

# Mesaharati: An ancient career fights extinction in digital age

Author:

Sun, 2019-05-05 23:02

CAIRO: A mesaharati is a person who wakes others up before dawn in order to eat before their fast during Ramadan.

The job has been around for generations, and despite the technological revolution, it is an honored tradition that continues to this day.

The Al-Jabarti family, for instance – from which the great historian Abdul Rahman Al-Jabarti is descended – is famous for having members perform the task.

Its origins, though, are disputed. Historian Abdelmajid Abdul Aziz said mesaharati first appeared in Egypt during the Fatimid dynasty, arguably the most decorated period for Ramadan celebrations.

According to 15th century Egyptian historian Mohammed bin Iyas, the profession began in the days of the Caliph Bi'amr Allah, who commanded citizens to sleep immediately after the Taraweeh prayer.

He would then send out his soldiers in the early hours, knocking on doors and shouting before dawn prayers began, to wake people for suhoor.

Abdul Aziz said that the Egyptian Governor Ibn Ishaq was the first to individually perform the task professionally in 832 AH (1432 CE). He would walk from the city of Fustat to the mosque at Amr ibn Al-Aas, and call out “O worshipers of Allah, eat. Suhoor is a blessing.”

That tradition has continued until modern times, lasting almost 600 years.

But now, it is facing extinction as fewer people are drawn to take up the role, and technology supplants it. 'Am Magdy, a 59-year-old mesaharati, told Arab News that his work begins from the last day of the month of Shaaban all the way until after Eid Al-Fitr.

He has performed the task annually for more than 40 years, having inherited the role from his father, and knows the names of all his neighbors so as to call each one personally before dawn.

Magdy said that he thought of leaving the profession, though, because of the spread of television and the extension of programs into the early hours of the morning, but his neighbors and children asked him to continue.

Sometimes he is accompanied by a group of children as he roams the streets, echoing phrases that have been recalled over centuries such as: “Wake up sleeping person, there is only one God, it is time for suhoor fasting people.”

He also rhythmically bangs a drum called a “baza,” which according to him is loud enough to wake up a whole neighborhood. After Eid Al-Fitr prayers, he then passes through the areas he walks one last time to collect money for his efforts throughout Ramadan.

But he is unsure whether his sons will inherit the task as he did. “My children are not interested in the profession. I used to take them with me when they were young, and they would be so happy to see their friends responding to our calls. But over time they lost this joy and became preoccupied with their work, and some even advised me to stop practicing it myself,” he said.



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King Salman addresses Saudi Arabia to mark the start of Ramadan

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# UN calls for a week-long humanitarian truce in Libya

Sun, 2019-05-05 19:43

TRIPOLI: The United Nations called on Sunday for a week-long humanitarian truce in Libya where forces loyal to the eastern-based military commander Khalifa Haftar have been waging an offensive to take control of Tripoli for four weeks.

In a statement the UN Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) urged the warring sides to implement a a truce starting Monday morning at 4 a.m. local time to coincide with the beginning of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan.

“UNSMIL calls on all parties to deliver of humanitarian aid to those in need and to ensure the freedom of movement for civilians during this truce,” UNSMIL said in a statement.

There was no immediate comment from Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA) force nor from the internationally recognized government in the capital.

Artillery shelling could be heard on Sunday coming from southern outskirts where the LNA has been trying to breach defenses by Tripoli forces.

The fighting has displaced around 50,000 people, the UN has said.



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Daesh attack on Haftar camp in south Libya kills 9 soldiers Fighting rages overnight in Libyan capital

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## Brother of Algeria's ex-President Bouteflika placed in custody by military judge

Sun, 2019-05-05 19:10

ALGIERS: An Algerian military judge has placed the youngest brother of former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and two former intelligence chiefs in custody, state TV reported, joining a string of businessmen and officials under investigation over corruption ahead of a presidential election.

Said Bouteflika and the two generals, Athmane Tartag and Mohamed Mediene, were arrested on Saturday, state TV said on Sunday.

The three are under investigation over "harming the army's authority and plotting against state authority," it said, quoting a statement from the prosecutor at the military court of Blida, south of Algiers.

It did not elaborate on the allegations but the news that the three have been detained may go some way to satisfying protesters in Algeria who have demanded a broad overhaul of the political system since President Bouteflika stepped down last month.

TV footage showed the defendants entering the court near a military base, 40 km from Algiers.

Said Bouteflika, who served as a top adviser to the presidency, acted as Algeria's de facto ruler after his brother suffered a stroke in 2013 that left him in a wheelchair.

Mediene had been intelligence chief for 25 years until his dismissal by Bouteflika in 2015.

An Algerian military judge placed in custody the youngest brother of former President Abdelaziz [#Bouteflika](#), Said Bouteflika, and two former intelligence chiefs, state TV reported <https://t.co/UegcuyxnNd> [pic.twitter.com/k7IYmK8GxA](https://pic.twitter.com/k7IYmK8GxA)

– Arab News (@arabnews) [May 5, 2019](#)

Massive protests calling for a radical change to Bouteflika's government pushed the ailing president to resign on April 2. Demonstrators continue to demand the removal of all those linked the former administration.

