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عيد مبارك .. وكل عام وانتم بالرف خيد

Seven million people in Yemen poor, three million lack food

By: Baleegh Al-Hutabi
For the Yemen Times

As many as seven million people in Yemen- 35 percent of the population of 22 million- are poor. Almost three million of them cannot provide for their basic needs and food.

These figures are high compared with the occasionally decreasing numbers in some other countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

According to Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank, Yemen ranks the first in the region in terms of high poverty rates.

The country needs YR 124.4 billion per year to eradicate poverty in society as well as achieve the establishment of a modern democratic state.

In the past, Yemen was called Arabia Felix- Happy Arabia. However, it has become the poorest Arab country, according to the UN, in spite of the efforts exerted since the 1990 unification. Many five-year development plans that adopted comprehensive reforms were launched, but not much was achieved due to the dominance of poverty, particularly in rural areas.

According to the latest report issued by Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Bank in December 2007, the number of poor has remained fixed as around seven million people for past eight years.

"The poverty reduction ratio has remained terrible if compared with the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the Yemeni government, which

made the poverty reduction as the first goal," said the report.

In a recent report issued by the Shura Council that was discussed last July, the number of the poor remained at seven million people, due to the high population growth estimated to be 3 percent. The report said that the increasing population is considered the major challenge in creating a modern state that respects citizens, protects their dignity and performs its duties including providing security and development.

While the report indicates that poverty was remarkably reduced in urban areas, it said that rural areas didn't witness any progress in poverty reduction, and over 40 percent of people in rural areas live in poverty.

"Although the poverty level decreased recently, it is still high compared with other Middle east and North African countries.

To tackle this situation and alleviate poverty in the country, the Yemeni government needs YR 124.4 billion annually, which is 4 percent of the country's GDP.

The report said that there is remarkable improvement in educating the poor and that poverty decreased among illiterate people from 45 percent in 1998, to 40 percent in 2008.

It further pointed to an increase in poor people's ability to attain health care when they have diseases compared with the situation in the past. They increased the use of local medical facilities. However, situation of the poor is still bad, as poor children are only limitedly vaccinated against measles and jaundice. In addition, they suffer from malnutrition. Poor women

deliver babies without medical care.

Many people have a hard time obtaining food, and around 12.5 percent of the poor (three million people) cannot provide their basic needs. About 50 percent of them live on less than two dollars a day.

It pointed out that the monthly aid that the government offers to the poor to alleviate poverty (social security salary) is only YR 2,000 for a whole family, not an individual.

The report pointed out that price hikes aggravated poverty in Yemen. Food security is tenuous prices jumped in Yemen two years before it occurred in the world, which made a big group of society bear burdens of this hike throughout the past years.

Mohammed Al-Mekhlafi, a professor of economics at Sana'a University, said that the situation of Yemen is far from aspirations of its people to achieve the establishment of a real modern democratic state.

Saif Al-Asali, former Minister of Finance, attributed poverty in Yemen three main reasons: laziness, extravagance and lack of ambition. He said that to come out of this situation, individuals, society and the state should discuss consequences and negative impacts of the problems. He said Yemenis should work towards achieving justice, raising awareness and boosting the level of ambition among society.

Preventing oppression, raising awareness and encouraging cooperation would also help improve the situation, he said.

Poverty harms Yemeni women more than any other society members. They are not involved in managing econom-



Many Yemeni find it difficult to obtain food, and around three million people cannot provide for their basic needs. About 50 percent of them live on less than two dollars a day.

ic and environmental resources. According to a study conducted by the National Committee for Women, there is a wide gap in enrollment in basic education between girls and boys.

The difference in rates of enrollment in education between rural and urban areas is attributed to weak access to education services in rural areas.

The study revealed that many women are subjected to the aggravating aspects of poverty, which obliges them to practice double roles inside and outside home. Many women are unable to manage affairs of their life.

A recent governmental economic report revealed expectations that the total poverty indicator will decrease in Yemen to 32.8 percent in 2010 and that

the gap between rural and urban areas will shrink.

According to the third five-year development plan and poverty reduction for 2006 to 2010, the poverty indicator should decrease to 19.8 percent by the end of 2009.

The gap in urban areas should decrease 8 percent against 23.4 percent in rural areas. The report also expects that unemployment in Yemen will decrease to 15.2 percent by 2010.

Mutahhar Al-Abbasi, deputy Minister of Planning for Development Plans Sector, confirms that the government exerts efforts to eradicate poverty based on a strategic vision for Yemen in 2025 which aims to move Yemen to countries of mid-human development through economic, political, social and knowledge variety.

The report revealed that the government is still facing a number of challenges, the

most important of which the weak participation ratio, 39 percent in economic activity and the weak education level of workers. More than 62 percent of workers do not have a basic education.

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Arabia Felix 103: despite crippling travails, Yemen draws eager tourists

Don't judge a book by its cover, particularly if its title includes words like "war," "terrorism," "separatists," "poverty," "illiteracy" and "kidnappings."

Reports from Yemen point to separatists tugging at its south, Al Qaeda using it as a base of activities, northern Houthi rebels fighting a sixth war against government troops, a corruption-saddled economy, poverty, foreign refugees, dwindling oil revenues, and a largely illiterate population.

But the country is quite a draw for visitors, travails notwithstanding. All is not bleak in the land historically known as Arabia Felix, or "Al Yaman Al Saed" ("happy Yemen" in Arabic), where thrill-seekers have ventured since time immemorial.

Sana'a literally takes first-timers' breath away at an altitude of 2,200 meters (7,217 feet) above sea level.

The capital's dry, dusty, polluted air - except for occasional flash floods - requires constant drinking to avoid dehydration.

A visit to Sana'a's old district through a once fortified gate is a throwback in time.

Traditional mud brick buildings therein are no threat to taller structures (maximum 20 floors) a few blocks

away. More dangerous are pedestrians competing with cyclists, occasional cars, wheelbarrows loaded with merchandise, animals and vendors in narrow labyrinthine alleys.

Fabric shops, spices, perfumes, incense, jewelry, antiques, food (cooked, dry or questionable), traditional "janbiyyas" (curved daggers), handicrafts and the ubiquitous qat to which almost everyone is addicted, jostle for space in the old souk.

According to a guide for novices, don't ask a man to show you his janbiyya [unsheathe it], because Yemeni chivalry permits it only to be drawn for use.

Yemeni 'aqeeq (agate) is a must-buy for semi-precious stone lovers.

Needless to say, bargaining is de rigeur and it's advisable to have a native alongside, even for Arabic-speaking tourists.

In another part of the capital stands the majestic Al Saleh mosque, named after Yemeni President Ali Abdallah Saleh, with its six towering minarets and 44,000-worshiper capacity.

The edifice inaugurated last fall houses a Koranic and Islamic Sciences college that can accommodate 600 students.

According to *Yemen Today* magazine,



Gate to old Sana'a.

the mosque cost \$60 million — an outrage to critics, given the country's reputation as the poorest in the Arab world.

After a hard day's sightseeing, visitors flock to the popular Al Beik Shibani restaurant and bakery for a traditional meal of freshly baked flat, round "roushoush" bread, spicy dishes and charbroiled fish or meat.

There's no booze and tablecloths are

rolls of plastic wrap changed with every customer, but the food is good, the atmosphere friendly, and according to an Arab journalist: "If you haven't eaten at Shibani's, you haven't visited Yemen."

A drive up unpaved roads to rocky hills overlooking Sana'a leads to Bait Baws, where even poorer Yemenis live, and where gays are said to rendezvous away from the preening eyes of their



Fresh-baked "roushoush" bread at Al Beik Shibani restaurant.

very conservative compatriots.

The weathered structures carved over the centuries by Mother Nature include houses precariously perched atop gnarled boulders etched by sand, water and a ruthless sun.

Students of El Greco's chiaroscuro would appreciate the landscape's colors against a backdrop of spiritual clouds, akin to the painter's representation of Toledo.

