Egypt’s 15m Coptic Christians join national celebrations with renewed sense of hope

Sat, 2022-04-23 22:14

LONDON: On Sunday, the 15 million Coptic Christians in Egypt and 2 million more in scattered migrant communities across the world celebrate Orthodox Easter.

The following day, together with Egyptians of all faiths, Coptic Christians will celebrate the national holiday of Sham Ennessim.

Like the Copts themselves, the festival of spring, whose origins date back millennia to the days of the pharaohs, survived the Arabization of Egypt in the seventh century to become an integral part of Egyptian society.

In a special Minority Report, Arab News tells the extraordinary story of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, which parted company with the rest of Christendom in the fifth century after a fundamental disagreement over the nature of Christ’s divinity.

Founded in the great city of Alexandria by Mark the Evangelist in about A.D. 60, the church and its followers have undergone centuries of turmoil.

During the Roman era, Coptic Christians were singled out for bloody persecution, with St. Mark himself brutally martyred in A.D. 68.

During the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian (A.D. 245-313), what became known as the Diocletianic Persecution saw countless hundreds of Christians massacred in Alexandria alone. Among them was Peter, the Patriarch of Alexandria, who was beheaded.

After the rise of Islam and the conquest of Egypt in the seventh century, although there were isolated periods of persecution, over the centuries the Copts were treated well enough.

But the pressure of rising taxes imposed on non-Muslims saw many Christians convert to Islam, while the rapid spread of Arabic culture caused the Coptic language to fall into disuse.

Although rarely heard outside the churches, today the language, a direct descendant of the ancient Egyptian tongue spoken in the time of the pharaohs, lives on in the liturgies and monasteries of the faith.

In modern times, the Copts in Egypt have faced waves of violence at the hands of Islamists, who have bombed Coptic churches and murdered believers.

The filmed killings of 20 migrant Coptic workers in Libya in 2015 shocked the world, while a wave of attacks on Copts and their churches in Egypt in 2017 left dozens dead.

> **“One of the most important things for Copts today, in Egypt and abroad, is that over the past decade we have seen a much greater, harmonious existence between Christians and Muslims.”**
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> Archbishop Anba Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London

Since the 1970s, many Copts, driven either by fear or economic pressures, have emigrated to seek new futures in the West, mainly in the US, Canada,

Australia and the UK.

Wherever they have put down roots, Coptic communities and their churches have blossomed, and maintain close links with Egypt and the faith.

Today, Coptic leaders look optimistically toward a brighter future.

“One of the most important things for Copts today, in Egypt and abroad, is that over the past decade we have seen a much greater, harmonious existence between Christians and Muslims,” Archbishop Anba Angaelos, head of the Coptic Church in the UK, exclusively told Arab News.

In “The Coptic Miracle,” Arab News tells the story of how Egypt’s historic Christian church not only survived but thrived, at home and abroad.

The Coptic miracle

How Egypt’s historic Christian church survived and thrived

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Egypt’s Copts celebrate Christmas at home

Israeli restrictions on Holy Fire ceremony in Jerusalem spark Christian outrage

Author:
Sat, 2022-04-23 21:59

RAMALLAH: Thousands of Christians were prevented from going to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in East Jerusalem on Saturday to celebrate the Holy Fire ceremony because of Israeli police checkpoints in the Old City.

Photos and videos from the scene and the Old City showed a large number of police and barriers deployed at the church entrances. Officers were seen pushing and hitting women and clerics, keeping them away from the building.

The scouts' band performed in the streets leading to the church with pilgrims watching in delight.

Israel's Supreme Court ruled there were no restrictions on the number of visitors to the church, but Israeli police forces decided the rules on the ground and ignored the court's decision.

A Christian woman from East Jerusalem told Arab News that the number of police barriers had increased this year in response to the court's decision. "Every year we suffer from these racist measures. We want to celebrate this day freely and without restrictions, and we want a solution," she said.

Police asked church authorities to reduce the number of worshippers and said it would only allow 1,000 people to enter the church on Holy Saturday and 500 people to enter the Old City and reach the patriarchate squares and the church roof.

The church moved the court, emphasizing its right to worship and demanding to access the church without restrictions or conditions.

Police tried to bargain with the church by offering to allow 4,000 worshippers in, but the petitioners rejected the offer and demanded free and unconditional entry for any number of worshippers.

