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Save Hana: 15-year-old will burn herself alive

By: Khaled Al-Hilaly

SANA'A, FEB. 14 — On a cold dark January 2010 night, they escaped from their village to Ibb city and from there to the capital city Sana'a, leaving behind everything. A local sheikh, Mohammed Mansour, has been terrorizing them for the past four decades, saying: "There is no power above me. Even the president and his whole government cannot do anything to stop me from doing what I want with you!" according to villagers.

They came to Sana'a, by the dozens, wanting to prove him wrong. They wanted to show him that if the president knew about their plight he would bring justice to them. Or so they thought.

Hana Noman is 15-year-old girl from Al-Ja'ashin. She picks up on her family's desperation, huddled with another forty women and children from her village in a four bedroom apartment whose rent, for the last five weeks, has been paid by HOOD, Yemen's National Organization for Protecting Rights and Freedoms.

"I will burn myself to death," Hana



The women camp with the men in the tents erected on an empty piece of land. Hana who is only 15 threatens to kill herself if the president does not do anything about their plight.

suddenly declared to her family, one week ago. "I will stand in the middle of the crowds in 'Freedom Square', pour kerosene over my body and use this lighter to burn myself in front of everyone," she said furiously, clutching a small green lighter in her hand.

Located near the parliament and facing the cabinet, 'Freedom Square' is where the activists and those demanding justice protest every Tuesday.

Her parents are worried. They can see in her eyes that she is serious. They

make sure she does not get access to fuel, but it has been impossible to unlock her fist the lighter. When they plead with her she argues: "What's the point in living without dignity? What's the point in being a citizen of a country where even the president cannot do anything about a cruel feudal sheikh?"

Terrorized children

Laith Adnan is a six-year-old boy from AL-Ja'ashin. During the day he camps with his father in one of the tents set up for men on an empty piece of land and at night he goes to one of the two apartments arranged for women and children. He had only been to school for a few weeks, for the first time in his life, when his family decided to flee from

the village and escape the wrath of Sheikh Mansour.

"I don't like that sheik," said little Laith. "I like the president." In his little head, the president is the superman who is just around the corner coming to his rescue and that of hundreds others from his village.

He cringes when he sees armed men. He still remembers when the sheikhs' militia came to his village.

"I was hiding under the basket. I was afraid of the sheikh's armed men because they were shooting fire randomly and kicking doors open. They even threw off the satellite dishes from the rooftops."

The terror the armed men had caused was coupled with the dismay of not being able to watch television. He said the sheikh's men even stole their television, the washing machine and his grandfather's shroud.

Although Laith feels relatively safe in Sana'a, he still has nightmares in which he sees the sheikh's armed men eating his baby brother.

"One of the sheikh's men came to our house and demanded my mom

make lunch for him. He told my mom that she could choose between cooking the chicken or my baby brother. Either way he wanted to eat meat for lunch," narrated a shaken Laith last Thursday glancing sideways at his two-year-old brother.

As he spoke to the Yemen Times, suddenly a group of gasping boys entered the fifth floor apartment where he was talking and frantically pointed to the street. "The sheikh's men are here. They are in the street waiting for this journalist to come down so that they can beat and kidnap him," they shouted. Upon hearing this, Laith, whose name in Arabic means lion, piped down looking scared, the others went to the balcony to look down at the street.

This was not the first time the sheikh, whose influence has now reached Sana'a, has sent his men to the city in pursuit of the escaped peasants. The sheikh does not want the media to expose his actions.

According to the villagers, the sheikh's men tried to burn down their tents, earlier last month.

In another tragic incident by the

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For more information go to a blog created by activists to lobby for change on the Al-Ja'ashin issue <http://gaashn.blogspot.com/>

sheikh's men, Mahyoub Hassan, a 60-years-old man, was stabbed in the head while participating in a protest in Freedom Square, last week.

"Mansour's men came in a car and stabbed my son in the chest. When I tried to help him, one of the sheikh's men stabbed me in the head," said Hassan.

During that protest, state security arrested six suspects involved in the stabbing. Two of them were released while the other four remain under investigation.

Three days later, in an attempt to reach sheikh Mansour and hear his view point, the Yemen Times managed to speak to him over phone.

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Attack on Zaidi Islamic study center

By: Mohammed Bin Sallam

SANA'A, FEB. 14 — Early morning, Wednesday, February 10, masked men tried to blow up the Badr Center for Islamic Studies in Sana'a. The center teaches Islam following the Zaidi doctrine.

"Masked men planted two explosives. One was planted at the gate of the center. One exploded while the other one, which was timed to explode after the first one, was thwarted by the security," said Dr. Murtada Al-Mahatwari, principal of the Center.

According to Dr. Mahatwari, the explosion caused panic among the people living in the surrounding areas of the center, as well as the students.

Dr. Mahatwari described the act as a crime and said that such acts are a threat to the lives of the people and to safety and peace of the area.

Though he did not accuse any specific organization of being responsible for the act, he said that, "Groups who engage in such things are enemies of peace and stability." He also said that



Dr. Murtada Al-Mahatwari

those responsible for the explosion are the ones who do not support the ceasefire in Sa'ada.

Claiming that the ceasefire harms the interests of these groups, he said such incidents are planned merely to create new fronts of insecurity in the capital.

Dr. Mahatwari demanded the security apparatus to deal carefully and seriously with the incident and bring the ones responsible for it in front of the court.

Hundreds of Zaidis gathered on Friday, February 12, in the center to condemn the act as a 'crime that targets the unity and causes social unrest'.

The center has been a target of many assaults since it was established in 1990.

Dr. Mahatwari, the principal and the founder of the center, was himself arrested and imprisoned by the authorities, several times, for trying to bring the Hashimites together under the umbrella of "Fatima", the messenger's daughter and the mother of Al-Hussein and Al-Hasan, the sons of the fourth caliph, Ali Bin Abu Talib.

The state considers bringing the Hashimites together under one umbrella as an attempt to revive the imamate rule that was ended by a revolution in 1962.

Houthis lay out conditions for prisoner release

By: Mohammad Bin Salam

SANA'A, FEB. 14 — Despite the ceasefire being in place, Sa'ada witnessed shooting on both Friday and Saturday, by an armed group from the Dahm tribe who live between the Yemeni and Saudi border.

The group said in a statement that they had shelled a Saudi militant site called Abu Saleh. They claimed that this center had invaded areas belonging to the tribe.

"An armed group in the Al-Jawf governorate has attacked the Saudi site of Abu Saleh which is located in Dahm tribal lands. The site was targeted by two missiles on Thursday morning", according to the Marib News website.

For their part, the group from the Dahm tribe said that they attacked the Saudi site to express their dissatisfaction about the Saudi presence on their land.

"We insist on our rights to have our land free from any external invasion and we hereby insist on our right to fight, in order to regain our own properties. We declare our intention to defend our land." The armed group from the Dahm tribe stated.

At the end of the statement they told the Saudi forces to expect more attacks if they didn't withdraw from this area.

According to informed sources, there were also violations of the ceasefire on Friday in areas around Aal Oqab and Wahban, near the governorate of Sa'ada. Shooting was witnessed; three

were killed and five injured.

The Houthis have denied their involvement with any of the above mentioned incidents. They also denied the assassination attempt on the deputy of the Minister of Interior, Mohammad Abdullah Al-Qawsi.

In a phone call with The Yemen Times, Houthis said this attempt had happened in an area far away from their sites.

They accused Al-Qawsi of gaining benefits from the Saudi government during the war against the Houthis.

In addition, they accused him of having invented the assassination attempt so that he can confirm Saudi Arabia assumptions of the Houthis breaking their word concerning the ceasefire agreement.

On the other hand, the four committees suggested by the government, to conduct field visits in Sa'ada, Al-Malaheth, Al-Jawf and Sufian and the Yemeni-Saudi border, as a way of checking out the Sa'ada ceasefire, reflected a state of calm in the governorate.

Exchanging of prisoners

The Houthis said that they will not act to handover Saudi prisoners unless they are given a confirmed guarantee that Houthi prisoners in Saudi Arabia will be exchanged.

The ceasefire between the Houthis and the Yemeni government came as a result of the Houthis accepting the six conditions asked for by the government to end the war which began in 2004.

Background of the war in Sa'ada

The sixth phase of the war started in August in 2009 and involved Saudi Arabia. Yemeni political analysts said that the decision of negotiating a ceasefire came from the Yemeni government. The Houthis agreed on the futility of this war especially after hundreds of people have been killed during hostilities.

Worth mentioning is that the six conditions laid down by the government are; a ceasefire, opening roads, removing land mines, withdrawing from all governates, not interfering in Sa'ada's affairs and releasing all prisoners in Yemeni and Saudi prisons.

The agreement, signed by the Yemeni governorate and the Houthis, was welcomed in Sa'ada and the state welcomed the conditions offered by the Houthis.

One of the conditions is to release all Houthis, except those who have been already sentenced. The Houthis have also asked to be included in any social activities and not to be marginalized.

They requested to have their representatives in the four committees suggested by the government. These committees will conduct field visits to check that the ceasefire in Sa'ada governorate remains in place. Their request to be represented by a party in the parliament was welcomed.

In addition, they were asked to hand in weapons to the government. However, as a request from the Houthis, this last condition was delayed until a later date.

Yemen and the US promote trade exchange

By: Mahmoud Assamiee

SANA'A, FEB. 10 — Yemen and the United States of America have taken the first step to promote a trade exchange supporting small and medium-sized projects.

In this regard, the US embassy in Sana'a and Sana'a Industrial and Commerce Chamber (SICC) organized a workshop on Sunday, to investigate the challenges facing businessmen from both countries and to promote trade between them.

Entitled "Small Trade and Middle-Sized Institutions are the Most Important Pillars of Development", the workshop aimed at presenting US small and middle-sized institutions to Yemeni businessmen and women, making use of American expertise in this field and to encourage reflection on their practical aspects.

Opening the activity, Chairman of the Board of SICC Hasan Al-Kabous commended any action that aims to acquaint Yemeni businessmen with the activities of US companies, with an emphasis on coordination between the chamber and the embassy to enhance a trade exchange.

For his part, US Ambassador in Yemen, Stephen Scheche, focused on creating a safe and positive environment that would enable US businessmen to invest in the country. "As you are well aware, we are working in one of the most challenging business environments in the world," said the ambassador.

"How can Yemen begin to attract serious investment when potential investors face corruption at every level of government and every phase of a project? How can factories be built somewhere when security problems prevent company employees from traveling around the country?" he stressed.

But he expressed hope that this workshop would deliver fruitful results and begin to help Yemen discover an answer to these very difficult questions.

Furthermore, he asserted a desire to promote American exports to Yemen and help American companies find effective Yemeni business partners. This would encourage trade activity in the country.

"A very important part of my job as Ambassador is to promote American exports to Yemen and help American companies find effective Yemeni business partners to help them navigate the local market" he said.

For his part, Economic/ Commercial official Ronald D. McKay talked about the American trade shows for small and medium sized institutions' products, which will be organized in Sana'a to help Yemeni businessmen make use of their expertise.

But he said the main concern for American companies to set out businesses in Yemen is corruption and the absence of law. "US companies have good products and want to invest in Yemen but the country's renowned corruption problem is a real problem."

While Americans talked about corruption as a great concern for their

businessmen, Yemeni businessmen reflected their suffering from strict measures imposed by the US embassy on exporting Yemeni products, especially natural goods like honey, to the United States.

"As an exporter of national products to the Yemeni community within the United States, it is difficult export my goods due to the strict procedures set out by the US authorities," said Mohammad Al-Shabita, who is a natural products' exporter.

Other businessmen talked about the difficulties in getting visas from the US embassy here in Sana'a, to go to the United States and explore business opportunities there and others talked about movements they would expect from the United States regarding the setting up of a framework for establishing a new era of trade exchange.

Some Yemeni businessmen, however, discussed the corruption within both the Yemeni public and private sectors, due to absence of effective laws. They demanded a stronger rule from the Sana'a Industrial and Commerce Chamber and negotiation with authorities to implement accountability measures.

Meanwhile businessman Mohammad Al-Ariqi talked about the collapse of important projects in Yemen because of an absence of consultative offices in the country that would advise businessmen on how to invest their funds. He also urged the establishment of such offices, in the near future, to avoid any further project failures.

JMP warns state not to cancel dialogue

By: Mohammed Bin Sallam

SANA'A, FEB. 13 — The Joint Meeting Parties called on the ruling party to change its mind on canceling the dialogue supposed to be held between the opposition and the state at the end of January.

The parties also called on the ruling party to stop using extremist policies, violence and military solutions as techniques for solving Yemen's internal problems.

This came during a press conference held by the JMP in Sana'a on Thursday, February 11th.

The Head of the High Council of the JMP, Dr. Abdulwahab Mahmoud, confirmed during the conference that the dialogue is the choice of the JMP.

"I do not think that the government should insist on halting the dialogue with the JMP. There is unusual pressure at the moment, from the international community, to carry out a dialogue with the opposition, including all its internal and external parties," said Mahmoud.

"There is also international pressure on Yemen to negotiate a ceasefire in Sa'ada, which will enable the state to implement required reforms and crack down Al-Qaeda," he added.

"The state has to complete all the terms and conditions that were set out by the European Union and the USA, before holding the Al-Riyadh conference between 27 and 28 of February," Mahmoud said.

The JMP is now negotiating with the Southern Movement so that they can be integrated into a nationally comprehensive dialogue, according to Mahmoud.

"If the essential issues in the south were resolved, all secessionist talk and actions would disappear because people in that area want unity as a core solution," Mahmoud said.

During the press conference, the JMP distributed a press release to various media outlets expressing its deep regret for the closedown of the dialogue by the state.

In this release, the JMP said that parliament is the founding institution for

a nationally comprehensive dialogue as it is an authentic source. It welcomed the efforts that were implemented in the ceasefire decision of the war in Sa'ada and described this initiative as a first step in resolving problems by non-military solutions. The JMP went on to discuss these efforts with the ruling party to engage a nationally comprehensive dialogue.

In addition, the JMP condemned the kidnapping and the arbitrary arrest of the journalist Mohammed Al-Maqaleh, who is a member of the Yemeni Socialist Party.

The JMP also criticized the torturing of Al-Maqaleh and called on the state to stop holding its impromptu trials in an unconstitutional court.

They demanded the quick release of Al-Maqaleh and other illegally confined political detainees.

The ruling party, along with opposition parties, was supposed to hold a national comprehensive dialogue at the end of January, but they have failed to do so due to their various disputes.

Continued from page 2

Save Hana: 15-year-old will burn herself alive

"Come to meet me and I will talk to you. I will cover your transportation cost to Taiz, just come to me and we will take it from there," said the sheikh before he ended the call.

Ridhwan Noman is Hana's seven-year-old brother. He cries every time he remembers the sheikh's trusted man Ameen Faisal dragging him from school along with another five children and putting them in the sheikh's private prison in Al-Habla for two days. "They only gave us bread and water, and we were very scared."

His anguished tears made everyone in the room cry. His father was most moved and through his tears he explained that the sheikh did this in order to force the fathers to surrender their lands to him.

The plight

The men of more than ten families have been living for the last five weeks in tents in Sana'a while the women and children live in two apartments in a nearby neighborhood. Each four bedroom apartment shelters women and children from six families.

"The ruling system has 'old deals' with tribal sheikhs all over the country. The sheikhs vow allegiance to the

ruling system in return for retaining full control over their territory, without interference of the state," said Shawqi Al-Qadhi, member of the Rights and Freedoms Committee in the Parliament.

"This indifference of the security and judicial authorities is not right," he said.

Al-Qadhi mentioned that a committee of parliamentarians had visited Al-Ja'ashin in 2007 in response to the pleas of the locals. However, Sheikh Mansour's men prevented the committee from even entering the area and threatened them. The MPs complained to the governor of Ibb governor, but were told that he would not be able to protect them.

"Al-Ja'ashin seems like a colony for Mansour and the people are paying this price for paying 'Zakat' or taxes to the government and not to the sheikh" said Al-Qadhi.

"Ironically, the government wants people in Sa'ada to abide by the laws, but wants the people of Al-Ja'ashin to be governed by a Sheikh," he concluded.

Al-Ja'ashin is located in Ibb governorate about 40 km southwest of the Ibb city and 250 kilometers to the south of Sana'a. Its total area is 360 sq km and a population of about 80,000. Since 2007, the people of Al-Anseen,

a local district of Al-Ja'ashin, have been fleeing from their villages and demanding help from the central government in Sana'a against the atrocities of the sheikh.

