

Palestinians accuse Israel of blocking COVID-19 vaccines to Gaza

Author:

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RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority on Monday accused Israel of refusing to allow some 2,000 coronavirus vaccine doses destined for Gaza health workers into the blockaded coastal strip.

The health ministry of the PA, based in the occupied West Bank, had planned to send the Russian Sputnik V doses to Gaza, a separate territory run by Hamas.

But on Monday evening, the ministry said Israel had blocked the transfer. Israel carries "the full responsibility of this arbitrary move" said minister Mai Al-Kaila in a statement, saying her ministry was coordinating with international organizations to organize the delivery as soon as possible.

COGAT, the Israeli authority that runs civilian affairs in the occupied Palestinian territories, said the PA had requested to transfer 1,000 vaccine doses to Gaza but that "this request is waiting for a political decision."

Israeli sources had told AFP in recent days that the transfer was not a simple administrative measure under the purview of COGAT, but rather a political decision possibly linked to talks between Hamas and Israel.

The two sides have fought three wars since 2008, and Israel has demanded the liberation of two Israeli hostages reportedly still in Gaza as well as the remains of two soldiers killed in the last war, in 2014.

Earlier Monday, the PA said it had pushed back the rollout of its vaccination campaign in the West Bank due to a delay in deliveries.

It had said it was anticipating a shipment by the middle of this month, enabling it to start vaccinating the general public in the occupied West Bank while sharing stock with Hamas.

"There has been a delay in the arrival of the vaccine," Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said ahead of a weekly cabinet meeting, without providing further details.

He said the launch of vaccinations for the general public would be announced "at a later time," when sufficient supplies arrive.

The PA is expecting some two million doses ordered from various manufacturers, in addition to vaccines from the UN-backed Covax program, set up to help less wealthy nations procure vaccines.

It began vaccinating frontline health care workers earlier this month with an initial procurement of 10,000 doses of the Sputnik V vaccine, as well as several thousand doses of the Moderna product via Israel.

The Jewish state, which is carrying out one of the world's fastest vaccination campaigns per capita, has faced international calls to share its stocks with Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank and Israeli-blockaded Gaza.

The PA has registered nearly 115,000 coronavirus cases in the West Bank, including nearly 1,400 deaths, while Hamas has recorded nearly 53,600 cases in Gaza, including 537 deaths.



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Palestinians push back vaccine rollout over delivery delay

[Dahlan likely to return to Gaza before May 22 legislative elections](#)

Tue, 2021-02-16 00:35

GAZA CITY: The Fatah breakaway Dahlan movement is returning to the Gaza Strip after a 14-year absence.

The movement is led by Mohammed Dahlan, who has lived in the UAE since a dispute with President Mahmoud Abbas forced him to leave the West Bank. He sought refuge there after Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007.

Last Sunday two of the movement's members went back to Gaza. One of them was Abdel Hakim Awad, who heads the Dahlan election department. He is also one of the founders of Fatah Youth in Gaza and has a remarkable presence among young people and the student movement.

The return also follows Dahlan representatives meeting the Hamas delegation that took part in the Palestinian national dialogue in Cairo earlier this month.

There are legislative elections on May 22, but Dahlan spokesman Imad Mohsen played down the return's timing. It had been scheduled since 2018 and was not primarily related to the polls even if it coincided with it, he added.

Hundreds of Fatah members left the Gaza Strip fearing for their lives after the 2007 split, which led to Hamas' control of the coastal enclave, and joined the movement formed by Dahlan.

Mohsen said about 300 Fatah activists were in Egypt and elsewhere, and that there was no legal problem preventing their return to Gaza. "It is expected that large numbers of these brothers will return in the near future," he told Arab News.

A Palestinian source, who preferred to remain anonymous, told Arab News it was possible that Dahlan himself would return to Gaza before the May 22 elections.

Observers have linked these developments with Dahlan's possible participation in the elections, whether through a separate list or with a unified Fatah list if there are successful reconciliation efforts between Abbas and Dahlan.

