

With new app, Halan looks to tuk-tuk travelers in Egypt

Sun, 2019-11-03 01:32

CAIRO: Looking to offer a transport service that sets it apart from its rivals such as Uber, Careem and Swvl, the Egyptian company Halan has launched a new app that offers its customers with travel by tuk tuk.

The number of Halan application users in Egypt is close to 7.5 million, due to the fact that there are huge numbers of tuk-tuks crisscrossing various parts of Egypt.

Naglaa Samy, head of the Motorcyclists and Tuk-Tuk Union in Egypt, said there were 3 million tuk-tuks in Egypt but only 99,000 were licensed to practice the profession, according to figures published by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) in March.

Mounir Nakhla, executive director of Halan, said there were investors "who contributed in creating the application, in addition to a marketing campaign we launched at the beginning. All these factors contributed in the success and wide use of the application in Egypt," Nakhla said.

Nakhla said that a 7-km trip costs around 13.5 Egyptian pounds (\$0.8) and takes roughly 20 minutes on a motorcycle, while it costs 20 Egyptian pounds in a taxi which takes an hour for the same distance. The trip has become more expensive with the increase in fuel prices but the increase is smaller than that charged by other transportation applications.

Nakhla is the founding partner of Mashaweery, Egypt's biggest light-weight transportation company which has more than 100 branches across the country and 40,000 active clients. The company finances most of the country's application motorcycles and tuk-tuks. Nakhla also founded Tasaheel, a macro-financing company with more than 100 branches and 350,000 customers in Egypt. Halan's biggest challenge is to respond to increasing demand and to beat out the major players in the Egyptian market, Uber and Careem.

Tuk-tuks in Egypt are not permitted in the center of major cities but Col. Emad Hamed, an officer in the Public Traffic Department, told Arab News that tuk tuks in the country had become a reality because they are used "in a massive and random manner."

They also have become one of the main factors behind the increase in robberies, rape and harassment. As a consequence, Hamed said it was necessary to legalize this mode of transport in villages and areas where vehicle access is difficult to reach while preventing the scooters from working in the cities. He said that the Traffic Department objected to the use of tuk-tuks in big cities because they were deemed unsafe and lacked safety and security precautions.

However, tuk-tuks have imposed themselves on society. Hamed noted that legalizing this form of transportation would decrease crimes since it would be easy to find violators. As for the Halan application Hamed said that it would monitor all tuk-tuk drivers, an important step toward the legalization process. "I want a law that says all application drivers must have licenses to practice the profession so that the process would not become haphazard."

NUMBER

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Ahmed Hussein, a tuk-tuk driver listed in the application in the Cairo suburb of Maadi, an upscale part of the city, said the application made it easier for him to reach his customers and that it was also a safe method for him. However, Hussein added that not everybody used the application – “not more than one client in four daily,” Hussein said.

He said that providing tuk-tuks with license plates would reduce crimes such as burglary, harassment and bullying since some tuk-tuk drivers commit such crimes safe in the belief that it is difficult to trace them. That, he said, gives other tuk-tuk drivers a bad reputation.

Arab News talked to some middle-class users in Egypt. Dalia, from Maadi, said that she uses the app because it is a safe method for her as she knows the driver’s name and the number of his license plate. However, Dalia’s mother said she doesn’t use the app because she doesn’t have a smart phone.



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Ride-hailing apps run Indonesia’s tuk-tuks off road

Lebanese protesters plan rally for 'salvation' government

Sun, 2019-11-03 01:19

BEIRUT: Protesters in Lebanon are planning mass demonstrations on Sunday in Riad Al-Solh and Martyrs' Square in the heart of Beirut to further their demands for political reform in the country. Zeina Al-Helou, a public affairs analyst, told Arab News that "the call to bring down the government has been met, but there are other demands we want to achieve."

Protesters are now focused on forming a government from outside the ruling political groups, she said.

"We did not topple Saad Hariri personally, but we toppled a government that includes Hezbollah, the Free Patriotic Movement and other political components, because their political practice over the years brought us to the situation we are in," she added.

Protests across the country eased on Saturday, the 17th day of unrest.

Meanwhile, supporters of the Amal Movement staged a counter-protest near the home of Parliamentary Speaker Nabih Berri following a rumor on social media that protesters would rally there on Saturday to call for his resignation. Al-Helou said that although the social media rumor was false, "protesters' enthusiasm has not cooled."

