

Palestinian families face another difficult Ramadan as aid funding dips

Author:

Thu, 2021-04-15 23:50

GAZA CITY: For the second year running, Hassan Abu Al-Amrain has missed out on relief aid for his family during the month of Ramadan.

There has been a significant drop in the amount of funding provided to local civil humanitarian charities due to the measures imposed to curb the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Abu Al-Amrain, 47, who lives in Gaza City said: "For the second year, the month of Ramadan has been the most difficult for us. We would usually wait for supplies of goods and food provided by charitable associations because I am unable to buy them."

Anxiety dominates Abu Al-Amrain, who suffers from illnesses that have kept him out of work for 20 years.

"The situation is very difficult, and I do not know how I will provide my family's needs," he told Arab News.

More than two-thirds of the Gaza Strip's population of some 2 million people suffers from poverty or extreme poverty, according to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

Local statistics show that the unemployment rate was 43 percent before the pandemic, but it has now exceeded 50 percent, with heads of families losing their jobs.

For needy families, the month of Ramadan is an opportunity to receive financial donations and food aid, which help them endure the hardships of life in Gaza, which has been deteriorating over the past 15 years as a result of the Israeli blockade and internal division.

"COVID-19 deprived us of the bounties of the month of Ramadan. In previous years, we did not need aid for months after the end of Ramadan," said Abu Al-Amrain.

Abu Al-Amrain lives with his wife Hala, 35, and their four children in a small and dilapidated house in the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood, north of Gaza City.

"For many years, we have not tasted fresh meat except during Ramadan, with charitable assistance," Hala said, adding: "We do not have the ability to buy it."

In Gaza, a kilo of fresh beef is sold for 50 shekels (\$14). According to UNRWA data, about 80 percent of the population depends on humanitarian aid.

Due to a weak diet with little protein and vitamins, Hala suffers from an imbalance in his white and red blood cells, which causes dizziness and a rise in body temperature.

Doctors also discovered that her son Mohammed suffers from bone erosion, while her daughter Malak suffers from weak immunity and skin diseases, caused by malnutrition, as well as dampness and poor house conditions.

Abu Al-Amrain receives assistance from the Ministry of Social Affairs, which it disburses to the poorest families in the Gaza Strip once every three months, and it is estimated at 750 shekels.

But Abu Al-Amrain complains that aid has been irregular in the last two years and is not sufficient for the minimum requirements of life.

Despite the difficult epidemiological situation in Gaza, with a sudden increase in the number of COVID-19 infections, Abu Al-Amrain and his family lack the most basic protective equipment such as masks, detergents, and sterilizers.

The government administration, headed by Hamas in Gaza, has imposed strict measures to reduce infections.

These restrictions impacted the level of services provided by charitable institutions, especially food aid and Iftar.

An official at Al-Khair Foundation, who refused to reveal his name, told Arab News: "For the second year in a row, we will not organize Iftar for the poor, orphans, and the marginalized due to the emergency measures associated with COVID-19, as well as the decline in the level of external financing associated with Ramadan activities."

Director of the Network of NGOs in Gaza, Amjad Al-Shawa, said that international funding has dropped more than 40 percent due to donor countries focusing on internal concerns and the pandemic.

Al-Shawa told Arab News that the Social Affairs Ministry's delay in disbursing the dues of the needy people in Gaza has exacerbated their suffering.

"Money and funding in Gaza are retreating and the poor are increasing," he said.



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[15 people hurt as train derails in northern Egypt](#)

Thu, 2021-04-15 23:35

CAIRO: Fifteen people were injured when a train derailed close to Minya El-Qamh station in Sharkia governorate, northern Egypt.

Khaled Mujahid, official spokesman for the Ministry of Health, said that 33 ambulances attended the scene of the accident and took the casualties to Minya El-Qamh Central Hospital. Six of the injured passengers were later discharged, he said, while the rest – who suffered minor and moderate

injuries, including fractures, wounds, abrasions and bruises – continue to receive care and treatment.

Two carriages of the train, which was traveling from Cairo to Dakahlia, left the tracks on Wednesday night but did not overturn. The driver of a train traveling in the opposite direction on an adjacent track managed to stop in time to avoid a collision.

An initial inspection by an investigation team from the Egyptian Public Prosecution found maintenance work was going on in the area, which might have contributed to the accident. The injured passengers were being questioned by the investigators to help establish what happened.

The crash came less than three weeks after a collision between two trains in Sohag governorate, Upper Egypt, in which 20 people were killed and 169 wounded.



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[Arab League chief 'deeply concerned' over Iran's uranium enrichment move](#)

Thu, 2021-04-15 23:21

CAIRO: The secretary-general of the Arab League has expressed his deep concerns over Iran's decision to increase its enrichment of uranium to 60 percent, nudging it ever closer to bomb-grade purity.

Ahmed Aboul Gheit has described Tehran's move as a dangerous development and a clear step toward developing a nuclear weapon, an official source at the General Secretariat of the Arab League said.

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US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday called Iran's announcement of an intent to begin enriching uranium at 60 percent purity "provocative." [Click here to read more.](#)



Further enriching uranium from 20 percent purity by using advanced centrifuges, added more doubts about the real goals of the Iranian nuclear program, as such high levels of enrichment were unnecessary for peaceful uses of nuclear energy, the source added.

