

# Egypt to ban Ramadan gatherings to counter spread of coronavirus

Author:

Tue, 2020-04-07 20:15

CAIRO: Egypt will ban any public religious gatherings during the holy Muslim fasting month Ramadan starting in around two weeks to counter the spread of the new coronavirus, a government statement said on Tuesday.

Muslims usually break the fast at sunset together with their families, go to the mosque to pray and spend maximum time with relatives.

But with health experts recommending social distancing measures during the global coronavirus crisis, Egypt will ban any gatherings and public iftars, or fast-breaking meals, as well as collective social activities, the ministry of Islamic endowments said in a statement.

Typically mass iftars are held for poor people.

The ban will also apply to the seclusion of Itikaf when Muslims spend the last 10 days of the month in mosques to pray and meditate, the ministry said. Egypt has reported more than 1,300 confirmed cases of the coronavirus with more than 250 deaths, according to a Reuters tally.

Egypt is home to some 100 million people and also the seat of the Al-Azhar university, Egypt's highest religious authority and one of the world's most eminent seats of Sunni Muslim learning.

Ramadan will start around April 23 depending on the sighting of the moon marking the start of the month.

Egypt already last month ordered mosques and churches to shut their doors to worshippers. Prayer calls are broadcast via loudspeakers.



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Virus pandemic hits Egypt's Ramadan preparations, prayers Egypt Coptic church suspends Easter Holy Week services over virus

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## [Israeli security agency says it arrested alleged Iran spy](#)

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1586274824684783700

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JERUSALEM: Israel's domestic security agency said Tuesday it arrested an Israeli citizen alleged to have spied for Iran.

The Shin Bet alleged in a statement the man was in contact with Iranian agents abroad, where he was given money, guidance and encryption tools. The Shin Bet said the man was expected to provide information on strategic Israeli sites, ways to promote division in Israeli society, carry out attacks against Israeli targets and enlist Arab citizens of Israel to assist Iran. The man, whose identity was barred from publication by an Israeli court, was arrested last month and indicted Tuesday for “serious security-related offenses.”

The Shin Bet said the arrest highlights Iranian efforts “to carry out spy and terror activity within Israel, this also at a time when the world is facing the coronavirus epidemic which has badly spread in Iran.”

Iran is facing the worst virus outbreak in the Middle East. Iran’s state TV said Tuesday the new coronavirus has killed another 133 people, pushing the country’s death toll to 3,872 amid 62,589 confirmed cases.

Israel and Iran are bitter enemies who have long fought a shadow war that over the last year has increasingly spilled out into the open. And although both countries are occupied with fighting COVID-19, the illness caused by the new virus, hostilities between them remain.



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# Israel seeks immediate resumption of talks on citizens held in Gaza

Author:

Reuters

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JERUSALEM/GAZA, April 7 : Israel called on Tuesday for the immediate resumption of talks on the return of four Israelis held for years in the Gaza Strip after the Palestinian territory's Hamas rulers said they might be willing to move forward on the issue.

Last week, Israel linked any future coronavirus aid to Gaza on progress in efforts to recover two soldiers who went missing in the 2014 war and two civilians who separately slipped into the enclave. Hamas holds all four. The Islamist group has never stated whether the two soldiers are dead or alive, but neither has it provided a sign of life, as it has done in a previous similar case.

It has said that returning the four would require negotiating a prisoner swap and would not be done in exchange for humanitarian aid.

In a statement on Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said his national security team "stands ready to take constructive action with the goal of returning the fallen and the missing and of ending the affair, and are calling for an immediate dialogue via mediators."

In past rounds of talks, Egypt, Qatar and the United Nations have served as intermediaries.

Yehya Al-Sinwar, Hamas chief in Gaza, has rejected the linkage to coronavirus aid but on Thursday said he saw "a possible initiative to revive this issue" of the Israelis held in the territory if Israel frees jailed Palestinians.

"A prisoner swap will exact a big price" from Israel, he told Hamas's Al-Aqsa TV, saying that were it to start by releasing sick, old and female prisoners "we may offer something partial in return."

Hamas, hoping to head off a contagion it says has so far caused 13 cases in blockaded Gaza, wants Israel to ease economic conditions. Israel is also loathe to deal with a new humanitarian crisis on its border with Gaza, now sealed by both sides.

Israel in the past has freed hundreds of jailed Palestinians, including many militants, in exchange for the recovery of dead or captive Israelis.

But rightists in Netanyahu's ent coalition government, including Defense Minister Naftali Bennett, oppose any further releases of Palestinian militants.



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Gaza sewing factories try to meet growing demand for protective gear  
Israel links COVID-19 aid for Gaza to recovering soldiers

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## [‘Barrier of love’: Palestinian civilians set up coronavirus checkpoints](#)

Author:

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1586271903054527000

Tue, 2020-04-07 14:38

EIN YABROUD, Palestine: Wearing a face mask and an orange vest while brandishing a thermometer, Palestinian Moayad Samha looks similar to the

countless others manning COVID-19 checkpoints across the world.