"The sheikh's men conduct violations against the people of Al-Anseen wearing national military uniforms," said Mohammad Alaw, head of the HOOD.

For decades, villagers of Al-Anseen and Al-Ja'ashin, have been working on the lands, leased at minimum amounts to the locals, by the Ministry of Endowment. However, the local sheikh wants to force ownership over these lands, which belong to the ministry, by terrorizing the locals into surrendering their lands to him, or otherwise paying him a rent.

"We have been harvesting this land for generations, for more than 150 years. This year, Mansour sent his militia to force us into paying him a rent," said Mohammad Noman, a local.

For those who would not budge, the sheikh's militia, loot the yields, destroy the coffee and qat plantations as well as houses.

Sheikh Mansour's men are jobless tribesmen from different parts of the country, turned into mercenaries. These men demand food and money from farmers, insult people and drag them by force to the sheikh's main



Laith (center boy) among friends and family in the sparsely furnished apartment which he calls a home. He does not go to school and, although he feels relatively safe in Sana'a, he still fears the sheikh's men.

residence in Taiz city.

In their complaints to the state institutions, the Ja'ashinis named six of the sheikh's men who harass them on behalf of the sheikh. His son is a member of parliament from the ruling party, and he is like his father, according to locals.

During the 2003 parliamentary elections, Al-Ja'ashin was called the

'golden district' for the ruling party as the entire district supported the ruling party and there was no chance for opposition.

Mansour has a private prison in Al-Habla in Al-Ja'ashin. There is also a room in his house in Taiz that is used as a prison for Ja'ashinis. In his main prison in Al-Habla, the prisoners are locked up with chains on their feet.

Mansour is seen during national events reciting poems before the president. Some people see him as the president's poet. He is also a member of the Shoura (consultative) Council.

"The government has sold us to Mansour in return for poems," cried one young man from Al-Ja'ashin, from inside the tent which he calls a 'home' since fleeing from his village.

In Brief

Yemeni youth gets first rank in contest of 4th International Scout Gathering

A Yemeni youth, Jamal al-Sharif got the first rank in a competition of youth inventors within activities of 4th International Scout Gathering, which was being held in Sharjah of United Arab Emirates (UAE).

On Thursday, Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed al-Qasimi, UAE Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah rewarded al-Sharif for his invention, which is an instrument for informing responsible persons or organizations about four cases; health, flood disease, fire and robbery.

For example if temperature of the patient reaches serious level, the tool makes a direct phone with the responsible nurse or doctor to inform about the case.

Al-Sharif told Saba that he is happy to get such reward, saying it is honor for him as Yemeni and Arab youth who got such rank.

He is working now as Assistant Prof in Sana'a University at physical section. He also got president's prize in field of science in 2008.

SANA'A

Official: 370 houses exposed to fall in Old Sana'a

Director General of the Old Sana'a district Khalid al-Kwa'a has affirmed that 370 houses in the Old city from a total of 8,000 houses exposed to fall or collapse according to official statistics prepared by the district.

In related news, random excavations have caused a partial collapse of a five-storey ancient house in the Old Sana'a City.

Al-Kwa'a told Saba that the random excavations under the old foundations of the house have led to collapse of the eastern part of the house.

He added that the local council in the district took several urgent actions, including evacuating the house inhab-

itants to another house and assigning specialized contractors to renovate and maintain the collapsed house to avoid falling and any collateral damages to the nearby houses.

In this respect, al-Akwa'a indicated that the Capital Secretariat and Ministry of Culture currently carrying out a restoration of several houses in the city.

Old Sana'a is one of the most famous Arab historical and ancient cities, which forms an important focus in the Arab and Islamic history. It has attracted the international and European attention due to its civilization rooted in the history.

There are about 35 old markets in the old city and each one has its name and distinguished features like Salt, Gold, Sliver, Cooper, Food (Grains), and Yemeni daggers (Djambia), fabrics, and onyx markets.

Bahraini Parliament Speaker due in Yemen next week

Bahrain's Parliament Speaker Khalifa al-Zahrani is to arrive in Sana'a next week, the weekly 26September reported on Thursday.

Well-informed sources said that the Bahraini official is expected to hold talks with his Yemeni counterpart Yahya al-Ra'e over the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries.

In an interview with the weekly, al-Zahrani has renewed his country's strong support for Yemen against different challenges, calling on all parties to stand together in order to save Yemen's unity.

He also lauded the strong Bahraini-Yemeni ties, asserting the kingdom's supports for Yemen's efforts to safeguard its security and stability.

The Bahraini official stressed the importance of Yemen's joining the Gulf Cooperation Council, noting his country's keenness to consolidate Bahraini-Yemeni relations.

SA'ADA

Tunisian relief plane to arrive in Sana'a for IDPs in Saada

A Tunisian airplane will arrive on Sunday in Sana'a international airplane carrying relief aid for internally displaced people (IDPs).

The Yemeni ambassador to Tunis, Tawfiq Jabar told 26sep.net that the airplane would arrive on Sunday morning accompanied by representatives of Tunisian Union for Social Solidarity, saying that the assistance comes within solidarity of Tunisian leadership and people with the Yemeni people.

He added that the Tunisian president gave orders to send the assistance airplane which includes foods and medicines to be presented to the IDPs in Saada.

HADRAMOUT

Drug stash seized in eastern Yemen

A Yemeni military unit in Yemen's eastern province of Hadramout seized on Friday a drug stash near the eastern military region, 26sep.net reported.

The 10-bag stash, estimated to be 200 kg of hashish, was seized inside a car early on Friday morning at the Hami beach in Alshih district, a military source said.

Two people were inside the car but they could flee, the source said, adding that a hunt was launched for them.

HODEIDAH

Plan to conserve Zabid's cultural heritage approved

The Ministerial committee for conservation of the historical city of Zabid approved on Thursday setting an executive plan of the projects and technical and legal procedures required to preserve the cultural heritage of the city, so as to ensure its survival in the World Heritage List.

A technical team was assigned during the committee's expanded meeting to set the plan and to program those projects and procedures in an executive scheduled package within two weeks.

Moreover, the committee charged a small team headed by Hodeidah Governor with removing the irregularities in the random construction that distort the cultural heritage and the traditional architecture of the city. The attendants stressed the government agencies to continue the restoration and maintenance of the buildings in the city and speed up supplying the city with electricity and activate the side of the city tourism promotion, development and rehabilitation of the economic resources of the population and support of handicrafts.

Furthermore, the committee reviewed reports presented by the agencies working in the city, among them the report submitted to the Cabinet including a number of actions that should be taken by each ministry to preserve the city of Zabid and the procedures taken by the cabinet in this respect.

ADEN

\$ 80 mln project to increase power generation in Aden

Minister of Electricity Awadh al-Socotri was acquainted here on Thursday with the situation of the electric power station in Khormaksar district and the site of the project to be implemented to increase the station's capacity to 60 MW at a cost of \$ 80 million.

The project expected to take 10 months is among the investment projects of the electricity sector and will serve districts of Sirah, Khormaksar, Mualla and Tawahi and its tender will be announced within the next few days.

In the same context, al-Socotri accompanied by Aden Governor Adnan al-Jeffri met with the leader-

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ship of the Electricity Corporation and directors of the areas in Aden province.

They discussed a number of issues relating to the corporation activities in improving and providing the electricity services.

In this respect, al-Socotri affirmed the importance of good preparation to face the coming summer and tackle all problems of the electricity sector. He pointed out that arrangements have been taken to complete the electrical projects of the Gulf 20th competition

to be hosted in Aden and Abyan provinces, especially with regard to stadiums, accommodation and tourist facilities and the city in general.

Al-Socotri stressed the need to accelerate providing the electrical services to those projects, noting that the completion of the experimental operating of Marib gas-powered station would lead to reduce the shortage of electricity by 70 per cent.

He indicated that the situation in the electricity sector would be better in the coming days than the last periods.

Their News

Japan supports construction of Al-Mogdad School in Dhamar Governorate

The Government of Japan has decided to extend a grass-root grant aid of YER18,547,620 for the Project for "Construction of Al-Mogdad School in Al-Manar District, Dhamar Governorate under the scheme of called "Grant Assistance for Grass-roots Human Security Projects" which aims at supporting small-scale community-based projects in basic human needs such as primary health care, basic education, and drinking water supply in the developing countries.

The grant is for construction of 2 floor-school building with six classrooms, by which 193 pupils in four villages will receive its benefit, and improve the education environment for students currently studying in 2 rented houses and outside of the buildings.

Mr. Masakazu Toshikage, the Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Yemen and Mr. Mohammed Al-Materi, the District Education Director of Al-Manar, signed an agreement for the implementation of this grant aid project at the Embassy of Japan today.

During this Japanese fiscal year (April 1, 2009 - March 31, 2010) the Government of Japan funded 14 projects so far including this school project in the Republic of Yemen, amounting to approximately 1.1 million USD under the above mentioned Japanese scheme. In the last Japanese fiscal year, Japan has funded 16 projects in Yemen under the same scheme with a total amount of more than USD 1.2 million.

Suzuki and Intelligent Energy Showcase the Zero Emission Burgman Fuel Cell Scooter

LOUGHBOROUGH, United Kingdom & LONDON, February 4, 2010 (Business Wire / ME NewsWire): Intelligent Energy, the leading clean power systems company, and the Suzuki Motor Corporation today jointly unveiled the Suzuki Burgman Fuel Cell Scooter in London's Living Room, City Hall, London.

First presented at the 2009 Tokyo Motor Show, the city friendly Burgman

Fuel Cell Scooter builds upon the success of the Crossage fuel cell motorbike unveiled in 2007. The Fuel Cell Burgman takes the next step towards offering cleaner, more efficient motorcycles in a practical and accessible form with the potential to significantly reduce emissions around the world.

Chair of the London Hydrogen Partnership and London's Deputy Mayor for policing, Kit Malthouse, who opened the event at London's City Hall, said, "I am incredibly excited by the Burgman Fuel Cell Scooter. It's a fantastic piece of kit which shows how we can combat climate change without all having to wear hairshirts. This scooter, which produces nothing but water, is a triumph of human ingenuity. I hope Londoners will dump their 20th century motorcycles and buy one built for the 21st century."

The scooter is equipped with the latest version of Intelligent Energy's unique and proprietary air-cooled, clean fuel cell power systems and is fuelled from a cylinder of hydrogen, which can be re-fuelled in a few minutes and gives a riding range of 350km comparable to a conventional Burgman scooter.

"The zero-emissions Fuel Cell Burgman scooter is the latest product of the successful commercial relationship between Suzuki and Intelligent Energy," commented Dr. Henri Winand, CEO at Intelligent Energy. "Clean fuel cell engine powered motorcycles are designed for the real world and can be widely available to a large global market in the near future. Fuel cell vehicles in general have entered a period of fleet tests, and our two companies will soon be releasing details of the first public road testing and demonstration of the Burgman Fuel Cell Scooters, which will begin in the UK later this year."

The first public road tests of the Suzuki Burgman will be conducted initially at Loughborough. These will be extended to controlled fleet tests in cities such as London, where zero emission vehicles such as a fuel cell scooter have the greatest initial potential.

Source : ME NewsWire
*View this release online and download high resolution logo at:

<http://www.me-newswire.com/news/1372>

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- Duke University and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA
- International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan
- Universidad del Salvador, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- University of Bradford, West Yorkshire, England
- University of California, Berkeley, USA
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Professor: Eliana Carvalho
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Assistant General Secretary of Parliament to the Yemen Times: "Parliament laws are still old and need to be updated."

Since the postponement of the parliamentary elections in April 2009 due to disagreements between the main political parties on the electoral system, members of the opposition -around 19 percent of the members of parliament (MPs) - have been boycotting the sessions. However, in December last year, the parliament went ahead with supplementary elections for twelve seats that became vacant due to death or resignation. There has been speculation that the opposition will return to sessions soon, although no official from the opposition or ruling parties has confirmed this. Mahmoud Al-Harazi interviewed Assistant Secretary General of Parliament Ahmad Al-Khawi on how the Yemeni parliament functions.

Does the parliament periodically assess the performance of its members? Will standards be raised for MP candidates in the next elections?

Specialized offices in the public secretariat periodically evaluate the performance of the permanent committees and parliament in its public sessions. The MP is judged by his achievements and the number of times he was absent from the committees and general parliament sessions.

Reports are given to the parliament's presidency council whose responsibility it is to make the right decisions based on those reports. It is the public secretariat's role to present these reports to the presidency council.

There is no plan to demand other requirements for MP candidates in the next parliamentary elections other than their qualifications. Some changes in the election law might occur if a majority agrees that they are necessary.

What is going to happen if the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) boycott the next elections?

It will not be useful to any political party or political organization to boycott the next election, whether it is the JMP or one of its parties such as the Islah party or the Nasserite party, and whether they are local or parliamentary elections.

Elections are the basic mechanism for practicing democracy. Without elections, speeches about democracy are meaningless. Democratic life in any society is a continuous process. No country was ever improved without continuing democracy, so boycotting the next elections is not a solution and will not help to establish and improve democratic life in our country.

The parliament is composed of about 20 permanent committees and some subsidiary committees. How can the number of committees be increased to give more votes to vital topics



Ahmad Al-Khawi

such as tourism in a specific independent committee instead of being within the committee of information, culture and tourism, for example?

The permanent committees in the parliament were established according to an old system that was taken by the ministries and was created when the

cabinet was established. There is no plan to add or reduce the number of the permanent committees or to change their names.

Some MPs have resigned due to the extension of the parliament's term without elections. Do you think that extending the parliament's term like this is serving democracy?

The extension came as the result of an agreement between all political forces in parliament, and the result of this agreement was an amendment to the article in the constitution on the parliament's term, so that it became six years with the extra two years. I don't know if any MP resigned from the

parliament due to this extension.

Extending the parliament's term did not serve democracy. I was personally against this action. The right thing was to continue with the elections when the time came, with no notice taken of any political argument that may have existed.

Do the MPs from the JMP attend the parliament sessions? If not, how are the sessions going on without them?

There are some MPs who attend parliament, but they don't offer their opinions during its sessions.

According to the constitution and parliament law, participation is an MP's right. Nothing can force him to participate or prevent him from doing so. There is no doubt that an MP not attending parliament sessions is regrettable. It certainly affects discussions and interventions in these sessions and with committees.

But legally a lack of attendance by the parliamentarian does not have a noticeable effect as long as the sessions have concluded with the legal quorum defined in parliament law, and parliament decisions have achieved the required majority either in parliament or in the committees.

What are the allowances and privileges given to the MPs?

The allowances and privileges are defined in the parliament's internal rules, notably the financial rules. There is an assessment for each MP [on his or her attendance] at the end of each period of the council. MPs who are absent from parliament or committee sessions are not paid.

In several government programs introduced by parliament, the government has promised the council to implement parliamentary recommendations. But these recommendations have not been implemented by the government. What procedures have been taken by parliament about that?

The government often does not follow

parliamentary recommendations, which is a sad thing, and does not follow the cooperation and solidarity principle between the two authorities [legislative and executive].

The parliament reminds the government that not following parliamentary recommendations is illegal and a violation of the constitution. The government must bear the responsibility to carry out the parliamentary recommendations.

Parliamentary committees must supervise the level of implementation of those recommendations, and present reports about the government's commitments to the parliament. There must be a mechanism in the parliament for continuation and accountability to observe government performance.

To what extent is there credibility in the parliament, in calling members of the government like ministers to account? Can the parliament dismiss a minister?

It is one of the parliament's constitutional rights to call ministers in for questioning, and constitutes a main part of the parliament's supervision over the executive. But the parliament's credibility is relative, as it varies from one MP to another and from one case to another. Calling in ministers is a correct part of parliamentary life.

Certainly the parliament could dismiss a minister. According to the constitution, the parliament has the right to withdraw its confidence from any minister who does not complete his duties.

How can parliament observe the government's performance and fight corruption effectively?

To make the parliament more effective, current mechanisms must be reviewed, starting with the permanent committees because they form the basis of the legislative and supervision process. As long as the permanent committees are not effective, the parliament's performance will remain very limited.

JUST ANOTHER DAY IN THE CAPITAL (18)

Talents, chocolate donuts and happy faces



By Judith Spiegel
For the Yemen Times

Imagine it is Tuesday afternoon and you are walking in a street parallel to Hadah street, not far from the Ethiopian embassy. From behind a wall, you hear Yemeni music and the excited voices of around 250 children. Filled with joy, they shout and whistle as if they just witnessed a Shakira concert. You see balloons floating above the courtyard and vehicles from the diplomatic corps parked outside.