Iran's decision is the latest violation of its obligations under the collapsed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, a nuclear deal that leading world powers are currently working to revive.

The league wants any renegotiated agreement to also address the concerns of Arab countries regarding Iran's destabilizing policies in the region and its ongoing interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries.





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Blinken calls Iran's uranium enrichment move 'provocative' European powers warn Iran over 'dangerous' uranium enrichment move

[Houthis to prosecute abducted Yemeni model](#)

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Thu, 2021-04-15 01:15

AL-MUKALLA: Iran-backed Houthis plan to launch a criminal investigation

against Entesar Al-Hammadi, a young Yemeni model and actress, who was abducted from a Sanaa street on Feb. 20, the model's lawyer Khaled Mohammed Al-Kamal said on Wednesday.

The kidnapping of Al-Hammadi and two of her friends is the latest in a string of attacks by the Houthis on dissidents and liberal women in areas under the group's control.

Al-Kamal told Arab News that a prosecutor from the rebel-controlled West Sanaa court will question Entesar on Sunday.

"My client was arrested without a warrant," Al-Kamal said by telephone, giving no information about the Houthis' explanation for the abduction.

Yemeni officials said the three actresses were traveling to shoot a drama series when the rebels stopped their vehicle on Sanaa's Hadda Street and took them to an unknown location.

Al-Hammadi was born to a Yemeni father and an Ethiopian mother and pursued her ambition to become a model despite growing up in a conservative society. The 20-year-old first caught the public's attention after she published images showing off traditional Yemeni costumes and she later appeared on a local television show talking about her dream of becoming an international supermodel.

The Houthis accused the abducted actresses of violating traditional Islamic dress codes.

Their detainment has sparked outrage inside and outside Yemen as human rights activists and government officials compared Houthi suppression of women to similar activities by terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh.

Moammar Al-Eryani, Yemen's minister for information, culture and tourism, said the rebels have launched a "systemic and organized" crackdown on Yemeni women in areas under their control.

"We call on the international community, the UN, the US envoys to Yemen and the women's protection organizations to condemn this crime and pressure the terrorist Houthi militia to immediately release the abductees," the minister wrote on social media. "They must stop the extortion of women and release all disappeared women from their secret prisons unconditionally."

Al-Hammadi told a local TV station last year that she wished she could travel abroad to work as a model, citing parental and societal resistance at home.

"It would be great if I was given an opportunity outside Yemen," she said.

Social media users have blasted the Houthis for snatching women from the street.

Huda Al-Sarari, a Yemeni activist, said that the abduction of Al-Hammadi is part of "a dirty" campaign by the rebels against women.

“My solidarity is with my dear Entisar and with all male and female abductees inside the militia’s prisons,” she wrote on Twitter.

Amat Al-Salam Al-Hajj, chairwoman of the Mothers of Abductees Association, an umbrella organization for thousands of female relatives of war prisoners, told Arab News that the Houthis have “brazenly” committed crimes against dissidents and women amid “unexplained” silence of international rights organizations.

“The Houthis have abducted models and female activists and committed flagrant violations of human rights before the eyes and ears of the UN, human rights organizations, and everyone else,” she said.



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[GCC calls on world powers to include Gulf concerns in Iran nuclear talks](#)

Wed, 2021-04-14 22:39

LONDON: The Iranian nuclear talks in Vienna must address the concerns and interests of Gulf countries to enhance security and stability in the region, the GCC secretary general said on Wednesday.

The comments by Nayef Al-Hajraf came in letters sent to the foreign ministers of the permanent members of the UN Security Council – the US, UK, France, china and Russia – and Germany.

The talks in Vienna are aimed at finding a way for the US to re-enter Tehran's nuclear agreement with world powers and have Iran comply again with its limits.

Al-Hajraf said the GCC is a major contributor to strengthening the security and stability of the region, and that the negotiations currently underway in Vienna should not be limited to the Iranian nuclear program, but rather should include Iran's destabilizing behavior, ballistic missiles, and paths. The talks have been thrown into disarray by a weekend attack on Iran's main Natanz nuclear enrichment site suspected to have been carried out by Israel. Tehran retaliated by announcing it would enrich uranium up to 60 percent – higher than it ever has before but still lower than weapons-grade levels of 90 percent.

The GCC chief warned that Iran's announcement of uranium enrichment is a dangerous and worrying indicator for regional and international security. Saudi Arabia similarly issued a statement, saying enriching at that level "could not be considered a program intended for peaceful purposes."

Al-Hajraf also called on the "international community to shoulder its responsibilities toward this dangerous and threatening development to regional and global peace and security."

Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit said he was "deeply concerned" over Iran's announcement of uranium enrichment, saying it is a "clear and certain step" toward developing a nuclear weapon and increases doubts about the real goals of Tehran's nuclear program.

He also said that ongoing negotiations in Vienna should not be restricted to the nuclear aspect, but should also address the concerns of Arab countries regarding Iran's destabilizing policies in the region and its continuous interference in their internal affairs.

(With AP)



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European powers warn Iran over 'dangerous' uranium enrichment move
Saudi Arabia: Iran must be prevented from obtaining nuclear weapons