

MEI Weekly.



Demonstrators protesting against the cartoons of French satirist Charlie Hebdo in front of the French embassy in Ankara on Wednesday (28 October). Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called for a boycott on French products amid a feud with French President Emmanuel Macron over his characterisation of Islam as a religion in “crisis”. Photo: Adem Altan / AFP.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

WATCH, LISTEN & READ: Contextualisation of Islam in Southeast Asia and the process of “Arabisation” have recently become an area of interest. In last week’s ME 101 lecture, Dr Norsahril Saat, a senior fellow at ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, discussed religion and politics in the Middle East and their implications on our region. Revisit the discussion [here](#).

WATCH, LISTEN & READ: In this lecture under our Prominent Speaker Series, His Excellency Vladimir Imamovich Norov, the secretary-general of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), discussed the organisation's crucial role in ensuring stability and sustainable development in the region. Missed the lecture? Catch up via this link [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Rift Widens Between Paris and Ankara

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan seized another opportunity to establish himself as the leader of the Muslim world by lending his support to a campaign calling for the boycott of French products on Monday (26 October). The campaign, which had been surging across the Arab world on social media last weekend, was triggered by French President Emmanuel Macron’s characterisation of Islam as a religion “in crisis” after history teacher Samuel Paty, who showed his students satirical images of Prophet Mohammed by cartoonist Charlie Hebdo, was beheaded. Early responses suggest countries are dividing along contentious regional lines, with Turkey and its allies on one side and Saudi Arabia and its supporters on the other. Qatar and Iran have joined Turkish criticism of France while the United Arab Emirates has remained silent.

Qatar ‘Regrets’ Invasive Searches of Women

Defending its decision, the Qatari government expressed “regret” on Wednesday (28 October) over the invasive medical exams performed on more than a dozen women who were pulled from a Qatar Airways Sydney-bound flight in Doha. The invasive searches were held to check if these women had recently given birth after a newborn baby was found abandoned in a bathroom at Hamad International Airport. This episode, which sparked shock and outrage in Australia and other countries, has highlighted the treatment of women in Qatar and also raised questions about whether foreign women travelling through the airport could legally be subjected to invasive and non-consensual procedures.



A Qatar Airways plane being loaded with supplies at Doha’s Hamad International Airport in April this year. More than a dozen women were pulled off a Sydney-bound Qatar Airways flight earlier this month and were forced to undergo intimate examinations after an abandoned newborn baby was found in an airport bathroom. Photo: Karim Jaafar / AFP.

Palestinian Leaders Banking on Biden Win

The Palestinians are hoping for a Trump defeat in the US presidential election that will be held next Tuesday (3 November) to bring economic relief and a return to American support for a two-state solution. They are opposed to the Trump administration’s pro-Israel plan for resolving the conflict. As presidential candidate Joe Biden has made clear that he opposes Israeli annexation of the West Bank, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is hopeful a Biden win could give him a face-saving chance to reverse a self-inflicted economic hardship. Nearly everyone around Mr Abbas, including the senior members of his Fatah’s party, however, are looking ahead for his exit.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

Renewable Energy Initiatives in the GCC

The need to keep up with growing domestic oil and gas demands for electric power grids while also increasing exports are driving Gulf Arab states to focus on renewable energy, not climate change goals. In this webinar, Dr Steven Griffiths, Khalifa University’s senior vice-president of Research and Development, and Mr Robin Mills, founder of Qamar Energy, will examine the extent to which solar power can alleviate local oil and gas demand in the power generating sector, the potential for this sector to promote new economic activity in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries’ diversification efforts, job creation and the potential for Asia-based companies to invest in this sector.



Join us for this virtual public talk conducted via Zoom on **4 November** from **3.30pm** to **5pm**. Registration is free and all are welcome. Click [here](#) for more details now!

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Saudi Arabia to Announce Labour Reforms

Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development is set to announce labour reforms next week to “increase the competitiveness, and flexibility of the Saudi labour market in accordance with international standards”, according to a media invitation sent to journalists. This could end its controversial *kafala* foreign labour sponsor system that has been criticised as a form of indentured servitude.

Saudi Arabia Set for F1 Debut Next Year

Saudi Arabia is set to make its debut on the Formula One calendar next year while a new purpose-built track at Qiddiyah is scheduled to be completed in 2023. Amnesty International UK said a Saudi Grand Prix would be “part of ongoing efforts to sports-wash the country’s abysmal human rights record”. Head of campaigns Felix Jakens has urged all F1 drivers, owners and teams to consider speaking about the human rights situation in the country.



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