

Coptic prayers suspended in Egypt as virus cases rise

Sat, 2021-04-10 22:42

CAIRO: Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church has suspended Mass prayers in seven dioceses following a rise in daily coronavirus cases.

Prayers were suspended at the dioceses of the Virgin Mary in Fayoum, Archangel Michael in Aswan, Asna and Armant in Luxor, Akhmim in Sohag, Tahta and Juhaina in Sohag, Nag Hammadi in Qena, and Sohag.

"The suspension follows a significant increase in coronavirus cases recently," said Besada El-Anba, bishop of Akhmim.

He said that priests will continue daily Mass with a number of deacons without people attending for an indefinite period.

"The diocese of Aswan started suspending Coptic prayers in churches during the holy week and resurrection," the bishop added.

"Mass prayers will be limited to priests and a limited number of deacons," said Bishop Hani Bakhoum of Sohag.

Anba Kyrillos, bishop of Nag Hammadi, said that the suspension of prayers will begin on Monday and will continue on until further notice, depending on health advice.

Prayers will be limited to priests and a few deacons during the restrictions.

Other dioceses have taken precautionary measures to confront the outbreak of the virus, including holding Mass with 25 percent of the church's capacity, stopping church activities, services, Sunday schools and conferences, and closing cemeteries.

Priests have also been advised against making home visits.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt coptic church](#)

Suez Canal receives Middle East's largest dredger Egypt to unveil 'portion' of 3,000-year old city

[Never insulted Erdogan? You're eligible to stay in a Turkish student dormitory](#)

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1618076437009637400

Sat, 2021-04-10 20:43

JEDDAH: A surprise amendment to the regulation of dormitory services under the Youth and Sports Ministry was adopted and published in the Official Gazette on Friday.

Under the amendment, students who have been convicted for a prison term of more than six months – or for insulting the Turkish president – will be unable to stay in student dormitories.

The move was criticized by rights groups as politically motivated.

Between 2014 and 2019, 128,872 investigations were launched into cases of insults against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and prosecutors launched 27,717 criminal cases about these alleged insults. Turkish courts sentenced 9,556 of those charged with insulting the president, including politicians, journalists and even children. A total of 903 minors between the ages of 12 and 17 appeared in court on this charge. In 2018, a 14-year-old boy was prosecuted over an Instagram post that allegedly insulted the president. Although he was sentenced to five months in jail, it was later turned into an administrative fine. Several students from Bogazici University were recently charged with "insulting the president" during protests against the appointment of a ruling party loyalist, Melih Bulu, as the rector of the university, one of the most prestigious in the country. An open letter in which they addressed the president, reiterating their demands and seeking to enjoy their constitutional rights, was also subjected to criminal proceedings with charges of insulting Erdogan. Separately, Turkey's main opposition Peoples' Republican Party (CHP) faced an investigation after banners were put up in the northwestern province of Mudanya. On the banners, which were taken down within hours, the CHP asked about a \$128 billion hole in the Turkish Central Bank's foreign reserves. For a couple of months, the CHP has been raising the issue of accountability as to where and how these reserves have been spent since 2019. Durmus Yilmaz, former head of the Turkish Central Bank, has also called for an investigation to determine how these huge and much-needed reserves were spent. The opposition claims that the reserves might have been spent to support the Turkish lira against foreign currencies, while Erdogan said that the money was used in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The chief public prosecutor will investigate the party officials – who will be charged with insulting the president – for being involved in the preparation and display of the banners on the billboards for a couple of hours. "The name of the president does not appear anywhere on the posters. I'm wondering what they thought about when opening such an investigation," Zeynep Gurcanli, a senior journalist, tweeted. The decision triggered a nationwide social media protest, with thousands of people tweeting: "Where is the 128 billion dollars?"



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#)

Turkey tops Council of Europe list for incarceration rates
Turkey and EU blame each other in 'sofagate' scandal

[Disappointed Lebanese protesters return to street, demanding end of deadlock](#)

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1618075371459527900

Sat, 2021-04-10 20:26

BEIRUT: Heavy rainfall on Saturday afternoon prevented large numbers of people from participating in a "Day of Rage" in the heart of Beirut, declared by the Oct. 17 groups demanding a transitional government with exceptional

legislative powers.