"We are counting on people to join the central rally on Sunday. The protests are continuing," she said.

"Protesters are in one valley and the political forces in power are in another," she said.

Al-Helou said that the Lebanese authorities "are all betting on procrastination and negotiating their shares. They do not know that the people have something else in mind.

"It is not our goal to bring in a government that follows the same approach and style. This is not what is required. People are more aware than the authorities and their demand is a salvation government with specific powers to reform the judiciary, adopt an electoral law, hold early elections and set laws to prevent collapse. It is not enough to have a technocrat government; it must understand and feel the people's pain.

"We will spare no effort to use the street as a means of pressure," she added. Lebanon's presidency has yet to issue a schedule of parliamentary consultations to appoint a replacement for Hariri, who resigned four days ago.

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Zeina Al-Helou, Lebanese expert

The Presidential Press Office said on Saturday that President Michel Aoun has

been making the necessary contacts, “but the current situation in the country requires a calm handling.”

“Expediting consultations in such cases can have harmful repercussions,” the presidency said.

Meanwhile, a leading figure in the Future Movement, Mustafa Alloush, said that communication “is no longer possible between Prime Minister Hariri and the head of the Free Patriotic Movement, Gibran Bassil, and the past experience between the two men made the coexistence between them intolerable after the dictates became boundless.”

“Bassil is a person who wants everything in the state. Coexistence with him is impossible,” Alloush said.

“The sovereign government demanded by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah is a government that maintains the same balance of the outgoing government, and Hezbollah refuses to change the current structure,” Alloush said.

“The structure of the current system is no longer useful today and the opposition must be a real force of pressure. We refuse to be in a government ruled by Gibran Bassil.”

Supporters of the Free Patriotic Movement are due to hold a protest near the presidential palace on Sunday.



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Tehran fury as Iraq's Shiite leadership rejects Iranian
'interference' Hezbollah TV channel says Twitter accounts suspended

Tehran fury as Iraq's Shiite leadership rejects Iranian 'interference'

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Sat, 2019-11-02 22:57

BAGHDAD: The mass demonstrations in Iraq have heightened tensions between Najaf's supreme religious authority, led by Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Al-Sistani, and Iran's supreme religious leader Ali Khamenei, sources close to Sistani told Arab News on Saturday.

Baghdad and nine southern Shiite-dominated provinces have been witnessing mass demonstrations since Oct. 1 as people protest over corruption, unemployment and lack of daily basic life services.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi and his Iranian-backed allies led a brutal crackdown on demonstrations in its first week, killing around 150 protesters and wounding 7,000 others.

The demonstrations stopped for two weeks but returned last Friday after Abdul Mahdi vowed under local and international pressure not to use live ammunition. Despite this commitment, more than 250 demonstrators were killed and more than 6,000 wounded, mostly in Baghdad and Basra.

Most demonstrators in Baghdad and Basra were killed by tear gas canisters, while in the other provinces by gunfire of guards of political parties and armed factions, whose headquarters had come under attack from protesters. Demonstrators' demands increased to include the overthrow of the government and early national parliamentary elections preceded by a change in the election law and the appointment of a new election commission.

Iraqi political forces and armed factions backed by Iran would be the biggest losers if the demands of the demonstrators are met, top senior officials and politicians said.

Sistani is the leader of the world's Shiite community and is the most influential man in Iraq, considered the godfather of the political process since 2003. Although there are many religious and sectarian points that he and Khamenei share, Sistani does not adopt the theory of velayat-e faqih and does not recognize absolute right of the clergy to control the state.

The two men have been at odds over managing the situation in Iraq for years, but it turned into a rupture a year and a half ago, according to Sistani's associates.

The dispute resurfaced last Wednesday, when Khamenei demanded in a public statement that the demonstrations in Iraq and Lebanon end. Many Iranian clerics have accused Iraqi demonstrators of being in the pay of Israel, America and Britain during their sermons at Friday prayers in the past few weeks.

Sistani, in an open letter read by his representative, Sayyed Ahmed Al-Safi, in Friday prayers said that no one is a guardian of the Iraqis and that no

person or group or regional or international party has the right to impose their will on them or determine their choices regarding the management of their country or the reforms that they want.

Sistani's message "irritated Khamenei and worried his allies in Iraq," Iraqi politicians and sources close to Sistani told Arab News.

"The message was earth-shattering," a top senior Iraqi official said. "No one, especially Khamenei, expected that Sistani would announce his rejection of their intervention in this way.

