

## Young Iranian women trying to redefine red lines

## In Iran, some take off their hijabs as hard-liners push back

TEHRAN, Iran, July 15, (AP): The simple act of walking has become a display of defiance for a young Iranian woman who often moves in Tehran's streets without a compulsory headscarf, or hijab.

With every step, she risks harassment or even arrest by Iran's morality police whose job is to enforce the strict dress code imposed after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

"I have to confess it is really, really scary," the 30-year-old fire-safety consultant said in a WhatsApp audio message, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of repercussions.

But she is also hopeful, saying she believes the authorities find it increasingly difficult to suppress protests as more women join in. "They are running after us, but cannot catch us," she said. "This is why we believe change is going to be made."

The hijab debate has further polarized Iranians at a time when the country is buckling under unprecedented US sanctions imposed since the Trump administration pulled out of a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers last year. It's unclear to what extent the government can enforce hijab compliance amid an economic malaise, including a currency collapse and rising housing prices.

There's anecdotal evidence that more women are pushing back against the dress code, trying to redefine red lines as they test the response of the ruling Shiite Muslim clergy and their security agencies.

An Associated Press reporter spotted about two dozen women in the streets without a hijab over the course of nine days, mainly in well-to-do areas of Tehran — a mall, a lakeside park, a hotel lobby.

## Opted

Many other women, while stopping short of outright defiance, opted for loosely draped colorful scarves that show as much hair as they cover. Even in Tehran's Grand Bazaar, frequented by many traditional women, most female shoppers wore these casual hijabs. Still, a sizeable minority of women was covered



In this July 7, 2019 photo, Iranians take selfie around of the Persian Gulf Martyrs lake, west of Tehran, Iran. (AP)

head-to-toe in black robes and tightly pulled headscarves, the so-called chador.

The struggle against compulsory headscarves first made headlines in December 2017 when a woman climbed atop a utility box in Tehran's Revolution Street, waving her hijab on a stick. More than three dozen protesters have been detained since, including nine who are currently in detention, said Masih Alinejad, an Iranian activist who now lives in New York.

Despite attempts to silence protesters, public debate has intensified, amplified by social media.

Last month, a widely watched online video showed a security agent grab an unveiled teenage girl and violently push her into the back of a police car, prompting widespread criticism.

President Hassan Rouhani and Iran's

supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have supported a softer attitude toward women who don't comply with the official dress code. However, hard-liners opposed to such easing have become more influential as the nuclear deal is faltering.

They have called for harsh punishment, even lashes, arguing that allowing women to show their hair leads to moral decay and the disintegration of families. The judiciary recently urged Iranians to inform on women without hijabs by sending photos and videos to designated social media accounts.

"The more women dress in an openly sexual way, the less we'll have social peace, while facing a higher crime rate," Minoo Aslani, head of the women's branch of the paramilitary Basij group, told a rally last week.

Another gathering was attended by several thousand women in chadors. One held up a sign reading, "The voluntary hijab is a plot by the enemy."

Reformist lawmaker Parvaneh Salahshouri said coercion does not work. "What we see is that the morality police have been a failure," said Salahshouri, who wears a headscarf out of religious belief.

Changing hijab rules through legislation is unlikely because of the constraints on parliament, she said.

Instead, women should engage in non-violent civil disobedience, Salahshouri said. She cautioned that it's a slow, difficult road, but that "Iranian women have not given up their efforts."

## Controversy

The hijab controversy goes back to the mid-1930s when police forced women to take off their hijabs, part of a Westernization policy by then-Shah Reza Pahlavi. Under his son and successor, women could choose. Western apparel was common among the elite.

A 2018 survey by a parliament research center indicates that most women wear a casual hijab and only 13% opt for a chador.

Attitudes have changed. In 1980, two-thirds believed women should wear hijabs. Today, fewer than 45% approve of government intervention in the issue, the research said.

Iran has seen waves of anti-government protests, including an outcry after a 2009 election many contended was stolen by hard-liners. Those with economic grievances frequently protest.

Alinejad, the activist, argued the campaign against forced hijabs carries symbolic weight, saying that mandatory headscarves were "the symbol that the Iranian government used to take the whole society hostage."

In recent years, she has posted videos and photos of activists, including of women filming themselves as they walk in the streets without a headscarf. Alinejad said she receives more than 20 images a day, but posts only some.

The activists in Iran take risks.

## Protesters

In March, human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, who has represented female protesters, was sentenced to 38.5 years in prison, of which she must serve 12, according to her husband.

