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Saleh says, "We are not beasts, but human beings."

Population bomb

By PETER WILLEMS
YEMEN TIMES STAFF

Last week President Ali Abdullah Saleh offered support for action needed to be taken to help bring the population explosion in Yemen under control.

"A father of two will definitely be able to feed, cloth and educate his kids than another with so many children going astray in the streets," said Saleh at Al-Shawkani Hall last Thursday during the inauguration of Census Night, the beginning of the largest census program being carried out in Yemen.

"We are not beasts but human beings. Determine the number of your children and educate your children. Scholars and preachers have to raise awareness of the public in this direction."

The president argued against conservatives that are against family planning as "some extremists who insist on labeling family planning as a taboo" because of their skepticism of birth control.

Saleh also warned that the population boom runs parallel to Yemen nearing a water crisis.

"The underground water that has been accumulating for hundreds and even thousands of years is now depleting," said Saleh. "The basins of Sana'a, Saada and other regions have seemed to run out of water due to the extravagant consumption over the past thirty years."

Population Reference Bureau (PRB), a private organization based in the



The birth of a baby, a very common scene in Yemen. It's expected that unless its birthrate is brought under control, Yemen will have 71 million by 2050, and unmanageable problems with it. (Yemen Times photo)

United States, reported last August that Yemen's population growth rate is one of the largest in the world. It calculates that in 2050 the country's population will have increased by 255%, bringing the number of Yemenis from 20 million

up to 71 million.

"It is a good sign that President Saleh emphasized awareness of the dangers of population growth," said Abdullah Al-Faqih, Professor of Political Science at Sana'a University. "But it is also

important that the concern for population growth is turned into a policy with concrete action. The policy needs to be implemented to reduce the surge in population growth."

Continued on page 13

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Truce in Al-Jawf ending Tribal hostages to return home

By HASSAN AL-ZAIDI
YEMEN TIMES STAFF

In an agreement reached between the fighting tribes of Al-Maraziq and Al Sa'ida, two tribes belonging to Al-Jawf, five hostages from each side are to return back to their own tribes.

Sheikhs from the neighboring tribes are doing their best to put an end to the conflict before the two-month-long truce ends. The truce was reached after 27 victims from both the sides were killed and up to 33 wounded in a bloody warfare.

Numerous Sheikhs and tribesmen from Al-Jawf are asking the government to take an active role in eradicating revenge, as well as tackling the ever-lasting conflicts between tribes.

Meanwhile, a number of cultured youths from Al-Jawf urged the differ-

ent media means to perform their role and reflect a positive picture about Al-Jawf Province and the constant sufferings experienced in the area.

They expressed their concern at the reply of Yemen's Prime Minister to the Governor of Al-Jawf when the latter highlighted the necessity for giving jobs to the unemployed locals at the Third Local Council Conference.

They quoted the PM as saying "There are over 300,000 Somalis working as car sweepers and therefore they do not die from hunger."

The reply sparked rage in Al-Jawf locals who has the confidence that the government will upgrade the standard of education and raise awareness in the area.

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More "reform" on the way Al-Ahmer to request release of Zaidi clerics

By HASSAN AL-ZAIDI
YEMEN TIMES STAFF

President Ali Abdullah Saleh will get a request to release the Zaidi clerics Moh'd Meftah and Yahya Al-Dailami, according to sources.

And, on behalf of Zaidi clerics, the request is to come from Sheik Abdullah Bin Hussein Al-Ahmer. He is to explain the story of their detention by the political security since this year's Sa'ada events.

The Zaidi clerics met with Sheik Al-Ahmer two weeks ago. Al-Ahmer pointed out that Sa'ada uprising shouldn't exceed the reasonable consequences and that wise people should look for unity.

This move of the Zaidi clerics came after the Attorney General decided to extend the detention of the two detainees for 45 days, saying it received some new information to prove their involvement in Al-Houthi's insurgency.

The Political Security confiscated a number of books from Meftah's house.

Meftah and Al-Dailami are considered the first personalities the Attorney General are interrogating before transferring them to court. This comes after Judge Luqman was sentenced to a ten-year imprisonment because of his support for Al-Houthi.

Abdulkarim Al-Khaiwani, Editor-in-chief of Al-Shura newspaper, was sentenced to a year imprisonment while Al-Shura Newspaper was suspended for six months because of its reporting on the Sa'ada insurgency.

At the same time, hundreds of

youths are detained by the Political Security, blamed for being members of Believing Youth, an illegal group led by Al-Houthi, and who are known for their passions against the US and Israel.

In this respect, Judge Hamoud al-Hitar, member of the Higher Court and Head of Theological Dialogue Committee, declared last Thursday that another course for reforming extremists will start soon with 499 of Al-Houthi followers who have been arrested by the Political Security.

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Final hearings on Christmas Day Limburg trial continues

By MOHAMMED AL-QADHI
YEMEN TIMES STAFF

The Sana'a Counter-Terrorism Appeal Court decided Saturday to run the final hearings in the appeal trial of 15 al-Qaeda suspects charged with terrorism operations next Saturday, Dec. 25th.

During the hearing that continued only half an hour the prosecution demanded the death penalty against some of the suspects. The prosecutor said that the law does not differentiate between those people who forge official documents to hide from security or for any other reasons.

He also said that that the confession of the suspects that their plan to assassinate the US ambassador was just a mere talk that did not materialize does not exempt them from punishment as long as they agreed to carry out a criminal act.

The prosecution also refuted the appeals made by eight of the defendants during the last six hearings and described them as baseless. "It is not true that they made confessions under force and threat; they were completely free when giving such confessions. The primary court verdict was not based only on such confessions but on other evidences, testimonies of the witnesses, experts' reports and others," chief prosecutor Saeed al-Akil said.

When court judge Saeed al-Katta'a asked other defendants who refused to

make appeals to the primary court verdict, they asked for a chance till next hearing.

They total five including alleged ring leader Fawaz al-Rabee.

The defendants appeared indifferent to what is going on as they were laughing all the time. Some of them even expressed strong support for al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden.

Before the end of the session, the director of the legal department at the US embassy in Sana'a presented a request to the court supporting the lawsuit made against the defendants and in the name of the Hunt Oil Company whose helicopter was shot by some of the tried suspects.

