

1.5m visits to Egypt pavilion at Dubai Expo

Sat, 2022-04-02 18:44

CAIRO: The Egyptian pavilion at Expo Dubai 2020 received 1.5 million visits over six months, and placed in the top-three of two leading competitions over the period, according to the Egyptian Minister of Trade and Industry Nevin Gamea.

The minister said that Egypt won third place among the medium-sized pavilions for its interior design, as adjudged by the International Bureau of Exhibitions. Egypt also won, in a public vote organized by the Exhibitor magazine, second place for its creative work, missing out only to Peru.

Gamea said the Egyptian exhibition was popular because of the country's rich history, and thanks to its promotion of its tourist industry over the past several years. The presentations included three original Pharaoh statues.

To attract visitors and investors, the country had showcased its heavy investment in infrastructure, including technologically advanced cities and industrial areas, as well as the Suez Canal economic zone.

Ashraf Hamdy, commissioner-general of the Egyptian exhibition, and head of the nation's commercial office in Dubai, said the country had an ideal spot at the event, which was next to the UAE pavilion. This reflected the close relations between the two countries.

He said the events on offer over the period included more than 100 seminars on investment opportunities in information technology and infrastructure, tourism and green tourism strategies, the Suez Canal, the transfer of space technology, the role of young researchers in the field of space science, and the empowerment of women.



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Egypt pavilion receives more than 50,000 visitors in first week of Expo 2020
DubaiDubai bids farewell to successful Expo 2020

[Ramadan kicks off in much of Middle East amid soaring prices](#)

Author:

By SAMY MAGDY | AP

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Sat, 2022-04-02 17:31

CAIRO: The Muslim holy month of Ramadan – when the faithful fast from dawn to dusk – began at sunrise Saturday in much of the Middle East, where Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sent energy and food prices soaring.

The conflict cast a pall over Ramadan, when large gatherings over meals and family celebrations are a tradition. Many in the Southeast Asian nation of Indonesia planned to start observing Sunday, and some Shiites in Lebanon,

Iran and Iraq were also marking the start of Ramadan a day later. Muslims follow a lunar calendar and a moon-sighting methodology can lead to different countries declaring the start of Ramadan a day or two apart. Muslim-majority nations including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates had declared the month would begin Saturday morning. A Saudi statement Friday was broadcast on the kingdom's state-run Saudi TV and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi and de facto leader of the United Arab Emirates, congratulated Muslims on Ramadan's arrival.

Jordan, a predominantly Sunni country, also said the first day of Ramadan would be on Sunday, in a break from following Saudi Arabia. The kingdom said the Islamic religious authority was unable to spot the crescent moon indicating the beginning of the month.

Indonesia's second-largest Islamic group, Muhammadiyah, which counts more than 60 million members, said that according to its astronomical calculations Ramadan begins Saturday. But the country's religious affairs minister had announced Friday that Ramadan would start on Sunday, after Islamic astronomers in the country failed to sight the new moon.

It wasn't the first time the Muhammadiyah has offered a differing opinion on the matter, but most Indonesians – Muslims comprise nearly 90 percent of the country's 270 million people – are expected to follow the government's official date.

Many had hoped for a more cheerful Ramadan after the coronavirus pandemic blocked the world's 2 billion Muslims from many rituals the past two years. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, however, millions of people in the Middle East are now wondering where their next meals will come from. The skyrocketing prices are affecting people whose lives were already upended by conflict, displacement and poverty from Lebanon, Iraq and Syria to Sudan and Yemen.

Ukraine and Russia account for a third of global wheat and barley exports, which Middle East countries rely on to feed millions of people who subsist on subsidized bread and bargain noodles. They are also top exporters of other grains and sunflower seed oil used for cooking.

Egypt, the world's largest wheat importer, has received most of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine in recent years. Its currency has now also taken a dive, adding to other pressures driving up prices.

Shoppers in the capital Cairo turned out earlier this week to stock up on groceries and festive decorations, but many had to buy less than last year because of the soaring prices.

Ramadan tradition calls for colorful lanterns and lights strung throughout Cairo's narrow alleys and around mosques. Some people with the means to do so set up tables on the streets to dish up free post-fast Iftar meals for the poor. The practice is known in the Islamic world as "Tables of the Compassionate."

"This could help in this situation," said Rabei Hassan, the muezzin of a mosque in Giza as he bought vegetables and other food from a nearby market. "People are tired of the prices."

Worshippers attended mosque for hours of evening prayers, or "tarawih." On Friday evening, thousands of people packed the Al-Azhar mosque after attendance was banned for the past two years to stem the pandemic.

