

Palestinians share rituals of last 10 days of Ramadan

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RAMALLAH: Ramadan will end in just a few days, and Palestinians share their rituals of how they spend the last 10 days of the holy month.

During the last 10 days of Ramadan, Duha Asous, a sexagenarian from Burin village near Nablus, makes cakes with dates, walnuts and cinnamon to distribute to neighbors and the poor. "Now, if you walk in the streets of Burin, you can smell the cake from a meter's distance," Asous proudly tells Arab News.

Asous reminisces about the Ramadan of 40 years ago when they would bake breads and potatoes with chicken in a wood-burning oven, the flavor of which she misses today.

On Friday, Asous visits Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem with her friends and family to perform Friday prayers.

"It is an opportunity as we cannot reach Jerusalem throughout the year, except in the month of Ramadan."

Sheikh Talib Al-Silwadi, one of the most prominent Islamic preachers and guides in Ramallah, told Arab News that he urges fasting people during his Friday and daily sermons to pay Ramadan charity and zakat, annual charity money, to poor people so that they can buy what they need to celebrate Eid. Al-Silwadi also advises people to do more good deeds and worship, especially in the last 10 days of Ramadan, to obtain double reward from God.

Hundreds of people also

sit for I'tikaf either in Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem or nearby mosques to pray in seclusion until the Eid crescent is sighted. Many Palestinians also go to perform Umrah to Makkah; and this year has been different as for the first time in two years, since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, Palestinians have traveled for Umrah.

Then there is Al-Musaharati, where young people wake up people for sahoor and wish families a blissful Ramadan, and in return get cash or gifts as an appreciation for voluntarily keeping the centuries-old tradition alive.

There is also a lot of hustle and bustle in the market after dinner until sahoor as people excitedly prepare for Eid Al-Fitr.

The streets are decorated with colorful lights and lanterns, and there are numerous stalls selling delectable corns, beans and boiled chickpeas dishes, in addition to tea and coffee.

Ramallah's two famous ice cream shops – Rakab Ice Cream and Baladna Ice Cream – treat adults and children to their famous product. Some people also treat themselves to shawarmas and falafel sandwiches after binging on heavy

traditional dishes for almost a month.

On Saturdays, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship who live in Jil, Triangle and the Negev go shopping to the West Bank markets, where goods can be bought at a lower price than in Israel.

Some people go out for long walks to enjoy the last nights of Ramadan while others host friends and families and for iftar meals before the holy month ends.



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[Lebanon halts passport renewals as](#)

fears of exodus grow

Author:

Fri, 2022-04-29 23:08

BEIRUT: Lebanese authorities have stopped accepting applications for passport renewals, saying they are unable to keep up with demand, as the country's worsening economic crisis pushes people to leave the country.

The Lebanese General Security has said that it will suspend passport renewals from this week and that its stock of passports will cover only current applicants.

The announcement has sparked fears that authorities are determined to stop people leaving Lebanon, limiting their freedom of movement.

Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, director-general of General Security, said: "The passport application platform has scheduled appointments until April 2023, and passports will be delivered to all those who have already applied until that date."

Lebanese have been rushing to get biometric passports since 2020, with requests for renewals 10 times higher than in previous years.

Locals anticipated a rise in passport fees, so rushed to get new documents, while expats took advantage of their vacations in Lebanon to renew their passports for about \$35, avoiding the \$200 or \$300 payment required at Lebanese embassies abroad.

A study by the General Directorate of General Security found that 69 percent of people obtained passports without using them, and that about 20,000 citizens renewed their passports in 2021, although they had two more years before their documents expired.

The study also found that more than 15,000 passports were processed, but were never claimed by their owners.

The General Security said: "As of 2020, our main and regional centers had 10 times more passport applications than previous years, which affected our passport inventory."

Brig. Gen. Mounir Akiki, from General Security, told Arab News that the rising number of applications and dwindling stock forced authorities to act.

New conditions were issued in February for renewing passports that some believed were impossible to meet.

Requirements included having a valid residency abroad, a valid visa affixed to the passport to be renewed, an embassy appointment within a month of the date of submitting the application, or evidence of continuing studies abroad, or medical reports if the purpose of renewing the passport is to continue treatment abroad, or to show a signed work contract and necessary documents

if the purpose is to work abroad.

In addition, the biometric passport fee was raised from 300,000 Lebanese pounds (\$200) to 600,000 Lebanese pounds (valid for five years) and from 500,000 Lebanese pounds to 1.2 million Lebanese pounds (valid for 10 years).

