

Egypt's street iftar comes with a community flavor

Author:

Tue, 2019-05-21 23:22

CAIRO: Hardly a street in Egypt is without its iftar table as families organize "mercy meals" for friends, relatives and neighbors during Ramadan.

A tradition that began to help the poor has been extended to include entire streets and neighborhoods, giving residents and friends a chance to meet, share old memories and instill community values in their children.

In Cairo, people compete to organize large iftar tables laden with food items.

Each year Moataz Aburiyeh plans an iftar table for friends and neighbors in the capital's central Abdin area.

"I consider it a great opportunity to see a lot of friends and talk about everything," 38-year-old Aburiyeh told Arab News.

The table contains all kinds of food. "On the table is meat, chicken, rice, salad and other items. I know the family and neighbors' preferences and I meet their taste," said Aburiyeh, who owns a men's clothing store.

Meanwhile, residents in Umm Reza, a village west of Cairo, organized an iftar table to gather all the people of the village for the second year in a row.

School teacher Khaled Kamal, who was behind the idea, said: "I suggested to residents that they gather during Ramadan and everyone welcomed the idea."

Villagers donated money for the gathering until they had raised more than 10,000 Egyptian pounds (\$600).

"We let all the people of the village, including Christians, share the meal," said Kamal.

Another villager, Sayed Fouad, said: "The iftar was well organized and included hot meals consisting of meat, rice, vegetables, salad, pickles and damietta sweets."

National unity

For the past five decades, Christian clerics in Egypt have organized annual Muslim iftar meals to encourage national unity.

In the 1970s, the Coptic religious brotherhood began hosting Ramadan meals for Muslims, a move that was followed by the Justice and Peace association a decade later.

Pope Shenouda, the Coptic Orthodox Pope of Alexandria, promoted iftar meals to strengthen the church's connection with the Egyptian nation.

The Church of the Palace of Dupara in Tahrir Square in central Cairo has been organizing a breakfast table for several years, attended by Muslim and Christian leaders. The church is being supervised by a number of young men and women.

Coptic scholar Robert Al-Fares said: "The Christians of Egypt are organizing iftar to show that society has returned to a period of friendship and unified spirit.

"This is a positive phenomenon that confirms the end of a dark era of division between sects and religions," he said, referring to the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012 and 2013.

"Egyptians have returned to their normal state after a period of radicalization by extremists who sought to destroy the culture of tolerance and acceptance between Egyptian people," Al-Fares said.



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Frugal fare for Ramadan in Damascus as war saps spending

[CNN Turk criticized for cutting opposition mayor interview](#)

Tue, 2019-05-21 23:05

ISTANBUL: CNN's Turkish channel was criticized Tuesday after it cut short an interview with the opposition candidate for Istanbul mayor as he began to talk about the municipality's "extravagant" spending.

Social media users lashed out at CNN Turk after it stopped Monday night's interview with Ekrem Imamoglu of the Republican People's Party half an hour ahead of schedule.

One Twitter user @muratagirel suggested CNN Turk change the program's name from "Unbiased Zone" to "Biased Zone."

Imamoglu was dramatically stripped of his victory in March's vote after the country's top election body annulled the results over claims of "irregularities" and ordered a new election for June 23.

He is rarely given time on Turkish screens, whereas President Recep Tayyip Erdogan delivered almost daily televised speeches ahead of the March vote on behalf of ruling party candidate Binali Yildirim, a former prime minister.

Imamoglu was interrupted by the CNN Turk anchor as he began to talk about the lavish spending in Istanbul municipality which he said he discovered during his brief 18-day stint as mayor.

He held up placards depicting alleged waste, such as high numbers of unnecessary official cars, and said his campaign would focus on turning this information into savings.

FASTFACT

Ekrem Imamoglu was interrupted by the CNN Turk anchor as he began to talk about the lavish spending in Istanbul municipality which he said he discovered during his 18-day stint as mayor.

This prompted the anchorman, Ahmet Hakan, first to interrupt him for a commercial break and then to end the program entirely when Imamoglu insisted on talking about the finances.

Imamoglu countered that the interview was supposed to last 30 minutes more, but was told time was up.

Many social media users reacted with anger, such as one person on Twitter who

wrote: "Ahmet Hakan you are a very bad journalist ... are you aware that the time is up for you and those like you?"

The Istanbul Municipality responded late Monday, denying Imamoglu's allegations about the official cars and said the claims amounted to "intentional distortion" to manipulate public opinion.

Turkey is ranked 157th in the world for press freedom by Reporters Without Borders, which says the government has increasingly seized control of media outlets and is the world's biggest jailer of professional journalists.

CNN Turk has been mocked in the past for toeing the government line, particularly during the "Gezi Park" protests in 2013, when it ran a documentary about penguins instead of covering the demonstrations.

It is a joint venture of CNN's parent company, Turner Broadcasting System International, and Turkey's privately owned Dogan Media Group.

Dogan was sold last year to Demiroren Group, which has close ties to Erdogan.



