

Dutch MPs Oppose Headscarves for Police

THE HAGUE (AFP) -- Dutch lawmakers have voiced opposition to a proposal by Amsterdam's top police official to consider allowing female Muslim agents to wear headscarves, Dutch media reported Friday. At least six major political parties are against plans from Commissioner Pieter-Jaap Aalbersberg to introduce Islamic headscarves to women's uniforms as part of a recruitment drive to diversify law enforcement in the Dutch capital. Aalbersberg on Thursday said he wanted to boost multiculturalism among Amsterdam's police, saying he wanted at least half of all new recruits in the tourist hotspot to come from a non-Dutch background.

Kayhan International

Sudan's Bashir Skips Riyadh Summit

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) -- Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court, will not join a summit in Saudi Arabia with U.S. President Donald Trump, his office said Friday. "President Omar al-Bashir has apologized to King Salman of Saudi Arabia for being unable to attend the Riyadh summit," a statement from his office carried by the official SUNA news agency said. Bashir has evaded arrest since his indictment by the ICC for alleged genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity related to the 14-year-old conflict in Darfur that has killed tens of thousands of people.

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Viewpoint

By Kayhan Int'l Staff Writer

Iran Decides

Scientists Produce Lab-Grown Blood Stem Cells



Iran Secure 3rd Place at Islamic Solidarity Games



Russia, Syria Blast U.S. Strikes Targeting Anti-Daesh Forces



Trump Visit to Mideast Set to Aggravate Tensions

DUBAI (Dispatches) -- U.S. President Donald Trump is expected to sidestep human rights questions when he meets Persian Gulf Arab leaders at the weekend and focus, to the dismay of beleaguered government critics, on business and security.

Civil liberties monitors point to freedom of expression as a right increasingly constrained in Persian Gulf Arab states including summit host Saudi Arabia, which is planning to buy tens of billions of dollars' worth of U.S. arms.

Persian Gulf Arab states began stepping up the muffling of political discussion in the dying months of former president Barack Obama's term and have continued this under Trump, they say.

"Given Trump's tenuous relationship with freedom of the press and free expression in general, we have no expectation that Trump would raise these issues during his visit," said Adam Coogle, Middle East researcher at Human Rights Watch.

In Washington, a senior Trump administration official said human rights would not take center stage in Riyadh, where Arab leaders are expected to discuss what they see as the growing influence of Iran.

The official said Trump preferred to keep such conversations private, much as he did with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi recently.

The Saudis "don't want any more talk about human rights, democracy, political reform or gender equality," said Bruce Riedel of the Brookings Institution think tank in Washington.

"They're pretty confident they're not going to hear it from Donald Trump."

While experts are not surprised, since the Persian Gulf states' monarchies abhor discord and dislike free-wheeling political debate, they are nevertheless dismayed.

The output of several columnists, economists and clerics in regional powerhouse Saudi Arabia and some of its smaller neighbors has either dried up or grown circumspect since the second half of 2016 in what critics see as an unacknowledged state drive to stifle public criticism, rights monitors say.

Among those who have fallen silent are critics, both liberal and conservative, of the kingdom's ambitious plan to diversify the economy and open up the country culturally under a plan known as Vision 2030.

Since the 2011 Arab Spring, Persian Gulf states have stepped up efforts to curb dissent with tough new cybercrime laws, sentencing offenders to prison terms for Web posts deemed insulting to rulers or threatening to public order.

But in the past two years, unnerved by low oil prices and the slow progress of a war in Yemen, Persian Gulf authorities became even less patient with dissenting voices in the media, analysts and rights groups say.

Madawi al-Rasheed, visiting professor at the Middle East Center, London School of Economics, said Riyadh was engaged in an effort to muzzle intellectuals with "dissenting voices."

"There are so many of them, both men and women, who have left the kingdom," she said.

Activists say muzzled writers include economists, academics, columnists and Muslim clerics. There are no precise figures on how many have been affected, but estimates by activists put the number at more than 20 from Saudi Arabia alone.

While some were merely advised not to air their views on social media, more vocal critics have found themselves behind bars, facing possible indictments on charges such as disobeying the ruler or incitement against the state, rights activists say.

"The pursuit by security is increasing rapidly and ... it is killing the voice of moderation," said Walid Sulais, a Saudi rights activist who fled abroad in late 2016 after authorities summoned him for questioning over his rights work.

Political parties are banned in Saudi Arabia as are protests, unions are illegal, the press is controlled and criticism of the royal family can lead to prison. Riyadh says it does not have political prisoners, while top officials have said monitoring activists is needed to keep social stability.