"Our firm position from the beginning is to run the elections with a unified list of Fatah and, in the event Abbas refuses to do so, we will run in the elections with a list that includes leaders of the movement," said Mohsen. "It consists of personalities with national, professional and youth competence, so that they meet the challenges that plague the Palestinian cause. We are part of the Palestinian scene, and no party can exclude us or prevent us from participating in this democratic path. Therefore, our movement will participate in all elections, including the presidential (one), in the form it deems appropriate with the requirements of the current situation."

There are different views about Dahlan's influence on the election results and Fatah's ability to make gains and not repeat the scenario from the 2006 elections, when Hamas achieved an overwhelming majority.

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Political analyst Mukhaimar Abu Saada said that Dahlan's movement would run in the elections with a single list, after efforts to achieve internal Fatah reconciliation had failed.

He said it was in Hamas' interest to have multiple Fatah lists because this approach would enhance its chances of achieving remarkable results.

He added that Fatah currently faced great challenges, not just from Dahlan's list but also from Marwan Barghouti, who has not yet decided on participating in the elections.

"The best option is a unified Fatah, and if that is not possible, it will have the option of a partnership list with Hamas," Saada told Arab News.

He believed it was too early to determine the extent of the damage as there were three months left before the polls and that options were still under discussion.

Options

The legislative elections will be followed by presidential elections on July 31 and then elections to form the National Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization on Aug. 31.

A member of the Fatah Central Committee, which is responsible for national dialogue, said that Fatah would start dialogues with all factions to build a broad national front in which everyone could participate for the elections.

Jibril Rajoub also said that "all options are open, including running the elections with a single list, if it is not possible to agree with the rest of the factions."

Fatah Revolutionary Council member Abdullah Abdullah said that while Fatah was united and did not suffer from any division, Dahlan was an industry and not a national movement.

"Dahlan is a person who is dismissed from Fatah and adjudications have been issued against him," Abdullah told Arab News. "He is not able to run in the elections. As for the members of his movement, who are mainly Fatah, there is nothing that prevents them from returning to Fatah."

But political science professor, Naji Shurrab, said that Dahlan's movement had become a reality that could not be ignored.

"During the past few years the movement has proven that it has become an organization with a presence and the masses not only in Gaza or the West Bank, but in the diaspora," he told Arab News. "It has clear regional and Arab support. It has elements of financial strength, and it has succeeded in

attracting youth.”

He ruled out internal Fatah reconciliation being achieved during Abbas’ lifetime and said that recent laws and judicial amendments made by the president were his attempts to exclude Dahlan from competing in the elections.

Shurrab said that Fatah would be the biggest loser from Abbas’ refusal to reconcile with Dahlan and unify the movement in the upcoming elections.



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[Turkey rejects US demands, commits to Libya troop presence](#)

Tue, 2021-02-16 00:00

JEDDAH: Turkey has confirmed that its troop presence in Libya will remain in place pending Libyan government approval and the status of the 2019 Ankara-Tripoli bilateral military agreement.

Presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin confirmed the decision in an interview with state broadcaster TRT.

On Sunday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that Turkey is preparing to send new Syrian mercenaries to Libya amid international calls for the withdrawal of all foreign fighters in the country.

The presence of thousands of Turkish-affiliated troops in Libya is stirring debate about the success of the interim government in the transitional process taking place under the watch of the UN.

Experts have warned that foreign intervention risks undermining the work of the UN Support Mission in Libya to end fighting between the country's warring factions.

Seth J. Frantzman, executive director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis, said Turkey's role in Libya has given it leverage over the outcome of the conflict and a potential political settlement.

"Turkey violated an arms embargo by shipping drones and weapons to Libya. The question now is whether Turkey's involvement will cement a political solution or continue to frustrate it," he told Arab News.

The Libyan cease-fire agreement signed on Oct. 23 last year calls for a withdrawal of mercenaries and foreign forces stationed in the country within three months.

However, Turkey claims that its troops are providing military training to units loyal to Tripoli-based Government of National Accord, and has rejected calls for a withdrawal, despite the expiration of the deadline.

About 1,300 Libyan soldiers recently completed Turkish-led training.

"Ankara's overall goal in the Middle East and North Africa is to partition countries into spheres of influence and then export weapons and mercenaries, while dividing the spoils with Russia and largely ignoring local people," Frantzman said.