Imagine it is the same Tuesday afternoon and you are waiting in a taxi at the corner of Zubairi and Hadah street. Children are offering you water, strawberries, padlocks or inflatable hammers. They risk their lives when the traffic starts to move. They run to the other side of the street to join their little companions who are sitting on the curb with a scale in front of them, waiting for someone to give them some Rials.

Is this story about the enormous gap between rich and poor? Is the first paragraph about the 'haves' and the second about the 'have nots'? It could be, but it is not. It is actually a feel-good-story. It is about children who once were tapping on the window of your taxi, but who are now learning English. It is about kids that found their way to YERO (Yemeni Education & Relief Organisation). They are still poor, and it would be exaggerated to say that they now all have a bright future in front of them, but they do have a purpose, and it is no longer to sell an inflatable hammer. They became the 'haves'.

The exhilarated children in YERO's

court, but the girl could not care less at this moment. She raises her eyes to heaven, probably thinking "couldn't he wait for one minute with that?". She continues, she is brave.

In the basement of the centre there is a room packed with t-shirts, pink backpacks, second hand clothes, shoes, pens and everything else a school going child needs. "We arrange everything here, we do not give money because then we risk that the families take the money and the fathers spend it on qat", Nouria explains. Her centre does everything to make sure the children go to school. And after school, they go to the centre, which serves as an after-school refuge. Not one where you can hang around a bit, but one where you'll be taught English, mathematics, computer science or painting. Or simply how to read and write. "We had many children who came here and could not read or write. They were in the fourth or fifth grade, can you believe?", Nouria says.

Today, the children do not have to go to mathematic classes. Today, they celebrate the graduation of students who successfully completed their computer science course or just had good results at their schools. In fact, today it is celebrated that children who seemed to be in a hopeless situation, often begging in the streets, are lifted to a level they would not have imagined ever to reach in their lives. And they love it. Both the performers on stage and the audience of dark eyed little boys and girls in their smart dresses and suits beam with self-confidence and dignity. They are happy.

All of a sudden the young audience is quiet. Turning around it is not hard to see why. They all received a plastic plate with an orange, a banana and a chocolate donut. Surprisingly, most of them eat the banana first. The donuts remain largely untouched. Or only eaten half. "I want to keep this for later", a little boy explains. A boy with the funniest face stops eating his banana, "you can have my donut", he offers. They are generous.

The ceremony culminates in the graduates being called to the stage. All wear Anglo Saxon type of graduation costumes and look smart and proud. Photo's are taken and the camera is snoring. "I would be lying if I would say that we are God's gift to mankind, but for a couple of hours a day they are happy", Nouria once said. But for the children of YERO this may actually be God's gift, if not to mankind, then at least to them.

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Yemeni Nationals only to apply. Please specify the post you are applying for. The deadline for receiving CVs is **19th February, 2010**. Only short - listed candidates shall be contacted.

Republic of Yemen
Social Welfare Fund (SWF)
Emergency Social Safety Net Enhancement Project
Social Welfare Fund Institutional Support Project

Vacancy Announcement **Project Technical Coordinator TOR (Consultant)**

Projects Background

Social Safety Net Enhancement Project

The World Bank is administering an EC-financed Global Food Crisis Response Trust Fund for the implementation of an emergency project to enhance the social safety net in Yemen targeting the poor and most vulnerable. The project has two components: (i) workfare component to be implemented by the Social Fund for Development (SFD); and (ii) cash transfer component to be implemented by the Social Welfare Fund (SWF). The project was appraised in September 2009 and negotiated November 2009 and effectiveness by January 2010.

The SWF Institutional Support project

An identification mission for the SWF Institutional Support Project (ISP) was concluded in September 2009. The Bank and GoY is starting the project preparation process. The project would be comprised of three components: (i) Improve management and administrative processes of the Cash Transfer Program; (ii) Support for the Design and Implementation of SWF's Beneficiary Development Program; and (iii) Project Management Support and Impact Evaluation. Component 2 focuses would be on assisting beneficiaries to leave poverty through provision of useful services designed to improve their educational status, technical skills and quality of life as well as access to entrepreneurial assistance such as microcredit. An overall assessment of current and previous SWF beneficiary development programs would be conducted after which, in selected areas: (a) the type of beneficiary program would be agreed and (b) networking with existing service providers undertaken and/or (c) capacity building programs for district office staff to deliver required programs designed and implemented.

The social Welfare Fund now invites Yemeni qualified applicants for the position according to the job descriptions specified below:

Duties and Responsibilities

1. The Technical Coordinator reports directly to the Managing Director of the SWF and is responsible for the management of project preparation and implementation activities of the above-mentioned two projects. He/she is also responsible to ensure coordination of the technical aspects of the project with different departments of the SWF. Specifically, he/she is responsible for:
 - (a) Play a key role in strengthening coordination of the different departments/offices involved in project preparation and implementation activities;
 - (b) Facilitate project implementation in compliance with the provisions of the Grant Agreement, Project Documents (Project Paper and Project Appraisal Document), SWF Operations Manual;
 - (c) Coordinate with the M&E and MIS units to ensure that the Projects' performance indicators are monitored and reported regularly as required;
 - (d) Prepare semi-annual project progress report according to the agreed report format coordinating with different Departments/Units;
 - (e) Analyze the actual progress of project implementation versus planned progress, and bring to the attention of the Managing Director any bottlenecks that may impede smooth implementation;
 - (f) Facilitate World Bank missions, and follow up on agreed upon action plans with related departments;
 - (g) Assist in the selection of consultants, the approval of their terms of reference, their briefing, and administration of their contracts;
 - (h) Follow-up with the local and international consultants' work progress;
 - (i) Supervise the Project Support Team (PST) and the performance of its staff; and
 - (j) Perform any other project-related duties requested by the Managing Director.

Assignment Duration

2. The post is anticipated to be for the six years of planned project implementation period. However, there will be a three months probation period and the contract will renewed annually based on the performance of the consultant. The initial assignment is expected to commence in April 2010.

Qualifications and Experience

3. Qualifications would be the following. However, experience and performance in prior assignments would also be a key factor in the selection process.
 - (a) Preferably, Master's degree in Business Administration, Management, Finance or related fields.
 - (b) Minimum of 7 years of professional experience in management or in coordinating technical and development programming.
 - (c) Good understanding of international procurement, financial management and accounting procedures.
 - (d) Proficiency in the use of computers.
 - (e) Strong communication, management, and team-work skills.
 - (f) Strong oral and written capabilities in both Arabic and English.

Interested applicants who meet the above requirements may submit their applications with their CVs and supporting documents to the address below by 27/02/2010. Selection will be processed in accordance with IDA (World Bank) guidelines for selection and employment of consultants and the IDA Financed Project Management Unit (PMUs) Guidelines for Establishment and Operations.

Attention: Mr. Mansoor Hussein Alfiadhi
Managing Director
Social Welfare Fund

Address: Sana'a - Nukum - P.O. Box : 4898

Tel: 544012-16-20

Fax: 544015-11

Email: alfeadi4@hotmail.com

Info@swf.gov.ye

Islam in Bosnia: Ground-breaking concepts of secularization

Islam has been practiced in Bosnia for centuries. Claudia Mende asked Armina Omerika, an expert in Islamic studies, whether the Bosnian Islamic tradition could serve as a model for the integration of Muslims in other European societies

How has Bosnian Islam come to terms with the non-Muslim Bosnian state?

Armina Omerika: This question arose for the first time in 1878, when Bosnia came under Austro-Hungarian rule. One could say that Bosnian Muslims have been living under "foreign rule" ever since. Even then, there were heated debates as to whether Muslims could live in a non-Islamic state. Reformers like Dzemaludin Causevic, the leader of the Bosnian Muslims from 1914 to 1930, were in favour of a *modus Vivendi*. Naturally, this *modus vivendi* has changed down through the years.

What issues were particularly controversial?

Omerika: There were fierce debates between Muslim intellectuals and scholars about the secularisation of education, the status of women in society, and about the reform of the Sharia. Since

the Austro-Hungarian occupation, the Sharia has been restricted to family and inheritance laws.

One particularly controversial issue was the extent to which women could operate in public. The question of Islamic banks and interest rates was also discussed, as was the way in which the community should come to terms with non-Islamic administrative structures and systems of rule. Many areas of life were secularised bit by bit. However, the impetus to reform the Sharia and to secularise society also came from within the Bosnian Muslim community, not only from outside it.

In other words, nothing can be achieved by applying pressure from the outside alone?

Omerika: Nothing much can be achieved without an inner-Islamic debate. In Europe in particular, Islamic communities are very diverse; they

frequently disagree with one another and are poorly linked. Dialogue within the Muslim community is, as far as I am concerned, the first prerequisite for solving integration problems in western European societies.

What was the situation during the period of Communist rule?

Omerika: Secularisation in Bosnia peaked during the period of Communist rule. Although the roots of secularisation reach back to Muslim groups and debates in the early twentieth century, the Communists enforced secularisation from above and coupled it with repressive measures against the Islamic community. Secularisation was implemented in a way that is out of the question for contemporary democratic states.

Did this forced secularisation lead to a religious revival?

Omerika: From the mid-1960s onwards, there was a phase of liberalisation and a hint of religious freedom, which led to a religious revival. Semi-legal movements and informal networks that had continued to exist underground, were now able to speak out in the Communist state.

Is there an overlap between Islam and Bosnian nationalism?

Omerika: Ever since the Bosnian war, the Islamic community has supported a form of political nationalism in which ethnic national identity is equated with religious and political identity. Accordingly, alliances are repeatedly formed between the Islamic community and the various Bosniak (i.e., Bosnian Muslim) parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina that have a nationalist outlook.

The Islamic communities in Western Europe, on the other hand, are largely made up of Muslims who have migrated there since the 1950s. Since then, Muslim life of an unprecedented diversity has developed. This diversity is not only of an ethnic, but also of a theological nature. There are linguistic, ethnic, and doctrinal barriers between the Muslims of Western Europe and these

barriers make it impossible to transfer an institution like Bosnia's Islamic community directly to other regions of Europe.

And what about the theological aspects? Could they act as a model?

Omerika: In Bosnia, the tradition of open Muslim discourse is as old as the Islamic community itself. While there are conservative currents, they are part of an ongoing debate.

A milestone in Bosnian Islam was the re-establishment of the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo in 1977. Islamic scholars such as Enes Karic and Fikret Karcic, who work at Europe's only Islamic faculty at a state university, have developed ground-breaking concepts for the integration of Islam into a secular state. The only thing is that they are less well known in the West than, say, Turkish theologians, even though Bosnian and Turkish Islam are actually quite similar in that they both adhere to the Hanafi school of law and the Maturidi school of theology. The Turks are no strangers to secularisation. After all, Turkey has been a secular state since 1923.

How does the Islamic community deal with radical Islamic Salafi traditions?

Omerika: The entire Islamic spectrum is represented in Bosnia today: not only neo-fundamentalist Salafism, but also Shia Islam, Sufism, and groups that are considered heterodox in Islam, such as the Bahai. During the Bosnian war of 1992-1995, up to 1,000 religious warriors from the Islamic world came to Bosnia, bringing with them active, missionary humanitarian organisations. These people imported Salafi traditions into Bosnia. This led to numerous conflicts with the native population. Many of these religious warriors have since left the country.

But there are still Salafis in Bosnia

Omerika: Many of them had to withdraw in 2001 as a result of pressure from the United States; their organisations were closed and Saudi sources of



Islam was brought to Bosnia by the Ottomans in the 15th century. Today, Muslims constitute approximately 40 percent of the population

funding were dried up. The more moderate elements were integrated into the Islamic community. Today, most of the Salafis in Bosnia are native Bosnians, not Muslims that migrated to the country.

While there was no direct confrontation with the Islamic community, its council (Sabor) did pass a resolution that all rites in the mosques had to be conducted in accordance with the Hanafi school of law. In practice, however, this is difficult to monitor. The integration of some Salafis led to criticism from the middle-class liberal Islamic community that these so-called "Wahabis" were being dealt with too leniently.

Is the status of Islam a topical issue in Bosnia?

Omerika: The subject of the mufti Mustafa Ceric in particular is very controversial. Many accuse him of positioning himself as a political player and overstepping the bounds of his role as a religious leader. They also say that he

is mixing Islam and politics and poses a threat to the secular character of the state.

In addition, Salafism and its missionary efforts are a regular theme in the Bosnian press. In contrast, hardly anything is said about Christian fundamentalists from the USA acting as missionaries to Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox youths. The same is true for the close ties between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the state structures. The debate about Islam and its status in society has become a kind of ersatz discourse for debates about religion in general.

Interview conducted by Claudia Mende © Qantara.de 2010

Translated from the German by Ainegeal Flanagan Armina Omerika currently holds the post of assistant professor at the Chair of Islamic Studies, University of Erfurt, Germany.



Street scene in Sarajevo: Bosnian Muslims often chose to be more lenient on the rules mandated by their religion than their fellow Muslims in, for instance, the Middle East - both in terms of behavior as well as dress and appearance.



JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

Oxfam, an international NGO, works with others to find lasting solutions to poverty and suffering. Oxfam has been working in Yemen since 1983. Oxfam announces the following vacancies for its Development and Humanitarian Programme. These positions are for 6 months period with possibility of extension.

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Words of Wisdom



Many countries hold elections. Even when these are not rigged, they tend to cement the old patron-clientele relations in a new grab. The reason is that the people in power use their connections (and state funds, media, bureaucracy, etc.) to achieve the election results they want. The result is that they create docile parliaments. Elections thus end up enabling those in power to hold on to it.

Prof. Abdulaziz Al-Sakkaf,
(1951 - 1999)
Founder of Yemen Times



OUR OPINION

The six-point agreement

A ceasefire has been announced and things are looking good. Despite some breaches at very local levels, it seems that the sixth war has come to an end. This, however, does not mean that the Sa'ada war has ended. Perhaps there will be a seventh war. But at least for now we know that there is a relative peace.

I know that this peace agreement gains its strength from the international pressure exerted from all sides. The mediation committee is only a façade, and the real dialogues take place behind this facade. Nevertheless, we have the six points conditioned by the state that the Houthis committed to fulfilling:

1. Ceasing fire, removing landmines and unblocking roads. Removing the armed hideouts on the mountain tops and roadsides
2. Retreating from the government offices and districts and allowing the local authorities do their business
3. Returning arms and other equipment confiscated from the Yemen and Saudi armies
4. Releasing the Yemeni and Saudi civilian and military detainees
5. Abiding by the Yemeni constitution and laws
6. Refraining from attacking Saudi territories

When I read these points I realized that they are very sensible. Any state would want that its citizens abide by the laws, refrain from attacking others, be nice to the neighbors and return any confiscated goods or men for that matter. Yet two thoughts occurred to my mind when I read the points: One that the Houthis are very strong and second that there are many other groups who need to commit to these points as well.

I really hope that the Sa'ada war ends for good and a sort of agreement, which saves the state's authority and allows for democratic representation of various sects and political entities, is reached. But I can't help but wonder whether the real war is against the Houthis per se, or against any armed rebellion that undermines the power of the state. During the fifth war, in 2008 I had spoken to one of the Houthi leaders for a news story I was writing. He said: "The government is attacking our lands. It is invading our territories and in American jets they are taking images and drawing maps to identify our hideouts."

At the time I was outraged. How dare this "Yemeni" demand that the state takes permission before entering any "Yemeni" land belonging to tribes or local groups? Who does he think he is, putting himself as equal to the government?

But then when I thought about it, I realized that there is no such concept as Yemeni land, at least not beyond the main cities. The government is only in Sana'a, Taiz and Aden. Maybe not so much the later, but still its official presence is visible and state's institutions are recognized in the main cities. But come to Ibb for instance, the governor says he has no authority over the local feudal sheikh who is terrorizing hundreds of people in Al-Ja'ashin village. Al-Jawf tribes don't even recognize that there is a government, and the citizens of Al-Dhale are hoisting a different flag.

So what is the state really doing? And are the six points limited to the problematic areas on the Saudi border? Do the tribes of Al-Mahara need to invade Oman before the state pays attention and decides to expand its control there? Fortunately Yemen is surrounded by sea from two sides. Otherwise, I can only imagine the pressure the Yemeni government would have faced, had we been surrounded by four countries on all four sides.

I respect what the state is trying to do now in Sa'ada, although it took years of bloodshed and the involvement of several countries for this to happen. But my concern is regarding the legitimacy and outreach of the Yemeni government. Is it really fair to ask the Houthis to surrender to the state when no one else does?

Nadia Al-Sakkaf

Yemen, the joke is on you ...