Defendants in this case of the French Tanker Limburg attack and other terrorist operations previously denied their involvement in these operations. They said the confessions they made were taken by force and that they were subject to beating and torture.

They disclosed that they reached an agreement with cleric Hamoud al-Hittar, head of the dialogue committee with extremists, to give up their fanatic views and take the path of tolerance. "Please help us; we do not have any devastating ideas," Ibraheem Huauidi told the judge while reading his appeal.

He refuted all allegations made by the prosecution against him. "I do refute and deny all allegations about my involvement in an armed gang or attacking Western embassies or attempting

assignment of the US embassy," he alleged.

On his part, Kasem al-Raimi requested the court to order the prosecution bring evidence of its charges against him. Other five defendants refused to comment on the appeal of the prosecution without having advocacy.

The court sentenced on August 28th one to death while 14 others received prison terms of three to 10 years, being found guilty of forming an armed group and carrying out attacks on Yemeni and Western targets.

Hizam Mujali was sentenced to death for killing a security man named Hamid Khasroof at a security checkpoint.

Omar Saeed Hasan Jarallah, Fawzi al-Wajeeh, Mohammed Saeed Ali al-Amari, Fawzi Yahia al-Hababi, and Yasser Ali Salem (tried in absentia) received ten years in jail for bombing the French Tanker Limburg. The two brothers Fawaz al-Rabee and Abu Bakr al-Rabee were sentenced to 10 years in jail.

The other five militants (Ibraheem Mohammed al-Huwaiddi, Aref Saleh Ali Mujali, Mohammed Abdullah al-Dailami, Abdulghani Ali Hussein Kaifan, and Kasem Yahia al-Raimee) were sentenced to five years in prison. The two defendants- Khaled Ahmad al-Jalob, and Saleem Mohammed Ali al-Dailami, were sentenced to three years in prison for falsifying documents relating to the various attacks.

Father and uncle allegedly murdered Family appeals to authorities for rights

By Yemen Times Staff

The family of the two victims, Saleh Al-Jedri and his brother Naji Al-Jedri, have appealed to Ministers of Interior, Justice and Human Rights to immediately intervene in the murder case of their relatives.

They claimed that a group of people killed their father and fatally wounded their uncle and elder brother. Prior to this, the victims were allegedly subject to severe beating in their own land.

The family members claim they have legally inherited the piece of land from their mother and that the perpe-

trators, distance relatives of the mother, want to take the land in spite of the fact that they were previously given a 200-hectare parcel.

The perpetrators have been receiving kind treatment since Ramadan 23rd, in a prison in Habra Police Station. They live in a special room at the prison and have large sums of money to bribe some alleged eyewitnesses to testify in their favor and nullify the case.

"The perpetrators have not been transferred to the Attorney General according to the law as they have passed the legal period being in

prison," said the family, in a statement.

The women in the family added they have nobody to appear for them in court, and the perpetrators take advantage of their brother being disabled and their uncle receiving treatment abroad to do what they like.

They want to know how such misconducts are practiced in country pretending to respect human rights and protect women and their children.

The bereaved women appeal the authorities to seriously look into the case, as they fear they will also to be murdered along with their children.

Yemeni judge gains reputation abroad Al-Hitar goes to Cairo

By Yemen Times Staff

Judge Hamoud Al-Hitar, Chairman of Yemen's Dialogue Committee, is in Cairo this week to participate in a meeting of the World Health Organization's regional bureau on public health and gender issues.

Al-Hitar said he will be involved in discussions concerning health, gender and the role of Muslim religious scholars.

"I will participate with several other religious scholars to discuss general health issues in the Middle East," said Al-Hitar. "Muslim scholars will share their own opinions on these issues."

Al-Hitar has also accepted an invitation to travel to France next month to share the Dialogue Committee's experience of working with extremists and sympathizers of terrorist groups to persuade them to turn away from vio-

lence. The committee focuses on convincing suspects to accept tolerance and people living together peacefully.

Later this month, the Dialogue Committee will start dialogue with a new group of suspects. Al-Hitar said that the group will include around 500 who were once followers of Hussein Al-Houthi, a radical cleric who fought with Yemeni forces from July until September this year in the northern province of Saada.

At least 600 soldiers and Al-Houthi followers were killed in the fighting. There will be a small group of suspects linked to Al-Qaeda international terrorist network in the next round of dialogue.

The Yemeni government released 113 detainees in November suspected of being a part of Al-Qaeda, including at least five who were accused of being involved in the bombing of the USS

Cole in 2000. The suspects were not charged with any crimes and signed a commitment to follow the constitution and laws and refrain from violence.

Last August fifteen suspects convicted of being involved in the attack on the USS Cole at the port of Aden, which killed 17 US sailors, were not released. Five terrorist suspects were found guilty of being involved in the bombing of the French oil tanker off the coast of Yemen in 2002 that killed one crew member.

Countries from around the world have shown interest in the method being used by the Dialogue Committee. Al-Hitar traveled to Great Britain last February and May to share his experience holding dialogue with suspects of radical Islamic groups. He was also invited last spring to attend the conference of Higher Council for Islamic Affairs in Cairo.

U.S. Ambassador Krajeski in Amran

FOR THE YEMEN TIMES

U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Thomas Krajeski visited a number of locations in Amran Governate Dec. 13.

He was accompanied by a USAID delegation headed by the Agency's Yemen Director Dr. Douglas Heisler.

The ambassador discussed the possibility of expanding US assistance to Amran, particularly in education and health. The Americans gave at least \$700,000 to improve basic health care in Amran in 2004.

At this time there is also an ongoing \$800,000 USAID health project that supports health sector reform and improvements.

The Ambassador commended the hard work of the 20 health care officials in attendance at a health workshop he visited.

The officials then visited the Aisha Girls School in Amran City. The school had received support from the

United States Department of Agriculture program that provided funds to renovate, expand and equip the school.

The school's enrollment has grown from 350 to more than 1,000 girls since the intervention.

The delegation met with the Head Mistress and several classes, and it was treated to a singing performance by some students.

The group then visited the Hababa Center where USAID has recently provided electricity and telephone service. Ambassador Krajeski presented the center with a fax machine, a VCR, an ultrasound machine, an autoclave and an ECG machine.

Additional support will be provided to the center through USAID's basic health care service delivery project.

The delegation also visited Thula, where the Ambassador presented an ultrasound machine and ECG machine to the District Health Center.

