

International

Iranians report being stopped, facing delays at US border

Muslim group says provided assistance to 60 travelers who were detained

WASHINGTON: Dozens of Iranians and Iranian-Americans have reported being harassed or questioned for hours at the US border following heightened tensions over the US killing of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a Muslim advocacy group, said it had provided assistance to more than 60 travelers who were detained at length over the weekend and questioned about their political views at Washington state's border with Canada.

Many of them were reportedly denied entry to the US due to a lack of capacity for Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) to detain them. One 24-year-old only identified as Crystal by CAIR said she was detained and interrogated for more than 10 hours with her family at the Peace Arch Border Crossing in Blaine, Washington, before being released early Sunday.

She said when the family asked why they were being detained, CBP agents said, "It is just the wrong time for you guys." "These reports are extremely troubling and potentially constitute illegal detentions of United States citizens," said Masih Fouladi, executive director of CAIR's

Washington chapter. "We are working to verify reports of a broad nationwide directive to detain Iranian-Americans at ports of entry so that we can provide community members with accurate travel guidance."

However, CBP officials have disputed the reports, saying that long delays at the border were due to increased traffic because of the holiday season and a shortage of staff to process travelers. They also insist that the agency does not discriminate based on religion, race or ethnicity.

'Constitutional and moral problems'

"Social media posts that CBP is detaining Iranian-Americans and refusing their entry into the US because of their country of origin are false," CBP spokesman Michael Friel told AFP. He added that reports that the Department of Homeland Security and CBP had issued a directive to bar Iranian-Americans from entering the country were also false.

A security official who did not wish to be identified said that the increased delays Iranian-Americans faced at the border were related to CBP "operating with an

enhanced posture at its ports of entry to safeguard our national security." The delays at the border have been condemned by public officials, with many accusing the Trump administration of overreach.

"Washingtonians who happen to be Iranian-American were detained at the Canadian-US border for extended periods of time for no other reason than their ethnicity or country of origin," Washington Governor Jay Inslee said in a statement. "This is wrong and rife with constitutional and moral problems," he added. "No one should be treated differently due to where they come from, how they look or what language they speak."

Senator Elizabeth Warren, a top Democratic candidate in the US presidential race, said she found the reports "deeply disturbing." "Iranian Americans have the same rights as all other US citizens and should be treated with dignity and respect at our border-not bigoted, xenophobic scrutiny," she said in a tweet.

The increased scrutiny at the border comes after Iran vowed to avenge Soleimani's killing in a drone strike ordered by US President Donald Trump. —AFP



Many Iranian-Americans were reportedly denied entry to the US due to a lack of capacity for Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) to detain them. —AFP

Brexit in sight as British MPs scrutinize divorce deal

LONDON: Britain moves a step closer to a historic departure from the European Union yesterday, after more than three years of bitter division and political drama, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson brings his Brexit deal back to parliament without the threat of defeat, deadlock or delay.

Lawmakers began three days of debate on legislation to enshrine Johnson's divorce deal, with few hurdles to its passing expected after he won a comfortable majority at recent elections. The air of inevitability that Brexit was finally about to happen contrasts starkly with the repeated postponements and rejections of the previous deal of his predecessor Theresa May that plunged Britain into political and economic uncertainty.

The lack of anticipated drama has instead seen focus shift to potential conflict between the United States and Iran. But the Conservative leader is still up against the clock. Both the UK and European parliaments must ratify the deal before Britain's January 31 departure date, when a so-called transition phase to the end of the year will kick in.

MPs gave their initial approval to the Withdrawal Agreement Bill in a vote on December 20, a week after Johnson

secured a majority of 80 in the 650-seat House of Commons.

They now have three days of debate before the bill passes to the unelected House of Lords for further scrutiny next week. Opposition lawmakers and troublesome peers will try to amend the text but with such a comfortable majority, Johnson is virtually certain of getting it through on time. In a sign of his confidence, Johnson's government announced it would hold a new post-Brexit budget vote on March 11, to "seize the opportunities that come from getting Brexit done".

