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Hajj salvation cut to Kingdom 60,000



In this July 31, 2020 file photo, pilgrims walk around the Ka'aba at the Grand Mosque in the Muslim holy city of Makkah. Saudi Arabia said June 12, 2021, that this year's Hajj pilgrimage will be limited to no more than 60,000 people, all of them from within the kingdom, due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. (AP)

Kuwait backs move

DUBAI, June 12, (Agencies): Saudi Arabia announced Saturday this year's Hajj pilgrimage will be limited to no more than 60,000 people, all of them from within the kingdom, due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The announcement by the kingdom comes after it ran an incredibly pared-down pilgrimage last year over the virus, but still allowed a small number of the faithful to take part in the annual ceremony.

A statement on the state-run Saudi Press Agency quoted the kingdom's Hajj and Umrah Ministry making the announcement. It said this year's Hajj, which will begin in mid-July, will be limited to those ages 18 to 65.

Those taking part must be vaccinated as well, the ministry said.

"The kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is honored to host pilgrims every year, confirms that this arrangement comes out of its constant concern for the health, safety and security of pilgrims as well as the safety of their countries," the statement said.

In last year's Hajj, as few as 1,000 people already residing in Saudi Arabia were selected to take part. Two-thirds were foreign residents from among the 160 different nationalities that would have normally been represented at the Hajj. One-third were Saudi security personnel and medical staff.

Each year, up to 2 million Muslims perform the Hajj, a physically demanding and often costly pilgrimage that draws the faithful from around the world. The Hajj, required of all able-bodied Muslims to perform once in their lifetime, is seen as a chance to wipe clean past sins and bring about greater humility and unity among Muslims.

Stakes

The kingdom's Al Saud ruling family stakes its legitimacy in this oil-rich nation on overseeing and protecting the hajj sites. Ensuring the Hajj happens has been a priority for them.

Disease outbreaks have always been a concern surrounding the Hajj. Pilgrims fought off a malaria outbreak in 632, cholera in 1821 killed an estimated 20,000, and another cholera outbreak in 1865 killed 15,000 before spreading worldwide.

More recently, Saudi Arabia faced danger from a different coronavirus, one that causes the Middle East respiratory syndrome, or MERS. The kingdom increased its public health measures during the Hajj in 2012 and 2013, urging the sick and the elderly not to take part.

In recent years, Saudi officials also instituted bans on pilgrims coming from countries affected by the Ebola virus.

Saudi Arabia had closed its borders for months to try and stop the spread of the coronavirus. Since the start of the pandemic, the kingdom has reported over 462,000 cases of the virus with 7,500 deaths. It has administered some 15.4 million doses of coronavirus vaccines, according to the World Health Organization. The kingdom is home to over 30 million people.

Kuwait welcomed Saudi Arabia's decision to limit this year's Islamic Hajj pilgrimage to only 60,000 nationals and expatriates living in the country, due to fears about the spread of coronavirus.

Kuwait's Foreign Ministry, in a statement, applauded Saudi Arabia's "huge and appreciated efforts" in service of Hajj and Umrah pilgrims, amid its commitment to ensure their safety.

The ministry went on to commend Riyadh's support of scientific and medical endeavours aimed at tackling the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation welcomed Saudi Arabia's decision to limit this year's Hajj season to just 60,000 citizens and expatriates living in the kingdom.

The decision was made to prevent the spread of COVID-19, particularly in light of the emergence of new variants and in accordance with Islamic teachings, GCC's Secretary General Nayef Al-Hajraf said in a statement on Saturday.

Riyadh's step aims to protect the health of pilgrims, he added.

On his part, Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Yousef Al-Othaimen also applauded the decision, adding that protecting people's lives and their wellbeing is part of Islam's main principles.

Day by Day

WHEN statesmen make up their minds, everything falls into place like a jigsaw puzzle. It is crystal clear that when the senior state officials were determined to hold paper exams for Grade 12 students, their determination paid off, the plan was successful and the students answered the exams.

This reaffirms the fact that when the State studies the demands of its people calmly and give deaf ear to the 'voices of traders' - those who trade in public issues - such as MPs, social networking sites and newspaper writers, and implements the decisions firmly, it means we are on the right track.

We say it frankly: see what your people want, and do not listen to those who say: 'We will not allow you ...' ... Yet, tomorrow is just another day.

Zahed Matar

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: The decision-makers remain divided on the issue of the renewal of work permits for those who have reached the age of 60 and above and hold high school diplomas or below, reports Al-Qabas daily.

The Supreme Advisory Committee of the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has been toying with the idea especially with regards to the fees to be slapped on this category of employees who wish to renew their work permits and are believed to number about 88,000.

According to the available information, the civil society and the Chamber of Commerce representatives have shown their respective reservations on the proposal to impose 2,000 dinars fee, in addition to health insurance.

KUWAIT CITY: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Saturday sent a cable of congratulations to the President of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte on his country's national day.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent similar cables. (KUNA)

DALLAS: The airline industry's recovery from the pandemic passed a milestone as more than 2 million people streamed through US airport security checkpoints on Friday for the first time since early March 2020.

The Transportation Security Administration announced Saturday that 2.03 million travelers were screened at airport checkpoints on Friday. It was the first time in 15 months that the number of security screenings has surpassed 2 million in a single day.

Airline bookings have been picking up since around February, as more Americans were vaccinated against COVID-19 and - at least within the United States - travel restrictions such as mandatory quarantines began to ease. (AP)

Kuwait reports 1,437 more COVID-19 infections

Thousands take 2nd dose of Astra

Grant subsidized building materials to citizens: MP

Speaker hails IPU condemnation of Israel

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 12: The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) condemns Israel's expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, says National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim.

