

Saudi Arabia's still a man's world

Some women accept Islamic laws prohibiting them from driving or going outside without a male relative; others don't like laws but are scared to talk about them.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia - Five Saudi women sat in a coffee shop chatting animatedly about their lives over café lattes and sandwiches. Suddenly, they heard a commotion outside.

Fearing the Mutawas, religious police, had come to throw them in jail for being in public without a male relative, they hastily grabbed their long black scarves and covered their hair and faces as they cast wary looks around them. The Mutawas did not show up, but the women decided to leave.

Their outing had been spoiled. Ten years after a group of women defied a ban on female driving and drove around the capital for 15 minutes, women in Saudi Arabia are still bound by tradition, their lives subject to the interpretations of male religious scholars of the sharia, or Islamic law.

Some Saudi women are happy with the status quo and denounce human rights groups that call for improvement of their situation. Others insist their lives should change.

"These traditions and customs, many of which go back to before the advent of Islam, target women and aim at marginalizing their role," said Hatoun al-Fassi, a historian who has published such opinions in local and Arab newspapers.

"Men behave as if they were the only ones in charge of building society and consider women as intruders whose sole mission is to procreate and be part of the decor," she added.

Saudi Arabian women lead among the strictest lives in the world. In public, they can only expose their hands and sometimes Kohl-rimmed eyes and hennaed feet.

They cannot travel or get an education or a job without the written approval of a male guardian, and the government does not issue them ID cards.

Mutawas are agents of the Committee to Prevent Vice and Promote Virtue, which is funded by the government and headed by a Cabinet minister. Mutawas reportedly get about \$300 for every Saudi they arrest and

\$150 for every foreigner.

The Mutawas patrol shopping centers, restaurants and other public areas to ensure that men and women are behaving.

They even go into sports stores or make-up shops with felt pens to black out promotional pictures of women on boxes and posters.

Princess Basma bint Majid bin Abdul Aziz, a niece of King Fahd, said foreign activists have no right "to tell a people who have existed for thousands of years, even before America existed, to change their ways."

"The problem with Americans is that they have a certain way of life and they think if you don't live like them, there's something wrong with you," said Princess Basma, head of the culture and heritage committee at Al-Nahda Women's Charitable Society.

"Why should I, a Saudi, dress the way an American woman does?" added the 40-year-old princess, who, like all Saudi women, wears a long, black abaya and scarf in public.

Princess Basma said she's not inconvenienced by laws that stop her from driving.

"If I can have someone drive me around why should I say no?" she said. "In Paris, you have to be a princess to afford a driver. Here, every woman is a princess because she has one."

Not every family can afford to pay about \$300-400 a month for a driver, so many women are at the mercy of male family members if they want to go out.

For most, especially for the 6 million foreigners who live here, life in Saudi Arabia can be a bit confusing because there are no written rules for behavior. What is condoned today may not be condoned tomorrow.

A foreign woman wearing a navy blue scarf was stopped by a Mutawa because her head cover was not black. His colleague told him navy blue was OK, and the two men launched into a theological debate over scarf color before the woman was let go.

An unmarried, non-Saudi couple who were seen kissing goodnight on the cheek in a parking lot were thrown in jail for a few weeks.

The role of women in Saudi society came under the spotlight during the buildup of 500,000 Western troops prior to the 1991 Gulf War that liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. The troops included American women who drove trucks and had leadership roles, and this was said to have inspired the Nov. 6,

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Hatoun al-Fassi
historian

1990, "drive-in" in Riyadh.

Today, the 47 women who led the drive-in stay out of the limelight.

Their punishment 10 years ago was harsh: They lost their jobs and passports for two years, and they were denounced in flyers written by religious groups as "fallen women calling for vice." Those who returned to work have been denied promotions.

Saudi women who work — about 5 percent of them do — are encouraged to enter fields such as nursing and teaching, where they do not mix with males. In college they cannot major in engineering, economics or law.

Very few women are seen in public or at government ministries. And many avoid being close to men. They do not get on elevators with them.

Outside most restaurants, signs announce that "single ladies are not allowed without mahram," or male guardian.

