

Human Rights minister vows to shut down private jails

By: Shatha Al-Harazi

SANA'A, Feb. 8 – Hooria Mashour, Minister of Human Rights in the interim government, has promised to close Yemen's private and secret jails run by officials and tribal sheikhs.

At present the number of these unofficial jails – or any detailed information on their locations – is not known. However, the ministry will begin work on the jails they already have information about. Both the Interior Ministry and the Justice Ministry will work to close down the illegal jails.

"I saw villagers in Tihama being jailed in a cow shed, held by the chains used for cows," said Hussein Ali, who was present people were tortured in a private jail. "Around 20 people were treated like animals in that place, which is owned by the most well-known Tihama sheikh."

Ali added that the owner of that jail is also a member of parliament.

In 2010, the Ministry of Human Rights forced the cabinet to launch a decree to prevent any new private jails from opening, while punishing those who owned existing jails. However, to date, the decree has not been implemented.

Work on shutting down Yemen's

private jails has been ongoing since 1991. At that time there were private jails in each ministry building to detain those who had disobeyed orders. These jails were successfully closed but represented just one part of a huge problem.

"The culture of private jails has always been a problem; before and after unification in 1990," said Ali Saleh Taisser, deputy of Human Rights. "But the problem is getting bigger as tribal figures are still powerful and some of them are now in parliament, which gives them more power."

Human rights activist Majid Al-Madhaji, previously with the Legal Protection for Violence Victims program, which has now ended, said that neither Yemen's private or public jails meet international standards as good rehabilitation institutions.

"Public jails in Yemen still participating in illegal practices, such as jailing people without arrest warrants and keeping them for more than six months. If this is the reality of public jails, you can imagine what private prisons are like," Al-Madhaji explained.

Al-Madhaji visited some of these private jails in Hajjah. Most are in narrow houses, which have been abandoned by their residents, he said.



Yasser Al-Edreasi, who was detained at the private jail of the Yemeni Economic Foundation for at least seven months, receives a smuggled visit from his son. Photos by: HOOD.



"Most of the private jails are old houses that are no longer livable, with no lighting or good ventilation."

After 2011's events the interim government is seeking to address human rights violations as a priority.

Although Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime was toppled, Al-Madhaji said that Yemen's tribal system also needed to be tackled if the interim government wants to create a civil state.

"Many of those who own private jails joined the youth revolution in a way to protect their positions in

the new state," he explained.

However, Taisser said that having Saleh out of power would ease the process, claiming that Saleh's regime had a hand behind allowing the tribal sheikhs to open and run private jails.

The cabinet's 2010 decree would be difficult to implement now, he added.

"After the amnesty law was approved last month for Saleh and his regime, the door for the jail owners to escape from criminal liability is open, we will focus our effort now on just closing down the jails," said Taisser.

Sheikh Abdullah Bin House Al-Ahmer's family owns many private jails that were owned by Sheikh Abdullah before his death.

"Although he was the head of the legislative authority, he has these jails; he even used to send some of his prisoners to the Central Security jails when his own jails were full, then when there was a free place he would get them back from the Central Security prison and move them to his own jail – like a deposit," said Taisser.

Even now that Al-Ahmer is dead, his sons continue these practices. On the Friday of Dignity when 25

protesters were shot by snipers in Sana'a's Change Square, Al-Ahmer family detained suspected snipers in their private jails.

Inside Change Squares, human rights activists have reported the Islah party detaining many independent youths at its private jails.

Taisser said that these jails can be found in every district and village of Yemen, adding that the tribal system is replacing the rule of law, delegating to a tribal sheikh all the authorities to judge, prosecute and punish people. Sometimes they skip the judicial system completely and jump straight to punishment.

Presidential campaign launched with international blessing

By: Nadia Al-Sakkaf

SANA'A, Feb. 8 – President to be Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi's presidential campaign was launched at the Supreme Commission for Elections and Referendum on Feb. 8, 2012, in preparation for elections later this month.

At the launch, Hadi said, "We are determined to overcome our plight through an open dialogue to restore the natural context of the crisis away from terrorism, extremism, corruption and tendencies of regionalism and racism."

Judge Mohammed Al-Hakimi, chief of the elections commission, asserted that the commission would remain a "non-political independent entity," adding, "These elections present a turning point for Yemen from a past with its negatives and positives and a future we hope will be prosperous."

The launch, which was attended by high-ranking officials from the coalition government as well as representatives from the international community and the UN, included the distribution of posters and cam-



Elections commission campaign poster, "21 February 2012: Make sure you vote to participate in building the future of your nation."

paing materials encouraging Yemenis to participate in the elections, despite the fact that there is just one candidate.

"There is close coordination between the UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] electoral

support program, which is supported by the international community and SCER in order to make these elections a success," said Darren Nance, Elections Coordinator at the UNDP.

"Your vote protects Yemen," was

the slogan of the campaign, which includes posters and banners in the main streets around the country, advertisements in the media and public events.

Thirty vehicles and 102 volunteers dedicated to the campaign

have started their work, aimed at increasing Yemeni awareness of the importance in participating in the coming presidential elections across the country's 21 governorates.

Earlier events specifically targeting women were organized by the Women's Department in SCER.

Controversial elections

Despite financial and technical support from the international community, and the official backing of Hadi as the sole candidate, many Yemenis are disinterested in participating in the elections, considering it a sham.

"What difference would my vote make? It is just one candidate I would feel ridiculous going to the ballot boxes to tick next to the only option I have," said Mohammed, an artist and activist from Sana'a.

Others completely oppose the Gulf Initiative, which allowed for Saleh to leave the country without prosecution and which is the foundation for the elections.

"We don't recognize these elections because they are a result of the Gulf Initiative which we

are against," explained Areej Al-Khawlani, a protestor from Change Square and a strong opponent of the elections. "Now it is a reality that we can't ignore but I will not participate especially since Hadi now is being portrayed as the new savior of Yemen."

However, some other youths have been persuaded by the campaign or other means and are ready to participate.

"I will definitely participate in the coming elections because I believe it will give the new president national legitimacy, it will protect Yemen against civil war and it will put a real end to Saleh's regime," said Gamal Alghazaly a 30-year-old computer engineer.

Amira Al-Arasi, a journalist, agrees and believes that if Yemenis do not participate they will actually be endorsing Saleh as president.

"We are with change; and anyone who refrains from voting is a very passive person. As it is elections are the transitional means for Yemen and we have to compromise and allow what is best for the Yemeni people," she said.

Fatwa puts journalists' lives at risk

By: Mohamed Bin Sallam

SANA'A, Feb. 8 – The lives of four Yemeni journalists are in jeopardy after a group of Islamic clerics issued a fatwa (religious statement) against them describing them as apostates.

The religious statement was made by clerics after the four journalists – Mohsen Ayd, Bushra Al-Maqtari, Fikri Qasem and Sami Shamsan – published opinion articles in opposition newspapers criticizing religious leaders and questioning God's justice.

Ayd explained in a press release that the fatwa was issued on the grounds of political disagreement between the clerics and the writers.

"This is a politicized fatwa that has nothing to do with the law or religion," Ayd said. He added that clerics who signed the fatwa have neither met him nor went to the

court to complain him.

"Now my life and my colleagues' lives who were included in the fatwa are at threat since some extremists may consider this a green light to kill us," said Mohsen.

The clerics that signed the fatwa, who include Abd Al-Majeed Al-Zindani and Abd Al-Wahab Al-Dailami, two prominent leaders of the Islah Islamic Party, should be held accountable for any potential harm may happen to the journalists, said Ayd. He also condemned the use of religion in political conflicts saying, "This represents a threat to our lives and our families."

Human rights activist Anwar Al-Rasheed, together with some Kuwaiti activists, begun a campaign to support journalist Bushra Al-Maqtari, also included in the apostate fatwa.

For his part, Shawki Al-Qadi, an Islah MP and preacher of a promi-

nent mosque in Taiz, described the fatwa as "illegal terrorism."

He said, "I disown this fatwa and I'm against the issuing of any fatwa of apostasy outside of professional and independent court."

"I demand that anyone who has a problem with another goes to court to prosecute," he added, calling on lawyers and activists to sue those leading such campaigns and issuing fatwas of apostasy.