By: Marwan Bishara
Al Jazeera

Marginalised by regional developments and intimidated by Washington's Cold War and Gulf War victories, two Yemenis -- so goes the joke -- wondered if their country should declare war on the US, force it to occupy Yemen and care for it.

"But what if we won?" wondered one. "We would have to care for America!"

As the US and Britain prepare for covert war on Yemen, and following on their failures in Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan/Pakistan, Yemenis might wonder if the joke is becoming a reality.

Over the last few days, London has called for an international conference on Yemen (after it called for another on Afghanistan) under US-British auspices to see how best to support the government of Ali Abdullah Saleh, the Yemeni president, against al-Qaeda.

From fragile to failed

One does not have to be a Yemen expert to tell you that further destabilising Yemen along the lines of Pakistan or Somalia is not sound policy, and that Yemen's proximity to the Gulf and the Horn of Africa does not bode well for regional stability.

But that is exactly what will happen if the US/UK "counterterrorism" policy focuses on providing military support to a three-decade-old government that presides over an unstable and decentralised country.

By offering more military training, arms, naval patrolling, intelligence sharing and possibly shared offensive operations, the West might help prolong and sustain an autocratic regime that faces secessionist movements in the North and South.

Mostly, though, it will aggravate a fragile state of Yemen into a failing state.

Even if estimates are exaggerated (Yemen's interior minister in 2002 put the number of guns at 60 million), Yemeni tribes are better armed than any other in the region and will not surrender their weapons quietly to the central government, especially in light of the declared foreign intrusion into their country's affairs.

Forgotten front?

But the US military presence, like that of al-Qaeda, is hardly new. In the decade since the bombing of the USS Cole off the coast of Yemen in 2000, Washington has sent special forces into the country, took out suspected "terrorists" and shared in various raids against al-Qaeda targets in the country.

But that is ignored by an ever more influential class of pseudo-experts and self-declared "terrorologists" whose careers revolve around advising the US/UK government on how to advance their interests in the Middle East through force.

They reckon Yemen has been the ignored "forgotten front" of the "war on terror" and advise much more of the same security and military solutions.

They disingenuously ignore the decade of covert American military co-operation and security operations in Yemen that utterly failed, and they dangerously advocate raising the stakes in a country that suffers from any number of tribal, religious, regional, cultural and economic tensions and conflicts that only feed into instability and violence.

Blowback

Dealing with Yemen must begin with understanding why this country can serve as fertile ground for al-Qaeda and recognising the US' role in it (not to mention the old colonial British rule).

Young Yemenis were first radicalised in Afghanistan, where tens of thousands went to fight the Soviets under the auspices of a CIA covert war there. But the end of the Cold War did not mean the end of the "Arab Afghans", who later formed the core of al-Qaeda, whether in Afghanistan or in their homelands.

Thousands who came back to Yemen and joined local radical religious groups looked on with bitterness and

betrayal as half a million US soldiers deployed next door in Saudi Arabia in 1991, the birthplace of the prophet.

The fact that the Yemeni government, as well as popular sentiment, opposed US military action against Iraq only empowered the newly formed radical groups.

Furthermore, Gulf regimes disappointed by Yemen's opposition to the war to liberate Kuwait, sent around a million Yemeni expats home, thus exasperating unemployment levels and reducing foreign remittances by a high margin, and in the process, fertilising the ground for extremism.

But the US role in Afghanistan in the 1980s and its role in the Gulf in the 1990s are only two examples of how US military interference has had major political repercussions in Yemen.

US support for Israel and its occupation of Arab Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian lands, and Washington's intervention in neighbouring Somalia have also led to direct and indirect hostility towards the US.

Domestic politics

A soldier and savvy political operator, President Ali Abdullah Saleh was not exactly innocent or idle as international and regional events affected his country.

Although Saleh has made serious attempts to strengthen the state's unity, economy and institutions since taking power in 1978, his main concern has been the stability and primacy of his regime.

In the first of three decades in power, Saleh the military man secured his position in then North Yemen by playing off the tribes, some of which were supported by Saudi Arabia.

In the 1990s, he secured national unity with South Yemen, merging the two into one state, first through political process and establishing partnership, and later by winning the war (1994) against the Southern leaders who tried to secede once again. But most importantly, he achieved unity by solidifying his power and boxing in his potential adversaries by playing off Northern-led Islamists against Socialist secular Southerners.

And over the last decade, Saleh has exploited the US "war on terror" to break his once-empowered Islamist partners turned political adversaries.

Following al-Qaeda's attack against British interests and the USS Cole in 2000, Saleh was reluctant to co-operate overtly with the US administration.

However, after the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington (and an attack on a French oil tanker in 2002), Saleh agreed to co-operate with the US on all security fronts after obtaining American assurances that Yemen would not be targeted by the US in the "war on terror" as was Afghanistan and Iraq.

The US put the guru of the Yemeni Islamist movement, Sheikh Abdul Majid Az-Zindani, on its "terrorist watch list", and the Yemeni government put all the religious schools under its supervision.

To no avail

However, none of this helped Saleh secure his regime. Recent clashes in the Northern region of the country with the Houthis led to Saudi military interference on the side of the government and exposed the weakness of the regime.

Likewise, Saleh's inability to reduce the unabated political and security tensions in the South, as socio-economic conditions continued to deteriorate in the rest of the country, has all but exposed and amplified the weakness of his regime and its dependency on foreign economic and military aid.

However, with half of the population illiterate or living under the poverty line and one third unemployed, any attempt at a military solution could only exacerbate an already untenable situation.

Barack Obama, the US president, would be well advised to remember the advice given to his predecessor by General Colin Powell: "If you break it Mr president, you will own it."

Paradoxically, if the US continues to fail successfully in its "war on terror", it is those local autocratic leaders like Saleh who end up caring for its security instead of their own national interests.

The joke is on all of us ...

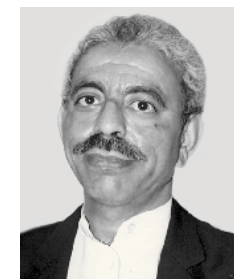
COMMON SENSE

A respite or a durable blessing:

A peace for the Yemeni people?

Yes, it seems quite now for a change in Sa'ada Governorate after six months of mainly guns doing the talking and undertakers operating ceaselessly, having to try to cater to human flesh that has lost its fine intricate and delicate engineering. For the undertakers this makes an already not so dazzling source of livelihood much harder to stomach even for the most hardened professional caretaker of human forms that have lost their meaningful contents and raison d'être -- their souls. The mostly untimely passing away of all these souls that needlessly consummated their allotted time in this world much earlier than their bearers or even their killers might have earnestly pursued. Most of the parting human beings who lost their lives in the Sixth Round of a war that should not have had a Round I in the first place, were folks, whose death would most likely not have a determining factor on the outcome of the war anyway. But then the ugly thing about wars is that most of the casualties are never even asked why they should have to die so prematurely. In fact they do not have people determining what coordinates they should be on when the deadly ordinance that ends their existence per deadly chance should happen to land just when they trek on those coordinates. Their doom is written at that moment and their destiny is decided by men, whom they have never met, let alone have the least admiration for. This war in Sa'ada has not only been a war for people, who only sought to be free from religious oppression. It was a war that most of the combatants on both sides of the dogmatic divide would have preferred not to have started by the men who took on their leadership by bad fate more than by freedom of choice of the constituency. Ironically, when one views the leadership of the leading parties in the war, the people of Sa'ada were indeed fighting behind elected leaders, whereas the leaders behind dictating the orders for the firing of the most lethal ordnances were not freely elected at all. But then, one is not here trying to find the "right" side, if ever there was a right side in war; for the innocent dead there is never a right side. Life for them was the only right side.

One is thus glad to see that the guns have for now stopped the talking and the leaders on both sides have betted on being able to win the hearts of people in more convincing ways than resorting to the gun that never won any heart for anyone. Needless to say, it is more likely that the end of the war may have come, because the more powerful player, who now decides the fate of the world at large, indeed found this war to be disturbingly unreal in their chess game of international conflict. Perhaps, the regime in Sana'a and perhaps their mentors in Riyadh failed to see that it is impossible for a country like Yemen, with its entire limited means to engage in three senseless wars at the same time! In fact, Yemen can't afford to engage in any war and the people of Yemen are already tired of thirty years of almost relentless warfare for a myriad of causes, none of which have brought the Yemeni people any clue as to when the country will ever see the light of day. In the arithmetic of war, in such a situation the main factors are power, greed and lack of faith in God and in the right of people to live in peace, so they can tend to the more urgent needs of fulfilling the needs of hungry children; hungry for food and hungry for learning! Wars do not solve the problem of feeding those hungry children, when the farmers that father those children are denied the most essential ingredients for producing their food and the access to the markets that will buy the output of one's labor. Wars will not help solve the problem of 55% of children in basic school age (whose number is now in the millions!) not being enrolled in schools at all, because there are neither enough schools or teachers, or even care for their future by those who should work night and day to try to remedy this serious of social problems and not the problem of how you pray while facing Mecca. Somebody should tell Thomas Freidman of the New York Times of the real facts on the picture of education in Yemen, because he left with the impression that there were only 5% unenrolled and only 15,000 in number. He also left with the idea that if schools could be found for these wrong numbers, Al-Qaeda would not have a chance to grow in Yemen. He does not even realize that the people who bring war to Yemen are the very same people who bring Al-Qaeda to the surface in Yemen and elsewhere. Mr. Freidman hardly cared about what is going in Sa'ada during his visit to Yemen. His main interests were taken up by the dirty underwear of a dubious Nigerian son of a wealthy man, who simply was deprived from some of the wealth of his father, or who simply found easier paths to glory in life. Thanks to the other breed of war merchants, who find in displaced human minds a good opportunity to extract wealth and fame by sending the former to their death or prisons like Guantanamo, the people of Sa'ada are of little concern to writers like Freidman, who probably does not have the faintest idea why there is Al-Qaeda in the first place. The people of Sa'ada know and are apparently not willing to have these contractors of death dictate their lives. That is what the War in Sa'ada really all about, isn't it?



By: Hassan Al-Haifi



By: Hamid

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Riot at Saudi girls' school

Midterm exams end in violence at girls' school in Islam's holiest city

Benjamin Joffe-Walt
The Media Line

Hundreds of angry students start screaming. Together they charge a nearby classroom. They break tables and chairs, destroy the school kitchen and attack the headmistress.

Shoes, pens and books are thrown at her, she is threatened with death, and forced to run back and lock herself into her office for protection.

Such a scene would scare parents, teachers, education officials and local police in any country.

It takes on a whole new meaning when it takes place at a girls' school in Mecca, Islam's holiest city, on the eastern seaboard of Saudi Arabia, a country known for its strict controls on women's behavior and an extensive internal security apparatus.

According to police and local Saudi media reports, the incident began Monday when Hasna Al-Ghafari, the headmistress of the 17th Intermediate Girls' School in Mecca, was told that a group of girls were sending each other obscene video recordings on their mobile phones.

School officials began searching students' belongings during midterm exams, confiscating seven mobile phones with cameras, perfume and makeup. School officials claim that hundreds of students refused to be searched and began shouting, breaking

tables and chairs, opening gas canisters and destroying the school's kitchen. When the headmistress arrived on the scene, she claims that 500 pupils began "viciously" attacking her with books, pens and shoes.

"I was forced to run away and lock myself in my office for protection," she told the *Saudi Gazette*, adding that one of the students threatened to kill her.

Female jail wardens were called in to break up the students after the headmistress called her husband in desperation.

Mecca's Education Department is investigating the incident and has questioned some of the students, who were reported to have claimed that the headmistress had repeatedly mistreated them, banned students from using mobile phones and locked them in classrooms.

Saudi teachers, education officials and women's rights activists were largely surprised by the incident. "Kids in Saudi schools are generally treated like they are in an army," Wajihah Al-Huwaidar, a women's rights activist and former teacher told The Media Line. "It's incredibly strict and most schools have a very high level of control over kids, especially girls." "Students have uniforms, have to behave a certain way, and are very closely watched," she said. "There are also religious police in front of each girls' school and you can't even bring a newspaper or magazine to school."

"But at the end of the day, you cannot control everybody," Al-Huwaidar said. "There is crime and gangs in

some of the schools, and all teenagers, even those from good families, are sometimes aggressive."

Eman Al Nafjan, a Saudi teacher, argued increased restrictions on a school's ability to discipline students has led to problems like this. "It's not common, but I've taught in a school like that and attacks on teachers do happen," she told The Media Line. "Some students are very tough. They talk back, and they don't listen, so I know where the headmistress is coming from and when the principal's husband said his wife 'was hard on the students because they were hard on her', that's what he's referring to." "When I was a student it was common for teachers to hit students," Al Nafjan said. "Today the ministry of education is extremely strict about any teacher physically abusing a student. The students know this and abuse it so it's just gotten out of hand because nobody is allowed to touch a child. I know one principal who hit a student and even though she is well connected she was demoted into an administrative position and transferred to another city."

Another Saudi teacher, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said student violence was more common in girls' schools serving immigrant communities.

"There are lots of areas in Riyadh and Mecca with large communities of first or second generation African immigrants," she told The Media Line. "They stick together so it's very hard to penetrate the community or get to know them."

"These are schools in very poor

communities so the students don't have the typical student life and that carries into the school," she added. "Many of the students are much older than they should be for their grade, work at night, or even beg on the streets. They come to school late, don't take well to authority and are very rebellious."

But Wajihah Al-Huwaidar said violence in Saudi girls' schools was a product of class, not race.

"This has nothing to do with African communities," the former teacher and women's rights activist said. "If it's a neglected poor area, you find that families can't watch their kids as much, so they don't listen, shout and have behavior problems. Nobody wants to teach in these schools."

"It's an issue we face in the neglected areas of all cities in Saudi," Al-Huwaidar added. "I used to teach in a school like this, in a neighborhood well known for prostitution, and some of the girls want to be like their mothers. So teachers have all sorts of problems."

Mobile phones with cameras are prohibited in girls' schools in Saudi Arabia, which follows a strict Wahhabist interpretation of Islam. A 13-year-old girl made international headlines last month after she was sentenced to a two-months prison term and 90 lashes in front of her classmates after she allegedly hit the school's headmistress on the head with a cup. The incident, which took place last year in the northeastern Saudi port city of Jubail, followed the girl's camera-equipped mobile phone being confiscated by the headmistress.

Israel disciplines senior officers for Gaza artillery use

Experts argue that international law is no longer relevant in Israel's asymmetric conflict with the Palestinians.

Arieh O'Sullivan
The Media Line

One year after the Gaza Operation, the Israeli army has reprimanded two senior officers for firing cannons in populated areas. The two are the highest ranking Israeli officers to be disciplined for actions in the three-week offensive against Hamas.

Israel's response to the UN-sponsored Goldstone report, which was submitted this week, reveals that eight months ago OC Southern Command of the Israel Defense Forces tried two of his senior officers and reprimanded them both for "the misuse of artillery."

"They did not follow procedures, they over exercised their authority in ordering the firing of artillery shells into a built up area," Capt. Barak Raz, an IDF Spokesman, told The Media Line. "This is why they were in fact reprimanded."

The two were identified as Gaza Division Commander Brig. Gen. Eyal Eisenberg and Col. Ilan Malka, commander of the crack Givati infantry brigade. They have both remained in their posts.

"This something that is following them," Raz said. "This means that it will be in their record and this is a stain in their record and unfortunately this is something they will have to deal with [in the future]."

The UN-sponsored Goldstone report accuses the Israeli army of systematic recklessness, including the firing of white phosphorus shells and demands Israel carry out an internal investigation. But Israel says its army is capable of investigating itself and that it doesn't need any outsiders investigating its behavior to keep its army moral.

But the internal disciplinary action has renewed debate over whether current international rules of war are relevant in the modern, asymmetric battlefield that exists between sovereign states and terrorist organizations.

"International law needs to be brought up to date, particularly in situations where you have a sovereign state with an army which is attempting to defend its civilians, as is the case with Israel, juxtaposed with an asymmetric enemy which is not complying with any of the laws," Prof. Justus Reid Weiner, a lecturer at Hebrew University of Jerusalem and scholar at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs told The Media Line. "I think that the rules of war have not kept up with the modern battlefield."

Palestinians charge that Israel committed war crimes through its use of

phosphorus munitions. The Israelis say they never violated any international laws during the three-week offensive to stop Hamas rocketing of Israeli towns and villages. At issue is an incident in which the Israeli army dropped phosphorous shells on a United Nations warehouse during a battle in the Tel el-Hawa neighborhood of Gaza City.

Set amid densely-populated, high-rise apartments, the officers called in the phosphorous to deliberately set the warehouse alight so as to provide a smokescreen for Israeli troops. Israel later paid \$10 million in damages to the United Nations.