"Iran threw all its weight behind Abdul Mahdi. They believe that this government is their government and they cannot allow it to fall.

"Any early election or amendment to the election law would mean losing the control of their local allies over the country, which they would not allow.

"They (the Iraqi forces backed by Iran) are currently rejecting any solutions to get out of the crisis and any activation of the constitutional procedures that can dismantle the crisis, means launching an endless cycle of violence because they they have weapons and power."

Gen. Qasem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards who runs Iran's operations in Iraq, arrived in Baghdad on Thursday and asked to meet Sistani on Saturday to discuss the latest developments and try to calm the situation between Najaf and Tehran, sources close to Sistani said.

"Sayyed Sistani's office agreed to his request to meet," the sources said.

"Sistani now has an interest in meeting him to tell him directly about their displeasure with Iranian positions.

"Although Sistani stopped meeting with any of Sayyed Khamenei's envoys more than a year and a half ago, now the country's interest requires his meeting Soleimani.

"Their groups (Iranian-backed forces) are ready to burn the country and the message must reach them clearly.

"The Iranians must take their hands off the demonstrators and curb their groups."



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Representatives of top Shiite cleric Al-Sistani urge followers to join protests in IraqIran cleric says US, Israel behind Iraq unrest to disrupt Shiite pilgrimage there

[Hezbollah TV channel says Twitter accounts suspended](#)

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Sat, 2019-11-02 18:42

BEIRUT: The television station of Lebanon's powerful Shiite movement Hezbollah protested Saturday that most of its Twitter accounts had been suspended.

Al-Manar accused the US-based social media platform of giving in to “political pressures.”

“Account suspended,” one such Arabic-language account, @almanarnews, read late Saturday.

“There is no place on Twitter for illegal terrorist organizations and violent extremist groups,” a Twitter spokesperson told AFP.

The accounts in English, French and Spanish were also not available, but the Twitter handles of specific television shows seemed to be functioning.

Iran-backed Hezbollah is designated a “terrorist” group by the United States and several of its officials are under US sanctions, but it is also a key political player in Lebanon.

The group held three ministerial posts and a majority with its Christian allies before Lebanon’s cabinet fell this week after 13 days of mass anti-graft protests.

Hezbollah is the only group not to have disarmed after Lebanon’s 1975-1990 civil war, and it fought Israeli troops who occupied southern Lebanon until 2000.

It has also been a key ally of Syrian President Bashar Assad in the neighboring country’s eight-year conflict.



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US and Gulf countries sanction individuals and businesses linked to Iran and

[Five candidates to run in Algeria's presidential election next month](#)

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Sat, 2019-11-02 15:57

ALGIERS: Five candidates will run in Algeria's presidential election next month, including two former prime ministers, the head of the election authority said on Saturday, amid mass protests rejecting the vote. The authorities have repeatedly said the Dec. 12 vote would be the only way to get out of a crisis Algeria been facing since the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in April under pressure from protesters.

Candidates for the Dec. 12 election include former prime ministers Abdelmadjid Tebboune and Ali Benflis, former culture minister Azzedddine Mihoubi, former tourism minister Abdelkader Bengrine, and Abdelaziz Belaid, head of the El Mostakbal Movement party.

They were announced by Mohamed Chorfi, head of the election authority. Twenty-three candidates had applied to the election authority, but most failed to meet requirements which include collecting signatures from 25 of the country's 48 provinces. Those who were rejected will be allowed to file appeals.

Tens of thousands of protesters have been staging weekly demonstrations to reject the election, saying it will not be fair as some of former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's allies are still in power.

Bouteflika ended his 20-year-rule in April after mass protests broke out on Feb. 22 demanding the removal of the ruling elite and the prosecution of people involved in corruption.

The army is now the main player in Algeria's politics, and its chief of staff Lt. Gen. Ahmed Gaed Salah has vowed transparency and fairness for the Dec. 12 vote.

The authorities also met some protesters' demands by detaining several former officials including two ex-prime ministers and several prominent businessmen over corruption charges.

Protesters now also demand the departure of the remaining symbols of the old guard including interim president Abdelkader Bensalah and Prime Minister Nouredine Bedoui.

Algeria had canceled a presidential vote previously planned for July 4, citing a lack of candidates.

"There will be full transparency in the handling of the presidential election," Chorfi said.



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Algerians in 'new independence' call on revolution anniversary
Algeria registers 22 candidates for presidential vote