Palm Tree Festival

By YEMEN TIMES STAFF
ADEN BUREAU

Under the auspices of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the events of the Fourth Palm Tree Festival started on Dec. 18 and were due to continue up until today.

Ahmad Al-Juneid, Deputy Governor of Hadramout for Wadi and Desert

Affairs, said the activities of the Festival included staging scientific and agricultural exhibitions, cultural activities and speeches by participants.

Popular games and chants related to the agricultural heritage in the area were performed. The exhibition also included an auction for different kinds of honey.

Al-Juneid added that the festival

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Do you agree that family planning in Yemen helps boost its economy?
- Yes
- No

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Cultural attitudes 32%
Yemen's Third World status 4%

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Court delays Al-Khaiwani's case, journalists resort to Sheikh Al-Ahmer

By MOHAMMED BIN SALLAM
YEMEN TIMES STAFF



The journalists community is impatiently waiting for the Sana'a Court of Appeal to resume hearings on Al-Shura newspaper and Al-Khaiwani's case, especially with the circulated news that judge Mohammed Al-Akwa'a, is no longer head of the court, and that judge Mohammed Amer has been appointed in his head. Observers of poor press freedom in Yemen commented saying that the replacement of the judge shows the huge pressure exerted by the state on the Judicial Authority, and reveals the course of litigation of the case.

"It is an opinion case with a political air. It has vivid parties and is raised because of Al-Shura's role and treatment of corruption and public property embezzlement as well as power inheritance and wasting the wealth of the country," they added.

Journalists and politicians hold the authority responsible for the continued detention of Al-Khaiwani.

"The authority turned down all local and Arab pleas which asked for the release of Al-Khaiwani and adherence to international human rights agreements ratified by Yemen."

On the other hand, the council of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate (YJS) is still trying to hold an urgent meeting to discuss the issue upon requests from the majority of the General Assembly members at their Tuesday's meeting, two weeks ago.

The council said the meeting could not be held due to lack of quorum. This was resented by journalists who noticed a lack of desire to deal with the issue, which they say is one of the greatest violations against press freedom and restrictions on freedom of expression.

The journalists community are in hope that the YYS's council will sense their main responsibility towards the members regardless of partisan affiliation. They appealed to the council not to surrender to pressures and reject dictations and to face attacks whatever is their source so as to achieve the aspirations of the members.

In its 2004 report, Freedom House criticized the independence of control and accountability bodies from the executive authority and appointing provincial governors despite much talk on local authority and the apparent independence of the judiciary.

The report added that Yemen has not achieved progress in terms of performance of its authorities towards public liberties especially press freedom, political plurality and peaceful transfer of power.

The New York-based international

organizations has moved Yemen from the not-free to the partially free category because of its regularity in conducting elections, specifically parliamentary elections, and allowing parties and press. But the report stresses that the Middle East region is the worst in the world in suppressing liberties particularly of the press.

Abdulaziz Mohammed, journalist, circulated a statement on Yemen media last week, which slashed at the authority.

"The Yemen media, partisan and private, is facing an authoritarian wrathful autumn seeming to be intending to blow away the remaining leaves on the tree of press freedom, which has been diminishing since its announcement at the time of the Reunification Agreement in 1990," the statement said.

"Affairs in Yemen go to an ever clasp grip on the political life and gagging mouths through tens of trials of newspapers and journalists to remove the last accomplishment of the Reunification and suppressing the last means of the other opinion and freedom of expression."

The statement added: "Colleague Abdulkarim Al-Khaiwani, editor-in-chief of Al-Shura newspaper, who is currently detained at the Sana'a Central Prison since September 5, 2004 is not the last victim of directives and orders. He is surely the most prominent of them. Yet, many others are still waiting for their turn on a long queue going through the same guillotine."

There are some seven journalists from Al-Shura newspaper, which is suspended for more than three months, are still being interrogated by the Attorney General on charges covered by a quick legally questionable judicial sentence.

"Colleagues Abdulfatah Al-Hakimi, Abdullah Sabri, Abdullah Al-Hakimi, Aidi Al-Munifi, Jamal Amer, Rashidah Al-Qaili, and Jamal Al-Ja'abi have not shed blood nor have they embezzled public money. They are journalists and writers charged by the authority with writing articles considered by the ruler as a public slander of the president and a call for disunity," the statement elaborated.

In the end of the writer's statement, he mentioned a number of newspapers who paid the price.

"Al-Nida newspaper, published by



Al-Khaiwani

colleague Sami Ghaleb had just one issue before it was suspended on the basis that it had no value. Al-Wasat newspaper also is being tried because it disseminates legally groundless news about Saudi Arabia. Al-Wohdawi newspaper, published by the Nasserite Unionist Organization, stood two trials to look into charges pertaining to its journalistic activities just in one week, while Al-Huryiah newspaper has been suspended for tow months up until now.

"The condition of Al-Thawri, Al-Tajamo'a, Ra'I, and Annas newspapers is not better. They are facing different charges, reflecting in general the condition of the Yemeni press and the false claim of the authority that there are democracy, plurality, while press freedom is bleeding in prison cells and courtrooms."

YJS asks Sheikh Al-Ahmer to intervene:

The Yemen Times has been informed that the Minister of Justice has assigned the Judicial Inspection Authority to appoint a new judge to look into Al-Khaiwani's case because of the ailment of judge Mohammed Al-Akwa'a, head of the Penalty Department of the Appeal Court.

With the defense team being not officially informed of these procedures, the YYS board and journalists fear that such measurements are part of the scenario of delay of the court meant to keep Al-Khaiwani imprisoned and Al-Shura suspended.

On the other hand a source in the YYS board said the meeting slated for this week would send a letter to Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein Al-Ahmer, speaker of the parliament, asking him to intervene in Al-Khaiwani's case. The YYS would reveal the report of its information committee, gleaned after the sit-in of journalists before the Parliament in the wake of arresting Al-Khaiwani and shutting down Al-Shura.

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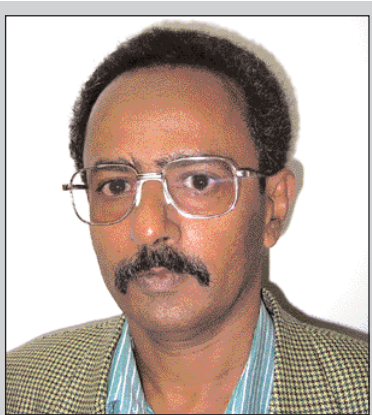
Ali Addulkarim al-Adeemi wants for government help A victim of racial discrimination?

