

# Philippines investigates suicide of a maid at embassy shelter in Lebanon

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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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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/F01vXI7g8j](#)

– 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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## [Iranian fuel shipment reaches Venezuelan waters](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2020-05-24 04:23

CARACAS: The first of five tankers carrying much-needed Iranian fuel and oil products entered Venezuelan waters on Saturday, a Venezuelan government official said.

“The ships of the sister Islamic Republic of Iran are in our exclusive economic zone,” Venezuelan oil minister Tareck El-Aissami wrote on Twitter after the arrival of the first tanker, named Fortune.

The fleet is carrying about 1.5 million barrels of gasoline according to media reports, and arrives amid tensions between Tehran and Washington, which has imposed sanctions on Venezuelan oil exports and Iran.

Venezuela had said its navy and air force would escort the tankers after Tehran warned of “consequences” if the US stopped the ships from reaching their destination.

According to shipping tracker MarineTraffic, as of at 9:00 p.m. local time (0100 GMT Sunday) Fortune was near the coast of Sucre state in northern Venezuela after passing off Trinidad and Tobago.

It plans to sail to the El Palito refinery in Puerto Cabello in northern Carabobo state, according to the state-run television station.

The rest of the Iranian ships – the Forest, Petunia, Faxon and Clavel – will arrive in the next few days, according to state television.

Relations between Caracas and Tehran have become close since former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez took power in 1999.

Iran has repeatedly expressed its support for Nicolas Maduro, his successor, who is also supported by Russia, China, Turkey and Cuba.

The United States calls Maduro a “dictator,” however, and has leveled a battery of economic sanctions against his administration, including an oil embargo that came into force in April 2019.

The fuel from Iran comes at a time when the shortage of gasoline, chronic for years in some parts of the country, has worsened in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world, but its production is in freefall, a collapse that experts attribute to failed policies, lack of investment and corruption.



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Iran warns US not to interfere with Venezuela oil shipment  
Iran summons ambassador over possible US measures against Venezuela shipment

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## [Contagion risk in Turkish prisons feared](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-05-24 01:43

ANKARA: The death of a Turkish prisoner from COVID-19 in Istanbul's Silivri Prison on Friday has put the health conditions of Turkish prisons under the spotlight again, with inmates under increased risk.

The number of infected inmates in the prison has risen to 82. Four inmates have lost their lives in the pandemic, according to the official figures. Many reports are coming about confirmed positive test results for COVID-19 nationwide.

Human rights activists and opposition politicians have called on the authorities to release prisoners during the outbreak. As a first step, they suggest releasing on bail those who are not sentenced yet, prisoners who have a serious disease and those who are above 60 years of age, postponing the enforcement of their sentences.

A prisoner release bill was adopted by Turkish parliament last month to ease overcrowding in jails and protect detainees from any contagion, but it was criticized for leaving behind bars journalists and dissident activists jailed on political charges and freeing 90,000 inmates, including mafia bosses. Hygiene, access to medical services and nutrition are the main concerns that are raised.

In a series of parliamentary questions on May 22, Feleknaş Uca, a parliamentarian from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), said that inmates in the southeastern Bayburt Prison were reportedly provided with one surgical mask between eight of them.

The lack of hot water for the past two months in the prison and the insufficient cleaning of the cells are also cited as a source of concern, especially in a period where strict hygiene precautions are essential.

**NUMBER**

## **82 – the number of infected inmates in the Turkish prison.**

Murat Yilmaz, a human rights lawyer in Ankara, said the public authorities have not disclosed official data about the outbreak risk in the prisons in a transparent way.

“Turkish jails, where 20 people are in a cell designed for eight, are overpopulated, with limited access to bathrooms. The restrooms are shared. The wardens are in constant contact with the outside world and they can bring the virus into the prisons. It is impossible to protect these vulnerable inmates once one of them contracts the virus because they stay in a closed environment with limited opportunities to take fresh air,” he told Arab News. Yilmaz, who monitors the situation in Turkey’s prisons closely, said inmates with chronic diseases such as cancer and high blood pressure are also kept in jail. Being in the risk group, they are highly vulnerable.