Inside restaurants, family sections with frosted windows are set aside for women and their male escorts. They are seated in cubicles with curtains, screens and sometimes even doors to shield them from other diners. If a Mutawa discovers that the couple sitting behind one of the screens are not married, the two will be hauled to jail.

Banks have special "ladies" branches. Because they have no identity cards, women use "family IDs" without photos that list them as dependent of fathers or husbands — a practice that sometimes leads to fraud.

Some men even forbid their wives from getting passports because they cannot stand the thought of their being photographed.

"It will take a revolution to change our situation," said Sara, a working woman, who did not want to be further identified because "there's no one to protect you if you speak out."

General Electric appoints new CEO

The 44-year-old follows in the footsteps of one of the world's most famous CEOs.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HARTFORD, Conn. - In a move as carefully orchestrated as it was closely watched, General Electric Co. anointed 44-year-old company man Jeffrey Immelt on Monday as successor to one of the business world's most fabled CEOs, Jack Welch.

The selection was six years in the planning and allows Welch, 65, a year to train Immelt, who was head of GE's medical systems division and now carries the title of president and chairman-elect.

Welch is to step down by the end of 2001, ending a 20-year reign that saw GE's transformation from a company best known for light bulbs and appliances into an empire that makes aircraft engines, provides financial services and includes the television network NBC.

GE's board quietly approved the choice during a special meeting over the Thanksgiving weekend, when Welch felt the company could avoid the intense media attention that the succession question has drawn.

"It's all going to unfold very nicely," Welch said. "You won't see a bump."

Welch and Immelt appeared Monday at a news conference in New York, appearing at ease in each other's company and wearing similar open-collar blue shirts and blazers.

The two men share an emphasis on company loyalty — Welch has worked for GE since 1960, Immelt since 1982. Immelt's father worked for GE for 38 years.

A Wall Street favorite because of his penchant for careful planning and surprise-free management, Welch has been grooming potential successors for years while laying a foundation with analysts for a hassle-free transition.

There were two other finalists for the top job: Robert L. Nardelli, president and CEO of GE Power Systems, and W. James McNerney, head of GE Aircraft Engines.

Like military leaders passed over for promotion, their days with GE appeared numbered. Their successors, as well as Immelt's, already have been designated.

"You can be sure they're being pursued very aggressively on the outside and are... evaluating their options very aggressively," Welch said. Immelt said he was honored to be head what Fortune magazine called "the most admired company in the world."

"I have a tremendous passion for the company," Immelt said. "We simply have the best team in the world."

Welch is widely credited with

remaking GE into the world's most valuable company, worth about \$490 billion based on Monday's closing stock price.

He shook up the company's management structure and sold major divisions including householders, air conditioning and semiconductor businesses.

In his two decades as chairman, profits have risen from \$1.6 billion to \$10.7 billion in 1999.

Several best-selling books have been written about Welch and this year Time Warner Trade Publishing paid Welch a \$7.1 million advance for his own book about management techniques. It was believed to be the largest-ever advance paid for a non-fiction title.

Immelt made it clear that more growth is planned at GE.

"We just don't believe in any of the rules of size," he declared — and predicted that the Internet "will change every job in the company."

Analysts praised the selection.

"He is an extremely capable executive leader," said analyst Martin Sankey, vice president of Goldman, Sachs & Co. in New York. "He compiled a strong record of generating growth and moving into new markets."

"He was the successor I wanted; he was the successor I expected," said Michael Linsky of McDonald Investments Inc. "I think he will do a superb job."

Immelt, who grew up in a Cincinnati suburb and attended Dartmouth and Harvard, joined GE in 1982.

Microsoft: Judge compromised objectivity

The company, working to avoid a split, filed legal briefs with an appeals court criticizing the original judge.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Seeking to keep its business intact, Microsoft filed legal briefs Monday alleging the federal judge who ordered its breakup compromised the "appearance of impartiality."

In its first filing with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, which now has custody of the landmark case, Microsoft lambasted U.S. District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson as a biased judge who thrust himself into the dispute rather than resolving it impartially.

"By repeatedly commenting on the merits of the case in the press," the company's brief argued, "the district judge has cast himself in the public's eye as a participant in the controversy, thereby compromising the appearance of impartiality, if not demonstrating actual bias against Microsoft."

