

Israeli leader vows to push ahead with annexing West Bank

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By JOSEF FEDERMAN | AP

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Mon, 2020-05-25 17:27

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday pledged to annex parts of the occupied West Bank in the coming months, vowing to move ahead with the explosive plan despite a growing chorus of condemnations by key allies.

The Palestinians, with wide international backing, seek the entire West Bank as the heartland of a future independent state. Annexing large chunks of this territory would all but destroy the faint remaining hopes of a two-state solution.

In an apparent reference to the friendly administration of President Donald Trump, Netanyahu said Israel had a "historic opportunity" to redraw the Mideast map that could not be missed. Israeli media quoted him as saying he would act in July.

"This is an opportunity that we will not let pass," he told members of his conservative Likud party. He added that the "historic opportunity" to annex the West Bank had never before occurred since Israel's founding in 1948.

The comments threatened to push Israel closer to a confrontation with Arab and European partners, and could deepen what is becoming a growing partisan divide over Israel in Washington.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war. It has settled nearly 500,000 Jewish settlers in the territory, but never formally claimed it as an Israeli territory due to stiff international opposition.

But the Trump administration has taken a much softer line toward Israeli settlements than its predecessors. Trump's Mideast team is dominated by advisers with close ties to the settlements, and his Mideast plan, unveiled in January, envisions leaving some 30% of the territory under permanent Israeli control while giving the Palestinians expanded autonomy in the rest of the area. The Palestinians have rejected the plan, saying it is unfairly biased toward Israel.

With Trump's re-election prospects uncertain this November, Israeli hard-liners have urged Netanyahu to move ahead with annexation quickly. The Israeli leader's new coalition deal includes an official clause allowing him to present his annexation plan to the government in July.

Israeli media quoted him as telling Likud members that "we have a target date for July and we don't intend to change it." The quote could not immediately be confirmed.

The plan has already exposed a partisan divide in Washington. Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic nominee in the US presidential elections, recently said that annexation would "choke off" hopes for a two-state solution. 18 Democratic senators warned in a letter this week that annexation could harm US-Israeli ties.

The EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, has said annexation would violate international law and vowed to use "all our diplomatic capacities" to stop it.

Closer to home, the Palestinians last week cut off security ties – a valuable tool in a shared struggle against Islamic militants – with Israel to protest the annexation plan.

Saudi Arabia, an influential Arab country that maintains behind-the-scenes relations with Israel, announced its "rejection of the Israeli measures and plans to annex Palestinian lands."

The Arab League has condemned it as a "war crime," and both Jordan and Egypt – the only two Arab countries at peace with Israel – have harshly criticized it.

Netanyahu spoke a day after beginning his trial on corruption charges.

The prime minister launched a blistering tirade against the country's legal system when he arrived at court, accusing police, prosecutors and media of conspiring to oust him. As he spoke, hundreds of supporters cheered outside. Speaking to Likud on Monday, Netanyahu said he was "very moved" by the support.

Critics have said his attacks on the justice system risk undermining the country's democratic foundations.



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Attacker attempts to stab Israeli officer, shot: police

[Egyptian police chase man who tried to lead Eid prayers](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-05-24 21:33

CAIRO: A video of a man wearing Al-Azhar University's uniform being chased by police was posted by social media users in Egypt on Sunday.

The man had been reportedly leading Eid congregational prayers in violation of anti-coronavirus measures that prevent gatherings. The video also shows a person laughing and saying: "Run sheikh."

The man had agreed to lead prayers in the open yard of a mosque in the city of Nabaroh, north of Cairo, according to a resident.

He said people had gathered and started praying but, as soon as they heard police sirens, the man leading the prayer and the congregation started to disperse fearing arrest.

Sheikh Taha Zeyada, secretary of the Egyptian Ministry of Endowments, told Arab News that the security directorate had not received any report about the incident.

He said the directorate had not told any mosque to hold Eid congregational prayers, complying with measures taken to stem the spread of the coronavirus disease. The investigation into the incident was the responsibility of the executive and security bodies, he added, and all the mosques in the governorate had adhered to the Cabinet's decision about Eid prayers.

Security officials confirmed that the prayer leader was not arrested as he ran away.

A source in the ministry said that the congregation was not in a mosque and that the man in the Al-Azhar uniform had been identified as Mahmoud, an Al-Azhar high school student.