In fact, amazing rock formations seem a staple of many parts of Yemen - a country noted for deserts, valleys, mountains and coastal areas.

Unfortunately, Yemen's infrastructure is woefully underserved, and roads to what could be exotic spots require sturdy four-wheel drives, indestructible tires and even sturdier staminas to withstand the rough rides.

Another seemingly endless bumpy but memorable trek meandering through valleys and riverbeds is the must-see castle and museum called Dar Al Hajar (Rock House) built on hard limestone jutting out of the ground.

Situated a mere 10 kilometers (6 miles) from Sana'a, Dar Al Hajar is an architectural marvel reportedly erected in the 18th Century A.D.

It served as a summer residence of past Yemeni rulers before being turned into a museum.

Writing in the January/February 1965

issue of the oil company magazine *Aramco World*, G. Lankester Harding said Arabia Felix (Fortunate Arabia) was the name chosen by the Romans for the lands on the southern fringe of the Arabian Peninsula.

"At the time there were many reasons for the Romans to believe that South Arabia was a blessed land," he said, adding that neither they, nor anyone else, knew enough about that mysterious and unexplored region to refute or dispute the legends about Arabia Felix.

Those legends, going back many years prior to the rise of Roman power, held that it was out of the South Arabian kingdoms that the Queen of Sheba emerged in all her glory to confront King Solomon in all of his, Harding wrote.

The legends also said inhabitants of Sheba had amassed vast treasures—stores of alabaster, spices, perfumes, ivory, tortoise shell, precious woods, pearls and silks—which they occasionally brought forth in great quantities to exchange for gold and silver, Harding noted.

The inhospitable terrain, weather and occasional kidnapping of foreigners may keep the faint-hearted at bay, but itinerant archeologists, scholars and adventure seekers still flock to Arabia Felix.



Amazing rock formations in Yemen.



Danger-dead end sign at picnic and kidnapping site in Yemeni wilderness.

An interview with Bahraini political analyst Abdul Nabi Al-Ikri

Yemeni crisis

There are indications of an increased crisis situation in Yemen. Sana'a is waging a war against Houthi tribes who are requiring a greater role, and in the south there are express demands for secession, giving Yemeni unity its biggest challenge in years.

In addition to this, there is an obvious increase in the role of Islamic fundamentalist groups as well as a slumping economy.

These are situations that can kindle conflict in Yemen, a country that has a distinguished location in the region.

Haidar Mohammed met Mr. Abdul Nabi Al-Ikri, a Bahraini political activist on Fox, a program published by alwasatonline.net. Al-Ikri is one of the outstanding human rights activists in Bahrain. He founded the first human rights committee in Bahrain in 1982. He is interested in Yemeni affairs and he has followed them up closely through his writings and events he participated in during the last three decades.

First of all, what is going on in Yemen? There is a war against Houthis in Sa'ada, the south is seeking secession and Al-Qaeda promises more operations. What is happening exactly, Mr. Al-Ikri? This reflects a decline in the political system that has let problems accumulate and then erupt one by one. Problems are raised not only by the opposition, but also by people from inside the regime who are calling for a serious national dialogue in order to face such drawbacks.

But why should all these crises break out now? Is there a meaning behind this timing?

The problems have not started today. The Houthi trouble for example, has been going on for three years. And as for the south, since the 1994 civil war at least there has been no stability. There were periods of quiet, but since 1994 the situation has never been under control. It was rather a crisis following a crisis.

We have seen the Socialist Party, a key partner to Yemeni unity, being practically excluded from power and marginalized. Little by little, the matter has become non-ideological. Regardless of being socialist or non-socialist, there is a common feeling that the people in the south are being disregarded and that southern interests and lands are being extorted by powerful people whom we should describe as northern, because extortion is not restricted to a specified area. This is an issue that has erupted in the south for the three past years, but it has been brewing under the surface at least since 1994.

You have been an informant about Yemeni affairs for many years. What are the roots of such crises?

I think that these current crises existed even before unity. There was a non-self-defined regime in the north and a despotic regime in the south. In the north, there was a monopolization of authority and wealth. Unity came as an escape or a magic solution. Well, it was supposed to be the solution, but the plagues of the former regimes overweighed the new promising project of unity being accompanied by reforms and democracy. Unfortunately,



authority was split as if it were loot and the result was bloody strife that ended in the war of 1994, at which point the state became worse than they had been before the unity.

Should we presume that this is merely an internal crisis, or is there regional and international intervention?

I don't think that there is any regional intervention because all surrounding countries are either incapable of taking an action or don't want to intervene in Yemeni affairs. Instability is dangerous to these countries, as shown by the war with the Houthis which has reached the Saudi borders. Borders are not walls that separate countries, after all. Therefore, I believe that the crisis, its reasons and its solutions are all internal.

Do you expect a deal between the Houthis and the authority?

In my opinion, deals are useless because there were a number of deals in the past with several parties involved that came to nothing. Other than the Houthis, there was the Islah party, which is close to the regime. The deal was made while the late Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein Al-Ahmar was

still alive, but deals are of no use. What are more useful are radical solutions that address the problem.

The regime needs to be renewed because it is restricted to a limited elite and its basis is becoming narrower. What is needed, as demanded by the JMP, is a serious dialogue. I believe that could be done through a summit attended by a group of people that is accepted by all. The present leadership has been in power for a long time, so why doesn't it step down for a president that is agreed upon by all sides and for a national government? This is the solution in my opinion because the current ruling elite are not able to handle the current problems.

But there are some who say that there is political multiplicity in Yemen, that there are political and social movements and free newspapers. How do you reply to this?

There is a movement that does not make change, a multiplicity that does not lead to a power handover and a press that does not create real effect. We all know that after 1994 war the GPC is the single authority and that the presidency is still the same, and we know that the margin in which the opposition operates is very narrow. The game does not lead to change.

It is noticeable that there is an international silence concerning what is happening in Yemen. How do you explain this?

Yemen is not an oil country, and Somalia and Sudan have greater problems. I think that we should not wait for the world to come to our rescue. We should do that ourselves.

The responsibility is that of Yemenis, especially those in power, because this stubbornness in accusing others of secession, treason and otherwise benefits no one.

What is helpful is the gathering of the authority, the opposition and those considered as insurgents to consider ways to settle the problems. I do not acquit Arab leaders because they let others intervene in their affairs instead of solving such issues themselves.

Arabs also have responsibility: they should not let an Arab regime go down under the pretext of national sovereignty because the Arab League Pact does not accept this and the Arab Joint Defense Pact provides that all Arab countries should cooperate to solve their problems together.

Why was there an intervention in Lebanon? And if that happened in Lebanon, why shouldn't it happen in other countries? I'm not talking about a military intervention as was the case in Lebanon. But there is a responsibility not to leave an Arab country to fight alone. And even if an Arab regime wishes to commit suicide, we should let it do that.

The president's political counsel, Dr. Abdul Karim Al-Iriani, attributed all problems to economic factors, namely the expansion of poverty. Is this a realistic reason from your point of view?

I don't think so. Yemen has wealth. However, the FAO expects a famine next year and at the moment, half of Yemen's population lives below the poverty line. What has caused this is corruption, the monopoly of power and a work situation that does not encourage productivity in addition to

inflation and nepotism. All of this has turned the State into a dairy cow for bribery and corruption, forcing people with qualifications to leave Yemen.

But President Saleh keeps saying that national dialogue is possible provided that it is not related to foreign agendas.

Talking about such agendas is meaningless. If there should be a dialogue, it should not be among the deaf. It should be serious about the idea that what is agreed on should be implemented. In my opinion, Yemen needs a provisional national unity government, at least for enough time to conduct a national comprehensive dialogue leading to free and fair elections. There are countries that have undergone similar crises. Why don't we take Mauritania as an example, which despite some defects, has overcome its problems to some extent although it is a very poor country?