The main opposition Labour party was meanwhile focused on the start of a campaign to replace veteran socialist Jeremy Corbyn as leader. His divisive leadership and ambivalence over Brexit were blamed for Labour's stinging defeat and loss of support in its heartlands of northern England. Britons voted in the 2016 referendum to end more than four decades of integration with the EU, but it has taken nearly four years of infighting and two general elections to implement the result. Johnson now looks set to finally make it happen, even if a potentially bigger battle awaits on future ties with the EU. The British premier will hold his first meeting with the new European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, in London today.

Both sides are keen to prepare for talks on their future trading relationship, although these cannot start formally until Britain leaves the EU. The Brexit deal includes a transition period in which ties remain unchanged in practice until December 31, 2020, to provide continuity until a new economic partnership can be agreed. —AFP

Austria's Kurz world's youngest chancellor

VIENNA: The leader of Austria's conservatives Sebastian Kurz was sworn in yesterday as the world's youngest democratically elected leader, at the head of an unlikely coalition with the Greens following the collapse of his previous alliance with the far-right. Vowing to "protect the climate and the borders", the 33-year-old has become chancellor of the Alpine country's first government to include the Greens, an arrangement called "exotic" and "unlikely" by Austrian media.

Speaking at a handover ceremony with his predecessor Brigitte Bierlein, Kurz said it was "good to be able to continue working for Austria" and promised: "We will strive every day to give our best."

Kurz's People's Party (OeVP) and the Greens agreed last week to govern together after the last administration with the far-right fell apart in a corruption scandal. Both the OeVP and the ecologist party made key gains in September's snap polls. President Alexander Van der Bellen reminded the new government that "citizens have great expectations of you," adding that "trust must be rebuilt".

The new government aims to please both parties by pushing for Austria to be carbon neutral

by 2040 and also continuing previous strict anti-immigration measures. Some observers think that if successful the alliance could become a model for other European countries as nations across the continent grapple with populist sentiments but also climate change.

'Best of both worlds'

Kurz-whose conservative OeVP has been in government for more than three decades—has defended the undertaking as combining "the best of both worlds". The OeVP has 10 ministers in the new coalition, while the Greens have four with its party chief Werner Kogler, 58, taking on the vice-chancellorship.

Among the ministers being sworn in yesterday more than half are women, including the defence minister. Many are in their 30s and 40s.

A Green politician and former activist will front an enlarged environment ministry, which includes traffic, energy and technology as well. The Greens have also nominated an openly lesbian party veteran to hold the culture portfolio, while a Green legal expert of Bosnian origin, who arrived in Austria as a child refugee, will head the justice ministry.

No 'love marriage'

But for all that's new, it's not a "love marriage", according to analyst Johannes Huber. "As he (Kurz) says at every opportunity, they are very different parties", which have always been rivals rather than allies on a national level until now, Huber told AFP.

And their detractors are many,



VIENNA: Austria's President Alexander van der Bellen (left) shakes hands with Austria's designated Chancellor Sebastian Kurz during a swearing-in ceremony of the new coalition government yesterday. —AFP

including some in their own ranks. The Far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) — the third strongest party in parliament after the OeVP and the Social Democrats (SPÖ) — was quick to denounce Kurz's "swing to the left" and the "dangerous experiment" out of which "nothing good" can come for the country of 8.8 million people.

The SPÖ too criticized the new government's program, saying social questions hadn't been addressed well enough. Kurz first became the world's youngest chancellor in a government with the FPÖ from December 2017 until May last year, driving a hard line against immigration and brushing off a steady stream of racist and anti-Semitic incidents involving his far-right colleagues.

But then the FPÖ leader and vice-chancellor became engulfed in a graft scandal, leading to the collapse of the coalition and snap

elections. Disappointed FPÖ supporters dealt the party a setback in the polls, many shifting their votes to the OeVP which won 37.5 percent—an increase of almost six points from 2017. The Greens, who failed to get into parliament in a shock result in 2017, garnered 13.8 percent as climate change replaced immigration as a top voter concern.

Party officials have said they have had to make "painful" compromises to reach the agreement with the powerful conservatives. "The Greens are very pragmatic... It is important for the party to take on responsibility on a national level," Huber said.

