

US issues new visa criteria for 6 Muslim nations

WASHINGTON, JUNE 29/-/The Trump administration has set new criteria for visa applicants from six mainly Muslim nations and all refugees that require a "close family or business tie to the United States."

The move comes after the Supreme Court partially restored President Donald Trump's executive order that was widely criticised as a ban on Muslims.

The new guidelines sent to US embassies and consulates yesterday say that applicants from the six countries must prove a relationship with a parent, spouse, child, adult son or daughter, son-in-law, daughter-in-law or sibling in the US.

This is according to a State Department cable obtained by the Associated Press.

Grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, fiancées or other extended family members are not considered to be close relationships.

Senior officials from the departments of State, Justice and Homeland Security are finalising criteria that visitors from six mostly Muslim nations must meet to avoid the Trump administration's revised travel ban.

The White House deliberations came as US embassies and consulates await instructions later yesterday on how to implement this week's Supreme Court order that partially reinstated the ban after it was blocked by lower courts. The new measures are expected to be implemented today.

Government lawyers must determine how to define such a relationship. The court offered only broad guidelines suggesting it would include a relative, job offer or invitation to lecture in the US. (AP)

Ex-Israeli PM Olmert granted early prison release: lawyer

JERUSALEM, JUNE 29/-/A parole committee has decided to grant early release to Israeli ex-prime minister Ehud Olmert, who is serving a 27-month prison sentence for corruption, his lawyer said today.

The committee accepted all our arguments, Olmert's lawyer Shani Ilouz told public radio. "As of now, Olmert will be released on Sunday," she said, noting the justice ministry could still appeal the decision. The 71-year-old Olmert, who was premier between 2006 and 2009, was convicted of graft and entered prison in February 2016.

His Sunday release would be after he completed two-thirds of his sentence.

The committee's reasons for granting his early release were not immediately clear, with a statement expected later.

Olmert is Israel's first former premier to serve jail time.

He resigned as prime minister in September 2008 after police recommended he be indicted for graft, but remained in office until March 2009, when Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu was sworn in to the post, which he has held ever since.

Olmert won international acclaim for relaunching peace efforts with the Palestinians at the Annapolis conference in the United States in 2007, but they failed to bear fruit and the corruption charges against him have come to define his legacy.

The parole committee's decision comes after Olmert was rushed to hospital after experiencing chest pains in prison last week. The former premier underwent ex-



Brett McGurk, U.S. envoy to the coalition against Islamic State, walks in the town of Tabqa, Syria—REUTERS

India voices concern at UN over terrorists' access to weapons of mass destruction

UNITED NATIONS, JUNE 29/-/India voiced deep concern over the possibility of collusion that leads to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to terrorist networks and non-state actors, calling for an early conclusion of negotiations on the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism to deal with the menace.

"Preventing access to Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and their means of delivery to non-state actors is a continuing concern, especially as terrorist groups and non-state actors strike ever deeper roots and exploit different avenues to strike terror," India's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Tanmayia Lal said here.

Speaking at a Security Council debate on efforts to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by non-state actors, Lal said terrorist networks and non-state actors, by themselves, do not have any capacity or access to advanced and sensitive technologies and materials.

"Instances of proliferation of WMDs, however, are not unknown to all of us. The possibility of such collusion remains a real cause for concern. This grave threat can only be contained through effective and sustained international cooperation and coordination and monitoring," he said.

In addition to capacity building and training, the international community must endeavour to close gaps in the global legal architecture to combat terrorism and non-state actors' access to WMDs and related material, Lal said.

"An early conclusion of negotiations on the draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism will be helpful," he said.

Further efforts to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction through global, non-discriminatory and verifiable disarmament treaties such as the Chemical Weapons Convention must also be taken to their logical conclusion.

Underscoring that "synergy" will be key to the success of global efforts, Lal said clandestine prolifer-

ation networks, which have been unmasked, have shown that non-state actors can exploit weak links in global supply chains and export controls and undermine international security.

"All states must therefore assume their responsibility to combat proliferation of WMDs by non-state actors."

"Prevention remains our best strategy against the threat of WMDs falling into the hands of non-state actors. The enemies of humanity will not hesitate to use WMDs if they are able. The international community must remain vigilant, strengthen cooperation, build capacity and encourage full assumption of national responsibility by states in accordance with their international obligations," he said.