Other countries suffered from civil wars like Lebanon and yet were able to move past it. It is not Yemen's fate not to pass through this crisis without doing anything about it. There should be real will, not a time-wasting or time-winning dialogue.

How do you expect developments to be in the coming months?

I expect deterioration, especially since we know that the country's security is failing, the economic situation is bad and it is rapidly worsening and Yemen's oil reserves are running out. I believe that within 10 years, Yemen's oil reserves will be depleted and the problem will be even greater. If the current situation should continue, there is possibility of civil war in the country.

Aziza Al-N'uman, director of training and qualifying at the Disabled Qualifying and Care Fund:

“Disabled people are innovative and have remarkable capacity.”

According to UN statistics, about 10 percent of people are either mentally or physically disabled. Based on this rate, there are around one million disabled people in Yemen. This number will increase in future due to increase of population growth and traffic accidents. Reports confirm that traffic accidents cause many physical handicaps.

Mohammed Ghouth interviewed Aziza Al-N'uman, director of qualifying and training at the Disabled Qualifying and Care Fund, and asked her about services, programs and financial support available to disabled people in Yemen.



What are the services that the fund offers in the field of social care?

The Disabled Qualifying and Care Fund supplies needs and requirements of Social Care Fund to the disabled. Since it was established in 2002, the fund's services have been increasing. The total services the fund offered in the field of social care amounted to YR 158,538 from 2002 to 2008 per each individual covered by the fund.

What kind of medical services do the disabled people receive from the fund?

Medical treatment and services that the fund offers to the disabled vary. They include major and minor surgical operations such as orthopedic surgeries, ophthalmologic surgeries including cataract extraction, corneal implantation, fixing lenses and associated requirements such as conducting tests and providing medicine.

Medical services also include natural treatment and other surgical operations such as adjusting spinal defects, plastic surgery, urinary tract surgery and obstetric and gynecological services.

The fund offered 94,316 medical and treatment services the fund offered from 2002 to 2008.

How many disabled people benefited from qualifying and training programs?

The expenses that the fund spent in the field of qualifying and training amounted to over YR 304,790 million between 2002 and 2008. Up to 126,546 disabled people benefited from these activities through 104 centers and private organizations working in the field of qualifying and training the disabled in the different governorates of the country.

In this field, the fund supports the institutional activities and projects. It further covers the expenses of workshops, seminars and conferences. It provides funds for sports, technical and cultural activities. Between 2005 and 2008, the number of participants in such activities amounted to 330, and the cost amounted to over YR 64 million.

In addition, the fund supports participation in sports activities held outside the country and the Yemeni disabled

athletes have achieved excellent results.

What kind of material and financial aid does the fund offers?

The fund provides medical equipment and other equipment like wheelchairs, specially equipped mattresses, devices for draining water from the brain and as devices that test diabetics. The fund also offers financial assistance for cases that requires treatment abroad. The number of financial and material assistances that the fund offered to the disabled between 2002 and 2008 amounted to 42,096 cases.

Can you give us figures on the disabled in the field of education?

The fund offers individual education services to disabled students in both private and public schools. These services include providing education fees, education and transportation services. The fund also holds integration programs. The number of services offered in this field to 21,580 cases between 2002 and 2008.

What kinds of programs of social integration does the fund offer to the disabled?

We integrate the disabled into society and private schools through assigning special classrooms for the deaf and mute students. For blind students, we integrate them in public schools and provide them with all of their needs. The students also go through a preparation process before they are integrated into the school. This helps prepare the disabled psychologically, as some of them refuse to go to school.

We also provide the disabled with the opportunity to study in universities and provide them with needs. Currently, we pay special attention to the disabled in the rural areas. The programs that will be offered to them are the same as those offered to the disabled in the cities.

What kind of support do you offer to help integrate disabled people into the job market?

We are working on integrating them into the different fields. Every year, we see a number of innovative disabled people enter into the different professions. We are also working on enabling the disabled to work within the community. Every handicap has a different kind of training. The fund provides training for the deaf and mute inside the associations including engineering, mechanics, electronic engineering, carpentry and blacksmithing.

Generally, physically disabled people have more capabilities than the mentally disabled. Currently, we are coordinating with Al-Amal bank to provide job opportunities. We care a lot about providing jobs for people who are able to work.

However, we don't have enough support because we don't have support

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from the government or international organizations. The main supporter of the fund is the private sector. Most of the support comes to us from the Tobacco and Matches Company.

What is your vision of the disabled as innovative people?

The disabled have become able to work due to development in the different fields of life. I was attracted by a Palestinian disabled person when he innovated a small car that enabled him to attain his living. He called on the Arab countries to support him in his innovation, as the car is good for the

environment. Disabled people have a lot of capacity. They may lose use of some part of their body, but they still have talents. For instance, they compete in international championships. Recently, the Yemeni mentally disabled were able to win the world hockey championships held in the US.

The Yemeni disabled and their peers in the developing countries lack a lot of things and suffer from a lot of problems. In the developed countries, the disabled are often provided with all the needs that can enable them to dream, aspire and achieve their targets.

Worsening drought threatens herders

Severe drought in Khawlan District, 70km east of the capital Sanaa, since mid-2007 has forced local herders to sell some of their sheep to buy fodder for the rest.

“Now we use grain as animal fodder to complement grazing but fodder prices have increased threefold over the past two years,” said Ali al-Qanis, aged 74, a local herder with 50 sheep. “These steep price hikes mean a sheep or goat is becoming a financial liability.”

To make matters worse, the selling price for a breeding ewe had dropped from around YR18,000 (US\$89) in early 2008 to YR11,000 (\$54) in 2009, he said.

While livestock farming constituted only 2.5 percent of Yemen's GDP in 2008, according to Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation Mohammed Al-Ghassm, it is an important source of revenue in several parts of southeastern Yemen, which has been hit by frequent droughts.

Livestock is the main income source for over three million people in the southeast, according to Mansoor al-



Hardly any herding communities have water networks, relying only on underground cisterns filled by rainwater.

Qadasi, director-general of animal health and veterinary quarantine, based in Sana'a.

Al-Qadasi said malnutrition was to blame for a drop in dairy production, high abortion rates and the spread of blood parasites and epidemics among ruminants. “Thousands of sheep and goats die of malnutrition... We have no accurate data on animal mortality as it is difficult to get from herders, most of whom are illiterate or lack awareness,” he told IRIN.

How donors can help

Al-Qadasi urged donor countries to help Yemen by providing capacity building training for herders, and training on how to cope with drought through pasture management and efficient fodder storage. “They can support epidemic surveillance programmes at the Agriculture Ministry to expand field activities,” he said.

Abdullah Al-Numan, an environment specialist at Sanaa University, said the Agriculture Ministry should train herders on grass management, random grazing prevention and provide them



Children driving with their goats through a parched area in search of pasture.

with tanks to harvest rainwater for use during dry seasons.

Families who are entirely dependent on herding for their livelihoods are the most affected by drought, as they have no alternative sources of income. These families lack the skills to take up alternative crafts or jobs, according to Ahmad Tallan al-Harithi, chairman of the Brotherhood Society for Social Development (BSSD) in Shabwa, about 400km east of Sana'a.

“Shabwa, where 65 percent of its 466,000 population are in rural areas raising cattle and growing crops, hasn't seen any good rainfall for the past 12 years,” al-Harithi told IRIN. “Over 300,000 herders and farmers in Shabwa and roughly the same number in the nearby provinces of al-Beidha, Marib and Lahj are affected by drought.”

In times gone by, when rainfall was more abundant and predictable, herders could expect to triple the number of their livestock within two or three years. “But these days, sheep and goats

die of malnutrition... tens of thousands of herders have drifted from cattle-raising as a result,” Mohammed al-Aidarous, a local councillor from al-Beidha, some 160km southeast of Sana'a, told IRIN.

