Bizri, a specialist in infectious diseases and a member of

the emergency committee on coronavirus, told Arab News: "Coronavirus is still in the early stages of spreading in the country. We're still able to follow up on the people who've been infected, where they came from, and those to whom they might have transmitted the virus."

He said: "The situation in Lebanon is still reassuring to some extent, compared to other countries around the world."

He added: "The first case, who came from (the Iranian city of) Qom, has recovered but is still in hospital because she's a carrier and we don't know when she'll be virus-free. Other people have also recovered, including children, who are able to heal from the virus unlike the elderly."

Meetings are being held with "university hospitals across Lebanon to start conducting coronavirus tests and using their laboratories," Bizri said.

Former Hezbollah MP Mahmoud Qamati denied rumors that he has coronavirus, and his media office said he "would not hide any news related to his health."

Lebanon's Middle East Airlines announced on Monday the suspension of its flights from and to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar until further notice, "in light of the decisions taken by some countries regarding travel bans to avoid the spread of the new coronavirus." The airline waived all penalties and restrictions related to its tickets.

As no coronavirus cases have yet been reported in Turkey, Arab News has learned that many travelers coming from countries that have suspended flights to Lebanon are flying to Turkey to secure their arrival to Lebanon.

The situation in Lebanon is still reassuring to some extent, compared to other countries around the world.

Dr. Abdul Rahman Bizri, Specialist in infectious diseases

Saudi Ambassador to Lebanon Walid Bukhari retweeted the decision to include Lebanon in the list of countries that the Kingdom has suspended travel from and to, not including evacuations and trade trips.

While cleaning and disinfection operations continue in Lebanese official and private institutions, people have been going out less as Tourism Minister Ramzi Al-Musharafieh ordered the closure of bars and nightclubs until March 15.

He has also banned concerts and music shows in restaurants and cafes, and urged "restaurants to commit to preventive measures and safety instructions to limit the spread of coronavirus." Nurseries, schools, universities, cinemas and gyms across the country remain closed.

Meanwhile, a Lebanese citizen holding Canadian nationality who escaped the coronavirus emergency section at Rafik Hariri Hospital in Beirut was arrested at the airport as he tried to flee to Canada.

He had refused to get tested after showing symptoms, but was returned to the hospital for testing.

Meanwhile, Dr. Ahmed Al-Samadi, director of Saida Governmental Hospital, confirmed a new case of coronavirus at the hospital on Sunday night.

He said a patient from the Mieh Mieh Palestinian refugee camp had arrived at the hospital with a high fever.

The patient was placed in quarantine and was then taken to Rafik Hariri Hospital for testing.

Hospitals receiving suspicious cases are implementing strict sterilization procedures to reassure other patients in light of rumors about cases being secretly treated.

Some hospitals have even decided to ban patient visits.

Hospital workers have also been receiving training to deal with suspicious cases.



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Coronavirus outbreak hits Turkish business sectors hard
Saudi health ministry announces five new coronavirus cases

[Jailed UK-Iranian 'in deep distress'](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-03-10 02:05

LONDON: Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a British-Iranian woman jailed in Tehran, has been caused deep distress after a promise of temporary release was broken by authorities, and she has still not been tested for coronavirus, her family have said.

Fears of the virus spreading rapidly in Iranian prisons prompted the

government to temporarily release some inmates as a containment measure. Zaghari-Ratcliffe was told last week that her release was imminent as part of these precautions, only to later be informed that she would not in fact be released.

She had packed her bags and was ready to leave the prison last Wednesday, before authorities reversed their decision over the weekend, The Guardian reported.

Her husband Richard Ratcliffe raised fears of her having coronavirus last week, and has since accused Iranian authorities of playing mind games. In a statement released by The Free Nazanin Campaign, Ratcliffe said: "(The doctor) confirmed to her that her symptoms were clearly a virus and were consistent with coronavirus, but he also confessed he was unable to test her with a testing kit."

NUMBER

237 – Iran on Monday announced 43 new deaths from the novel coronavirus in the past 24 hours, bringing the overall toll to 237 dead, one of the world's highest.

This kind of treatment, the campaign said, is designed to torment her and her family. "The effect is a kind of gaslighting, raising hopes before promises are not kept, and then a kind of guilt and self-blame, as the regime manages another distraction and avoids accountability for its acts of abuse," it added.

"Cumulatively the experience is not just cruel and degrading. The cumulative effect – of promising to release and failing to do so, again and again – is a kind of mental torture. That is its design."

Ratcliffe said: "Dangling publicly the idea of furlough without yet carrying it through has been an act of media management by the Iranian authorities. It has

aimed at distracting media attention from the refusal to test for coronavirus, and the fact thousands of prisoners, including British ones, have just been left in harm's way."

Zaghari-Ratcliffe was detained in April 2016 and later sentenced to five years in prison over allegations, which she denies, of plotting to overthrow the Iranian government.

Iran has struggled to contain the coronavirus outbreak, with the latest figures indicating roughly 200 deaths and up to 6,000 infections.