The Yemen Times recently interviewed Ahmed al-Adeemi about the misfortunes experienced by his brother, the Yemeni businessman Ali Abdulkarim al-Adeemi.

Ali studied engineering in USA and came back to Yemen in 1987. He returned to USA in 1993 to a merchant of medicine, infant's milk and other substances.

He then obtained a concession for producing the Yemeni Qamariah (the semicircular Yemeni windows) in the USA in 2000. But then the September 11, 2001 attacks hit, which prevented him from completing his technical and cultural project.

Al-Adeemi was detained in 2002 and he is now in Suncity prison in Ohio. His wife with her six children was put under compulsory residence



Ahmed Al-Adeemi

for four months.

Ahmed explained to us his brother's version of his story his trial and time in prison. Here's an edited copy of an interview with him done by Yemen Times staff.

Q: How were your brother's properties were confiscated?

A: Under accusations such as not paying the taxes and financing terrorists, my brother's money, estimated as US\$ 2.5 million, was confiscated by the US authorities. His office and commercial stores were closed. They refused to release him rejecting any guarantees claiming that he will escape from USA: The lawyers left him after earning about US\$ 500,000 from him.

Q: Is there any sentence issued against him till now?

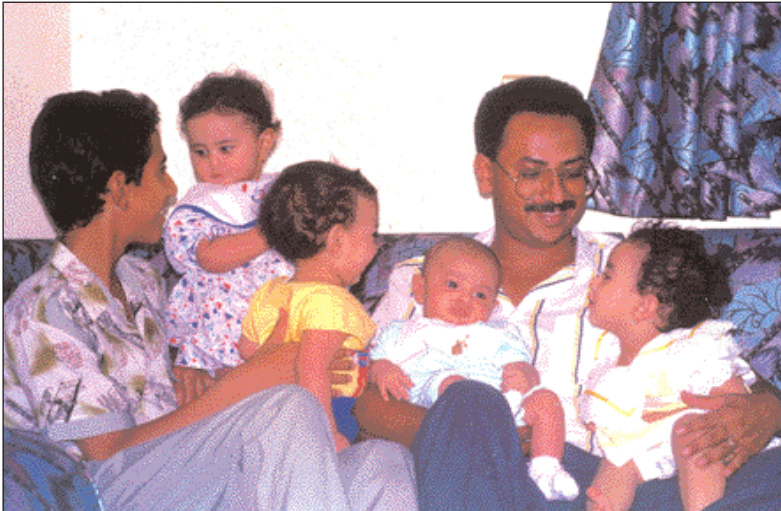
A: There is not any sentence against him till now. His staying in prison till now makes us no longer trust American judiciary justice. I wonder where the justice is that President Bush calls for.

Q: What are the accusations your brother is blamed for?

A: My brother was accused of about 63 accusations but not one of them is proven true. Of those accusations was the accusation of financing terrorists. They accused him going to Lebanon to meet with Hassan Nasrallah, though he went to Lebanon to visit his sons. Another accusation was that he supports Social Reform Charitable Society (SRCS) by sending huge sums of money for helping poor people and orphans in Yemen. He also donated some medicine, and Ramadan and Eid gifts for the needy people. That's the source of my brother's misfortunes and miseries. These were the accusations against him.

Q: What do you request the Yemeni government to do in this respect?

A: I demand the Yemeni government to follow the issue of this Yemeni businessman who is now in prison though innocent. If my brother is accused of any



Ali Abdulkarim al-Adeemi with family.



The Yemeni qamariah was brought to USA by al-Adeemi

civil charges, he would have held responsible for them, but not to be detained according to some political decisions. This is my request to the President, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Immigrants Affairs, appealing to end the unjust arrest of my brother. Is it possible that simply having the telephone numbers of Hameed Al-Hmar and SRCS justify his being detained?

I do trust that the president will cooperate with us. I appeal to him to stop the security cooperation with USA until they release the Yemeni innocent detainees in the American prisons.

The president is responsible for every Yemeni and my brother is a Yemeni businessman whose properties were confiscated and his children are alone there without anyone to care for and help them.

My brother was turned from a famous businessman to a well-known terrorist after the American media presented him so.



Ali Abdulkarim al-Adeemi's home.

AL-Shura Council calls for honesty In the census, together

By FAHMIA AL-FOTIH
FOR THE YEMEN TIMES

Al-Shura Council recently held its fifth meeting devoted to issue of Yemen's census.

The meeting was headed by Mr. Abdulaziz Abdualghani, the head of Al-Shura Council with attendance of Mr. Ahmed Sofan, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation along with Dr. Amin Mohyedin, the head of central statistics organization.

The council's committee of public

health and population presented a report, along with the above mentioned ministries, and the council came up with recommendations.

The council calls on all the people to positively respond to the census, so Yemen benefits.

The council also stressed the vital role that civil society organizations should play in actively participating in the census and make it successful.

It appealed to the media, political parties, and others to raise awareness of the census to build a better present and prosperous future.

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Wedding party for 27 grooms

By YEMEN TIMES STAFF
TAIZ BUREAU

Under the auspices of Judge Ahmad Al-Hajri, Governor of Taiz and local council President, Al-Tawheed Social Charitable Foundation organized the first collective wedding party for 27 bridegrooms in Hajda, Maghbana District.

The ceremony was attended by Ali Al-Maqdashi, Deputy Governor of Taiz, MP Mohammad Al-Hemiari, Chief of Maghbana District, Local Council Secretary General, General Manager of Al-Barah Cement Factory and a number of provincial officials.

Deputy Governor of Taiz delivered a speech in which he congratulated all the bridegrooms and expressed his



The 27 grooms celebrating the wedding

happiness at the wonderful wedding party.

He also expressed gratitude and

recognition to Al-Tawheed Social and Charitable Foundation for its continued efforts in supporting such events.

Charitable bazaar for refugees held

By HASSAN AL-ZAIDI
YEMEN TIMES STAFF

The Health and Social Project for Refugees, held a Charitable Bazaar for refugees at its headquarter in Sana'a Dec. 16-17.