On Wednesday, a group of human rights activists took the case to the attorney general.

"This fatwa incites the killing of activists and puts the lives of journalists mentioned in the fatwa at risk," said another journalist during a sit-in in front of the office of the attorney general.

The Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate also condemned the fatwa, which was issued late last week.

Al-Zindani denied rumors of a

similar fatwa issued by him and other clerics in 1994 during the civil war between south and north Yemen.

The previous fatwa allowed outgoing president Saleh to kill opposition southerners and take their properties in retribution for their rebellion against Saleh's rule at the time.

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Houthi-Salafi fighting claims 39 lives

By: Mohamed bin Sallam

SANA'A, Feb. 8 – An estimated 39 people have been killed and many more injured in the latest round of clashes between Houthis and Salafis in Hajjah.

Fighting broke out in the town – which sits 127km from the capital Sana'a – on Sunday, with local sources claiming that Houthi fighters carried out a surprise attack against Ahim, a town located in Keshir in east Hajjah. Clashes continued from dawn on Sunday February 5 until late Monday night.

Political parties in Sana'a sent a delegation to mediate between the conflicting groups and bring an end to the fighting, which has displaced over 2,000 people since the latest round of fighting broke out, according to the Ministry of Defense.

Sources said the mediation committee would meet with Houthi representatives near the Yemeni-Saudi border in Al-Malahidh, Haradh before meeting with tribal sheikhs and dignitaries from Hajjah. "The committee," explained the sources, "will endeavor to make good efforts to impose a cease-fire in Keshir and Mustaba'a districts, the latter remaining a witness to tension following the last showdown between the Houthis and Salafis last month."

The Ministry of Defense announced on its website last Monday that fighting in the two areas led to the displacement of over two thousand families.

Meanwhile, Helene Kadi, an emergency coordinator with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), told IRIN, a humanitarian news and analysis network working with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), that 580 families had been displaced by the fighting. "Over 30 percent of the IDPs (internally displaced persons) have taken shelter in five schools, a worrying trend we have seen with recent displacements in the country... Others have been hosted by families or have no shelter to turn to."

Local social worker Ali Meshal said the fate of many displaced families remains unknown, while Ali Al-Debbi, an officer at Al-Khair Development and Social Charity, said that about 2,000 IDPs have been located and registered to receive support in Hajjah.

However, several families are now stranded and are "either on their way to safer areas or inside their homes after many villages in Kisher district became inaccessible and the roads unsafe," said Sheikh Abdullah Dhahban, a member of a recently established tribal mediation committee

attempting to persuade the warring parties to lay down their arms.

"Several dead bodies are lying on the mountains... No relatives have come to collect them for burial," Dhahban told IRIN.

Local witnesses who preferred to remain anonymous said on January 28 that Houthi fighters attempted to tighten their control of a strategic mountaintop position called Abu Dowar, and that fighting had also continued for control of Mishabab Hill, which overlooks Suq Ahim, a local market in Kisher district.

According to a December 2011 report by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Hajjah Governorate is home to more than 100,000 IDPs who have been displaced by fighting between government troops and Houthi rebels since June 2004.

Tribal leaders accuse the Houthis – who have been supporters of the anti-government protests – of exploiting the nation's state of lawlessness in order to strengthen their influence in new areas, especially in Hajjah and Al-Mahweet, which sit to the northeast of Sana'a.

Al-Mahweet's governor, Ahmed Ali Mohsen, warned of the dangers of forming a youth resistance movement in a governorate loyal to Houthis, but denied at the same time any role for the ruling party (the Gen-

eral Peoples Congress) in supporting the Houthis, who have waged six wars against government forces.

Concerning armed conflict between Houthis and Salafis in Sa'ada, a tribal source said that over 100 Arabs from Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Algeria and Libya, as well as German and British adherents to the Salafi doctrine, have arrived in Sa'ada's Kitaf district over the past few days to battle with Houthi fighters.

In a phone call with the Yemen Times, Mohammed Al-Wadi'ee, a Salafi media officer, denied this claim by saying that it is impossible for such a large number of people to enter Sa'ada with all the checkpoints which have been set up by Houthis positioned around Sa'ada. "No one can enter Sa'ada unless they have been inspected thoroughly by Houthis spread out between Harf Sufyan and Sa'ada itself."

The tribal source told the Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Syasa that the "mercenary" fighters came to Yemen officially as tourists by way of Sana'a airport and that elements of the Salafi sect transported them to Kitaf. From there, the source claimed that the men were armed with different weapons before joining the 5,000-strong force composed of Salafi fighters from various governorates.

Street cleaners demand jobs before election



Street cleaners and garbage truck drivers protest in front of the General Cleaning Administration building on Wednesday.

By: Malak Shafer

SANA'A, Jan. 8 – At least 2,000 street cleaners in Sana'a are on their third day of strike after being promised that their demands would be met last month.

Ibrahim Abbas, a member of the Street Cleaners Syndicate, said that the head of the Cleaning Project had promised Sana'a's 4,300 street cleaners that they would be officially hired.

"We are anxious that we won't be hired before the election. If nothing is done for us by then, we will be forgotten."

"We went to the Civil Service Ministry and they responded by giving us a letter to be signed by the head of the project...but he refused to sign it," said Abbas.

"The head of the project, Yahya Mughales, claimed that our papers were not completed, but he is just evading fulfilling his promise," he said.

Last year in January, street cleaners went on a similar strike to demand their rights. But, according to Abbas, "because of the bad situation in our country, we decided to keep silent. Now, we think it is time to give us what we deserve."

Repeated efforts by the Yemen Times to contact Mughales for comment have been unsuccessful.

When they went on strike last

month last month and last year, Ali Al-Maghribi, a secretary for the General Cleaning Administration (GCA), confirmed that the street cleaners were promised that they would be officially hired and receive paid vacations and benefits such as medical insurance.

Nee'ma Ali, a striking street cleaner, said that they have demanded their rights "for years and years, but that nothing has been given to them to show any appreciation".

In a meeting at the General Cleaning Administration (GCA) last month, it was decided that street cleaners would receive medical insurance and paid vacations after one month's time.

In response to last month's strike, Minister of Defense Mohammad Naser Ahmad gave urgent orders to the Logistics Department to provide the street cleaners with sacks of sugar, bottles of oil and boxes of canned beans.

According to Abbas Al-Sharafi, head of the GCA's operational unit, Sana'a produces 10,000 tons of garbage every day. With the street cleaners on strike, tons of garbage will fill Sana'a's streets.

"We are suffering because we are not official employees. This time, we won't clean anything until we are hired. This is their last chance," said Ali.

Scholars call for cut-price dowries

By: Abdulkareem Al-Nahari

DHAMAR, Feb. 7 – Islamic scholars in Dhamar are calling for the cost of dowries and weddings to be reduced so that young, unemployed men and those from poorer families can afford to marry.

Costs can rise to as much as \$7,000 or more than YR 1.5 million, while the average salary in Yemen is just \$200 a month. Now there is a campaign to reduce the cost to \$2,200 for a virgin bride or half that price for a woman who has already been married.

Ahmad Al-Anesi, 25, who is not yet married, said the high cost of a dowry and wedding is his main obstacle.

"This problem stands before us and we feel we cannot make our dreams come true. We cannot have the wife we want or establish a happy family," said Al-Anesi.

He explained that young men from poor families cannot afford the expense. Sometimes, the family will sell any expensive things they own, like gold and jewelry, or spend their savings on wedding parties.

Muslim scholars and leaders, Local Council leaderships and tribal leaders have called on people in Dhamar to reduce the cost of dowries and weddings so that unemployed youth can start their own families. In Dhamar governorate, 100 km south Sana'a, the total cost of a wedding can reach \$7,000.

According to a source at the Min-

istry of Endowments and Guidance office in Dhamar, Muslim scholars told locals at last Friday's sermon to break the barriers preventing youths from getting married – however, some rules were laid down.

Mohammad Al-Shami, an enthusiastic resident of Dhamar, approved of the call for a new, lower dowry. He also voiced disapproval over the requirement that the groom brings his bride a belt made of gold – something that many fathers insist on. He also said that there should be only one party instead of those following the wedding day, such as Al-Dhabayal and Al-Qahwata.

