

1776

Thomas Paine publishes his first “American Crisis” essay beginning “These are the times that try men’s souls” (date disputed)

1783

William Pitt the Younger becomes the youngest ever British Prime Minister at age 24



1932

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) begins transmitting overseas

1958

First radio broadcast from space, US President Dwight D. Eisenhower sends a Christmas message “to all mankind, America’s wish for peace on Earth and goodwill to men everywhere”



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TWEETS

01



My gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Government and people of Oman for their affection during this visit. The signing of CEPA was a major outcome, which will benefit the youth of our nations. We have also covered substantial ground in other futuristic sectors. May India-Oman friendship keep getting more robust in the coming times.

@narendramodi

02



Technology is connecting people & communities like never before, but it's also creating fertile ground for criminals. Let's work together to shut down on-line scammers & build a safer digital world for all.

@antonioгутerres

03



Thank you to @CO-PACOGCECA for a good and productive meeting. In times of uncertainty, our farmers need reliability and support. And Europe will always stand behind them.

@vonderleyen

04



It's always a pleasure being with our @WHO Director-General @DrTedros - this time in New Delhi where we're attending the 2nd WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine, a programmatic imperative close to his heart, and mine.

@RD\_WPRO

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stance)

# Have Iran’s authorities given up on the mandatory hijab?

AFP | Paris, France

Women swaying to dance music at a DJ set, strolling without headscarves through cutting-edge art exhibitions and in coffee shops showing off trendy styles that could have come from the streets of Europe.

Until recently, such scenes would have been unthinkable in the Islamic Republic of Iran, whose strict dress code for women has required they wear the hijab in public since shortly after the 1979 revolution that ousted the pro-Western shah.

But while casually flouting the rule has become increasingly common, Iran’s leadership insists the hijab is a legal obligation and is implementing a crackdown that has seen dissident figures who oppose the mandatory headscarf detained.

The tension has come at a critical moment for the clerical establishment, still recovering from the recent 12-day war with Israel and with supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei now 86.

The 2022-2023 nationwide protests, sparked by the custody death of Mahsa Amini who was arrested over alleged improper hijab, are still a recent memory.

Analysts and activists say authorities in recent months have indeed slackened off on imposing the mandatory hijab in

daily life, but are far from abandoning an ideological pillar of the Islamic republic, warning a new wave of repression to re-impose it could come at any time.

Roya Boroumand, cofounder and executive director of the US-based Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, said it was “heartwarming” to see images of women without the headscarf, calling it the result of social pressure from below rather than “a reform granted from above”.

“What we see today is unquestionably the result of years of persistent civil disobedience by Iranian women and girls who have fought to carve out and defend a small space of freedom in public life,” she told AFP.

Women sporting braids, curls and even bleach-blond locks have now become common sights in public, while more traditional women wear the hijab or chador.

The trend, which has grown more visible in recent months in Tehran and other major cities, now extends to all generations to varying degrees.

Some women are also sporting tighter clothing and outfits that expose their shoulders, legs and midriffs, much to the dismay of conservatives who decry such “nudity” in public.

Hard to ‘put the genie back’

Boroumand



Iranian women Elham (2nd L), Leila and Mona, pose next to their instructor Maryam Ghelich (behind) as they sit on their motorbikes at a motorbike training center, in northern Tehran

were bareheaded, brandishing scarves of the home team.

Even the office of Khamenei, in power since 1989, came under fire last month from some ultraconservatives after it published in its newspaper a photo of Iranian woman Niloufar Ghalehvand, a pilates instructor killed during the Israeli attacks, wearing a baseball cap rather than hijab.

A design week exhibition at Tehran University saw bareheaded women mingling freely amid boldly experimental art exhibits.

But it closed down early after objections from clerics in a sign of the authorities’ readiness to hit back.



Iran has a mandatory hijab law that requires women and girls to cover their hair and dress modestly in public, and although enforcement has fluctuated, the legal requirement remains in the country’s penal code and authorities have increased penalties and surveillance to enforce compliance.

said enforcement of the mandatory hijab varied across the country and that authorities were still closing down businesses deemed to have failed to enforce the rule.

