

MEIWeekly.



A person wearing a mask on an empty street in Bnei Brak, Israel. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, many officials have been urging countries to further their co-operation to fight the coronavirus. Photo: Amir Appel / shared on Flickr.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING INSTITUTE EVENTS

Dawat in the Time of Corona

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, practitioners of Tablighi Jamaat, a transnational Islamic piety movement, continued their mass gatherings called *Ijtimah*. Taking reference from his extensive fieldwork with Pakistani Tablighi, Dr Arsalan Khan will outline how a ritualised form of face-to-face preaching, or dawat, creates a distinct pious sociality based on what he calls the “ethics of hierarchy”.



Join us for this virtual public talk conducted via Zoom on **23 June** from **4pm to 5.30pm**. Registration is free and all are welcome. Check out <https://nus.edu/2Yrzgwh> for more details now!

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

UAE Can Work with Israel: Senior Official

Mr Anwar Gargash, the United Arab Emirates minister of state for foreign affairs, addressed a conference of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) advocacy group on Tuesday (16 June) and said that despite their political differences, the UAE can work with Israel in areas such as technology or fighting Covid-19. His question and answer session was described as “historic” by the AJC and came days after another senior official made a rare appeal to the Israeli public by having an article published in Hebrew in Israel’s leading newspaper.



Concert-goers waving a rainbow flag during a performance by a rock band, Mashrou' Leila, whose lead singer is openly gay, in Cairo in September 2017. After the concert, Egyptian authorities barred the group from performing again. Photo: [egyptianstreets / shared on Wikipedia Commons](#).

Exiled Gay Egyptian Takes Her Life

The suicide of 30-year-old Sarah Hegazi in Canada on Saturday (13 June) reverberated across Egypt this week as the country’s gay and transgender community mourned the loss of yet another young Egyptian life. Openly identifying herself as a lesbian in a country where homosexuality is taboo, Hegazi’s life had been marked by violence, despair and exile after she shot to infamy for raising a rainbow flag at a 2017 pop concert in her home country. Even though she subsequently fled to Canada and was granted political asylum, she continued to suffer anxiety and panic attacks. In her final note, she wrote: “To the world, you’ve been greatly cruel, but I forgive.”

Oman Seeks Financial Aid from Gulf

Oman is looking at a seventh straight year of fiscal deficits, with its financial woes compounded by the drop in oil prices due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Given Oman’s important role as a mediator on regional and international issues, including with Iran, and its geographical position on one of the world’s busiest shipping lanes, its stability is important to the Gulf states and international allies like the US. However, their explicit support is necessary to reassure investors as well as repair the economy to ensure stability.

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Cathay Pacific to Restart Flights to Tel Aviv

Cathay Pacific will operate passenger flights between Hong Kong and Tel Aviv’s Ben-Gurion Airport from next week, due to demand from Israeli passengers. The Hong Kong flag carrier will depart for Israel from Chek Lap Kok International Airport on Thursday (June 25) and return on Friday (June 26). The airline has reinforced the “importance and strength” of regular flights between Hong Kong and Tel Aviv.



Egyptian Borders to Reopen for Tourism

The Egyptian Cabinet announced on Sunday (14 June) that it will reopen its borders for tourism. International flights will be allowed to enter the country from 1 July, with foreign tourists permitted at the seaside resorts least affected by Covid-19. The government had imposed a lockdown and curfew back in March, but those measures are currently being relaxed, with hotels that meet health and safety requirements being allowed to reopen. The government has also decided “to waive tourist visas from July 1 until October 31”, citing Egypt’s reputation as a tourist destination and people’s health as the primary considerations behind reopening for tourism.

#MUSTREAD: WHAT’S POPULAR ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK: An Israeli Cabinet official announced they will begin developing Ramat Trump, or “Trump Heights”, in the occupied Golan Heights. This is part of a larger annexation scheme green-lighted by Trump’s Middle East plan. <https://bit.ly/30TSHBe>



The idea of engaging Iran through the lens of Eurasia is not alien to India’s foreign policy. Ms Sumitha Narayanan Kutty traces India’s shifting priorities vis-à-vis Iran and finds that — intentionally or not — the future of the India–Iran relationship is strongly intertwined with the Eurasian sphere, given its emphasis on connectivity. <https://nus.edu/37ICBma>

TWITTER: After weeks of lockdowns, many Middle Eastern countries are easing restrictions and beginning to reopen. In the midst of this reopening, Covid-19 cases have started to rise. However, most governments are reluctant to shut down again given their economies are just restarting. A second wave may be on the horizon and harder to stop than the first, but few of the countries can afford to shut down once more. <https://econ.st/3hFSBTp>

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