"Libya appears to be on the cusp of more peace, with buy-ins from Egypt and other countries," he added.

Turkish companies are also expected to take part in rebuilding infrastructure in the war-torn country, which experts have said is a strong signal of Ankara's intentions.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said last Tuesday that Turkey would withdraw its troops "only if other countries withdraw their troops first."

Frantzman said: "For Turkey to play a positive role in stability, it needs to

work with Egypt and other countries, rather than appear at odds with most of the region. Sidelining militias and extremists is key to that.”

In late January, the US called for an immediate withdrawal of Turkish and Russian troops from Libya. The warning came a month after a motion passed through the Turkish parliament authorizing an 18-month extension of troop deployment in Libya.

On Friday, French Minister for Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian also repeated calls for a withdrawal of mercenaries and an end to political interference in Libya.





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[How the UAE's Mars mission can be the Arab world's springboard to the future](#)

Mon, 2021-02-15 22:39

SHARJAH: The successful entry of the UAE's Hope probe into orbit around Mars is a historic event on the scientific, educational, and strategic levels. Indeed, for the first time ever, an Arab nation has gone beyond applied space science and technology (satellites, essentially) and successfully invested and engaged in space exploration.

It is important to underline the mission's wider and embracing slogan, "Arabs to Mars," which stresses the idea that this project is greater than just the UAE joining a select club of space-faring nations. It is about leading the Arab world into deep space, into the future.

Now that Hope probe is set for its scientific agenda and the UAE is set to become a science-producing nation in the space arena, it is important to reflect on the significance of this event for the Arab world and the vistas that it opens for its people.

As great as the scientific agenda of the mission is (providing in-depth, close-up, and global explorations of the Martian atmosphere), the impact that this is likely to have on the Arab world, particularly its ambitious youth, will be multifaceted and strong.



Emirati men are pictured at the mission control center for the “Hope” Mars probe at the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre in Dubai on July 19, 2020, ahead of its expected launch from Japan. (AFP/File Photo)

Indeed, this quantum-leap event tells Arabs – or at least this is how it should be understood – that science is the way to the future, and Mars (with all the scientific and technical know-how that will have been acquired) is simply a springboard to that future.

Since the launch of Hope, last July, followed by the Chinese mission to Mars, Tianwen-1, and the American one, Mars 2020, I have noticed an important change in the views expressed by many Arabs and people in the region.

Until then, most people seemed bewildered by the “wasteful” Hope mission (although \$200 million is really not much for such a big endeavor) and often asked “what’s the benefit in there?”, “why don’t you spend money helping the poor around the world.”

Indeed, the utilitarian standpoint is so prevalent in the Arab world that

last July, two weeks before the launch of Hope, I took part in a panel titled “Why spend money on space science?”, a question I am asked time and again.



H-2A rocket carrying the Hope Probe, known as “Al-Amal” in Arabic, developed by the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to explore Mars, blasts off from Tanegashima Space Centre in southwestern Japan. (AFP/Mitsubishi Heavy Industries/File Photo)

My reply, depending on my interlocutors or audience, usually revolves around the following points. First, before anyone criticizes space-science budgets (a grand total of roughly \$50 billion in the whole world, averaging \$6.5 per year for each human being), they should take a look at military budgets (\$1,750 billion worldwide in 2019, 35 times more than the worldwide space budget).

Secondly, space science brings many direct benefits (think of all the applications of satellites, starting with GPS, which each of us uses almost every day) as well as indirect ones, as we explore, discover, learn, widen our horizons, and think of new things.

Last but not least, space is a field that fascinates people, especially youngsters, and leads them to embark on various exciting careers that benefit their nations and the world at large.

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[UAE Hope Probe expected to provide first complete picture of Mars in one week](#)

Interestingly, since the launch of Hope, I have been hearing the “why waste

money on Mars and in space” viewpoint less often. Surveys on attitudes toward science, technology, and space are being conducted in the region, and it will be highly interesting to see how those attitudes have evolved recently and will evolve in the future.

