

After ban ends, Saudi women see new job in becoming drivers

By Aya Batrawy
The Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Saudi women are driving freely through busy city streets for the first time after years of risking arrest if they dared to get behind the wheel. And with the longstanding ban now lifted, a new opportunity has emerged: Working as drivers.

It's a job that had been reserved for men only and one that until recently even many Saudi males rejected as socially taboo. Driving was almost entirely the job of foreigners, often lower-income and from countries like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Saudi women who want to work as drivers — for ride-hailing services such as Uber, for example — are challenging an even wider array of traditional limits on women's rights and are part of a wave of change that has drawn resistance from parts of the male community in the deeply conservative country.

"It's very natural for people to resist change," said Ammal Farahat, an affluent mother of two with a master's degree who runs her own consultancy. "Once they start seeing more positive images and opportunities and what it means for women to drive, they're going to change their minds."

Farahat, who had a driver's license from the U.S. before obtaining a Saudi one, signed up to be a driver for Careem, a local competitor to Uber. She and her sister, who grew up in Saudi Arabia with a German mother who could drive freely in her home country, are trying out becoming drivers together.

Farahat says she decided to take on the job to defy stereotypes that working as a driver is beneath Saudi women.

For many women who sign up to become drivers, the job provides another source of income and greater financial independence.

"By opening our platform now to women, we are empowering them to be their own boss, to drive or to work whenever they want, and to work how long they want, as well. Perfect for women who are in the workforce," said Careem co-founder Abdullah Elyas.

It's not just women. In recent years, thousands of young Saudi men have started moonlighting as drivers for the two ride-hailing services.

The change reflects the shift in Saudi lifestyles mirrored by the kingdom's



DETERMINED DRIVERS. Ammal Farahat, who has signed up to be a driver for Careem, a regional ride-hailing service that is a competitor to Uber, drives her car in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. After lifting a longstanding ban on women driving, it's the latest job opening for Saudi women that had been reserved for men only, and one that sharply challenges traditional norms. (AP Photo/Nariman El-Mofty)

shrinking ability to rely solely on its vast oil exports for wealth. While 70 percent of Saudis who work are employed by the public sector, those jobs alone are not enough to keep pace with the number of Saudis entering the workforce.

Official statistics show that the average public sector salary for Saudis is about 10,600 riyals per month (\$2,800), far from enough to comfortably cover the costs of one-income households in major cities like the capital, Riyadh.

Unemployment is close to 12 percent. The overwhelming majority of job seekers in Saudi Arabia are women, and around 34 percent of Saudis seeking employment are between 25 and 29 years old. The lifting of the driving ban is expected to gradually improve women's participation in the workforce and buoy the economy.

There will still be many roadblocks for women. They need a male relative's approval to obtain a passport or travel abroad. And the support of a father, husband, or brother is seen as key to a woman being able to work or drive.

Careem says 2,000 women have registered with the company to sign up as drivers since the kingdom announced in September the driving ban on women would be lifted. Uber, meanwhile, launched a website with more than 100 Saudi women registering their interest in driving.

Already, more than 150,000 Saudi male drivers are signed up with Uber, with the majority working part-time. Careem says 95 percent of its fleet of drivers are Saudi men, totalling around 170,000.

But 80 percent of Uber's customers are women; 70 percent for Careem.

When the royal decree was announced last year that women would be allowed to drive, some Saudi

women eager to drive their own cars shared pictures on Twitter deleting their Uber and Careem apps.

Elyas says the company is not worried about business being hurt, and is embracing the change.

"There is a need (for) being driven by a woman in Saudi and we're opening with that whole new customer segment, which we are excited to serve with our service going forward," he said.

While there has been a loosening of social restrictions in recent years, the culture here still shuns the mixing of unrelated men and women. A male driver initiating conversation with a female passenger can lead to a complaint.

Uber conducted its own research and found that 74 percent of prospective women drivers interviewed said they'd only be interested in driving female riders.

To accommodate this, Uber is rolling out a new feature in Saudi Arabia that allows women drivers to select women riders. The company describes it as an effort at "being mindful of the cultural context" in Saudi Arabia.

Careem says its drivers too can decide to confirm or decline an order based on the rider's gender by seeing their name.

