

# Saudi Women to Start Own Businesses without Male Permission

RIYADH - Women in Saudi Arabia can now open their own businesses without the consent of a husband or male relative, as the kingdom pushes to expand a fast-growing private sector.

The policy change, announced by the Saudi government on Thursday, also marks a major step away from the strict guardianship system that has ruled the country for decades.

"Women can now launch their own businesses and benefit from (governmental) e-services without having to prove consent from a guardian," the ministry of commerce and investment said on its website.

Under Saudi Arabia's guardianship system, women are required to present proof of permission from a male



"guardian" -- normally the husband, father or brother -- to do any government paperwork, travel or enrol in classes.

Long dependent on crude production for economic revenue, Saudi Arabia is pushing to expand the country's private sector, including an expansion of female employment under a reform plan for a post-oil era.

While women still face a host of restrictions in the ultraconservative Muslim kingdom, Saudi Arabia's public prosecutor's office this month said it would begin recruiting women investigators for the first time.

The kingdom has also opened 140 positions for women at airports and border crossings, a historic first that the government said drew 107,000 female applicants. (AFP)

## Trump Turns on FBI Over School Shooting after Criticism from Survivors

FORT LAUDERDALE (United States) - US President Donald Trump said Saturday the FBI was so caught up in the Russia probe that it failed to heed signs which could have prevented the Parkland school shooting.

His comments came as he faces criticism from survivors of the attack over his ties to the powerful National Rifle Association, and after several thousand rallied in Florida to demand urgent action on gun control.

"Very sad that the FBI missed all of the many

signals sent out by the Florida school shooter. This is not acceptable," he wrote on Twitter. "They are spending too much time trying to prove Russian collusion with the Trump campaign - there is no collusion. Get back to the basics and make us all proud!"

US authorities have come under mounting scrutiny for failing to act on a series of warning signs ahead of the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in which 17 people were killed. (AFP)

TOKYO - Palmreading could take on a whole new meaning thanks to a new invention from Japan: an ultra-thin display and monitor that can be stuck directly to the body.

The band-aid-like device is just one millimetre thick and can monitor important health data as well as send and receive messages, including emojis.

Takao Someya, the University of Tokyo professor who developed the device, envisions it as a boon for medical profes-

## Japan Team Builds Second Skin Message Display



sionals with bed-ridden or far-flung patients, as well as family living far from their relatives.

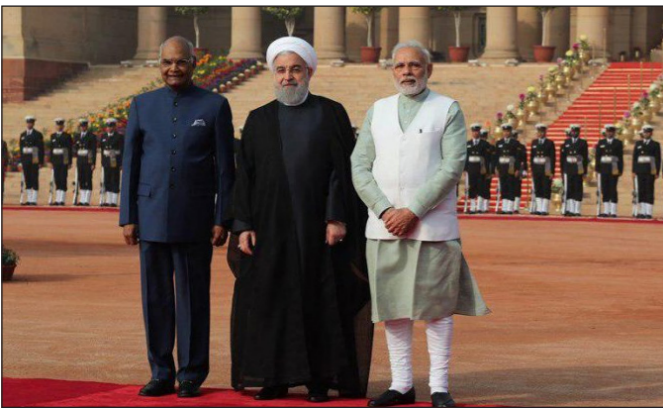
"With this, even in home-care settings, you can achieve seamless sharing

of medical data with your home doctors, who then would be able to communicate back to their patients," he told AFP.

Slapped onto the palm or back of a hand, it could

flash reminders to patients to take their medicine, or even allow far-away grandchildren to communicate with their grandparents. (AFP)

## India's Interest in Closer Ties with Iran Only for Economic Reasons



DEHLI - A senior political analyst is sceptical about India's interest in development of its ties with Iran, saying New Delhi is just after securing the energy

supplies it needs and gaining access to the region's markets via the Islamic Republic. As Iranian President Hassan Rouhani made a three-day trip to

surrounding them. The highlights of the interview conducted by Sara Massoumi follow: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi used to be the

Chief Minister of Gujarat. His successful economic policies in Gujarat turned him into a high-profile figure among top Indian leaders and become a candidate of the BharatiyaJanata Party (BJP) in the election. This success of Modi's came as he was on the black list for killing 2,000 Muslims in 2002, and was even banned from travelling to Europe and the United States. He has focused his policies on economic development, which, in turn, is not possible without having broad relations with other countries. (Agencies)

## Leftist and Young Buck Lead as Mexico Parties Make Presidential Picks

MEXICO - Mexico's political parties will formally choose presidential candidates on Sunday, setting the stage for a race between a leftist holding a strong lead, a young leader of a right-left coalition catching up, and a trailing ruling party candidate.