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UK summons Iran ambassador over case of British-Iranian aid worker Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe
Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe freed temporarily from Iranian prison: Husband

[Coronavirus outbreak hits Turkish business sectors hard](#)

Tue, 2020-03-10 01:56

ANKARA: The global impact of the coronavirus outbreak has dealt a blow to the Turkish economy, especially in the tourism, trade and marble sectors, despite the deadly and fast-spreading virus not even officially being confirmed as having been detected in the country so far.

Turkey has a trade volume of \$21 billion with China, while transportation costs have risen significantly because of logistics blockages and production delays after the coronavirus epidemic.

Turkey has had to close border crossings with its eastern neighbor Iran, which has been hit hard by the outbreak, a move that undermined not only the bilateral trade that represents only 1.6 percent of Turkey's foreign trade volume, but also the tourism sector, with almost 2 million Iranian visitors

to Turkey annually.

On March 2, Turkey's health minister also warned there may be infected individuals in the country, although there has been no official confirmation of any cases up to now.

The World Health Organization recently canceled a high-level and multinational consultation conference in Istanbul between March 10-12 as a precaution.

HIGHLIGHT

Turkey has had to close border crossings with its eastern neighbor Iran, which has been hit hard by the outbreak.

In the meantime, various Turkish companies active in the marble sector are facing the threat of bankruptcy. Up until the virus outbreak, Turkish exporters were selling about 5 million tons of marble blocks to China, making it the top importer.

An annual natural stone fair in China, due for March 16-19, has been canceled, setting orders back months.

The sectoral loss is expected to amount to around \$450 million this year, because China and Italy – another coronavirus afflicted country – were the biggest buyers of Turkish marble.



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Saudi Arabia gets to grips with coronavirus
Philippines declares state of emergency over coronavirus

[Ankara, Brussels open talks to find solution to escalating refugee crisis](#)

Tue, 2020-03-10 01:29

ANKARA: Crisis talks on the Syrian refugee emergency began on Monday in Brussels between senior officials from the EU and Turkey, including Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

It followed Ankara's announcement on Feb. 28 that it was opening its borders to allow refugees to cross into Europe.

Thousands of refugees gathered along Turkey's border with Greece after Ankara's announcement, and Greek police used tear gas and water cannon to control the crowds.

During the tense talks, Germany, which has criticized Turkey for "negotiating on the backs of the weakest," said that a "coalition of the willing" among EU member states will take in 1,500 unaccompanied children from Greek refugee camps who are under the age of 14 or in need of urgent medical help.

Erdogan ordered the Turkish coast guard to prevent risky Aegean Sea crossings on Friday, but land crossings remain open.

As Syrians continue to flee rebel-held Idlib province amid assaults by Syrian regime forces, Ankara says it cannot take any more refugees as it already hosts four million. Emphasizing the need for burden-sharing, Turkey accuses the authorities in Brussels of falling short of their commitments on financial support to help care for refugees.

Following a meeting of European foreign ministers in Zagreb on Friday, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said member states are willing to offer additional financial support to Turkey beyond the 6 billion euros (\$6.9 billion) promised in 2016, but added that "they cannot accept that migrants are being used as a source of pressure."

Kadri Tastan, a Brussels-based senior fellow of US public policy think tank the German Marshall Fund, said: "This latest crisis shows once again that the EU acts only in emergency situations and it has no long-term strategy for such types of crises."

BACKGROUND

Turkey hosts more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees, and Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has demanded that Europe shoulder more of the burden of caring for them.

“Erdogan kept repeating that he was going to open the valve; Europeans thought it was just a blackmail. So the Europeans are reacting again in an emergency.”

Brussels expects Turkey to honor its side of the 2016 EU-Turkey deal by ensuring refugees remain within its borders rather than allowing them to freely cross into the EU.

Given the strength of feeling and the reaction in European nations to Ankara’s decision to open its border, Tastan said, the EU is obliged to cooperate with Ankara. This is surely not being done voluntarily, he added. Erdogan met European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Monday. The meetings were purely consultative, designed to de-escalate the crisis and open a dialogue.

“The heads of European institutions have no power to decide anything on this very controversial subject,” said Tastan.

“Decisions will be taken at the European Council and by the governments of the member states.”

He added that Germany and the Netherlands are likely to spearhead attempts to reach a new consensus among the divergent views within the EU bloc.

“In any case, visa travel for Turkish citizens and the modernization of the Custom Union will not be linked to the question of migrants by Europeans this time,” he said.

The EU is not expected to extend any significant assistance to Turkey’s ongoing efforts to create a safe zone inside Syria. Borrell recently told reporters “we are not that powerful to create a safe zone.”

Brussels prefers instead to consult with and influence the UN and NATO, rather than assuming any burden in Syrian territory.



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Turkey's former economy tsar challenges Erdogan with new party Battle for Syria's Idlib takes its toll on migrants, refugees and Turkey's ties with EU