Kurz has promised Austrians a stable government for the next five years. However, "the new coalition has not provided a complete answer on how they plan to finance their fiscal plans," according to analyst Katharina Koenig of Oxford Economics. —AFP

Killing Charlie: The attacks that heralded France's year of terror

PARIS: "Nothing will ever be as before", predicted Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo after two gunmen massacred cartoonists at the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine in Paris five years ago.

The attack on the weekly—with its long history of mocking Islam and other religions—was the first in a series of assaults that have claimed more than 250 lives since January 7, 2015, mostly at the hands of young French-born jihadists. It sent shockwaves through France, exposing divisions in the multicultural modern Republic and sparking an intense debate about Muslim integration and press freedom. The Kouachi brothers who killed 12 people in their strike on Charlie Hebdo claimed to be avenging the magazine's publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) deemed offensive by many Muslims.

"We avenged. We killed Charlie Hebdo!", they shouted triumphantly as they ran through the streets. Within three days, the death toll in the rampage of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated siblings and accomplice Amedy Coulibaly had risen to 17, including four people at a kosher supermarket and three police officers.

'I am Charlie'

The Kouachis failed in their bid to "kill" Charlie Hebdo: despite losing its top talent the magazine remained afloat thanks to an outpouring of solidarity. "I wanted the paper to continue to exist. For me it couldn't just stop like that because of what happened," said Pierrick Jun, a cartoonist who joined the magazine just months after the attack. This



PARIS: In this file photo taken on January 11, 2015, members of the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine team join Renald Luzier, known as Luz, (5 left) and editor-in-chief Patrick Pelloux (7 left) as they take part in a Unity rally "Marche Republicaine" in Paris in tribute to the 17 victims of a three-day killing spree in the French capital. —AFP

week the magazine published a defiant anniversary issue remembering the attack and also denouncing what it said was a new kind of politically correct censorship by those who "believe themselves to be the kings of the world behind their keyboard and smartphone." But the attacks did expose deep divisions in France: even a nationwide minute of silence observed by four million people under the slogan "Je suis Charlie" (I am Charlie) could not project a nation united in mourning.

Students at around 200 schools, many of them in neighborhoods with big immigrant populations, boycotted the tribute, accusing Charlie Hebdo of Muslim-baiting. Then prime minister Manuel Valls drew widespread criticism by linking the rise of extremism to France's "geographical, social and ethnic apartheid". President Emmanuel Macron reprised the theme during his 2017 election campaign.

But despite his talk of ending the "house arrest" of young people trapped in high-rise suburban housing projects, the breeding grounds of several of the jihadists who have

attacked France since 2015, their conditions remain largely unchanged. A major Odoxa survey in November showed a majority of residents in housing projects still feeling abandoned by the state and discriminated against by employers.

'Loss of innocence'

The three days of attacks in January 2015 culminated in a deadly hostage-taking by Coulibaly at the Jewish supermarket, confirming fears that French Jews had become a top target for homegrown Islamist radicals. Coming three years after an Islamist gunman shot dead a teacher and three children at a Jewish school in Toulouse, the attack compounded the feeling that "everywhere, at any time, we were a target." France's chief rabbi Haim Korsia told AFP.

For Korsia it marked "a sort of loss of innocence" in the 500,000-strong French Jewish community, Europe's largest, which had until then seen the biggest threat as being from the far right. —AFP

CONSUMER PROTECTION DEPARTMENT

RECALL INFORMATION

TOYOTA

Model Name: FORTUNER
Model Year: 2017 -2020

RECALL REASON	Cooling fan Caution Label Correction
REMEDY	AISayer will contact the involved vehicle customers and to inform them to bring to our service centers as the necessary parts are available. All the repairs will be free of charge, both Parts and Labor.
CONTACT	MOHAMED NASER ALSAYER & SONS EST. CO. W.L.L. HOTLINE: 1803803 WWW.TOYOTA.COM.KW Please book an appointment to serve you better Mobile: 97211792 (call & whatsapp)

This Recall is run pursuant to articles (42, 43, 44, 45, 46 and 47) of no. 39/2015 issuing the executive bylaws of law no. 39/2014 on Consumer Protection

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