Al-Ghanim, who is now back in the country after a two-day visit to Geneva where he met IPU Chairman Duarte Pacheco as a representative of geopolitical countries at the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, made the statement in a press conference after the meeting. Pacheco was also present at the press conference.

During the press conference, Al-Ghanim thanked Pacheco for supporting the Palestinian cause and for the fruitful meeting. He disclosed that the IPU condemns the killing of Palestinian children in Gaza within 51 days, pointing out the number of Palestinian victims in 51 days is higher than the number of Israelis killed in the last 51 years. He said this is a clear manifestation of the huge imbalance of power between the Israelis and Palestinians.

He added the Israeli apartheid regime and racial segregation practiced by Israel against the Palestinians are unacceptable for any just individual or organization in the whole world. He highlighted the statements of the European Parliament and Human Rights Watch, stressing he expects the same from the IPU.

He expressed gratitude to Pacheco for instructing the Middle East Committee at the IPU to form a fact-finding panel to visit the occupied Palestinian territories and submit a report in this regard. He

praised the decision of Pacheco to visit Palestine in order to determine the truth through meetings with both parties.

Addressing Pacheco, Al-Ghanim asserted the latter will visit the largest prison in the world - Gaza, which has become a big jail trapping the innocent Palestinians. He said the Israeli apartheid regime besieged the Palestinians in Gaza, up to the point of blocking the gates between Gaza and Egypt.

Violated

He went on to say that Israel violated international laws, United Nations (UN) resolutions; as well as articles 2/C and 3 of the IPU Charter. He clarified that IPU was not established to organize social gatherings, but to adopt strong positions under such circumstances. He added that on behalf of Arab parliaments, he expects IPU to intensify its efforts regarding the Israeli attacks on Aqsa Mosque and Christian holy places in Jerusalem under the leadership of Pacheco.

Deputy Speaker MP Ahmed Al-Shuhoumi, Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Mubarak Al-Harees and Secretary General of the Assembly Adel Al-Lughani welcomed the speaker upon his arrival at Kuwait International Airport.

Meanwhile, Pacheco revealed they discussed relations between IPU and Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union; as well as the current situation in the Middle East, especially in Palestine.

He emphasized the importance of respecting UN resolutions on the establishment of two sovereign states - Palestine and Israel - living together harmoniously with Jerusalem as their

capital. He affirmed the IPU is keen on achieving this goal by enhancing dialogue between the two parties.

He underscored the need to condemn the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories as it will not contribute to the progress of dialogue between the two parties and peace will not be achieved. He denounced the launching of rockets from Israel towards the Palestinians in the same manner he condemned attacks inside Israel, particularly the sacred places for Muslims and the use of excessive force by Israeli authorities against the Palestinians in Gaza; which led to the suffering of many people. He emphasized the need to establish dialogue between the two parties, asserting this is the most important issue at the moment. He said the dialogue must focus on the future of both parties and achieving peace rather than talking about the past.

On the other hand, MP Khalil Al-Saleh submitted a proposal to grant subsidized construction materials to citizens who are not covered by Housing Welfare Law No. 19/2014. He suggested that the amount of subsidized construction materials is KD 30,000 - the same amount granted to citizens covered by this law.

He said these citizens need such a subsidy for the renovation and maintenance of their houses that were constructed a long time ago. He affirmed his proposal is in line with the principle of social equality stipulated in the Constitution; particularly Article Eight: "The State shall preserve the pillars of society and shall guarantee security, tranquility and equal opportunity for all citizens."

Israel attacked Iran nuke assets: ex-Mossad chief

DUBAI, June 12, (AP): The outgoing chief of Israel's Mossad intelligence service has offered the closest acknowledgment yet his country was behind recent attacks targeting Iran's nuclear program and a military scientist.

The comments by Yossi Cohen, speaking to Israel's Channel 12 investigative program "Uvda" in a segment aired Thursday night, offered an extraordinary debriefing by the head of the typically secretive agency in what appears to be the final days of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rule.

It also gave a clear warning to other scientists in Iran's nuclear program that they too could become targets for assassination even as diplomats in Vienna try to negotiate terms to try to salvage its atomic accord with world powers.

"If the scientist is willing to change career and will not hurt us anymore,

than yes, sometimes we offer them" a way out, Cohen said.

Among the major attacks to target Iran, none have struck deeper than two explosions over the last year at its Natanz nuclear facility. There, centrifuges enrich uranium from an underground hall designed to protect them from airstrikes.

In July 2020, a mysterious explosion tore apart Natanz's advanced centrifuge assembly, which Iran later blamed on Israel. Then in April of this year, another blast tore apart one of its underground enrichment halls.

Discussing Natanz, the interviewer asked Cohen where he'd take them if they could travel there. Cohen said "to the cellar" where "the centrifuges used to spin."

"It doesn't look like it used to look," he added.

Cohen did not directly claim the attacks, but his specificity offered the closest acknowledgement yet of an Israeli hand in the attacks. The interviewer, journalist Ilana Dayan, also seemingly offered a detailed description in a voiceover of how Israel snuck the explosives into Natanz's underground halls.

"The man who was responsible for these explosions, it becomes clear, made sure to supply to the Iranians the marble foundation on which the centrifuges are placed," Dayan said. "As they install this foundation within the Natanz facility, they have no idea that it already includes an enormous amount of explosives."

They also discussed the November killing of Mohsen Fakhrazadeh, an Iranian scientist who began Tehran's military nuclear program decades ago.