

Chinese student in Lebanon complains about being subjected to abuse after coronavirus spread

Sun, 2020-03-01 02:58

DUBAI: A Chinese student, who is currently residing in Lebanon, said he is subjected to negative comments in streets due to the spread of coronavirus, which started in his home country.

“I understand your fear of the virus, but I can’t bear the name-calling,” the students said in the video.

Amir Wang moved to Lebanon around six months ago, and was very happy to live and study there. He lives in a town called Shhim, south-east of Beirut in the Chouf region.

However, the spread of COVID19 changed his feelings about living in the Levantine country. In a video posted on social media, Wang explained that some people get scared of him and avoid him, while others actually call him ‘corona’ as a slur to offend him.

He pleaded by saying such negative behavior will not benefit anyone, but shows that those who do it lack conscience, manners and humanity.

“China is our mother, and she is sick... would it be okay for me to call you or your mother names if she were sick?” Wang added.



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Lebanon shuts schools after fourth coronavirus case
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[Iranian MP dies from coronavirus as Saudi Arabia resists infection](#)

Sun, 2020-03-01 00:51

JEDDAH: An Iranian member of parliament died on Saturday after becoming infected with coronavirus, one of nine new fatalities.

The death toll in Iran is now 43, the highest outside China, and the total number infected has risen to 593.

Several, including a vice president, the deputy health minister and five MPs, have tested positive for the virus as the outbreak forced the regime to close the parliament and impose internal travel bans.

Tehran has also ordered the shutting of schools until Tuesday and extended the closure of universities and a ban on concerts and sports events for a week. Authorities have also banned visits to hospitals and nursing homes.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Iran is at the center of the spread of the coronavirus through the Middle East. Qatar and Oman both reported their first cases on Saturday, both linked to travel from Iran. The UAE suspended nursery classes and school trips.

Saudi Arabia is now the only Gulf Arab state not to have reported any cases of the coronavirus, but pharmacies in the Kingdom are nevertheless struggling to meet the demand for face masks.

“Despite assurances by the Ministry of Health, people have been demanding face masks, and I’m seeing more people wearing them in public,” pharmacist Adel Abdul Shakoor told Arab News. “We are out of masks now and usually we have full shelves.”

The Ministry of Health said all measures had been taken to protect the Kingdom against the virus and confirmed that there have been “no known cases” of infection.

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Since December the virus has infected more than 85,919 people and killed 2,941, mostly in China.

The first death from the virus in the US was confirmed on Saturday night in Washington state, prompting the governor to declare a state of emergency on Saturday.

Gov. Jay Inslee directed state agencies to use “all resources necessary” to prepare for and respond to the outbreak. The declaration also allows the use of the Washington National Guard, if necessary.