A great number of refugees exhibited their hand-made articles and popular dishes.

Dr. Sameera Ba Naweer, manager of the project, told the Yemen Times that the bazaar was attended by around 500 organization representatives, social personalities and refugees in Sana'a.

Most of the refugees were Somalis.

She said that the bazaar contributed to supporting refugees who listened to songs and enjoyed dances in the inauguration.

The purchase of the exhibited articles supports the refugees in Yemen. Naweer expressed gratitude to those attending the inaugurating ceremony, including Abdulmalik Abboud, Public Relations Officer at the UN Higher Commissioner for Refugees, Khalid Al-Dub'i, Manager of Intracs Development Organization and many others.

WFRT participates in civil education course

By YEMEN TIMES STAFF

A training course on the Vocational Development for Trainees of Citizenship Draft is being organized from Dec. 13-15 by the Arab Civitas. A number of Yemeni trainees, including Mrs. Su'ad Al-Qadasi, the Director of Woman Forum for Researches and Training (WFRT) are participating in the course currently held in Egypt.

Another course is due to be held in Morocco from Dec.17-19, with the participation of a number of trainees from different Arab countries. A series of lectures focusing on basic skills like reading, problem identification, and information collection will be delivered by a group of experienced trainers.

The WFRT is one of the more effective branches of the Arab Civitas, and has organized numerous activities on civil education.

EFAD inaugurates project in Dhamar

By FAHMIA AL-FOTIH
FOR THE YEMEN TIMES

Under the auspices of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Ahmed Sofan, a workshop on "inauguration of Dhamar Rural Development Project" was held Wednesday Dec.14.

Ahmed Sofan and Hassan Omar Sowaid, Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation along with Abdulwahab AL-Dorah, Governor of Dhamar, attended the inauguration.

Dr. Fathia Bahran, Head of Women Economic Empowerment Association (WEEA) and Project Manager, delivered speech in which she gave a detailed account of the workshop and revealed the importance of implementing the developmental project.

"Today's workshop is very crucial as it will draw the first steps of implementing the project. It is an initiative paving the way for the project through its 7-year period. It will cover a number of districts in Dhamar governorate. The aim of this workshop is to give a chance to the representatives of all the interested parties from the project management, local councils and other governmental sectors to form a

perfect concepts and deep understanding about the project content, goals, strategy and mechanisms."

Dr. Bahran said, "The Dhamar Rural Development Project is one of a series being implemented in a number of governorates all over Yemen. It is a result of cooperation between Yemen and International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) as well as some international organizations. The project aims at enhancing food insurance and increasing the family income to overcome poverty. It also aims to improve the standards of living of the poor families particularly women."

Mr. Mohammed A. Hassani, Country Portfolio Manager at the Program, delivered a speech in which he said "IFAD (International Fund for Agriculture Development) and the government of Yemen have been working together for the two past decades formulating and implementing projects and programs throughout the country. The goal behind that is to provide food and security as well as to upgrade the living standards of those living in a remote areas. They experience a lack of infrastructure and live on rain-fed agriculture. He added: "The Rural Development Project in Dhamar is being implemented by

the government within the frame of Poverty Alleviation Strategy. It focuses on the poorest areas of Dhamar. Its activities will be planned and implemented in a way involving all stakeholders. The project involves the participation of non-organizations and articulates endogenous technologies and knowledge.

He further said "One important aspects of this project is its emphasis on gender mainstream, by ensuring full participation of women in its components.

Regarding the administration of the project, it should be noted that this is the first IFAD-project to be managed by women.

Dr. Farhia Bahran who has been chosen as the Project Manager through an open transparent and competitive process."

Hassani concluded "I must say this experience was a successful and enriching; all the participants either from the local council, the participating ministries or the project administration unit had demonstrated full understanding of the project, its approach, its implementations strategy and above all their readiness to adhere and implement its approach. The success of this workshop should be attributed to Dr. Bahran and her staff who worked very hard.

Americans help finance equipment

Siamese twins under care

By NASSER ABDULLAH SALAH
FOR THE YEMEN TIMES

According to recent reports, the Yemeni-born Siamese twins continue to receive medical treatment that are keeping them alive and may lead to surgery to separate them.

The twins were born in Shabwa. Joined, they have four ribs in the left side and five in the right one forming a single chest box attached to two backbones. They have two livers and three kidneys besides the other organs including the spleen, two legs and the urogenital apparatus.

Dr. Saleh A. Al-Hemsi, Head of the Pediatrics Dep't in Attaq Central Hospital, said that such congenital deformities are likely to appear on in every 50,000 births. The reason for such cases is that the egg isn't divided inside the womb properly, therefore two babies developed in one placenta.

The mother has suffered from four miscarriages. She got some medicine and hormones for securing pregnancy.

Following directives of the President, a medical team consisting of a number of specialized doctors arrived in the hospital to

diagnose the case as the first of its kind in Yemen and the rare one worldwide.

A press conference was held after when doctors said the twins are a complete female infant and another incomplete one with only a head, a backbone, two livers, and two stomachs.

The intervention of surgery is not possible before 9 -12 months. They confirmed the necessity of the medical care till that age.


After a week of the birth, Dr. Aref Banaf'e and Dr. Al-Hemsi visited the infant offering some medicine. Dr. Al-Hemsi mentioned that Mohammed Al-Qatta'a, Head of the Central Medical Team, said that they agreed to transport the infant to Sana'a on Dec.12.

Dr. Aref Banaf'e declared that he has received a baby's incubator for the newly born children and a number of people are being trained in Al-Sabe'en Hospital in Sana'a in order to be qualified in dealing with the incubator unit and the intensive care.

There are a lot of procedures aiming at developing the hospital; an operation room with recent technological equipment financed by an American company at the cost of \$ 140,000 is to be prepared.



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Continued from page 1

Population bomb

The World Bank recommends that getting more girls to complete an education helps to slow down population growth. According to a recent report from the US State Department, 67.5% of women in Yemen were illiterate in 2002. The World Bank has calculated that only 39% of school-age girls are enrolled in primary school to get a basic education.

Some economists claim that a stronger economy curbs rapid population growth. According to Dawood Othman, Chairman of the Economics Department at Sana'a University, it has been proven that the more developed countries have a slower population growth rate, and the best solution for Yemen is to speed up economic reform and give a boost to economic growth.

