

# Ultra-conservative cleric appointed head of Iran's judiciary

Author:

AFP

ID:

1551983056347003900

Thu, 2019-03-07 18:18

TEHRAN: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Thursday appointed ultra-conservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi, a one-time presidential hopeful, as head of the judiciary, the leader's website said.

Former judge Raisi, who currently heads the holy shrine of Imam Reza, was the leading rival to President Hassan Rouhani at Iran's 2017 election and has close ties to the supreme leader.

Khamenei said in a statement that he appointed Raisi to bring about a "transformation (in the judiciary) in line with (its) needs, advancements and challenges" on the 40th year of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

"For carrying out this crucial act, I have chosen you who have a long track record in different levels of the judiciary and are in touch with its nuances," he said in the statement.

He called on Raisi to be "with the people, the revolution and against corruption" in his new role.

Raisi is a mainstay of the conservative establishment, having served as attorney general, supervisor of state broadcaster IRIB and prosecutor in the Special Court for Clerics.

He bears the title of Hojjat Al-Islam, which is a rank under Ayatollah in the Shiite cleric hierarchy.

Raisi became deputy prosecutor at the Revolutionary Court of Tehran during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

Human rights organizations, opposition members and dissidents have accused the tribunal of overseeing the execution of political prisoners without due legal process during his tenure.

He was chosen by Khamenei in 2016 to head Iran's Imam Reza Shrine and lead its huge business conglomerate, Astan Qods Razavi, with interests in everything from IT and banking to construction and agriculture.

During his 2017 campaign, Raisi took a tough line on Rouhani's "weak efforts" in negotiating the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers that brought the Islamic republic sanctions relief in exchange for limiting its nuclear program.

US President Donald Trump last year withdrew Washington from the pact and reimposed sanctions on Tehran.



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US general: Iranian regime seeks to dominate countries of the region  
Iranian opposition calls on Western countries to adhere to US sanctions

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## [Sudan unions call for protests ahead of Women's Day](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1551979721086677800

Thu, 2019-03-07 13:17

CAIRO: An umbrella of Sudanese independent professional unions has called for more protest ahead of the International Women's Day to demand the ouster of President Omar Al-Bashir.

The demonstrators on Thursday took to the streets in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere in the country.

Footage posted online shows dozens of people marching, mostly women, and chanting, "Freedom, dignity and justice."

In some videos, security forces are seen arrested people and beating them in the backs of pick-up trucks.

The protest was called by the Sudanese Professionals Association that's been spearheading the demonstrations, which erupted in December, initially over surging prices and a failing economy, but quickly turned into calls for Al-Bashir's resignation.

Activists say hundreds of women have been detained or subjected to violence by security forces.



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**[US general: Iranian regime seeks to](#)**

# dominate countries of the region

Thu, 2019-03-07 18:32

LONDON: The Iranian regime is seeking to dominate countries in the Middle East, the top US commander for the Middle East said Thursday at a House Armed Services Committee (HASC) hearing on national security challenges.

Gen. Joseph Votel also said that although Daesh militants are losing the last of their territory in Syria, the militants who remain are unbroken and radicalized, and represent a "serious generational problem."

"The ISIS population being evacuated from the remaining vestiges of the caliphate largely remains unrepentant, unbroken and radicalized. We will need to maintain a vigilant offensive against this now widely dispersed and disaggregated organization," he said.

"Reduction of the physical caliphate is a monumental military accomplishment – but the fight against ISIS and violent extremism is far from over and our mission remains the same," General Joseph Votel, head of the US Central Command, told Congress.

Votel told the House committee that unless Daesh and its ideology are handled properly, the militant group will sow the seeds of future violent extremism. The US commander's assessment provides a reality check to President Donald Trump's repeated assertion in recent weeks that Daesh has been defeated and lost 100 percent of its "caliphate," which once covered a vast territory straddling Syria and Iraq.

Votel says Daesh now holds less than a single square mile, but has kept that that sliver of land for weeks, and many militants have escaped and are in hiding.



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Hundreds limp out of besieged Syria Daesh enclave Syria students say militants waging war on their future

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## [Algeria's Bouteflika warns against infiltration of protests](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1551969425445795400