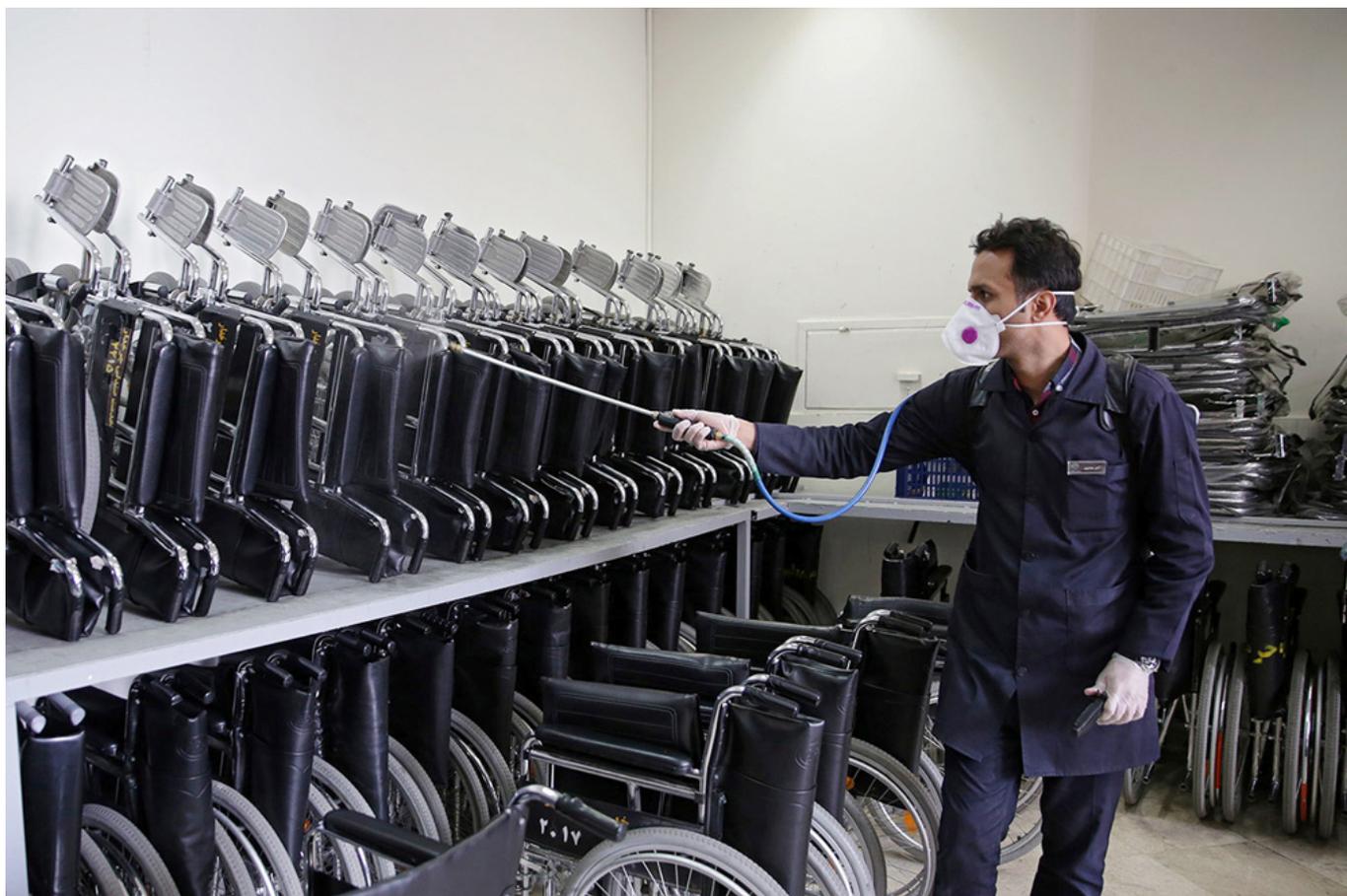
Dr. Jeffrey Duchin, a Seattle and King county health official who works with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the person who died was a man in his 50s.

President Donald Trump described the person as having a high medical risk. He said healthy Americans should be able to recover if they contract the new virus.

Health officials in California, Oregon and Washington state worried about the novel coronavirus spreading through West Coast communities after confirming at least three patients were infected by unknown means. The patients had not visited an area where there was an outbreak, nor apparently been in contact with anyone who had.

(With AP)





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[What Ankara expects from Washington after Idlib attacks](#)

Sun, 2020-03-01 00:29

ANKARA: Turkey's losses in Syria's opposition-held northwestern Idlib province on Thursday night, and Ankara's subsequent request for assistance from its NATO allies, especially the US, has stirred concern over regional de-escalation.

So far, no Western ally has been willing to intervene in a conflict, which many consider is of Turkey's own making. Calls for NATO support may fall on deaf ears, though there is also some suggestion that a symbolic US deployment, perhaps in the form of reinforcing Incirlik airbase with Patriot missile batteries, could happen.

As the US does not have the legal authority to stop or shoot down Syrian warplanes targeting Turkish troops, Turkey recently asked Washington to deploy such batteries on its southern border against any future attacks from Syrian rockets.

"I think the US will give rhetorical support for Turkey – I'm just not sure it will give military support," Aaron Stein, a Turkey expert at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, told Arab News.

According to Stein, any US action would be to defend Turkey, not to enable it to mount an offensive.

One of the key problems Turkey faces is that Russia controls the airspace over Idlib, which provides regime troops with a strategic gain over Turkish forces. In current circumstances, Russian President Vladimir Putin's brinkmanship with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan may test the limits of their personal ties, and undermine any immediate search for political settlement.

"Right now, the main strategy of the US support is more verbal than concrete, and it is disconcerting that the (US) administration has been slow to respond to a crisis involving a NATO ally that has been escalating for several days," Jonathan Katz, a senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, told Arab News.