"During war, there is obviously the fog of war in which mistakes were made," Capt. Raz said. "This is why we investigate, so that we can find these mistakes and correct ourselves for the future and know that we did everything the best that we could."

"Israel has disciplinary procedures," said Prof. Weiner. "Israel has court martials and if there's a need for more serious action there will be, but to jump ahead today and to immediately start circling and looking for blood like a shark ready to pounce, well, I think we are getting ahead of the facts."

The Israeli army said they began investigating themselves immediately after the operation. Of the 150 claims of inappropriate behavior, 29 led to the opening of criminal investigations. The judge advocate general must decide whether to file an indictment, make do with disciplinary proceedings or close the case.

Phosphorous shells are not banned by international law, but they are banned from being used in civilian areas. The sticky, burning phosphorous can burn straight through the human body. No casualties were reported from the use of phosphorous on the UNRWA warehouses.

"The international law that pertains to the rules of warfare is based on three fundamental premises: wars are fought between countries, both sides use uniformed soldiers and both sides are committed to the same codes," Giora Eiland, a former national security adviser, wrote in *Yedioth Ahronot*, Israel's largest daily. "None of those three fundamental terms were met in Gaza."

For better or worse, Israel's military investigations are seen by the outside world as a whitewash. Eiland, a retired major-general and member of the Israeli army's general staff, said that even if Israel does heed the UN and forms a commission of inquiry, it would not reduce international political pressure on Israel.

"Neither justice nor law are the tools of the game, only pure politics," Eiland wrote. "The establishment of a commission of inquiry in Israel will not ease pressure on us; rather, it will only encourage hostile people to continue to pressure Israel."

Somalia's Al-Shabab aligns with Al-Qaeda

Somalia's Al-Shabab declares a formal allegiance with the global terrorist network Al-Qaeda

Rachelle Kliger
The Media Line

Somalia's Islamist Al-Shabab movement plans to become part of the global Al-Qaeda organization in an attempt to boost its standing among potential recruits and deter enemies.

The movement, which currently controls large parts of Somalia, announced on Monday that it was aligning with Al-Qaeda and that a smaller Islamist group, Ras Kambouni, had agreed to join forces with Al-Shabab.

The announcement was made during a gathering of Islamist insurgence leaders in the central town Baidoa.

"Al-Shabab are following a fairly classic route of looking for greater global legitimacy and greater resources by entering into a formal alliance with the Al-Qaeda hard core," Jason Burke, foreign correspondent for the UK-based newspaper *The Guardian* and author of *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical*

Islam, told The Media Line.

But he mentioned that in the long run this move could backfire.

"What tends to happen is that the local groups try an alliance with the global organization and then see that it has serious drawbacks," Burke said. "One of them is that it tends to lose local support among original followers who didn't necessarily sign up for worldwide jihad."

"What may well happen is what has happened elsewhere, such as in Iraq, Algeria and Indonesia," he continued. "They have lost local support and made themselves weaker as a result."

Burke added that the global Al-Qaeda network has less resources now than it had in the past.

In the mid-1990s, the primary advantage of linking up formally with Al-Qaeda was to gain technical know-how and logistic and financial support.

"[Al-Qaeda] doesn't have those attributes any longer," Burke said. "What they do have is the global name and image - its legitimacy - and it would appear superficially more attractive to some militants to be able to say that they're fighting a global holy war than fighting to liberate a small corner of eastern Africa."

During Monday's gathering, Sheikh Fuad Muhammad Shangole, an Al-Shabab leader, said leaders would wage jihad [holy war] in the eastern and Horn of Africa regions "in order to liberate the Islamic communities and link up our jihad to the global one."

Despite western depictions of Al-Shabab as a unified organization with clear objectives, many regional analysts have said it is a collection of loosely aligned and competing groups that could easily fall apart when challenged.

The organization has stated it wishes to topple the weak central government and impose strict Islamic law.

Richard Cornwell, an independent expert on African affairs, said the declaration had a lot to do with Al-Shabab's rivalry with another Islamist group, Hizbul Islam, which also wishes to topple the government.

They're marginalizing Hizbul Islam and trying to get a monopoly in Somalia," Cornwell told The Media Line. "They've now got the Kambouni to join as well."

"I think the most worrying thing is that it doesn't seem that the Transitional Federal Government,

despite the efforts and support of the international community, is making itself a credible player in all of this," he added. "Also, by playing the Al-Qaeda card, [Al-Shabab] can probably get the international community to misstep and come in, which will do their cause all the more good...It's a way of merging the Islamist and nationalist cards."

"They're trying to link up with a global franchise and of course the global franchise is only too happy to play along," Cornwell continued. "There may be linkages but they won't be practical in terms of command and control."

Al-Shabab is short for Harakat Al-Shabab Al-Mujahideen (the Warrior Youth Movement) and controls large parts of southern Somalia and of Mogadishu. The group is an offshoot of the Islamic Courts Union, which was in control of the country for the second half of 2006 but was ousted by the Somalis and their Ethiopian allied forces at the beginning of 2007.

Islamists regrouped following the ousting and began seizing strategic areas and launching daily attacks on the army, civilians, aid workers and peacekeepers.

Defying convention – A Gaza love story

Finding love amidst Gaza's traditional society is a tricky business, and for those who defy the odds there's a high price to pay.

Omer Ghraieb
The Media Line

Ehsan fell in love with his wife A'isha, a girl from the neighborhood, when he was 14 and she 13.

Eight years later they are still together, with Ehsan is about to graduate with a degree in pharmacology from Gaza's Al Azhar University and A'isha studying journalism at the same school.

But after being together for years, the couple is still no closer to being able to expose their marriage.

"I am a religious person and well mannered, and so is A'isha," Ehsan told The Media Line. "We know right from wrong. Whenever we sneak our the back door of the university so that we can walk in the street for five minutes, we feel guilty and ashamed."

"Then I remind myself that it's not wrong, even though our parents don't know," said the black-haired young man with cautious honey eyes. "I have

never even touched her hand, or degraded her in any way, be it hurting her feelings or her dignity. How can I hurt a person I love more than myself? Love is not wrong even though it's considered 'scandalous' and unacceptable here in Gaza."

A'isha and Ehsan's status is what is known in Gaza as a 'conventional marriage', a union recognized by law, but often without the approval of the religious authorities or the couple's families - an anomaly in a society in which religion, law and cultural legitimacy are so intricately weaved together.

"Conventional marriage, in its real meaning, is just like the real legitimate marriage but lacks the court papers, appearance and approval," Dr Hassan Al Juju, Head of the Supreme Council of Sharia Law in Gaza told The Media Line. "Instead of the sheikh, a lawyer does his usual work in the presence of the man and woman. The bride's father or legal guardian has to be present even if she is over 18."

'Conventional marriages' occupy an uncertain space in Gazan society and are frequently known to stir controversy. The debate on whether they can be considered legal and culturally

legitimate often appears irresolvable and the boundary between 'conventional marriages' and 'secret marriages' is often blurred.

In a society in which women's 'honor' can impinge upon a family's reputation, secret marriages and love affairs are a dangerous business, and often end in 'honor killings' - the murder by a family member of a female seen to have shamed the family name.

"Conventional marriage is neither an equivalent nor an alternative to secretive marriage, because secretive marriage is totally refused, forbidden and 'haram' (sinful) by the Sharia," Dr Hassan said. "But conventional marriage has some bad sides just like secretive marriage. Don't forget that it can be a reason behind spreading sexually transmitted diseases. Mixed lineage is one of the most dangerous problems coming out of conventional and secretive marriage. It affects the children and their future tremendously and can end up with them not having any evidence of their identity."

Accepted or not, succeeding in conventional marriage is quite a feat.

"One day at university, we snuck out of the back door and headed to a

lawyer I know," Ehsan said, retelling the story of his wedding day. "I got the papers ready the day before and A'isha told her parents that the university needed some identification papers. After 30 minutes with the lawyer we were married secretly. We went back to the university as if nothing happened."

"We are very cautious," he continued. "Only A'isha's best friend and my best friend know about our secret and now you know."

Men began knocking on A'isha's door to ask for her hand in marriage when she was 16. Although she would always find a reason to refuse, she knows it won't be long before her parents would start asking questions and force her to get married.

"I hope it never happens," A'isha said through tears. "I am trying my best to buy him time and I don't know how my destiny will end once my family knows I am married."

"I am sure my family will either kill me or lock me up forever," she said. "I want to live my life and be happy. Is that too much to ask?"

"I want to graduate, then work, then marry Ehsan and have kids and lead a happy life," she added. "Why is it so

hard when it sounds so simple?"

Many say they got into a conventional marriage by chance.

Nur, 31, holds a prestigious position in a Gazan civil society organization. With a degree in social science from the Islamic University, she has a tall fit frame, grey eyes, looks younger than her age and is smartly dressed.

"Every one who meets me thinks I am very happy and that I am lucky to have such an open minded father that lets me work and not get married," she told The Media Line. "But the truth is much more complicated and painful."

"My father has been refusing every man that knocks on our door for over nine years," Nur said. "I am tired of him taking my salary and preventing me from marriage. Now I see education, work and independence as a burden, not a privilege."

"Eight months ago a man came to ask my father for my hand," she said. "After two months my father said he wasn't fit and that I should forget about him but it was too late, we are in love."

"I know it might sound too bold or maybe wrong but what could I do?" she said. "I had to turn to Dr. Hassan

and tell him to give my father his last ultimatum or I will use conventional marriage to marry this man. I just want to be happy and be a mother. Isn't that my right?"

Though the consequences for those who chose traditional marriage can be very severe, the desire to find love and happiness is often too big a draw.

"You know what would happen if we revealed our marriage right now?" Ehsan said. "She would be killed and I would be either locked up or have to go into hiding to keep myself alive. But I can never let them separate us and I will do everything to fight them if they try. I am willing to take her and live somewhere else or hide or even get out of Gaza."

When reminded that Gaza is like a prison now, where no one can get in or out, Ehsan goes into a rage.

"I will get us out by any means," he shouted. "Whatever I have to do."

"But if they force her to marry someone else," he said, "then we will either announce it and face the consequences or run away."

***All names in this article have been changed to protect the identities of those interviewed.*

The credibility of Yemen's civil Society organizations

By: Nabil Khedr

Undoubtedly, numerous Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have been established to enhance the image of political and social leaders and some of them have even been created through the support of such leaders, resulting in their activities being negatively influenced, which affect them and the society around them.

Meanwhile, just as there exist some corrupt CSOs that simply serve as mouthpieces for politicians and to maintain the status quo, there are also many foundations and organizations that actually are exactly what they claim to be and are not in any way deceiving the public. They exist only to carry out the work they have been created for; no more, no less.

In addition, in the past several years a number of foundations have been set up by and for women and the youth in the nation, which have been quite successful in presenting new ideas and engaging in awareness building activities, which has in turn gained them notoriety, respect, and support from society, the government, international donors and targeted audiences.

The purpose of this editorial is to try to ascertain whether or not Civil Society Organizations are actually credible or if they have been negatively affected by their lack of originality.

Some elements which are often lacking in many of these associations and organizations, and which are crucial for work in development are: the ability to write and produce a framework for projects; a strong and distinctive public relations component; productive ties with donors from international foundations, the private sector and the government; and a sufficient amount of information regarding issues in the community, both theoretically and statistically.

This is in addition to some other obstacles that lead to the lack of capacity in these institutions and associations which prevent them from becoming credible in their local communities.

"The devil you know is better than the devil you don't"

These words ring true for many donors from the private sector, the government, and international organizations. Thus, many of these agencies only deal with specific organizations that have clearly demonstrated their credibility through their activities and who have unfailingly impressed those involved in Civil Society Organizations in Yemen. This support should certainly not be misconstrued as an indicator that these CSOs are somehow stealing the limelight or are corrupt and are guilty of any wrongdoing, as long as they continue to carry out their activities to the best of their abilities and to develop in order to further spread their message and obtain their goals and aspirations. Simultaneously, numerous institutions have emerged in the Yemeni capital, which are essentially inactive or ineffectual. These various organizations should also be trained on diverse methods to gain support in order to be effective and enjoy credibility rather than allowing them to continue atrophy into a meaningless state which reinforces their stereotype of operating under false pretences.

This means, among what it means, that private funding foundations, the governmental and those of international organizations are being asked to devote particular programs and grants to be paid for the first time for new institu-

tions or for those who did not get into joint projects with these funding institutions before. This aims at examining and choosing the right partner among them. Hence, this will lead to an annual push for a number of institutions from the arena of mere formal look to that of high credibility.

Serious leadership and credibility

Leadership in any organization is the mastermind behind the activities of the foundation. The leadership, generally, are the ones concerned with carrying out the institution's work and finding it the proper support to allow it to access the necessary resources. This is in order to enable the foundation or the association to attain a certain level of credibility and a purposeful level of activity.

Leadership can also play a role in giving the foundation since such a leadership may establish a certain foundation for the aforementioned purposes; the profits, its mere existence or for social appearances.

Unprofessional behavior and its negative impact on the credibility of institutions

The environment of civil society in Yemen is largely characterized by the diversity of the societal issues being addressed, particularly those of gender-equity, child welfare, and youth-related issues. Nonetheless, many of these institutions were formed swiftly to serve the urgent needs of the local community, which has unfortunately resulted in an often less than professional approach on the field. They have not even been able to build on their experience so far in order to make them more powerful activists and advocates for their causes. For example, there have been countless feminist associations which are still working in tailoring and embroidery, but have done nothing to move beyond that or develop in the field of Human Rights for Women, which comprises far more richness and diversity.

This applies to many institutions located both outside the capital city of Yemen as well as within the capital of Sana'a, and the larger cities of Taiz and Aden.

This unprofessional behavior impacts not only the institutions' activities in the event that there is a certain activity that they carry out, but also impacts greatly on their credibility such that the progress of their work and activities are impeded. This is although they have activities that exhaust the foundation's staff and lead them to believe that their institution is effective, while if evaluated objectively, they are actually ineffective and have no credibility.

Perpetuating a vicious cycle

One of the main reasons for the lack of credibility of these institutions is that they have a great fear of actually going down to the street and a fear of getting into direct confrontations when dealing with social issues. This makes them appear ineffectual and deeply impacts the credibility of the organization.

Their entire existence takes place within a closed vicious cycle of a lack of knowledge regarding the issues surrounding the community, or not knowing the ways of addressing these issues, and a fear of the expansion of their base and the inability to cover these activities using their human and material resources.

Many of the institutions we hear about and the opening of which we are witnesses to every day, appear to have interactions with their staff or volunteers, working and returning back home to perform activities such

as writing papers but not really in the executive carrying out activities in the sense that they are supposed to perform them. They have become fixed in the 'report' and theory stage and have not been able to move beyond this phase into something more tangible and meaningful.

Many of the institutions, despite having been in operation for many years, still remain in this stage. We hear about their meetings which espouse the institution's visions and desires to work in the local community, and yet they can not seem to translate all this paperwork and research into action on the ground. On the contrary, there is the accumulation of more words, the affirmation of the old dreams with the addition of new hopes which can also gather dust till they are discussed at the next 'meeting'.

Geography and its role in affecting the credibility of the institutions

In all fairness, the number of sessions accorded to develop the performance of activists in civil society organizations in the capital, Sana'a, far exceeds the number provided to activists in other cities.

The members of a foundation in Sana'a, Aden or Taiz, may receive an amount of training and rehabilitation that is available to merely ten percent of the staff working at any institution in Marib or Al-Jawf.

And quite frankly, the funds which are available to a foundation in Sana'a far exceed those available to foundations in Hodeidah and Dhamar, for example.

Many of the various institutions have been established recently in most of the cities, but the management of the institutions in Sana'a in terms of activities such as funding and training, rehabilitation and capacity-building gives the impression that many associations and institutions in other cities are operating under severe handicaps. This is because they do not have the professional staff and the funding that would enable



The Yemeni Women's Union among other civil society organizations participated in assisting the displaced persons because of Sa'ada war. They sent truckloads of in kind aid such as blankets and food to help the displaced people overcome this distress.

them to operate to their utmost capacity. This drives them forcefully into the trap of lack of originality and strikes at their credibility. The same holds true for the alliances and networks that are established mostly in the main cities of the Republic of Yemen, which creates many institutions outside the two capitals completely outside the scope of coverage even from level of the networks, thus essentially cutting them off from support from the networks, as well as training and rehabilitation, and even financing in some cases.