“Families in these communities, particularly herders, face extreme poverty and life-threatening food insecurity... They are under growing pressure to sell their livestock at lower prices,” he said. “Thousands of herders are moving with their livestock to faraway areas in search of pasture.”

Hardly any herding communities have water networks. They rely only on underground cisterns filled by rainwater - if there is any - or trucked-in water, al-Aidarous said, adding that trucked water was sold at a higher price in remote villages.

In al-Qabbaita District of Lahj Province, 300km south of Sanaa, more than 40,000 pastoralists face difficulties accessing drinking water for themselves and their livestock, he said.

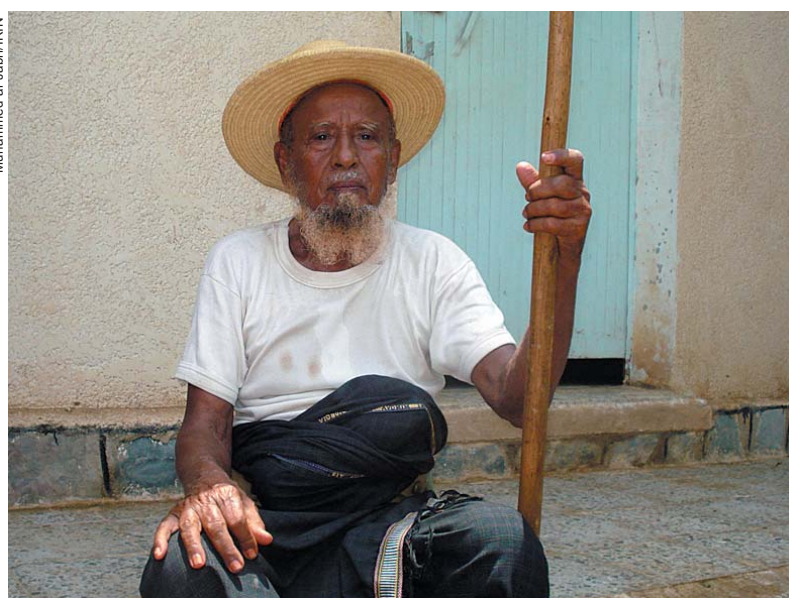
Plea for subsidized feed, water

Hani Merai, a veterinarian working for the Ministry of Agriculture, said prices for good quality barley fodder are at record highs - increasing from YR500 (\$2.5) to YR950 (\$4.75) per 12-kg sack - while cheaper alternatives can cause malnutrition resulting in a variety of health problems including high abortion and young lamb mortality rates.

“Fodder increases an animal's need for water and as the drought continues, extra water must be bought,” he said. “Making a livelihood from livestock is not that easy.”

Herders are in urgent need of government support to help their flocks survive. “Unless there is immediate support to herders with subsidized feed and water, many of them will be forced out of herding and the livelihood that has supported them for decades will be lost,” al-Harithi said.

Source: IRIN



Some 35 percent of Yemen's population of 21 million live beneath the poverty line.

A few notes about Yemeni coffee

The word coffee came into English from Latin, which got the word from Turkish, which took its word from the Arabic 'qahwa'.

The earliest accounts of coffee beans are from Ethiopia and Yemen. There is a folk story about antics of goats who had consumed coffee beans, so the shepherd tried the beans himself and felt the same effects as the goats. This story is also related in A Thousand and One Nights as a Yemeni shepherd but it seems that the beans and the story in fact originated in Ethiopia.

One of the oldest known records of the use of coffee indicate that it was prescribed as a cure for intestinal difficulties as early as the tenth century by a Muslim doctor.

An oasis in Yemen on the Red Sea, called Mocha, became the world's major exporter of coffee. Coffee beans from Mocha's high plain were shipped to the capitals of the Muslim



Yemen is unique because the dry processed skins, the coffee husk, is nearly as valuable as the seed. It is used for Keshir (Quesher), tea sweetened with sugar. It's excellent, and hopefully we will be able to offer this soon as a product. So the warehouse is as much a Keshir warehouse as a coffee warehouse.

world. The Arab rulers of Mocha insured that the cultivation of coffee would not spread by scalding all the green beans that were shipped from their port.

Yemen's hold on the lucrative coffee trade faded as coffee plants were able to flourish in other areas of the world through cuttings from Yemeni coffee plants.

Both the Dutch and the Sultan of Yemen gifted Louis XIV of France with coffee trees, which were planted in the King's Garden in Paris. In the 1720s an infantry captain stationed in Martinique finagled two plants from the then king, which he transported back to the Caribbean not without difficulties. The young captain, one de Clieu, tended his plants through, storm, attack by pirates and a lack of water, arriving in Martinique with only one of the coffee plants. The cherries produced in its first yield were distributed on the island and also to Guadeloupe and Santo Domingo.

Jamaica, Haiti, and the countries of Central America were soon to follow as producers of coffee.

The worldwide demand for coffee gave rise to the slave trade. Slaves from Africa were shipped to Haiti by the French, to Surinam by the Dutch, and to Brazil by the Portuguese. There were a half million Africans working in Haiti by the time of the Insurrection in 1791, when the island was set ablaze. Until then half of the world's coffee had been produced there.

Back to Yemen, an these days, almost all the coffee growing areas of Yemen have been devoured by qat farming (narcotic plant). Qat is much thirstier than coffee and more harmful to consumers and society in general. I can't see the scourge of qat being eradicated anytime soon.

There was apparently a time in the past when coffee drinking was encouraged by the administration to move people away from chewing qat. Qat won. Check the photos below, how on earth did qat win over coffee? Mocha, the traditional port for coffee is now a run-down sea-side town with crumbling infrastructure.

The coffee production that does still exist in Yemen is top quality. The flavors are amongst the best coffees I have ever tasted from anywhere in the world and to top it off, Yemeni coffee is extremely cheap. In UAE I used to pay 30 Dirham for a 200gram semi-decent ground coffee usually imported from Europe. Yemeni coffee is around 10 Dirham, far better tasting and grown and produced by Yemenis.

Some of the companies marketing European style ground Yemeni coffee are Al-Kabous, who also produce all types of local style coffees and Yemen Coffee Mill also produce a very good quality coffee.

If you come across some Yemeni coffee, grab a pack. You won't be let down!

Source: Glad Tidings to the Strangers:
algharibablog@hotmail.com



Winnowing coffee where the worker used the motion of the aluminum pans to separate the seed from the skin.



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Images of Ramadan from around the world

Here are some fascinating pictures The Boston Globe's The Big Picture displayed on their page. This truly captures and shows the beauty and multicultural celebration that is Ramadan.



Symbolizing the faith of Islam, the crescent moon is seen at sunset on top of the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, Pakistan, Tuesday, Sept. 16, 2008.



An officer of Brunei's Islamic authority looks through a telescope as he performs "rukyah", the sighting of the new moon for Ramadan, over the skies of Bukit Agok outside Bandar Seri Begawan August 31, 2008. Muslims scan the sky at dusk at the end of their lunar calendar's eighth month in search of the new moon to proclaim the beginning of Ramadan.



A Palestinian man reads from the Koran, during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan, in a mosque in the West Bank city of Jenin, Thursday, Sept. 11, 2008.



Indonesian men attend Friday prayer at Istiqlal mosque, the biggest in Southeast Asia, in Jakarta, Indonesia, Friday, Sept. 12, 2008.



Jordanian Muslim girls queue in line outside a humanitarian center waiting for meals to be donated at the time for the breaking of their fast, or Iftar, on the 13th day of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan in Amman, Jordan, Saturday, Sept. 13, 2008.



This picture taken September 5, 2008 shows a stall worker preparing roasted chicken wings to be sold at a Ramadan bazaar in downtown Kuala Lumpur for the breaking of their fast. In Muslim households across Asia, the inflation crisis is casting a shadow over the holy month of Ramadan, and making the nightly ritual of breaking the fast a more meagre affair.



