

Erdogan's recitation of 'sensitive poem' angers Tehran

Author:

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JEDDAH: The latest row between Turkey and Iran over the controversial poem that was recited by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during his visit to Azerbaijan continues to escalate.

Iranian lawmaker Ali Asgar Hani threatened the Turkish president by posting a picture of Saddam Hussein hanging on Twitter with the caption: "Mr Erdogan, this was the fate of the last person who coveted Iranian land." The image was later deleted.

On Saturday, Ankara reprimanded Tehran for "offensive language" aimed at Erdogan about the poem, that refers to Iran's northwestern provinces as belonging to Azerbaijan. Tehran considers some verses of the poem as promoting separatist ideas among Iran's Azeri minority.

Ethnic Azeris, who speak Turkish, live in Iran's three northwestern provinces of West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan and Ardabil.

The disagreement added another layer to an already tense relationship between the two countries, whose geopolitical interests clash in several Middle Eastern countries.

Iran is concerned with Azerbaijan's recent victory in Nagorno-Karabakh over Armenia, as it fears an Azeri awakening within Iran, and views Turkey as a regional competitor.

"They didn't tell Erdogan that the poem he ill-recited in Baku refers to the forcible separation of areas north of Aras from the Iranian motherland," Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted.

In the meantime, Iran's Foreign Ministry said on its website on Friday: "The Turkish ambassador was informed that the era of territorial claims and expansionist empires is over."

Iranian authorities also summoned the Turkish ambassador to Tehran to protest about Erdogan's "interventionist and unacceptable remarks." Turkey retaliated by summoning the Iranian ambassador to Ankara over the "groundless" claims.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu also called his Iranian counterpart on Saturday to criticize the "heavy statements aimed at Erdogan," calling them unacceptable.

Erdogan's communication director, Fahrettin Altun, condemned Tehran's use of "offensive language" over the "emotional poem, whose meaning has been deliberately distorted.

"It does not include any references to Iran. Nor is that country implied in any way, shape or form," he added. Some experts believe the spat will soon blow over.

"The recent controversy over a poem recited by Turkey's president as part of aggressive victory celebrations in Baku appeared to lead to Iranian concerns that Ankara was stoking 'expansionist' ideas," Seth J. Frantzman, executive director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis, told Arab News.

"However, the controversy was quickly patched up and even Iran's foreign minister was quickly excusing the Turkish leader's comments, claiming he simply was not informed about the poem's origins. It shows that the real desires of Tehran and Ankara are to cultivate a closer working relationship, including between each other and Russia," he added.

"Clearly, Iran and Turkey's current leadership value each other and do everything possible not to cause any missteps. This can be seen in the warm embrace that Iran receives whenever there are official visits," he said.

"Turkey's ruling party, which tends to use bluster and threats against other countries in the region, such as Egypt, Israel, the UAE and Greece, is quick to not condemn Iran, and to work towards (an) amicable understanding with Tehran," Frantzman added.

"The overall assessment of the Erdogan government is that Iran is a partner in the region, and that more authoritarian regimes, that jail journalists, can work together against Europe, the West, and moderate states in the southern part of the Middle East."



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Turkey rebukes Iran's 'offensive language' against Erdogan
Iran summons German, French envoys after Ruhollah Zam execution outrage

[Iran jails British-Iranian researcher Kameel Ahmady for 9 years](#)

Author:

Reuters

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DUBAI: A court in Iran has handed a nine-year jail sentence to British-Iranian anthropologist Kameel Ahmady, after convicting him of conducting "subversive" research work, the semi-official news agency Tasnim said on Sunday.

Ahmady was also fined 600,000 euros (\$727,000) – the sum Iranian authorities said he received for his research from institutions accused of seeking to topple Iran's Islamic government, Tasnim reported.

There was no immediate official confirmation of the sentence, which was also

reported by other Iranian news agencies and a human rights groups. "Ahmady was accused of acquiring illicit property from his cooperation in implementing subversive institutions' projects in the country," Tasnim said. Ahmady, an ethnic Kurd who had researched controversial issues such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) in Iran, was detained in August 2019 but released on bail three months later, according to human rights groups.