However, not everyone thought the campaign was a good idea. Qaid Al-Alawi, a lawyer from Dhamar, criticized the program because young men who cannot afford to marry will also struggle to support their new families.

"I advise youths not to get married unless they have secured an income through a job or enterprise. They should think of covering the costs of having a family, not just getting married," he said, adding that early marriage can often lead to other problems that can later damage families.

Some scholars involved in the campaign work in the Ministry of Endowment and sought its help to promote the campaign. During Friday sermons, the Imams of the mosques called on locals to reduce the high cost of wedding parties and

to stop bringing singers from outside the city.

Campaigners also called for a fine of YR 100,000 – or just over \$450 – against those who do not follow the new guidelines, with representatives from the ministry to receive complaints.

Judge Mohammad Dadya, a member of the Yemeni Muslim Scholars in Dhamar, said that people should abide by the rules of Islam that call for the facilitation of marriage.

"I call on the parents not to lay impossible conditions on their daughters' future husbands because this might be behind social problems," said Dadya.

The campaign has been designed to help unmarried young men start their families. In Yemen's conservative society, unmarried men are blamed for much of the sexual harassment experienced by women.

Hussein Al-Ansi said that the issue of expensive dowries should be solved by the state, with everyone committing themselves to finding a solution. He added that while he respects the call for lower dowries, social differences would remain a barrier regardless of any positive campaigns.

"Fathers look for the best for their daughters and that's why they make their daughters' dowries expensive and matched with the other girls so that they do not feel inferior," he explained.

Salwa Mohammad, a 22-year old engaged woman, said that the cost of weddings is a problem threatening the future of many families.

"When a man decides to marry a woman, he will enter a world of poverty for years after the marriage. Such a problem will affect his lifestyle and he will not be able to live happily ever after," said Mohammad.

"After the wedding the newly married couple constantly thinks about how to pay off their debts, which could evolve into many problems that lead to divorce."

Mohammad explained that since it is the parents who define the dowry, the girl has no option to helping her husband until they are married and she can give him some of the gold she bought with her dowry.

She has been engaged for more than four years as her fiancé left to work in Al-Mahra governorate to save and pay her dowry.

Kholod Ahmad, 31, said that fathers from well-known families impose even higher conditions on their daughters' hands – especially when the girls are educated as they should not marry anyone less respected or educated. She added that conservative girls who are kept at home also struggle to find a suitor.

"Some of the families are conservative and if the girl does not find a job she has to stay at home. How can such girls get to be known if they are kept inside?" asked Kolod.



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The Latest BUZZ

By: Nadia Al-Sakkaf

- ▶ Hodeidah port employees closed the port's gate and blocked the Jizan highway after being subjected to beating and shooting by the governorate's security and thugs sent by influential figures.
- ▶ Citizens in Taiz marched in protest of the Syrian regime's brutality. They chanted: "Where is the Arab dignity? Bashar is burning Syria."
- ▶ The Minister of Youth and Sports issued a decree that a sports elections committee be formed per national coalition government regulations.
- ▶ Starting on February 8, the visiting doctor program at Hodeida's Thawra Hospital will begin offering cosmetic surgery and treatment for burns, coordinated by the Taiba charity organization and funded by Al-Awn Development Foundation. The program is expected to provide surgery to at least 30 Yemenis with a limited income.
- ▶ Armed men in civilian clothes broke into the Immigration Authority offices on Tuesday and terrorized its staff. Workers at the offices were striking to demand an improvement in staff wages, as well the removal of corrupt officials.
- ▶ According to his media office, following the February 21 election, president-to-be Hadi will follow the Gulf Initiative's implementation mechanism as an agenda.
- ▶ The Wafa Foundation for victims of the revolution filed a report which stated that 1,154 men have been killed by pro-Saleh armed men. Compensation needs were also included in the report, which will be passed on to the cabinet. A fund will be created by the cabinet to handle related grievances.
- ▶ The security director for Al-Mahwait fired the governorate's traffic director after employees held a three-day strike in which they presented evidence of their director's malpractice.
- ▶ Starting on Thursday, Yemenia Airlines is recommencing flights to Socotra Island in an attempt to reconnect the island's people with the mainland, as well as to encourage tourism to the island.
- ▶ Twenty male and female religious leaders in Aden received a three-day training course on human rights and modern media to enable them to reach their audiences and convey international values and principles.

Women argue against the need for "mahram"



By: Marwa Najmaldeen

"I have always dreamt to make my dreams come true. I wanted to study abroad, but because I am a woman, I cannot travel without a mahram," said Laila Muneer, a microbiology major who was the top student at Sana'a University's Faculty of Science.

Muneer said that she was dreaming of continuing her studies outside the country, but did not imagine that girls are not allowed to travel without a man. The word mahram means a man whom the woman cannot marry such as her father, grandfather, brother, son or nephew. Most Islamic scholars say that a woman should not travel without a mahram to protect her while traveling. The mahram can also be her husband.

"My father prevented me from studying abroad by myself despite the fact that he told me he trusted me but he felt afraid that I would be alone there," Muneer said. She quoted her

father as saying that, «If you were a boy, I would have let you go. I wish you had a brother. He would be your fellow everywhere you want to go so that you can travel safely and come back with a high position.»

Since Muneer could not travel outside the country to continue her studies abroad, she accepted the position available to her, teaching at her college as a demonstrator. Nevertheless, Muneer said she remains saddened by being denied the opportunity to nurture her knowledge in her major. "Now, I have to adjust to the fact that I am just a teacher at a college, using primitive tools and humble laboratories that do not provide the researcher with the most basic needs. I dreamed about using well-equipped laboratories, but being a woman without a mahram compels me to bury those dreams."

Hind Salah's experience underscores the price women pay because of the need for a mahram. After completing her study at university, Salah accepted positions at a number of pri-

vate schools but never stopped thinking of continuing her studies outside of Yemen. "I felt happy when my brother decided to study in Cairo and my father allowed me to go with him, also to study," said Salah. "But when my brother failed after two years and he had to return to Yemen, I had to come back, too. I tried in vain to convince him to study something else so that I could get my master's degree, but he refused," she added. "Honestly, from the first month abroad, I was busy thinking about what if somebody would in love with me and I married him so that I could get rid of the threats of returning home at anytime."

In Islam, seeking knowledge is obligatory for both men and women. Prophet Mohammad said, "Seek knowledge even in China." Mohammad Hassan, 45, the father of two boys and a girl had a different point of view from the conservative thought prevalent in Yemen. "Not allowing girls to travel for study reveals minor understanding and awareness of so-

ciety, not religion," said Hassan. He said that today women face few risks when they travel abroad to study, citing the example of being able to live in dormitories with other students. "This makes it easy for her. In fact, she will be facing the same things that she might face while she is at home." Hassan insisted that there is no longer a need for a mahram. "So where is the danger and what is the problem of allowing the girl to achieve her dreams and study abroad? In the past, traveling took weeks and months on camels; people were sleeping in tents. Just in this case the mahram is needed," he said.

Defending the traditional position, Fadhel Nasr, 29, insisted that women should be traveling with a mahram and that it cannot be denied that traveling with a mahram is obligatory in Islam. "We were told that we should protect women. In these days, there are many bad guys even inside the country. So what would be the case if a woman traveled in a strange country with strange people?" Nasr said, questioning why people are calling for women to be able to travel abroad and have more freedom. "The woman needs the man all the time and he should be there whenever she needs him. He should protect his mother, sister and wife, and this thing is taken for granted."

Hamoud Al-Awadi, a sociology professor at Sana'a University, disagrees and says that the issue of the mahram is over. "It does not even exist in the Islamic legislation," Al-Awadi argued.

"This is one of the things that denigrates women. Some Muslim scholars say that women cannot go outside her home without a mahram whether he is younger or older. Some people even say that girls cannot leave their father's house except to go to her husband or to the grave," he said. He said that the issue of mahram presents a bad image of Islam while in reality it was only the discretion of some scholars. "Islam made men and women



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equal in duties and rights," Al-Awadi said. "The strange thing about it is that some consider a little boy of four or five years old a mahram. I wonder who needs protection in this case: the woman or the little boy?" He suggested that, "If we think about the issue of mahram, we would realize that yes, in some cases like war or dangerous places, women do need protection. But in such cases, men would also need protection."