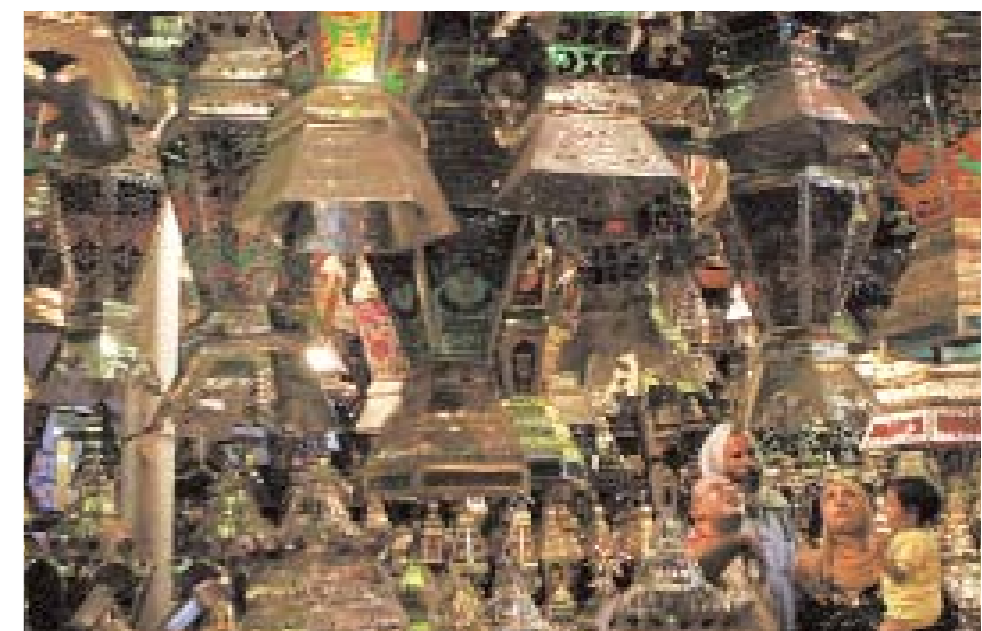
Kashmiri Muslims pray inside the Jamia Masjid, or Grand Mosque, on the first Friday of Ramadan in Srinagar, India, Friday, Sept. 5, 2008.



A Pakistani man prepares sweet drinks for people to break their fast at a mosque during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan in Lahore on September 3, 2008.



A seller of traditional Syrian sweets calls out for customers in the Meidan quarter of Damascus September 2, 2008. Sales of the sweets go up during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.



An Egyptian family looks to buy chandeliers



The Al-Zaim family of Duxbury, Massachusetts sits, gathered together for their dinner after 7pm on September 14th, 2008, to break their Ramadan Fast.



Thai Muslim children pray at a mosque during Ramadan in Narathiwat province in Thailand on September 9, 2008.



Afghan men offer prayers on a hill top overlooking Kabul, Afghanistan on September 8, 2008, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.



A boy sleeps in a mosque while waiting to break his fast on the first day of Ramadan in Makassar, Indonesia on September 1, 2008.



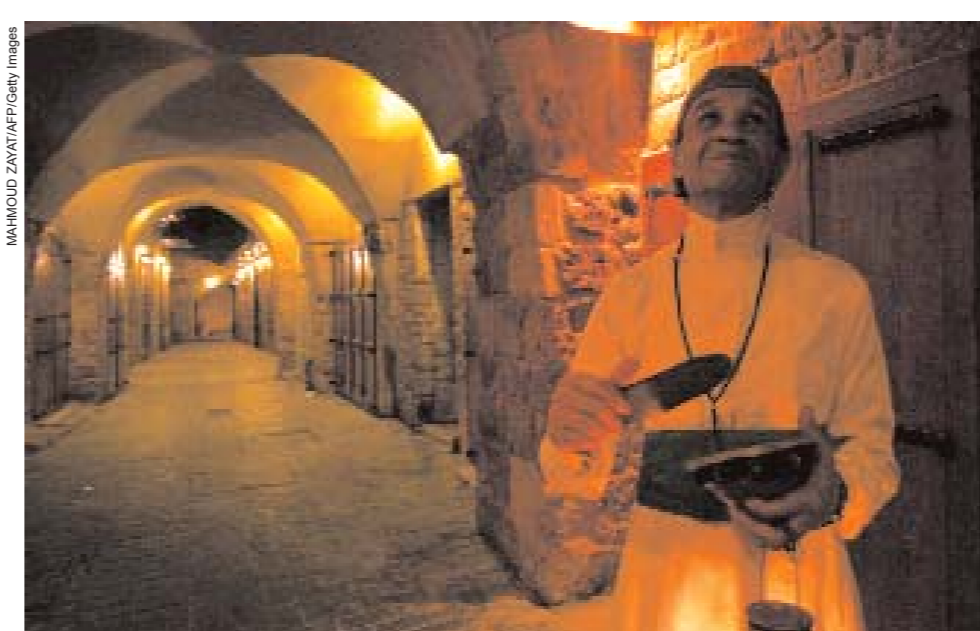
Workers sew prayer caps in a factory in old Dhaka, Bangladesh on September 18, 2008. Prayer caps have huge demand during the holy month of Ramadan.



Kashmiri Muslims offer prayers inside the Jamia Masjid, or Grand Mosque, on the first Friday of Ramadan in Srinagar, India, Friday, Sept. 5, 2008.



A child prepares food for Iftar (evening meal) before the breaking of fast on the first day of Ramadan at Memon Mosque in Karachi, Pakistan on September 2, 2008.



Lebanese Musaharati Mohammed Fanas wakes up observant Muslims for their overnight suhur meal before the day's fast in Sidon's Old City in south Lebanon just before dawn on September 3, 2008.



Visually impaired Palestinian students read verses of the Qu'ran, Islam's holiest book, written in Braille, during the holy fasting month of Ramadan at Al-Qabas Islamic school in the West Bank city of Ramallah, Sunday, Sept. 7, 2008.



Workers dry vermicelli, a specialty eaten during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad, India on September 5, 2008.

Rubbish the rubbish food and embrace a healthy lifestyle

By: Shobha Shukla

Diabetes is a major health challenge, particularly in a developing country like India. Yet, we seem to be closing our eyes to this silent killer. Increasingly, younger people, including children, are developing diabetes, with the potential to cause serious complications that can derail lives and overwhelm health care budgets.

With India being at the threshold of an outbreak of obesity, insulin resistance syndrome and type-2 diabetes in children and adolescents, it is of immediate importance that we focus on the primary prevention of obesity and inculcation of healthy diet/ life style practices be started from infancy. Children/adolescents (especially those residing in urban areas) are at an increased risk for development of early onset of type-2 diabetes and coronary heart disease, more so due to nutritional westernization and sedentary life styles.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Dr Martin Silink, president of the International Diabetes Federation (IDF). He lamented that schools were not encouraging sports and that computers were overtaking the play fields. He wished that people would go back to the sensible living of yesteryears and make the children rubbish the junk food and their sedentary life style. They need to walk/ cycle/ run/ play,

rather sit for long hours before the television/ computers. Otherwise diabetes and other non communicable diseases will subvert the gains of economic development in India. He also advocated the concept of 'health screening' of children at the school level. Singapore is already doing this and so is Japan, which is witnessing an unprecedented increase of type-2 diabetes in children.

The aim of the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) is to alleviate human suffering related to diabetes by focusing on prevention and care right from womb to adulthood. The ultimate aim is to encourage governments, policy makers and funding bodies worldwide to prioritize prevention and care. If appropriate public health action is not taken, disability and premature deaths from heart disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic heart disease will grow by more than 21% in Southeast Asia over the next 10 years.

