

# International

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Kim portraits and death threats: Life at a North Korean school in Japan

## US lawmakers tackle sexual harassment in Congress

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TEHRAN: Iranian schoolgirls chant slogan during an annual gathering in front of the former US Embassy marking the anniversary of its 1979 takeover as a surface-to-surface missile (rear left) is displayed in Tehran yesterday.—AP

# Iran displays missile, calls Trump 'crazy'

## Iranians mark anniversary of US embassy takeover

**BEIRUT:** Iran put a ballistic missile on display as thousands marched yesterday to mark the anniversary of the 1979 seizure of the US embassy, with a senior official accusing President Donald Trump of a "crazy" return to confrontation with Tehran. Turnout for the annual Iranian street rallies commemorating the embassy takeover, a pivotal event of the Islamic Revolution, appeared higher than in recent years when Trump's predecessor Barack Obama pursued detente with Tehran.

Last month, Trump broke ranks with European allies, Russia and China by refusing to re-certify Iran's compliance with its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, reached during Obama's tenure. Under that deal, most international sanctions on Iran were lifted in exchange for Tehran curbing nuclear activity seen to pose a risk of being put to developing atomic bombs. Iran has reaffirmed its commitment to the

deal and UN inspectors have verified Tehran is complying with its terms, but Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has threatened to "shred" the pact if the United States pulls out.

"All the governments confirm that the American president is a crazy individual who is taking others toward the direction of suicide," Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, told a rally in Tehran, state media reported. "Trump's policies against the people of Iran have brought them out into the streets today," Shamkhani said. He did not identify the governments he had in mind. The other parties to the nuclear deal - Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany - have voiced disquiet at Trump's opposition to it, fearing this could stir new Middle East instability. But the Europeans share US concern over Iran's ballistic missile program and "destabilizing" regional behavior.

### Not negotiable

Senior Iranian officials have repeatedly said that the Islamic Republic's missile program is solely defensive in nature and is not negotiable. In a sign of defiance, a Gadr ballistic missile with a range of 2,000 km was put on display near the ex-US embassy in Tehran, now a cultural centre, during yesterday's street demonstration, Tasnim news agency said. "That America thinks Iran is going to put aside its military power is a childish dream," said Brigadier General Hossein Salami, deputy head of its elite Revolutionary Guards which oversees the missile development, according to Tasnim.

Fars news agency posted pictures of demonstrators nearby burning an effigy of Trump and holding up signs saying "Death to America". Iran and the United States

severed diplomatic relations soon after the 1979 revolution, during which hardline students seized the embassy and took 52 Americans hostage for 444 days.

Shamkhani spoke a few days after Khamenei said the United States was the "number one enemy" of the Islamic Republic. US-Iranian tensions have risen anew at a time when Tehran has been improving political and military ties with Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Tehran on Wednesday.

Khamenei told him that Tehran and Moscow must step up cooperation to isolate the United States and help defuse conflict in the Middle East. Iran and Russia are both fighting on the side of Syrian President Bashar Al Assad against rebels, some of them US-backed, and Islamist militants trying to overthrow him.— Reuters

## French car park statue triggers secularism row

**PLOERMEL:** The peaceful little town of Ploermel is at the centre of a debate over France's secular principles that has taken on international proportions—all because of a statue in a car park. Poland and Hungary have offered to take in the statue of the late pope John Paul II after France's top court ordered the removal of a cross hanging over it, and tens of thousands have signed online petitions against the ruling. Like the furious debate that erupted last year when beach resorts tried to ban the "burkini" Muslim swimsuit, the row is a test of France's strict limits on the role of religion in public life.

"I hope you haven't come to take away our John Paul," said Guy Olszewski, a resident of the town in the staunchly Catholic northwestern Brittany region, getting out of his car after seeing journalists clustered around the statue. "It's beyond me. We are in a Christian country," said Olszewski, who like the late pontiff has Polish roots. French authorities have no problem with mosques being built, he argued. On his way back from the bakery, another local, Michel Pageot, shot back. "It's not the statue itself that's the problem. The pope is a personality like any other," he said. "But putting a giant cross on top of it turns it into a religious monument."

### Offer from Orban

Enshrined in a 1905 law and fiercely defended by many French, "laïcité", or secularism, tightly restricts the display of religious symbols in public. In the case of the bronze statue, which has stood at the centre of a car park since 2006 and a legal battle for almost as long, the court had no issue with John Paul himself. But the Christian cross topping the arch that frames the 7.5-metre monument must come down, it ruled.

The decision sparked anger in John Paul's native Poland, with the Catholic country's Prime Minister Beata Szydlo offering to move the statue there to "save it from censorship". Hungary too, where Prime Minister Viktor Orban has vocally defended European "Christian identity" against what he says is a threat from Islamisation, also offered to take the statue in. In Ploermel, home to some 10,000 people, residents are divided. "The statue doesn't bother me—it has its place here, and could even attract tourists," said Denis Robin. "I don't understand this controversy, and unfortunately I don't think it's over."