"They were difficult (times) ... Ramadan without tarawih at the mosque is not

Ramadan," said Saeed Abdel-Rahman, a 64-year-old retired teacher as he entered Al-Azhar for prayers.

Soaring prices also exacerbated the woes of Lebanese already facing a major economic crisis. Over the past two years, the currency collapsed and the country's middle class was plunged into poverty. The meltdown has also brought on severe shortages in electricity, fuel and medicine.

In the Gaza Strip, few people were shopping Friday in markets usually packed at this time of year. Merchants said Russia's war on Ukraine has sent prices skyrocketing, alongside the usual challenges, putting a damper on the festive atmosphere that Ramadan usually creates.

The living conditions of the 2.3 million Palestinians in the impoverished coastal territory are tough, compounded by a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade since 2007.

Toward the end of Ramadan last year, a deadly 11-day war between Gaza's Hamas rulers and Israel cast a cloud over festivities, including the Eid Al-Fitr holiday that follows the holy month. It was the fourth bruising war with Israel in just over a decade.

In Iraq, the start of Ramadan highlighted widespread frustration over a meteoric rise in food prices, exacerbated in the past month by the war in Ukraine.

Suhaila Assam, a 62-year-old retired teacher and women's rights activist, said she and her retired husband are struggling to survive on their combined pension of \$1,000 a month, with prices of cooking oil, flour and other essentials having more than doubled.

"We, as Iraqis, use cooking oil and flour a lot. Almost in every meal. So how can a family of five members survive?" she asked.

Akeel Sabah, 38, is a flour distributor in the Jamila wholesale market, which supplies all of Baghdad's Rasafa district on the eastern side of the Tigris River with food. He said flour and almost all other foodstuffs are imported, which means distributors have to pay for them in dollars. A ton of flour used to cost \$390. "Today I bought the ton for \$625," he said.

"The currency devaluation a year ago already led to an increase in prices, but with the ongoing (Ukraine) crisis, prices are skyrocketing. Distributors lost millions," he said.

In Istanbul, Muslims held the first Ramadan prayers in 88 years in the Hagia Sophia, nearly two years after the iconic former cathedral was converted into a mosque.

Worshippers filled the 6th-century building and the square outside Friday night for tarawih prayers led by Ali Erbas, the government head of religious affairs. Although converted for Islamic use and renamed the Grand Hagia Sophia Mosque in July 2020, COVID-19 restrictions had limited worship at the site.

"After 88 years of separation, the Hagia Sophia Mosque has regained the tarawih prayer," Erbas said, according to the state-run Anadolu Agency.



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Muslims in Italy celebrate first post-pandemic RamadanCharities warn half of British Muslims will struggle to eat during Ramadan

[New Syria anti-torture law a 'whitewash': Amnesty International](#)

Author:

Fri, 2022-04-01 21:52

LONDON: Syrian President Bashar Assad is trying to “whitewash decades of state-sanctioned human rights violations” by passing a new anti-torture law, Amnesty International has said.

The Assad regime is accused of widespread torture against its own citizens

since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, as well as myriad other human rights abuses, including forced disappearances, sham trials and extra-judicial killings.

The regime passed the new law on Wednesday, having first proposed it just two days prior. It outlaws the use of torture, with penalties starting at three years' imprisonment for those convicted of the offense.

But human rights organizations have condemned it, saying it gives no real recourse to justice for victims or their families, leaving many in Syria acutely vulnerable.

"While we welcome any legislative steps towards complying with internationally recognized anti-torture conventions, the new law effectively whitewashes decades of state-sanctioned human rights violations," said Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty's deputy regional director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"It fails to offer redress to past victims of torture, include any protection measures for witnesses or survivors of torture, nor does it state whether torture survivors, or in the event of their death, their families would receive compensation," she added.

"Crucially, it fails to mention any measures that could be taken to prevent torture from occurring in detention centres and prisons in the future."

Maalouf said without greater international scrutiny and openness from the Assad regime, the new law does not amount to a genuine attempt to rectify its history of committing atrocities against ordinary Syrians.

Moreover, she added, the Assad regime would need to get serious about bringing known perpetrators of torture to trial whilst ensuring they were fair.

"Amnesty International calls on the Syrian authorities to urgently allow independent monitors to access the country's notorious detention centres – where torture leading to death has been taking place at a mass scale for years – as a first step to signalling any genuine intent to curtail the practice of torture by state agents," she said.

