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Moscow Authorities Open Parks, Close Roads for Eid al-Fitr

By Anna Dolgov

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Muslim worshippers pray during the holy month of Ramadan in Moscow, July 2014.

Moscow city authorities will close off sections of the capital to traffic this Friday to accommodate mass prayers during the Muslim holiday Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the month-long fast of Ramadan.

In addition to five mosques that are expected to hold mass prayers, the city has allocated areas in three parks — the Izumrudny sports complex in the southwest on the city, the Park of the 60th Anniversary of October in the south, and a section of Park Sokolniki in the east — for Muslim religious services, City Hall said in a statement.

At the parks where prayer service are expected to be held, police will install metal detectors and will require anyone seeking admission to show ID, the City Hall statement said.

"Moscow mosques are unable to accommodate everyone who comes to religious services,"

the statement said in explanation for allocating sections of the parks for prayers.

More than 160,000 people attended services last year marking the Eid al-Fitr holiday, known in Russia as Uraza Bairam, according to Interior Ministry estimates cited by Moscow's M24 news portal.

Municipal authorities are also contemplating removing or covering up advertising billboards that feature scantily clad models or other subjects that could "offend the religious feelings of Muslims" around the allocated prayer sites, an unidentified official at the mayor's office was quoted as saying by Moscow's M24 news portal.

Muslim activist Airat Kasimov, whose "mobile mosque" service operates a bus equipped for holding prayers, welcomed the plans to cover up billboards, the report said.

"During prayers, there should be no depictions of animals or people in front of the faithful," he was quoted as saying.

Streets around five mosques — Moscow Cathedral Mosque, Old Mosque, the adjacent Yardyam and Inam mosques, and the memorial mosque on Poklonnaya Hill — will be closed to car traffic, according to the statement.

The subway schedule will also see some changes: The entrance to the Prospekt Mira station on the orange line will be closed on Friday morning, and trains will proceed through the station without stopping, the statement said. The Prospekt Mira station on the ring (brown) line will remain open.

Among the huge influx of attendees at Eid al-Fitr prayer services each year in Moscow, only an estimated 20 percent are residents of the Russian capital, a spokesperson for the City Hall was quoted by M24 as saying.

"The rest are either migrants who end up staying in the Moscow region, or visitors from other regions," the spokesperson was quoted as saying.

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