The theme of the World Diabetes Day (WDD) for 2009-2013 is "Diabetes education and prevention." The World Diabetes Day (WDD) campaign is led by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) and its member associations. The WDD campaign calls on all those responsible for diabetes care to understand diabetes and take control. For people with diabetes, this is a message about empowerment through education. For governments, it is a call to implement effective

strategies and policies for the prevention and management of diabetes to safeguard the health of their citizens with and at risk of diabetes. For healthcare professionals, it is a call to improve knowledge so that evidence-based recommendations are put into practice. For the general public, it is a call to understand the serious impact of diabetes and know, where possible, how to avoid or delay diabetes and its complications.

The World Diabetes Day (WDD) campaign slogan for 2009 is "Understand Diabetes and Take Control". Diabetes is difficult. The disease imposes life-long demands on the 250 million people now living with diabetes and their families. People with diabetes must deliver 95% of their own care, so it is of paramount importance that they receive ongoing, high-quality diabetes education that is tailored to their needs and delivered by skilled health professionals. In addition, IDF estimates that over 300 million people worldwide are at risk for type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes can be prevented in the many cases by helping and encouraging those at risk to maintain a healthy weight and take regular exercise.

India's former union health minister, Dr Anbumani Ramadoss, voiced similar concerns. He was emphatic that the aim of policies on health promotion should be to stimulate health awareness and to promote conditions which favored positive health. He was of the

opinion that food labeling should become mandatory in India, wherein all packaged food have to contain information about weight, and the nutritive/caloric value of the ingredients used. He emphasized that the threat from junk food should be taken seriously and that schools should ensure that no junk food—from pizzas to 'samosas' - is sold in school canteens, to create a facilitating environment for the students. He also underlined the importance of teaching Yoga compulsorily to school children, as it had proven beneficial effects on one's physical and mental health.

Health initiatives taken at the family and community level will have the potential to snowball into a major health movement, which is indeed the need of the hour.

The role of parents, community, schools and teachers in contributing to the health of a nation is of paramount importance.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General's Awardee (2005) Professor (Dr) Rama Kant who heads the Diabetic-Foot Care clinic in Department of Surgery, CSM Medical University, Lucknow, is of the opinion that the role of family and community will determine which way we want to proceed: the sweet path leading to bitter results or a healthy lifestyle. According to him, glucose monitoring in type-1 diabetes (a metabolic disorder in which the body produces insufficient insulin), requires constant fam-

ily support. Type-2 diabetes is linked to obesity which in turn is linked to modern lifestyle changes. Parents are overworked and find it convenient to let their children feed on fast foods from an early age. High burden of school work, craze for the internet and lack of appropriate play areas in schools and around homes makes it difficult for them to remain active. Keeping this in mind, Prof Rama Kant is currently running the diabetes education project called 'MARG' (path), in many schools of Lucknow, with a view to prevent obesity and diabetes through healthy eating and active living.

According to Dr Samlee Plianbangchang, the regional director of WHO's South East Asian Regional Office (SEARO), one should not live to eat but eat to live. His simple mantra to avoid diabetes is to eat a proper diet ('no gulabjamuns, please' he said jokingly) and do regular exercise. He quoted himself as an example of bringing down his blood sugar levels simply by leading a disciplined life. He wanted the media to play a major role in advocating awareness about the benefits of a balanced diet and wished that the 'anti cola drive' should not lose its fizz and should be carried forward.

So the message is loud and clear. The prevention programme for diabetes and other non communicable diseases should start from the time of conception of the child in the womb. The pregnant mother should take all

precautions to avoid gestational diabetes by managing her diet and physical activity. Once the child is born, proper food habits and tastes need to be developed in her/him right from infancy. Parents have to realize that feeding the toddler on coca colas and burgers is not a fashion statement. Rather, it is a diseased statement.

Television viewing and playing games on the internet should be drastically controlled, as this not only curtails the much needed physical activity, but also exposes young minds to the negative impact of junk food advertisements.

The proverbial seven to eight hours of sleep everyday are also very important. Recent studies have shown that insufficient sleep may trigger insulin resistance and reduced glucose tolerance.

So, when the unhealthy aspects of modern life styles are combined with reduced sleep duration, this might contribute to the increased risk of many overweight and sedentary individuals developing diabetes.

Only when we are healthy in mind and body, can we truly be called progressive as a nation.

(The author is the Editor of Citizen News Service (CNS), has worked earlier with State Planning Institute, UP, and teaches Physics at India's prestigious Loreto Convent. Email: shobha@citizen-news.org, website: www.citizen-news.org)

Denying democracy

By: Nu'man Abd al-Wahid

There is methodical logic in Iran's supreme Mullah singling out Britain and the British government's funded BBC Persia as the main foreign culprits in encouraging and fomenting sections of Iranian society to further actively question the outcome of the recent election. Britain's alleged attitude to Iran in the recent crises is no surprise to anyone who has merely glided into the history of the UK's relationship with the Iranian people and indeed the people of the Middle East.

A people's right to question the outcome of strongly perceived electoral irregularities is beyond dispute. Yet what moral right does the British government possess in carrying the beacon of pro-democracy agitation? The answer is a resolute and definite none.

Britain, with all its historical involvement in that part of the world, simply has no record in implementing democracy in the Middle East. Indeed, out of the major powers, only Britain had had the political power to

impose democracy in the early histories of the modern Middle Eastern states. However, in accordance with its perceived interests, it opted for the promotion of colonialism and monarchical despotism. Both these options were founded on the forceful denial of democracy to the indigenous populations.

For example, one of the foundational building blocks of Zionist colonialism under the British mandate in Palestine in the early part of the last century was the adamant British denial of democracy to Palestinians. Lloyd George, Prime Minister of the U.K. at the time of Britain's acquirement of Palestine ordered the Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill that he, "mustn't give representative government to Palestine." The reason for this was that before the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948, the indigenous Palestinian Arabs were by far the majority and major Zionist settlements had not yet been established. If democracy had been allowed in 1920's Palestine then Britain's colonial Zionist project would have been dealt

a "terrible blow."

Another example whereby Britain denied democracy was in 1920's Iraq. Britain imposed its colonial directorship of the country by imposing a puppet king. The Iraqi people wanted nothing to do with Britain's chosen candidate, King Faisal. The British imperial officers had other ideas. They rigged a referendum to produce the now familiar over 90 per cent of votes for Britain's candidate – the first of its kind in the region or as one British historian writes, "As yet popularity ratings of over 90 per cent were not recognised as the exclusive prerogative of unloved dictatorships."

We find the same ghastly anti-democratic tendencies in Iran in 1953. The Iranian people voted for a candidate, Muhammad Musaddiq that was not to the liking of the British. For a start he nationalised the oil industry which hitherto had been under British control and ipso facto run in accordance to the benefit of British capital. An affronted post-imperial Britain conjured a master plan and devised a coup d'état with a view to bringing Iranian oil profits

back into Her Majesty's government royal orbit.

However, with Britain no longer the imperial power it once was and with resources drawn to a minimum due to rebuilding the nation after the second world war, it needed to rope in the Americans in order for the anti-democratic coup to be a success. The reputable British journalist Patrick Cockburn recently wrote that one of the ways it convinced the Americans was to argue that the Iranian Communist party was on the verge of taking over Iran and therefore falling under the Soviet Union's orbit. But this is only half the story, if that.

Before Musaddiq's nationalisation Britain had pocketed 85-90% of Iranian oil profits while the rest was graciously left for the Iranian nation. Musaddiq's nationalisation of the oil industry left Britain with nothing. Therefore, to further convince the Americans of the necessity of a coup, Britain needed to financially cut them into what it had hitherto thought was its sphere of influence. The Americans were obliged to "dip their beak" (as

the fictional, small time crook Funnuci would have insisted on the young Don Corleone in the Godfather) into this British master plan.

A deal was done which guaranteed American oil corporations 40% of Iranian oil if it joined the UK in overthrowing Musaddiq. The rest is history which includes the raiding of the American embassy in Iran during the 1979 revolution and President Obama's admittance in Cairo that America played "a role" in the overthrow of Iranian democracy. Hence, the use of the indefinite article, 'a role' because the foundational role in concocting the coup d'état was Britain's alone. Unlike the United States, no UK head of state has yet to acknowledge Britain's leading role in concocting the coup.