The ministry had already canceled Eid Al-Fitr prayers in mosque grounds. It also decided to broadcast the prayer from Al-Sayeda Nafisa mosque. It named 20 people to attend the prayer and the sermon was delivered by Sheikh Yousry Azzam, one of the ministry's imams.

The ministry also issued rules and regulation regarding Eid Al-Fitr and operating microphones or loudspeakers in mosques.

According to the rules, prayer leaders were to be present in mosques from

dawn until the end of the Eid prayer broadcast.



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Doctor loses sight fighting coronavirus in CairoEgypt to offer coronavirus testing in all general hospitals

[Modest Eid celebrations take place in Lebanon amid coronavirus restrictions](#)

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Sun, 2020-05-24 21:31

BEIRUT: Eid prayers were held in Lebanon's mosques, as people celebrated the end of Ramadan amid measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Movement in Beirut was limited to family visits, with parks and other entertainment facilities remaining closed. Most people refrained from visiting restaurants because of the ongoing economic crunch. Families with

properties in the mountains preferred to spend their Eid holidays there in order to protect themselves against the virus.

Eid prayers were held in mosques, and the number of worshippers varied region-wise. Mosques abided by the decision of the Islamic Dar Al-Fatwa to maintain distance between worshippers, ensure that everyone wore masks, have worshippers bring their own prayer mats, and prevent handshakes and hugging. Doctors expressed fears that social mixing during the holidays might boost the number of infections. On Sunday the Health Ministry confirmed 17 new COVID-19 cases, raising the total number to 1,114.

But economic concerns overshadowed other worries during Eid, and shopkeepers complained of a significant drop in purchasing activity.

"Business activities in markets before Eid remained minimum due to a decline in people's purchasing power and the pandemic," Tony Eid, head of the Beirut Traders Association, told Arab News. "Reopening markets gradually is better than continuous closure. We are facing several issues such as banks not issuing US dollars, and forex dealers are still on a strike forcing us to resort to devious ways to buy dollars. If we don't do that the commercial sector will suffocate."

The third phase of the repatriation of Lebanese expatriates ended on Sunday. Citizens arrived on Sunday at Rafik Hariri International Airport from Riyadh, Frankfurt, Paris, Brussels, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and London. On Saturday night, flights from Moscow, London, Abidjan, and Mozambique arrived. The government is currently not planning to start the fourth phase of the operations. The next phase will be based on the pandemic situation.

According to the Ministry of Health, the total number of COVID-19 cases among those coming from abroad is 193, while 6,393 people are in quarantine centers.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab offered Eid prayers at the Al-Amin Mosque in central Beirut. Former prime ministers, who oppose the current government, were absent from the scene.

Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri participated in Eid prayers at Imam Ali Mosque in Beirut's Jdeideh Road district, which is loyal to the Future Movement. Many of the district's people came out to greet Hariri and expressed their support for him.

In his Eid sermon Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian criticized "the destruction and sabotage of public institutions" and called on the government to stop the country's financial, banking, and economic collapse.

"Where have the billions (of liras) gone?" he said. "These should have been spent on safeguarding the interests of citizens, supplying them with power and water, on addressing the waste crisis, improving communications, and promoting agriculture, industry, and services. Why has the country accumulated public debt of \$90 billion, \$50 billion of which were wasted on electric power that is always out? Who is responsible for holding the depositors' money? The ones who drained this money inform us every day that it has been lost forever."

He said Lebanon should reach out to its Arab brothers, who were keen on the country's safety, stability, and prosperity. "We will not abandon our Arab nationalism," he added.

Sheikh Hassan Merheb, assistant general inspector at Dar Al-Fatwa, criticized those attempting to undo the policies of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. He said Beirut would remain faithful to him and to those following in his

footsteps.

Grand Jaafari Mufti Sheikh Ahmad Kabalan said that the Lebanese formula, which was established on a "sectarian and tyrannical basis to serve the colonial and monopoliztic project," had ended.

He also said that what the post-independence president, Bechara El-Khoury, and former Prime Minister Riyad Al-Solh did was no longer suitable for a state of citizenship because the country had collapsed due to the "corrupt constitution."

He said that Lebanon must not listen to "the lying international community" and that "the International Monetary Fund is neither a charity nor independent from politics."

