

Friday prayers resume in Iran after 20-month hiatus due to COVID-19

Author:

Sat, 2021-10-23 00:24

TEHRAN: Mass Friday prayers resumed in Tehran after a 20-month hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, state TV reported.

The prayers at Tehran University, a gathering of religious and political significance, came as authorities warned of a sixth wave of the coronavirus, which has so far claimed 124,928 lives in Iran and afflicted more than 5.8 million.

On Saturday, schools with fewer than 300 students are also due to reopen. Also starting on Saturday, government employees, except those in the armed forces, will be barred from work if they are not vaccinated at least with a first dose, according to a government circular released earlier this week.

The government says more than 28.2 million people have so far received a second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

"Today is a very sweet day for us. We thank the Almighty for giving us back the Friday prayers after a period of restrictions and deprivation," said Mohammad Javad Hajj Ali Akbari, Tehran's interim Friday prayer imam who led the sermons.

Worshippers had to heed social distancing and use face masks during the gathering, a forum where officials present a unified front in the weekly sermon, a duty that rotates around senior members of Iran's conservative clerical establishment.

Most worshippers brought their own prayer rugs and clay tablets used during prostration, said the broadcast.

It added Friday prayers were also performed in several other Iranian cities.

Health Minister Bahram Einollah said earlier this week that it was a "certainty" that Iran would face a sixth wave next week. The warning came even as the country has accelerated its vaccination drive.

Einollahi added that his country was well-prepared for the new surge.

Schools with more than 300 students will re-open on Nov. 6, Alireza Kamarei, spokesman for Iran's Education Ministry, said earlier this week, adding that it was not essential for students and teachers to be vaccinated. He said 85 percent of the country's teachers and 68 percent of students had so far been inoculated and that classrooms were well ventilated.

Required social distancing will remain at least one and a half meters.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[FRIDAY PRAYERS](#)

[Iran](#)

[COVID-19](#)

Iran nuclear talks 'on life support' as Tehran drags feet
Iran holds nationwide air force drill, latest armed exercise

[Evacuation flights for migrants start again in Libya](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1634932161367872200

Fri, 2021-10-22 17:44

CAIRO: The United Nations said on Friday that it has resumed humanitarian evacuation flights for migrants stranded in Libya after authorities suspended them for several months. The announcement comes after a massive crackdown on migrants by Libyan security forces.

The UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) said in a statement that it had evacuated 127 people to Gambia from the Libyan city of Misrata on Thursday. It said the Gambian migrants were among thousands more who are waiting to go home through the organization's voluntary return program. Evacuation flights for migrants have operated sporadically amid Libya's

conflict, and been periodically suspended because of fighting. The latest suspension came from the country's ministry of interior on Aug. 8, according to the IOM.

Libya was plunged into turmoil by the NATO-backed 2011 uprising that toppled and killed longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi. The North African nation has since emerged as a popular, if extremely dangerous, route to Europe for those fleeing poverty and civil war in Africa and the Middle East. Many set out for Italy, packed by traffickers into unseaworthy boats.

Earlier this month, Libyan authorities started a massive crackdown against migrants in the western coastal town of Gargaresh, detaining more than 5,000 people over the course of a few days. In response, many turned to a community center operated by the UN's refugee agency's office in nearby Tripoli, camping outside and asking to be evacuated.

On Friday, the UNHCR refugee agency said that there are still 3,000 vulnerable people staying outside its community center for fear of government raids. The agency said it had suspended the center's operations for security reasons but was still able to offer some limited provisions to the migrants there. It welcomed the resumption of humanitarian flights, but also called on the government to urgently address the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees in a "humane and rights-based manner," especially those who cannot return to their countries of origin.

Detained migrants in Libya have been held in overcrowded detention centers where torture, sexual assault and other abuses are rife. UN-commissioned investigators said Oct. 4 that abuse and ill treatment of migrants in Libya could amount to crimes against humanity.

The migration agency has operated evacuation flights for those wanting to return home since 2015 and since then returned some 53,000 migrants. The program receives funding from the European Union and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Migration Fund, according to the IOM statement.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

[Iran nuclear talks 'on life support' as Tehran drags feet](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-10-22 22:17

LONDON: Talks to rein in Iran's nuclear arms program are on the verge of collapse, an anonymous source from a government involved in the negotiations has told The Independent.