Moreover, the information plays a significant role in advancing the progression of any institution to a more professional level, but the farness from the capital as well as being located at great distances away from modern means of communication, mainly the Internet, contribute to these institutions' lacking the ability to build their capacity through the Internet and this is a great source of weakness for them. The lack of capabilities for the institutions, working in the field of Civil Society Organizations, lying in areas out-

side the three active capitals of Yemen makes it just an institution with great history but does not seem active in serving their local community. This again makes it inevitable that the institution will be wholly discredited and accused of non-credibility, relying merely on its formal look.

In fact, there are many factors that may lead an institution, whether located inside one of the major capitals or even within any of the other provinces, to lose its credibility and to be accused of a rigid structure. Also, not to be discounted among these factors, are the frequent upheavals and replacements of staff and management within these institutions, often forcing these organizations to go through what can only fairly be considered a start-up phase more than once during their professional history. The top members of their management often leave for other businesses which can provide them with stable and secure economic revenue. Moreover, the challenges of financing and its instability render many institutions unable to carry on with their activities

and to remain viable, which contribute to them being accused of corruption and a lack of credibility. This is on the grounds that the local community seems unsure of what the institution actually distributed during the month of Ramadan, for example. Though that this institution works almost only in this month. This also damages the credibility not only in the face of donors, but also target groups, even though the organization may be completely transparent and actually willing to serve their local community.

Credibility is an important challenge for any organization. Whenever one proves its credibility this indicates the ability guarantee their work on a larger scale and with many partners at local and international levels. Building credibility requires a great deal of work, effort and planning. This is a skill that isn't mastered by the majority of organizations, but only by the exceptional few in the minority.

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Wadi Abou Jamil: Stories About the Jews of Beirut

By: Magda Abu-Fadil
Huffington Post

The beautifully recounted stories about Beirut's Jews are enlightening, but beg for details about community members who decided to leave their Lebanese homes and lives, mostly unannounced, without having been persecuted, tortured, or killed as in the Holocaust.

Wadi Abou Jamil, the book by Nada Abdelsamad about the downtown neighborhood inhabited by Jews in Beirut, is a rich narrative tracing the existence of countless Jewish families and individuals born in Lebanon, or who'd moved there from other countries, and were free to work, worship and be part of a mosaic of 18 officially recognized religious sects.

"Modern Lebanon's Jewish sect was at its peak in the 1920s. With the creation of the Greater Lebanese State in 1920, it enjoyed legal protection equal to that of other Lebanese sects," said the book's introduction.

The Jews also had privileges short of political benefits, since they lacked parliamentary representation in successive elections.

Dr. Shams, a kindly old physician who treated patients for almost no fee, or in return for chickens and eggs, was the most famous Jewish general practitioner in Lebanon.

He wrote prescriptions asking the neighborhood's pharmacist, Dr. Farhi,

to dispense medication at discount rates for Wadi Abou Jamil's needy -- Jewish or otherwise.

His sudden death and funeral drew patients of all denominations to honor a man who had treated them all with equal compassion.

But others like teenager Gamalo Mezrahi left her home and friends in the Jewish Quarter for Israel when her parents decided to pack their belongings and start a new life.

The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 was the turning point for Lebanese Jewish emigration, author Abdelsamad wrote, noting that pictures of pitched battles in what had been Palestine depicting terrified Palestinians carrying whatever they could to flee the oncoming Jewish fighters and settlers filled publications of the era.

Untold numbers of Jews emigrated to Israel from 1948-on, for fear of repercussions against their community.

But others lived through the 1967 Six-Day War pitting Israel against the armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, or stuck it out during the Lebanese Civil War, feeling more at home in Lebanon than what they considered an alien Zionist implant in the Middle East.

The 274-page book published by Dar Annahar examines the lives of Beirut's Jews as remembered by their former neighbors and friends. But most of the characters' names were changed due to the sensitivity of the stories and unfolding regional

events.

One character's story was turned into a spy movie in Lebanon.

The beautiful Shola Cohen worked at a local bank and often entertained well placed government officials in her apartment that was off-limits to her own neighbors.

She also disappeared for stretches of time that people found fishy.

Cohen, also known as The Pearl, was arrested in 1961, tried and sentenced to 20 years in jail for running a spy ring that provided Israel with sensitive information about military formations and other matters.

A few years later she was released and swapped for four Lebanese soldiers captured by Israel across its border with Lebanon.

Ironically, her son Yitzhak Levanon (Hebrew for Lebanon), who was born in Lebanon and speaks fluent Arabic, was named Israel's ambassador to Egypt in November 2009 (<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/11/23/92166.html>).

Abdelsamad, the BBC's Arabic-language correspondent in Lebanon, wrote about the country's Jews after she was asked to report on the Shiite community in the wake of Israel's 33-day war against Lebanon in 2006.

Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah fighters who killed three Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two others in a cross-border raid in July of that year triggered the war that crippled Lebanon but that an Israeli commission of inquiry deemed a "failure" for the Jewish state (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/30/AR2008013000559.html>).



Beirut's Magen Abraham Synagogue today gets a facelift.

[com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/30/AR2008013000559.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/30/AR2008013000559.html)

In Wadi Abou Jamil, Abdelsamad weaves fascinating interlaced histories about families like the Sourours, Abadis, Salamons, Basals, Zeitunes, Sakkals, Lizbonehs, Sassons, Attiyehs, Linados, Shreims, Tagers, and Shoas - Sephardic Jews -- or others identified only by their first names.

An occasional Ashkenazi name creeps into the tales of the community that, for the most part, worshipped at the Magen Abraham synagogue

and sent its children to the secular Alliance Israelite School or the religious Talmud Torah School behind the temple.

The author's graceful narrative describes the relationships, entanglements and religious traditions of the quarter's Jewish, Christian and Muslim residents.

Her very nimble prose, to be translated and published in English, lends credence to reports that Lebanon once had a thriving Jewish community numbering in the thousands, whose members were very much part of the social fabric.

But some of Wadi Abou Jamil's residents who left as children with their parents during the different waves of Jewish emigration, returned as Israeli soldiers during Israel's invasion of Lebanon and the siege of Beirut in 1982.

While pounding the city to kingdom come and cutting it off from food, water and fuel supplies, they found time to meander down memory lane to Wadi Abou Jamil in search of old neighbors and recognizable landmarks.

"The common thread in the stories about Lebanon's Jews is that they left in complete secrecy," of their own free will, the book's introduction said, adding that news about them stopped after their departure for Israel, Europe or North America.

Many were pressured to join their families in Israel and transited through the eastern Mediterranean island of Cyprus to get there.

One old Jewish woman, Lisa, still resides in Wadi Abou Jamil with her cats. She refused to go to Israel, choosing instead to live with her memories of a once dynamic quarter.

Magda Abu-Fadil is the Director of Journalism Training Program at the American University of Beirut.

Foreign Arabic-Language TV: An Exercise in Futility?

By: Magda Abu-Fadil
Huffington Post

They're tripping over each other. American, British, French, Russian, Chinese and Turkish satellite TV channels want a piece of the Arab viewers' pie by raising their profiles in the Arab region, with no real guarantees of success.

That hasn't deterred the BBC from re-launching an Arabic-language channel - it had one, but a flap with co-financier Saudi Arabia shuttered it for a few years - to jostle for air time with the U.S. government-funded Al Hurra, French France 24 and Moscow-based Russia Today, to name a few.

"Arabic-language foreign channels: millions squandered on a non-responsive audience," headlined a feature in the Lebanese daily An-Nahar's youth supplement.

"I watch France 24 and it's good," Ralph Hanna told the paper. "I don't like Al Hurra and I haven't heard of the others."

France 24, supported by the French government and launched during the tenure of former president Jacques Chirac, is a relative newbie to the Arabic-language channels bandwagon and has yet to make a dent in the Arab world's viewers market.

"What with the technological revolution, people no longer need to be fed news from the outside," explained Nahida Nakad, France 24's assistant director for Arabic news, adding that times had changed since audiences depended on only one or two "reliable" sources.

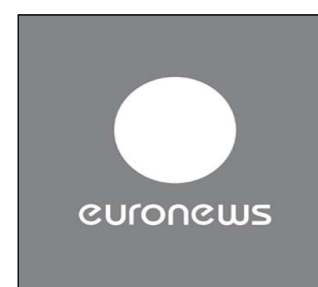
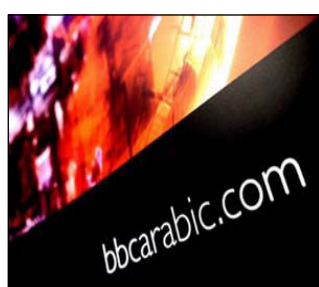
But she insisted that, unlike other foreign channels broadcasting in Arabic, hers did not have a specific agenda, given the French tradition of independent public or private media.

Nakad may well have been referring to Uncle Sam's Al Hurra, a satellite channel that has been struggling to find viewers in the Arab world, where Qatar's Al Jazeera. Saudi-backed Al Arabiya, and Lebanese Hezbollah's Al Manar TV already have a loyal following.

Funding for Al Hurra was first provided during the administration of former president George W. Bush, when the more respected Voice of America - that for years played second fiddle to Britain's BBC in the Middle East - was ravaged to create a TV channel and a radio station, Sawa, aimed at Arab youth.

According to Al Hurra officials, the station has no hidden agenda and broadcasts its news and entertainment programs in keeping with high professional standards.

But PR attempts to win Arab hearts and minds have to date fallen on deaf ears and eyes and run red ink all over



the books, with legislators in Washington demanding to see more tangible results. Apart from what is perceived as U.S. propaganda, Arab viewers don't always have access to all these stations.

Nevertheless, it's a lucrative market of some 300 million people in a region where, according to various reports, close to 500 Arabic-language channels already serve viewers from the Arabian Gulf to the Atlantic.

Unless viewers have their own powerful dishes and receivers, TV "bouquets" and station choices are available through satellite providers who may cut channels they don't favor.

"I don't know why they spend money to establish these channels, notably the Americans who won't convince us of their views, whatever they do, since they're an occupation force in Iraq and support Israel everywhere," Ali Darwish told Lebanon's An-Nahar.

That notwithstanding, well-established organizations like the BBC haven't shied from plunging into the choppy Arab TV waters.

Noted for its professionalism and serious coverage of the Middle East, the BBC has a longstanding relationship with Arab listeners, who have been tuning in to its radio broadcasts for over 70 years.

Like its American and French counterparts, the BBC claims diversity and editorial independence from its paymaster, the British government.

Its Arabic programs director, on a recent trip to Beirut, said the BBC wasn't out to compete with other channels, but to work professionally, to be different, to raise questions others fail to ask, and, that there was room for everyone in the playing field.

Given its seniority on the scene, the BBC claims its programs are distinctive.

So where does that leave Euronews, a pan-European venture headquartered in France that has been broadcasting to the continent and beyond in half a dozen languages, with Arabic added to the mix in 2008?

The channel rarely shows on-air reporters, relying instead on video

feeds with voice-overs. Its simple circle logo represents purity, managing director Michael Peters told Asharq Al-Awsat daily at a launch party.

"This is because Euronews doesn't strive to impose opinions, and has none of that small talk between presenters," he opined.

That could also be said for Deutsche Welle, whose radio and TV programs in Arabic have been a standard of the industry for many years.

Its Berlin-based Arabic program studios and newsroom are a testament to Germany's outreach efforts towards the Arab world.

Not to be outdone, Russia jumped

into the fray and launched an aggressive advertising campaign in Arab newspapers and on billboards in Saudi Arabia to promote its news, sports, press reviews, talk shows and documentaries.

With Russia Today, Moscow secured its television footprint through three orbiting satellites in what it said was its aim "to build bridges between civilizations."

It's a familiar refrain for Arab viewers who have become inured to the plethora of local, regional and foreign stations.

This dim sum of channels wouldn't be complete without the requisite nib-

bles from China.

Enter China Central Television (CCTV) in July 2009 into the already crowded satellite landscape with its brand of Arabic programming aimed at the Middle East and North Africa.

A CCTV official said the channel would focus on news, but feature entertainment and education programs as well.


He expressed hope the Arabic channel might "help further cooperative and friendly ties between China and the Arabic countries by deepening mutual understanding and communication," according to a Chinese embassy news release in Beirut.

Closer to home, Turkey's TRT media empire has the region in its sights with an Arabic language channel aimed at strengthening bonds between it and its neighbors.

So, one can't blame Arab viewers for being a bit blasé.

"What we want isn't (foreign satellites') blood-filled newscasts, but getting to know the other's culture," wrote Bandar Abdel Hamid in the pan-Arab daily Al Hayat.

Magda Abu-Fadil is the Director of Journalism Training Program at the American University of Beirut.



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Yemeni doctors discuss liver diseases

By: Mirvat Fawzi
For the Yemen Times

Scientific progress may have meant discovering a cure for diseases like the plague with antibiotics, but still today viral liver infections still remain a challenge to man. There is to this day no vaccine for hepatitis C, for example.

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver, and hepatitis viruses are often its cause. According to recent research by medical graduates at the University of Sana'a, hepatitis B is more prevalent than hepatitis A and C in Yemen, and more than 20 percent of people in Yemen carry the hepatitis B virus.

In December, doctors specialized in liver diseases organized workshops to spread awareness about the changes in their field. These activities were crowned by a conference in Aden that discussed scientific research in the field of liver infections and diseases of the digestive system.

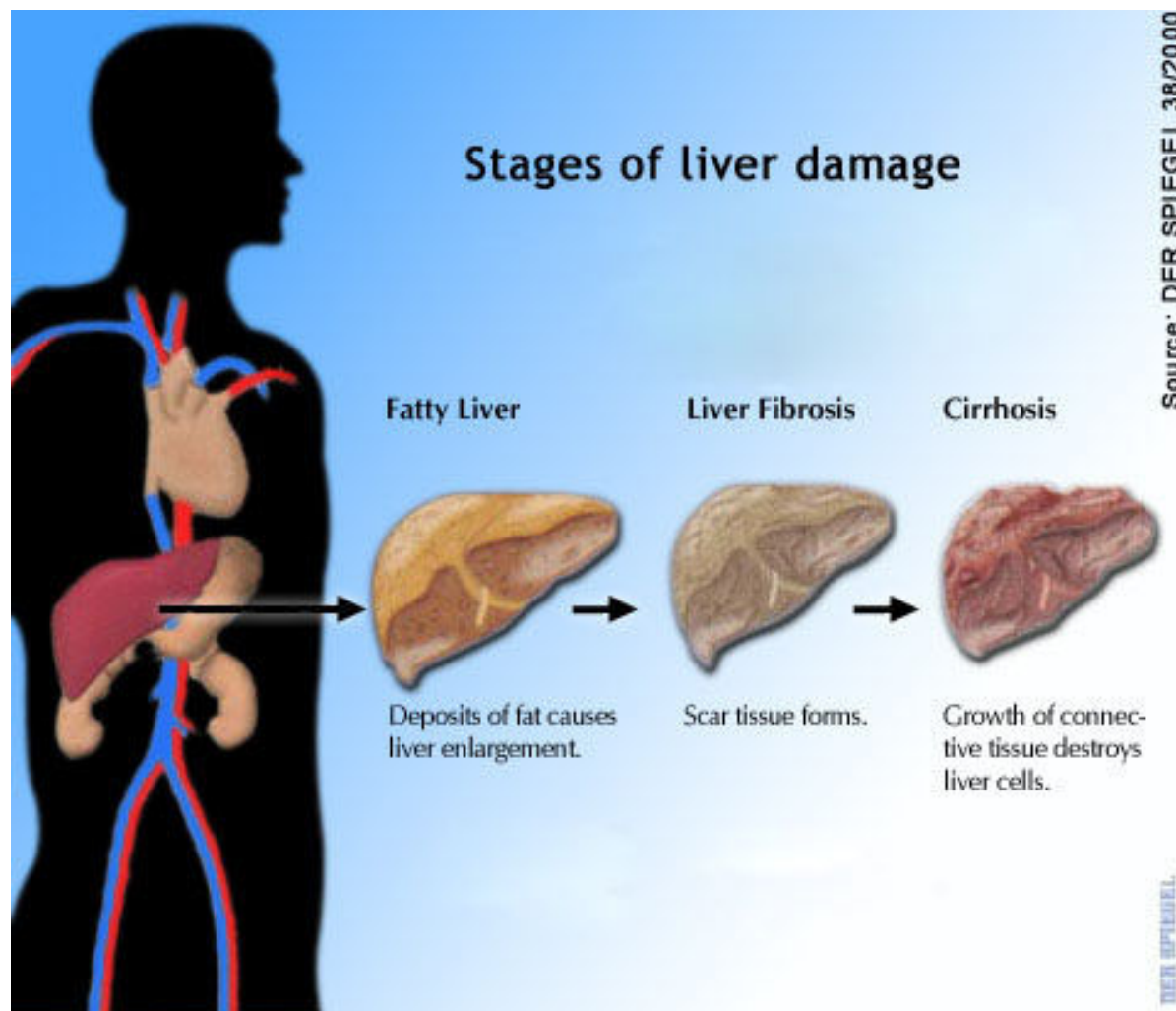
During the conference, Mansoor Al-Amrani, assistant professor at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Sana'a, discussed the transmission of the hepatitis C virus through blood and drew attention to the fact that vaccines are not yet available for this virus.

