

World News Roundup

Iran

Iran issues rights charter

'Trump's travel bans a great gift to extremists'

TEHRAN, Jan 29, (AFP): Iran's Foreign Minister **Mohammad Javad Zarif** said Sunday that US President Donald Trump's decision to ban arrivals from seven Muslim majority countries was "a great gift to extremists".

"#MuslimBan will be recorded in history as a great gift to extremists and their supporters," Zarif said as part of a string of tweets.

"Collective discrimination aids terrorist recruitment by deepening fault-lines exploited by extremist demagogues to swell their ranks."

Trump on Friday signed a sweeping executive order to suspend refugee arrivals and bar visas for travellers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.



Zarif

Iran's foreign ministry had earlier released a statement saying it would reciprocate with a ban on Americans entering the country.

But Zarif added that its restrictions would not apply to Americans who already have a valid visa.

"Unlike the US, our decision is not retroactive. All with valid Iranian visa will be gladly welcomed," he wrote.

With more than one million Iranians living in the United States, the travel restrictions are expected to cause chaos for students, businessmen and families travelling between the two countries.

Measures

Parliament speaker Ali Larijani said the measures were proof of America's "violent racist spirit".

The foreign ministry released a travel advisory, calling on all citizens travelling to the US to "make completely sure" before leaving that they will not face obstacles.

Travel agents in Tehran said Saturday they had been instructed by foreign airlines, including Emirates, Etihad and Turkish Airlines, not to sell US tickets and that Iranians holding American visas were not being allowed to board US-bound flights.



Iran issues rights charter: Iran's new charter of rights outlining freedoms of speech, protest and fair trials does not apply to the detention of opposition leaders and dual nationals, the bill's architect says.

The Charter of Citizens' Rights, released last month by the office of President Hassan Rouhani, embodies freedoms including the right to trial in open court without arbitrary detention.

But Elham Aminzadeh, special assistant to Rouhani on citizens' rights, told AFP in an interview that the bill has no power over the judiciary or parliament and only covers the civil service and other parts of the executive.

"I cannot put an article in this charter for the judiciary or legislative," said Aminzadeh, who spent three years compiling the document.

Asked about the continued house arrest without trial of opposition leaders since anti-government protests in 2009, she said: "It is not very related to the executive or administrative power. It is something else. I cannot answer to this."

On the trials of dual nationals, who have recently been jailed in closed-door courts, Aminzadeh said: "Security prisoners have a special process inside the judiciary. We cannot say anything about special security prisoners."

"We talk to the judiciary, but just talk and notifying -- nothing more," she added.

Recent months have seen several cases such as that of British-Iranian Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, sentenced to five years in prison for "sedition", and US-Iranian Siamak Namazi and his father, both given 10 years for espionage, which have caused outrage around the world.

Aminzadeh said she hoped the charter might one day be made into law by parliament and extended to all branches of government, but she indicated this was not a pressing concern.

"In comparing to other countries, I think (the human rights situation in Iran) is good, but it can be better," she said.

Campaign

Aminzadeh denied the charter was just an attempt to win votes ahead of Rouhani's likely bid for re-election in May. It had been a key campaign promise in 2013.

"It's not a slogan... It is not just for the Rouhani government, it is for the next 100 years," she said.

Pressed on the detention of dissidents and journalists, and other allegations of rights violations, Aminzadeh said these were largely invented by the foreign media and NGOs.

"I don't know why of the many different human rights violations around the world, the foreign media is not keen on discussing them," she said, highlighting the use of chemical weapons by Iraq in the 1980s.

She accused Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International of picking on Iran and ignoring rights abuses in countries like Bahrain and Yemen -- saying this was "double standards".

In the past five years, Human Rights Watch has written 14 long reports on Yemen and five on Bahrain, compared with four on Iran.

Reformist commentators in Iran have given a mixed response to the charter.

An editorial by the Association of the Reformists, published on social media network Telegram, said the charter was "good but not enough".

Rouhani "should form a committee with representatives of all branches of power and endeavour to execute this bill so it does not look like an election gesture to the public," it said.

But Mohammad Fazeli, an official with the Centre for Strategic Studies think tank, which comes under the president's office, said: "Words are not neutral".

"They will gradually pierce the hard planks of resistance," he wrote in a column for reformist paper Arman.