The PRB report said that over the next 50 years, ninety-nine percent of the population increase will come from poor countries "while population size is static or declining in rich nations." In developed countries, the number of citizens will increase only four percent which will reach 1.2 billion in 2050. In less developed countries, population will jump

55% with a total of eight billion people.

Economic growth in Yemen, however, has slowed down. The World Bank's most recent report showed that Yemen's gross domestic product growth rate has decreased from 4.1% in 2001 to an expected 2.5% in 2004, while population growth hovers around four percent.

Oil production, which takes up over 70% of the government's revenue and the country's exports, dropped nine percent in 2004 after leveling off in the last few years. Inflation has climbed dramatically in the last two years, reaching 12% in 2003 and up to around 13% this year.

There is also concern that with slow economic growth and a rapid population increase, poverty will spread. Forty-two percent of the Yemenis currently live below the poverty line, while roughly 25% are living just above poverty.

It is estimated that as many as 40% of the population is unemployed. With over 50% of the country's population under the age of 15, unemployment will rise further unless there is better economic growth.

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Mosul roadside bomb kills high school student

MOSUL, Iraq, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Attackers detonated a bomb near a U.S. military patrol in Mosul on Saturday but missed the patrol and hit a school bus, killing one teenage student and wounding six others, the U.S. military said.

The bomb exploded as the patrol was travelling through an eastern district of the city, closely followed by a minibus carrying students to a nearby high school.

"The blast hit an Iraqi school bus killing one and injuring six, all eighth graders," the military said in a statement. A photographer for Reuters saw several badly wounded teenagers being treated at a local hospital for blast wounds.

No U.S. soldiers were wounded in the attack, but one of the assailants was killed, the statement said.

Mosul has experienced a surge in violence over the past six weeks. On Friday, a car carrying Turkish security guards was attacked in the city, in Iraq's far north near the Turkish border, and four people were killed, one of them beheaded.

Over the past six weeks, more than 150 bodies have been discovered



U.S. Army Sergeant Bill Whittaker from the 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, conducts a security patrol in the northern Iraq city of Mosul, Dec. 17. Later in the day, unknown gunmen attacked a car in Mosul on Friday, killing three men who appeared to be three foreigners and their Iraqi driver before cutting off the head of one in a daylight attack. Picture taken on Dec. 17. REUTERS

around the city, most of them members of the Iraqi National Guard

but many of them also apparently civilians.

Israel kills two Gaza gunmen: Medics

GAZA, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Israeli soldiers shot dead two Palestinian militants on Saturday on the second day of a raid in the southern Gaza Strip, medics and witnesses said.

In all, 11 Palestinians have been killed and 40 wounded in the Khan Younis incursion which Israel launched on Friday to curtail a spate of mortar attacks on Jewish settlements.

The Israeli army said soldiers shot in two separate instances at gunmen who approached their forces on Saturday. It did not say what happened to four gunmen who were shot.

In a second incident, a militant was killed when an Israeli tank fired on him after he shot off an anti-tank rocket, and three other people were wounded by Israeli fire that landed near a hospital, medics and witnesses said.

An Israeli military source confirmed the tank fire but denied it was anywhere near a hospital.

The violence was the latest in a series of incidents that shattered a brief period of calm in the Palestinian territories after the death of President Yasser Arafat in November.

Fifteen other Palestinians were wounded in Khan Younis on Saturday.



Palestinian homeless women feed their children inside the United Nation school after their house was demolished by Israeli army during an operation at the Khan younis refugee camp southern Gaza Strip, Dec. 18. REUTERS

Palestinians have been unable to bury any of those killed in the raid in Gaza's second largest city because Israeli forces were in control at the local cemetery, medics said.

The Israeli army said it launched the raid on Friday after militants bombarded Israeli settlements with 30 mortar bombs and rockets in the past week, killing a foreign worker and hurting 17 other

people. Israel said it also arrested 17 militant suspects the West Bank, a territory it captured in addition to Gaza in the 1967 Middle East War.

Meanwhile militants in northern Gaza fired a Qasam rocket at the southern Israeli town of Sderot, causing no casualties but damaging a car, Israel Radio said.

Saddam trial process opens with "Chemical Ali"

BAGHDAD, Dec 18 (Reuters) - War crimes trials against Saddam Hussein and his closest lieutenants moved forward on Saturday when his feared cousin known as "Chemical Ali" was the first to face a formal interview with the chief investigating magistrate.

Iraq's U.S.-backed government had promised trials would begin before next month's election, the first free vote since Saddam rose to power three decades ago. But the judge stressed his meetings with Ali Hassan al-Majid and the former defence minister Sultan Hashem were just the start of a long process.

"Hurrying will not help this case," Raed Jouhi said.

Official and silent film of the two hearings showed both men looking relaxed, chatting and smiling under guard. Majid leant on a walking stick, possibly still suffering from wounds sustained while on the run from invading U.S. forces last year.

Some Iraqi officials have dismissed the publicity as little more than an election campaign ploy by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. However that may be, the 67-year-old ousted dictator and his aides have now been given access to lawyers.

After brief appearances in July to hear

possible charges of crimes against humanity and genocide against Kurds gassed by troops under Majid's control, the formal process of deciding who is tried for what is under way, a year after Saddam was caught.

The Jan. 30 election will furnish a national assembly that will draw up a new constitution and, Washington hopes, give Iraq a legitimate government to replace the de facto U.S. rule that filled the vacuum left by the overthrow of the Baath Party.

U.S. officials concede an insurgency among Saddam's Sunni Arab minority poses the major threat to the chances of forming a representative legislature. Three election offices in Sunni northern Iraq came under attack in the latest incidents.

Election offices hit

Two people were killed and eight were wounded, including six National Guards, when mortars landed on an election office in Dujail, 50 km (30 miles) north of Baghdad. It is one of many around the country registering and educating voters.

A mortar also landed on an election office in the northern oil capital of Kirkuk, where ethnic tensions among Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen are high ahead of a

poll many want delayed locally.

National Guards fought off gunmen who attacked an election office 60 km southwest of Kirkuk.

Saboteurs who are hampering efforts to restore Iraq's oil wealth and contributing to a cold winter without heat and light for many, blew up a key oil export pipeline near Kirkuk, halting flows for the second time in a week.