The assistant professor, who specializes in hepatitis, bile ducts and digestive system diseases, stressed that basic prevention from contamination included testing blood before donation, constant examination of the blood bank, and regular inspections of clinics providing injections.

The conference was also part of an effort to enlighten people about both cirrhosis, the accumulation of scar tissue on the liver which impedes it from working properly, and liver cancer. Both these are caused by chronic hepatitis C.

Religious advice

Ma'moon Aashoor, a gastroenterologist at the Faculty of Medicine at the



Ain Shams University in Egypt, presented a sheet about Islam's role in combating behavior that makes people more vulnerable to hepatitis viruses.

Tattoos, adultery, homosexuality, and excreting in stagnant water all present a risk of contamination by the Hepatitis C virus, he said, and good personal hygiene is important to keep diseases away.

He mentioned Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) saying: "If you hear that there is plague in a land, do not enter it; and if it visits a land while you are therein, do not leave it."

Hepatitis C and diabetes

Al-Amrani presented a paper on the

link between hepatitis C and diabetes. Hepatitis C causes the body not to respond to insulin, so that sugar in the blood is not burned as it is supposed to be, which leads to high blood sugar.

He said that patients with hepatitis C must have their blood sugar checked so that any case of diabetes is treated almost immediately. In case of diabetes due to hepatitis C, regulating blood sugar levels can reduce the negative impact of hepatitis C on the liver.

Fatty liver

Intesar Abdullah Khamees, a gastroenterologist, discussed "fatty liver" or the accumulation of fat in liver cells, a condition often said to be caused by

obesity and diabetes.

She presented a study conducted on 73 patients with fatty liver between 22 and 70 years.

The aim of the study was to find out whether there was a relationship between a fatty liver and a large waist, in order to better understand the causes of the accumulation of fat in liver cells.

The study showed that more than 40 percent of the patients with fatty liver are over 50. Those who have a fatty liver are likely to have wider waists and to be women.

The doctor recommended these patients do sport to help them lose the fat around their waists.

Higher Institute for Health Studies reviews its performance

By: Ismail Al-Ghabyri
and Ali Saeed

The employers of graduates from the Higher Institute of Health Sciences in Sana'a say that their new staff lack English language and practical skills, according to a new review of the institute.

The review, conducted by the institute with the support of the German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), was based on interviews with all levels of the institute's staff, students, and employers in the health sector.

"The review report aims to provide highly qualified health personnel consistent with local, regional and international standards," said the dean of the institute, Dr. Abdulwahab Al-Kuhlani.

"It also aims to make the health personnel provide a high quality health service to optimize the general health situation in Yemen," he added.

The Higher Institute of Health Sciences (HIHS) was created in 1971 to qualify Yemeni health personnel, according to Al-Kuhlani. It started with just three departments: nursing, public health, and laboratory.

Now the institute offers the Yemenis students around ten courses, including midwifery, medical equipment, physiotherapy, radiology, pharmacology, health statistics, health management, health education, occupational health, anesthesia, surgical nursing, pediatric nursing and hematology, according to the report.

Although the institute was initially supervised by the Ministry of Public Health and Population and the Ministry of Education, it has been financially and academically autonomous following a presidential decree in 2003.

Its general board of the institute however still operates under the leadership of the Ministry of Health with members from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Higher Education.

"A five-year strategy is now also under preparation to make the institute



Over a half of HIHS graduates for the year 2008-2009 were women.

operate better," said Al-Kuhlani.

Poor spoken English

The report indicated that graduated students from the HIHS cannot communicate very well with foreigners in English. Yemeni hospitals employing foreigners complained about the HIHS graduates' poor English language skills.

"They have obvious difficulties to communicate with our foreign staff," said one of the interviewees to the report team.

Some of the employers said that the main language of the HIHS should be English, and that the graduates need to have intensive courses in English.

"A fundamental problem felt by many is the language used to teach, usually a mixture between Arabic and English," reads the report.

The employers also complain that the theoretical knowledge that the students receive at the HIHS is outdated, and that its graduates are unable to use the equipment that employers have in their hospitals because training during their studies was with old-fashioned

equipment. Employers also complained that HIHS graduates were not confident enough with their skills.

The employers gave a better score to male than to female graduates, because male graduates are more available than female graduates who are not willing to work at all hours, according to the report.

About 1,000 students graduate each year from the institute. For the year 2008-2009, over half of these were female graduates. There are in total about 5,000 students at the institute including its various branches, according to Al-Kuhlani.

Students evaluate teachers

Many students praised good engaged teachers and praised the institute: "Our institute is simply better than the private ones," said one student.

Some others however expressed their dissatisfaction with the way their teachers deal with them.

"Some teachers neglect us," the report quoted one of the students, "We cannot exchange opinions and there are a lot of shouting and insulting, instead

of dialogue."

From the interviews with the HIHS students conducted by the report team, students are aware of what they need and how they should be taught.

"Some of the teachers do not appreciate the needs of the rural girls and do not consider the differences among students," one female student said. "We would like more understanding for the differences among us."

Employability of graduates

Although there is a yearly general board decision on how many applicants may be admitted, the final production of graduates per year is a very uneven and do not seem to match the market demand, according to the report.

Since 2007, secondary school graduates can sit an entry exam to study at the institute. A quota system gives a fair chance to students from rural areas to be accepted and granted accommodation during their studies.

No concrete figures about graduate employment one year after graduation were available to see how well HIHS "products" suit market demand.

At a best guess, the dean of the HIHS estimates that, a year after graduation, most of its community midwives are being hired, less than half of the diploma midwives are being hired, and only a small fraction of the other department are being hired.

Al-Kuhlani said that the administration of the institute is now working on many projects to optimize the level of graduates level to suit market needs.

Health education helps Yemen

Such an academic medical institution contributes to preventing social unrest, by providing many male and female graduates with job opportunities, according to the report.

"Graduates may contribute to improving Yemeni people's health, by increasing the coverage of good health services," reads the report.

The report also said that, if Yemeni graduates moved to other countries, their remittances would benefit Yemen.

HEALTH WATCH

By: Dr. Siva



This weekly column is to disseminate health information to the readers in Yemen and outside. Dr. Siva is currently working at Aden Refinery Company Hospital. Life style diseases and cancer prevention are his special interests. Complementary medicine and Naturopathy are his passions.

Stress & Heart Attacks

Ahmed was looking pale and clammy. He felt as if a weight was pressing on his chest and winced in pain – a look that made everyone in the emergency room scramble without even being told. He was young, not even 30. Within minutes, the ECG I had ordered was done and blood samples were taken and sent for analysis. We gave him nitroglycerin and morphine. He felt better, but was still drenched in sweat and looked weak.

The ECG was totally normal. The blood test reports showed no heart damage. What was the problem? He had just started his own business. Things hadn't been going well: He hadn't slept in days, was making no money, and totally forgot his weekly "khat" sessions with his friends. He even forgot his favorite beverage, coffee. Instead, he took to a new habit, he started smoking cigarette after cigarette. He was young and never had any health problems, but the burden of trying to kick start a new business overwhelmed him.

The Burden of Stress

There's plenty of stress to go around these days. As a doctor, I've seen how an argument with the spouse, boss, or losing a job can send people to the hospital. Studies have shown a clear link between stress and heart attacks.

A recent study called INTERHEART, published in the *Lancet* medical journal, collected information on thousands of heart attack patients in over 50 countries around the world. Researchers wanted to identify the most important risk factors that could predict a heart attack, and it was unique in its international scope. The usual risk factors were all present: high cholesterol, smoking, obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure were the major factors linked to heart attacks.

But one of the most interesting findings was that patients who reported high stress levels also had a higher risk of heart attack, even when the other factors were taken into account. The importance of stress was consistent across-the-board, in people from Africa, Europe, Asia and the United States, and seemed to be as important as high blood pressure.

Controlling Stress

So stress isn't just a homegrown phenomenon. Other studies have shown that workplace and marital stress have been linked to heart attacks. In these times of recessions, competitions from all around, layoffs and less productivity, how can you control stress as a risk factor?

The first step is to know where your stress comes from. Is it family, financial, or work-related? Basem once came to my consulting room complaining of chest pain. He was young and active, but then told me that he recently moved out of Aden. He still worked in the city, but now had to commute one hour. He hated every minute of it. In addition, he had stopped exercising because the travel time had taken over his workout sessions.

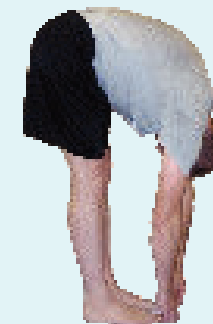
What's the solution? A full cardiac evaluation showed his heart was healthy. I told him categorically that he should take out some time to exercise and learn to live with the stress of commuting.

It was impossible for him to move back to Aden again. So we talked about ways to deal with his travel stress. He started exercising again, lost weight - and the chest pain soon disappeared. He had identified the cause for his stress, accepted it as something unavoidable and learned to control it. And that is the most important aspect about treating stress. Although much of our stress cannot be eliminated, it can almost always be managed. Find the stressors in your own life—are you dealing with them in the best way? Is the stress avoidable? If not, sometimes a different approach, like dividing a large job into smaller ones, can help the stress melt away. Focusing on these tactics can help you feel more in control and skip a trip to the doctor's consulting room.

Stress-reduction is an important effort we all need to practice if we want to stay healthy. Researchers have unveiled studies showing that stress not only contributes to cancer and other illnesses but can also cause relapses and recurrences, as well.

Stress is bad. But what can we do to lessen it? Between work stress, money stress, and the stress of caring for our aging family members and children, we're pulled in a million directions already. How in the

world are we going to reduce our stress? I get stressed just thinking about it! Experts have suggested easy, quick stress-reducers; things we can do for just a few minutes every day to bring some relaxation into our lives. Here are a few tips to bust your stress.



1. Cuddle a Pet. According to psychologists, the relaxation response is automatic when we hold or cuddle a pet. So, have a pet at home, be it a dog or cat. Some experts even say that when a cat purrs or rubs its body against you, our heartbeat slows down to a healthy level.

2. Indulge In a Laugh. Stick comic strips on your refrigerator or next to your computer, buy a joke book and read a new joke every day, or check out an online humor website. Share your jokes with friends. One friend buys a daily desk calendar featuring comics so she has a new one to chuckle over every morning. In the supermarkets in Yemen,

a famous brand of tea (Lipton) has a puzzle to solve with every teabag. So, every time you sip your cup of tea, you can read the puzzle and try to solve it. Anything that takes your mind off your worries and makes you smile will work. Solving the Crossword puzzle in your favorite weekly newspaper or magazine is yet another stress buster.

3. Listen to Music. Music is one of the great stress-relievers of all times. But if you don't have much time, one song is all it takes; the average pop or country song is 4 to 5 minutes long. Have a small CD player or radio in your kitchen. When you're busy cooking or chopping vegetables for dinner, pop in a CD or put on your headphones and listen to a favorite tune. If possible, sing along aloud-experts say humming or singing along to music releases even more feel-good endorphins. When you drive your car or in your office listen to soft, relaxing or soothing music.

4. Take Two Deep Breaths. Close your mouth and inhale slowly through your nose, drawing the air as deeply into your lungs as you can. Exhale slowly through your mouth, expelling the air until your lungs feel empty; then do it again. Experts say that taking a couple of deep breaths can provide as much beneficial relaxation as meditating if you do it several times a day.

5. Do a Simple Stretch. We've all heard about the benefits of yoga for stress reduction, and five minutes is all it takes to do a couple of simple yoga-based stretches. Stand tall and bend forward at the waist; if you can't touch your toes, just bend your knees and bend forward as far as you can. Then stand up and reach for the sky, stretching your arms as high as possible.

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Saudis top list of foreigners marrying Yemenis in 2009

By: Khaled Al-Hilaly

The increase in the number of Yemeni-Saudi couples in recent years reflects the close cultural ties between the two countries, but a disparity in gender shows the difficulty for Yemeni men to marry Saudi women.

More Yemeni women married Saudi men than Yemeni men married Saudi women last year, according to recent reports by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice.

Higher dowries in Saudi Arabia and the difference in the standard of living between the two countries are some factors behind the higher frequency of Yemeni women marrying Saudi men.

"For Saudis, marrying Yemeni women is less expensive compared to

the amount they have to spend in their country," said Mohammad Al-Harbi, a student from Saudi Arabia.

For a Yemeni, it is very difficult to marry a Saudi woman because it would cost him no less than SR 30,000 (USD 8,000), according to Al-Harbi.

Yemeni women tend to marry Saudis if they don't marry a Yemeni, and Yemeni men tend to marry Somali women if they marry foreigners, according to the report by the Yemeni Ministry of Justice.

According to the report's statistics, up to 1,230 people from 52 countries married Yemenis in 2009. They were from Saudi Arabia and the United Emirates, in the Arab world, and from the USA and Britain from the non-Arab world.

Many Britons and Americans mar-

ried to Yemeni women are of Yemeni descent.

The number of Yemeni women married to foreigners is slowly but steadily on the rise. In 2008, some 1,024 Yemeni women were registered as having married a foreigner, a much higher figure than that for Yemeni men marrying foreigners that year, which was barely over 200.

Hana Al-Khamri, a Yemeni journalist based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, further attributed the increasing trend in Saudi-Yemeni marriages to the large presence of the Yemeni community in the Saudi Arabia, as well as economic reasons.

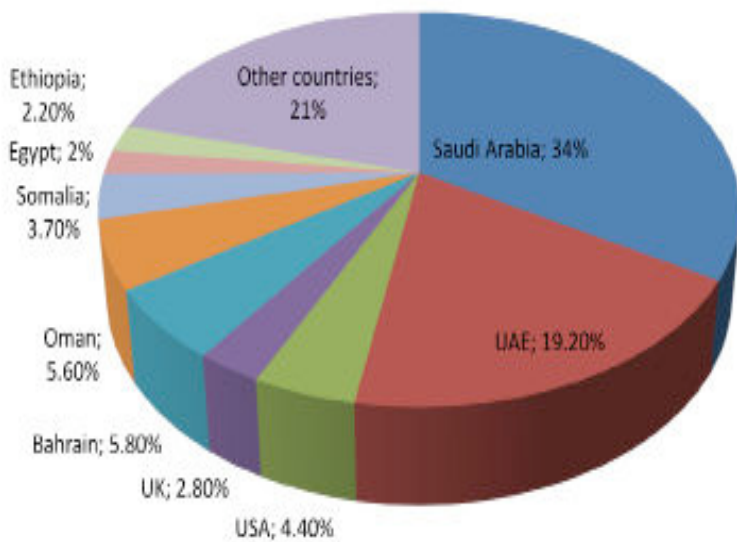
"Saudis prefer to marry Yemeni women because of the low cost of marriage in Yemen when compared Saudi Arabia," she said.

"There are families of Yemeni origin who have Saudi passports and they prefer to marry their relatives in Yemen," she added. "There is great faith between Saudis and Yemenis that they share the same culture and traditions."

But if marriage to a Yemeni woman is an attractive prospect for a Saudi man, the same cannot be said the other way round. The expenses make Yemeni men unwilling to marry Saudi women.

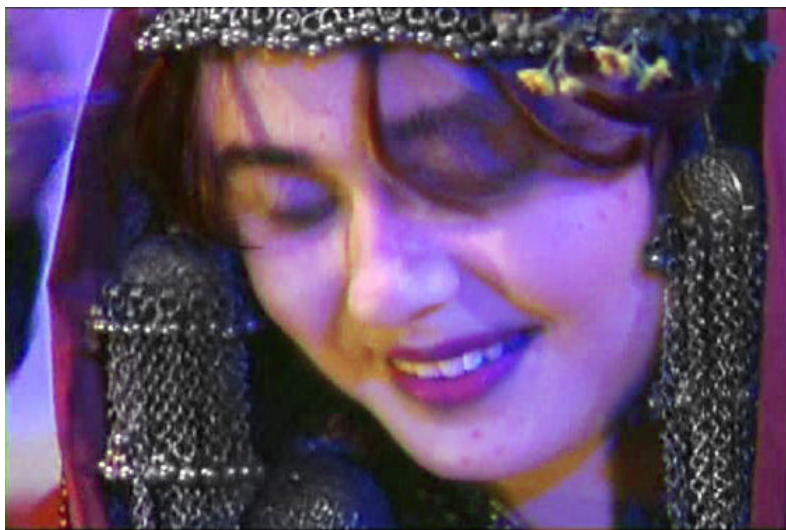
Unlike a Saudi man wanting to marry a Yemeni girl, a Saudi woman wishing to marry a non-Saudi is not a single person's decision, because it is strongly linked to the family, she explained.