Lal told the UN meeting that as a country with advanced nuclear technologies, India is fully conscious of the responsibilities that come with the possession of such technologies and the country remains fully committed to strengthening national and global non-pro-

liferation efforts.

He said India also participates actively in the interessional process on the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) that needs to be strengthened including through a legally-binding protocol in light of technology trends and the threat of bio-terrorism.

"Export controls remain the first line of defence in combating WMDs proliferation by non-state actors," Lal said.

India is committed to maintaining effective national export controls consistent with the highest international standards, and has harmonised its legislative and regulatory framework with the control lists, guidelines and best practices of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) and Australia Group (AG), he said.

India's admission to MTCR in June last year is recognition of its non-proliferation record and its ability to contribute to global non-proliferation efforts, Lal added. (PTI)

'Indo-US relationship stands on merits, not to contain China'

WASHINGTON, JUNE 29/-/The Indo-US relationship stands on its own merits, according to a top American commander who said that China is using its military and economic power to "erode" the rules-based international order.

"There are those who question the motives for the increasingly cooperative relationship between the US and India. Some have said that it is to contain China. That is simply not true," Commander of the US Pacific Command Admiral Harry Harris said in his address to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute in Brisbane yesterday.

"The US-India relationship stands on its own merits. That is why I made en-

hancing our relationship with India a major line of effort when I took command of Pacific Command," Harris said, a day after the Chinese media raised questions on the increasing relationship between India and the United States.

"The growing US-India relationship has also inspired my thinking about partnerships like our Australian alliance, the US' deepening cooperation with India is based on shared values and shared concerns. I have spoken about the clear benefits of a democracy quadrilateral that enhances security cooperation between Australia, India, Japan, and the US," Harris said.

China, he said, poses a challenge to the US.

"China is using its military and economic power to erode the rules-based inter-

national order. I believe the Chinese are building up combat power and positional advantage in an attempt to assert de facto sovereignty over disputed maritime features and spaces in the South China Sea... where they are fundamentally altering the physical and political landscape by creating and militarising man-made bases," the four star ranked admiral said.

"Fake islands should not be believed by real people," Harris said, apparently referring to the artificial islands being built by China in the dispute with South China Sea. China claims almost all of the resource-rich South China Sea and Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counter-claims.

America's goal, he said, remains to convince China that its best future comes from peaceful cooperation, meaningful participation in the current rules-based international order, and honouring its international commitments.

"I have also been loud and clear that we won't allow the shared domains to be closed down unilaterally. So we will cooperate where we can, but remain ready to confront where we must."

"Ultimately, the US seeks a constructive and mutually beneficial relationship with China. This will benefit America, our allies especially Australia and our partners, while pressing China to abide by international rules and norms," Harris added. (PTI)

India gives \$ 100,000 to UN Tax Fund; 1st nation to contribute

UNITED NATIONS, JUNE 29/-/India has contributed USD 100,000 to a UN fund to help developing countries actively participate in the discussion of tax issues, becoming the first country to make the contribution.

The UN Trust Fund for International Cooperation in Tax Matters (the UN Tax Fund) received its first financial voluntary contribution from India, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Office for Financing for Development Office announced.

The UN Tax Trust Fund aims to support the work of the Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters (the UN Tax Committee).

Voluntary contributions for the fund have been called for by the UN and the committee since its establishment in 2006.

The call for contributions was also emphasised in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda adopted at the third International Conference on Financing for Development in 2015, the UN department said.

India became the first country to respond to the call with an initial contribution of USD 100,000 that will be dedicated towards ensuring greater support for developing countries' participation in the sub-committee meetings of the UN Tax Committee, which are currently unfunded.

Handing over a cheque to the Financing for Development Office, India expressed hope that developing countries will similarly contribute to the UN Tax Trust Fund to advance developing countries' participation on taxation issues.

"Through the fund, the UN expects that more developing countries will draw upon the best practice of other bodies, ensuring that global tax cooperation norms and rules will work more effectively and efficiently for all countries and all stakeholders."

The UN Tax Committee, a subsidiary body of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), has provided guidance on current issues such as double taxation treaties, transfer pricing (profit shifting) taxation of the extractive industries and taxation of services.