After his arrest, his wife told the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran that his work was independent and published with government approval. Rights activists have accused Iran of arresting dozens of dual nationals to try to win concessions from other countries – a charge that the Islamic republic has regularly dismissed.



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Iran arrests British-Iranian academic Kameel Ahmady
Iran summons German, French envoys after Ruhollah Zam execution outrage

Bigger role for Arab women urged in scientific research and innovation

Author:

Sat, 2020-12-12 23:56

DUBAI: When the pandemic is finally defeated, the scientists who devised vaccines in record time will no doubt be hailed as the paladins of coronavirus prevention. So too will the tech experts who through the lockdowns helped move jobs and infrastructure into the digital space. There will be no shortage of heroes, but can the same be said about heroines?

In spite of recent progress, women remain a minority in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) professions, especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Now experts in the region are calling on schools, governments and employers to do more to fix the imbalance.

Speaking during a recent L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science webinar, in partnership with the speakers' platform She Is Arab, experts from across the Gulf stressed the central role women have to play in research and innovation.

"I can see the passion in women in science," said Dr. Maha Al-Mozaini, an infectious diseases specialist and educator at King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center in Saudi Arabia. "It's changing dramatically and quickly, and I believe they can bring a brighter future."

According to 2018 figures from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, just 28.8 percent of the world's researchers are women. Female enrolment in engineering, manufacturing and construction courses stands at just 8 percent worldwide, while in natural sciences, mathematics and statistics it is 5 percent. For information and communications technology (ICT), the figure drops to a paltry 3 percent.

"These numbers are alarming," said Dr. Anna Paolini, director of the UNESCO Office in Doha and representative for the Gulf and Yemen. "They call for action to close the gender gap in science, technology and innovation and equip the future generation with adequate skills and competencies, and harness the power of emerging new technology, such as artificial intelligence, robotics, virtual reality, and augmented reality, just to name a few."

In these unprecedented times of disruption, particularly in education where 1.5 billion students have missed out on learning, Paolini says the contributions of men and women to the sciences, technology, problem-solving and decision-making cannot be underestimated.

"Research and innovation are catalysts for achieving our goals to live on a healthier, sustainable and prosperous planet," Paolini said. "However, the world urgently needs more scientists to tackle the global challenges we are facing today. And we cannot afford to let half of the world's population,

which are women, go unnoticed behind their remarkable achievements.”

THE NUMBER

28.8%

*** Proportion of the world’s researchers who are women (UNESCO).**

Female teachers, doctors, nurses and researchers have all been at the forefront of the battle against COVID-19. In the case of Al-Mozaini’s team in Saudi Arabia, a remarkable 99 percent of her researchers are women.

“When I advocate for women’s empowerment in STEM, the challenges that we face as women are different from country to country,” said Al-Mozaini, who is a winner of the L’Oreal-UNESCO for Women in Science Middle East Regional Young Talents Program.

“We have seen that, in the United States, the numbers of graduate women in science are there but they tend to decrease in the workforce. In our case, it is very promising. We only have one man on the team.”

Many factors have contributed to their success, including career support from their families, Al-Mozaini said. “So, we have advantages compared to other countries in the Middle East, and especially in the GCC,” she said.

“They all come from different backgrounds, from molecular biology and genetics to virology and immunology. They were working 24/7 during the lockdown, leaving their families behind. And because little was known about the virus, we all had to take precautionary measures to protect our families.”

The work was arduous. Early in the pandemic, the Saudi research center had to spread its resources across many different aspects of the outbreak. “Our team, which was (focused on the) immunocompromised, was trying to establish testing, because the early signs of the virus showed that it was transmitted at very high levels,” she said. “So, in order to stop the cycle of the virus spreading, you needed to do testing.”

“We cannot afford to let half of the world’s population, which are women, go unnoticed behind their remarkable achievements.”

Dr Anna Paolini, UNESCO representative for GCC and Yemen

Their efforts involved establishing a mode of in-house viral testing as a back-up diagnostic test. “The test is very sensitive, reliable and fast,” Al-Mozaini said. “Best of all, in developing and low-income countries that don’t have the opportunity to get these expensive kits; they can use our protocol and do the testing.”

Al-Mozaini is heartened to see a growing number of women in the Gulf entering the sciences. Women in the Middle East now account for almost half of the total STEM student population and they will no doubt play a prominent role in the post-pandemic world.