As she drove around the streets of Riyadh, Farahat talked about how her daughter and niece, both under five years old, will never know the challenges her generation went through in getting from one place to another and needing to rely on a man for transportation.

"They're not growing up in the same Saudi Arabia I grew up in at all," Farahat said. "It's exciting, but also I know every generation has their own challenges, so what challenges would they go through? It will be different."

Fay Abuelgasim contributed to this report.

Malaysia to sell bling seized in ex-prime minister's probe

By Ian Phillips and Eileen Ng
The Associated Press

PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia — Malaysia's government will sell much of the huge stash of jewelry and luxury goods, including diamond necklaces, tiaras, and designer handbags, that were seized in a money-laundering probe of former leader Najib Razak, finance minister Lim Guan Eng told The Associated Press.

Police said 12,000 pieces of jewelry, 567 handbags, 423 watches, and 234 sunglasses were confiscated from properties linked to Najib after the shocking electoral defeat of his long-ruling coalition. The police estimate the haul, the biggest in the country's history, is worth more than \$273 million.

Lim told The AP in an interview that the government will "try to monetize whatever we can." He said the amount is a drop in the ocean compared to some 50 billion ringgit (\$12.4 billion) of losses related to the defunct 1MDB investment fund set up by Najib, including from alleged outright theft and loans used to conceal the graft.

"We will try to monetize whatever we can, but bear in mind it is nothing compared to the amount that has been robbed from the state," he said, adding he was stunned by the police seizure.

Malaysians have reacted with disbelief on social media at the extensive stash that included 2,200 rings, some 1,400 necklaces, 14 tiaras, and thousands of bracelets, earrings, and brooches.

Najib has claimed most of the items were gifts from foreign dignitaries over decades



SEIZED STASH. An officer of Malaysia's Federal Commercial Crime Investigation Department shows pictures of jewelry during a press conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Malaysian police say the total value of cash, jewelry, and hundreds of watches and handbags seized from properties linked to former Prime Minister Najib Razak in a money-laundering investigation amounted to more than \$273 million. (AP Photo/Vincent Thian)

and said the police valuation was grossly inflated and appeared to be a "political vengeance" against his family.

"Imagine if that amount was discovered or revealed in the United States, it would be mind boggling even for a country as wealthy, rich as the United States," Lim said. For a small country such as Malaysia, "it is completely out of this world," he said.

Najib set up the 1MDB fund when he took power in 2009, but it accumulated billions in debts. U.S. investigators say Najib's associates stole and laundered \$4.5 billion from the fund from 2009 to 2014, some of which landed in Najib's bank account. They say \$27.3 million was used to buy a rare diamond necklace for his wife, Rosmah Mansor.

New Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has reopened investigations

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Department of Consumer & Business Services



Workers' Compensation Division: What we do

In Oregon, all employers must have workers' compensation insurance or be self-insured. The Workers' Compensation Division enforces laws and regulations and provides services and resources to assist those in the workers' compensation system. Workers' compensation insurance protects workers by paying for treatment and lost wages. It also protects employers against legal claims that may result from injury or related illness at work.

Workers' compensation services include:

- Resolving disputes fairly and quickly.
- Prevention and reduction of injuries and illnesses at work.
- Ensuring injured workers receive medical treatment and appropriate benefits to recover and return to work more quickly.

If you are injured at work or for more information, call the Workers' Compensation Division at 1-800-452-0288 or 503-947-7810.

www.wcd.oregon.gov

What do you think about a new MAX line to SW Portland, Tigard and Tualatin?

Alternatives for a new MAX light rail line serving southwest Portland, Tigard and Tualatin were studied in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The study is available for review and comment. Your comments can improve the study and help determine which route is pursued for further study, design and funding.

Comment at swcorridorplan.org
through Monday July 30, 2018



The Southwest Corridor Steering Committee is scheduled to hold a **public hearing 6 p.m. Thursday July 26** at Tigard Town Hall, 13125 SW Hall Blvd., Tigard.

Submit comments | swcorridorplan.org | swcorridorDEIS@oregonmetro.gov | 503-797-1888 or TDD 503-797-1804 | Metro SW Corridor, 600 NE Grand Ave., Portland, OR 97232.

Esta es una notificación de su oportunidad para comentar sobre las prioridades de transporte en la región. Para recibir una traducción de la notificación pública completa en español, llame al 503-797-1888.

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