

# Egypt's Coptic Christians celebrate Assumption of Mary amid pandemic

Author:

Sat, 2020-08-22 23:05

CAIRO: Coptic Christians in Egypt celebrated the Assumption of Mary on Saturday, amid health and security measures to control the spread of coronavirus.

The celebrations followed a 15-day fast that started on Aug. 7. Security services increased their presence outside churches and side streets were closed to prevent overcrowding and congestion.

Among the monasteries that opened their doors to visitors during the fasting period were the Dronka Monastery in Assiut and the Historical Church of the Virgin Mary in Mostorod.

The churches took health and safety measures, such as having visitors wear masks. But, despite the pandemic and preventative steps recommended to contain the spread of the virus, the monasteries welcomed a large number of visitors who failed to maintain social distancing.

While the pandemic meant that churches witnessed a spiritual revival online, there was still an event at the Monastery of Darnaka Mountain in Asyut. Thousands took part in it without following anti-coronavirus measures, coming into close contact with each other and not wearing masks.

A zaffa (procession), deacons, priests and monks came out of the church during the ceremony that was led by Anba Yu'annis, bishop of Assiut. They went out from the ancient church bearing images of the Virgin Mary and crosses.

"This gathering with such a large number of people can possibly lead to a health disaster," said journalist Muhammad Mustafa Shardi, adding that the disease could be transmitted to large numbers of participants.

Pastor Paul Halim, a spokesman for the Coptic Orthodox Church, said that it had been agreed within the church to change the nature of the celebrations this year due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The churches are largely avoiding occasions that include gatherings of worshippers.

Halim added that precautionary measures would be tightened up inside churches as they would only admit a certain number of worshippers. There would be one worshipper per pew and those not wearing a facemask would be stopped from entering.

Anba Baiman, bishop of Naqada and Qus Qena and rapporteur of the Public Relations Committee of the Holy Synod of the Church, explained that the

second wave of coronavirus had started because of gatherings during celebrations between families and in public without the necessary precautions being taken.

He called upon all church members to take precautions during the celebrations in order to preserve public health.



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## [Iraq appeals for US help in Turkey row](#)

Sat, 2020-08-22 22:19

ISTANBUL: Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi has described Turkish attacks on Iraqi soil as “unacceptable” and urged the US to resolve the dispute in a meeting with US President Donald Trump.

Ankara and Baghdad have been negotiating since mid-June to solve the dispute over Turkish offensives in Kurdistan and other disputed territories. However, alienating Turkey could pose an economic threat to Iraq as Ankara is a key

trading partner.

The Iraqi constitution bans the use of its territory to attack neighboring countries.

“The only potential US card to play is the personal relationship between Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He could ask Ankara to temporarily halt its cross-border activities,” Joe Macaron, a Middle East foreign policy analyst at the Arab Center, told Arab News.

Macaron doubts that the US will impose sanctions or threaten Erdogan to achieve this objective.

On Aug. 11 a Turkish drone strike in northeastern Iraq killed two Iraqi border guards and the driver of their vehicle. The Iraqi military called it “flagrant aggression”.

The drone attack coincided with alleged meetings of Iraqi high-ranking officials with members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), who are based in northern Iraq.

Baghdad canceled a Turkish ministerial visit and summoned the Turkish ambassador in response to the strike.

The Kurdistan Regional Government Ministry of Interior also urged Turkey and the PKK to continue fighting outside Iraq.

Macaron said there is an informal between Turkey, Iran and the Kurdistan Regional Government against the PKK in northern Iraq. He added that there is little the US can do on an issue that is viewed as low-priority.

## **FASTFACT**

**Ankara and Baghdad have been negotiating since mid-June to solve the dispute over Turkish offensives in Kurdistan and other disputed territories.**

“Turkey has military bases inside the Iraqi border and there are several pending challenges between Ankara and Baghdad, including the water quota in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers,” he said.

During the 1990s Turkey launched several military incursions into northern Iraq and established a dozen military bases in the region.

Macaron says the success of any mediation will require Arab pressure on the US to become involved.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein also urged his Egyptian, Jordanian, Saudi and Kuwaiti counterparts, as well as the Arab League, for diplomatic backing to confront Ankara and force it to “pull out its troops who have infiltrated Iraq.”

France also criticized Turkey's strikes in the region and emphasized Iraqi sovereignty in a statement.

However, Ankara has accused Iraq of "turning a blind eye to the presence of PKK terrorists on its soil."