In April, activists Yasaman Ariyani, her mother Monireh Arabshahi and Mojgan Keshavarz were arrested after posting a video showing them without headscarves in the Tehran metro. In the video, they distributed flowers to female passengers and spoke of a day when women have the freedom to choose.

Amnesty International said Monday that Iranian authorities have used incommunicado detentions, prolonged solitary confinement and threats against family members to coerce detained activists to retract their opposition to forced veiling in video-taped "confessions." The group said it had detected such a pattern in six cases since April.

Some activists maneuver carefully. The 30-year-old fire-safety consultant said she tries to avoid policemen when she walks the streets without a hijab. She said she grudgingly complies with the dress code when she delivers lectures or sings in a mixed choir — activities she would otherwise be barred from.

At the high-end Palladium Mall in northern Tehran, several shoppers casually ignored a sign reminding customers that the hijab is mandatory. One woman only pulled up her scarf, which was draped around her shoulders, when she stepped into an elevator and found herself next to a security guard.

Nearby, 20-year-old Paniz Masoumi sat on the stone steps of a plaza. She had dyed some of her hair blue, but kept that funky patch hidden under a loose scarf.

She said police recently impounded her car for two weeks, fining her amid claims that a traffic camera snapped her with a below-standard hijab.

If hijabs were voluntary, she'd throw off hers, Masoumi said. But for now, "I am not looking for trouble."

## Student Visa Days at the US embassy

The US Embassy's Consular Section will hold two Student Visa Days on July 16 and Aug 6, 2019 to support students currently studying or planning to study in the United States.

The Embassy offers student visa appointments every day. However, hundreds of additional appointments will be offered to students who apply on Student Visa Days.

Encouraging Kuwaiti students to pursue higher educational opportunities in the US is one of the top priorities of the US Mission.

Students should visit [www.ustraveldocs.com](http://www.ustraveldocs.com) to apply for their visa and schedule their interview. Student applicants should bring an original I-20 and a SEVIS receipt to their appointment.

Follow us on our social media platforms for updated information.

Visit us @ <https://kw.usembassy.gov>

## Travel



A cliff diver (top left), jumps from the landmark Raouche sea rock, during the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series competition, in Beirut, Lebanon, on July 14. Twenty-four athletes, ten females and fourteen males from 18 different nationalities dive from 21 to 27 meters platform positioned on the landmark Raouche sea rock as part of the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series includes 7 competitions across the globe and Lebanon is the 5th stop for the first time. (AP)

## Back on the map

## Lebanon hopes for best tourist season in years

BEIRUT, July 15, (RTRS): Ibrahim Zeeb is visiting Lebanon for the first time in years and says it's the food he has missed most.

"The best breakfast we'll find anywhere is here," said Zeeb as he waited with his children at Beirut airport for a relative flying in to join them from Saudi Arabia.

Lebanon is hoping for its best tourist season since 2010, thanks to a rise in European visitors and a return of Saudis, whose government lifted a travel warning this year.

Once a mainstay of Lebanon's economy, tourism has been in the doldrums since 2011 when conflict erupted in neighbouring Syria.

Political disputes in Lebanon and travel warnings against Gulf Arabs flying to the Mediterranean country have added to the industry's woes.

This year's promising season marks a rare ray of light in an otherwise gloomy outlook for Lebanon's economy which is struggling with massive public debt after years of low growth.

In the first half of 2019 the number of Saudi visitors has doubled from a year earlier, Tourism Minister Avedis Guidanian says.

"The warnings and so on, that's what kept us away before. But we have big love for Lebanon," said Zeeb, whose family will spend most of the summer here.

"We're happy honestly. We saw our people here, from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the Emirates... We've all gathered here once again."

Revenue from tourism will exceed \$7 billion in 2019, nearly 46% more than last year, Guidanian told Reuters.

"Airlines, hotels and car rental bookings, they all point to very high growth," he said in an interview at Beirut airport. "And so, 2019 could be the best year for tourism in Lebanon."

He credits the boost to better security, efforts to tap into new markets and a thaw in relations with Riyadh.

## Ties

Ties to Gulf states took a hit in recent years as the Iran-backed Hezbollah movement's influence grew in Lebanon.

Before the travel bans, Beirut had long been a favourite for Gulf Arabs escaping the stifling summer temperatures at home.

Lebanon is also looking further afield, beyond relying on Gulf tourists, to draw more people to its nightlife, UNESCO world heritage sites, mountain scenery and Mediterranean coast.

The tourism ministry expects 40% more European travellers this year than in 2010.

"I thought which country can I go to see Arab culture? Then I came across Lebanon and thought why not? It's safe to go," said Casper Boks, 21, a student from Amsterdam strolling down Beirut's busy Hamra Street with a friend.

