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- **إستخدام الخدمة :** إطلب *9*9 يليه رقم الموبايل المطلوب ثم إتصال.
- الخدمة متاحة لجميع خطوط الدفع المسبق ضمن شبكة سبافون ولا تحتاج إلى تفعيل.
- إمكانية الإتصال حتى بدون رصيد بالنسبة للمتصل، لكن يشترط توفر رصيد كاف لدى الطرف الآخر حتى تتم المكالمة.
- **إستقبال المكالمات :** عند ورود المكالمات سيظهر رقم المتصل على شاشة الموبايل وعند الرد سيستمع المتلقي إلى رسالة صوتية تطلب منه قبول المكالمات على حسابه بالضغط على الرقم 1 أو رفضها بالضغط على الرقم 2 وفي حال كانت المكالمات من رقم موجود في قائمة السماح، سيظهر رقم المتصل على شاشة الموبايل وعند الرد سيتم إستقبال المكالمات مباشرة دون إنتظار موافقة الطرف الآخر.
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Bombing on Siteen Street leaves four injured

Bomb destroys home of Houthi leader, meters away from local school

Story and photo by
Ali Aboluhom

SANA'A, Jan. 5—An explosion on Siteen Street in western Sana'a left six people injured Sunday, two of them in critical condition.

The blast was caused by an improvised explosive device (IED), and struck a two-floor house belonging to Naji Mahi Al-Deen, a prominent Houthi figure, located in the Salah Al-Deen neighborhood on Siteen Street. The first floor of Al-Deen's home was being used as a residence for Houthi youth. The second floor was the living quarters of Al-Deen and his family.

Al-Deen told the Yemen Times that the blast occurred around 6 a.m. All those injured in the attack were Houthis living on the first floor. "They were Ansar Allah youth who were living here," Al-Deen said. None of his family members, who reside on the second floor, were injured, he said.

"The attack took place early, so not that many people were hurt. It could have been a lot worse," he added.

Al-Deen told them Yemen Times that one of those injured suffered a serious head injury, and that another had one of his legs amputated as a result of permanent damage done.

Sultan Mohammed, 35, owns a barbershop in the neighborhood. He said the explosion was very loud, and that it woke him up.

All the windows in his shop—which is located a few meters from the residence that was targeted, were shattered. "The explosion

blew open the door and damaged everything," he added.

Al-Deen blamed Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) for the attack. "They want to intimidate and coerce us into not hosting our activities and meetings, but they won't succeed. We'll keep having meetings here after we rebuild what was destroyed," Al-Deen said.

The blast also took place roughly 15 meters from the Saleh Al-Deen school.

"The blast took place almost one hour before students arrived," Mohammed said. "The school's windows and doors were shattered and damaged. They gave kids the day off," he said.

"If the blast had occurred [an hour] later, the result would have been disastrous," Mohammed added.

Abdulrazaq Al-Muaiad, director of the Sana'a Security Department, said security forces were deployed to the area following the incident to check for more explosives. He told the Yemen Times that investigations were underway, and that no one has yet been named as a suspect.

He cautioned residents not to gather at the scene of explosions, as they can become the targets of second bombs that get detonated after the fact.

Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthi political office, accused AQAP of being behind the attack. AQAP has not yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

The blast came one day after an explosion in Dhamar governorate claimed the lives of four Houthis and a journalist. Houthis engaged in preparations for the Prophet Mohammed's birthday in Ibb were also targeted on Dec. 31 by a suicide bomber, in an attack that left more than 40 dead. AQAP claimed responsibility for the attack.



The first floor of Naji Mahi Al-Deen's home in Sana'a's Salah Al-Deen neighborhood following an IED explosion that took place Sunday morning.

Kalfout brothers arrested

Notorious brothers behind repeated sabotage of oil pipelines

■ **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

SANA'A, Jan. 6—Fugitive brothers Hammad and Mohammad Kalfout were arrested in the capital Sana'a on Saturday.

Security forces in Hadda neighborhood arrested Hammad and Mohammad Kalfout on Saturday night after the pair were stopped at a checkpoint.

The brothers have been wanted since 2012 for sabotaging a number of oil pipelines and transmission towers in Marib governorate, in addition to stealing equipment used to build such facilities and holding them for ransom.

Lieutenant Colonel Ahmed Al-Dubai, chief of the Suhail police station located on Sabeen Street in Hadda, told the Yemen Times the men were arrested in cooperation with Houthi popular committee members who were also manning the checkpoint.

Officers became suspicious when they noticed the car, a beige 2013 Toyota Land Cruiser, passing through without license plates. Once officers and Houthis identified the suspects, were they were arrested and taken to the Suhail police station, Al-Dubai said.

He added that the two brothers were in possession of AK-47s and 119 rounds of ammo at the time of their arrest, which were deposited at the station. The Yemen Times could not independently identify the claim.

Investigations into the amount of infrastructure destroyed by the brothers are ongoing, according to Al-Dubai.

Mohammad Hizam, deputy head of the Ministry of Interior's Public Relations Department, said security forces have been unable to determine the costs of any damage caused by the brothers because several tribes in Marib governorate and elsewhere have also taken responsibility for cases of sabotage in recent years.

Statistics released by Yemen's Cabinet on Dec. 11 claimed that the state incurred \$6.9 billion in losses between 2012 and 2014 as a result of attacks against oil and gas pipelines and electricity grids.

Mohammad Kalfout has confessed in various media outlets to blowing up transmission tow-



Mohammed Kalfout during his appearance on the Azal television station.

ers and oil pipelines, in order to pressure the government into meeting a range of demands.

In September 2013 he appeared on the Azal television station and admitted to sabotaging oil pipelines and electricity power lines in Marib governorate. During his appearance, he called for the government to improve infrastructure in Marib governorate, employ more of its residents in the public sector, and imprison those responsible for killing his son and nephew.

Kalfout alleged that the pair were killed in Sana'a city on May 18, 2012 by tribesmen based out of Amran governorate. He claimed that those responsible were arrested but had been released without charge.

The Yemen Times contacted Sheikh Abdullah Al-Judai, a prominent member of the brothers' Abidah tribe in Marib. "He destroys and at times steals the equipment used to build and construct government facilities, holds them ransom and demands money," he said. "The money he makes he pays to those who help him. He's been doing this for years."

Al-Judai accused Mohammad Kalfout of working with criminals and armed members of other tribes interested in making quick money, and said many in his tribe have disowned him as a result of his activities.

Ministry of Defense asks for battalion's seized equipment in Marib

■ **Bassam Al-Khameri**

SANA'A, Jan. 5—Tribesmen in Marib governorate are currently in negotiations with the Ministry of Defense to return a stockpile of weapons and military vehicles they seized Friday morning from a government battalion returning to its base in the Arhab district north of Sana'a. The disgruntled tribesmen attacked the government convoy, belonging to Brigade 62, as it passed through a valley in the Marib area as it returned from assignment in the eastern Shabwa province, where it had been stationed since last April.

According to tribal sources, clashes broke out when the battalion refused to surrender their equipment. Two tribesmen and four soldiers were killed in the fighting, said Saleh Lanjaf, a prominent sheikh in the Abidah tribe, part of the tribal alliance. Twenty others were wounded.

According to tribal sources, the tribesmen confiscated the equipment to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Houthis, a group whose militias have spread throughout northern Yemen since late September when they seized the capital, undermining state authority and local tribal sovereignty.

The alliance to which the tribes belong, known as the Sons of Marib, have long worried that a peace accord struck in late November between them and the Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah, would not hold, and that the group's fighters might overtake Marib. Brigade 62 was formerly commanded by Ahmed Ali, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh's son. It is widely believed that Saleh is in an alliance with the Houthis and aided in their seizure of Sana'a.

"We are willing to hand over this military equipment if the state guarantees that it will not be given to the Houthis," said Lanjaf.

The battalion's final destination was Arhab district, an area where the Houthis have controlled checkpoints and government buildings since mid-

December.

Among the seized weaponry includes numerous rocket launchers and guns, ten tanks, ten other military vehicles and scores of ammunition, said Lanjaf. The tribal leader claims that an additional three tanks and five military vehicles were rendered inoperable during the clashes.

A well-placed source at the Ministry of Defense, could not confirm the quantity or make of the equipment that the tribesmen had in their possession. However, the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the press, described the negotiations to recover the equipment as promising.

In an act of good faith, the tribesmen released on Saturday several soldiers that they had captured during the

clashes on Friday.

Estimates of the number of soldiers in the battalion are between 80-100, according to both the tribal alliance and the Ministry of Defense.

Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a, denied that the Houthis were poised to receive the battalion's equipment upon its arrival in Arhab, labeling such talk as rumors.