But Samha does not work for the Palestinian Authority – he is a lawyer and one of dozens of civilians deployed along rural roads in the occupied West Bank to enforce coronavirus controls.

Some fear the civilian checkpoints will foster resentment among Palestinians, as villages with no COVID-19 cases turn away residents from places that have recorded an outbreak.

But Samha told AFP that he and others doing roadside monitoring were striving to protect the whole territory from a full-scale epidemic.

“We are trying to detect the virus as much as is possible with our limited means,” Samha said at the checkpoint in his home village of Ein Yabroud.

Following agreements with Israel in the 1990s, the Palestinian government controls major cities in the West Bank, but the Israeli army controls 60 percent of the territory.

Palestinian police cannot enter many rural villages without first coordinating with the Israelis, who can refuse permission.

Those Israeli restrictions, and chronic cash shortages faced by the Palestinian government, have hindered efforts to contain the virus.

So the Palestinian police have called on volunteers to help do the job.

The Palestinian interior ministry has approved the scheme, calling it key to containment efforts.

The West Bank, which has been under near total lockdown for weeks, has 250 confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Ein Yabroud has no confirmed cases but the village of Dayr Jarir, roughly 1.5 kilometers (one mile) to the east, has several coronavirus patients.

Drivers who approached the Ein Yabroud checkpoint on Monday were all stopped.

Samha told anyone with an elevated temperature to hold their breath for 10 to 15 seconds, in an attempt to see if they cough or feel discomfort.

If someone presented possible COVID-19 symptoms, he called officials in nearby Ramallah to conduct a test.

Other volunteers checked travelers’ IDs to determine their place of origin.

People from towns or cities with many confirmed cases were turned away.

Mohammed Hawih, who is in charge of the village’s checkpoints, told AFP the procedures differed depending on the person.

“Residents of some places are allowed to stop in the village to buy things, but those from other towns and villages are not,” he said.

But he pointed out the Ein Yabroud checkpoint is called the “barrier of love” and was designed for the protection of everyone.

Hawih and others said civilian checkpoints were a response to persistent new infections in small villages and refugee camps far from main Palestinian cities.

Volunteers in different locations communicate via the Zello app, which works like a walkie-talkie.

Some villages have even produced uniforms for their civilian protectors, with checkpoint staff in Dura Al-Qara, adjacent to Ein Yabrud, wearing yellow outfits emblazoned with the village council’s name.

At the Ein Yabroud checkpoint, a key priority has been preventing the Israeli army from entering the village during patrols or raids.

There are more than 9,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Israel and Palestinians fear that troops from the Jewish state might cause further West Bank infections.

Hawih claimed to have forced soldiers to turn back by blocking their path on several occasions.

Concern has also risen about a possible surge in West Bank infections caused by the thousands of Palestinians who have returned home in recent days from jobs in Israel.

When a large truck arrived in Dura Al-Qara on Monday, the driver was told to open the rear doors. His ID and destination were checked before he was allowed to pass.

Checkpoint staff said they were on the lookout for anyone trying to sneak through the village after returning from Israel, instead of entering mandatory quarantine.

Abdul Rahman Hussein, an official at the checkpoint, said looking for returnees from Israel was a civic duty.

“Our brothers in the central government can’t reach us in this area, but if there is something urgent they come.”

So far, he said, by working with other local checkpoints, “we have caught four sick people” seeking to avoid quarantine.



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“Pride of Palestine” in fighting shape to reignite MMA career Palestinian, Syrian refugees in Lebanon camps brace for virus

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# Kuwait locks down two districts, extends public holiday over coronavirus

Author:

Reuters

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1586265094063910400

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DUBAI: Kuwait placed a full lockdown on two densely-populated districts and extended a public holiday by two weeks until April 26 as precautionary measures against the coronavirus, the cabinet said on Monday.

It also extended its partial curfew by two hours in the morning to run from 5 p.m. until 6 a.m. effective Monday until further notice. The interior minister urged people to stay indoors even during non-curfew hours.

The Gulf Arab country has recorded 665 cases of the new coronavirus and one death so far.

It declared a two-week public holiday from March 12 except for entities providing essential services, which has since been extended.

On Monday, the cabinet said all ministries and government institutions would now remain on holiday until April 26.

The two districts to be put under a two-week "complete isolation" are Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula, two heavily populated areas where poorer expatriate workers live.

"The decision to isolate (the two area areas) is in order to test everyone in there and treat them so it does not impact other areas," the state news agency KUNA reported the interior minister as saying.

Countries of the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have recorded almost 8,000 cases of infection and 60 deaths.



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Kuwait launches online database for disadvantaged families to register for aid amid coronavirus pandemic  
Kuwait's Ministry of Interior launches new online services amid coronavirus pandemic