In the UAE, 61 percent of university students in the field are women, 71 percent in Oman and 55 percent in Bahrain. However, women are still underrepresented in the research community. Although 38 percent of Saudi graduates in the field are women, only 17 percent of them work in STEM sectors.

Al-Mozaini says the best way to support women entering careers in science is to provide them with appropriate mentorship and good role models. "We, as scientists, should give that to younger generations," she said.

"I pursued STEM because I was exposed to it early in my schooling. I had a really nice professor who was retired and teaching biology at school, and he inspired us. So that gives you good mentorship and role models and exposure to STEM."

In September, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) discussed plans to step up the provision of STEM education for women and girls at a meeting in Jeddah. During a virtual workshop, members of the OIC's general secretariat looked at ways of improving access to learning for women and girls in member countries.

In the host country of the OIC, Saudi Arabia, women's participation in the workforce and the wider economy and having more women in leadership positions is one of the key goals of the Vision 2030 reform strategy. A growing number of Saudi women are already holding high-ranking positions even as new government policies aim to increase the employment of women in all fields.

Al-Mozaini says Saudi Arabia and the GCC countries at large are fortunate, thanks to a strong support system at various levels of education, including scholarships.

"In the workforce, we need to create the right environment for them," she said. "They are mothers, they have kids, so they need to have the best childcare system within their working institute to leave their kids and go to work.

"They need to have the best mentorship program at an early age and most important of all is providing them with a leadership opportunity, and this is why the Vision 2030 of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is promoting women in leadership."

For Paolini, the key to promoting women in science is inspiring girls at school and in the home. "It really shaped all of us," Paolini said. "We all have a story that inspired how we are today and this is why this network and platform are so important.

"Everywhere in the world, we need more science and we need more women in science."

Twitter: [@CalineMalek](#)



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Saudi Arabia's Hadaf to train 1,200 women in beauty business
Wusool transport program extends support for women in Saudi Arabia
OIC discusses ways to empower women in STEM education

[Iraq 'shrine factions' look to peel away from Hashd](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-12-12 23:57

NAJAF: Around the corner from Iraq's holiest shrines, a years-long struggle

over allegiances and resources is coming to a head – threatening a dangerous schism within a powerful state-sponsored security force.

The growing fissure pits the vast Iran-aligned wing of the Hashd Al-Shaabi network against four factions linked to the shrines of Iraq's twin holy cities, Karbala and Najaf.

Those factions, dubbed "the Shrine Hashd" and comprising around 20,000 active fighters, held their first strategic planning meeting earlier this month.

Throughout the packed three days, spokesmen for the shrine groups leaned on two sources of legitimacy: A patriotic, "Iraq-only" discourse, and the blessing of the "marjaiyah," Iraq's Shiite spiritual leadership.

"The Shrine Hashd are the origin of the broader Hashd," Hazem Sakhr, a spokesman for the four factions, told AFP.

"We are committed to Iraqi law and the marjaiyah's orders."

Maytham Al-Zaidi, the prominent commander of the largest shrine group known as the Abbas Combat Division, struck a nationalistic, reformist tone.

"The main reasons for establishing the Shrine Hashd is to serve our country, and to correct both its track record and trajectory," he said.

Ali Al-Hamdani, who heads the 3,000-member Ali Al-Akbar Brigade, said the meeting – held in Najaf and Karbala – was "exclusively" for the Shrine Hashd, setting their future apart from the rest.

Hamdi Malik, a London-based expert on Shiite factions, said the shrine groups were now publicly insisting on a separation.

"They are escalating with this new conference, and want to accelerate that process," Malik told AFP.

The Hashd Al-Shaabi network was formed in 2014 when Iraq's top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, issued an edict urging citizens to fight the advancing Sunni extremists of Daesh.

His call brought together already-existing paramilitary factions and new formations, including the Shrine Hashd.

But internal disputes emerged as early as 2016, with Malik pointing to three main fault lines.

SPEEDREAD

The growing fissure pits the vast Iran-aligned wing of the Hashd Al-Shaabi network against four factions linked to the shrines of Iraq's twin holy cities, Karbala and Najaf.

Shrine factions began complaining that they were being starved of resources by Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, the umbrella group's deputy head.