It is worth noting that in the decade following John Kennedy’s “to the moon” announcement, the number of Ph.D. holders in the US tripled in the physical sciences and quadrupled in engineering. And a 2009 survey found that 50 percent of the internationally renowned scientists who have published in *Nature* (the premier scientific research journal) had been inspired to become scientists by the US moon program.

I am convinced that the Hope mission will have a similar effect in the Arab world. We are already seeing such results in the UAE, where the number of students who are choosing physics, astronomy, and space has increased manifold in recent years.



Visitors watch an air craft maintenance competition during the “World Skills” International competition in Abu Dhabi on October 18, 2017. (AFP/File Photo)

If the Hope mission produces that kind of educational effect in the wider Arab world, it will be a magnificent, transformative achievement that historians will be discussing for decades or even centuries.

In fact, I believe that the project can achieve even greater objectives than that lofty educational goal. It could also lead to a quantum leap in science and technology production in the Arab world.

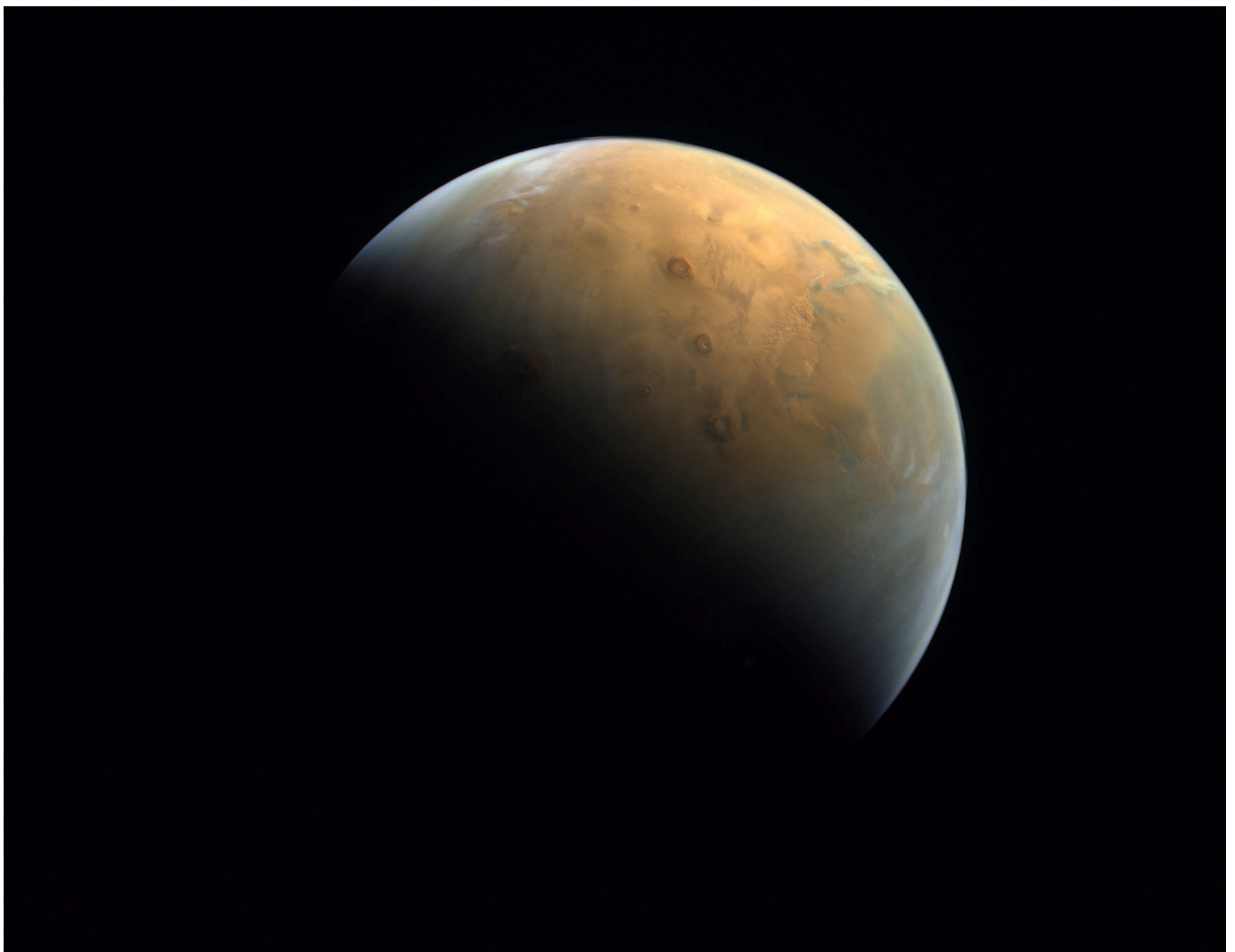
How could that be achieved? First, Arab scientists, decision makers, and