Ali Al-Ahdal, professor of Islamic Studies at Sana'a University, said that originally in Islam, women should travel alone for more than three days. He offered as proof the example that during the time of pilgrimage, women

were required to have a mahram and that if she did not have one, she was excused from doing this duty. Al-Ahdal said that the purpose of the mahram is because women are weak and need protection from those who have desire for them, exploiting the fact that she is alone outside her country. Al-Ahdal explained that, "The purpose in Islam of having a mahram is not limiting women's rights, but to protect them." He added that there is no harm for women to study abroad alone, but one theory is that a mahram accompany her while she travels from one country to the other, and then may leave her once he determines that she has a [presumably safe] place to stay.

The financial cost of the February 21 elections

By: Shatha Al-Harazi

With the presidential election fast approaching, Vice President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi's short electoral campaign is already in motion.

The campaign, which started on Tuesday, February 7, will last until February 20.

The election is not understood to be democracy in action, but rather a move to shift ruling power away from outgoing President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

On January 21, Yemen's parliament closed the door to any other possible candidates with its announcement that Hadi would be the election's only candidate. Hadi became a consensus candidate of all political parties in Yemen as the GCC power transition plan stated.

"This election will give another impression on democracy in Yemen, we could hardly educate people about democracy, by applying a one-candidate election we will damage what we have achieved already, we are in a high illiterate country and this is how people will receive democracy from now on," said Mohammed Al-Masawa, head of Rushed, NGO to raise awareness on democracy.

After the plan was signed on November 23, few people questioned the clearly undemocratic practices that the deal carried with it, while some parts have already been implemented, including the proffering of immunity to Saleh and members of his regime.

But as the election date nears, debates have arisen among people on social media sites and on Yemen's streets about whether they would in fact vote.

The Supreme Election and Referendum Committee has been offering training and has worked to raise political awareness in order to get the public involved in the upcoming elections.

On January 21, the UN signed a deal to grant the committee \$15 Million - \$5 million of which for the February election, and \$10 million for the referendum which will follow the result of the National Dialogue that will come up with the draft of new constitution.

According to the committee, the election has so far cost more than \$48 million. \$40 million has come from the national public budget, with the remaining \$8 from foreign sources.

"Increased financial support from the international community led to the fund going up from \$5 million to \$8 million so far. Germany has donated \$950,000, and Japan has given \$1 million," said Dr. Abdawahab Al-Qadasi, head of international relations for the committee.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) alone has contributed \$1 million.

"The international community's response to Yemen's electoral constituency has been remarkable. In just 45 days, the financial needs of the presidential elections, which amounted to around \$8 million, were covered.

Japan, Germany, Denmark, the United Kingdom and the United Nations Peace-Building Fund quickly added to initial contributions made by the European Union and UNDP. This support has helped to cover the costs of technical assistance and equipment, electoral kits, election staff training, and media campaigns," reads a UNPBF press release.

Gustavo Gonzalez, the UNDP's Senior Country Director for Yemen, described these contributions as

"timely" and said, "It allows us to fill the financial gap of the presidential elections."

"This contribution supports critical training activities and reinforces the awareness campaign," he added.

Dr. Al-Qadasi told the Yemen Times that this year, there are more ballot boxes than ever.

"We have 29,642 ballot boxes - unlike in the 2006 election, when there were only 28,742," said Al-Qadasi. "There are even 186 new monitoring committees for internally displaced persons in Sa'ada and Abyan."

He explained that this year, the international community has urged women to participate.

"50 percent of the monitoring committees will encourage women to participate," said Al-Qadasi.

Al-Qadasi said that the international community has a coordination committee named the International Support Coordination Group which will attempt to boost participation in Yemen's elections.

Meanwhile, some Yemenis feel irritated about so much money being put towards a one-candidate election at a time when widespread poverty has sharply risen.

"They should have used that money to fix the electricity instead of wasting it this way" said Nadia Mohammed, a citizen of Sana'a.

"We share the aspiration of Yemeni citizens who seek a more stable and prosperous Yemen and a government that provides all the services citizens rightly expect. The next two years of transition will be vital in achieving this, and we stand ready to support in every way possible this process," read a joint statement by the European Union and ambassadors from the permanent five nations in the Gulf Cooperation Council.



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Where the qat is out of the bag

By: Brian Whitaker
guardian.co.uk

Stroll along Edgware Road in London and you'll find a mystifying array of signs in the shop windows, written in Arabic. Disappointingly, perhaps, most of them advertise nothing more exotic than flats to rent, over-priced dental treatment or cheap flights to Dubai.

But in one window, there's a small sign, hand-written with a felt-tipped pen, which offers flights of a different kind. Translated, it says: "Here is sold qat. And thank you."

Inside the shop, stowed in a fridge along with the cans of Coca-Cola and Fanta, is a black bin bag. The bag contains rubtas (or bundles) of qat stalks, neatly rolled up in banana leaves and flown in from Ethiopia to sell at £5 a time.

It's a discreet, almost furtive trade, though in Britain – unlike in many other countries – the drug is legal. Customers – mainly Yemenis, Somalis and Ethiopians – leave the shop with their purchases double-wrapped in carrier bags so that people in the street won't see what they are carrying.

In Yemen, though, nobody hides their qat. To be seen walking home with half a tree slung over your shoulder commands respect. The qat markets of the capital, Sana'a, are bustling places where people shove, curse and haggle to get the best leaves at the lowest possible price.

Qat leaves are not so much chewed as crushed, then tucked inside the cheek for their juices to be absorbed through the membrane. Yemenis call it "storing", rather than "chewing". Over an hour or two the leaves – if expertly managed – build up into a large green wad. The cheeks of habitual chewers stretch, sometimes the chewers develop pouches the size of a tennis ball.

The effect of qat has been likened to a couple of spliffs and six double espressos, but really there is no equivalent. Kevin Rushby, in his colorful qat-chewing odyssey, *Eating the Flowers of Paradise*, describes it thus:

"I passed the hours listening to the gentle lubalub of the hoo-

kah and whispered conversations about dead poets and fine deeds. In Sana'a, qat governs. Each day at three, climbing the steps to a smoky room with a bundle under the arm; then closing the door to the outside world, choosing the leaves, gently crushing them with the teeth and waiting for the drug to take effect. No rush, just a silky transition, scarcely noticed, and then the room casts loose its moorings."

As you approach cruising altitude, the brain slips into overdrive and you discover that you're one of the most intelligent and articulate people in the world. Thoughts have never been so clear, nor have ideas flowed so freely.

No matter how difficult the problem, by the end of the session you will have either dreamed up a solution or decided that it's not worth bothering about.

Needless to say, qat is much valued by Yemeni students preparing for exams. It also makes words come easily; one Egyptian author of my acquaintance wrote an entire stage play in three days with qat, and poets have also gained inspiration from it.

I have often wondered if Tennyson, the 19th century English poet, used to go shopping in Edgware Road. His poem, *The Lotos Eaters*, is hard to interpret as anything other than an ode to qat:

"Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind,
In the hollow Lotos-land to live and lie reclined
On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind."

But chewing is best as a social activity, and in Yemen the discussion at qat sessions usually centres on politics. Woe betide anyone who turns up at a Yemeni's house in the afternoon without a bundle of qat under his arm.

The foreign minister of Yemen was once quietly chewing and musing on affairs of state when his door-bell rang.
"Yasser Arafat to see you, sir," a servant announced.
"Then tell him to come back in a few hours," the minister replied.

With qat, time loses its urgency. Past, present and future blend imperceptibly, capturing, as one writer put it, "moments of eternity".

Eventually, nature sends a reminder of passing time as the sun

sinks in the Arabian sky and its last, sidelong rays pulse into the room. That's when you realize why Yemeni windows have multicolored glass.

As night falls, the lights twinkle surreally, the stars come close enough to touch and the chewers drift away into their own private worlds. But just when you think it's over, qat's afterburners start to roar, bringing a surge of energy and dynamism. You're so alert you could drive round Brands Hatch at twice the speed of sound.

Now, surely, is the moment to do all those things you've been putting off for weeks – it'll only take a minute, two at the most. It's late at night, perhaps early morning – who cares? The mind is racing and the last thing you want to do is sleep. Fly on until daybreak if you wish, but at this point many Yemenis parachute to earth with what, in their country, is an illegal substance: whisky.