With six weeks to go before campaigning begins for the July 1 vote, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, 64, will be named as candidate by the leftist Morena party he founded after his second failed bid for the presidency in 2012.

The former Mexico City mayor has held a double-digit lead in most polls since last year and his support grew in two surveys last week, but coalition candidate Ricardo Anaya, the youngest of the three at 38, narrowed the gap. The ruling party's choice, former finance minister Jose Antonio Meade, 48, has been trailing far behind and losing support in recent polls as he struggles against public anger at the government over violence and corruption scandals. (Reuters)

## Zimbabwe President Sees Deceased Opposition Leader's Family

HARARE, Zimbabwe - Zimbabwe's president Sunday visited the home of deceased opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai to pay condolences to his family and to urge unity as power struggles within the opposition have heightened tensions.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa pledged that his government will meet hospital and funeral expenses for Tsvangirai, who died of colon cancer last week in neighboring South Africa.

Tsvangirai's body arrived in the capital, Harare, Friday and was taken to a military barracks where it will remain until Monday for public viewing. The longtime opponent of former president Robert Mugabe will be buried Tuesday in Buhera, his rural home about 250 kilometers (155 miles) south of Harare. (AP)

## Poland Tries to Frame PM's Holocaust Remarks as Frank Debate

WARSAW, Poland - A spokeswoman for Poland's prime minister sought Sunday to downplay his words equating Polish collaborators in the Holocaust to alleged "Jewish perpetrators" by saying they were an invitation to a frank debate about the World War II crimes against Jews.

Israeli politicians have accused Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki of anti-Semitism following his remarks Saturday at the Munich Security Conference, which set off a new chapter in an angry dispute over Poland's new law banning some Holocaust speech.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he planned to speak with Morawiecki soon about his remarks. (AP)

## 2nd Gold by Largest Olympic GS Margin in 50 Years

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea - Here's one way to explain just how dominant Marcel Hirscher was Sunday: His winning margin of 1.27 seconds was the largest in the men's giant slalom at an Olympics in 50 years.

Here's one way to explain just how dominant Hirscher is right now: The Austrian, who also won the Alpine combined last week, will try to become the first male ski racer with three gold medals at a Winter Games in 50 years.

That shot at No. 3 will come in Hirscher's specialty, the slalom, on Thursday. If others'



thoughts immediately turned to the possibility of that rare triple gold -- only two men and one woman have ever done it in Alpine at a single Olympics -- Hirscher offered a simple answer when asked whether his mind was there yet.

"No," he repeated, laughing. "I am happy

with today's result, and I didn't (think) about the slalom race until you asked me this question." And then the best at his sport in recent years -- with six overall World Cup titles and other accolades to prove it -- and among the greatest ever, laughed again. (AP)

## Saudi Arabia Welcomes Push for U.N. Action against Iran on Missiles

MUNICH - Saudi Arabia on Sunday welcomed a draft United Nations resolution offered by Britain, the United States and France that would condemn Iran for failing to stop its ballistic missiles from falling into the hands of Yemen's Houthi group.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir told Reuters the measure, if passed, would help hold Iran accountable for what he described as its "exports of ballistic missiles" to the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, and "radical and aggressive" behavior in the region, including support for terrorist groups.

A proxy war is playing out in Yemen between Iran and U.S. ally Saudi Arabia. A Saudi-led coalition intervened in Yemen in 2015, backing government forces fighting Iran-allied Houthi rebels. Iran has denied supplying the Houthis with weapons. "In order to ensure that Iran complies itself with international law, we must have firmer positions with regards to ballistic missiles and with regards to Iran's support for terrorism," al-Jubeir said in an interview during the annual Munich Security Conference. "Iran must be held accountable." (Reuters)

## Japan's Kodaira Wins Olympic 500 over South Korea's Lee

GANGNEUNG, South Korea - Naoko Kodaira sped around the oval, furiously pumping her arms and legs. She charged across the finish line, the 500-meter Olympic speedskating gold medal easily in hand.

With two pairs to go, Kodaira could watch knowing that two-time defending champion Lee Sang-hwa was unlikely to catch her despite the loud cheers of the Korean fans.

Kodaira was timed in 36.94 seconds on Sunday, becoming the first woman to race under 37 seconds at sea level.

Lee clocked 37.67 to earn silver, and Karolina Erbanova of the Czech Republic took bronze in 37.34.

Kodaira came into the Olympics as the reigning world champion and the dominant sprinter on the World Cup circuit, where she has won 15 straight races dating to 2016.

Her time was an Olympic record, bettering the mark of 37.28 set by Lee four years ago in Sochi.

Kodaira is just the second Japanese speedskater to win Olympic gold, joining Hiroyasu Shimizu, who won the men's 500 at the 1998 Nagano Games.