While negotiations play out with the Ministry of Defense, local Marib journalist, Mohammed Bohaibeh, says the Sons of Marib—which claims to command 4,500 armed men strong—have been uneasily eyeing the Houthis' next move.

"The tribesmen are cautious and fear the Houthis may enter the governorate any moment," he said.

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Four killed and 23 injured in Dhammar explosion

■ **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

SANA'A, Jan. 4— Four people were killed and 23 injured in an IED explosion in Dhammar city on Sunday.

Dhammar governorate security chief Abdul Karim Al-Odaini said the explosive went off in the guest suite of a mansion belonging to governor Hamoud Abad as attempts were made to disarm it.

Al-Odaini confirmed that four members of Ansar Allah, also known as Houthis, were killed in the blast. Amongst the dead was Khalid Al-Weshali, a television correspondent with Al-Masira station, the media mouthpiece of Ansar Allah.

As of Monday he said no suspects had been named in the case and that investigations were still ongoing. "However, this attack bears the markings of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula [AQAP]," he added.

Al-Weshali's cousin Najib, a prominent Houthi media figure in Dhammar and former deputy editor-in-chief of weekly newspaper Al-Khalasa, explained the sequence of events leading to the explosion.

He said the IED had initially been planted in front of the Al-Wahda School for Girls on Al Manzel street in Dhammar city. Popular committee members reportedly discovered the device under a pile of garbage and, after removing its external timer, had it transported to a guest suite in the governor's home to be defused.

Accompanied by the Al-Masira television crew, it was there that the IED exploded as popular committee members were attempting to defuse the bomb. "The governor was ushered out of the house about



Four Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah, were killed during an attempt to disarm an IED in Dhammar city. Among them was Khalid Al-Weshali, seen above, a correspondent with the Al-Masira television station, the organization's media mouthpiece.

30 seconds before all this happened," Najib said.

Mahmoud Ali Dadyah, a resident of Dhammar city who witnessed the explosion, confirmed the course of events as described by Najib.

The Yemen Times spoke with Abu Al-Zinad Al-Abyani, an AQAP fighter operating in Dhammar, about the incident. "We stated clearly on Dec. 30 that civilians should not congregate near groups of Houthis, who we'll be targeting in our attacks," he said. "We have a hundred attacks planned against Houthi forces stationed throughout the country."

Nonetheless, neither Al-Abyani nor anyone else has claimed responsibility for placing the IED in front of the Al-Wahda School for Girls.

Ali Dadyah claimed that the city has become increasingly lawless as of late, creating a vacuum that AQAP fighters have taken advan-

tage of.

The explosion came one day after a study was published by the Abbad Research Center, an independent non-profit NGO established in 2010 through Yemen's Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, detailing the number of casualties witnessed throughout Yemen over the last year as a result of armed conflict in the country.

According to the report, a total of 7,000 Yemenis were killed in 2014, including nearly 1,000 from the country's security forces. An estimated 1,200 civilians have died since the conclusion of the National Dialogue Conference on Jan. 25, 2014.

The reports estimates that 500 AQAP members have died, 106 of whom have been killed by American drone strikes. It added that roughly 5,000 Houthis had been killed throughout the year, including 2,000 in the Marib, Al-Jawf

and Amran governorates, 2,000 in Sana'a, Hodeidah and Ibb, and nearly 1,000 in Al-Baidah governorate.

Figures show that Houthis seized a total of 120 (T55-T62) tanks, 70 (BTR-BMB) armored cars, 20 Howitzer Cannons, 10 Katyusha rocket launchers, 100 Grade surface-to-surface heat seeking and anti aircraft missiles, 100 armored vehicles carrying heavy and medium machine guns and hundreds of other military vehicles and dozens of ammunition warehouses.

Muhammad Salam Muhammad, chairman of the center, claims that his team arrived at these statistics through field studies conducted by

staff members, monitoring of media outlets and press statements released by government bodies and the country's various armed militias, and through exclusive documents received by the center from government bodies.

Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a, has dismissed estimates of the number of Houthis killed as false, but was unable to provide alternative numbers.

He added that although Houthis had acquired large numbers of weapons since their recent expansion throughout the country, popular committees were cooperating with security forces in maintaining

security. He reiterated claims that Ansar Allah would disarm entirely once stability was restored to the country.

Jamal Al-Qiz, chairman of the Ministry of Defense's Security Directorate, reviewed the report and told the Yemen Times that its statistics regarding the total numbers killed in 2014 were accurate.

"Not a day has gone by in the last year that Yemen hasn't witnessed fighting and killing," he said. He added that security forces were in ongoing negotiations with Houthi leaders for the latter to disarm and return weapons they had seized, but that as of yet these talks have not yielded any results.

Military officer assassinated in Shabwah

■ **Khalid Al-Karimi**

SANA'A, Jan. 5— Unidentified gunmen assassinated the head of the Operations Department of the 21st Mechanized Army Brigade in Ataq city within Shabwa governorate Sunday morning, according to security sources.

Abdul Karim Al-Jaefi, chief of staff for the 21st Mechanized Brigade in Shabwa, told the Yemen Times that Colonel Hamoud Hussein Al-Durhani, 48, was assassinated in Ataq city early on Sunday as he left his home.

"Two unknown assailants riding a motorcycle opened fire on Al-Durhani while he was driving to work at approximately 9:30a.m., killing him," said Al-

Jaefi. "They removed his body from the car, which they then opted and used to flee the scene, leaving his corpse on the road."

Al-Durhani was originally from the Yafa'a district in Yemen's Lahj governorate, according to Naji Al-Yafei, a soldier in Ataq city who was personally acquainted with the deceased officer.

"He was a noble military officer, his death is a true loss," he said.

Al-Jaefi claimed investigations were ongoing to identify those responsible for the attack, but that no suspects had been identified as of yet.

An Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) source speaking with the Yemen Times on

Sunday said that the organization's members had orchestrated the assassination, however AQAP has not officially claimed responsibility for the attack.

On Jan. 3 of this year, the group claimed responsibility for killing two soldiers in the Dalaa region of Shabwa governorate when their vehicle drove over an IED that had been planted in the area. On Dec. 6, 2014, Luke Somers, an American photojournalist, and Pierre Korkie, a South African English teacher—both been held by the group for more than a year—were killed in Shabwa governorate when the United States, in cooperation with Yemeni military forces, attempted to free them.

Civil disobedience campaign launched in Mukalla city

■ **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

SANA'A, Jan. 6— The capital of Hadramout governorate saw a widespread civil disobedience campaign begin on Monday morning with much of the city's public facilities and businesses closing down.

According to Nasser Baqzaqur, a Southern Movement leader based in the city, the campaign lasted from 6 a.m. until 2 p.m.

Hadba Al-Yazidi, a Mukalla-based correspondent working with the Al-Sa'eda news outlet, said Southern Movement members had blocked off a number of streets in the city and set up makeshift checkpoints. He claimed the city's schools and universities had closed down, and that a number of government facilities had officially given their employees the day off.

"The streets of Mukalla today were deserted," said Al-Yazidi.

Health clinics, hospitals, electricity and water facilities were excluded from the campaign, according to Baqzaqur.

Abdu Rabu Al-Asali, director of Human Resources at the Mukalla Water and Sewage Local Corporation, said his office chose to remain closed in spite of the exemption in order to avoid any possible riots or acts of vandalism.

Al-Asali pointed out that many protesters are armed with AK-47s, and he claimed that all government facilities had followed suit to avoid potential reprisals.

Baqzaqur confirmed that armed members of the Southern Movement could be found throughout Mukalla, however he maintained that the movement's leadership was against the use of violence, confrontations with security forces or attacks on buildings and institutions.



Most private and public businesses remained closed during the civil disobedience campaign, which lasted until 2 p.m. on Monday.

"Unfortunately, the proliferation of weapons throughout Mukalla in general means that many of those who took to the streets did so while armed," he said.

Muhammad Qasim Al-Dhamari, a grocery store owner in Mukalla who is originally from Dhammar city in Dhammar governorate, part of the former North Yemen Arab Republic, says that he closed his store in fear of reprisals from armed Southern Movement members.

In the city's Fough Al-Mukalla neighborhood, security forces temporarily clashed with Southern Movement members who had been blocking a road and preventing drivers from passing through. Security forces attempted to disperse the demonstrators by firing into the air, but eventually withdrew to avoid an escalation.

Abdullah Al-Qaedi, an officer within the Ministry of Interior's Mukalla city Operations Department, said that the call for civil disobedience was announced Sunday

evening, and that security forces in the city had taken a decision then not to engage the Movement's armed supporters in order to avoid exacerbating the situation.

Mohammad Bafrid, a member of the Southern Movement Coordination Council for protests in Mukalla city, claimed that no one was injured during the altercation. "We'll continue our escalations and campaign for civil disobedience every week until we achieve independence," he added.