Sadly, qat does have its downside. It can (I'm told) cause impotence as well as enhancing sexual performance. According to a Yemeni friend, achieving the latter rather than the former is a matter of learning to recognise good quality leaves.

What little medical research there is on the long-term health effects suggests that qat may cause mouth cancers, high blood pressure and heart attacks, and may also rot the teeth.

Loss of teeth does not put off many chewers. In Yemen, those who have lost their teeth can buy gadgets to mash up the leaves before popping them into the cheek.

Constipation is another possible side-effect. During a short-lived ban on qat imposed by the Marxist regime in southern Yemen some years ago, sales of laxatives fell by 90%.

A more serious worry is the pesticide sprays used by some qat growers to maximise their crop, because in Yemen there is rarely enough rain to wash away the chemicals before the leaves go to market.

For farmers, qat is at least five times more profitable than other crops and produces income throughout the year. To meet the ever-growing demand, one-third of Yemen's agriculture is now devoted

to a plant with no nutritional value, and irrigating it consumes scarce water supplies. Qat has replaced other crops that might have been exported or used to reduce the need for imported food.

Some Yemenis spend well over half their income on qat. This, undoubtedly, deprives many families of basic necessities, but it's also an effective way of redistributing what little there is of the nation's wealth from the cities to the countryside.

One of the few things that radical Islamists and secular modernisers in Yemen agree upon is that qat is evil. But repeated efforts, over the last 700 years or so, to stamp it out have failed.

Qat is not specifically forbidden in the Koran, and some Yemeni religious leaders are enthusiastic chewers. Devout Yemenis reputedly used it in the past to stay awake during all-night prayer vigils.

In the US, qat is treated as a schedule-one drug and offenders are severely punished. Most of those prosecuted are not American citizens and, therefore, face deportation as well as incarceration if convicted.

Qat – known botanically as *catha edulis* – contains around 40 different alkaloids, of which perhaps six can be regarded as stimulants. Prosecutions in the US are normally for possession of cathinone, an amphetamine-like chemical that can be found in the growing plants.

This allows police officers seizing a typical imported consignment of 100lb of qat to claim that they have seized 100lb of a schedule-one drug – which looks spectacular on their career records.

In fact, the amount of cathinone in qat is tiny – about 36 parts per 100,000 when freshly cut. But once it has been cut, the cathinone breaks down rapidly and after 10 days is only one hundredth of its original level.

"You can, legitimately, argue that it's not there," says Sid Moore, a Georgia-based lawyer who has made a speciality of defending qat cases. He adds that the total amount of cathinone in 100lb of 10-day-old qat is equivalent to 0.04 grams of amphetamine. He also argues that US law does not give consumers "fair notice" that qat is illegal. It is unreasonable, he says, to expect the average person to know that qat contains cathinone, and anyone who looked up the word qat on the lists of banned drugs would not find it.

In this respect, US law treats qat differently from other drugs of vegetable origin. Marijuana, for example, is listed in addition to its active ingredient, THC, and coca leaves are listed in addition to cocaine.

Using these arguments, Mr Moore has now won 19 qat acquittals in a row, leaving the law looking more than a little ragged.

Love it or loathe it, in Yemen, qat is as much a national institution as tea in Britain or wine in France. This poses a dilemma for the more strait-laced foreign diplomats and business visitors. Yemeni life revolves around qat, and it's impossible to know the country or its people without first getting to know qat.

The British embassy in Yemen once received a stern note from its masters in London warning of the prevalence of qat, and of the damage to Britain's reputation that might result if any of the embassy staff were tempted to indulge in it.

The message arrived while the ambassador was out – chewing with local dignitaries.

Assassination never ends terrorism

By: Ameen Al-Hemyari

Terrorism is a term used by many countries to define the illegal practice, the anti-government movements or the resistance to the foreign culture. Each country defines this term according to its own interests and according to its own law. This phenomenon is as old as human being existence, however; recently the western media used this term to refer to Al-Qaeda militants. Most of the Islamic movements were established as responses or reactions to certain political, religious or cultural behavior. Therefore, these movements will never give up or disappear due to more oppressions or assassinations.

The majority of the Islamic movements were established with an Islamic reform vision. Their vision is that practicing the Islamic laws in everyday life is part of their worship to Allah. This made them believe that implementing the Islamic laws in their countries will not be successful until they change the regimes that are supported by the western governments. Consequently, this crossed or angered both the regimes in the Moslem countries as well as the western countries that support these corrupt regimes. They thought the best solution is to get rid of these movements and getting rid of them can be achieved by detaining, killing or assassinating their leaders. This will never be successful for many reasons.

The first reason that makes assassination fails to end such movements is the strong belief of these movements in their ideas and their belief in the reward from Allah for those who sacrifice for their religion. They think that the more they are oppressed the more reward they will get. In addition to

that they think that Allah is testing their faith by sending someone to torture them, oppress them and/or to kill them. This belief came from reading of the history of the prophets and their followers especially the history of prophet Mohammad peace be upon him.

The second reason is the sympathy they get from the people in their country and many Muslims all over the world. This support and sympathy is due to the corruption of the regime in the region and due to the lack of freedom and democracy. A lot of people want to change and want to have better life and they are looking for some parties and movements to help them get rid of these dictators in the region. Moreover, most people believe religious people are more sincere and less corrupt than the people in power.

The third reason is that the call for coming back to the teachings of Islam is the only successful voice in the region. This is also due to the fact that Islam always demands purity, sincerity and justice. People are certain that with the practice of Islamic teachings their life will be better and they will gain prosperity, justice and equality. Consequently, Allah almighty will reward them for following his divine fair teachings.

In brief assassination will always increase terrorism. Terrorism will only end by the study of the reasons and the causes that made this phenomenon erupted. By understanding the causes, one can find the right solution. If these movements were strengthened by oppression, therefore more oppression will make them even get stronger and more determined to achieve their goals.

Ameen Al-Hemyari is a Yemeni Prof. at Qatar University

Unemployment among youth a ticking bomb

Middle East governments should work with private sector to tap human resources

Editorial
www.gulfnews.com

Unemployment is a ticking bomb that helped fuel the recent political turmoil in the Middle East – otherwise known as the Arab Spring – that toppled a number of regimes last year. However, a year after the turmoil, the youth unemployment rate in the region remains at 26.2 percent – one of the highest in the world.

A society cannot move forward keeping more than a quarter of its young workforce out of jobs. The governments in Middle Eastern countries, including those in transition after the Arab Spring, should work closely with the private sector to unlock economic potential and help attract investment that will create jobs.