"The Big Lie" writes a leader writer for the London Times, "about the election haunts every corner of Iranian life..." this may or may not be the actual case. And there is certainly a vast proportion of Iranians who would agree with this observation. Yet surely the 'Bigger Lie' that has 'phan-

tomised' the British media since the Iranians came out on the streets to protest the election results is that the British government has any interest in promoting Iranian democracy or the welfare of the Iranian people.

Barack Obama's Cairo speech was perceived by many as turning the page in relations between America and the Arab and Muslim world. Indeed one American writer goes so far to argue that the address was a departure from the usual "language of Anglo colonialism." Whether Obama's America will actually turn the page and subsequently withstand further British arguments in condemning and isolating regimes or will the US be once again roped into "dipping its beak" waits to be seen.

Nu'man Abd al-Wahid is a Yemeni freelance writer who aims to specialize in the relationship between the British state and the Arab world. My focus is on how Britain has maintained its position in the Arab World through war and ideas. He could be reached at: numan.abd.al-wahid@hotmail.co.uk

Israeli, Palestinian teens talk peace

By: Naazish YarKhan

Chicago, Illinois - Although Israelis and Palestinians have been meeting and communicating at a grassroots level to better understand one another and work toward a more peaceful future, the initiatives that bring them together do not receive the recognition that they deserve. Until a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is found, these grassroots initiatives remain vitally important.

One of these initiatives is Hands of Peace, which began in spring 2002 when Gretchen Grad and Deanna Jacobson, a Christian and Jew living in Northbrook, Illinois, began talking about how glad they were that their children were growing up with peers of different faiths. The

two neighbors had a vision to spread intercultural understanding beyond their own neighborhood and foster it in youth from the Middle East.

With the help of Nuha Dabbouseh, a member of the local Islamic Cultural Center (ICC), Gretchen and Deanna secured sponsorship from Glenview Community Church, B'nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim (BJBE), a Reform Jewish congregation, and the ICC, as well as the support of individual donors and local businesses.

Hands of Peace was born with the belief that bringing Israeli and Palestinian teens together in a safe, supportive and neutral setting could begin a dialogue that would promote understanding—and therefore a more peaceful future. While they realise that cultural appreciation alone is not enough to mend the animosities that have fuelled

generations of conflict, they recognize that putting a face on the "other" is part of the necessary groundwork for peaceful coexistence.

This summer, from 17 July to 3 August, 21 local families volunteered to host five Arab citizens of Israel, eight Palestinians and eight Jewish Israelis. The students and staff visited the Illinois-based Islamic Foundation in Libertyville, Glenview Community Church and the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation in Evanston to observe religious services and take advantage of educational opportunities.

Dialogue sessions are the heart of the Hands of Peace Summer Program and encourage participants to discuss contentious issues and develop critical thinking and communication skills. Each group is led by two facilitators

who work to create a safe environment in which participants can express their thoughts and feelings. Beginning with introductions and trust-building exercises, the groups establish ground rules and move on to discuss more contentious issues, gaining deeper understanding of the conflict.

As 18-year-old participant Jafar Qutob of Nablus explains, "I want to represent my people as they are: humans who are eager to have a better life than the one they are living today, a peaceful life without war, killing or any kind of violence. I will try to communicate and socialise with all different people regardless of their religion or nationality, and especially with Israelis, who I believe are humans like me".

During the intensive two-week program, American teens who serve as hosts join their Middle Eastern counter-

parts for daily dialogue sessions, team-building exercises and cultural activities. "It's also a great learning experience for the Americans who become much more aware of the conflict and its impact on their teen peers from the region. We've had program alumni go on to study Arabic or international relations, and to generally take a serious interest in world affairs", says Julie Kanak, Hands of Peace's executive director.

Board chair Debby Fosdick describes some of the longer-term results for Middle Eastern participants: "Many of these young people had no contact with the other side prior to Hands of Peace, and when they return home they make the effort to come together to continue the dialogue they started here. We've also had some parents in the region come together with their children in informal settings. Many of our partici-

pants have made presentations at their schools, not only about Hands of Peace specifically, but about the merits of non-violent conflict resolution."

While there is still a great deal of work in ensuring a peaceful coexistence in the Middle East, groups like Hands of Peace are essential in creating one part of that foundation.

Naazish YarKhan (www.naazish-yarkhan.blogspot.com) blogs for the Huffington Post, is an NPR commentator and writes a column, "Musings from America" for the Oman Observer. This article was written for the Common Ground News Service (CGNews). Source: Common Ground News Service (CGNews), 1 September 2009, www.commongroundnews.org Copyright permission is granted for publication.



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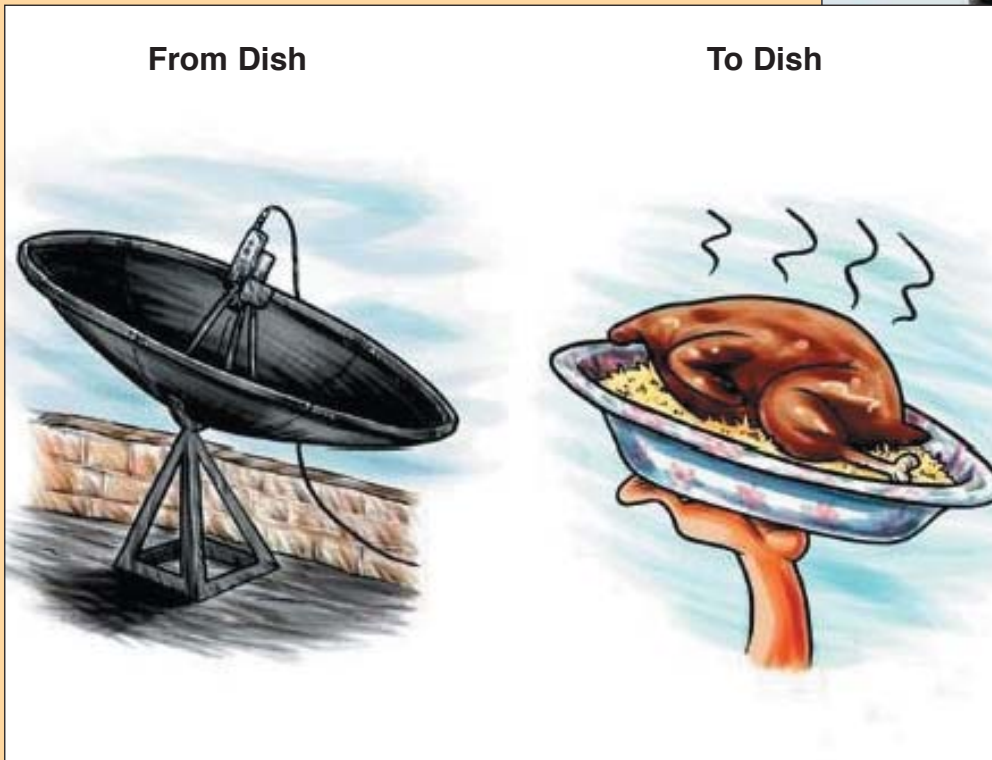
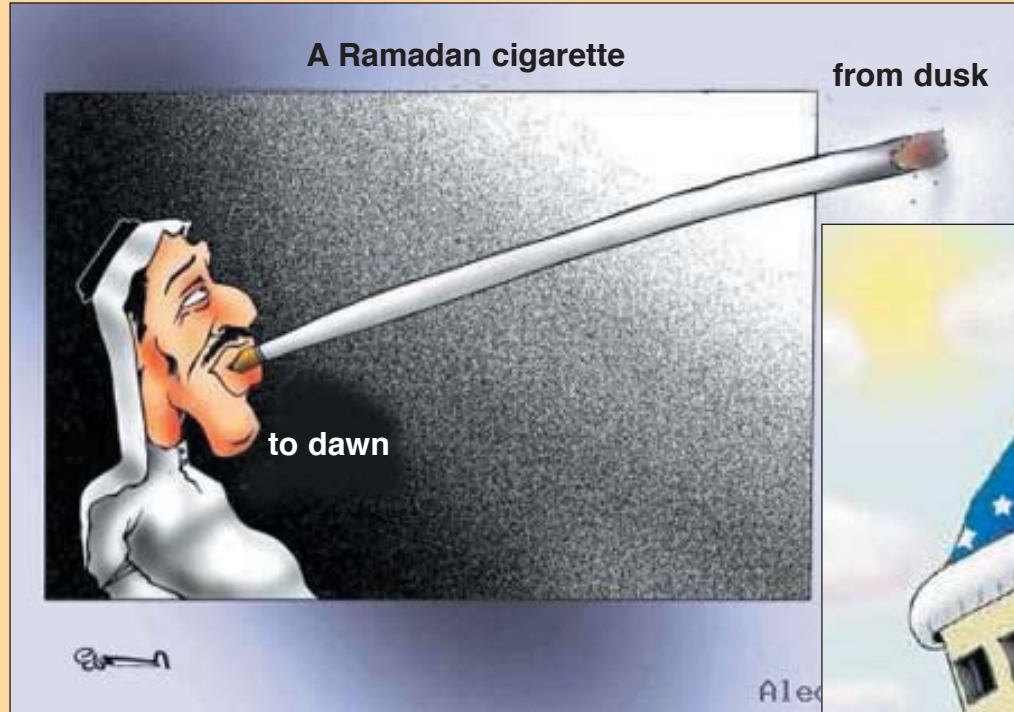
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Number one