Talks that had been continuing in Vienna earlier this year ground to a halt when Iran elected its new president, Ebrahim Raisi, who is a religious and political hard-liner and a close ally of supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei.

Since then, Iran has failed to return in earnest to the talks and has instead ramped up production of enriched uranium and other measures that bring it closer to having a nuclear bomb.

The JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), agreed in 2015 between Iran, the US, China, Russia and other world powers, curbed Iran's nuclear program

in exchange for sanctions relief, but the deal later broke down.

Now negotiations for a return to the JCPOA are on the verge of collapse, The Independent has reported.

“The deal is not totally dead, but it’s on life support,” said an official of a government involved in the talks. The official spoke on condition of anonymity.

The US has accused the Iranian side of dragging its feet in returning to the table for talks. State Department spokesman, Ned Price, told reporters “this is not an exercise that can go on indefinitely.”

Israel’s finance minister, Avigdor Liberman, warned this week that “a confrontation with Iran is only a matter of time, and not a lot of time.”

Raisi’s team has claimed they need time to settle into their new government and that is why there are delays, but the official involved in the talks said: “If they’re just playing for time while expanding their program, we’ll have to recalibrate our approach.”

Some suspect Iran is enriching more uranium and ramping up its production capacity to gain more leverage if it chooses to rejoin the talks.

Sanam Vakil, deputy director of the Iran program at London-based think-tank Chatham House, told The Independent: “They are struggling to build a strategy and build consensus. Their foot-dragging can be seen as a leverage-building exercise, but it’s also a reflection of internal paralysis.”

She continued: “Their thinking is they can survive whatever is to come because they have survived everything thus far. But it’s a dangerous calculation. They’re always strategically on the razor’s edge. The outcome domestically could be dangerous in the long run. Yes, they have the monopoly of violence. Yes, the economy is bandaged, but the poverty level is increasing. Debt is increasing.”

The insider source told The Independent: “If the Iranians really wanted to take their time, why continue to escalate their non-compliance?”

“Why not freeze their non-compliance? If they walk away, the options aren’t good. It would be a miscalculation to think everyone would just shrug their shoulders.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

[Ebrahim Raisi](#)

[JCPOA](#)

[Iran nuclear program](#)

IAEA: Surveillance of Iran nuclear program no longer 'intact'

[In Iraqi Kurdish city, women gain power without parity](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1634853413959870700

Fri, 2021-10-22 00:53

HALABJA: In the Kurdish city of Halabja in northeastern Iraq, municipal director Kwestan Faraj recalls the day when being a woman saved her life. Though equality may be a distant reality for many women in Iraq, in Halabja women have reached top levels of local government. Mayor, university dean, director of the veterinary department, and health

spokesperson are some of the senior posts held by women in the city of around 115,000 inhabitants.

It marks something of a departure for Iraqi Kurdistan, where public affairs have long been dominated by a handful of men. Tradition and conservative values have meant that women face routine discrimination and are largely confined to the private sphere.

"When you are a woman, climbing the ranks comes with a lot of sacrifices," Faraj, 55, said.

A former deputy head of the municipality for 15 years, Faraj launched her political career many years earlier when as a student she handed out leaflets against Saddam Hussein's regime, which carried out an infamous chemical attack on the city shortly before the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988. She recalled one day when an armed man arrived demanding that she sign dubious paperwork. She refused.

"I thought he would pull out his gun and shoot," she said.

"He got up and told me: 'If you weren't a woman, I know what I would have done'."

She said that in her city the drive for gender equality was largely led by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), one of two historical parties in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Yet some residents complain that the advances are largely cosmetic and aimed at masking the shortcomings of public services.

A junior partner in the Kurdistan regional government in Irbil, the PUK holds the post of speaker in the regional parliament, which it also awarded to a woman, Rewaz Faiq.

The party "believes in equality between men and women in all domains," Faraj said.

"This has allowed us to achieve gender balance in administrative posts in Halabja," said the head of the municipality, who has held the post since 2016.