opinion makers need to embrace the “basic” (that is, not applied) type of science and knowledge that space exploration represents. Simply put, Arab countries cannot become “developed” by limiting their development to applied fields; technology goes hand in hand with science, and with broader knowledge.

It is not a coincidence that astronomy (which has little if any direct applications in our everyday lives) was the first big science to blossom and flourish during the Arab-Islamic civilization and the last one to wane. And yet, today, the number of properly operating and science-producing astronomical observatories in the entire Arab world can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Most Arab countries have locations and weather that favor the erection of astronomical observatories, which are not very expensive; this should be pursued promptly and in earnest.

Likewise, several Arab countries, particularly the UAE and Oman, are geographically well placed (low latitude, sea or ocean to the east, etc.) to host space rocket launch facilities. This could be one of the next projects to embark on, to build platforms from where to launch both our own rockets and those of others (for profit).



A handout picture provided on February 14, 2021 by the United Arab Emirates

Space Agency (UAESA) taken by the Emirates eXploration Imager (EXI) after Mars Orbit Insertion (MOI) on board the First Emirates Mars Mission (EMM) from an altitude of 24,700 km above the Martian surface shows the Olympus Mons, the highest volcano on Mars, and the Tharsis Montes, three volcanoes named (top to bottom) Ascraeus Mons, Pavonis Mons and Arsia Mons. (AFP/File Photo)

Moreover, as we have seen with NASA for the last 60 years or so, technological spin-offs from space programs can be adopted and applied in other areas of life and economy, such as medical facilities, transportation, telecommunications, and more.