Ex-Israeli PM Olmert granted early prison release: lawyer

JERUSALEM, JUNE 29/-/A parole committee has decided to grant early release to Israeli ex-prime minister Ehud Olmert, who is serving a 27-month prison sentence for corruption, his lawyer said today.

The committee accepted all our arguments, Olmert's lawyer Shani Ilouz told public radio. "As of now, Olmert will be released on Sunday," she said, noting the justice ministry could still appeal the decision. The 71-year-old Olmert, who was premier between 2006 and 2009, was convicted of graft and entered prison in February 2016.

His Sunday release would be after he completed two-thirds of his sentence.

The committee's reasons for granting his early release were not immediately clear, with a statement expected later.

Olmert is Israel's first former premier to serve jail time.

He resigned as prime minister in September 2008 after police recommended he be indicted for graft, but remained in office until March 2009, when Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu was sworn in to the post, which he has held ever since.

Olmert won international acclaim for relaunching peace efforts with the Palestinians at the Annapolis conference in the United States in 2007, but they failed to bear fruit and the corruption charges against him have come to define his legacy.

The parole committee's decision comes after Olmert was rushed to hospital after experiencing chest pains in prison last week. The former premier underwent ex-



British Prime Minister Theresa May is welcomed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the Chancellery in Berlin—REUTERS

Venezuela vows to fend off 'coup' after grenade attack

CARACAS, JUNE 29/-/Venezuela's leader Nicolas Maduro put the military on alert today against an alleged coup after a renegade police detective claimed responsibility for a grenade attack on the Supreme Court, demanding the embattled president quit.

Four grenades were hurled at the high court from a helicopter and bullets were fired at the interior ministry yesterday, Maduro said, in a potentially dramatic escalation of the violence gripping the oil-rich South American country.

The attack was claimed in a video released online by a man identified by media and the government as 36-year-old Oscar Perez. Beyond his police work, Perez has acted in a Venezuelan action film, "Suspended Death," and has posted photographs on social media of himself posing with weapons.

"We are a coalition of military, police and civilian public servants... opposed to this transitional, criminal government," said Perez, flanked by four masked figures in

black, two of them holding rifles. Maduro has for months been fending off calls for elections to replace him, from opponents who blame him for a desperate economic crisis that has sparked hunger and deadly violence.

He so far retains the public backing of the military high command—a factor that analysts say is decisive if he is to remain in power.

Venezuela has seen three attempted military coups since 1992. The government named Perez as the author of the attack, saying he had stolen a police helicopter.

No one was hurt in the incidents, Maduro said.

He branded the attack part of an "escalation" by right-wing "coup" plotters.

"I have activated the entire armed forces to defend the peace," he said in remarks broadcast from the Miraflores presidential palace.

"Sooner or later, we are going to capture that helicopter and those that carried out this terrorist attack," Photos circulating on social media showed a helicopter flying

over Caracas as witnesses were heard. In the video published by Venezuelan media, Perez called on Maduro to resign and for early elections to be held.

Maduro called on the opposition MUD alliance to denounce the attack, but its leaders said there was not yet enough information to comment.

"Some people say it is a hoax, some say it is real, some say it is real," opposition legislative speaker Julio Borges told reporters.

"Whatever it is, it is very serious. It all points to one conclusion: that the situation in Venezuela is unsustainable."

Borges said pro-government military officers had scuffled with opposition lawmakers in congress yesterday and blocked them in the chamber for several hours.

Another senior opposition lawmaker, Freddy Guevara, urged people to take part in anti-government rallies today—the latest in nearly three months of daily street protests that have left 76 people dead.

The assault on the Supreme Court came a day after Maduro announced the arrests of five opponents he accused of plotting against him to clear the way for a US invasion.

Earlier yesterday, Maduro warned US President Donald Trump that Venezuela would fight back against such a move.

"If Venezuela were dragged into chaos and violence... we would fight," Maduro bellowed in a speech to supporters.

If coup prevented his side from fulfilling his contested reform plans, he said, "we would achieve it by arms."

"I am not exaggerating when I say it would have involved the arrival of American ships and troops in Venezuelan waters, on Venezuelan soil," Maduro warned.

The opposition regularly accuses Maduro of repressing and jailing opponents.

The international community has called for mediation to solve the crisis after Vatican-backed talks last week broke down. (AFP)