Abdul Rahman Bahahad, a resident of Mukalla who runs the Furniture Department of Yemen's Economic Corporation, told the Yemen Times that he does not support the civil disobedience campaign.

"As southerners we have legitimate demands, including the return of land stolen by northerners and increased opportunities for employment, but this is not the way to do it," he said. "Closing down streets and engaging in thugery isn't the way to effect change."



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Father foregoes dowry request, demands one million Facebook likes instead



Dowries: A measure of worth for a prized daughter's hand? Or an outdated tradition that does more harm than good?

■ **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

“I agreed to allow him to marry her, on the condition that he help me collect one million likes on Facebook,” said Salem Ayash, 48, a resident of Taiz city. “In the end, we only got 141,000, but I figured that was enough.” Salem was referring to his daughter, whose name he did not want to reveal, and Osama Al-Qudaimi, a young man who had been courting her since 2012. Traditionally in Yemen, marriages come after a hefty mahar, or dowry, is paid to the father of the bride by the groom and his family.

Ayash has worked as a herbal doctor for twenty years and runs a clinic in Taiz's Al-Masbah neighbor-

hood known as “Arabian medicine.” He has long been vocal against the practice of paying dowries, calling it an outdated practice that does more harm than good in modern society.

As an act of defiance, and to make a statement about his opinion regarding the practice, he instead chose a different form of payment: For Al-Qudaimi to start a popular Facebook campaign that attracted one million likes.

The campaign was launched and a Facebook page was created Dec. 6, 2013, the day Al-Qudaimi proposed. One year later, after having reached 141,000 likes, Ayash finally allowed Al-Qudaimi to have his daughter's hand in marriage.

“It's not realistic for families to ask for exorbitant sums of money to marry off their daughters,” he said.

“People today are poor and can't afford it. As a result, young men and women get older, and resort to sexual deviancy and other immoral behavior,” Ayash said.

“Getting rid of the practice, or at least decreasing the price of dowries on the whole, will help youth start families and strengthen society.”

In Taiz, it is not uncommon for dowries to range from anywhere between YR2 million to YR4 million.

The request for such a high number of likes, he said, was simply a ploy

to spread the anti-dowry message to a large number of people.

Not everyone in Yemen supports his move, and Ayash claims he has encountered resistance both online and from people in his community. “No good deed goes unpunished,” he said. “A lot of people I know say that by doing this I'm encouraging youth to go online and engage in immoral behavior without their families knowing. Obviously, that's not the point at all.”

He mentioned a popular hadith, or saying of the prophet Mohammad, taken from the Kitab Al-Nikah (book marriage) section within the Rawayat Al-Trimidhi collection, in which the prophet states that when marrying off one's daughter,

it's better to receive even a small dowry, amounting to an ‘iron ring’, than nothing. He says that those who agree that the price of dowries should be decreased, have pointed to this hadith as a justification for the necessity of maintaining the dowry system, even if it is reduced.

“Marrying off my daughter for free is what they find hard to believe,” he says. “They think it's degrading.”

Al-Qudaimi graduated from Sana'a University's Faculty of Media and currently works as a web designer within various offices in the Ministry of Information. Despite his skills, he doubts that he would have been able to save up enough money to pay a normal dowry in the time it took to reach the 141,000 likes he obtained for Ayash on Facebook.

“I met my wife in 2012, and have been in love with her ever since,” he said. “Before we came up with the idea to launch the Facebook campaign, I offered Ayash all I had—not quite YR 100,000—but he wouldn't accept it. I'd still be single if it wasn't for Ayash's progressive mindset. More fathers in Yemen should adopt this practice.”

Studies released last year by Sana'a University's Faculty of Sociology claimed that roughly 70 percent of Yemeni men postpone mar-




The bride's father: “Getting rid of the practice, or at least decreasing the price of dowries on the whole, will help youth start families and strengthen society.”

“People today are poor and can't afford it. As a result, young men and women get older, and resort to sexual deviancy and other immoral behavior,” said the bride's father.

“Fathers work hard to raise their daughters to be moral, they can't be expected to marry them off for free. Plus, there are other options,” said Hamzah Al-Wali, a psychologist who works with youth in local schools.

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riage until after the age of 25 as a result of high dowries and the costs associated with marriage.

Abdul Kareem Daghbas, 35, lives in Dhamar and supports Ayash's campaign and what it represents for just this reason. “Dowries in Dhamar city run as high as YR1.5 million. I don't know when I'll ever be able to afford that,” he said.

He speculated that there would be further social deterioration within society if solutions were not provided. “If young men don't get married, they'll resort to harassing girls in the street or worse,” he said. “This is something that I myself have done, admittedly.”

Hamzah Al-Wali is a psychologist who works with youth in local high schools throughout Sana'a. Like many others, he believes dowries should be reduced but that, for religious and cultural reasons, they cannot be done away with all together.

“Fathers work hard to raise their daughters to be moral, they can't be expected to marry them off for free. Plus, there are other options,” Al-Wali said.

According to Al-Wali, a number

of charitable organizations have recently cropped up to help youth pay for their dowries, often performing mass wedding ceremonies.

But, it's not just fathers that are sticking with the dowry tradition. Many women find it shameful to be married off for small sums.

Jamila Al-Rai, a recent graduate from Sana'a University's English Department, claims she would never agree to such a marriage if put in that position.

“Ayash treated his daughter like a can of Pepsi,” she said. “I would never agree to marry a man for anything less than YR1 million.”

For other women, it is not difficult to find reasons to oppose the practice of dowries. Jamila Al-Kulaibi, who is 30 years old, says she is still single because none of the men who proposed to her were able to afford the amount of money demanded by her father, a sum YR1.2 million.

“I know a lot of women as old as 40 who still aren't married because of dowries,” she said. “They're known as ‘awaanis,’ or ‘spinsters.’ The stigma attached to such women who never get married is horrible, I don't want that for myself.”

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Bahrain's elections and the opposition

Elizabeth Dickinson
Middle East Institute
First published Dec. 23

As Bahrain's newly elected parliament convened for the first time last week, the island nation stands divided. The Shia-dominated opposition boycotted last month's elections and will be outside the political system for the foreseeable future, leaving little prospect for the community's political advancement. Meanwhile, the predominantly Sunni electorate participated strongly in the polls and will move forward alone on a series of reforms and priorities that are most important to their community.

In other words, half of Bahrain is progressing politically while the other half remains frozen in place. This growing—and now essentially codified—split may increase social tensions and exacerbate the long-standing structural issues that led to the initial political crisis.

The Sunni community is more politically aware and empowered than they were four years ago, when a Shia-dominated opposition took to the streets in Arab Spring-inspired protests. Loyalists' demands for better government services, more transparency in government, and a more accountable parliament will become the political priorities for the next four years—with potentially large political and economic dividends for the community.

The Shia community, meanwhile, remains politically disenfranchised and subject to strict policing. Its members frequently report economic discrimination for public jobs. But because the opposition, led by the officially registered political society Al-Wefaq, chose to

boycott the elections, neither the government nor the international community will see an immediate reason to push for political concessions.

The Polls

November's election was the first full parliamentary vote since opposition MPs resigned en masse in 2011, in protest of a crackdown against the Arab Spring-inspired protests that drew tens of thousands to the streets.

In the years since, Bahrain has struggled to overcome the crisis. The country's crown prince spearheaded several attempts to hold a national dialogue that included opposition members, loyalists, and independents. But each fell short of a full consensus. Meanwhile, small-scale protests have continued in Bahrain's Shi'a-majority villages, often devolving into clashes with security forces. According to activists, an estimated 3,000 prisoners are now being held in relation to the unrest and as many as 150 have died. Meanwhile, for the last 18 months, radical elements of the opposition have begun deploying rudimentary bombs and other explosives in retaliation. A handful of incidents have led to casualties, including most recently the death of a Jordanian police officer on Dec. 8. The officer had been part of a security cooperation agreement between the two governments.

In this context, both the Bahraini government and the international community saw the parliamentary vote as a benchmark that could bring the opposition back into the political system and turn the page on the last four years. Diplomats campaigned aggressively for the opposition to participate in the polls. Despite ongoing concerns about hu-

man rights, they argued that being in parliament was vital for the opposition's ability to work for reform.

"We and other international partners were very disappointed that Wefaq didn't take part," said a Western diplomatic source. "We thought that was a bad move and we all tried very hard to persuade them that it made sense to participate."

The Opposition

The early signs for electoral participation were not promising. But in early January 2014, figures from Wefaq held a "frank and transparent" meeting with the country's crown prince that the group hoped would re-open talks and yield some progress. Prince Salman bin Isa al-Khalifa solicited proposals from the opposition, as well as from non-opposition political societies, from which the Royal Court would put together a proposed agenda for a new national dialogue.