"We're just walking around the city... I'm really enjoying it. It's so different (to) Europe and it's also so close."

There are more Western tourists roaming around Beirut's gleaming city centre which was rebuilt from the ruins of the 1975-90 civil war.

Though the peace has held since then, there

are occasional lapses — most recently a deadly shooting in the popular Chouf mountains involving followers of rival Druze leaders.

Guidanian has described the incident as a hiccup Lebanon will soon overcome. He has pleaded with politicians not to let tensions flare, warning this would ruin the summer forecast.

"There's progress from the past years... though not as much as our ambitions," said Pierre Achkar, head of the Lebanese Hotel Association. "We've suffered and the losses built up, but today, we're at the start of the ascent."

Meanwhile, Lebanon's tourism minister has urged politicians recently not to wreck the country's best tourist season in years, after a deadly shooting in a popular mountain region stirred fears of strife.

## Tensions

Avedis Guidanian said more tourists came to Lebanon in the first half of this year than in the same period any year since 2010. But he warned the president in a meeting that the summer forecast would take a hit if political tensions persisted.

"I told him, in case this incident cannot be contained, there are fears. There are many questions from people planning to come," the minister told a press conference at the presidential palace.

He added that there were no big cancellations so far.

"His excellency (President Michel Aoun) assured me that things are on the right track."

God willing, soon, we will have really overcome this."

The government has vowed to restore security after the shootout on July 1 killed two aides of a minister in the Chouf mountains, one of the bloodiest theatres of Lebanon's 1975-90 civil war.

The tourism industry, once a mainstay of Lebanon's now-battered economy, has been in the doldrums since 2011 — the year conflict erupted in neighbouring Syria.

Political paralysis in Lebanon and travel warnings from Gulf Arab states also added to the sector's woes.

The slump in tourism has played a part in years of weak economic growth and a hike in the huge public debt, which the government now pledges tough reforms to bring under control.

As relations with Gulf Arab states and security improved, officials including Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri have predicted a promising summer for tourism this year.

"The numbers of people travelling to Lebanon in first six months of 2019 are very encouraging," Guidanian said on Tuesday.

More people were arriving from Europe and Gulf states including Saudi Arabia, which lifted its travel warning against citizens going to Lebanon this year, the minister said.

Guidanian said the expected rise in tourists would bring in big revenues which Lebanon direly needed. "Imagine if we stopped shooting ourselves in the foot — the politicians I mean."

click

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IEI, Kuwait Chapter conducts many technical events for the benefits of its members. Please watch for further details in your registered e-mail or announcement in media. The chapter has science club activities for members' children, and ladies wing activities for the member's family. IEI, Kuwait Chapter has facility to register student members for AMIE Examination for those interested in pursuing career enrichment.

For more information and on chapter membership, kindly contact IEI, Kuwait Chapter on Mob: 90098667 or through email to [ieikwt@hotmail.com](mailto:ieikwt@hotmail.com)

**Advisory for OCI card holders:** All those having OCI Cards are required to carry both their OCI Card and passport to travel to India so that they do not face any difficulty in immigration clearance.

From October 2018, ICAO will accept only machine readable travel documents, hence, existing PIO Cards, which are handwritten will therefore, become invalid. Thus it will be necessary upon PIO Cardholders to obtain machine readable OCI Cards in lieu of existing hand written PIO Cards before October 2018 to avoid any inconvenience.

**Q8BBall Season 13:** Q8BBall is beginning our 13th season with Boys U13 (ages 10-13) and U17 (ages 14-17). We train three times a week and play regular games throughout the year with schools and clubs. Contact Coach T 97128884 for information.

**Invitation to Grand Mosque:** The Visits Department is pleased to invite you to visit the Grand Mosque, which is one of Kuwait's most treasured religious and cultural landmarks to discover the beauty of Islamic arts and architecture. Free guided tours are available all year round on official working days between (9-11 am) and (5-7 pm), within a special tour program designed to cater to the needs of different age groups. The program is as follows:

Reception; Auditorium show; (according to age group); Touring the Mosque; Q & A; Art workshops; (according to age group — between 5 and 18 years old); Snack break; Distribution of the Grand Mosque publications and souvenirs; End of tour.

According to these age groups:  
Age group: 5 to 9 years old: Morning: 60 visitors max; Evening: 20; 10 to 15 years: Morning: 100 visitors max; Evening: 45; 16 and above: Morning: 140 visitors max, Evening: 105;  
Tour language: Arabic- English- French; Arabic (English upon prior request); Arabic- English- French; Arabic (English upon prior request); Arabic- English- French; Arabic (English upon prior request)

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