"There are growing concerns in Washington about thousands of Syrians fleeing from Assad and Putin-directed attacks, and deep sympathy for Turkish troops killed or injured, but Erdogan should not expect US President Donald Trump to come to the rescue," Katz said.

According to Katz, the current developments are the result of significant US-Turkish relations fallout from Erdogan's foreign policy decisions over the last decade that have poisoned the waters among Ankara's Western partners, including his embrace of Putin and insistence on purchasing a Russian S400 air defense system – despite US and NATO objections.

"The US must go beyond diplomacy immediately to support Turkey, but it is essential for the Turkish people to hold a mirror up to their own leaders to better understand why President Erdogan put Turkey's security at risk with an unreliable partner like Putin," he said.

A high-level US delegation is expected to visit Turkey next week.

"Erdogan knows that Turkey cannot defeat Russia on its own," Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish program at the Washington Institute, told Arab News. "Therefore, if he is going to escalate significantly, he wants to make sure he has the US support and at least the political backing of NATO allies."

I think the US will give rhetorical support for Turkey – I'm just not sure it will give military support.

Aaron Stein, Analyst

According to Cagaptay, that support can come in different forms, like

intelligence support for targeting Syrian assets. Turkey reportedly destroyed a chemical weapons facility belonging to the regime 13 km south of Aleppo on Friday.

“But there could be even further support, like the US providing Patriot missiles to Turkey, and of course the ultimate (support) would be the US taking out Syria’s air defense system,” he said.

For Cagaptay, the last option would be significant because it would create a de facto no-fly zone over northern Syria.

“There is a clear asymmetry between Turkey and the regime forces. If the Syrian air defense system was taken out, that would give Turkey military superiority,” he said.

“So, Erdogan is perhaps going to push for Patriots, increased intelligence support, and political backing of NATO allies. That I think is the only way Turkey can stand up and push back. In the absence of that Turkey will have to take the deal that Putin has offered.”

According to Cagaptay, Putin probably calculated that Turkey’s NATO allies would not come to Ankara’s assistance in Syria, which could see a scenario where Syrian regime troops end up controlling the majority of Idlib’s territory, and Turkey receiving the majority of its civilian population as refugees, if that gamble proves correct.

The pressure that would place on EU allies would prove significant – already since Friday, 18,000 refugees have arrived on the Turkish border with Europe, with the number expected to reach as many as 30,000 in the upcoming days, as Erdogan facilitates their movement across Turkey to show Europe Syria is not Turkey’s problem to face alone.

“It all depends on Trump. I think Trump has surprised analysts and observers quite a few times. It would not be shocking this time either if Erdogan got what he wanted, which is significant US support. We have to wait and see.”





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Why water scarcity is a security risk for the Middle East

Sat, 2020-02-29 23:49

DUBAI: In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, access to freshwater is a perennial quest.

Most countries have a limited supply of the precious resource, which is also under severe stress due to arid conditions, population growth, poor infrastructure and overexploitation.

Large expanses of MENA are hot and dry, with only two percent covered by wetlands, so water supply is poor to begin with. To compound the problem, countries are placing increased demands on their limited supplies.

Against this backdrop, a report conducted jointly by Good Judgement, a geopolitical and geo-economic forecasting entity, and the Dubai-based Arab Strategy Forum has tried to find out if water scarcity would heighten future security risks in the region.

The study, which looked at 11 global megatrends and forecasts for the next decade, presented findings by a group of "superforecasters" from around the world, who have proven to be "30 percent more accurate than 4,300 members of the US intelligence community."

According to the research, the overall probability that water scarcity would act as a pivot point in one or more regional conflicts over the next 10 years was fairly small, at 8 percent.

Kerry Anderson, a political risk consultant, says water concerns in the MENA region are more likely to stoke internal civil unrest and "exacerbate" other issues than cause cross-border conflict.

Describing water scarcity as potentially a "contributing factor in the escalation of hostilities" regionally, the Good Judgement report put the likelihood of a conflict between Jordan and Israel at only 1 percent.

The chances of war between Turkey and Iraq or Egypt and Ethiopia were both put at 3 percent, although the latter was considered to be among the more probable ones.

"(While) Egypt against Ethiopia is the only case where a more powerful downstream country may lose water, the report never says that a conflict may emerge considering the significant drought and deteriorating economic situation in Egypt," Anderson told Arab News.