Some nine months later, Wefaq says it felt blindsided when the crown prince announced a series of proposed political reforms said to be the "common ground" between the various sides. Although short on details, the proposals did include nods to at least some of the opposition's key demands, such as electoral redistricting, a more empowered parliament, judicial independence, and some security sector reform.

Still, Wefaq said it had not been consulted since the spring and felt the proposals were unilateral. "We didn't know that negotiations were over," said Abdul Jalil Khalil Ibrahim, former head of Wefaq's parliamentary bloc. The bloc decided to boycott the polls, arguing that the elections would do little to heal political rifts.

According to some analysts in Bahrain, this decision stirred de-

bate within the opposition, with certain parts of Wefaq seeking to participate while others remaining opposed. One candidate from the party ranks did register, though he later withdrew, and Ebrahim denied that the issue had caused any fractures.

By the time the election took place, the opposition did appear to coalesce around the boycott. Turnout in the two strongest opposition districts fell below 10 percent. While the majority likely boycotted by choice, there were also reports of intense community pressure deterring any hopeful voters from the polls.

The Vote

While the opposition debated whether to participate, those not in the opposition, mostly Bahrain's Sunni community, were taking the election seriously—arguably more so than any previous vote. The results from these districts indicate some democratic gains, including high percentages of voter turnout and impressive rates of punishment for candidates seen as failing to follow through on past promises.

Voters dealt a stunning loss to nearly all incumbents and political societies in favor of new faces and independents. Some in the Sunni community have taken to calling the new parliament the assembly of "The Unknowns."

The vote marked the first time that elections have revolved largely around issues, argues Yacoub Al-Slaiss, a co-founder of the Sunni youth coalition Al-Fateh, which soon hopes to register as a political society. "This election was the first time that voters punished candidates who did not deliver," he said. "Maybe you did not vote for the best MP, but you got rid of the old one."

Contributing to this dynamic was the rise of social media accounts documenting parliamentary accountability. One such Twitter feed with 122,000 followers, @DeertyBhr, posted lists of MPs who had voted for or against popular measures like a public sector salary increase.

Other candidates look to have been punished for sectarian rhetoric. For example, Sunni preacher Jassim Al-Saeedi, an MP since 2002 famous for vitriolic attacks on Shia, lost his seat by a landslide. Analysts said voters were unconvinced by the MP's tendency to blame Shia Iran for many of Bahrain's problems, rather than addressing internal solutions.

Electoral districting in September also likely contributed to the result. The new lines broke up or expanded some traditional constituencies of the country's Sunni political societies, reducing their previous electoral advantage.

Voter turnout was high—a priority for the government given the electoral boycott. Some local media indulged in fear mongering that may have pushed some to the polls. Local dailies cited unconfirmed reports, for example, that public services would be prioritized for those who participated in the election. Citizens receive a stamp in their passports when they vote, and some feared they could be asked for this proof of participation when applying for jobs or soliciting public housing in the future.

Going Forward

The incoming parliament is likely to focus on the issues that its constituents care most about, among them public service provision, government salaries and pensions, and security.

The fact that the opposition is left

out of parliament does not necessarily mean that the government will escape criticism. In fact, having stood by the ruling family in 2011 at the height of the unrest, many in the Sunni community now feel more empowered to ask for things they have long sought, such as a more efficient and transparent government.

Some of these demands align with the objectives of the opposition, including the empowerment of the elected parliament vis-à-vis an appointed upper chamber, the Shura Council.

"Parliament still has some limitations, and as we are elected, we need more power," said incoming MP Mohammed Al-Amadi. He suggests a constitutional amendment that would ensure that a two-thirds majority in the lower chamber could circumvent laws needing the approval of the Shura.

Meanwhile, the prospects for the opposition to secure any significant political compromise look increasingly dim.

The opposition has in recent years turned its focus to the international community, hoping that pressure from Bahrain's Western allies could encourage reform. But this dynamic is changing fast as regional insecurity heightens. Bahrain has joined a 60-country U.S.-led coalition against the Iraq and Syria-based militant group the Islamic State, and both Washington and London are relying on Bahrain's naval facilities for their role in the campaign.

"Just because Wefaq didn't take part in the electoral process doesn't mean that it was not legitimate," the Western diplomatic source said. "The crown prince has made clear that he wants to empower the parliament. Everyone should welcome that."

Why the Al-Jazeera trial is so important

Nadine Marroushi
Middleeasteye.net
First published Jan. 3

"It's pretty terrifying for all of us who are correspondents, who covered Egypt and who have covered the Middle East, because we look at the Al-Jazeera three and we think that could have been any of us," Lindsey Hilsum, Channel 4 News's International Editor, told me at a protest outside the Egyptian embassy in London on Dec. 29, the coldest day of the year.

She was joined on that biting cold day by at least 30 other prominent international journalists and human rights campaigners calling for the release of Peter Greste, Mohamed Fahmy, and Baher Mohamed, the three Al-Jazeera English journalists who have already spent just over a year in prison in Cairo.

They were charged last year with spreading false news and aiding a terrorist organization, the now-banned Muslim Brotherhood group, in a widely criticized trial. They were given between seven to ten year prison sentences.

Outside the Egyptian embassy, the international journalists were also calling for the release of other journalists that are languishing in Egypt's jails. There are 16 in total, according to the Paris-based moni-

toring group Reporters Without Borders, placing Egypt in fourth place for the world's largest jailer of journalists.

The other jailed journalists in Egypt include Mahmoud Abdel Nabi (Rassd News Network), Mahmoud Abu Zeid (freelance photographer), Samhi Mustafa (Rassd News Network), Ahmed Gamal (Yaqeen News), Ahmed Fouad (Karmoz News), and Abdel Rahman Shaheen (Freedom and Justice News Gate), according to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists and London-based Egypt Solidarity Initiative.

Many of those arrested worked for Islamist-affiliated news networks, such as Rassd and Freedom and Justice News, or were rounded up while covering protests by the Brotherhood.

Since Egypt ousted former president Mohamed Morsi in a popularly-backed military coup on July 3, 2013, the government has launched a broad crackdown against the Brotherhood and its sympathisers in the name of a "war on terror". That crackdown has also spread to secular political activists, journalists and human rights defenders.

On his 500th day in prison on 20 December without charge or trial, freelance photojournalist Abu Zeid wrote a moving letter from his three meter by four meter prison cell asking the world not to forget him.

Entitled "Sunset in the black hole", he said: "I simply ask that now that you know of me, please do not turn away. I am a photojournalist, not a criminal."

He was arrested while covering the break-up of the Rabaa demonstration on Aug. 14, 2013, as many of us did, when at least 817 pro-Morsi demonstrators were killed in a single day by Egyptian security forces in what has been described as Egypt's Tiananmen Square massacre.

And that's the significance of the Al-Jazeera trial. It sets a precedent for the work of journalists in Egypt, and the world, and sheds a spotlight on those lesser well-known reporters, who don't have the backing of a powerful media organization putting pressure and calling for their release. It's about press freedom for international and local journalists, the rule of law, and broader political battles.

The Al-Jazeera three have long recognized that. "A retrial is a milestone toward victory in our free press battle! Our spirits are bullet-proof! Back to white garb!" tweeted a defiant Mohamed Fahmy on Jan. 1, the day an Egyptian court ruled in favour of a re-trial for him and his two other colleagues.

Greste wrote a poignant speech in October highlighting the declining state of press freedom all over the world in the last decade, particular-

ly in the context of the global "war on terror".

"In all of these battlegrounds, whether hot or cold, journalists are no longer on the front lines. We are the front lines. In this wider conflict, there is no such thing as a neutral, independent reporter. In the view of both sides, if you cross the lines in pursuit of our most fundamental principles of balance, fairness and accuracy, you effectively join the enemy."

And that applies in Egypt, as much as anywhere. If you're a reporter covering Muslim Brotherhood protests, you open yourself up to accusations of bias, rather than trying to get a sense of the other view, such is the polarized nature of the environment. And vice versa.

Hilsum said that arresting journalists in this context is counterproductive. "It doesn't help the fight against terrorism. Actually quite the opposite. Because if you're wasting the resources of your country on tracking and imprisoning journalists, then you're distracting yourself with actually trying to deal with the real problem of terrorism."

In ordering the re-trial on Jan. 1, the court appeared to recognize that legal flaws took place in the widely criticized first trial.

Amnesty International criticized last year's court proceedings saying that it observed several irregularities.

"In 12 court sessions, the prosecution failed to produce a single shred of solid evidence linking the journalists to an organization involved in terrorism, or prove they had 'falsified' news footage," the London-based human rights organization said.

