

# MEIWeekly.



Mr Benjamin Netanyahu (above) will remain prime minister while Israel heads to a third election, but he will relinquish his health, welfare, agriculture, and diaspora affairs ministerial portfolios. Photo: Russia Presidential Executive Office.

## CALENDAR: UPCOMING INSTITUTE EVENTS

### MEI Annual Conference

Hear from Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for Social Policies Tharman Shanmugaratnam on economic transformation, Harvard University's Professor Ezra F Vogel on the East Asian development model, and from other distinguished speakers at MEI's Annual Conference "The Middle East in Transformation: Are there Lessons from East Asia?". Join us on 15 and 16 January 2020! Attendance is free. Register now.



## WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

### Israel Heads to Record Third Election

With the failure of both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Mr Benny Gantz to form a government after the September elections, Israelis will vote for a third time in March 2020. Mr Netanyahu, who has been charged with bribery, fraud, and breach of trust, will remain prime minister of a caretaker government, but announced on Thursday (12 December) that he will relinquish all ministerial positions. Should a third election fail to break the political deadlock, Israeli law would mandate a fourth.



Saudi Arabia, which has some of the world's strictest social rules, has experienced sweeping reforms in recent years, including the end of a ban on female drivers. Saudi racing driver Ms Aseel al Hamad (above) celebrated the lifting of the ban with a lap of honour in June 2018. Photo: Jaguar MENA, shared on Flickr.

### No More Separate Entrances for Saudi Eateries

Saudi Arabia's ministry of municipalities and rural affairs said on Sunday (8 December) that restaurants in the country would no longer need to have gender-segregated entrances. It is unclear whether segregated seating areas within food establishments would be eliminated. The move is part of a drive championed by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to encourage social openness in the conservative Kingdom.

### US Increases Pressure on Iran with Sanctions

The United States announced on Wednesday (11 December) plans to impose new sanctions on Iran's largest shipping company and a major airline for their roles in transporting material for Iran's alleged nuclear programme. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned that entities engaging in illicit transactions with these companies were also at risk of sanctions. The sanctions are the latest in a series of attempts by the US to counter the Islamic Republic's "campaign of terror and intimidation" through economic pressure.

## LOOKAHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

### Erdogan, Sheikh Tamim to Attend KL Summit

The Kuala Lumpur Summit, aimed at addressing the problems faced by the Muslim world, is set to take place from 18 to 21 December. Plans for the summit were devised by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, on the sidelines of a United Nations meeting last year. Mr Erdogan and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani are among the dignitaries expected to attend.

### Israeli AG Urged to Decide on Netanyahu

In response to a petition by hi-tech officials and security members, Israel's Supreme Court urged Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit to announce before 18 December his intention to rule on indicted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's eligibility to run for office. Mr Mandelblit had until now refused to give his opinion, citing that "the question was hypothetical" as long as Mr Netanyahu was not in a position to be appointed to form a government.

## #MUSTREAD: WHAT'S POPULAR ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA

**FACEBOOK:** A visit to a mosque to witness the korban sacrifice, and a *nasi biryani* meal — just some of the ways Singapore tries to promote understanding of Israel. Listen to former foreign minister Mr George Yeo's opening address at Monday's (9 December) launch of *Beating the Odds Together: 50 Years of Singapore-Israel Ties* (book cover pictured below) here: <https://nus.edu/2t411Rr> or read his speech here: <https://bit.ly/2YF7en6>.

A new grassroots movement is achieving real cultural revolution on the streets of Tahrir Square, the epicentre of Iraq's protest movement, says MEI Senior Fellow Fanar Haddad in his latest article for the *Middle East Eye*. <https://bit.ly/34h5fQQ>

**TWITTER:** How does Iran's fragmented factional political system affect its foreign policy decision-making? Professor Luciano Zaccara from the Gulf Studies Centre at Qatar University shared his insights in his talk at MEI on 6 December. Missed the event? Tune in: <https://spoti.fi/2YwDRxc>



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