The Lebanese head of the Maronite Catholic Church, Patriarch Bechara Al-Rahi, used his Sunday sermon to condemn attempts to involve Lebanon in the region's wars. He said these destroyed Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, or turned it into a battlefield.

He declared his refusal for "changing the face and heart of Lebanon and its pluralistic characteristic in order to preserve our identity."





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Easing of restrictions intensifies COVID-19 cases in Lebanon
Lebanon's dollar crisis hits migrants workers

Philippines investigates suicide of a maid at embassy shelter in Lebanon

Author:

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Sun, 2020-05-24 17:44

AMMAN: The Philippine government is investigating the suicide of a maid who died on Sunday after an incident at a shelter run by its embassy in Beirut for Filipino workers waiting to return home after losing their jobs in the coronavirus pandemic.

Her death comes just days after human rights groups raised concerns about the treatment of 26 female domestic workers staying at the shelter under the care of the Philippine embassy.

The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said the Filipino domestic worker had been staying at the facility since Friday where she was sharing a room with two other people.

Coronavirus restrictions coupled with an economic meltdown in Lebanon has prompted people to ditch domestic help or not pay them, with workers seeking refuge at their countries' embassies while they wait for borders to open so they can return home.

"The Embassy was able to speak to the Filipino's eldest sister in the Philippines as well as her cousin in Lebanon to convey its condolences," the DFA said in a statement.

"The Embassy has ensured the safety of the rest of the female wards in the shelter and will provide them counseling as needed."

Neither the Philippine embassy in Lebanon nor the DFA were immediately available for further comment.

A spokesman from Lebanon's internal security forces said they could not comment while an investigation was ongoing.

Human rights groups last week raised concerns that about 26 Filipino domestic workers, some of whom were working without legal documentation, were being held in over-crowded conditions, although embassy staff repeatedly denied mistreatment.

Bassam Al Kantar of the National Human Rights Commission of Lebanon said these women "have not seen the light of day for more than 40 days."

The Philippine embassy said in an earlier statement that the allegations "do not depict an accurate description of the conditions" and posted a social media video on May 18 of a shelter resident saying there was lots of food and

medical care.

Thousands of foreign workers in Lebanon, some without legal documentation, are out of work and left stranded by border closures, with many unable to access state services and others subjected to abuse in confinement, according to Amnesty.

Lebanon is home to up to 250,000 foreign workers, some working illegally, who are employed under the country's kafala sponsorship system which binds them to one employer.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have blamed the kafala system and the inability to change jobs, which exists in many parts of the Middle East, for the abuse of migrant workers.



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[Muslims celebrate Eid Al-Fitr holiday amid curfews, coronavirus fears](#)

Sun, 2020-05-24 16:26

JERUSALEM: Muslims around the world on Sunday began celebrating Eid Al-Fitr,

a normally festive holiday marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, with millions under strict stay-at-home orders and many fearing renewed coronavirus outbreaks.

The three-day holiday is usually a time of travel, family get-togethers and lavish daytime feasts after weeks of dawn-to-dusk fasting. But this year many of the world's 1.8 billion Muslims will have to pray at home and make due with video calls.

Some countries, including Turkey, Iraq and Jordan, have imposed round-the-clock holiday curfews. But even where many restrictions have been lifted, celebrations will be subdued because of fears of the pandemic and its economic fallout.

Saudi Arabia, home to the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, is under a complete lockdown, with residents only permitted to leave their homes to purchase food and medicine.

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[Face masks and 'prayer shifts' as Italy's Muslims return to mosque](#)

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In Jerusalem, Israeli police said they broke up an "illegal demonstration" and arrested two people outside the Al-Aqsa mosque, which Muslim authorities have closed for prayers since mid-March and will not reopen until after the holiday. Worshippers who tried to enter the compound scuffled with the police.

Al-Aqsa is the third holiest site in Islam and would ordinarily welcome tens of thousands of worshippers during the Eid. The hilltop compound is also the holiest site for Jews, who know it as the Temple Mount. The site has long been a flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Iran, which is battling the deadliest outbreak in the Middle East, allowed communal prayers at some mosques but canceled the annual mass Eid prayers in Tehran led by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran has reported over 130,000 cases and more than 7,000 deaths.