In the big northern city of Mosul, scene of widespread bloodshed in recent weeks, seven children in a school bus were hit when a roadside bomb missed a U.S. patrol. One child died.

The Turkish foreign ministry said several guards from its Baghdad embassy were killed in Mosul on Friday and others were missing. Witnesses saw four people killed in one car, apparently Turks.

Representation concerns

"We recognise that there are some real concerns," a Western official, briefing reporters this week on condition of anonymity, said of the need to secure an election for which U.S. troop numbers are being increased by some 10 percent to 150,000.

Asked what would happen if, as some Sunni leaders fear and others are encour-



Saddam Hussein's cousin and feared lieutenant Ali Hassan al-Majid, known as "Chemical Ali" appears before Chief Investigative Judge Ra'ed Juhi of the Iraqi Special Tribunal in an undisclosed courtroom, in the Iraqi capital Baghdad, Dec. 18. REUTERS

aging, the 20 percent Sunni Arab minority stays or is kept away from the polling stations, the official said:

"Clearly we want a representative assembly. What will happen if there isn't sufficient Sunni participation for this to be representative I wouldn't want to speculate."

A lack of Sunni voters would boost the share of the Shi'ite 60 percent and the Kurds, who account for up to 15 percent.

Shi'ite clerics have rejected accusations from Allawi's secular allies that they are a stalking horse for Iranian-style rule by Shi'ite ayatollahs — a line taken up by U.S. officials who say Iraqi clerics prefer

secular rule.

President George W. Bush has already warned U.S. adversaries in Tehran not to interfere.

Jouhi told reporters there was no set timetable for the trials, each of which will be prepared by different judges.

Majid and Hashem appeared in turn, both being released from handcuffs and seated on a folding chair in a bare room before Jouhi's desk, on which lay a Koran wrapped in green cloth.

Jouhi, who presided over the brief hearings for Saddam and the others in July, said both men on Saturday had legal counsel.

One of the defence lawyers declined to speak to reporters for fear of reprisals. Many Iraqis want summary justice for their former leaders, who they say have the blood of tens of thousands on their hands; the former U.S. occupying authority abolished the death penalty and Iraq has yet to bring it back.

Saddam saw a lawyer for the first time on Thursday, just over a year since he was captured on Dec. 13, 2003.

Majid earned his soubriquet for his role in using poison gas against Kurds in the 1980s; some 5,000 died at Halabja in 1988.

Greek Cypriots debate acceptance of EU-Turkey talks

NICOSIA, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Greek Cypriots were divided on Saturday over whether their acceptance of Turkish EU accession talks was the biggest foreign policy blunder in decades or a historic gesture of goodwill.

Dropping threats to dash Ankara's hopes of joining the bloc, EU newcomer Cyprus agreed on Friday, after much wrangling, that Turkey should start accession talks with Brussels next October — on condition that it recog-

nise the Cyprus government by then, at least tacitly.

The decision had a mixed reception among Greek Cypriots. Opinion polls had suggested a large majority of them wanted to veto Turkish entry talks unless Ankara agreed on formal recognition of their government.

"We had all this talk of a veto and we should have vetoed, because the Turks never keep to their word," said 56-year-old Andreas Shiandris, whose Nicosia restaurant borders a United

Nations-patrolled ceasefire line laced with mines separating ethnic Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

Diplomats had repeatedly warned that a Cypriot veto on European Union talks with Turkey would not only be catastrophic for Turkey, but would also kill off any hopes of reuniting the island.

Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos appeared to share that view. "I asked myself whether a veto would have promoted a solution. My

view was that it wouldn't," he told journalists.

Some local politicians suggested Cyprus had caved in to pressure. "I don't think we realize the catastrophe that has happened," European Parliament member Marios Matsakis told Reuters. "Cyprus has lost its leverage over Turkey."

Others were more conciliatory. "Nobody is fully satisfied ... the real message is that we have to consider how we can live together in the future," said Greens Party member Georgios Perdikis.

For 54-year-old shopkeeper Savvas Olympios, the agreement was a great success: "I think anyone with half a brain would be thrilled with the outcome. Tassos (Papadopoulos) persuaded the European leaders that we are not a pathetic minnow of a country and that we are going to fight for our rights."

HISTORICAL GRIEVANCES

Greek Cypriots have deep historical grievances against Turkey, which invaded northern Cyprus, uprooting a third of the Greek Cypriot population, in 1974, days after a brief Greek Cypriot coup engineered by the military then ruling Greece.

Turkish Cypriots had been victims of Greek Cypriot nationalism in the early 1960s and there had been years of tension between the two communities.

Turkey has no diplomatic ties with Cyprus, now represented in the EU by a Greek Cypriot government viewed internationally as the island's only legitimate authority. Ankara alone

recognises the breakaway Turkish Cypriot state in north Cyprus.

A U.N. plan to reunite the island under a loose bizonal federation with each side keeping a large degree of autonomy collapsed earlier this year when Greek Cypriots rejected the initiative in a referendum, though Turkish Cypriots backed it.

Days later, Cyprus was one of 10 countries to join the EU.

Ankara is now expected to take

steps to extend its 1963 association agreement with the EU to all 10 newcomers, before it starts entry talks.

Turkey insists that extension of the protocol does not mean recognition of Cyprus.

But Papadopoulos, whose uncompromising stance on the reunification referendum earned him few friends among Europe's powerful, has made clear he retains his veto right should Turkey fail to move far enough.



Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan holds a banner of flowers sporting the Turkish and EU flags as he greets his party supporters upon his arrival from Brussels at Ataturk Airport in Istanbul, early Dec. 18. The banner in Turkish reads "Here's the leader, here's E.U.". The European Union and Turkey struck an historic deal on Friday to start talks next year on admitting the vast Muslim nation to the bloc after last-minute haggling over Ankara's relationship with EU member Cyprus. REUTERS



US not aiming to topple N.Korean regime-report

TOKYO, Dec 18 (Reuters) - The United States has decided to aim for a gradual transformation in North Korea rather than seek to topple North Korean leader Kim Jong-il's regime, a Japanese newspaper said on Saturday.

The report comes after North Korea said on Monday it was seriously reconsidering its role in stalled six-way nuclear talks because of what it sees as a concerted campaign to topple its ruling system.