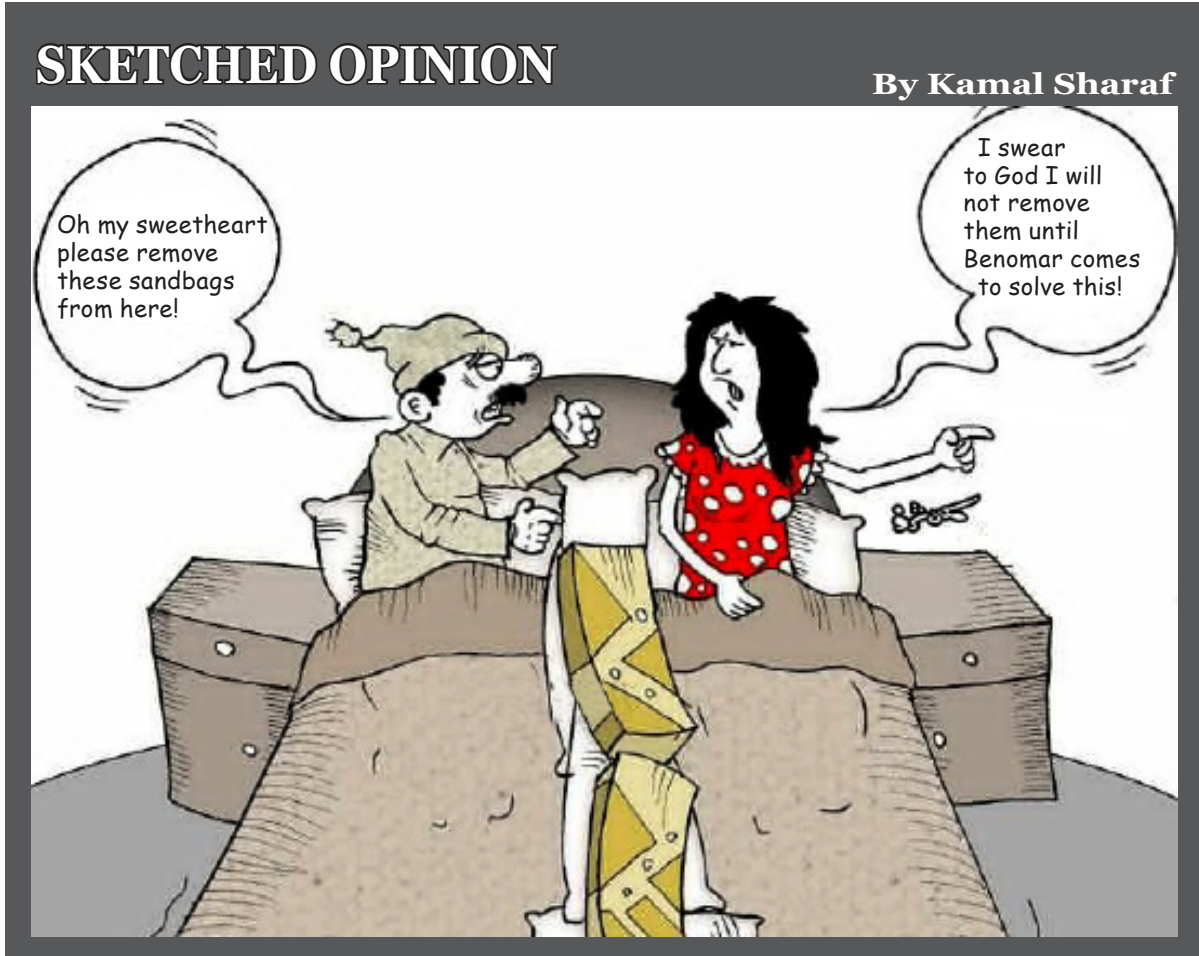
The Middle East has been blessed with vast natural resources and human talent. It is the birthplace of some of the richest civilizations. It has given the world algebra, chemistry and

simple solutions to complex mathematical problems.

With rich literature, heritage and culture, the region has presented the world with three religions that have been embraced by the majority of mankind. Its leaders have spread their cultures and spheres of influence to Europe and South Asia – at one point of time.

Yet it seems that the present leadership of the Middle Eastern countries, with a few exceptions such as the UAE, have forgotten their past successes and their basic duties to citizens – to provide decent food, shelter, education, health care and employment. These are not too much to ask, especially for a region that is so rich.

These governments should start looking at opening up avenues of economic opportunities by relaxing restrictions, reducing red tape and developing institutions to fast-track finance facilities for start-up companies. Governments could also start attracting investment from wealthy Arab neighbors to help tap these opportunities.



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Adeni Indians: 200 years of integration

By Ibtisam Al-Assiri

The presence of Indians in Aden dates centuries back to even before the British occupation in 1839. Indian traders and sailors arrived at Aden sea port carrying merchandize and ambitions, and upon experiencing what this coastal town has to offer many decided to settle down and call it a new home.

Older generations in the city still recall the image of Aziz, the silent contemplating Indian man who established a bookshop cum library over a century ago, in a Victorian style building at Al-Tawahi district. As you enter this crowded bookshop you are greeted with a smell of Indian incense which he always burned to remind him of home. The place is home to a magnificent collection of Indian, English and some books in other languages

depending on the nationalities of tourists or sailors who contributed to the library.

It also includes some of the oldest pictures and maps of Aden.

However, this valuable treasure has become out of reach since Aziz passed away in 2006 and the younger generation lost interest in preserving it and decided to sell it.

The same fate met Barakat Al-Durzei's shop who was the special tailor for the British and Indian soldiers during the British colonization of Aden. His shop was stacked with the long Victorian style military uniforms and even official men's suits with specially decorated cuffs and buttons that were famous in the 19th century.

This shop was put out of business when the British left Yemen in 1967. For many years Barakat kept the shop open as a place for people to spend time and read until he finally decided to close it down in 1992

after he distributed all the valuable merchandize to neighbors and friends.

Bombay port in Al-Tawahi

Until date, in Al-Tawahi district in Aden governorate, at the entrance of the tourist dock, you can still find post office that was built in 1919 by the Khan family. Now the place where you can find old and new stamps, tourist pictures and post cards, and Yemeni, Indian and Chinese agate is run by third generation Nadir Khan and his two brothers. His father Mahmoud Buji Khan who was a known sports figure in Aden.

The Buji-Khan family is one of the most famous families in Aden of Indian descendant who maintained their Indian traditions with a few tweaks to adapt to Yemeni culture.

The Khan post office is a part of the larger Bombay Port in Al-Tawahi built in April 1904 which was called then the "Prince of Wales Harbor."

The Bombay port was a famous transit point for ships coming from all around the world although today much of the traffic has gone down for various reasons.

Preserved Indian Traditions

Many Yemeni families of Indian origin maintained much of their traditions in a quest for preserving their identity in Aden despite their well integration into the Yemeni society.

There are the Mahmoud Khan, Abdulmajeed Al-Kashi, Sulaiman Rahool, Khalid Ibrahim Mummin, and Mahmoud Ghulam families who all tried persistently to preserve the Indian and English language among their children.

Yet they all admit that today's generation is less keen on speaking Hindi and Urdu. Another reason for this is that many Indians in Aden have married into Yemeni families and so the mixed marriages have created a more Yemeni dominated generation.

However, some families like Naser Abdulnabi Al-Buhri, Hashim Asaboola, Bahader Khan, Al-Manager, Mana, Beer Bahai, Khawajah, Makki, and Iman Rustum Khan said they still preserve their language, food and tradition to the fifth generation today.

They still wear the Kurta, Sari, Izar, Panjabi, Gharara. Although they complain that the fabric for making these clothes has become quite expensive. Also they complained that education in English, unlike the British times, has become limited to expensive private schools which they can't afford to send their children to.

Jamat parties

These are wedding celebrations where the Indian community play and sing Indian traditional songs mixed with Yemeni folklore. The women wear "hajala" which is an ankle bracelet and make musical sounds with their steps following Indian dance styles.

Khalid Ibrahim Mummin says they have just had one in January this year in Al-Buraiga and the whole neighborhood celebrated with them until after midnight.

There are several areas in Aden like Al-Qatee', Khassaf, and the Indian district or Hussain district which was called Binian locality in the past.

There is also Musafir Khan area in Crater and which holds a special significance for Indians of older generations because it was the reception and welcoming point for new Indians.

In these districts you can find some of the oldest Indian shops such as Rahool's shop for paan and tumbul. Some say this shop goes way back to 1800. The shop sells fofal, nora, tobacco and special flavors.

There is also Abdulnabi's famous

shop which dates 1889 and is located in the oldest market in Aden which is Al-Buhra Market, an Indian clan that existed in Aden since the 18th century.

They still use terms such as Yihwar which means commercial trading and Abdulnabi's shop is one of twenty similar shops that sell special fragrances, kuhl, incense, body oils and other specially made cosmetics.

Naser Abdulhussain Abdulnabi Al-Buhri one of the younger generations

who opened his own shop says that there is a huge demand for this to the extent that they opened branched in UAE and India.

He says many of the Buhra clan had to leave Yemen in the seventies to the gulf countries when conflict took place in Aden because they were peaceful businessmen who did not want their businesses to be affected by the conflict.

Abdulmajeed Al-Kashi owner of Abdulkarim Al-Kasho spices shop says it was the Indians who brought dishes such as Zurbian, Biryani, Siadia, Daal and Kajar Halwa. There are other dishes according to Nadira Khan and Farhana such as kulonji, kishra, kari, green sabji, wara potato, shabati bread.



Sumaia Khan dresses up in her ancestor's traditional clothes.

integrated Indian music, cuisine and costumes into the Yemeni ones.

French social scientist Arthur De Gobineau describes Aden city which he visited in 1855 saying:

"In Aden we saw an Indian city over Arab land amidst rocks."