Among the pieces of evidence presented at the trial were: Footage of trotting horses by Sky News Arabia, a BBC documentary about Somalia, a song by the Australian musician Gotye, a Kenyan press conference, and Greste's family photos.

Many observers have called the Al-Jazeera three "scapegoats" caught up in a cold war between Egypt and Qatar, which owns the Al-Jazeera news network and supported the Brotherhood. Others see them as legitimate targets, who worked for a news channel considered biased towards the now unpopular Islamist group.

Families of the imprisoned journalists have said that hope lies in the recent thawing of relations between Egypt and Qatar, which culminated in the recent closure of Al-Jazeera's Egyptian channel, Mubasher Misr. This opens the space for public acceptance of their release, if and when it happens, Marwa Omara, Fahmy's fiancée told me.

There is also hope in a new law that President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi issued in a decree last year that al-

lowed for the deportation of foreigners, who have been convicted of crimes committed on Egyptian soil. The lawyers and families of Greste and Canadian-Egyptian Fahmy have put in requests to the Egyptian government that they be deported.

This, however, would not help Baher Mohamed. He is an Egyptian, whose wife hasn't even been allowed to attend any of the court proceedings because she is Egyptian, she told me. Only foreigners and their families have been allowed to attend, she said. Hope for them lies in the re-trial.

The journalists could also be released on bail during the retrial.

President Sisi says he won't interfere in the work of the judiciary, so a presidential pardon before the legal process is over seems unlikely.

And when the Al-Jazeera three are released, as many of us hope they will be, one hopes the world continues to push for the release of the other journalists in jail, among them: Abdel Nabi, Abu Zeid, Mustafa, Gamal, Fouad and Shaheen.

Nadine Marroushi is a British-Palestinian journalist who has worked for Bloomberg and the English edition of Al-Masry Al-Youm (also known as Egypt Independent), and as a freelance journalist has written for The National newspaper in the UAE, and the London Review of Books blog.

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Syrians worried over Lebanon's new visa rules

The new restrictions come into effect on Monday to stem the influx of Syrians fleeing their country's civil war.

Nour Samaha
Aljazeera.com
First published Jan. 5

A mixture of confusion and fear have struck the Syrian population currently residing in Lebanon following a recent announcement made by General Security over new visa measures to be implemented today.

Huddled together under the pouring rain in a run-down neighborhood in Beirut, a number of Syrians who have been living in Lebanon for several years kept repeating the same questions, "What does this mean for us?"

The move by the Lebanese government is unprecedented. As of Monday, Syrians trying to enter Lebanon have to provide documentation identifying their reason for being in Lebanon, highlighting stricter entry procedures for people who, since Lebanon gained its independence in 1943, had been able to move freely across the border.

While the registered refugee population in Lebanon, now 1.1 million, is said to be largely unaffected by these new measures, there are at least 300,000 unregistered refugees—many of whom move back and forth between the two countries—who are expected to suffer, as the procedures are aimed specifically at those attempting to enter as refugees.

One Syrian refugee, who wished to remain anonymous, said he was afraid that his family would be forced to split up.

"My wife is currently in Tur-

key, and we are panicking that she won't be able to come back to Lebanon," he told Al-Jazeera. "Will these new measures mean she gets stuck trying to get back in? I don't know. Nobody seems to know."

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has voiced concern over the lack of clarity regarding the restrictions.

"We want official clarification from the government on some points, specifically what this means for those seeking extreme humanitarian entry," Ron Redmond, senior regional spokesperson for the UNHCR, told Al-Jazeera.

The Lebanese government had already introduced strict measures in October 2014 to limit the flow of refugees into the country, whereby all but extreme humanitarian cases are refused entry. This led to a significant drop in the number of refugees fleeing Syria into Lebanon.

According to Redmond, the UNHCR has witnessed a 50 percent reduction in the number of refugees coming across, with some months witnessing a drop of 75 percent.

"This could be because they've been turned back, or it could be because they've heard how difficult it is to try and cross," said Redmond.

"We've been warning for months that the governments here need international assistance as they don't have the resources to take care of the increasing demands," he continued. "Our concern is if the international community doesn't show support, the protection space will shrink."

Syria's ambassador to Lebanon,

Ali Abdul Karim Ali, said in a television interview on Sunday that Damascus had not been informed in advance of the decision, adding that the measure "is not appropriate". He also said there needed to be coordination between the two countries on the issue.

Workers dilemma

One group of Syrians expected to be affected by the new measures are the hundreds of thousands of Syrian laborers who have been working for years in Lebanon and who travel between the two countries on a regular basis.

Obaida Kasabry, a Syrian worker from Deraa who has been living in Lebanon since 2006, told Al-Jazeera that the lack of clarity over the new measures has left many concerned about their future in Lebanon.

"I live and I work here in Beirut, but go back to Deraa every two months to take care of my family," he said. "With these new measures, I don't know if I'll be able to allowed to keep going back and forth, and if I need some kind of sponsor to stay in Lebanon. If I'm not going to be able to come back how can I support my family?"

"Before I wasn't afraid, but now I am. What am I supposed to do? I can't go back and live in Syria, there is no work there."

For the last 15 years Ahmad has been working as a driver in Lebanon, coming back and forth from his home in Aleppo province. Today, he is petrified of what these new measures will entail.

"I'm scared, I don't know if I'll be able to continue working here. I either have to get my employer to



Syrian refugees are increasingly appealing to the international community for assistance.

sponsor me or I'll have to be here illegally, or I'll have to stay in Syria," he said. "No one really understands what's going on."

Meanwhile the Lebanese government is trying to downplay the issue, with the Minister of Social Affairs, Rashid Derbas, telling Al-Jazeera that "there is an over-reaction to the new procedures".

"The government has not issued visas for Syrians. The Syrians still enter all legal crossings directly,

what the government has done now is limit the number of refugees."

He went on to say that the procedures are simply to allow General Security to know if the individual crossing is a refugee or not.

"I want to be clear that there was a panic for no reason, these new procedures don't target refugees in Lebanon."

Yet Syrians already living in Lebanon are less convinced, con-

cerned over whether or not such procedures will make their living situation much harder than what they are currently facing today.

"I've been here since the 1990s, and I've been okay, I can take care of my family," Zakaria, a Syrian labourer told Al-Jazeera. "But with these new measures, do I have to look for a sponsor for my family, who also live here with me? Would someone be willing to pay for that?"

Basra moving toward independence

Ali Mamouri
Al-monitor.com
First published Dec. 30

Since the establishment of modern Iraq in 1921, its provinces have had different positions toward decentralization as a result of the country's ethnic and cultural diversity. In addition, economic resources have varied widely from one region to another. At the end of 2014, Iraqis were once again discussing the possibilities of decentralization.

Perhaps the oldest demand for decentralization was raised even before the establishment of modern Iraq, when a prestigious group of men presented a petition signed by 4,500 people to the British High Commissioner in June 1921 demanding the administrative independence of Basra province. The rationale behind the petition was based on the economic and social characteristics of Basra, such as its having a seaport and economic vibrancy. Iraqi politicians and British decision-makers never welcomed the petition, despite constant demands until 1928 that they consider it.

Other federalism or disassociation plans, such as for the Kurds and Assyrians, were also tamped down by the strengthening of the Iraqi state. The central government in Baghdad, however, failed to please certain segments of society with its management of the country, so demands for disassociation continued until the Baathist regime was overthrown in 2003.

The idea of regional federal governments within a united Iraq was suggested during negotiations between the political blocs while drafting the current constitution, which defines Iraq's republic as a

federal state. According to Article 117, "This constitution, upon coming into force, shall recognize the region of Kurdistan, along with its existing authorities, as a federal region," and according to Article 120, "Each region shall adopt a constitution of its own that defines the structure of powers of the region, its authorities, and the mechanisms for exercising such authorities, provided that it does not contradict this constitution."

Establishing separate regions did not, however, meet with broad popularity among the political elite or the public at the time. Only the Kurds, who had been granted significant administrative independence before the overthrow of the Baathist regime, welcomed the idea. The reason for the opposition to separate regions included the lack of a clear vision among decision-makers regarding the separate regions and the fear that dividing Iraq might lead to serious conflicts in the future.

The failure of successive Iraqi governments to provide adequate services and improve living standards have now led to demands to reconsider the establishment of separate regions, especially in the areas rich in oil or other resources, such as Basra. The escalation of violence and sectarian conflicts between the Shia and the Sunni-dominated regions has contributed to strengthening these demands.

Iraqis currently appear to be welcoming of the idea of separate regions in two context—the first involving economics, allowing the distribution of resources according to a decentralized system and free market economy, and the second involving sectarian strife, which threatens to divide Iraq along ethnic and religious lines.