With regard to the tensions between Turkey, Iraq and Syria, Anderson said

water disputes were unlikely to be the cause of any future conflict involving the three countries.

“Iraq’s government and military are not currently capable of launching the type of war against Turkey that would be necessary to force Turkey to change its policies,” she added.

Anderson also points out that objections by Jordan and Iraq, to what they see as disproportionate extraction of water from shared resources respectively by Israel and Turkey, are unlikely to escalate into a conflict.

“The risk of a war over competing claims might be low, but the risk of water shortages and disputes contributing to political instability, protest movements and economic challenges is far greater.”

For instance, rural families could be forced to leave unproductive farms and migrate to cities, which would contribute to increased social pressures on communities. In combination with corruption, water scarcity could worsen “inequalities,” fueling unrest, Anderson said.

The risks for MENA countries due to water scarcity cannot be overstated. A report released last year by the World Resources Institute (WRI), said 12 of the 17 most water-stressed countries in the world were located in the MENA region.

In the WRI’s “Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas,” Qatar was ranked first, followed by Israel, Lebanon, Iran, Jordan, Libya, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Oman.

The scale of the challenge facing MENA governments can be gauged from the fact that in 2017, 17 out of 22 Arab League nations had more than half their populations living in urban areas.

Regional experts say the growth of urban areas in MENA countries is inevitable given that rural living was nearly impossible on arid land with marginal environments that could barely support subsistence agriculture.

The combination of increasing populations, especially in the cities, new municipalities and industrial units, rising living standards, and maintenance or expansion of irrigation systems, was putting additional pressure every year on already water-stressed countries.

In the past, the increasing demand on a limited supply of water had sparked strife, but in the future the same phenomenon could be a trigger for more migration and social unrest, according to Middle East observers.

Protests linked to water have repeatedly broken out in Iraq and Iran, and some experts have linked the Arab Spring uprisings to instability caused by droughts and heatwaves.

“There is substantial evidence that extreme, prolonged drought contributed to the causes of the Syrian civil war, partly by prompting a migration from rural areas to cities,” Anderson said.

Waleed Zubari, coordinator of the water resources management program at the College of Graduate Studies in Manama, Bahrain, said close to 1 million people were affected by an extended drought in northeastern Syria between 2006 and 2009.

This mass displacement of people from their farms in search of refuge in cities contributed to the conditions that led to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, Zubari added.

Competition for scarce water resources exist in Palestine as well, he said, noting that Israel had exercised full control over water resources in the West Bank since 1967, including supplies from the Jordan River and mountain aquifers.

Darfur in western Sudan was another example, according to Zubari, where climate variability, water scarcity and loss of fertile land aggravated the region's political problems, caused by ethnic tensions, to spark protracted civil war.

"Water is increasingly becoming an additional source of tension in an already unstable region," he said, pointing out that it was now a national security priority for many Arab countries.

Given that 60 percent of the Middle East's surface water originates from outside the region and almost all water basins are shared, the lack of management and planning in sharing these resources was likely to remain a source of political tensions.

Even so, Zubari added, water scarcity was an unlikely determinant of conflict in the Arab region if the past was any guide. "History also shows that power asymmetry in favor of the upstream or occupying countries is a major factor in avoiding conflict over water instigated by downstream countries."

Put simply, even if water stress does not cause wars, across the Arab region factors such as population increase, economic growth and climate change will place ever greater strain on limited water resources and confront policy makers with daunting challenges.



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India, Pakistan water deal must be an 'instrument of peace'As water scarcity affects millions, a Middle East foundation is making a difference

[Lawsuit accuses Trump and other US officials of crimes against Palestinians](#)

Author:

daniel fountain

ID:

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Sat, 2020-02-29 23:00

WASHINGTON: A federal lawsuit filed in Washington, DC, last week by 13 Palestinian and American activists accuses US President Donald Trump and his Middle East adviser Jared Kushner of violating Palestinian civil and human

rights.

Also named in the suit are Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu; New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo; Miriam Adelson, the wife of billionaire settler financier Sheldon Adelson; Israeli lobby group the The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC); and 13 others.

Attorney Martin McMahon said the action targets Trump's "Deal of the Century," along with laws introduced in 28 American states that illegally deny Americans the right to boycott Israel.

Filed on behalf of 13 plaintiffs, including Palestinians living in America and in occupied Palestine, the lawsuit argues they were stripped of their legal and civil rights not only Israel but by American officials and activists empowered by a biased media and political system.