"We consider that the Israeli authorities limiting the number of worshippers and celebrants in the church today constitutes a challenge to the historical and legal situation of the church for decades, and the Israeli police today did not allow our people to enter the church as it should, and there was harassment against them," Bishop Monib Younan, the former head of the Lutheran Union in Jerusalem, told Arab News.

"Holy Saturday is the only day for Christians to celebrate in Jerusalem, and

Christian pilgrims came from Egypt, but we were not allowed to enter to celebrate.

“Unfortunately, the matter is related to what is happening in Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, and Bab Al-Khalil. We condemn this restriction and affirm that the existing legal and historical status of the church must be adhered to under the auspices of King Abdullah II of Jordan,” he said.

The monarch is the custodian of the holy places in Jerusalem.

Israel says it wants to prevent another disaster after a crowd stampede at a packed Jewish holy site last year left 45 people dead. Christian leaders say there is no need to alter a ceremony that has been held for centuries.

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Christianity

Crowds gather for Holy Fire ceremony at Jerusalem’s Holy SepulchreIsrael says no change to status-quo at Jerusalem mosque compound

Sudden exchange rate turmoil angers Lebanese ahead of parliamentary elections

Author:
Fri, 2022-04-22 22:48

BEIRUT: A sudden upheaval in Lebanon’s exchange rate has angered people ahead of parliamentary elections.

Economist Louis Hobeika said the turmoil should motivate people to “vote for change and not re-elect those in power.”

He told Arab News that the ruling parties had all the time they needed to issue laws but did nothing.

The Lebanese pound hit a sudden low, trading at LBP28,000 to the dollar on Friday, with the country on official holidays until Tuesday for Orthodox Easter.

The exchange rate turmoil caused a clamor in the markets, as people said on social media that shop owners had already started pricing goods based on a rate of LBP30,000 to the dollar.

Protesters cut off the southern highway with burning tires, denouncing the deteriorating living conditions, Lebanon’s National News agency reported.

Electricite du Liban, the state-owned electricity supplier, said on Thursday that the Deir Ammar power plant had shut down. The Zahrani power plant shut down last week, leaving the Lebanese with no electricity supply until a ship carrying a fuel delivery is unloaded and tested.

Subscription fees for private generators that are charged in dollars continue to rise.

The two plants depend exclusively on Iraqi fuel as part of an agreement concluded between the two countries last August.

The state is unable to secure dollars to import additional quantities of fuel, while the agreement to draw electricity from Jordan and gas from Egypt is yet to be implemented.

According to the agreement with Iraq, every month only one shipment of 40,000 tons of gas oil is supplied to Lebanon, for the benefit of EDL.

The agreement expires in September, and EDL had pledged to ensure “a minimum level of stability in electricity supply, until May 18,” that is after the parliamentary elections on May 15.

Lebanon was supposed to start importing electricity and gas from Jordan and

Egypt in March, but the implementation was delayed due to the World Bank's failure to finance the two agreements.

Energy Minister Walid Fayyad said he had not been officially notified by the World Bank of the decision to delay funding.

"We are constantly contacting the World Bank and the US ambassador to Lebanon, Dorothy Shea, and her French counterpart Anne Grillo, and the ball is now in the court of the US administration and the World Bank to begin formal negotiations, which is an essential stage for financing," Fayyad said on Thursday.

On Friday, the US-based Al-Hurra TV channel quoted a State Department spokesperson as saying that the government was awaiting final contracts and financing terms from the parties to ensure the gas and electricity projects complied with US policy and address any potential sanctions concerns.

Egyptian gas will be pumped to Lebanon via Jordan as well as Syria, which is subject to US sanctions under the Caesar Act.

Hobeika said the "political confusion and failure to find solutions to the problems at hand, naturally leads to chaos again."

He added that all signs indicated that Lebanon was further deteriorating, including the value of the national currency.

"There is a clear political inability to find solutions and deal with reality, and the best evidence is the chaos and sub-standard effort that happened in the Parliament session that was held to discuss the capital control bill.

"We are only three weeks away from the parliamentary elections, and such discussions should be postponed until the elections are held. Until then, chaos will prevail, and the national currency will further depreciate.