The technocrats among Iraqi politicians hold the first perspective. They consider the economic, geographic and social specificities of each region in viewing their separation as a way to eliminate corruption at the center and unleash the economic power of the provinces. Political and economic analyst Nebras Al-Kadhimi wrote on his website, "The current central state, after 90 years of experience in accumulating oil money and authority in a single place, is an old recipe for the control of some over others, the anticipation of coups, the spread of bureaucracy and corruption, the sectarian and partisan conflicts, the strangling of the private sector and the launching of adventures cross-border. Decentralization may be an obstacle and a solution all at once for all of these disasters, not only in Basra but in other Iraqi provinces as well."

The idea of a Basra region became more an issue after the recent deterioration in security that resulted in the fall of Mosul to Islamic State forces. Some of Basra province's council members suggested the idea at a meeting Dec. 11 along with making it a legal demand at a later date based on the Iraqi constitution. Some activists designed a flag for the Basra region that is supposed to fly above the state buildings, the airport and seaports of the province.

On the other hand, there are calls for division for sectarian reasons, based on the ethnic and religious distribution of the population. Some are demanding the establishment of three main regions: a Kurdish area (the Kurdistan regional government), a Shia region (which would include the nine provinces in the center and the south) and a Sunni region (in the north and the west). This sug-



Policemen stand guard at Basra railway station in Basra, southeast of Baghdad, May 13, 2014.

gestion is consistent with the so-called Biden plan for federal Iraq.

The majority of the political parties, which objected to the federal plans for Iraq on the pretext that they would lead to division, are now supporting the option of dividing the country along sectarian and ethnic lines. The Islamic Dawa Party, especially the wing that supported former Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, was one of the main parties opposing the idea of separate regions when Maliki was prime minister. Today, however, they support the idea of a Shiite region consisting of the central and southern provinces. Meanwhile, Sunnis are demanding the

establishment of their own region comprised of four or five provinces in the north and west.

The main problem with these plans is that establishing separate regions should be based on economic and administrative strategies instead of a sectarian baseline. Such a division does not necessarily serve the interests of the people in the provinces. Instead, it would likely multiply sectarian conflict between the regions and lead to displacement and forced migrations, creating strict sectarian disassociation among the regions.

It has become obvious that Iraq will not return to the centralization of the past, but move toward

further division. It remains unclear whether the divisions will be based on economic strategies that benefit the people or whether they will cause further sectarian alienation.

Ali Mamouri is a columnist for Al-Monitor's Iraq Pulse. He is a researcher and writer who specializes in religion. He is a former teacher in Iranian universities and seminaries in Iran and Iraq. He has published several articles related to religious affairs in the two countries and societal transformations and sectarianism in the Middle East.

Sana'a: Then and Now

■ Zakarya Dahman

An elderly man, dressed in traditional Sana'ani attire, sits next to Bab Al-Yemen, the gate to Sana'a's Old City.

It is a cold December morning, and he is basking in the sun.

"The goodness and cleanliness, that's what's disappeared," he replied when asked about the developments that the Old City center have undergone in the last 40 years.

"The guards of Bab Al-Yemen also disappeared," he said. "When I was younger, guards protected the entrance to the city.

Now its gates are wide open, all the time."

Bab Al-Yemen welcomes residents and visitors to Sana'a's most famous fortified city. It is the point where, nowadays, old and new Sana'a meet. First refurbished in the 1980s, the ancient structure was last renovated in 2013.

According to Naji Thawabah, the head of the Historical Cities Authority department of Yemen's Ministry of Culture, plans are in place to reinforce the gate's old wooden doors in 2015. There are no details on the materials that will be used or the techniques to restore the massive

doors.

Like Bab Al-Yemen, the Al-Saila that surrounds the Old City has also been around for centuries. Known as a wadi or ephemeral riverbed, the Al-Saila has been hollowed out over time due to water erosion that occurs during Yemen's rainy seasons.

Traditionally, Al-Saila has been used as a road during the dry season. In 1994 the passageway was paved. While many praised the modern renovation, Al-Saila now requires constant maintenance and has caused major instances of flooding.

While the riverbed used to provide natural drainage for

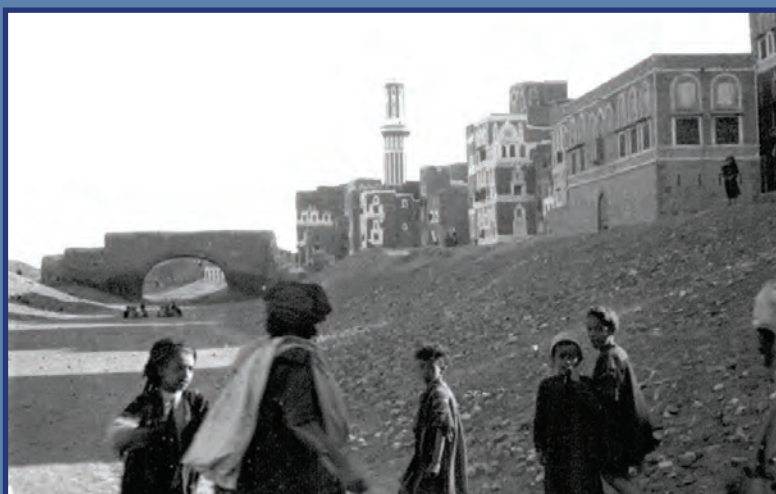
water coming from Sana'a's nearby mountains, more cement is now needed to strengthen its walls. Urbanization has made this an imperative as growing volumes of water are being channeled into Al-Saila from new neighborhoods cropping up around it.

Other than Al-Saila and Bab Al-Yemen, Sana'a is home to numerous other ancient landmarks that have been re-

stored throughout the years. The building hosting Yemen's Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption is one such example. Located in Tahrir Square, it was built in the early 20th century and has since housed the offices of a number of different state institutions, according to Thawabah. Prior to 1997 it served as the headquarters of the Ministry of Education, later to be used as office space for the Capital Secretariat.



Sana'a's sprawling urban metropolis. The capital city was founded inside the gates of the Old City centuries ago. Now it is home to close to 2 million people, and continues to grow. The photo on the left is the city before mass urban development.



Al-Saila. On the top: before it was paved. Below: Following the pavement.

The Old City's historic gates. Decades ago, citizens who did not make it back before curfew were out of luck, because authorities would lock the gates in the evenings.

The Military Museum outside the Old City.

Modern and traditional slavery still exist in Yemen

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

Most Yemenis and international observers have been shocked by recent revelations of slavery in Yemen, which has been shown to exist in its most archaic form. A sensitive topic, slavery receives relatively little attention in the media, but modern-day forms of subjugation need to be addressed. Recent studies have shown slavery to be far more pervasive than previously imagined, and current trends do not bode well for the future.

Article 248 of the Yemeni penal code stipulates that anyone involved in the buying, selling or owning of human beings can be imprisoned for up to ten years. The article was introduced in 1994, even though Yemen became a signatory to the United Nations Slavery Convention as early as the 1950s.

The earliest attempts to suppress slavery in Yemen began with the arrival of Harold Ingrams in 1934. A British agent tasked with pacifying southern Yemen on behalf of the crown, his first report on slavery in the region was published in 1936.

Ingrams estimated the total number of slaves to be between 5,000 and 10,000, and found slave-owners within every class, and hence a great variety in the living conditions of slaves. They were used as soldiers, servants, laborers and concubines.

While legal definitions may seem straightforward, slavery is a tricky concept and it covers wide-ranging forms of servitude. The story of royal slaves in Mukalla, Hadramout governorate, who in 1941 resisted attempts at liberation, is testimony to the fact that not all slaves were unwilling victims—although this may say more about the alternatives that were available to them than it does about the conditions of their servitude.

Yemen's government has since remained largely complacent towards slavery. It was not until 1962, in response to growing criticism from the UN, that British colonial authorities publicly denounced the practice. However even as late as 1967, some local authorities still allowed its residents to legally own slaves.

The issue reemerged in 2010 when the Yemeni Observatory of Human Rights leaked a contract authorizing the purchase of a slave that was approved by a judge in the Kuaidinah district of Hajja governorate.

The contract was between the owner of a slave, named Qanaf Bin

Saiarah, and Abd Al-Rahman Al-Suhaila, a prominent figure in the Kuaidinah district who purchased Bin Saiarah for YR500,000 (\$2300). Kuaidinah had the document legally certified by Hadi Abu Asaj, a local judge.

"The aim was to let the community know what was going on," journalist Omar Al Omky told Al Jazeera in its documentary, Slavery in Yemen, which aired in Sept. 2014 and chronicled Bin Saraiah's case. "His intentions were good but he embarrassed the Yemeni government. Some saw this as an admission that slavery existed."