Turkey's Prime Minister Binali Yildirim (right), and British Prime Minister Theresa May speak during a press conference in Ankara on Jan 28. May on Jan 28 refused to condemn an order by US President Donald Trump suspending refugee arrivals, saying Washington was responsible for its own refugee policy. (AFP)

Turkey

British PM signs \$125 mln fighter jet deal

UK's May eyes Turkey trade boost

ANKARA, Jan 29, (Agencies): British Prime Minister Theresa May signed a \$125 million fighter jet deal with Turkey on Saturday and briefly cautioned Ankara on human rights following last year's failed coup, in a visit squarely aimed at boosting trade between the NATO allies.

May, in Turkey a day after meeting with US President Donald Trump in Washington, avoided criticising his sweeping ban on people from certain countries seeking refuge in the United States. She visited both countries for the first time as prime minister, promoting trade deals that would strengthen her hand in talks to leave the European Union.

Speaking to reporters at the presidential palace in Ankara alongside President Tayyip Erdogan, May called Turkey one of Britain's oldest friends and touched on human rights, a sore point for Erdogan, who accuses the West of not showing enough solidarity following a July 15 military putsch attempt.

Important

"I'm proud that the UK stood with you on the 15 July last year in defence of democracy and now it is important that Turkey sustains that democracy by maintaining the rule of law and upholding its international human rights obligations as the government has undertaken to do," she said.

Rights groups and some Western politicians have been more critical. More than 100,000 people have been sacked or suspended following the failed coup and some 40,000 jailed pending trial. Ankara says the measures are needed to root out supporters of the putsch.

At a joint news conference later with Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, May was asked more than once about Trump's sweeping ban on people seeking refuge in the United States. She said Washington was responsible for its own policies on refugees.

May had previously said the nature

of the "special relationship" between Britain and the United States meant the allies could speak frankly to each other when they disagreed.

In her Turkey visit, as in the United States, it was clear her priority was on securing trade. She said the UK and Turkey had agreed to form a joint working group for post-Brexit trade and would step up an aviation security programme.

The two countries signed a defence deal worth more than 100 million pounds (\$125 million) to develop Turkish fighter jets.

Develop

May said the deal, which involves BAE Systems and TAI (Turkish Aerospace Industries) working together to develop the TF-X Turkish fighter programme, showed "Britain is a great, global, trading nation and that we are open for business".

Yildirim said the two countries plan to sign a free-trade deal once Britain leaves the European Union, while Erdogan told reporters that he discussed steps towards defence industry cooperation with May, and that he hoped to increase annual trade with Britain to \$20 billion from \$15.6 billion now.

May's government is keen to start laying the groundwork for bilateral trade agreements for when Britain leaves the European Union, a process that will take at least two years after triggering the formal divorce talks by the end of March.

The United Kingdom was the No. 2 destination for Turkish exports in 2015, buying \$10.6 billion in goods, according to IMF trade data. Only Germany imports more from Turkey.

The countries also discussed the fight against militant groups. Yildirim said he requested legal action against supporters of the coup, who he said are active in Britain.

May sought to strike a delicate balance between showing Britain's keen interest in expanding trade with Turkey follow-

ing the June vote to leave the European Union, while echoing European alarm over the scale of the crackdown after the July 15 attempted coup.

May announced the creation of a joint group to boost trade to over \$20 billion and above ahead of Britain's departure from the EU, and also oversaw the signing of a deal for Britain's BAE Systems to develop a new Turkish fighter jet.

May said after meeting Erdogan at his palace she was "proud" Britain had stood with Turkey's democratically-elected government when the coup struck.

But she added: "Now it is important that Turkey sustains that democracy by maintaining the rule of law and upholding its international human rights obligations, as the government has undertaken to do."

She confirmed she had brought up human rights directly with Erdogan in their talks.

Around 43,000 people are under arrest on charges of links to the coup bid, which Ankara blames on the US-based preacher Fethullah Gulen. He denies the charges.

May's visit is also seen as the first to Ankara by a major Western leader since the attempted putsch, although then US vice president Joe Biden held talks with Erdogan in August.

May stressed that Turkey was one of Britain's "oldest friends" with relations going back over 400 years, referring to the establishment of relations between the Ottoman Empire and England under Elizabeth I.

Erdogan said the two sides were targeting increasing annual trade from over \$15 billion to \$20 billion.

May said Britain and Turkey have agreed to set up a working group to "prepare the ground for our post-Brexit trading relationship" after Britain leaves the European Union.