These groups are trying to reactivate protests against the political class that they accuse of corruption.

Waddah Sadek, deputy head of the "I Am a Red Line" initiative, told Arab News: "We support these protests. The aim on this day was to mobilize school and university students to take to the streets and encourage people to gradually return to the streets to express their anger. Protest squares have been empty in the past few months due to the coronavirus and people are disappointed as demos did not manage to make any change on the governmental level."

Sadek talked about "the recent mistakes of protesters, caused by some disputes over minor issues that could have been avoided."

Sadek said that "the main revolutionary groups, opposing political parties, independent politicians and intellectual figures will announce the formation of an opposition political front by the end of April, that has a political program aiming to form a rescue government that would save the country.

"The current political class is unable to form an alternative government. Any government they form will only be the same as the current one," he said.

Judge Shoukri Sader, who served as head of the State Shoura Council before retiring, told Arab News: "If protesters do not unite, the same politicians will be elected in 2022. Those in power now are seeking to divide us. If we present three electoral lists in the next parliamentary elections, they will beat us. Today, we are risking our own presence. We cannot remain divided; therefore, we are forming a political front to unify votes and priorities."

He added: "We cannot play their game; they disagree on the government's nature and quota. We, on the other hand, must unite and put the small details aside.

"Large groups of protesters are communicating via Whatsapp and Facebook and each one of them has their own demands and opinions. What is required of these groups at this point is to be mature and aware, before actually trying to wake up the silent majority of Lebanese who are suffering.

"Activists must agree on the priorities and must not force others to follow them. People quit their political parties and joined us not to be forced to follow opposing politicians and partisans nor to be marginalized.

"The top priority we should agree on is the rejection of Hezbollah's arms. We must reclaim the decision of the state from its kidnappers. Our second priority is restoring the provisions of the constitution because the Lebanese constitution includes all our sovereignty demands; the neutrality of Lebanon, a parliamentary republic and a free economic system. Therefore, let us cut to the chase and call for early elections and a transitional government. The country is collapsing."

He said: "President Michel Aoun's experience in power has been unsuccessful,

from the War of Liberation in the 1980s, the War of Cancellation until his current mandate. He has only done the opposite of what he promised and has put his personal interests above the national interests. We are aware that in Lebanon, revolutions are doomed to fail, and we are also aware that a new civil war is impossible since there is no equity among fighters in the presence of Hezbollah's arms. Chaos might prevail and this is what is making us wait for the constitutional deadlines to make the change."

One hundred and seventy days have passed since Saad Hariri's nomination to form a new government, yet officials are still swapping responsibilities and accusations without establishing any social security network for the poor and needy amid the worsening economic collapse.

Zeina Akar, defense minister in the caretaker government, shed light on the living situation of soldiers during a visit she made to a town in the Bekaa valley. She said that soldiers' salaries had lost 85 percent of their value against the US dollar. "Soldiers can no longer provide for their families or even pay transportation to and from work," she said.

Akar urged soldiers "not to slip into anything that could prevent them from performing their duties because they represent the safety valve protecting Lebanon's sovereignty and people, and preserving its security and stability."





Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Protests](#)

Egypt will make 'all possible efforts' to help resolve crisis in Lebanon
Lebanon's dollar crisis dims future of students abroad

Turkey tops Council of Europe list for incarceration rates

Author:

Fri, 2021-04-09 22:46

ISTANBUL: Turkey has been ranked first among member states of the Council of Europe (CoE) for its annual incarceration rate, with a record number of inmates convicted for terrorism offenses.

Last year, the Turkish parliament adopted a controversial law to release about 45,000 prisoners to ease overcrowding in prisons and protect detainees from the pandemic.

However, the amnesty law was found to be politically biased as several drug dealers and mafia bosses were released while dissident journalists and politicians were excluded.

