



An open-air café in Tehran

Iran's 'Sacred' City Shuts Cafes, Restaurants In Morality Crackdown

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The Iranian city of Mashhad, known for its religious significance, is closing outdoor spaces in at least 110 restaurants and coffee shops in a morality crackdown.

In an unexplainable move, the cafes have been branded centers of 'nightlife' in a bid to stop people from gathering and crack down on social activities, ordered by the Provincial Chastity and Hijab Headquarters, though they play no music, and have to close before midnight.

However, as women are increasingly going out without the mandatory headscarf, the regime is doing its utmost to crack down on all social activity to punish the masses as it continues to lose its hijab war against an increasingly rebellious public.

So vast is the crackdown on citizens, social media users have reported unofficial curfews in other parts of Iran, including streetlights in the capital, Tehran, being turned off from 8pm, raising concerns about public safety during the evening hours. Additionally, some cafes in Tehran have been compelled to close before 8pm, and only a handful of restaurants remain open at night.

According to the semi-official ISNA news agency, the municipality of Mashhad initiated the plan to close the outdoor space of cafes and restaurants from August 1. Out of the 270 affected units scattered across various districts in Mashhad, at least 110 have already closed their outdoor areas.

The Chief Justice of Khorasan, back in July, clarified that the Prosecutor's Office was not responsible for sealing the spaces in front of these facilities. It remains uncertain whether these provincial bodies have the legal authority to enforce such approvals.

The move has faced mass criticism, with many expressing concerns about its impact on businesses and the daily lives of the city's residents, and not least, yet more hypocrisy that the rules apply differently to the regime's insiders to those ordinary citizens trying to live their lives. The crackdown comes while elites from the regime continue to have **parties around the country** both indoors and outdoors, as well as **reveling in foreign countries**.

Iranian youths playing a boardgame at a café

Meanwhile, Hasan Amirian, the head of the Mashhad Restaurants Association, revealed on Thursday that during peak hours, around noon, the electricity supply of 80% of restaurants in Mashhad is being cut off, exacerbating the challenges faced by restaurant owners.

This recent crackdown on nightlife is not an isolated incident. In May, the Tehran municipality unilaterally **demolished eight cafes in the Ekbatan town market** in western Tehran without prior notification. Reports suggested that the demolition was a response to protests by residents during the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, aiming to deter further dissent.

The resistance to night activities in the Islamic Republic is not a new phenomenon. Authorities have consistently opposed the nightlife culture for ordinary Iranians, deeming it incongruent with religious values and detrimental to citizens' well-being. Javan, a newspaper affiliated with the IRGC, has recently written about the “psychological damage caused by nightlife”, citing religious guidelines as a basis for their opposition.

As the regime continues to push its propaganda, its psychologists quoted by Javan argue that nightlife “adversely affects citizens' mental health by deviating from what God has decided for us and asked us to do.” Pro-regime sociologists have also commented, asserting that nightlife conflicts with the societal working patterns and have implicitly called for shops to close at 7.30pm. Some even propose limiting television broadcasting of engaging programs beyond 9pm to encourage earlier sleeping habits as the regime bid to control the public begins to spill into people's homes and private lives.

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