Leaders in Riyadh believe that Trump will sign on to one of the biggest weapons deals in history and unveil plans to form and back an 'Arab Nato'.

"Iran is the grand prize here," said one member of the Saudi royal family, who declined to be named. "Everything else is bells and whistles."

Saudi officials appear to have conditioned their moves against extremist wahabism on U.S. support for their agenda on reforms and Iran.

"The war against extremism is a centre piece of that," said the royal family member. They're in part saying to Trump: "We'll do you a deal."

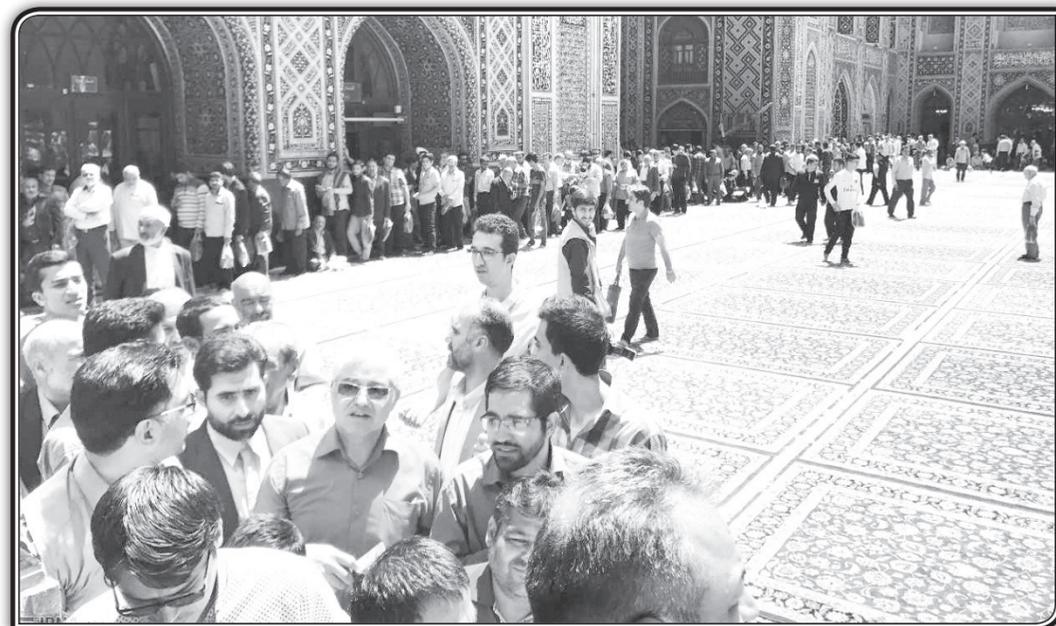
Trump is also likely to lobby Saudi leaders to form closer ties with the occupying regime of Israel. Sporadic ties between Riyadh and Tel Aviv have existed since the mid-70s, but have become more frequent over the past 15 years.

The perception that Saudi Arabia had facilitated the rise of extremist groups was widespread among senior Obama officials, who viewed some Saudi leaders suspiciously and claimed that proselytizing by senior clerics and some officials had had spread rigid wahhabi thought into Islamic countries it had regarded as "moderate".

The new administration has eschewed such comments, but Trump himself has claimed that "Islam hates us", attempted to bring in a travel ban targeting six Muslim-majority countries and has hinted at immigration policies that make it more difficult for Muslims to live and work in the U.S.

Trump has so far favored bilateral models that shift the burden of payment to allies. But his reluctance to write checks may be tempered by the suggested size of the arms deal: up to \$100 billion in new weapons to the Saudi military, much of which will be diverted to the ongoing, contentious, war in Yemen that has pitched Saudi forces against the impoverished country.

Iranians Stun World With Huge Turnout



Voters line up to cast their votes at Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad in Iran's presidential and city and village council elections, May 19, 2017.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- **Iranians voted in huge numbers in fiercely-contested presidential polls on Friday, standing in long lines to choose between incumbent Hassan Rouhani and a serious challenger, Seyyed Ebrahim Raesi.**

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei described the 2017 elections as very important, saying the destiny of the country is in the hand of the masses.

"I thank God Almighty for the blessing of democracy, election people's participation. This is a great blessing," the Leader said, casting his ballot here as lengthy

queues formed across the country of 80 million.

"I believe a good work should be done in early hours and should not be delayed. I also believe the presidential election is very important," the Leader said.