“The number of prison infirmaries and doctors is very insufficient. There are disruptions in the referral of the patients to the hospitals. People who are behind bars for a long time are already deprived of sunlight and they are not sufficiently nourished,” he said.

After the failed coup attempt in 2016, the total number of prisoners in Turkey rose to about 300,000, the second largest prison population in Europe, according to the data from Council of Europe. Around 50,000 people are locked up on terror charges.

Gamze Akkus Ilgezdi, a lawmaker for the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), said that in the last two weeks of April COVID-19 cases in the jails increased by 606 percent.

“Urgent precautions must be taken in the prisons. Otherwise, the responsibility of the deaths will fall on the government and the bureaucracy,” she told Arab News.

Ilgezdi also emphasized the need to protect 3,100 child inmates, along with 780 children who stay with their mothers in prisons, as they are also vulnerable to the risk of contagion.

Last month, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) of the Council of Europe urged all member states to apply alternative practices to detention whenever possible and without discrimination.



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## [Hadi vows to thwart attempts to divide Yemen](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-05-23 21:54

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has vowed to keep the country united and to confront all internal and external attempts to divide the country.

In a televised speech to mark the 30th anniversary of the unification between north and south Yemen on May 22, Hadi said that his country was facing serious challenges that threatened its unity, and a wave of diseases that had overwhelmed the country's fragile health system.

"We will defeat all who try to harm our homeland, culture, history, geography and the aspirations of our people. We will not allow anyone to drag the country into chaos, violence and terrorism," he said.

Hadi reiterated his government's willingness to comply with peace initiatives that could end the war in Yemen. Hadi's speech comes as his forces battle two rebellions in the north and south of Yemen.

The Iranian-backed Houthis seized control of Sanaa in late 2014, forcing Hadi to call for military intervention from Arab countries. In the south, the separatist South Transitional Council (STC) declared self-rule in Aden and other southern provinces, blocking the return of the internationally recognized government.

Vowing to face all challenges, the president said: "We are making every effort to restore the state and end the coup and rebellion in the north and south of the country. We have dealt positively with all peace calls and all humanitarian initiatives," he said.

Hadi ordered his forces positioned in Abyan on May 11 to push toward Aden to drive separatists out of the strategic city and other provinces, triggering heavy fighting with separatists. Over the past couple of days, Yemen's army has dispatched heavy equipment and military forces to Abyan to reinforce the government's troops battling to break the military impasse.

Residents in Abyan reported seeing a convoy of flatbed trucks carrying tanks, armored vehicles and heavy machine guns heading to Abyan's Shouqra.

Hadi said that separatists seized control of state bodies in Aden, obstructed the return of the government, blocked the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement and attacked army troops in the southern provinces, stressing that his government was still willing to implement the agreement.

"We affirm that the Riyadh Agreement is still, to date, an available option that offers solutions for these problems," he said.

### **Coronavirus cases**

The number of coronavirus cases in government-controlled areas has increased to 193 with 13 new cases in Aden, Hadramout, Shabwa and Taiz. Three deaths have also been reported, the Aden-based national coronavirus committee said in a statement. Yemen recorded its first case of coronavirus on April 10 in the province of Hadramout.

Yemeni Health Minister Dr. Nasser Baoum has urged western envoys to Yemen to send medical teams to the port city of Aden to help local health authorities investigate the causes of hundreds of deaths reported since early last month.

At a meeting with European ambassadors to Yemen, the minister said that the deteriorating health situation in Aden required urgent intervention from international health care experts. Health officials and international non-government organizations working in Aden say that malaria, dengue and chikungunya, coronavirus and other diseases have killed hundreds of people in the city since early last month.



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UN: Yemen's health system 'has in effect collapsed' as COVID-19 spreads  
Aden labs run out of reagents as Yemen reports new virus cases