Akiki said that issues with passport were also behind the General Security's decision.

"In 2021, we realized the repercussions of the economic crisis in Lebanon and signed a contract with the French company that prints Lebanese passports worth \$12 million in return for printing 1 million passports, but the company requested to transfer a certain amount as a documentary credit to start printing, and according to the Code of Money and Credit in Lebanon, contracts must be signed in Lebanese pounds and not in dollars."

He added: "When we signed the contract with the French company, the dollar exchange rate was based on the official rate, i.e. 1,500 Lebanese pounds to the dollar, and there was no exchange platform affiliated with the Central Bank that sets rates in accordance with financial market movements."

This affected the continuity of the work. Akiki claimed that Ibrahim urged several politicians to end the crisis, but without success.

According to Akiki, there will be no passports available after April 2023 if the issue is not resolved by then.

Discussing the possibility of renewing old passports as an alternative, Akiki said: "We cannot do that. The old passport has been canceled and can no longer be used. This decision is made by the International Civil Aviation Organization."

Akiki said that the contract with the French company was worth around 22 billion Lebanese pounds, based on the official exchange rate.

But he said the value increases to around 300 billion Lebanese pounds as per the central bank's Sayrafa platform rate (around 22,000 Lebanese pounds to the dollar).

The Lebanon Crisis Observatory at the American University of Beirut has predicted a wave of emigration from Lebanon in coming years.

A key indicator is that 77 percent of young people are considering emigrating, while specialists and professionals are also leaving in search of better working conditions and income.

Thousands of Lebanese, including teachers, doctors, nurses and university graduates, left the country two years ago, and the number of departures increased after the Beirut port explosion.

The World Bank estimates that Lebanon will need at least 12 years to return to 2017 gross domestic product levels.

This will pressure hundreds of thousands to leave the country in order to invest, work, study and retire abroad, the bank said.



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[Head of Yemeni presidential leadership council arrives in Abu Dhabi](#)

Author:

Fri, 2022-04-29 21:58

ABU DHABI: The head of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council Rashad Al-Alimi arrived in Abu Dhabi on Friday for an official visit that will last for several days.

Al-Alimi will hold official talks with the Emirati leadership on strengthening and developing relations between the two countries in the political, economic, security and military fields.

Al-Alimi will also talk reconstruction and mobilizing political and development support for Yemen to face the repercussions of the war ignited by the Iranian-backed Houthi militia, according to the Yemeni News Agency (SABA).

He also praised the Emirati political, military and humanitarian support provided to Yemen over the past few years.

Al-Alimi arrived in the UAE capital from Jeddah, where he had been received by King Salman at Al-Salam Palace on Wednesday.

The meeting was also attended by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.



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[Syria accused of flouting Chemical Weapons Convention at UN](#)

Author:

Fri, 2022-04-29 21:36

LONDON: On the 25th anniversary of the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the US on Friday accused Syria of flouting the treaty and obstructing inspectors.

“The Assad regime has used chemical weapons against its own people on at least eight occasions since joining the convention,” said Richard M. Mills Jr., US deputy ambassador to the UN.

“And the picture is even more grim than that. The US assesses that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons at least 50 times since the conflict in Syria began,” he added.

“Syria, as a state party to the CWC, agreed to fully disclose the precise

location, aggregate quantity and detailed inventory of chemical weapons it possesses, yet as we've heard countless times ... Syria's declaration still cannot be considered complete and accurate."

Izumi Nakamitsu, UN undersecretary-general of disarmament affairs, told the Security Council: "Despite the accession of Syria to the CWC, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons continues to document instances of chemical weapons use in Syria."

She added: "This council has not fulfilled its responsibility to hold accountable the perpetrators of these heinous acts."

Nakamitsu said while the regime had agreed to limited talks in Beirut, the OPCW had yet to receive documentation about Syria's remaining stockpiles, an attack on a military installation in March 2021, and an attack on the city of Douma in 2018. The regime had also refused to issue a visa for a key inspector, she added.

"The Syrian Arab Republic has agreed to the limited round of consultations, while at the same time requesting the exclusion of one OPCW secretariat expert," she said.

"Until these outstanding issues are closed, the international community cannot have full confidence that the Syrian Arab Republic's full chemical weapons program has been eliminated."