The Council of Europe released its Annual Penal Statistics report on Thursday: Turkey topped the list with an incarceration rate of 357.2 inmates per 100,000 inhabitants.

Turkey was followed by Russia, Georgia, Lithuania and Azerbaijan in the report.

According to the report, about 300,000 people, including pre-trial detainees, are behind bars in Turkey – second only to Russia.

Based on the ratio of the number of inmates to the number of places available in penal institutions, Turkish prisons were also found to be the most overcrowded in the CoE report, with 127 inmates per 100 available places. Turkey was followed by Italy in the report.

Of 30,524 prisoners convicted for terror charges in the European continent, the majority of them – 29,827 people – were found in Turkey alone. Terrorism offenses are broadly defined in Turkish laws under which dissident activities such as attending demonstrations and exercising critical journalism are punished; disregarding European Court of Human Rights' judgments.

The Council of Europe has repeatedly demanded that Ankara immediately release from prison the prominent businessman and activist, Osman Kavala, and the Kurdish politician, Selahattin Demirtas, after their years-long detention

based on political motives.

The country also has Europe's second largest prison population, at 297,019, after Russia. Over the past decade, the imprisonment rate in Turkey has increased by 115.3 percent.

Separately, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is working on legal amendments to digitally record and retain all visits to inmates for a period of one year – a move that has been criticized by the opposition as a serious invasion of prisoners' privacy.

Opposition deputies have called on the AKP to withdraw its controversial bill, saying inmates' private lives need to be protected.

Turkish penitentiary institutions made headlines recently after opposition party claims about the use of unlawful strip-searching of women as a degrading practice.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

Doctors in Turkey urge coronavirus lockdown during Ramadan
Turkey and EU blame each other in 'sofagate' scandal

Video shows Israeli police beating lawmaker at protest

Author:

AP

ID:

1617997027442091500

Fri, 2021-04-09 22:43

JERUSALEM – A video circulating online shows Israeli police punching a member of parliament and wrestling him to the ground at a protest against planned evictions in east Jerusalem on Friday.

The video shows a scuffle between Israeli police and Ofer Cassif, the only Jewish member of the Joint List, an alliance of Arab parties in Israel's Knesset.

The police can be seen punching him and trying to put him in a headlock before dragging him to the ground. One of the officers can later be seen briefly kneeling on his chest.

Cassif was left with a swollen eye, his shirt torn.

Ahmad Tibi, a fellow lawmaker from the Joint List, was among those sharing the video of the scuffle on Twitter, calling it a "brutal assault" and a violation of parliamentary immunity.

Israeli police said in a statement that Cassif attacked the policemen, who used "reasonable force" in response and released him as soon as they identified him as a member of parliament.

It said Jerusalem's police chief, Doron Turgeman, has ordered an investigation into the incident.

Cassif was taking part in a weekly protest in the mostly Palestinian neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, where rights groups say dozens of people are at risk of being evicted after a long court battle with Jewish settler groups.

Jewish and Palestinian activists have been holding small weekly protests against the threatened evictions.

Israel captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 war and annexed it in a move not recognized by most of the international community. Israel views the entire city as its unified capital, while the Palestinians want east Jerusalem to be the capital of their future state.

An Israeli court recently ordered the eviction of 58 people, 17 of them children, from seven houses in Sheikh Jarrah, according to the Israeli anti-settlement watchdog Peace Now.

The families are Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation who Peace Now says took up residence in the neighborhood under an agreement with Jordan, which controlled east Jerusalem from 1948 until 1967. Peace Now says settler groups are pushing for their eviction by arguing that the land belonged to Jews prior to 1948. Israel supports the return of Jews to lands they lost in the 1948 war while barring Palestinians from doing the same.

Some 700,000 Palestinians fled or were forced from their homes in what is now Israel during the 1948 war. They and their descendants now number more than

5.8 million and are scattered across the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.
Their fate is one of the most divisive issues in the Middle East conflict.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

[Jewish settlers](#)

Four arrested as Israeli police, ultra-Orthodox Jews clash
Israeli police block Palestinian election meeting in Jerusalem