Authorities earlier this month arrested two people who organised a marathon event on Iran’s Gulf island of Kish, viral images of which showed dozens of women running bareheaded through the streets. They also shut down a cafe that served as the start and finish point.

Arash Azizi, a postdoctoral associate and lecturer at Yale University, told AFP that “the regime has given up on harshly enforcing mandatory hijab but it has not at all given up on it as a principle yet”.

“It would be a grand ideological concession that it is not prepared to make. We still see places closed down and even people fined and arrested due to lax hijab. But the regime knows that it will be very difficult to put the genie back in the bottle.”

Other recent incidents have also gone viral on social media: the grand opening of a mall in Tehran, for instance, saw young people dancing and swinging their arms to a DJ’s beats.

And a match this month in Iran’s second football division was unusual not just for the presence of women -- albeit in a segregated area of the stadium -- but for the fact that many

## France catches second escapee in bedsheet prison break

AFP | Lyon, France

French police yesterday caught the second inmate who escaped from prison in late November by sawing through cell bars and using bedsheets, sources close to the case told AFP.

The 19-year-old escapee, suspected in a drug-linked attempted murder case, was found in the southern port city of Marseille after Interpol issued a red notice for him, two sources close to the case told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

He and another detainee had fled an overcrowded jail in the eastern city of Dijon after sawing through their cell bars with blades that investigators suspect



A police officer from the BST 14 Brigade, specialised in drug trafficking, walks through Les Rosiers housing project, in the northern districts of Marseille, southern France

were delivered by drone.

Police tracked down the Marseille native some 500 kilometres (310 miles) south of the prison to a run-down apartment complex in the north of the city, known to be a drug-dealing hotspot.

His fellow fugitive, a 32-year-old man accused of violence against a partner, was arrested a day after their escape, when police officers swooped down on a village bar where he was sipping coffee.

The Dijon public prosecutor’s office confirmed Thursday’s arrest to AFP, without offering further details.

‘Old-fashioned’ blades

Guards noticed the two men

had fled from the Dijon prison before dawn.

The 32-year-old man had left a message in his cell, saying he had been held for “too long”, according to Dijon’s public prosecutor, Olivier Caracotch. It was not immediately clear for how long he had been held.

Union official Ahmed Saih, who represents prison officers at the jail, told AFP shortly after the breakout that the inmates used “old-fashioned, manual saw blades”, and that several such blades had been found previously. The saws were likely delivered by drones, Caracotch said following the escape, with several individuals already sentenced over drone deliveries to the same jail.

## Israel to open embassy in Fiji next year

Jerusalem, Undefined

Israel said Thursday it plans to open an embassy in Fiji next year, after the Pacific island nation inaugurated its mission in Jerusalem in September.

“Just spoke with the PM and FM of Fiji... I informed the PM of my decision to open an Israeli embassy in Fiji in 2026,” Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar posted on X, referring to Fijian premier Sitiveni Rabuka.

“Opening the new embassy will tighten the relations between the two countries... at the same time, Israel’s embassy in Fiji will strengthen Israel’s presence in the entire Pacific region, which is friendly to Israel.”

Rabuka inaugurated Fiji’s mission in Jerusalem in September, joining a small group of nations that have opened their embassies in the city, alongside the United States, Guatemala, Honduras, Kosovo, Paraguay and Papua New Guinea.

## EU kicks off crunch summit on Russian asset plan

Brussels, Belgium

EU leaders kicked off a make-or-break summit Thursday on using frozen Russian assets to fund Ukraine, with key player Belgium under pressure to drop its opposition.

The 27-nation bloc is scrambling to bolster its ally Ukraine, as US President Donald Trump pushes for a deal with President Vladimir Putin to end the fighting. Officials have insisted the talks will last as long as it takes to hammer out an agreement, saying both Ukraine’s survival -- nearly four years into the war -- and Europe’s credibility are at stake. “We will not leave the European summit without a solution for the funding of Ukraine,” European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen said.