Halabja prides itself on having had a woman mayor, Adela Khanum, in the first decades of the 20th century. Now it has another, Nuxsha Nasih.

It also has Kurdistan's first female university dean, Mahabad Kamil Abdullah.

"The Islamist parties were among the first to congratulate me when I became the president of Halabja University," she said.

But it is by no means representative of the situation of women in Kurdistan as a whole. A 2018 UN report found that women in the workforce represent barely 15 percent of the women of working age. About three quarters of those work in the public sector.

In Iraq's Oct. 10 parliamentary election, more than 90 women were elected according to preliminary results, exceeding the minimum 83-seat quota established for women in the 329-seat chamber.

Though the Kurdistan region has cultivated an image of relative stability and tolerance, women's rights activists say key issues like forced marriage and female genital mutilation have gone unaddressed.

"It is not enough to have women in high posts. There need to be more women in the lower ranks," said Gulistan Ahmed, who heads the governmental commission for human rights in Halabja.

Many residents are more preoccupied with the failings of public services than with seeking gender equality.

"There have been no notable changes in the city under their mandate, whether

at the level of public services or with the launch of new projects,” complained Wshyar Abdulkarim, a 45-year-old spice merchant. Female market trader Mujda Ahmed said having women in top jobs had yet to lead to an improvement in services for women. “I have worked in the market for six years and not a single person has built public toilets for women,” she said. “I have the impression that they are being used by their parties, which simply want to improve their image on the issue of equality, nothing more.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Kurdish](#)

[Iraq](#)

Turkey shifting Syria strategy after Kurdish militia's attacks
Turkey plans military action against Syrian Kurdish YPG if diplomacy fails

[**Ancient and modern fuse together at the Indian pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai**](#)

Thu, 2021-10-21 21:41

DUBAI: Stepping into India's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai is like being instantly transported from the skyscraper-dominated skyline of the Middle East's commercial capital to the hustle and bustle of South Asia.

The pavilion, located in Al-Forsan Crescent in the expo's Opportunity District, is one of the largest at the event. Designed by CP Kukreja Architects in Delhi, it features an innovative kinetic facade made up of 600 individual blocks in assorted hues of brown and beige – not entirely unlike the desert landscape outside – arranged in a mosaic of panels, each of which rotates on an axis.



The Indian pavilion's design represents the country's dynamism and forward-thinking vision, echoing the theme of an "India on the move." (Credit: Supplied)

The design is intended to represent India's dynamism and forward-thinking vision, echoing the theme of an "India on the move;" a country rooted in its rich heritage but also avant-garde and innovative in its approach to technological and economic advances.

The pavilion is also a nod to the nation's fight against COVID-19 and the various reforms implemented by the government to prepare for what is hoped will be a period of high and accelerated growth as India strives to become a \$5 trillion economy.



Combining both its heritage and its ambition, the Indian pavilion features yoga demonstrations alongside displays on its space program. (Credit: Supplied)

“The pavilion takes visitors through the numerous phases of development and the unparalleled growth trajectory that India has experienced in all sectors, ranging from health and wellness, climate change, biodiversity, food agriculture to accomplishments in space,” Aman Puri, the pavilion’s commissioner general and the consul general of India in Dubai, told Arab News.

“We have a wide assortment of festivals and celebrations to offer at the pavilion, which provide our visitors with a once-in-a-lifetime experience to get the ... feel of the diverse Indian culture.”

Visitors are greeted warmly as they arrive at the state-of-the-art pavilion, which occupies a 1.2 acre site and showcases the nation’s cultural treasures and technological marvels.



Combining both its heritage and its ambition, the Indian pavilion features yoga demonstrations alongside displays on its space program. (Credit: Supplied)

As they move along a winding pathway they pass by a live yoga display in an area surrounded by greenery, a demonstration of Ayurveda, India's ancient art of wellness, and a sharply contrasting area dedicated to India's space program.

Visitors then move up through several levels that offer insights into various aspects of Indian culture, heritage and modern-day achievements. Massive floor-to-ceiling LED screens show images of Indian dancers and traditional ceremonies, and showcase the nation's successes in the fields of robotics, energy, e-commerce, healthcare, cryptocurrency and blockchain.

