

US sending delegation to Bahrain, Israel for first direct flight

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WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy, Avi Berkowitz, will lead a US delegation to Bahrain and Israel this week to discuss expanded economic cooperation between the two countries, a senior White House official said on Monday.

Berkowitz, part of a team led by Trump senior adviser Jared Kushner to help negotiate the Bahrain-Israel deal, will join Bahraini officials on the first-ever direct commercial flight from Bahrain to Israel.

The flight on Wednesday will depart Manama and arrive in Tel Aviv, where the US and Bahraini delegations will participate in meetings with senior Israeli officials.

The Trump administration has helped broker normalization deals between Israel, the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan.

Trump national security adviser Robert O'Brien told the Global Security Forum on Monday that he hoped the incoming administration of Democrat Joe Biden, should he be certified as winner of the Nov. 3 presidential election, would pursue more such deals between Israel and Arab nations.



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Analysts debate impact of Israel-UAE-Bahrain accords at Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate
Israeli parliament votes to endorse Bahrain ties

[Amnesty: Iran blacked out internet to hide 'true scale' of 2019 killings](#)

Mon, 2020-11-16 23:11

LONDON: One year since anti-regime protests rocked Iran, a new report by Amnesty International has exposed how Tehran used a massive internet shutdown to hide the “true scale of the unlawful killings by security forces.”

The human rights group on Monday said it had verified 304 people killed by security forces during the November 2019 protests, 23 of them children, but it suspects the real number is far higher.

Tehran instigated a violent crackdown after demonstrations against a huge increase in the price of fuel morphed into widespread protests against the regime.

[#Iran](#)'s authorities deliberately shut down the internet during nationwide protests in [#BloodyNovember](#) 2019, hiding the true scale of unlawful killings by security forces.

Our new research: <https://t.co/Xbxa15CD6G>
<pic.twitter.com/dbfh09lBgP>

– Amnesty International (@amnesty) [November 16, 2020](#)

One of the distinguishing features of the crackdown, Amnesty said, was the implementation of an internet blackout that began on the deadliest day of the protests as a way to “hide the killings.”

Amnesty's report said: “Security forces used lethal force unlawfully against

the vast majority of protesters and bystanders killed, shooting most to the head or torso, indicating intent to kill. To this day, no official has been held accountable for the unlawful killings.”

Mansoureh Mills, Iran researcher at Amnesty, told Arab News that the internet blackout was “a calculated move to stop more than 80 million people inside Iran from reaching the outside world and sharing information about the human rights violations that were being perpetrated by the authorities.”

He said shutting down the internet for an extended period meant that protesters removed recorded evidence of human rights abuses from their phones for fear that it would be used against them if detained.

He added that people interviewed by Amnesty had deleted swathes of evidence documenting human rights abuses for this reason.

“Imagine all the video footage that has been lost in this way because of the internet shutdown. All of the evidence of crimes and serious human rights violations are gone forever,” said Mills.

He urged the international community to take action through the UN against Tehran. “International accountability is the only way to ensure non-repetition of what we know happened in November 2019, otherwise the Iranian authorities will know that they can get away with killing unarmed men, women and children under the cover of an internet shutdown,” he said.

Sadeq Saba, an editor at Persian-language media organization Iran International, told Arab News that Tehran “is really scared of the internet and social media in general. They can control traditional media and news in the country, but not what people say online and the news coming in from outside the country, so they try to shut down the whole thing.”

The regime’s war against freedom of speech “is a losing battle. Doing things like shutting down the internet may work for a while, but in the end they just become more ridiculous in the eyes of the people,” he said.

“Shutting down the internet doesn’t solve anything. There are deep-rooted problems in the Islamic Republic. The regime is a failure in every sense: Ideologically, economically, politically and diplomatically. They want to run a modern, 21st-century country with rules made in the Middle Ages. This is the root of the problem,” Saba added.

“Iranians are fed up with this regime. They’re doing their best to fight the Islamic Republic, and they’ll continue to do so whether their communications are restricted or not.”



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US State Department threatens actions against Iran on protests anniversary US plans sanctions on Iranians for violence against protesters

[Palestinians torn as Israel seeks Gulf tourists in Jerusalem](#)

Mon, 2020-11-16 01:19

JERUSALEM: With Israel courting Gulf tourists and establishing new air links to the major travel hubs of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, Palestinians in East Jerusalem could soon see a tourism boon after months in which the coronavirus transformed the Holy City into a ghost town.

The Palestinians hope to establish a state including East Jerusalem and the West Bank, territories occupied by Israel in the 1967 war. Arab support, seen

as a key form of leverage in decades of on-again, off-again peace negotiations, now appears to be evaporating, leaving the Palestinians arguably weaker and more isolated than at any point in recent history. In a striking development last week, a delegation of Israeli settlers visited the Emirates to discuss business opportunities. The Palestinians view settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as the main obstacle to peace, and most of the international community considers them to be illegal. But the prospect of expanded religious tourism could end up benefiting Israelis and Palestinians alike, as wealthy Gulf tourists and Muslim pilgrims from further afield take advantage of new air links and improved relations to visit Al-Aqsa and other holy sites.

Israel considers all of Jerusalem to be its capital, and its Jerusalem municipality is organizing conferences and seminars to help tourism operators market the city to Gulf travelers.

Hassan-Nahoum, who recently visited the Emirates and is a co-founder of the UAE-Israel Business Council, said the municipality is reaching out to local Arab tour operators to ensure the benefits extend to all.

Abu-Dayyeh expects up to 28 flights a day arriving in Tel Aviv from Dubai and Abu Dhabi, global travel hubs for long-haul carriers Emirates and Etihad, making it easier for travelers from the Far East and South America to reach the Holy Land.