The case of Bin Saiarah caused a media sensation throughout the country, and Abu Asaj was allegedly sacked as a result.

As the case demonstrated, slavery is not only common in some parts of the country but is even treated as a legally recognized institution. Equally significant, however, is the fact that three years following his release, Bin Saiarah returned to work for Al-Suhaila because he had no where else to turn, and did not receive any government support.

Traditional and modern-day slavery in Yemen

The case of Bin Saiarah was shocking because it revealed that traditional forms of slavery continue to exist in Yemen on a much broader and more institutionalized level than previously imagined.

A 2012 report by the Wethaq Foundation, a non-governmental human rights group operating in Yemen, estimated there were at least 190 slaves in Hajja, and found evidence of 13 slaves being traded there in recent history.

A new report being prepared by the foundation indicates that there are a total of 356 slaves in the Al-Zuhra district of Hodeida and in the Abs and Kuaidinah districts of Hajja.

Najib Al-Saadi, the foundation's director, estimates there are between 2100 and 2500 slaves in similar circumstances throughout the country.

There exist a wide range of forms that forced servitude can take, however, and definitions of slavery have evolved to include human rights violations not always associated with



Despite being illegal according to the Yemeni penal code, modern day slavery is still practiced in many parts of the country.

traditional slavery. According to the 1956 UN supplementary convention on slavery, the practice can include, "debt bondage, serfdom, forced marriage and the delivery of a child for the exploitation of that child...all [of which are] slavery-like practices and require criminalisation and abolishment."

Recent studies have shown that, under its expanded definition, modern-day slavery exists on a much larger magnitude than previously thought.

The Walk Free Foundation (WFF), an Australia-based NGO that publishes the annual global slavery index, reported in November 2014 that 35 million people around the world are victims of modern slavery.

According to WFF, five countries account for 61 percent of slavery: India tops the list with about 14.29 million, followed by China with 3.24 million, Pakistan 2.06 million, Uzbekistan 1.2 million, and Russia 1.05 million.

With an estimated 106,100 people living in slavery, Yemen is ranked 64 globally and 14 regionally.

Least global rankings detract from the severity of the situation, the index also determines how vulnerable populations are to enslavement, and in this category Yemen is much higher on the list.

Vulnerability to enslavement is

measured using five categories: national policies to combat modern slavery; the availability of human rights protections; levels of economic and social development; state stability; and levels of discrimination. According to the index, Yemen ranks fourth globally and first in the Middle East.

"The Yemeni government scored poorly across all indicators," the report concludes, citing high levels of corruption, pervasive poverty and weak rule of law as major contributing factors.

Mohammed Al-Hunahi, a lawyer with the National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms (HOOD), a human rights group founded in 1998, says that children, illegal immigrants and women are the most vulnerable victims of modern-day slavery.

"Children are exploited and used in armed conflicts, girls get married at an early age and human rights are violated across the board," he said.

A 2014 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report, compiled with the help of the Ministry of Planning and International Development, found that children are being used in armed conflicts and are recruited by the military, Ansar Allah (Houthis) and Ansar Al-Sharia (AQAP). Many of these young recruits face sexual exploitation, the



13th century depiction of a Yemeni slave market.

ious forms of slavery. As Al-Saedi points out, the withholding of passports from workers to prevent them from escaping or seeking work elsewhere also constitutes a form of slavery.

"Modern slavery includes hiring people in return for food only, taking passports of maids and foreign employees to ensure that they will not leave without permission, hiring people for low payment and sending them to work in other places like in security services companies, child labor and early marriage," he explained.

The WFF has concluded that government corruption and weak rule of law in Yemen have facilitated the rise and ongoing abuse of East African immigrants. Its 2014 report charges that the government "failed to hold traffickers or complicit police and border guards to account, routinely deported victims, and systematically failed to respond to the presence of perpetrators along the Yemeni coast."

Future prospects:

Investigations by Wethaq Foundation, WFF and UNICEF have been highly critical of government efforts to deal with the issue of slavery, and there is little indication that its shortcomings will be addressed in the near future. Repeated attempts were made to get a response from the Human Rights Minister, Ez Al-Deen Al-Asbahi, but our phone calls were ignored.

Given such high levels of vulnerability, unprecedented immigration and ongoing instability in the country, we can only expect the situation to worsen. Faced with government denial and complacency, committed individuals and human rights organizations are essential in combatting slavery in all its forms.

As the case of Bin Saiarah demonstrates, however, liberating the enslaved is not a remedy in itself, and government assistance will be crucial to any effective and long term solution.

As Al-Saedi points out, "the problem isn't in setting the slaves free but in providing assistance to them, they need training to be able to face life."

YEMEN TIMES Radio

التأسيس

"راديو يمن تايمز" هو أول إذاعة مجتمعية في صنعاء، حيث بدأ العمل في هذا المشروع في بداية 2012، والذي كان تأسيسه من أهم رؤى مؤسس يمن تايمز الراحل، البروفيسور عبد العزيز السقايف. ولذلك سعت الأستاذة / نادية السقايف رئيس تحرير صحيفة يمن تايمز إلى تحقيق فكرة المؤسس الراحل، من خلال تأسيس راديو يمن تايمز بمشاركة الكثير من المتطوعين والداعمين ومن أمن بأهمية الإعلام المستقل ودور الإذاعات المجتمعية.

وتعد إذاعة يمن تايمز جزء من مشروع أصواتنا، و هو برنامج دولي يدعم تأسيس الإذاعات المجتمعية في دول الربيع العربي. حيث يتمحور هذا البرنامج حول العرب الذين سعوا لأن تكون أصواتهم المستقلة مسموعة، بعيداً عن الاحتكارات الحكومية، أو التجارية، بحيث تكون نقطة انطلاق جديدة لكل من يريد الخوض في تجربة الإذاعات المجتمعية المستقلة.

أهدافنا

يعمل "راديو يمن تايمز" على طرح وجهات نظر جديدة وموضوعات هامة للجمهور اليمني ويعايش قضايا المواطنين الذين يجيدون اللغة الإنجليزية والعربية والأميين بشكل مباشر.

ويسعى أيضاً لإيجاد فضاءات جديدة لحرية الرأي والتعبير في اليمن عامة وفي العاصمة صنعاء خاصة ليكون راديو يمن تايمز «صوت من لا صوت لهم» وليعزز مفاهيم الديمقراطية وحرية الرأي والتعبير من خلال دوراته البرمجية المتنوعة التي تعالج قضايا المرأة والطفل وحقوق الإنسان وتدافع عن الحريات بواسطة إعلامها الهادف وبرامجها المتعددة والتي تخاطب بشفاافية وموضوعية كل مستمعها وتتسم بروح شبابية وإيجابية واضحة لكل من يتابعها سواء سكان صنعاء أو اليمن.

رؤيتنا

للإعلام دور كبير ومهم في الدعوة للتغيير السلمي فهو ركيزة من ركائز التغيير نحو الأفضل، ولكن الصراعات السياسية اعتادت أن تفرض أجنداتها على المؤسسات الإعلامية مما يخلق أثراً سلبياً واضحاً على طابع استقلال الإعلام وأثر بشكل مباشر على معايير أساسية مثل الحيادية والموضوعية.

وهنا تسعى "إذاعة يمن تايمز" لتعزز من دور مؤسساتها الإعلامية المستقلة لتصل إلى كل من لا تصل إليه عبر صحتها لتكون من الإذاعات الرائدة في اليمن التي جعلت من الحياء والاستقلال سياسة لها مواصلة بذلك سمعتها الحسنة التي استطاعت أن تفرضها من خلال سياسة الصحيفة على الرغم من عدم وجود قوانين منظمة لعمل الإذاعات الخاصة في اليمن.

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The economics at the heart of Israel's "illegal" settlements

IRIN

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Of all the hurdles to peace negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, perhaps the largest is the 150 or so Israeli settlements in the West Bank. These communities, considered illegal by the UN, are fracturing Israel's relationship even with its allies: The pro-Israeli head of the UK parliament's foreign affairs committee this year declared that a decision to develop a new settlement, "outraged me more than anything else in my political life".

Despite an unofficial freeze on settlement planning, in late December the Jerusalem Planning and Budget Committee set the stage for approving building permits for some 400 homes on Palestinian land in Jerusalem, and approved a plan for 1,850 more homes in a neighbourhood that sits on the border.

While they are often thought of as the result of a religious quest by Jews to claim new territory, in fact for most settlers the reasons for moving are economic - encouraged through government-planned incentive schemes to relocate. But for some, the process of living in a settlement may have a radicalizing effect.

"Quality of life"

It's a weekday in the West Bank town of Ariel. Students share a cigarette break on the university

campus. Two women walking their dogs chatter in Russian-accented Hebrew. Nothing suggests this is anything other than an ordinary Israeli town.