A number of conference rooms and meeting spaces will be used to host talks and networking events in the coming months in an attempt to encourage the forging of new international business relationships with India.



Prior to the pandemic, bilateral trade between India and the UAE was worth \$60 billion. As business begins to return to normal, the governments of both countries hope to facilitate investments totaling \$75 billion in the coming years.

“The expo is an important occasion to exhibit and invite the world to participate in India’s economic growth by utilizing the existing Indian talent base, creating additional employment opportunities, and empowering the secondary and tertiary sectors,” said Puri.

“The plethora of global discussions, business and investment summits will focus on creating synergies and providing opportunities to explore and accelerate trade partnerships.”

Prior to the pandemic, bilateral trade between India and the UAE was worth \$60 billion. As business begins to return to normal, the governments of both countries hope to facilitate investments totaling \$75 billion in the coming years.

INNUMBERS

8.5 million – Population of overseas Indians in the Gulf states (2018).

(Source: GoI, Ministry of External Affairs)

Noting that India is “a country of start-up unicorns, and with an ecosystem

of more than 50,000 recognized start-ups,” Puri said that “the Innovation Hub at the India pavilion will host several leading startups from India. Expo 2020 Dubai will be an excellent platform for these startups to engage with the global market.”



As it emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, India has set its sights on becoming a high-tech, \$5 trillion economy. (Credit: Supplied)

Among the events the pavilion will host is a World Majlis, which includes a program of talks including: Lessons from Space, on Oct. 19; Cities on the Move, on Nov. 2; and Off the Beaten Path, on Jan. 13.

For those interested in sampling some of India’s heritage, arts and crafts, and cultural treasures, the pavilion features a retail area with shops selling gemstones, textiles and pashminas from Jodhpur, Rajasthan and Jaipur.

And of course there is also a food court offering a wide range of Indian delicacies, along with a fine-dining restaurant, managed by Taj Hotels, where visitors can feast on a selection of the country’s rich culinary offerings.

The pavilion will also offer a packed schedule of indoor and outdoor performances of traditional Indian music and dance. In addition, visitors are invited to take part in festivities such as Diwali, the festival of light, and Holi, the festival of color.



India's state-of-the-art pavilion, which occupies a 1.2 acre site, showcases the nation's cultural treasures alongside its technological marvels. (Credit: Supplied)

There are plans for the pavilion to remain as a permanent space for cultural

and business exchange after the expo concludes, a testament to the long-standing relationship between the UAE and India.

About 2.75 million Indian nationals live in the UAE, representing 27 percent of the Gulf state's population of about 10 million. The majority work in the service industry, which was badly hit by the precautionary lockdown measures during the pandemic. As a result, many Indian expats were forced to return home.