[#PHOTOS](#): Muslims around the world celebrate [#EidAlFitr](#) in 2020 amid [#coronavirus](#) pandemic

Check out more photos here: <https://t.co/hsSHaSRWtR>
[pic.twitter.com/A4y4n0m0vX](https://t.co/hsSHaSRWtR)

– Arab News (@arabnews) [May 24, 2020](#)

The virus causes mild to moderate flu-like symptoms in most patients, who recover within two to three weeks. But it is highly contagious and can cause severe illness or death, particularly in older patients or those with underlying health conditions.

Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, has reported nearly 22,000 infections and 1,350 fatalities, the most in Southeast Asia. Lockdown orders intended to contain the pandemic mean there will be no congregational prayers at mosques or even open fields, no family reunions, no relatives bearing gifts for children.

"This outbreak is not just dampening spirits of Eid, but also has made the tradition entirely different," said Andieka Rabbani, a university student in Jakarta. This year, like many Indonesians, he will only see family and friends through video calls.

[#WATCH: #Indonesia's capital #Jakarta observes a quiet #EidAlFitr with most mosques not allowed to hold prayers](#)
[#COVID19https://t.co/BHXESoiejZ pic.twitter.com/F0lvXI7g8j](#)

– Arab News (@arabnews) [May 24, 2020](#)

In neighboring Muslim-majority Malaysia, businesses have mostly reopened after weeks of lockdown. But mass gatherings are still banned and people are not allowed to travel back to their hometowns for the holiday. Police have turned away more than 5,000 cars and have warned of strict penalties for those who try to sneak home.

Malaysians are only allowed to visit relatives who live nearby, and only on Sunday, with gatherings limited to 20 people. Mosques have reopened but are limited to small congregations of up to 30. Malaysia has reported 7,185 infections and 115 deaths.

Rohaizam Zainuddin said he felt blessed he could celebrate Eid with his elderly parents living nearby, but his sister in another state could not return home.

"We are frustrated that celebration this year is not the same," he said. "But there is no point getting angry. We just have to accept it, life goes on." He and his family members are still wearing new clothes and preparing traditional dishes. Plates of cookies are set out for any visitors, alongside a thermometer and hand sanitizer.

In Pakistan, Eid is being celebrated in the shadow of the coronavirus and in the wake of a passenger plane crash near Karachi on Friday that killed 97 people.

For the first time, Pakistan is celebrating Eid countrywide on the same day, ending an annual controversy between rival committees over the moon sighting that signals the start of the holiday.

Pakistan has taken measures to control the spread of the coronavirus since mid-March, but Prime Minister Imran Khan refused to close mosques during

Ramadan despite pleas from doctors and a rising number of infections. Pakistan has reported more than 52,000 cases and more than 1,100 deaths. More than 1,000 worshippers gathered and prayed shoulder-to-shoulder in an open field in Karachi on Sunday, with only a few of them wearing masks. In neighboring Afghanistan, the government and Taliban insurgents announced a three-day cease-fire in honor of the holiday. Some 2,000 Muslims gathered for Eid Al-Fitr prayers Sunday at a sports complex in the Paris suburb of Levallois-Perret, carefully spaced apart and wearing masks, according to France-Info radio. Traditional embraces were not allowed. France is allowing religious services to resume for the first time since March, but France's leading Muslim organization, CFCM, advised mosques to stay closed Sunday. The CFCM said the government decree didn't give mosques enough time to procure masks and hand gel to ensure that gatherings don't turn into super-spreading events. In Sudan, which has reported more than 3,600 cases and 146 deaths, thousands of people gathered for prayers in mosques and open areas, defying a curfew and other restrictions imposed by authorities, local media reported. Virus restrictions remain in place in the mostly-Muslim Balkan countries of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Mosques have reopened in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, but worshippers must wear masks and practice social distancing, and older individuals were urged to continue praying at home. Naim Ternava, the mufti of Kosovo's Islamic community, led prayers in a mosque in front of a small group of imams sitting 1.5 meters (yards) apart, with the sermon broadcast outside on loudspeakers. "I invite you to be patient a little bit more until we overcome the danger," he said.



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US Muslims try to balance Eid rituals with virus concerns Saudis are finding new ways to celebrate Eid Al-Fitr despite a 24-hour curfew