### Death threats

France's secularism laws have repeatedly prompted court cases and heated public debate. The top administrative court ruled in August 2016 that beach resorts could not ban the burkini on the grounds that the garment posed a public order risk following the truck attack in Nice the month before. Christian campaigners also won a victory last year when the courts said public buildings could display Christmas nativity scenes, which had been contested. In Ploermel, the former rightwing mayor who had the statue installed accused the pro-secular camp of trying to make Christians "feel permanently guilty".

"France is France and no legal authority, even the highest, has the right to violate our convictions, our beliefs and above all our culture," Paul Anselin said. Anselin wants a local referendum on the cross row and supports a proposal of current mayor Patrick Le Diffon to privatize the land it sits on so that it doesn't fall under secularism laws.

But Gilles Kerouedan, a local activist whose freedom of thought group fought the case, said privatizing the space would solve nothing. "Clearly it's the prominent nature of the cross that is the problem," he said. Kerouedan filed a legal complaint this week after he received death threats from a group calling for a "nationalist revival".—AFP

## Saddam, Castro and Hitler: Controversial Palestinian names

**HEBRON:** Hitler, Castro and Saddam Hussein meet in a bar. It may sound like the beginning of a joke, but in the Palestinian territories it is actually possible. Palestinians often name their children after famous celebrities, national heroes or backers of their cause. But from time to time, they pick far more controversial names and the children have to live with the consequences. Hitler Abu Hamad is not proud to carry the name of a man responsible for the slaughter of millions.

"There is no relationship between my name and the actions of Adolf Hitler," he said at his home in the city of Hebron in the occupied West Bank. "I hate what he did." "I am against killing, violence and human rights abuses, but I got used to my name and it is part of my character." How the quiet, polite 41-year-old school teacher came to be named after the most hated man of the 20th century says a lot about Israel and the Palestinians. Israel occupied the West Bank in 1967 in a move never recognized by the international community.

Jewish settlers moved into the territory and the occupation continues. When Abu Hamad was born in 1976, his father wanted to send a message, though in perhaps the most offensive way possible: picking the name of the man who systematically murdered six million Jews in the Holocaust. "My father gave me the name to provoke the occupation," he said. "He was not political. He was a simple man who made mistakes. He wanted to make the occupation think with my name."

The father-of-two studied English literature and is a deputy head at a school near his home, while also teaching adults. His name is "weird for the kids at school", he said. He says it also causes him endless problems at Israeli checkpoints in the West Bank. When he was 15 and living in Hebron's Old City, an army officer approached him and asked him his name.

When he told him, the soldier flew off the handle, he alleges. "He said 'you are a criminal'." Abu Hamad said, alleging he was then beaten by soldiers, leaving him with a broken nose still bent out of shape. Israel's military did not



HEBRON: Palestinian Hitler Abu Hamad, deputy head at a school, sits at his office in the Israeli occupied city of Hebron.—AFP

respond to a request for comment. He believes the name also stopped Israelis from giving him permits to study or work outside the Palestinian territories. "We are not against the Jews," he said. "We are against the occupation and don't respect it. It destroys our homes, confiscates our possessions and restricts our freedom."

### Saddam Hussein

Many Palestinians have named children after their longtime leader Yasser Arafat, while other names heard include Castro, Guevara and Chavez—after the Latin American figures who supported their cause. In Hebron, there is a Carter Abu Isneyna, named after former US president Jimmy Carter, who tried to get Israel to end the occupation and led the Camp David peace talks between Israel and Egypt. Qais Hussein Omar was born in 1976 under a different name—Saddam Hussein. He alleges he was regularly harassed at checkpoints by Israeli soldiers angered by his name, and was once hospitalized by a particularly brutal beating. "My name was the source of psychological and physical suffering," he said. In other countries, too, he faced issues and it all affected his health, so seven years

ago he changed it. He urges parents not to name their children after famous people as it "won't fit the personality." "His name could be Yasser Arafat and he wants to become a ballet dancer."

In the city of Haifa in northern Israel, an Arab Israeli man is named after Jules Jammal, a Syrian military hero believed to have driven his boat into a French warship during the 1956 Suez crisis. "I am happy with my name," he said. Naji Obeid, a Christian Arab who tries to encourage members of his community to join the Israeli army, named his son after former Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin.

"I loved the leader Menachem Begin and he was my friend, so I called my son Begin Obeid, and he serves in the Israeli navy," he said. Arab Israeli Christian Waheed Nicola named his son Benjamin Netanyahu after the right-wing Israeli leader won elections in 1996. Delivery man Benjamin Netanyahu Nicola, 21, has said in previous interviews with Israeli media the name has caused him no end of problems when he delivers goods in Arab areas. Israeli media reports have said he wanted to change his name but his father, who is a member of Netanyahu's Likud party, refused.—AFP