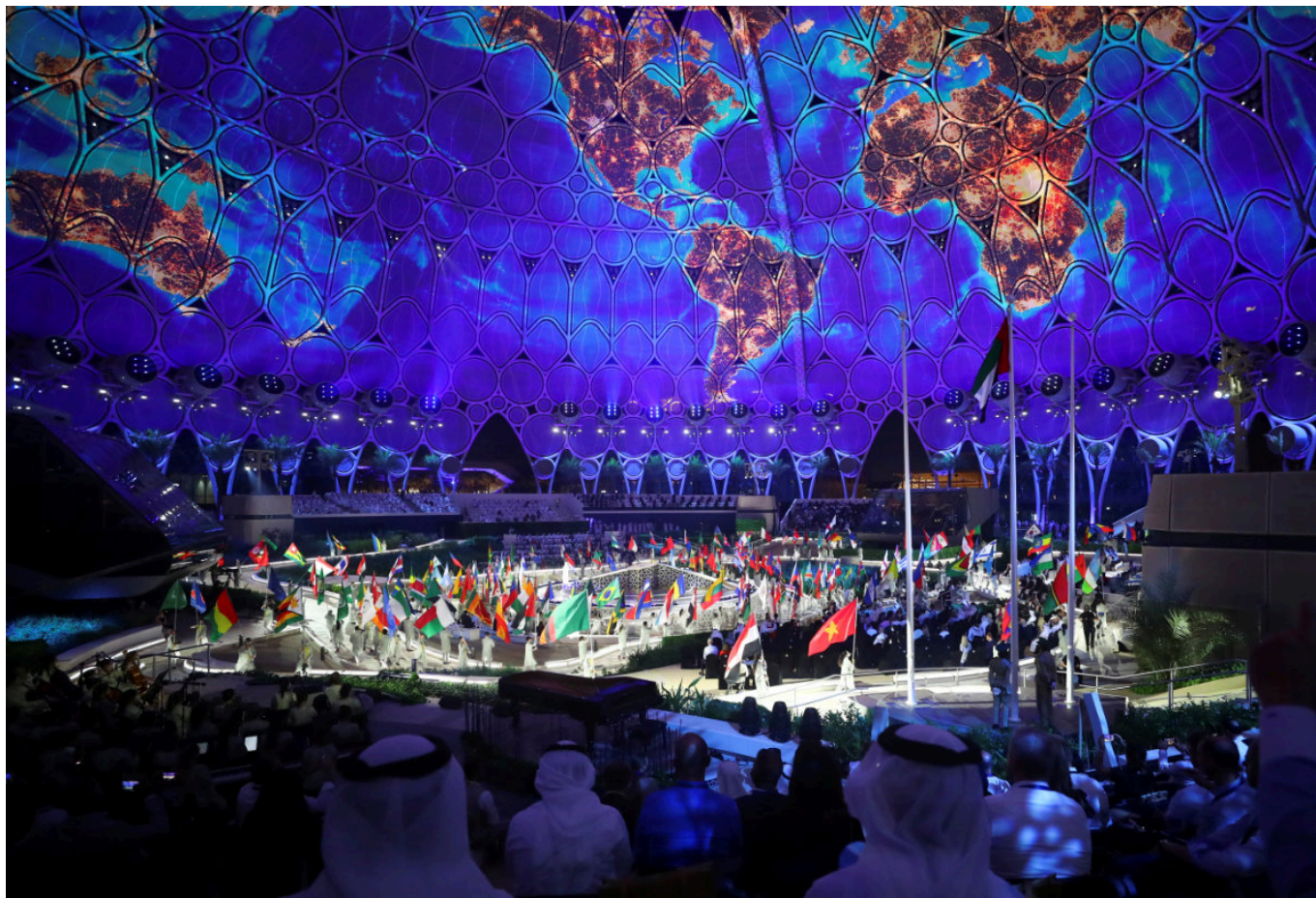
India's participation at the expo coincides with the Indian government's Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav initiative, also known as India@75, a year-long celebration of the upcoming 75th anniversary of independence from British colonial rule.



The Indian pavilion's design represents the country's dynamism and forward-thinking vision, echoing the theme of an "India on the move." (Credit: Supplied)

The Indian consulate has launched a number of special events, in addition to those taking place at the expo, to mark the anniversary, including competitions, documentary screenings and art exhibitions. The consulate is also reportedly planning a joint celebration to coincide with the 50th UAE National Day on Dec. 2, in celebration of the bond of friendship between the nations.

Expo 2020 Dubai is the 35th World Expo. The previous one was in Milan in 2015, and the next is scheduled to take place in 2025 in the Japanese city of Osaka, which also hosted the 1970 World Expo.



People attend the opening ceremony of the Dubai Expo 2020 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on September 30, 2021. (REUTERS/Ahmed Jadallah/File Photo)

The event dates back to 1851 and the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in London, the first of what came to be called World Expos. In recent years have been staged every five years in a host city for a period ranging from three to six months.

Since 2013, when Dubai impressed a selection panel in Paris with its bid for the 2020 event, the expo has been one the most talked about and eagerly anticipated events in the UAE.

Organizers say the expo, which was delayed by a year because of the pandemic and finally got underway on Oct. 1 this year, provides a showcase for more than 200 participating entities, including 192 countries, and features 60 events. About 25 million visitors are expected before it closes in April.

• *Twitter: @rebeccaaproctor*















Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Editor's Choice](#)

[Expo 2020 Dubai](#)

[Opportunity District](#)

[Al-Forsan Crescent](#)

[Ayurveda](#)

Saudi Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai welcomes 23,000 visitors in one day
Saudi Arabia's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai puts on a show for curious guests