A spokeswoman for Jackson said the judge had no comment on Microsoft's statements.

"Believe me, I have no grudge against Microsoft,"

Jackson said in an interview with The Washington Post just days after his June ruling. But in the interview, rare for a federal judge, he said he had little choice but to accept the government's breakup proposal.

And in a speech to an antitrust conference in New York in late September, Jackson said his order was a last resort forced by the company's unwillingness to make changes voluntarily.

Microsoft on Monday asked the appellate court to overturn Jackson's order in June that the company be broken into two parts. If the higher court calls for a new trial, Microsoft wants someone other than Jackson to preside.

Monday's brief was the latest volley in a long-running battle that could result in the largest government ordered restructuring since the 1984 breakup of AT&T.

Microsoft's brief asked the federal appeals court to find that Jackson was wrong in concluding that the software giant was an unfair monopoly, and reverse his breakup order.

"The case went awry from the outset," said company spokesman Vivek Varma, "and our appeal provides a comprehensive picture of why Microsoft should win this case."

Said Justice Department spokeswoman Gina Talamona: "The judgment is well supported by the evidence offered during a 78-day trial, including thousands of pages of Microsoft's own documents. We are confident in our case and look forward to presenting it to the Court of Appeals."

Microsoft said its "competitive response" to the takeoff of widespread Internet use, and Web browser rival Netscape, "produced enormous consumer benefits" and did not illegally conquer its market, as the government charged.

"The District Court branded Microsoft's conduct anticompetitive even though it recognized that Microsoft did not foreclose Netscape from the marketplace," it said.

Netscape Corp.'s Navigator software was the standard Internet browser until Microsoft's Internet Explorer took over. The government has maintained that when Microsoft integrated its Windows operating system with Internet Explorer, it pushed competitors like Netscape out of the market.

On Jan. 12, the government is due to file its brief with the appeals court. Microsoft will have a chance to reply by the end of January, and oral argu-

ments in the landmark antitrust case are set for late February. Jackson's ruling came in early June.

The Justice Department, suing Microsoft along with several state attorneys general, had wanted the case passed directly to the Supreme Court, citing a long-standing law that allows such high-profile cases special consideration, but the high court refused.

Meanwhile, the Association for Competitive Technology filed a "friend of the court" brief for Microsoft. ACT, founded in 1998 at the time the federal government's effort against Microsoft was escalating, has frequently defended the Redmond, Wash.-based firm.

ACT argued that Microsoft improved its products by fusing them together, rather than bundling its operating system and Internet browser together to shut out competitors, as the court concluded.

The group also said that splitting the company in two — one part managing with the Windows operating system and another comprising everything else the company controls — would hurt the market by eroding the industry standard. Windows runs on more than 90 percent of the world's personal computers.

A&M bonfire victims honored

A scholarship was set up at the University of Texas to say thanks for putting the UT-A&M rivalry on hold in 1999.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN - Just over a year ago, University of Texas at Austin students put their football rivalry with Texas A&M University on hold to honor victims of the bonfire collapse.

On Monday, Texas A&M rewarded that act of reconciliation in the form of a \$50,000 endowment for scholarships at UT.

The "1999 Bonfire Unity Endowed Presidential

Scholarship" will be available to UT students with passing grades who are sophomores or over and display "a clear commitment to the ideals displayed" during the tragedy, said UT official Jim Kunetka.

"We're old and bitter rivals, and that will probably remain," Kunetka said. "But at least when it comes to humanity, we're all the same."

Twelve students were killed Nov. 18, 1999 when the bonfire they were building collapsed, sparking an outpouring of support from the University of Texas. Students gave blood, collected money and traveled to the rival campus to provide comfort.

"Last year's tragedy at Texas A&M has been shared by all Texans," said UT Austin president Larry Faulkner. "It is our deepest hope that the memory of those who lost their lives in 1999 will live forever."

Texas' two largest public universities both have legendary traditions concerning the annual day-after-Thanksgiving game that gives the winner state bragging rights.

UT's event last year was supposed to be a "hex" rally to put a good-natured curse on the Aggies before the game. It became an emotional candle-light rally in which thousands of students from both universities gathered to honor the dead.

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