Kodaira and Lee carried their respective countries' flags as they skated around in a parade lap. A crying Lee got a hug from Kodaira as the crowd chanted Lee's name. Brittany Bowe finished fifth in 37.530, and her U.S. teammate Heather Bergsma was 11th in 38.13.

Erin Jackson, the first black woman to make a U.S. Olympic long-track team, was 24th of 31 skaters in 39.20.

The 500 used to be decided over two races, in which each skater had to start both in the inner lane and the outer lane once. (AP)

## Neighbor News

### Uzbek Tax, Customs Agencies Raided in 'Major Investigation'

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan's top tax and customs agencies are being searched, documents seized, and employees questioned in a large-scale operation in Tashkent, officials say.

An Interior Ministry official who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to speak publicly about the situation told RFE/RL on February 13 that entry and exit from the compound that houses the Tax Committee was restricted, with military trucks blocking the way.

The searches come two weeks after Rustam Inoyatov, a long-powerful figure who is related to Tax Committee head Botir Parpiev by marriage, was removed from the post of National Security

Service (MXX) chief by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

Inoyatov headed the MXX for almost 23 years and his ouster was seen as part of an effort by Mirziyoyev to consolidate power in the Central Asian country, which he has led since the death of longtime autocrat Islam Karimov in 2016.

An official at the Uzbek Prosecutor-General's Office, also speaking on condition of anonymity, told RFE/RL that Parpiev was recently hospitalized for unknown reasons.

The official said that law enforcement authorities launched investigations last week into suspicions of the misuse of some \$8.5 million by the Tax Committee and Customs Committee.

### Tajik Teacher Fired for Missing Rahmon's Speech is Reinstated

DUSHANBE - A dance teacher in Dushanbe who was fired for not watching President Emomali Rahmon's address to the nation on television has been rehired after reports about her ordeal.

The Federation of Unions of Tajikistan told RFE/RL on February 16 that Saida Rustamova had been reinstated at its request by the choreography school that had fired her a few days earlier. On February 14, Rustamova told RFE/RL that she was fired and official documents stated

that she lost her job because she was not present in the school auditorium where students and teachers were gathered to watch Rahmon's annual address. Rustamova said she had left the auditorium because there were no available seats left. The school's principal, Kenja Ibrohimov, said that Rustamova was dismissed because of what he said was poor professional performance and her failure to follow her supervisors' recommendations. (Agencies)

### Pakistan Court Sentences Man to Death for Rape and Murder of Girl, 7

ISLAMABAD - Imran Ali, 24, convicted over death of Zainab Ansari, has also been linked to death of seven other girls. A Pakistani anti-terrorism court has sentenced a suspected serial killer to death for the rape and murder of a seven-year-old girl, a prosecutor said.

The girl's murder ignited nationwide protests over allegations of government inaction, and a media campaign led to his arrest after years of him being on the loose. Police found Zainab Ansari's body on a rubbish dump in Kasur district near the eastern city of Lahore in mid-January, four days after she was reported missing. Residents of the area have said the murder was the 12th such incident in a year. Police investigators said later that they had matched DNA from eight girls' bodies, including Zainab's, with the convicted killer, Imran Ali, 24. "The court handed down death on

four counts and life imprisonment to Imran Ali in the rape and murder of the little girl, Zainab," government prosecutor Ehtisham Qadir Shah told Reuters.

Hundreds of residents protested after Zainab's body was found, and two were killed when police fired shots to disperse them. Police identified Ali as one of Zainab's neighbours, and CCTV footage on the day she was abducted showed her walking off calmly with a man. In the same district, Kasur, there have been complaints of a number of missing children since 2015 when authorities uncovered what they said was a paedophile ring linked to a prominent local family. At least two people have been convicted in connection with that case, in which authorities say hundreds of children in the district were abused. (The Guardian)

### Commercial Plane Crashes in Southern Iran, Killing 66 People

TEHRAN, Iran - An Iranian commercial plane crashed on Sunday in a foggy, mountainous region of southern Iran, killing all 66 people on board, state media reported.

An Aseman Airlines ATR-72, a twin-engine turboprop used for short-distance regional flying, went down near its destination of the southern Iranian city of Yasuj, some 780 kilometers (485 miles) south of the Iranian capital, Tehran. Aseman Airlines spokesman Moham-

mad Taghi Tabatabai told state TV that all on Flight No. EP3704 were killed. "After searching the area, we learned that unfortunately ... our dear passengers had lost their lives," Tabatabai said. "This plane had 60 passengers, 59 adults and one child, as well as a pilot, a co-pilot, two flight attendants and two air marshals on board." Due to foggy condition, rescue helicopters couldn't reach the crash site in the Zagros Mountains, state TV reported. (AP)