Aaron Stein, director of Research at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, said the US supports Turkey's right to strike against PKK in northern Iraq and has a mechanism to deconflict the two countries' operations.

"That deconfliction doesn't always work well, but I don't see US policy changing. Turkish strikes are making US partner operations in the north more difficult, but I don't see how policy will change because of that fact," he told Arab News.



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# Iran says 164 health care professionals among pandemic dead

Author:

Associated Press

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Sat, 2020-08-22 18:23

TEHRAN: Iran's health minister said Saturday that at least 164 health care professionals have died while battling the coronavirus pandemic, state media reported.

The official IRNA news agency quoted Saeed Namaki as saying new cases have been reported that will be added to that number.

The latest toll of health care worker deaths from the virus is 26 more than the 138 cases reported July 22. Iran at the time said some 12,000 health care workers had been infected.

Iran is grappling with the deadliest outbreak of the virus in the Middle East.

Earlier on Saturday, the country put the total death toll from COVID-19, the illness caused by the virus, at 20,502 out of nearly 356,800 confirmed cases. Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said 126 patients died since Friday and there were 2,028 new confirmed cases over the same period. She said 3,850 patients are in critical condition, though 307,702 have recovered so far.



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## [Sudan's Hamdok says government ready to cooperate with ICC over Darfur](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2020-08-22 18:37

KHARTOUM: Sudan's prime minister said on Saturday the country was ready to cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC) so those accused of war crimes in Darfur appear before the tribunal, a list that includes ousted

President Omar Al-Bashir.

Bashir, who has been in jail in Khartoum since he was toppled after mass protests last year, is wanted by the ICC for alleged war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity in Darfur in a conflict that killed an estimated 300,000 people.

The government reached a deal with rebel groups in February that all five Sudanese ICC suspects should appear before the court but Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok had not previously publicly affirmed Sudan's position.

"I reiterate that the government is fully prepared to cooperate with the ICC to facilitate access to those accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity," Hamdok said in a televised address on the anniversary of his ascent to office.

Sudan's transitional government, a three-year joint civilian-military arrangement led by Hamdok, says it is close to a peace deal with some rebel groups active in Darfur, a vast region roughly the size of France.

The government and some of the rebels are expected to initial an agreement on Aug. 28.

Hamdok also said during his TV address that Sudan had come a long way towards being removed from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism.

There are intense communications with the American administration about removing Sudan from the list and significant progress is expected in the coming weeks, a senior government source told Reuters on Sunday.

Washington added Sudan to the list in 1993 over allegations that Bashir's Islamist government was supporting terrorist groups at the time.

The designation makes Sudan technically ineligible for debt relief and financing from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. The US Congress would need to approve Sudan's removal from the list.



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## [Pompeo to visit Israel, UAE; peace agreement on agenda](#)

Sat, 2020-08-22 21:07

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration will send two top officials to the Middle East this week in a bid to capitalize on momentum from the historic agreement between Israel and the UAE to establish diplomatic relations. Three diplomats say Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and President Donald Trump's senior adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner plan to make separate, multiple-nation visits to the region in the coming days to push Arab-Israeli rapprochement in the aftermath of the Israel-UAE deal.

Pompeo is expected to depart on Sunday for Israel, Bahrain, Oman, UAE and Sudan, according to the diplomats, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the itinerary has not yet been finalized or publicly announced. Kushner plans to leave later in the week for Israel, Bahrain, Oman and Morocco, the diplomats said.

Neither trip is expected to result in announcements of immediate breakthrough, the diplomats said, although both are aimed at finalizing at least one, and potentially more, normalization deals with Israel in the near future.

Pompeo also plans to meet in Qatar with members of the Taliban to discuss intra-Afghan peace talks that are key to the withdrawal of remaining US forces in Afghanistan, the diplomats said.

The White House and State Department had no comment on the planned trips, which will come as the administration steps up efforts to push for Arab-Israeli normalization even without a resolution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

They also come as the administration has taken the step of triggering the restoration of all international sanctions on Iran.

Israel and the UAE announced on August 13 they would establish full diplomatic relations, in a US-brokered deal that required Israel to halt its contentious plan to annex occupied West Bank land sought by the Palestinians. The historic agreement delivered a key foreign policy victory to Trump as he seeks re-election.



US and Israeli officials have suggested that more Arab nations may soon follow the UAE's lead.



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UAE minister says UAE-Israel agreement not directed at Iran