Muhandis died in a US strike in January this year that also killed his friend, top Iranian general, Qasem Soleimani.

The Shrine Hashd had accused Muhandis of prioritizing factions closer to Tehran in the distribution of military equipment and state-allocated salaries.

Malik said the tug-of-war was linked to a second, more profound split: a "real ideological divide" over ties to neighboring Iran, which had long provided support to armed groups in Iraq.

Those factions are even dubbed "the loyalist Hashd" for their perceived

allegiance to Tehran over Baghdad.

At the meeting, spokesmen were careful not to specifically criticize Iran but repeatedly rejected what they characterised as external meddling.

"Foreign intervention is dangerous. The Shrine Hashd rejects all shapes and sizes it may come in," Sakhr said.

The 90-year-old Sistani, known to be wary of Iran's influence, has not commented publicly on the meeting – but it would not have gone ahead without his tacit approval, said Malik.

"It's important for Sistani, while he is alive and capable, that he puts his house in order," said Sajad Jiyad, a fellow at US think tank The Century Foundation.

Thirdly, shrine-linked groups have looked disdainfully at the Hashd's dabbling in politics.

"Sistani had given clear instructions that no Hashd member should participate in politics. But pro-Iran factions in the Hashd created the Fatah alliance and took part in the 2018 parliamentary elections," Malik said.

Fatah won the second-largest number of seats and wields significant influence in both parliament and several government ministries.

With new elections set to be held in June 2021, shrine factions have said they will stick to Sistani's orders.

"Our members are free to participate as voters but not as candidates," said Mushtaq Abbas Maan, the media head for Karbala's Abbas shrine, which sponsors the factions.

While The Century Foundation's Jiyad said he doubted armed conflict would erupt between the two wings, he said a divorce would likely be messy.

The Shrine still lack a legal or administrative framework to govern their forces outside the broader network's by-laws, and government decrees linking them to the prime minister's office have been slow to take hold.

At the conference, Maan appealed to the premier, who is Iraq's commander-in-chief, to "urgently" bring shrine factions under his wing, thereby finalizing their split from the wider network.

But shrine factions also fear that if they peel away, "loyalist" groups could monopolize the Hashd's budget, fighting force and political influence, Malik said.

Their moves have already irked the Iran-linked Hashd, whose commanders declined AFP's requests for comment.

But the sharp-tongued Qais Al-Khazali, who heads a powerful Hashd faction known as Asaib Ahl Al-Haq, told state media last month that a secession by shrine groups could prompt other wings to strike out on their own, too.

"The Hashd will be divided into three. That means the end of the Hashd," he warned.



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Hundreds protest against Kurdish authorities in northeast Iraq Iraqi filmmaker Mohamed Al-Daradji discusses 'Mosul'

[US adopts map of Morocco that includes Western Sahara](#)

Author:

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RABAT: The United States adopted Saturday a "new official" map of Morocco that includes the disputed territory of Western Sahara, the ambassador to Rabat said.

"This map is a tangible representation of President Trump's bold proclamation two days ago – recognizing Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara,"

Ambassador David Fischer said according to a statement seen by AFP.

He then signed the "new official US government map of the kingdom of Morocco" at a ceremony at the US embassy in the capital Rabat.

The map will be presented to Morocco's King Mohammed VI, he added. Western Sahara is a disputed and divided former Spanish colony, mostly under Morocco's control, where tensions with the pro-independence Polisario Front have simmered since the 1970s. Morocco on Thursday became the fourth Arab state this year, after the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan, to announce it had agreed to normalize relations with Israel. US President Donald Trump in turn fulfilled a decades-old goal of Morocco by backing its contested sovereignty in Western Sahara. The Polisario condemned "in the strongest terms the fact that outgoing American President Donald Trump attributes to Morocco something which does not belong" to the country, namely sovereignty over Western Sahara. The movement dismissed the announcement and vowed to fight on until Moroccan forces withdraw from all of Western Sahara. The prime minister of Algeria – Morocco's neighbor and regional rival, and the key foreign backer of the Polisario Front – on Saturday criticized "foreign maneuvers" that he said aimed to "destabilize Algeria."



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Trump announces Morocco and Israel will normalize relations Leaders react to Morocco-Israel agreement to establish ties