Army chief of staff Ahmed Gaed Salah has promised to rid the country of corrupt politicians, oligarchs and military officials to restore confidence among the people.

Last month he accused Mediene of trying to undermine the transition that is due to end with the presidential election on July 4.

Several businessmen, including the country's richest man, Issad Rebrab, have been placed in custody pending completion of investigations of corruption allegations.

Finance Minister Mohamed Loukal and former Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyhia also appeared in an Algiers court last week on charges related to "dissipation of public funds."

Protesters are also seeking the resignation of Prime Minister Nouredine Bedoui and interim president Abdelkader Bensalah, who replaced Bouteflika for 90 days to oversee the election,

Bensalah, head of the upper house of parliament, is considered by Algerians as part of the ruling elite that has run the country since independence from France in 1962.



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Said Bouteflika, brother of former Algerian president, two former intelligence chiefs arrested  
Bouteflika seeks forgiveness from Algerians

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## [Warplanes strike hospital in Syria's rebel-held Idlib](#)

Sun, 2019-05-05 18:12

BEIRUT: Warplanes struck a hospital in Syria's northwestern Idlib province on

Sunday, knocking it out of service, as government forces continued to bombard the rebel-held region following insurgent attacks last week.

The latest fighting has killed dozens of people and displaced tens of thousands in Idlib and nearby rebel-held areas, who fled to safer regions further north. It's the heaviest fighting in months, and has raised fears the government may launch a wider offensive to retake the country's last major rebel stronghold.

Attacks on hospitals and clinics in the past have preceded major government offensives on rebel-held areas, including the 2016 attack on rebel-held parts of the northern city of Aleppo and last year's offensive on eastern suburbs of the capital, Damascus.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Russian warplanes were behind the attack on the main hospital in the rebel-held village of Hass. The opposition-run activist collective Baladi News also reported the airstrike on the hospital, adding that it was not clear if there were casualties.

The Observatory said that since the early hours of Sunday, Russian warplanes carried out more than 50 airstrikes on Idlib and nearby Hama province. It said government and Russia bombardment killed at least six people on Sunday in different rebel-held areas.

Turkey's Defense Ministry meanwhile said that two Turkish soldiers were wounded on Saturday when mortar shells fell near one of their positions in Hama province.

Turkey and Russia, who back opposite sides in Syria's eight-year conflict, brokered a truce in September that averted a government offensive on Idlib. But the truce has been repeatedly violated, and parts of it have yet to be implemented, including the withdrawal of Al-Qaeda-linked militants from the front lines. Two major highways that cut through rebel-held areas were supposed to be reopened before the end of 2018 but remain closed.

The latest fighting erupted on April 30, three days after Al-Qaeda-linked militants launched attacks on the positions of government forces in northern Syria, killing 22 soldiers and pro-government gunmen.

"Any action taken by the Syrian Arab Army is legitimate since there has been no commitment to agreements reached," a Syrian security official was quoted as saying by the government-run Syrian Central Military Media.

Pro-government media said insurgents shelled villages near the front lines, killing one civilian.

State news agency SANA quoted an unnamed Syrian military official as saying that insurgents are preparing to launch an offensive on government-held areas, warning that such an attack "would mark the beginning of their end." Government troops and insurgents have been reinforcing their positions in recent days in a sign that violence is expected to continue as Muslims mark the holy month of Ramadan beginning Monday.



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## [Foreign domestic workers in Lebanon protest abuses](#)

Author:  
AFP  
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Sun, 2019-05-05 13:45

BEIRUT: Hundreds of foreign domestic workers demonstrated in the Lebanese capital Sunday to demand the scrapping of a sponsorship system that they complain leaves them open to abuse from employers. Lebanon hosts more than 250,000 registered domestic workers, the vast majority of them women, from countries including Ethiopia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

They are excluded from the labor law, and instead obtain legal residency through their employers' sponsorship under the so-called "kafala" system. The protesters marching in Beirut held up placards reading "No to slavery and yes to justice" and "Stop kafala."

"We want the cancelation of this system. There are employees imprisoned in houses and they need to have days off," Dozossissane, a 29-year-old Ethiopian, told AFP.

Lebanon's labor ministry introduced a standard contract for domestic workers in 2009, but the forms are often written in Arabic, a language many cannot read.

Activists regularly accuse the authorities of failing to take claims of abuse seriously, with maids, nannies and carers left at the mercy of employers. Amnesty International last month urged Lebanon to end what it called the "inherently abusive" migration sponsorship system and change the labor law to offer domestic workers more protection.

A report from the rights group that surveyed 32 domestic workers revealed "alarming patterns of abuse," including physical punishments, humiliating treatment and food deprivation.



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