Sociologist Hamoud Al-Awdi also believes that restrictions on marriage to non-Saudis and the high cost of marriage in Saudi Arabia are behind



Foreigners married to Yemenis in 2009 according to nationality

Independent Yemeni film seeks cinema for screening



Something Called Homesickness follows the trials of a young Yemeni woman whose husband leaves her for work abroad after their wedding.

By: Marzook Yasseen
For the Yemen Times

Yemeni filmmaker Samir Al-Afif spent seven years making his second feature film, *Something Called Homesickness*.

He has shown his film both at the French Cultural Center and at the university in Aden, but has since struggled to show it in Sana'a.

The Yemeni Cultural Center has offered him a price to rent out the building, instead of encouraging him with free facilities, he said.

One of the first cinemas in the Arab world opened in Aden in the 1930s, but the cinema industry in Yemen has yet to flourish. Over the last few decades, cinemas have fallen into decline, with many of those in Aden having been turned into wedding halls or simply abandoned.

"I can't show my movie at the cinema because they are no cinemas to show it in," said Al-Afif.

The filmmaker laments the lack of support for homegrown cinema in Yemen. He said the government has sometimes intentionally neglected the upkeep of cinemas by saying that these places are haram (forbidden in Islam), especially after the political rise of the Islah party.

"The government doesn't believe in the importance of culture and arts because they increase people's awareness, and the government wants to keep them ignorant," he said. "Cinemas should be revived."

There are investors who want to reopen cinemas in the country, he said,

but the government is not on their side. If he showed his latest film on television instead of the cinema, he would not be able to cover the costs of making the film.

Al-Afif was previously the director of Yemeni television series, including a Ramadan television series called *Tragicomedy*. His first film, *The Wedding*, 1997, was awarded a prize at the 2000 Tunisian Radio and Television Festival.

His latest film is a shorter version of an adaptation television series he previously made of the short stories of late Yemeni writer Mohammad Abdulwali. The nearly two-hour long film follows the trials of a young Yemeni woman whose husband leaves her for work abroad shortly after their wedding.

Something Called Homesickness was shot in Aden and Thula (to the east of Sana'a).

Although some Yemenis have said the film is a promising to independent Yemeni cinema, others have questioned the role of televised or cinematographic adaptations of literature in enlightening society.

Al-Afif said that it is difficult to establish cinema as an art form and industry in Yemen, especially since it has lost its credibility among spectators. This may be due to financial difficulties in the past, rendering it unable to produce independent work.

He lamented the fact that Yemenis have become more attracted to international cinema that local television productions, and said that concerned authorities should deal with this "mental emigration."

Homegrown cinema is essential for the industry to thrive in Yemen.

Cinema as social police

Mubarak Salmeen, the President of the Yemeni Writers' Union, said that the role of the cinema was just as important as that of the police in controlling and influencing people. Cinema can socially control and educate people.

Salmeen ascribed the absence of cinema critics to the absence of films produced in Yemen. He stressed the importance of finding a source to produce movies.

According to Salmeen, there is a great amount of subject material in Yemen with which to produce movies, including Yemeni literature that can be adapted to the screen.

Since the 1970s, there have been several attempts to produce documentaries, but they have not reached the level of international productions, he said.

Develop Yemeni talent

Abdusalam Amer, a teacher at the Fine Arts Institute, said that Yemenis should realize their potential, using available social, economic, and cultural resources to their advantage.

Establishing the art of cinema in Yemen will require training cameramen and actors, as well as encouraging film critics.

Abdul Rahman Abdu, a writer, said that Yemenis should work to produce an original Yemeni film. Yemen only has one so far, *From the Cottage to the Palace* produced in the 1970s.

He explained that the film *A New Day in Old Sana'a* was produced with the help of a European team which enabled the movie to be shown at a European festival, and stressed that future productions should be made exclusively by Yemenis

Broken glasses
Najeeb Mahfoodh, a theatre director, however found no problem with seeking assistance from external experts to help produce a good Yemeni film.

He said that Yemenis should adapt some of Yemen's many literary works to the screen.

Abdurahman Ahmed, a writer who specializes in arts, said that the Association of Theatre and Cinema and in Aden was only active in the 1970s when it was founded. He said that the association only ever produced one play, *The Glasses* by Abdulkarim Al-Razi'i.

"The [drinking] glasses are now broken and everything is over," he said.



the rare marriages of Yemeni men to Saudi women.

"The number of marriages is very little in comparison with the huge intercultural exchange between Yemen and Saudi Arabia," said Al-Awdi. "There are more than one and half million Yemeni expatriates in the Gulf countries."

Al-Awdi criticized the "plague" of high dowries in Saudi Arabia. He hopes that Arab countries can limit dowries and make marriage easier for young men.

Yemeni citizenship for children

The Ministry of Interior statistics for 2009 show that 120 foreign women acquired Yemeni nationality because they married Yemeni men. Their children would be given the Yemeni nationality by their father.

But the children of Yemeni mothers married to foreigners have only just obtained the right to Yemeni citizenship. In April 2009, the Yemeni parliament approved amendments on article 3 of the Citizenship Law to grant Yemeni women the right to transfer their nationality to their children from

mixed marriages.

"In Yemen the laws were reformed and that is a very good step, as now Yemeni women give her nationality to her children," said Al-Awdi.

Protecting Yemeni women

The Yemeni government forbids marriage officers from issuing a marriage contract to a non-Yemeni man without the approval of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice, in addition to having permission from the embassy of the person who wants to marry the Yemeni.

Without approval, he cannot travel abroad with his new wife.

In the last year, the Yemeni Ministry of Justice referred 12 judges to judicial inspection because they issued marriage contracts for Yemenis to foreigners without the approval from the Ministry of Interior, according to Al-Qabalani, general manager of the department of documentation and registration at the Ministry of Justice.

"The government's rules and procedures on marriages to non-Yemenis are there to ensure the rights of Yemeni women," said Al-Qabalani.

The government requires a non-Ye-

meni who wants to marry a Yemeni woman to be a single Muslim, to have permission from his country to marry a Yemeni woman and not to be more than 20 years older than the woman he wants to marry.

He also has to have legal residency in Yemen, provide a character reference, and present a health certificate proving that he is free of infectious diseases. Furthermore, he has to have enough money to spend on his wife.

Saudi state approval

Saudi men who want to marry a foreign woman must register their marriage in a Saudi court after approval from the Saudi Ministry of the Interior, explained journalist Hana Al-Khamri. Because this approval is difficult, some instead simply sign the marriage contract with a marriage official.

The contract is legal according to Islamic Sharia law, but without approval from the Ministry of Interior a Saudi cannot travel with his foreign wife out of the country.

Only this January did Saudi Arabia allow its ministers, diplomats, and officials to marry foreigners.

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Job Vacancy

CHF is looking for an experienced researcher to conduct research about child labor in the fishing industries in Aden and Hudeida Governorates.

Background

October 2008 CHF Yemen was awarded the ACCESS PLUS Project, Alternatives to Combat Child Labor through Sustainable Educational Services. The project, spanning over a three year period, aims at educating targeted children, withdrawn or prevented from entering exploitive child labor in Yemen.

Research on Child Labor in Fisheries

CHF will enhance the in-depth understanding of different forms of child labor in Yemen through research and promotion of the collection of reliable data. CHF will conduct focused research studies on children's involvement in the fishing industry. In addition to raising awareness on the topic, the study will provide relevant information aimed at future policy development in Yemen.

Scope of the assignment/target

1. Familiarize with child labor phenomenon in fisheries in Yemen.
2. In close collaboration with the ACCESS-Plus M&E specialist, fine tune already developed research tools; train surveyors in research methodologies; conduct research
3. Analyze collected data and write draft report, finalize it once discussed with / feedback received from CHF both Yemen and HQ
4. Time permitting, assist with organizing dissemination workshop with stakeholders to come up with action plan to address issues identified in research

Location: Sana'a plus Aden and Hudeida Governorates

Qualifications / Requirements:

1. Academic or training background in research and evaluation in the field of child labor
2. Excellent reading/writing skills in English and Arabic.
3. Computer literate.
4. Previous working experience in the Yemen is desired

CHF will provide the consultant with all existing documentation and data. CHF will make all relevant data available to the consultant on an ongoing basis, based on availability.

Submission Guidelines:

Applications should be submitted to info@chfyemen.org. Applications submitted after 26/2/2010 will not be considered. Only short listed candidates will be contacted. Applications should consist of a one page cover letter and detailed CV. The cover letter should include the applicant's earliest date of availability to begin work with CHF.

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From Ibb to Aden with love



By: Rania Ameen

Yemeni youth have proved that they are innovative and are capable of taking the initiative.

Although the whole of Yemen suffers from political and economic instability and social unrest in both the south and north, carrier pigeons are to carry messages saying «We are one nation» from four governorates: Ibb, Sana'a, Dharm, and Hadramout to Aden.

This has already started in Ibb, from the youth of Ibb to the youth of Aden. Early in the morning a few weeks ago, preparation for the pigeons' flight had already started. Boxes of pigeons were brought by participants to a large schoolyard in Ibb.

The amazing climate in Ibb has helped in the preparation for their journey. There was a clear blue sky, brilliant sunshine and fresh air. Crowds of men, women, children, teachers and officials gathered enthusiastically to participate in this event.

The Youth of Aden Association for

Pigeons and the Association for Social Development in Ibb had joined forces with many young people in Aden and Ibb. Officials from the local council in Ibb and some headmasters in the area also participated. As a result, 10 pairs of doves have started their journey of love and peace from the youth of Ibb to the youth of Aden.

Before setting the pigeons loose, representatives of the two associations and the head of Ibb local council made simple speeches about the event and the symbolism of the dove. Young people from Aden had supplied the pigeons for this journey and delivered them to Ibb.

From the district of Jibla, the pigeons' journey began with the birds carrying small pieces of paper inscribed with phrases like «We are one nation», and «From Ibb to Aden with love.»

The carrier pigeon or homing pigeon is believed to have been used since the time of the Ancient Egyptians to deliver messages over hundreds of kilometers of land and sea. During the Battle of Waterloo between Napoleon and the British in the 19th century, a homing pigeon is said to have delivered the message of victory to Britain. In the 21st century, homing pigeons have been raced against a broad-

band Internet connection to see which was faster in transporting data.

Homing pigeons can be white, thus leading people to mistake them for doves, a closely related bird of the same family and a universal symbol of peace.

In ancient Greek mythology, the dove was a symbol of love and the renewal of life. In ancient Japan, a dove carrying a sword symbolized the end of war. In the story of Noah's Ark, when the rains that flooded the earth stopped, Noah sent out various birds to see if they would return to the Ark with any sign of land and a dove eventually returned carrying an olive branch.

From Yemen, using pigeons to send messages could become a hobby for young people.

«We hope this sport spreads to all governorates of Yemen,» said Ahmed Alazab, head of Association for Social Development in Ibb.

«I had read about pigeons carrying messages in the past and so I thought that this practice had finished long ago,» said Nawal, one of the participants from Ibb. «So it was amazing to see these pigeons flying to Aden, carrying messages. The young people of Aden have confirmed that the pigeons have arrived with their state-

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Valentine's Day in Yemen



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Valentine's Day, a holiday devoted primarily to the celebration of romantic love, is not a traditional Yemeni holiday, but evidence of Valentine's Day celebrations are present everywhere in Sana'a as flower shops have gone red flaunting fancy roses, teddy bears, and heart-shaped cards have increased in the city.

In the Sana'a Trade Center, located on Algiers Street, the windows of many stores are decorated with red hearts made out of foil and with other popular Valentine's Day decorations. The windows of the Patchi chocolate shop are filled with heart shaped chocolates of all sizes.

In Yemen, which in 2008 witnessed a large campaign by preachers calling Valentine's Day celebrations 'forbidden', the occasion is unacceptable to most. Valentine's Day receives a mixed response and celebrations are common mostly amongst the youth.

I decided to find out on my own what the Yemenis really thought of this day.

«Love is sublime, it makes us understand life and I don't think assigning one special day to celebrate it can do justice to this great emotion, at least not in a society like Yemen,» said Ali Al-Sharhee, a fine art student.

Ahmed Abu-Adba, a chemistry teacher said, «This day has its origins in western traditions which we really don't need to follow when we have our own Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha and some national days. These are enough for us to celebrate.»

«I find celebrating Valentine's Day really weird and I cannot understand what makes the youth promote it. Personally, I believe that it is not necessary to give a proof of love every year. Love is forever,» said Abdultawab, a student of English.

Sara Mamdoh, a dentist said, «From my view point, westerners innovate, work hard to improve their military, and I think trying hard like them, making efforts, is much better than just celebrating what they celebrate.»

Abdulqawi, a businessman said, «Valentine's Day is a fable. What we need for Yemen today when poverty and unemployment are on a constant rise is security, stability and lasting solutions to the current crises.»

«I have heard something about such an

'Eid' but I never celebrate it. Instead I invite people to follow the instructions of our Prophet,» said Ahmed Al-Qam, a farmer.

Abdulkareem, a soldier said, «Believe me, I have not heard of such a day and I didn't know that there are people in Yemen who celebrate it.»

«I never celebrate this day and I do support celebrating it,» said Mohammad Abu Arfat a university graduate.

Most among a group of students from Dharmar city had not even heard of the day.

Origins of Valentine's Day
Saint Valentine's Day is celebrated every year in the UK, the US, Australia, Canada,

France and now most countries celebrate it. But the day has its origins in ancient Roman and Christian traditions.

According to one legend, when Emperor Claudius II of third century Rome decided that single men made better soldiers and outlawed marriage for young men, a priest called Valentine defied Claudius and continued performing marriages in secret, for which he was later put to death.

Another legend says that, the night before his execution, Valentine, a Christian priest sentenced to be beheaded on February 14 for his teachings, sent a farewell letter to the jailer's daughter whom he had cured of blindness and befriended, signed «from your Valentine.»

Some say that the holiday began with the ancient Roman February 15 Lupercalia, the spring festival celebrations, that were later moved to February 14 with the advent of Christianity.

Others associate the holiday to the 14 and 15 century European belief that birds picked out their mates on February 14.

In Britain the Valentine's Day began to gain popularity around the 17 century. Americans probably began exchanging hand-made valentines in the early 1700s. Today, different countries celebrate Valentine's Day following their own unique traditions.

White Day in Japan
In Japan, on February 14, ladies present gifts to their boyfriends. The 'giri-choco'

are for friends. 'Giri' in Japanese means 'obligation' and these chocolates are commonly bought by girls from the stores. However, the 'hon-me'i' chocolates are for the special ones: husbands and lovers. These symbols of true love are traditionally made at home by the girls.

Exactly after one month, on March 14, is the White Day when it is the men's turn to return the favor, by giving gifts to the ladies who gave them a gift on the Valentine's Day. The White Day, a Japanese creation, was invented in 1980 by the highly commercial confectioners in Japan, taking advantage of the Japanese feelings of obligation. The color of the White Day chocolates is generally white.

Poems in Britain

Of the various customs popular in England, penning verses of love and matters of the heart is the most fascinating. In various parts of the United Kingdom, magazines and tabloids get ready for the day, publishing sonnets and verses.

This year, on Sunday February 14, the words «look to the living, love them, and hold on,» will shine on the north face of the Castle Rock, a leading heritage attraction of Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland. The projection is one of the five poems selected for the 'Carry a Poem' Valentine campaign aiming to inspire city residents to cherish the poems they love.

Satin cushions in Australia

In Australia, men are more romantic than women and 58 percent men buy Valentine's Day cards against 41 percent women.

Valentine's Day gained popularity in Australia during the mid-nineteenth century gold rush in the mines of Victoria, when because of the new found wealth, miners in Australia were willing to pay a princely sum for elaborate 'valentines' or greeting cards for their objects of affection. These extravagant valentines, worth as much as 1,000 pounds, were commonly made of a satin cushion and ornately designed with flowers, colored shells and ribbons. They came in neatly adorned boxes.

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