Thu, 2019-03-07 13:56

ALGIERS: Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika issued his first warning on Thursday to protesters who have taken to the streets in thousands to demand an end to his 20-year rule, saying the unrest could destabilise the country. In the latest demonstration, hundreds of lawyers in black robes rallied in

downtown Algiers on Thursday as momentum gathered in the country's most sustained protests since the 2011 Arab Spring. Bouteflicka, 82 and ailing, has not spoken in public since suffering a stroke in 2013 and he is staying in a hospital in Geneva. But in a letter reported by the state news agency APS, he said: "Breaking this peaceful expression by any treacherous internal or foreign group may lead to sedition and chaos and resulting crises and woes." He did not say who any of these groups might be. An insurgency in the 1990s that broke out after the army blocked an election victory by an Islamist party was crushed at the cost of up 200,000 lives. There has been sporadic militant activity in recent years. The stance taken by the military and security forces will be crucial to how the present situation unfolds. The military has stayed in barracks throughout the unrest. But analysts and former officials say the generals are likely to intervene if the protests lead to instability in one of Africa's biggest oil producers. At the lawyers' protest, police were deployed to monitor the demonstration but as with previous protests, they did not intervene. Lawyers shouted chanted: "The people want to overthrow the regime" and "Republic, not a kingdom." Tens of thousands of Algerians, tired of the dominance of elderly veterans of the 1954-1962 war of independence against France, have protested for the past three weeks to urge Bouteflika not to stand in an election scheduled for April 18. Despite his ill-health, he has submitted his candidacy papers. The national association of lawyers has demanded that the authorities postpone the election and set up a transitional government.





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Social media breaks 'wall of fear' for Algeria protesters  
Army chief of staff vows to secure Algeria, prevent bloodshed

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## [Syria students say militants waging war on their future](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-03-06 23:14

IDLIB: In Syria's militant-controlled Idlib province, Mudar Darwish and fellow medical students clutched banners and chanted against the closure of their university.

"Our future is being wasted because of unfair decisions against our university," Darwish told the crowd gathered in the northwestern region.

"We won't allow it," said the 28-year-old with a short beard, who has been protesting against the closure of his university in the town of Maaret Al-Noman.

Militants dominating Idlib have come under increased criticism in recent weeks after they shut down a series of universities in their stronghold.

Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), a group led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate, has closed down a dozen universities since January, in a bid to bring them under its control.

The so-called Salvation Government, an HTS-dominated body administering Idlib and its eponymous capital, said the move serves to regulate higher education.

The degrees offered by Idlib's universities, including the Maaret Al-Noman university, are not recognized abroad, but they can facilitate employment within the province.

Darwish said the closure of the Maaret Al-Noman university will deal a blow to "the future of 1,700 students." The 28-year-old student suggested the militant administration in Idlib was trying to turn the universities into a cash cow.

"We used to pay a tuition of no more than \$300 and we can't afford to pay \$1,800 for universities" accredited by HTS, he said.

Reda Omari, a 23-year-old nursing student, expressed a similar sentiment.

"The Government of Salvation's universities are commercial enterprises," said the young man, wearing a leather jacket and his hair gelled back.

"They're just 'uni for money'," he said. Idlib is the last major region outside government control in northwest Syria. HTS took administrative control of the whole of the Idlib region in January, after overpowering smaller factions that are backed by Turkey.

As it expands in the province, so does hostility toward its iron-fisted rule, especially as it moves to tighten its hold on universities previously outside its control.

After two weeks of rallies in Maaret Al-Noman, students moved their protest to Idlib city, where they gathered around the so-called Council of Higher Education, a body linked to the Salvation Government.

They raised banners, chanted slogans against the council's president and blocked access to its main headquarters. Militants quickly swept in to curb protests.

After the first rally, HTS erected checkpoints to prevent more students from Maaret Al-Noman and the nearby town of Ariha from joining demonstrations.

They threatened to arrest students if demonstrators did not disperse.



Majdi Al-Husni, the head of the Council of Higher Education, said he understands why students are angry but stressed the need for uniformity across Idlib's educational sector.

He said the council aims to "supervise" the educational sector and harmonize the curriculum to ensure "quality education" in regions controlled by HTS.

"University programs don't have to be 100 percent identical, but there has to be some consensus," he told AFP.

He said the Salvation Government has granted accreditation to only eight universities.

"There are more than 13 educational institutions operating without the oversight of the Council of Higher Education ... on a territory of barely 10,000 sq. km," Husni added.

"This reflects badly on the reputation of higher education in the region," he said.

Protests in Maaret Al-Noman have largely fizzled out in recent days but students and teachers continued to express anger at HTS.

In a sign of defiance, staff members at the faculty of medicine at the Maaret Al-Noman university started teaching on the street outside campus.

Photos shared on social media networks showed students sitting in rows on plastic chairs, facing a white-haired man dressed in a medical gown.

The instructor used the sidewalk as a podium. Behind him, the university's facade is visible, including Qur'anic verses painted on its walls.

Heavy government shelling on the town, however, has disrupted these open-air classes.

Since September, Idlib has been protected from a massive regime offensive by a cease-fire deal brokered by regime ally Russia and rebel backer Turkey.

But sporadic regime bombardment has continued to hit the region, and hundreds of missiles have rained down on Maaret Al-Noman in recent weeks.

With the closure of the university, "many young people will give up their studies to stay at home or look for work," fellow student Mohammed Al-Shahud said.

"Our future is being thrown away," he said.



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Idlib extremists kill 20 Syria govt loyalists in 3 daysA battle of nerves for the control of Idlib city