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Syria harassing ex-foes in former opposition zones

Tue, 2019-05-21 22:41

BEIRUT: Damascus has carried out a wave of arbitrary arrests against former activists in opposition areas that surrendered under deals brokered by its ally Moscow, Human Rights Watch said on Tuesday.

The so-called “reconciliation” agreements that restored government control over swathes of central and southern Syria last year were heavily criticized from the start because they were signed under the pressure of military blockade and intense air and artillery bombardment.

The regime offered amnesty to all who agreed to end their political activities.

But thousands of residents, particularly former fighters and their families, chose to be evacuated to remaining opposition-held territory rather than accept renewed rule by Bashar Assad’s regime.

Human Rights Watch said its research showed that former government critics and opposition activists who signed up for “reconciliation” had paid heavily for their decision.

It said it had documented 11 cases of arbitrary detention and disappearance in three areas retaken by regime forces last year – the southern province of Daraa, the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus, and southern neighborhoods of the capital.

Syrian organizations had documented at least 500 arrests in the three areas since August, it added.

“Active combat has ended in much of Syria, but nothing has changed in the way intelligence branches trample rights of perceived opponents of Assad’s rule,” said HRW’s acting Middle East director, Lama Fakih.

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Lama Fakih, Top rights activist

“Lack of due process, arbitrary arrests, and harassment, even in so-called reconciled areas, speak louder than empty government promises of return, reform and reconciliation.”

HRW said those targeted included family members, as well former opposition activists and fighters.

“In all cases, the people targeted ... had signed reconciliation agreements with the government,” it said.

The UN on Tuesday said that, between 26 July 2018 and 31 March 2019, at least 380 people were arrested or detained in Daraa province alone.

At least 230 of these were subjected to enforced disappearances, while the rest were released after a few days in detention.

“Many families in Daraa continue to have limited or no information about their missing or detained relatives,” said Marta Hurtado, spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Assad’s forces secured full control of Daraa province from fighters in July, in a massive blow to the country’s ill-fated revolt that erupted in the southern city.



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Frugal fare for Ramadan in Damascus as war saps spending
Syrian Kurdish official: Damascus talks going nowhere, Russia to blame

Lebanese budget protesters clash with security in Beirut

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Mon, 2019-05-20 15:56

BEIRUT: Security forces opened water cannons on Lebanese anti-austerity protesters in the country's capital on Monday, as the government continued to hold marathon meetings to discuss severe budget cuts.

Lebanon faces a looming fiscal crisis as the economy struggles with soaring debt, rising unemployment and slow growth. The government's tightened budget and key reforms aim to unlock billions of dollars in pledged foreign assistance. But planned cuts have unleashed a wave of public discontent, amid leaks that austerity could target public wages, services and social benefits.



A retired Lebanese soldier chants slogans while holding an army flag, during a protest in Beirut, Lebanon, Monday. (AP)

Over one hundred protesters gathered Monday outside the Government House in downtown Beirut shouting "Thieves, thieves!" as the Cabinet met for its 16th session and struggles to reach agreement.

Protesters pushed back against police lines and set fire to tires outside the building. At least two policemen and one civilian were wounded in the

scuffles.

Among those demonstrating Monday were public and private school teachers and retired officers.

The government, headed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri, has sought to calm nerves while also describing the upcoming budget as the most austere in Lebanon's history.

Hariri said he hopes the government will be able to send the budget to parliament later this week.

Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil said the cabinet made "important progress" in discussions Sunday.







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Indebted Lebanon may struggle to refinance as austerity budget stalls
Lebanon's cabinet postpones final budget meeting

[World Food Programme considers ending aid to Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen after 'interference'](#)

Mon, 2019-05-20 18:26

LONDON: The World Food Programme (WFP) is considering suspending aid delivery in the areas under the control of Yemen's Houthi group because of fighting, insecurity and interference in its work, the agency said on Monday.

"Humanitarian workers in Yemen are being denied access to the hungry, aid convoys have been blocked, and local authorities have interfered with food

distribution,” the WFP said in a statement. “This has to stop.”

The highly unusual threat from the UN agency, which is feeding more than 10 million people across Yemen, reflected what it said were “obstacles that are being put in our way”.

“We face daily challenges due to the unrelenting fighting and insecurity in Yemen. And yet, our greatest challenge does not come from the guns, that are yet to fall silent in this conflict – instead, it is the obstructive and uncooperative role of some of the Houthi leaders in areas under their control.”

Negotiations with Houthi leaders to open up access to hungry people had not yet brought tangible results, WFP said, although some had made positive commitments.

“Unfortunately, they (Houthi leaders) are being let down by other Houthi leaders who have broken assurances they gave us on stopping food diversions and finally agreeing to a beneficiary identification and biometric registration exercise.”

WFP’s threat of a partial pullout comes after fighting around Hodeidah marred an apparent diplomatic breakthrough by U.N. envoy Martin Griffiths, who got the Iranian-aligned Houthis to agree a unilateral withdrawal of their forces from Hodeidah and two other ports earlier this month.



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Yemen Minister: Houthi militia raid WFP warehouse, kidnap 2 UN staff membersKSRelief, WFP sign deals to combat hunger across the world