By: Gaar Adams

Walking through the Old City in Sana'a, I learned to sort of love—or at least marvel at—the way Yemeni vendors got away with genially accosting passers-by. I also learned very quickly how exceedingly difficult it was to walk in any sort of "hey, get out of my way—I'm on a mission here" way, so I'd usually end up wandering over to a vendor even if I didn't have a reason, speaking a bit, and trying a taste of whatever he was selling—be it peanuts, raisins, dates, or the like.

But there was always something about the date vendors that was especially...let's call it "animated." Shouts of "Raqam Wahid" (number one!) could be heard coming from each gruff voice behind the date counters. One especially enthusiastic vendor always seemed to encourage me to try all of the kinds of dates even while making it clear that it would be absurd to buy anything but "number one."



You can see him in the picture below, climbing back to perch above the dates after unsuccessfully trying to get a sale from the two men in the foreground.

So in honor of him, here's a great article I read on MSNBC about dates. This tradition of naming dates after politicians hasn't seemed to spread to

Sana'a, but I certainly wouldn't mind having a conversation with him about which date he would call "Bush."

My favorite quote from the article was this: "We put a sweet date in Mr. Obama's mouth and a message in his ear," Hashim said. "Please help to bring peace to the world. We have a lot of hope in you."

Everyone always warily asks me what it was like to be an American in Yemen. Lately, I've been finding myself always prefacing my response with, "Well, you know, it certainly would have been a different story if I had been there under Bush." And it would have. Obama was always one of the first things that Yemenis wanted to speak with me about. He continues to be a source of curiosity, excitement, and—perhaps most interestingly—pride for Yemen and much of the Middle East. People in Damascus and Beirut were largely the same, wanting to know how I felt about him, what the chance was that he was serious about improving relations with the Middle East, and—of course—how Americans felt about his ties to Islam.

Certainly Obama has much to deal with domestically right now. But here's to hoping that this small gesture is at least a gentle reminder to the administration that much of the Middle East is waiting and hoping for this promised change. Otherwise, in a few years, Obama's words might be as valuable as Bush's dates.

Hyderabadi Ramadan in Saudi Arabia



Ramadan in Hydrabad.

By: Mohammed Sadullah Khan.
For the Yemen Times

Like many Hyderabadis, I had the opportunity to live and work in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has become a home away from home.

Ramadan is the blessed month for Muslims and a time to earn great rewards. It is spiritually and physically the best month for Muslims. As Muslims follow the Hijrah (Lunar) calendar, which is shorter by 11 days as compared to Gregorian (Solar) Calendar. This allows the sliding of the Ramadan each

year by 11 days and it comes in different seasons over a long period. This gives Muslims an opportunity to fast in different weather conditions. Saudi Arabia provides a conducive and congenial atmosphere for fasting and it is one of the best places for fasting.

Having spent fifteen years in Saudi

Arabia, we had an opportunity to fast in Spring, Winter and now Summer. This year Ramadan is in Summer i.e., during the months of August/September. Over 90% of the population in Saudi Arabia fasts and there are restrictions on public eating during the period of the fast, this facilitates easy fasting. The Masjids are bustling with the devout during this month. For many bachelors breaking Iftar at Masjid is a boon, as there are a variety of food is provided at the Masjids. This helps them from strains of making preparations at home.

However those with their families have a different strategy they break the fast at homes, Iftar parties are held for friends and relatives. Some Iftar parties are held outdoors or near the Corniches. The Maghrib and Isha prayers are held in the open areas.

There are many attractions of Ramadan, the month it selves, fasting, tarawi, Lailatul Qadr, Umra, Zakat, Fitra, Eid and the routine Iftar Parties.

During the last ten nights of Ramadan mid-night prayers are held. It is for Lailatul Qadar, which is explored during the last 10 odd nights. It is equivalent to 1000 months and no Muslim wants to miss this blessed night.

Another blessed aspect of Ramadan is that people plan and go for Umra. It is said that an Umra during Ramazan carries a reward equivalent to Haj, even though Umra is optional whereas Haj is mandatory upon meeting certain conditions. Quran is read as and when there is an opportunity especially after each prayer. Maximum charity, Zakat and good deeds are done during Ramadan to

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The Hyderabad community, which is the second largest community among Indians in Saudi Arabia, has its own unique way of making preparations for Iftar parties.

A typical Iftar Party preparation starts a day before, with two to three items readied for the Iftar party. Rest of the items, are prepared on the day of the Iftar party. For Iftar the families start arriving half an hour before the Iftar time. Ladies and children are sent to separate room and the Gents sit in a separate room. The dining sheet is spread and gets filled with a variety of food items but the common ones are Dahi Vada, chickpeas, Laban with Rooh Afza, Samosas, Haleem, Dates (khajoor), fruit juices and water. As soon as the Maghrib Azaan is heard the fast is broken with the Khajoor (Dates) and the delicacies are devoured. The eating session last between 10 to 15 minutes then everyone rushes for Maghrib Prayers. After the prayer everyone is back at their respective places. Few minutes later, it is time for a good filling meal. Once again the dinner sheet is spread, but now the items are totally of different variety. People try to follow the

typical traditional hyderabadi menu like biryani, roti, mirchiyon ka salan (sweet chilly curry), Dahi ki chatni (made of Curd), dry chicken and chicken 65. On the top of it a standard Double ka metha (sweet made of bread, sugar and other ingredients) and or Kheer is made. Once the dinner is over then tea is served. The tea is with a good amount of milk and sugar. After dinner there is a time for little chat and usually revolves around as to the payment of Zakat and Fitra (which has to be provided to the less fortunate people) and other noble acts, then time to go for Isha and Tarawi prayers.

The night prayers are one of the best opportunities for earning rewards from Allah. Once the prayers are over then every one gets into their routine of next day's fast.

The sighting of moon not only brings about a joy of Eid, but also a bit of disappointment as the blessed month has ended. A large number of Hyderabadis plan for vacation during Eid Holidays and celebrate Eid in Hyderabad.

Mohammed Sadullah Khan, is a Faculty Member and a Freelance writer based in Saudi Arabia and can be contacted at mosakhan40@gmail.com.

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