Syrian Ambassador Bassam Sabbagh said the inspector in question had been denied access because of a "lack of objectivity and professionalism." He accused the OPCW and the CWC of political bias.

Russian Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya said the convention had become a "punitive" instrument wielded in the interests of a "narrow group of countries" against Syria.

"At its 25th anniversary, the OPCW has very serious systemic problems and a tarnished reputation," he added.

"Russia unconditionally supports the CWC and is committed to its letter and spirit. What gives rise to question to us is how its provisions are being implemented by the OPCW."

Mills, though, said: "In the face of irrefutable proof documented by the meticulous work of the OPCW that Syria is flouting its CWC obligation, the Assad regime in this chamber hurls preposterous accusations of bias at the OPCW independent and professional experts in a failed effort to immune them and distract from proven facts."

The UK, China and others also accused Syria of not cooperating with the international community, with France calling its use of chemical weapons "odious."

The UAE said while the CWC had succeeded in securing the disposal of "99 percent" of the world's chemical weapons, they were being sought by terrorist

groups such as Daesh.

“As we have recently witnessed in Al-Hasakah, terrorist groups continue to develop their methods of attack, and seek to obtain advanced weapons such as chemical weapons to achieve their nefarious goals,” said Mohamed Abushahab, the UAE’s deputy permanent representative.

“Accordingly, we stress the importance of continuing our fight against Daesh in Syria and elsewhere ... to prevent them from acquiring chemical weapons.”



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Jordanians enjoy Ramadan as normalcy returns after COVID-19

Author:

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JORDAN: Life returned to normal a few days before Ramadan when the Jordanian government eased the COVID-19 lockdown after nearly two years of restrictions.

To curb the spread of coronavirus – which took the lives of almost 14,000 Jordanians – the government imposed a lockdown that led to curfews and the closure of businesses, limiting the mobility of people.

People continue to wear masks as a precaution – however it is not mandatory to do so in open spaces. Stadiums, wedding halls, cafes, restaurants, Ramadan tents and iftar banquets are running at full capacity during iftar and sahoor.

Worshippers now stand shoulder-to-shoulder to offer prayers in mosques and churches.

“This is how mosques should be in Ramadan and this how we should pray, and anything other than that is abnormal,” said Abdulatif Al-Jarrah, comparing the Ramadan rituals of 2020 and 2021 with 2022.

As Ramadan 2020 coincided with the height of the coronavirus pandemic, Jordan completely closed mosques even for the five basic prayers, let alone Itikaf, where people go into seclusion to pray during the last 10 days of Ramadan.

With calls growing to ease some COVID-19 restrictions during Ramadan two years ago, the Jordanian authorities responded at the time by allowing people to walk and go for Fajr and Maghrib prayers in mosques for only 30 minutes.

“Ramadan in 2020 and 2021 was sad. I have never, ever experienced that sadness before, and not only because we were not allowed to pray at mosques but also because I was unable to invite my sons and daughters to iftar,” said 70-year-old Al-Jarrah.

Organizing big iftar feasts was not allowed in 2020 and 2021, and it remained almost impossible even after the easing some of the lockdown restrictions.

The easing of COVID-19 restrictions was not only a relief for worshippers but also for business owners, who are hopeful that this Ramadan and the summer season may bring some recovery for their hard-hit businesses.

Wedding venue owner Mohammad Bashaireh said that his business was closed for two years due to restrictions, incurring “big financial losses” that he hopes to make up for this summer season.

“I had to close my wedding venue for two years but at the same time I was

paying the rent of the property, and I was unable to lay off my employees and had to pay them their salaries under the defense orders,” he told Arab News.

Under the sixth defense order, which has been in effect since April 2020, companies are unable to lay off employees but instead can lower their salaries according to rules outlined by Jordan’s Social Security Corporation.

“The decision to allow large gatherings and cancel the capacity limit has really brought back the spirit of Ramadan,” said Sufyan Dweiri, who organizes Ramadan tents in Irbid, some 80 km north of Amman.

“Ramadan is solidarity and bringing together people. This spirit was missing during the past two years,” Dweiri said.

Amer Badran, the owner of a cafe in Amman, also expressed relief about the removal of COVID-19 restrictions, expressing hopes that Ramadan and the summer season would help his business to recover.

“In addition to the positive economic impact, removing restrictions has brought back the spirit of Ramadan ... People staying out until dawn at mosques, cafes, restaurants,” he said.



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