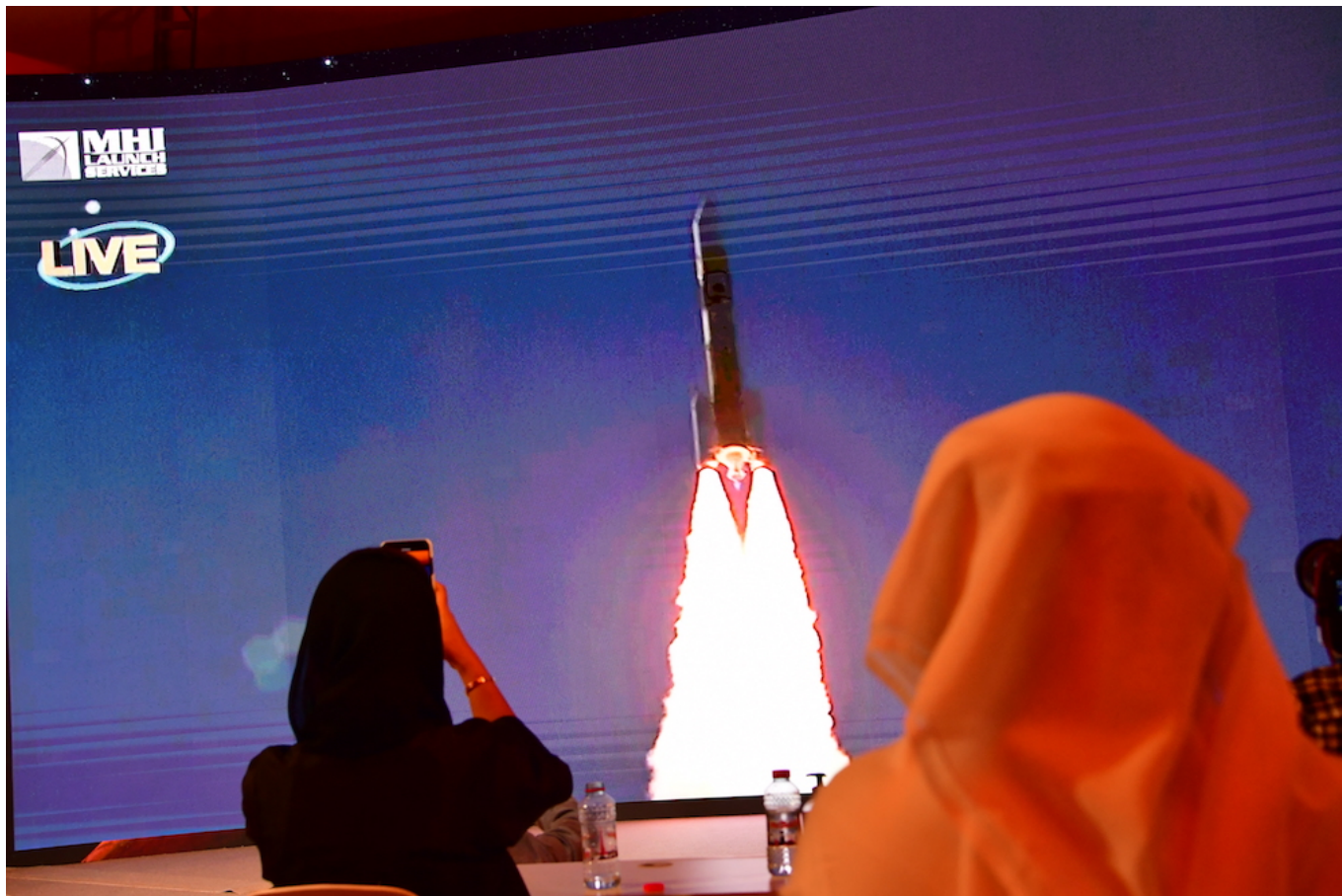
Last but not least, the new Arab space strategy (at least six states have space agencies now) should lead to important reviews of Arab educational programs. Universities must revisit, update, and upgrade their curricula, including the creation of new departments and specializations (space science, artificial intelligence, etc).

It is not acceptable, or even logical, for the Arab world to have half a dozen space agencies but fewer space-science departments and specialized programs.

We urgently need to train students in both applied space science (for example, remote sensing) and astronomy (Mars and beyond), to support and complement the work of the Arab space agencies. In fact, we need a wider update and revamping of higher-education programs in the Arab world, but that is another discussion.

The Hope mission to Mars can be truly transformative if everyone aims high and believes that science is the key to a knowledge-based economy and future. Let us use this historic event to rebuild Arab scientific, technological, and educational institutions, to strengthen national, regional and international collaborations, and to give Arab youngsters a vision and plan for a bright future.

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UAE's 'Hope' probe sends home first image of Mars
UAE Hope Probe expected to provide first complete picture of Mars in one week

[Hamas restricts travel of Palestinians in Gaza](#)

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Mon, 2021-02-15 18:15

GAZA CITY: Gaza parents and guardians have new powers to block adult children or dependants from traveling, the territory's Hamas rulers said in a decision

condemned by rights groups Monday.

The ruling allows “males over the age of 18 to be banned from traveling by court order based on the wishes of the father or grandfather, and bans virgin, widowed or divorced women from traveling without permission from a guardian.”

“One of the parents or the grandfather may prevent a male child over the age of 18 from traveling if genuine harm will result from the travel, by bringing a case at the relevant court,” it said, without elaborating on what constitutes “genuine harm.”

The decision, authored by the head of the Supreme Sharia (Islamic law) Council in Gaza, Hassan Al-Juju and with immediate effect, was circulated in the Mediterranean enclave late Sunday, with no further explanation.

The secular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine condemned the edict as “a violation of basic Palestinian law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

The Geneva-based Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor said the measure was “a flagrant violation of the right to movement” and demanded its immediate withdrawal.

Hamas took power in the Gaza Strip, an Israeli-blockaded territory home to some two million Palestinians, in 2007.

The Islamists recently struck a deal to hold the first Palestinian elections in 15 years with their secular former rivals Fatah, who control the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank.



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