In the same context Yemeni researcher Shafiqah Abdullah Al-Arasi says that the Indian influence has become embedded in the Adani society texture.

"During the Indian/British influence in Aden the

Indian culture dominated the city as many of the government paperwork was done in English with an Indian style. Even the Arabic songs were played on Indian music and so was the dress-code."

However, due to politics, the British Empire decided to circumvent the Indian influence and redirect the governance to London which angered the Indian community in Aden especially the business owners. Great disputes took place between the Indian community and the British government in Aden on this decision and threatened that this will have significant economic consequences.

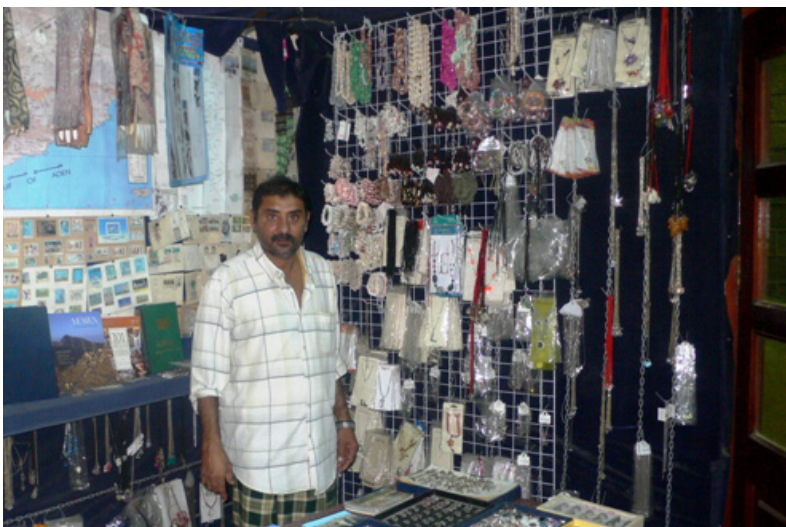
Historical documents show that some of the influential Indian businessmen in Aden sent a letter to the British government stating that "India has more right to Aden than the Brits due to the longer historical and cultural relations India and Yemen."



The younger generation lost interest in preserving Aziz's bookshop, which was built one century ago. The Indian founder of this shop passed away in 2006.



Naser Al-Buhri is a fifth generation Yemeni of Indian origin who still preserves his culture.



Nader Khan, one of the Yemenis of Indian origin who still maintains Indian traditions.



Abdulkarim Al-Kashi in his shop selling Indian spices in Aden. Many Yemenis of Indian Origin have their own businesses in Aden.

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9. Prepare all procedures and necessary steps for commodity disposal.
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MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS:

- + Completion of secondary education, preferably supplemented by technical or university courses in related field. Six years of progressively responsible clerical or administrative work, of which at least one year is closely related to support supply logistics work.
- + Fluency in English and Arabic is required
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Yemen shows its worth at the Bahrain Garden Show

By: Adel Al-Ashtal

Highlighting the growing demand and urgency for sustainable food security in the Gulf Region, the Bahrain International Garden Show attracted some 15,000 guests over three days last month.

Studies have shown that current food imports to the region value \$25 billion annually – a figure that is expected to double by 2020.

Accordingly, the show presented an excellent opportunity for Yemeni entrepreneurs working in this field learn more about the best practices in water management, irrigation, soil enhancement and management. They also got the chance to explore the possibilities of joint cooperation and investments in the agricultural sector.

Agriculture in a new Yemen

Bahrain's agriculture event came as Yemen continued to struggle after a year of protests and revolution, aimed at creating a "new Yemen".

Yet this revolution should reach all aspects of our lives – including agriculture and environment, where Yemen needs to make radical changes. The issue of how we manage our water, land and soil must be

addressed and it is high time Yemen tackled the problem of qat, which uses huge amounts of the country's ever-decreasing water reserves.

Bahrain's International Garden Show is an opportunity to draw attention to two essential areas of agricultural development; sustainability – or planting without harming the environment – and preserving water by introducing the most modern and environmentally friendly methods of irrigation to minimize waste.

This will maintain Yemen's land, crops and water for future generations and cultivation. Another issue that must be addressed is the use of chemical pesticides that destroy the soil's natural characteristics, affecting crops and future cultivation.

Yemen's entrepreneurs

Mohammed Thabit Ali Al-Gamal began a shift in the way that fruits and vegetables are sold in Yemen. Starting in 2006, he moved away from traditional displays, focusing on quality, appearance and packaging, offering attractive products at affordable prices. This led to Al-Gamal winning contracts from the largest Malls and department stores in Sana'a to manage their grocery sections. He has since inspired many traders to change the



Helmi (left), Yemeni entrepreneur and main distributor of the Arabian jasmine flower in Yemen.

way their fruits are displayed and packed.

Helmi Ahmed Baqader is the second selected participant. Another Yemeni entrepreneur, Baqader started as farmer growing Arabian jasmine in Lahj governorate – but

what distinguishes him from other farmers is the fact that he succeeded in becoming the main distributor of the scented flower – used in a variety of occasions from marriage to graduation – to more than ten governorates across the country.

Participation in the show by Yemen's entrepreneurs is also an opportunity to learn the most up to date methods of marketing, presentation, packing and selling agricultural products that could lead to new markets for Yemen.

Yemen's variety

Yemen's products impressed at the show, due to their quality and diversification. On display were mangos, bananas, oranges, mandarins, papayas and figs as well as the Arabian Jasmine flower.

One thing that drew attention to Yemen is the fact that these fruits grow in different climates and so it is rare to find them in one country. They were also deemed to be of high quality and taste. Yemen has a tradition of supplying a variety of agricultural products to the Arab world, using its diverse climate, fertile soil and the accumulated knowledge of Yemeni farmers to solidify its reputation for quality products.

Now Yemen must build on the assets cultivated by our fathers and grandfathers by preserving our environment and implementing sustainable methods that preserve the country's water and soil for future generations.

Adel Al-Ashtal, of Yemen's General Investment Authority (GIA), was assigned by the regional office of the United Nations Industrial Organization (UNIDO) in Bahrain to select Yemeni entrepreneurs for the show and worked as team leader of the New Enterprise Creation, funded by UNIDO.



The quality and diversity of Yemen's products impressed the Garden Show. These fruits grow in different climates so it is rare to find them in one country, adding to Yemen's impressiveness.



Islamic insurance: a competitive business in Yemen

By: Dr. Moneer Saif

Takaful, which translates into solidarity in English, is an Islamic monetary concept designed to assist and stabilize the financial situations of individuals, families and organizations.

Takaful is an insurance concept grounded in Islamic muamalat [Islamic banking] which observes the rules and regulations of Islamic jurisprudence. The concept has been practiced in various forms for over 1400 years.

Islamic insurance depends on principles of interdependence and solidarity with policyholders. At the end of each year, subscribers are provided with the surplus of the insurance company's share of the profits according to their equity. In this way, the system is advantageous for clients who receive part of the premiums they already paid.

The mutual guarantee offered by Takaful is centered on a transparent, ethical and Shariah-compliant agreement between the operator and participants.

Takaful operators can meet the financing needs of large projects, and can thereby help national economies enlarge the range of feasible investment projects and encourage economic efficiency.

With the development of Islamic finance in Yemen, certain banks chose to inaugurate a new Islamic Insurance company seven years ago. The banks did, however, encounter many difficulties; for example, people did not yet fully comprehend the particular nature of Islamic Takaful and how it works.

In 2010, Islamic Takaful gained

momentum in Yemen when the United Insurance Company, one of the nation's leading insurance institutions, started a Takaful Sector. This move introduced the idea of Islamic Insurance to Yemen. Three other insurance companies later introduced Takaful insurance sectors. The number of investors has continued to grow, with many customers now choosing Islamic Insurance.

Tareq Abdul Wasie Hayel Saeed, General Manager of United Insurance Company, said that, "We established a special sector of insurance, Takaful, as it is our priority to meet the requirements of Yemeni society through the offering of new and distinctive products and services to satisfy our clients. This sector launched in September 2008 within the conventional insurance company. Takaful attracted many customers, particularly those who have a strong desire to deal with an insurance which represents a quantum leap in terms of services provided to the local market, as well as a new vision that has kept pace with global changes and regional insurances industries around the world." Saeed added that "80 percent of our customers have turned to Takaful insurance, this change being based on Yemeni society's preference for dealing with Islamic insurance, as they do in dealing with Islamic banks."