"The destiny of the country is in the hands of the people who choose the chief executive. They should heed the importance of this task," Ayatollah Khamenei added.

Besides picking a president, Iranians also voted to choose members of the country's City and Village Councils.

"The City and Village Councils

Election is also important as it elects those who are in charge of urban and rural services, namely the everyday issues involving the people," the Leader said.

Some 350,000 security forces were deployed around the country to protect the election, national television reported.

Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi said no security threat had been observed, adding the "slightest anti-security move" would be dealt with accordingly.

"In the past, anti-security and counter-revolutionary currents were trying to somehow create threats,

but this time around, we are witnessing a decline in this regard," he said.

Before voting had even concluded, the head of Raisi's campaign complained of multiple "infractions" and called for an intervention by authorities.

Ali Nikzad said there had been "propaganda actions by certain officials and supporters of the government" in favor of President Rouhani. "Such infractions are immoral actions that violate people's rights," he said.

Iranian election rules state that no one can seek to influence voters once the campaign finishes 24 hours before the polls open.

Another official in Raisi's campaign said there had been 219 infractions so far on Friday, and that not enough ballot papers had been distributed in areas thought to favor Raisi, including his home city of Mashhad.

Meanwhile, officials announced they would keep polling stations open for an extra four hours on Friday evening after many people queued for hours to cast their ballots in the presidential and council elections.

Rouhani campaigned on a platform of an active foreign policy meant to enhance international relations, while Raisi vowed a strong economic management towards the elimination of poverty and unemployment.

Raisi also focused his campaign on the economy, visiting rural areas and villages, promising housing,

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U.S. Imposes New Sanctions on Iran

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- **The U.S. Treasury has announced new sanctions against individuals and corporate entities in Iran and China for allegedly assisting Iran's ballistic missile program.**

In a statement, the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said it has "designated two senior Iranian defense officials, including a defense official who facilitated the sale of explosives and provided other support to Syria and the director of the organization responsible for Iran's solid-fueled ballistic missile program" as targets for sanctions.

Those officials are Morteza Farasatpour, a senior Iranian defense official, and Rahim Ahmadi, a senior official with Iran's Shahid Bakeri Industries Group (SBIG).

Also designated for sanctions were a Chinese national and three Chinese companies.

Finally, Iran-based Matin Sanat Nik Andishan, a company that has provided materials useful to Iran's liquid-fueled ballistic missile pro-

gram, was listed for sanctions.

Even as the new sanctions were announced, the Trump administration "notified Congress that it's continuing to waive sanctions, including restrictions on oil sales, that were eased under the 2015 deal between world powers and Iran based on an April finding that "Iran is complying with its side of the deal."

Iran promptly attacked the new sanctions as a violation of the nuclear deal, calling the measures "unacceptable and contrary to the tenets of the international law."

"Iran condemns the U.S. administration's ill will in its effort to reduce the positive results of the country's implementation of JCPOA commitments by adding individuals to the list of unilateral and illegal extraterritorial sanctions," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said in a statement.

Qassemi said Iran had added "nine U.S. individuals and corporations"

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Cholera Set to Hit 300,000 Yemenis: WHO

GENEVA (Dispatches) -- **Yemen could have as many as 300,000 cases of cholera within six months and an "extremely high" number of deaths, the World Health Organization said on Friday.**

"We need to expect something that could go up to 200,000-250,000 cases over the next six months, in addition to the 50,000 cases that have already occurred," Nevio Zagaria, WHO Yemen representative, told reporters in Geneva by phone.

The cost in lives from this will be "extremely, extremely high," he said.

The epidemic began in October 2016 and grew until December. It dwindled but was never fully under control, Zagaria said, and new cases had arisen with the rainy season, worsened by the collapse of the economy and the health system.

The outbreak has caused 23,425 cases in 18 of Yemen's 23 governorates since April 27, and 242 people have died, he said.

That misleadingly suggested a case fatality rate of about 1 percent, with the true rate more likely 4-5%, he said, adding that the latest data had taken health experts by surprise.

"The speed of the resurgence of the cholera epidemic is unprecedented (for Yemen)."

Caused by the ingestion of the Vibrio cholerae bacterium from faecally contaminated water or food, cholera's sudden onset of acute watery diarrhea and can kill within hours, although three-quarters of infected people show no symptoms.

The short incubation period means outbreaks can spread with explosive speed, especially in places without safe water and proper sanitation, according to the WHO.

Yemen has been ruined by two years of Saudi war, with 18.8 million people needing humanitarian aid, many of them on the brink of famine, and less than 45% of health facilities fully functional.

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