"This is due to the bad impression the ruling authority has left, which will increase demand for the dollar. The worst thing the ruling parties are doing is trying to outsmart the International Monetary Fund. They claim they are working on reforms, but things have remained the same. Reform needs laws, and such laws don't exist yet in Lebanon."

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US official urges Iraqi parties to expedite government formation

Author:
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1650656877311993900
Fri, 2022-04-22 22:46

WASHINGTON: A US official on Friday called on all Iraqi parties to work together and form a new government to prevent Iraq from sliding into instability and insecurity.

In a press briefing attended by Arab News, Jennifer Gavito, deputy assistant secretary of state for Iraq and Iran, said it is critical that Iraqi parties work together so the US can continue to implement the strategic framework agreement with Iraq in support of its armed forces, economy and health sector.

Iraq held national elections last October in which Shiite cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr's camp won 73 out 329 seats in Parliament, making it the largest single political bloc.

Other Shiite groups, especially the Fateh alliance that is affiliated with the Iran-backed Hashd Al-Shaabi militias, refused to concede defeat and contested the elections, preventing efforts to form a government.

"The current delaying of government formation is delaying our progress on bilateral issues and on all sectors including security, economy and cultural issues," Gavito said.

"Once the government is formed, we're looking forward to working with our Iraqi partners to implement our strategic framework agreement and continue to support the Iraqi armed forces to defeat ISIS (Daesh)."

Gavito said she traveled last month to Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan, meeting with government and business leaders.

She added that she discussed important legal and political reforms that would help attract major US corporations in the energy and health sectors. "We're committed to helping strengthen Iraqi sovereignty and democracy," Gavito said.

She added that the US government is eager to work with a new Iraqi government on key issues of mutual interest such as economic empowerment for all Iraqis, anti-corruption measures and human rights protections.

Gavito said the US government does not have a position on which personalities should be involved in government formation, as that is up to Iraqis.

She added that security cooperation between the US and Iraq is ongoing, especially in terms of combating Daesh.

She said Washington will continue to build up Iraq's military and security capacity as "the United States wants to see a strong and resilient Iraq."

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Jordan king urges unity to stop escalations in Jerusalem during Arab League meeting

Fri, 2022-04-22 16:46

RIYADH: Jordan’s King Abdullah on Thursday stressed the need to unify, coordinate, and step up Arab efforts to halt escalations in Jerusalem, again urging Israel to respect the historical and legal status quo in Al-Aqsa Mosque and safeguard the rights of Muslim worshippers.

Speaking during a meeting of the Arab League ministerial committee tasked with galvanizing international action to counter illegal Israeli measures in Jerusalem, the monarch expressed appreciation for Arab leaders’ stances in

calling for calm in the Palestinian territories, and in supporting the steadfastness of the Palestinian people, as well as the Hashemite Custodianship.

He urged further efforts to prevent the recurrence of any form of escalation, state news agency Petra reported.

An upsurge of violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories in recent weeks has raised fears of a slide back to wider conflict.

Saudi Arabia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Waleed Al-Khuraiji participated in the work of the fourth emergency meeting in the capital, Amman, on behalf of Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, the Saudi Press Agency said.

The committee is chaired by Jordan and includes Saudi Arabia, Tunisia – the president of the Arab League's current cycle – Algeria, Palestine, Qatar, Egypt, and Morocco.

Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit also took part in the meeting, along with the UAE, as the Arab country which is currently a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council.

The meeting discussed ways to confront the dangerous Israeli escalation in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and to solidify a joint action to stop the Israeli attacks and violations of the holy sites, halt the violence, and restore comprehensive calm.

The committee also called on the international community, especially the UN Security Council, to take immediate and effective action to stop the illegal and provocative Israeli practices in Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, in order to protect international law and the UN Charter, prevent an exacerbation of the wave of violence, and maintain security and peace.

The committee issued a final statement in which it stressed its condemnation of the Israeli attacks and violations against worshippers in Al-Aqsa Mosque. The committee also warned that the attacks and violations were a flagrant provocation to Muslims everywhere.

"These violations are a blatant affront and provocation of Muslim feelings everywhere and they risk a cycle of violence that threatens security and stability in the region and the world," the Arab League said in a statement.

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Dozens wounded in clashes at Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa compoundUN-Arab League cooperation essential for tackling regional crises, says UN chief