He's confident Palestinian operators will be able to compete. "We're on the ground here and we've been giving this service for many years, for hundreds of years," he said.

Other Palestinians appear to be more skeptical. More than a dozen Palestinian shop owners in Jerusalem's Old City, which is largely shut down because of the coronavirus, declined to comment on the push for Gulf tourism, saying it was too politically sensitive.

There are also concerns that an Israeli push to promote tourism to Al-Aqsa could heighten tensions.

The hilltop esplanade in the Old City, home to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the iconic Dome of the Rock shrine, is the third holiest site in Islam. It is also the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount because it was the location of the two biblical temples in ancient times.

The site is a raw nerve in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and tensions have soared in recent years as religious and nationalist Jews have visited in ever-larger numbers, escorted by the Israeli police.

Officials from the Waqf, the Jordanian religious body that oversees the mosque compound, declined to comment on Israel's efforts to promote Gulf tourism to the site, underscoring the political sensitivities.

Ikrema Sabri, the imam who leads Friday prayers at Al-Aqsa, said any visits must be coordinated with the Waqf so that they do not advance any Israeli claim to sovereignty over the site. The Palestinians have long feared that Israel intends to take over the site or partition it. The Israeli government says it is committed to the status quo.

"Any visitor from outside Palestine must coordinate with the Waqf," Sabri said. "But any visitor from the side of the occupation, we do not welcome or accept them."



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Israel strikes Hamas positions after rockets fired from Gaza
Israel resumes plans of east Jerusalem settlement, cuts access for Palestinians

[Saudi Arabia backs Egypt's digital future, crafts with \\$6.4m grant](#)

Mon, 2020-11-16 01:34

CAIRO: Saudi Arabia has given one of Egypt's largest banks a \$6.4 million grant to finance digital transformation and encourage local crafts programs in the country.

Egypt's Minister of International Cooperation, Rania Al-Mashat, said on Saturday that the Saudi Grant Management Committee funding for the Bank of Alexandria will strengthen financing mechanisms to support small, medium and micro enterprises, and create job opportunities.

The Saudi Arabia Grant Committee has funded 2,180 projects so far in 27 governorates, creating about 12,000 jobs.

Al-Mashat praised the Kingdom's financial contribution to creating new jobs and achieving the goals of the National Development Agenda 2030.

In June, the committee agreed to fund three projects for the Agricultural Bank and two health care initiatives to the tune of \$19 million.

The three projects will finance small and micro enterprises in rural villages, targeting projects undertaken by women as well as handicraft activities.

Financing programs targeted by the Bank of Alexandria include digital transformation in the bank's 176 branches in 26 governorates, with a focus on the Cairo and Alexandria governorates.

The second program will finance handicraft micro-projects through the bank's branches in 26 governorates, focusing on the governorates of Delta, Upper Egypt, Cairo and Alexandria.

The bank's portfolio in the medium, small and micro enterprises sector is worth about \$600 million.

According to an official statement, it is expected that about 1,475 clients will benefit from the funds, with 30 percent going to women-owned companies and 45 percent to firms owned by people under 35.

The most prominent intermediaries are the National Bank of Egypt and the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency, in addition to the beneficiaries of the direct grant financing, including FJ Hermes Financial Leasing Company and Inmaa Leasing Company.



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Saudi stock market rises as financial shares gain strength
Post-Brexit trade talks enter crunch week

Iran says opposition leader tested positive for coronavirus

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Sun, 2020-11-15 19:37

TEHRAN: An Iranian opposition leader who ran in a disputed 2009 presidential election and his activist wife have tested positive for the coronavirus while under house arrest, the semi-official ILNA news agency reported Sunday. The report came as authorities announced a stricter two-week lockdown set to begin Saturday for some 100 cities and towns to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Daily death tolls in Iran have spiked to their highest-ever levels in recent weeks.

Mir Hossein Mousavi lost the 2009 race to former hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Allegations of vote-rigging sparked huge protests, leading to a wide-scale crackdown on dissent.

Mousavi and his wife Zahra Rahnavard have been under house arrest since 2011 in the capital, Tehran. They both endorsed President Hassan Rouhani, a relatively moderate cleric, ahead of his successful 2013 run for office.

ILNA said a person close to the family confirmed the couple had contracted the virus, but that they were in good condition and receiving the necessary care. The report said the two were tested after they began feeling symptoms. During their house arrest, Mousavi and Rahnavard are reportedly allowed occasional visits from their family and certain close political friends. Rouhani, already under fire from hard-liners over Iran's unraveling nuclear deal, faces criticism from reformists for not freeing the pair as promised in his 2013 and 2017 campaigns. The terms of their house arrest have loosened in recent years.

Iran has been struggling to fight the worst coronavirus outbreak in the Middle East, with more than 762,000 confirmed cases. It has seen over 41,400 deaths and 558,800 recoveries.

Starting this Saturday – the first day of Iran's workweek – only medical centers, grocery stores and other "necessary production sectors and necessary services" would be allowed to remain open, Cabinet spokesman Ali Rabiei said. Governmental workplaces would operate with only one-third of their employees. The restrictions would be implemented in some 100 high-risk localities designated "red status" that have a high number of confirmed cases and deaths.

Rabiei said the lockdown could be extended beyond two weeks if it fails to get the virus under control.

The government had recently resisted shutting down the country in an attempt to salvage an economy cratered by unprecedented American sanctions, which effectively bar Iran from selling its oil internationally. The Trump administration reimposed sanctions in 2018 after withdrawing from Tehran's

nuclear deal with world powers.

Earlier this week, authorities ordered a month-long nightly business curfew in Tehran and 30 other major cities and towns, asking nonessential shops to keep their workers home. Still, enforcement in the sprawling metropolis remains a challenge.



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US State Department threatens actions against Iran on protests anniversary