

80,000 Muslims Pray on Moscow Street

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Muslims praying near a reproduction of a Russian Orthodox icon during the Eid al-Adha festival on Sunday. Some 80,000 showed up in Moscow. **Sergei Karpukhin**

Tens of thousands of Muslim men knelt shoulder-to-shoulder in prayer on the freezing streets of Moscow on Sunday to celebrate the religious holiday of Eid al-Adha.

Estimates of the number of Muslims living or working in the Russian capital run from 2 million to as high as 5 million, but the city has few mosques.

Police said 170,000 people celebrated the holiday in Moscow, including 80,000 who gathered on the street outside what was once the main mosque. The 100-year-old pastel green Cathedral Mosque was torn down in September and a new mosque being built next to it is still under construction.

Many of those who braved temperatures of minus 8 degrees Celsius to pray on Sunday morning were migrant workers from countries in Central Asia that were once part of the Soviet Union.

"Of course, new mosques are needed," said Maruv, a shop worker from Tajikistan who gave

only his first name. "Look at how many people are in the street, and it's cold. They have been standing here waiting for the beginning of prayers since 6 a.m., and there are no facilities."

Police cordoned off the area and set up metal detectors to screen worshippers. The mosque is located next to the Olimpiisky Sports Complex, where this weekend women tennis players from Russia and the Czech Republic played the Fed Cup final.

Eid al-Adha, or "festival of sacrifice," known as Kurban-Bairam in Russia, is a feast celebrated by Muslims worldwide. The holiday commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael, to show obedience to God, but God provided a sheep for him to sacrifice instead.

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