The concept of Takaful has spread throughout Islamic and non-Islamic banks. People now see these new developments in Sharia-compliant products as good alternatives to conventional ones. Moreover, there are some investors who see them as profitable alternatives, especially after the global economic collapse in 2008. As a result, the issuance of Su-

kuk (Islamic bonds) has since been adopted by non-Islamic countries such as the United Kingdom.

Since there is a lack of clear understanding among customers, many customers fear that Takaful is dominated by the commercial line of the company and don't have enough trust in the Islamic handling of their business. As a result, many of them consider both kinds of insurance are similar to each other. However, as many investors in Yemen are religion-oriented, they prefer to get Islamic insurance to the conventional one. However, some other customers prefer to deal with Islamic Banks and Islamic Insurance companies which come as an outcome of people's attitude and culture as Muslims feel content in no violation of Islamic instructions which not allow them to deal with conventional banks and insurance companies, according to Saeed:

"Lack of understanding and vision is not only limited to Takaful insurance but also people lack of understanding of conventional insurance. Insurance market in Yemen is still very small when compared to foreign countries not exceeding \$75 million while the insurers are no more than 10 percent and 90 percent of Yemeni society still outside the insurance system. However, Takaful insurance has achieved big success which has great impact on other insurance companies to establish Takaful sectors."

It is obvious that interaction of demand and supply will determine the consumption of Takaful. The shift in demand for Takaful will occur as it is an innovative product and suits to socio-economic and religious teachings of Islam. That's

Islamic banking performance during 2011, compared with conventional banks in the same period:

Islamic Share in Local Market (18 banks)	Consolidated Balance Sheet %	ASSETS Growth		Financing		Equity
		YER	USD	YER	USD	
1 Tadhamon Bank	20.9	-14	-9.8	27.8	15.4	26.8
2 SABA ISLAMIC BANK	8.8	-18.4	-18	9	18.5	5
3 SHAMEL BANK	1.8	4.1	-7.2	4	3.6	3.4
4 YEMEN ISLAMIC BANK	1.2	3.4	21.3	4	1.3	2.5
5 Al Kurimi Is SME	0.2	21.2		0.0	0.0	0.6
Total	32.9	-3.7	29.2	44.8	38.8	38.3
1 CAC Bank	12.7	-29.9	-31.2	13.7	20.1	6.1
2 Arab Bank	11.1	4.1	-1.1	4.1	5.7	5.7
3 IBY	10.3	-4.9	-16.9	7.7	12.8	9.8
4 YB for Reconst. Dev.	7.6	1.9	-15.1	11.3	2.5	7.7
5 National Bank	6.2	0.5	-22.5	4.1	2.1	7.3
6 Credit Agricol	5.9	-5.2	-10.3	1.5	0.8	4.1
7 Y-Commercial Bank	4.6	-24.8	-5.7	5	2.7	4.2
8 Y- Kuwait Bank	3.1	-15	-11.2	2.5	4.6	3.5
9 United Bank	2.5	27.3	22.3	0.5	6.5	4.3
10 Qatar National Bank	0.9	16.7	95.6	0	1.3	3.3
11 Al Rafedain Bank	0.9	7.6	2.3	0.1	0	4.1
12 Y- Gulf Bank	0.7	-4.7	0.5	4.5	1.9	0.6
13 Al Amal Bank	0.2	3.4	63.5	0.3	0	1
Total	66.7	-23	70.2	55.3	61	61.7

why, Yemen as an Islamic country is likely to have good economic growth in this kind of activities, which meet the needs, and religious satisfaction of customers. However, the major increase in the consumption of Takaful will result from the increase

in the supply of Takaful as the demand already exists.

Takaful market in Yemen is bound to grow more side by side with Islamic banks, which obtained good records till 2010 and 2011 despite the crisis that faces the country.

Although there is an increase in trend of people to deal with Islamic banks, there are some weaknesses that Islamic banks' must be aware of and according to some customers these weaknesses might affect the Islamic insurance too.

Abdullah, a resident of Sana'a, regularly deals with Islamic banks and the Takaful system. He said, "Islamic Banks haven't yet adopted all the Islamic finance methods, which leaves them vulnerable to criticism and can shake customers' trust in them."

"Some Islamic banks do not pay enough attention to caring for their customers, whereas conventional banks develop their systems and products to meet with their clients' satisfaction. Moreover, when I go to Islamic banks, I don't receive good welcome from employees...as if I came to draw my money away by force," he said.

What's more, there remains a lack of awareness among customers regarding the key differences between Islamic and conventional banks.

Finally, if there is strong intensive media presence of Islamic banks to introduce these banks and Takaful, it will increase awareness of the privacy of Islamic banks and cause strong demand for Islamic Takaful, which will of course grow faster than it is now. However Takaful is still a reflection of the size of wealth and it is notable that risk management awareness is still very low among Yemeni investors. In addition, there is an urgent need to create a deeper understanding and awareness among the policy makers on what role Takaful can play to improve the quality of life and economic growth for the welfare of the nation.

Sahar Dara'an: A promising talent from Aden



By: Fuad Musid

Sahar Dara'an stands out as one of Aden's young new voices in Aden. Yemeni TV channels have contributed to publicizing her gift across Yemen, while her participation in celebrations organized by Aden University, public ceremonies such as national festivals and singing soirees on the radio have all contributed to her growing success.

She also produces some segments on Aden radio and in 2010 represented Yemen during the Radio and Television Festival in Bahrain.

Sahar, who was born in 1989, was brought up by a family with artistic tendencies and has always loved music. Her uncle, Ahmed Dara'an, is a renowned violinist and a graduate of a Russian arts institute while her other uncle, Ali Dara'an, is an actor and director who has produced a number of plays.

"My participation," Sahar told

Yemen Times, "in the field of singing and presenting school programs started when I was a child. When I was in secondary school, I excelled in daily activities and summer functions. I was always keen to be first in class."

Sahar is now a senior mass media student at the faculty of arts at Aden University. "When I joined the university, I just got more active because the college atmosphere is supportive and there's also the university activity center that helps

even more."

Always willing to take part in campus activities, including university student week, Sahar won Aden University's singing competition in 2009. She is also keen to participate in national functions such as revolution and unity anniversaries in various governorates.

Last year, she won the president's youth prize for singing at the city level.

In addition to singing, Sahar also writes poetry and sometimes publishes in local newspapers. She also aspires to compose songs. "Soon," she said, "I'll sing songs I composed myself."

Although Sahar is a regular on Yemeni TV, this does not satisfy her ambition of launching a career in the whole Arab world. "My aim is to spread Yemeni art abroad, especially since many well-known Arab singers have been adding Yemeni songs to their albums [without mentioning their origin]."

She added, "I had to stay in Yemen to pursue my studies, but I had some participation in Gulf States like the Bahrain festival two years ago when Yemen joined the Gulf States Radio and Television."

As for the status of female in Yemen, Sahar said, "Women's situation in Yemen is difficult because of 'bad practices' that result in a shortage of female voices. However, I was lucky because my family is artist and encouraged me and made things easier for me from early age."

Advertorial

Yemen Commercial Bank awards grand prize: Dream House



Yemen Commercial Bank handed last Monday the 2011 Jawaher awards program's grand prize which is the Dream House to account holder Naef Khaled Al-Juaidi from Mukalla, Hadramout.

"I am extremely happy that I got this dream house and am thankful to the YCB and Jawaher program," said the winner.

President of the Board of Directors sheikh Mohammed Bin yahya Al-Rowaishan gave the lucky winner keys to his "Dream House" in the fourth annual awards ceremony while encouraging account holders to compete for the 2012 awards.

The 2010 dream house went to Abdulmalik Al-Hutami from Hodaidah, while the 2009 went to Fatima Muraisi from Aden and the first dream house award in 2008 went to Abdulraqib Al-Uraidh from Sana'a.

Yemen Commercial Bank is considered one of the best Yemeni banks as it won "The Banker" award by the Financial Times for four years in a row in recognition for its role in the monetary industry.

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