But while it is not known for a strong ideological bent or violent attacks on its Palestinian neighbours, jutting out some 16km east of the Green Line that divides Israel from the Occupied West Bank, this town of 19,000 is very much a settlement.

In Ariel, many residents live the Israeli commuter lifestyle. There is a direct motorway to Tel Aviv, less than 40km away, with buses running frequently to the capital and less often to Jerusalem, 50km away.

"People come here looking for different things," said Avi Zimmerman, head of Ariel's Development Fund and the de facto spokesperson for its municipality. As an observant Jew, he came eight years ago looking for a heterogeneous community.

"You'll find people who came for the quality of life, even for the relief from the humidity of Tel Aviv."

But the financial benefits are top for many. House prices in Israel have risen rapidly for the last seven years, with the high cost of living and food prices sparking mass protests in the summer of 2011. The average apartment in Ariel costs 1,098,774 NIS (US\$280,537), a far cry from the Tel Aviv average of 2,363,268 NIS (\$603,386).

Cheap rent made Noa and her boyfriend temporary settlers in 2009 when they started looking for

a place near her Jerusalem university. "We were both students and we needed a cheap place to live," explains Noa, a dance teacher in her late twenties. They couldn't find anything in their price range in Jerusalem, but in Anatot, a community of 1,000, 7km over the Green Line, the price was right.

Amit, a 34-year-old mother of one, sees her settlement - although she doesn't call it by that name - 5km over the Green Line as just another suburb of Jerusalem. She and her husband had lived in the city, but when they went looking for a home she wanted, "a house, a garden and a parking lot... and the green parks and closeness to Jerusalem were a big thing." She commutes to Jerusalem for work, and her husband to Tel Aviv: "I don't see this as contested land," she emphasizes, but "for me it's a suburb of a big city and I come back at night."

Government incentives

According to the Yesha Council, an organization that represents and campaigns for West Bank settlements, at last count in June 2014 there were 382,031 Jewish settlers in the West Bank, not including East Jerusalem, which Israel does not consider occupied. This draw across the Green Line has been encouraged by consecutive Israeli governments.

Much of the state's help comes through the definition of roughly three-quarters of settlements as "national priority areas", along with other areas that are deemed to need a boost - communities close to the

borders with Lebanon or Gaza, or otherwise peripheral and underdeveloped.

National priority areas receive discounts on land and grants for mortgages, and those areas recognized by the Construction Ministry as national priority areas receive state investment in apartment infrastructure. In areas designated as the highest level of priority, there are discounts on land costs and development expenses.

Investment in settlement infrastructure such as roads is also key, and teachers who live in settlements receive generous assistance, including what the Israeli NGO B'tselem reports as 15-20 percent salary boost and government coverage for 75 percent of travel and 80 percent of home rental expenses. As national priority areas, the settlements also receive extra investment in education, including increased school hours and more funding.

Direct benefits to individuals have mostly been eliminated, with an income tax break lifted in 2003, allowing many in the settlement community to argue that that the settlements should be considered like any other Israeli city.

Zimmerman disputes the idea of unfair economic incentives drawing people onto Palestinian land. "People talk and talk about incentivization because of the past." Now, "there are no direct incentives - you don't get a bank loan, [for example]."

Natan Sachs, a fellow at the Brookings Institution's Center for



Israeli settlements have continued to grow in recent years despite criticism from the United Nations.

Middle East Policy and an expert on Israeli politics, agrees that there are "no direct incentives in the sense that there aren't grants."

But "there are lot of ways" to encourage settlement, "in particular the cost of land and permits... There is no overt incentivizing but there is still dramatic incentivizing in real terms."

Radicalization

The increase in "quality of life" settlers is a major shift from the settler movement's origins in the late 1960s, when after its victory in the 1967 war with Egypt, Jordan and Syria, Israel began moving its citizens into what it refers to as Judea

and Samaria, the biblical names for the occupied West Bank.

Many early settlers hoped to reclaim what they saw as biblical Israel, as Elie Pierpz, director of external affairs for the Yesha Council, explains.

"Religious consideration was a major driver of growth in the 70s and 80s. There is an ideological capacity - this is the last Zionist frontier; 100 years ago it was Tel Aviv, 60 years ago it was the Negev [desert in the south of Israel] and the ... [northern part of the country], and for the last 47 years it has been Judea and Samaria."

Continued on the back page

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Continued from page 8

The economics at the heart of Israel's "illegal" settlements

The phenomenon of the economic settler is a mixed bag. Ariel, for example, is a blend of immigrants from the former Soviet Union - secular and religiously observant but non ultra-Orthodox Jews.

Dror Etkes, an expert on settlements, argues that the difference in terminology between economic or quality of life settlers and their more ideological counterparts can't really be justified - all are part of the larger occupation project, whether they like it or not.

"When ideology meets economy it's always nicer, and the ideology eventually comes to align with self interest. People tell themselves stories ... it's very easy to be a settler. Whatever you don't want to see, you don't have to see."

Yet settlements, even those dominated by economic migrants, can shift beliefs towards the right.

Etkes notes that several recent violent attacks on Palestinians have come from these so-called "non ideological" settlements. Last month, a bilingual Hebrew-Arabic school in Jerusalem was set ablaze. Two of the three suspects, who have confessed to the crime, hail from Beitar Illit, not previously known for its far right wing beliefs.

And even as economic settlers may see themselves as nonpolitical or even left wing - Noa says she's "centre left, sometimes left" - by moving to the settlements, settlers'

voting patterns may change out of self-interest.

Ultraorthodox settlers are the paradigm of this change - largely poor, in the past 15 years many have moved to areas like Beitar Illit or Modi'in Ilit for cheap housing and a homogenous atmosphere, with plenty of space for their high birth rate. Historically, they were not interested in settlement or Zionist activism.

Neve Gordon, professor of politics and government at Ben-Gurion University and the author of Israel's Occupation, points out that the parties who represent this sector have shifted its policies. "In the early 1990s the Orthodox parties were in favour of a land compromise - today, much less so, because a large percent of their constituency lives in the occupied territories: space changes consciousness."

Obstacle to peace

The "quality of life" settler came into public consciousness after the 1993 Oslo agreement between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, when there was serious talk of territory swaps. It has long been assumed that large settlement blocs, either those close to Jerusalem such as Ma'ale Adumim, Beitar Illit, Modi'in Ilit, or those too big to move, and strategic places like Ariel, would be included in any future two-state solution.

But continuous surveys have suggested that a large percentage of non-ideological settlers would be prepared to leave their homes and move inside the Green Line, for a price.

At the moment though, said Sachs, "there's a perverse disincentive to leave." The Israeli public largely sees its government as having bungled the 2005 disengagement from Gaza, with some former settlers who were dragged from their homes on TV complaining about poor compensation and the government's inability to properly relocate them.

This makes those who might be willing to move from the West Bank, Sachs says, understandably wary. One group founded by a former Shin Bet director, Blue Light Future, advocates a unilateral and voluntary evacuation of settlers by payment.

Amit purchased her house right around the time of the Gaza pull-out, and said the possibility of an eventual evacuation, "was something that we did think about". Her area was often mentioned as one that was close enough to Jerusalem to eventually be included in Israel proper, and that was a selling point.

"If there was some compensation [as part of a peace deal] I don't see us saying 'we're staying under a Palestinian government.'"

But large settlement blocs like Ar-

iel are also unlikely to go anywhere, even in the event of an eventual peace settlement with the Palestinians. In some ways, they are simply too big to move.

To Zimmerman, who has been in Ariel for eight years, the concept of a payoff is irrelevant, as he doesn't see the Israeli government even attempting an evacuation of Ariel. "That's going to be handled by the elected government... they're going to make the policy on that and the consensus in Israeli politics is that Ariel is part of Israel, period."

It's perhaps this certainty that has led to house prices in Ariel shooting up: In the six years up to 2013, prices of new and secondhand homes increased by 104 percent. Other settlements saw increases, including Beitar Illit (80 percent) largely secular Efrat (77 percent), and Oranit (65 percent). While house prices in Israel proper have still outpaced those in the settlements, rising prices increase the pressure to find new settlements.

Pierpz is enthusiastic about the future of the settler project. "The extremely tight-knit communities (where hitchhiking is a way of life, doors often remain unlocked, young kids are safe on streets unsupervised late at night), are some of the reasons why people want to

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stay and raise multiple generations here."

Palestinian officials have said they will take into account the motivations of settlers in negotiating the boundaries of a future Palestinian state. In the end, they see all settlements as encroaching on Palestin-

ian land, whether the settlers have come for the fresh air and cheap accommodation or because of religious fervour.

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