"I know the system in this country is biased against Palestinian rights, but I also know that the rule of law defends those rights," McMahon told Arab News. "With the power of the rule of law, we will prevail."

McMahon's lawsuit was filed during African American heritage month, which recognizes the civil rights struggles of black Americans who were enslaved and segregated under illegal laws and policies that stripped them of land rights, denied them citizenship and treated them as second-class citizens. These are all crimes that Palestinians are subjected to inside and outside of Israel as a result of American financial and political support.

"The Palestinian cause is very similar to the legal fight by African Americans and by Native Americans," said McMahon.

"The Nuremberg Trials of 1945 defined that war crimes were illegal, and that wanton destruction of property, extrajudicial killings, collective punishment and land theft are war crimes that fall under the umbrage of the Alien Tort Statute, which is what we use to defend these victims. There is no statute of limitations on these kinds of crimes."

The Alien Tort Statute is a US Federal law, adopted in 1789, that gives the federal courts jurisdiction to hear lawsuits filed by non-US citizens relating to actions committed in violation of international law.

McMahon confirmed that his 13 clients include American citizens and non-citizens who are living or lived under Israeli occupation. Among them are three members of the Dawabsheh family, including an infant, who were murdered in a July 2015 arson attack in Hebron by Israeli settlers. Several other family members were seriously injured. Although the three Israeli Jewish arsonists were arrested, their actions were enabled by Israel's government, the lawsuit argues.

The plaintiffs also include Palestinian activists Ahed Al-Tamimi, her father Bassim Al-Tamimi and their extended family, who have been harassed, beaten and jailed by Israeli forces in the village of Nabi Salih for protesting against Israel's illegal policies. Their family lands were illegally confiscated by Israel.

Others are relatives of Abdul Rahman Barghouthi, who was murdered in Dec. 2016 by Israeli soldiers as he returned to his village, Aboud, near the Israeli settlement of Halamish. The Israeli media claimed Barghouthi attacked and injured an Israeli soldier but witnesses said he was killed in cold blood as a result of long-standing tensions between the village and the armed settlers.

McMahon explained that the lawsuit is based on four main principles.

"Since 1948, (the) defendants have denationalized and dehumanized the

Palestinian population, discriminating against them and denying them their legal rights," he said. "Individuals who contribute money or political support to this illegal system are accomplices. We are suing all of the Americans who have aided and abetted the denationalization of the Palestinian people."

The second principle, he said, is that Americans have a right to choose to boycott Israel over its apartheid practices that violate international law. The third seeks to declare Netanyahu, who has been Israel's prime minister for a total of 16 years, a war criminal based on his policies in Gaza and the West Bank.

The fourth principle, McMahon said, involves the illegality of the Trump administration's "Deal of the Century," which seeks to give Israel personal property and lands owned by Palestinians and occupied in conflict.

"That is illegal under both international law and American law," he said. "And because Americans are engaged in this with Israelis, it makes them liable for these actions."

McMahon said that despite the difficulty of challenging Israel in the pro-Israel American judicial system, he has had some success; most recently in a lawsuit filed in 2016 that also involves the Al-Tamimi family, American officials, and individuals and companies that have financed or support Israel's illegal settlements.

"That lawsuit also addresses an injustice against the Palestinians, and it was initially thrown out by the Federal Court," McMahon said. "But it was reinstated by the US Federal Appeals Court because we have the weight of the law on our side."

McMahon said Jewish Americans have filed many lawsuits against Palestinian organizations and individuals asserting terrorism, violence and loss of property rights, but the time in which US courts only entertain pro-Israel lawsuits has ended.

"My law firm won't sit back," he said. "We will defend the legal rights of Palestinians or Americans. Anyone who feels they have been denied their rights should contact my office and I will include them in the lawsuit."

The other 13 defendants in the lawsuit are AIPAC officials Brian Shankman and Howard Kohr, international attorney Gustaff Cardelius, US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, housing investor Daniel Gilbert, former Senate Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, Trump legal adviser and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Trump adviser Jason Greenblatt, New York City Council member Donald Hikind, former Arkansas Governor Michael Huckabee, Israel Defense Forces activist Susan Levin-Abir, former Palestinian terrorist and now celebrated pro-Israel advocate Walid Shoebat, and University of Haifa Chairman Dov Weissglas.



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