"We both want to build on our existing links and I believe that doing so will be to the benefit of both of our countries and for the prosperity of both our nations," she said.



A Palestinian man waves to his family on a bus before they cross into Egypt through the Rafah border crossing after it was opened by Egyptian authorities for humanitarian cases, in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip on Jan 29. (AFP)



Netanyahu



Abu Ismail

Mideast

Bibi backs US embassy move: Israeli Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** on Sunday called for US President Donald Trump to make good on his campaign pledge to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Departing from a long-standing US position, Trump promised he would recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital and relocate the American mission there, a pledge that drew a fierce rebuke from Palestinian officials and concern from the European Union.

"The US embassy must move here to Jerusalem," Netanyahu said after his weekly cabinet meeting. (AFP)

Israel to vote on outposts: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday he would ask parliament to vote on adopting a law legalising unauthorised Jewish settlements built on Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank.

Late last year lawmakers approved draft legislation that would retroactively grant legal status to wildcat settlements across the West Bank in defiance of international law, prompting strong condemnation from the United States.

A statement from Netanyahu's office said the new bill would be submitted for parliament's approval on Monday "to allow us to regularise once and for all settlements in (the West Bank) and prevent repeated attempts to damage them". (AFP)

Israel in hot water: When Benjamin Netanyahu sent a tweet in support of President Donald Trump's plan for a wall along the Mexican border, the Israeli prime minister can barely have expected it would be retweeted 40,000 times and cause a backlash at home and abroad.

Already under arguably the greatest pressure he has faced in his 11 years as prime minister, with police questioning him in two criminal probes into abuse of office, aligning himself with Trump may further undermine his standing.

The tweet was sent from his personal account shortly before the Jewish sabbath officially ended on Saturday. (RTS)

Egyptian Islamist jailed: An Islamist former presidential hopeful in Egypt was sentenced to five years in prison on Sunday for inciting his supporters to "besiege" a Cairo court in December 2012.

Supporters of **Hazem Salah Abu Ismail** used force, violence and threats against prosecutors to try to force them to order the release of a defendant, according to the indictment.

Five other defendants received the same

jail terms, while another 13 were sentenced to 10 years in prison in absentia, the judge said in a televised verdict.

Abu Ismail is already serving a seven-year prison sentence after he was convicted of lying in nomination papers for the 2012 presidential elections. (AFP)



Sisi blasts evil people: Returning to some of his favorite topics, Egypt's president on Saturday called on Egyptians to stand together against terrorism, angrily denounced the "evil people" plotting against his country and made a stern warning: There would be no comeback if Egypt fell to Islamic militants.

"Terrorism will not end unless we all stand together. Don't cover your eyes and pretend



Members of the Libyan National Army (LNA), also known as the forces loyal to Marshal Khalifa Haftar, inspect on Jan 28 a grave of an unknown person discovered in Qanfudah, on the southern outskirts of Benghazi, after retaking it from Islamic State (IS) fighters. Haftar has managed to retake a large part of the eastern coastal city from jihadists since Benghazi came under their control in 2014. But jihadists still control the central districts of Al-Saberi and Souq al-Hout. (AFP)

that it does not concern you," President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi told participants on the second and final day of a youth conference in the southern city of Asswan. "If Egypt is lost, it will not come back. Those who fall in the abyss never come back." (AP)

'Nazis could still be at large': Hundreds or even thousands of Nazi war crimes suspects could still be at large, one of the world's leading experts on the matter said Thursday, ahead of International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Efraim Zuroff said he expected a spike in convictions in the coming years despite most suspects being in their 90s, but admitted most were unlikely to face justice as many countries are unwilling to pursue cases.

"There are still hundreds, if not thousands of these Nazis, but the problem is who among them can be brought to justice?" the so-called Nazi hunter told an event ahead of International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Friday. (AFP)

Palestinian shot dead: A Palestinian was shot dead Sunday and five others were wounded by Israeli soldiers at the Jenin camp in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian medical sources said.

The person who was killed at the camp located in the northern West Bank was identified as 19-year-old Mohammed Abu Khalifa, the sources said. The shooting occurred after an incursion into the camp by Israeli forces sparked clashes with young Palestinians, Palestinian security officials said.

An Israeli army spokeswoman said the soldiers had opened fire after entering the camp and being attacked with explosive devices. (AFP)