"Furthermore, the anti-torture law must align with international human rights law – and that means, as a first step, ensuring that the perpetrators of torture, cruel, inhuman or other ill-treatment face justice in fair trials before ordinary civilian courts and without recourse to death penalty."A



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Syrian torture chambers brought to life in haunting drawingsIran torture victim warns of sexual abuse if UK acts upon asylum offshoring plan

Yemen government to open Sanaa airport, help with release of prisoners: Foreign minister

Fri, 2022-04-01 17:51

LONDON: Yemen's legitimate government said on Friday it would take steps to arrange for the release of prisoners, open the airport in Sanaa and facilitate the release of oil ships via the port of Hodeidah.

The foreign minister announced the moves in a tweet and said they came in support of calls for a truce during the holy month of Ramadan.

The minister also announced the release of the first two fuel ships through Hodeidah, after orders from President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

UN and US envoys on Wednesday welcomed unilateral truce moves by the Yemeni forces and the Iranian-backed Houthis in the conflict as encouraging steps, while stressing the need for a more comprehensive cease-fire.

Both sides agreed to a two-month cease-fire starting Saturday to allow fuel ships to enter the Houthi-held Hodeidah port and select flights from Sanaa airport, the UN special envoy for Yemen confirmed on Friday.

Hans Grundberg said in a statement that the nationwide cease-fire could be renewed with the consent of the parties.

On Thursday, the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen said it was committed to stopping military operations inside the country in response to a request from the secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

It also said its air forces had not carried out combat operations inside Yemen, adding it was taking all steps to make the cessation of military operations a success and to achieve comprehensive peace.



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Coalition says committed to halting military operations in Yemen
Yemen talks focus on aid, care for wounded and opening of roads

[Israeli forces kill Palestinian as protests turn violent](#)

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Fri, 2022-04-01 17:23

RAMALLAH: Israeli forces shot and killed one Palestinian and injured dozens of others on Friday during clashes in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron.

Violent confrontations erupted between Palestinians and Israeli forces during rallies in several West Bank locations to commemorate the 46th anniversary of Land Day, according to Palestinian medical sources.

Ahmad Al-Atrash, 28, a freed prisoner who spent six years in Israeli prisons, died in Hebron Governmental Hospital from a gunshot wound to the chest, doctors said.

Palestinian youths threw stones at Israeli troops, who responded with live bullets, tear gas canisters and sound bombs.

Eyewitnesses said that the army had deployed snipers in areas overlooking Bab Al-Zawiya, Al-Shuhada Street and Al-Shalala Street in anticipation of clashes.

Palestinian groups called for a day of official mourning in Hebron on April 2.

In the Israeli towns of Umm Al-Fahm and the Northern Triangle, dozens of Palestinian youths waving Palestinian flags joined a protest march.

The Red Crescent Society said its crews were among 150 Palestinians wounded in confrontations in Nablus, Beita and Beit Dajan.

Beita Mayor Mahmoud Barham told Arab News that the clashes in the township were the most violent in months, with hundreds of young men involved and at least 120 injuries.

Nine civilians, including two children, were injured by live bullets and tear gas canisters during rallies in the West Bank town of Qalqilya.

Dozens of protesters, including deputy leader of the Fatah movement Mahmoud Al-Aloul, received treatment after inhaling tear gas.

Later Aloul vowed that "popular resistance" will continue.

"It is our choice and there is no turning back from it in light of the expansion of settlements we are witnessing at the expense of our lands," he said.

Osama Al-Qawasmi, a Palestine Liberation Organization official, told Arab News: "It is clear that Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has made a decision to clear the path for the killing of Palestinians in cold blood."

Al-Qawasmi described deaths over the past two days as "field executions."

Labelling the killing of Palestinians a "war crime," the PLO official accused Bennett's government of "trying to silence the Israeli people at the expense of Palestinian blood."

Israel is dragging the region into a "cycle of action and reaction, which will not serve anyone at all," Al-Qawasmi said.

"Nobody can control a Palestinian people being killed by Israel, which bears full responsibility for this violence and escalation. If Bennett thinks that killing Palestinians can bring security to Israel, he is delusional."

Israeli military sources confirmed to Arab News that the Israeli army had deployed two military battalions to the West Bank and two more beside the Gaza Strip in the past few days amid fears of escalating violence at the start of Ramadan.

Mustafa Barghouti, secretary-general of the Palestinian National Initiative Movement, who took part in a rally at Bilin, west of Ramallah, said that the protest was an "escalation of the popular resistance to end the (Israeli) occupation and bring down the racist apartheid regime."

He added: "The Palestinian people have nothing but the path of struggle and resistance to achieve their freedom."

Barghouti said that the presence of foreign observers at the rally highlighted the international interest in the Palestinian cause, and encouraged Palestinians to press their demands for global sanctions on Israel.

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Three Palestinians killed as Israeli extremist visits Al-Aqsa in
'provocation' 2 Palestinians killed in Israeli raid on West Bank: Ministry