"Assistant Secretary of State (James) Kelly clearly denied ... that the Bush administration was seeking to topple Kim Jong-il's regime, and revealed that their stance was to appeal for regime transformation and urge it to gradually open up to the outside," the Asahi Shimbun newspaper said.

The U.S. stance had been conveyed to countries such as North Korea and South Korea, the newspaper said.

Kelly, who heads the U.S. delegation to the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programme, added that self-help efforts by North Korea were desirable, Asahi said.

While the United States has said that it has no intent to attack North Korea, the new stance goes a step further and



North Korean leader Kim Jong-il (C) gives field guidance at a steel production complex in Kimchaek, northeast of Pyongyang in this undated picture released in Tokyo Dec. 17. The United States is to blame for the break-up of talks on North Korea's nuclear programmes this year, but the two countries can "co-exist" if Washington drops its "hostile policy", the North's main newspaper said on Friday. JAPAN OUT REUTERS

shows a readiness to co-exist with Kim's regime, the newspaper said, adding that the stance was likely aimed at urging North Korea to return to the multilateral talks.

Other U.S. government officials said that the Bush administration has decided to view the idea of "regime transfor-

mation" as the basis for North Korean policy in Bush's second term, the newspaper said.

Senior U.S. envoy Joseph DeTrani outlined the position to an official at North Korea's mission to the United Nations in New York in late November, Asahi said.

South Korean media had reported last week that Stephen Hadley, who has been named to replace Condoleezza Rice as U.S. President George W. Bush's national security adviser, told South Korean lawmakers that the United States was seeking a "regime transformation" in North Korea and not its collapse.

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun, in a summit in southern Japan on Friday, jointly urged North Korea to return to talks aimed at ending its nuclear weapons programmes.

Separately, a senior U.S. official told Reuters on Friday that the United States might consider holding multilateral talks without North Korea if the reclusive Communist state continues to resist another round of negotiations on the nuclear issue.

In the talks, the United States, Japan, South Korea, Russia and China are seeking to persuade North Korea to ditch its nuclear arms ambitions in return for aid and security guarantees. A fourth round planned before the end of September never materialised after three inconclusive rounds in Beijing.

China jails Beijing protest organiser for 4 years

BEIJING, Dec 18 (Reuters) - China sentenced a Beijing protest organiser to four years in prison on Saturday after he planned a demonstration by 10,000 people against corruption and widespread evictions in the capital, his son said.

A Beijing court found Ye Guozhu, 49, guilty of "picking quarrels and stirring up trouble", his son, Ye Mingjun, said by telephone, adding that his father planned to appeal.

"Your Honour, you still have not allowed me to speak," Ye, shouted after the sentence had been handed down, a source close to the family said.

Two policemen then led Ye from the courtroom and he struck a door on the way out, but it was unclear whether he suffered any injury, the source said. Ye, dressed in a gray uniform for detainees, had appeared upset throughout the 20 minute hearing.

"There is no doubt we will appeal. The sentence is too heavy. The judge surprised all of us," his son said.

Officials at the Dongcheng district court could not immediately confirm the sentence.

State media said in September that Ye petitioned several government and

party offices and his actions "seriously interfered with the work and order of the state organs, and public order".

Ye was detained in August after he applied to stage a protest by 10,000 petitioners that would have been the biggest in Beijing since practitioners of the Falun Gong spiritual movement held a sit-in outside the heavily guarded Zhongnanhai leadership compound in 1999.

Ye and his son had organised the protest, which never materialised, after the government razed their restaurants and then their home and neighbourhood as part of a Beijing facelift for the 2008 Olympics.

The protest had been planned for mid-September, just two weeks before the 55th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1. It would have coincided with a secretive meeting of the Communist Party's elite Central Committee.

Protests have become increasingly common in China, fuelled by corruption and a widening gap between the wealthy and poor. Last year, more than three million Chinese staged some 58,000 protests nationwide.

Pakistan's Musharraf says won't quit as army chief

KARACHI, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has said he will continue to stay as army chief, reneging from an earlier pledge to quit the powerful post by the end of the year.

"I will remain in uniform even after Dec 31. I am telling you this for the first time," Musharraf said in an interview with the private Kawish Television Network late on Friday.

Last year, Musharraf pledged to take off his military uniform by the end of 2004 in return for support for constitutional changes validating his rule and giving him extensive power under a deal with an alliance of Islamist parties.

Musharraf said that he would soon tell the nation about his decision. "I will talk to the nation in a few days.

.... and tell them some reasons, and explain that," said Musharraf, who took power in a bloodless coup in 1999.

Musharraf has earlier indicated that quitting as army chief would undermine Pakistan's support for the U.S. war on terror and his efforts to make peace with rival India.

The military has ruled Pakistan for more than half of the 57 years it has been an independent nation.

Last month, Pakistan's parliament passed a law that allowed Musharraf to retain both positions, giving early warning that he was unlikely to leave the army.

Islamist and mainstream opposition parties are furious.

The Islamic Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) alliance held two rallies

last week to force Musharraf to quit as army chief.

The MMA will hold another anti-Musharraf rally on Sunday in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, near Islamabad.

But observers say the opposition's protest is unlikely to pose any challenge to his rule given the parliamentary majority of the pro-military ruling party and its allies.

Musharraf has survived at least three assassination attempts — two last December — which security officials say were orchestrated by extremists incensed by Musharraf's U.S. ties. While Western countries have voiced concern over Musharraf's democratic credentials, criticism has been muted given his role in helping the United States hunt al Qaeda members.

Five policemen killed in Nepal rebel attack

KATHMANDU, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Maoist rebels attacked a police post near Nepal's capital with crude bombs and automatic weapons on Saturday, killing five policemen, police said.

The attack at Sankhu village, 20 km (10 miles) from Kathmandu, was the biggest assault by rebels so close to the capital since they launched a revolt in 1996 aiming to topple the constitutional monarchy.

At least 55 people have been killed in Nepal in the last week in fighting between government troops and insurgents who want to establish communist rule in one of the world's poorest countries.

"About 40 heavily armed guerrillas set up road blocks and cut off access to the post before they attacked it," a police officer said, adding that three policemen were wounded in the raid.

Residents of the ancient village said rebels told people to shut shops and close their windows before they stormed the police post.

"It's feels like a dead town now," one resident told Reuters by phone. "There are unexploded bombs, cartridges and unused bullets, clothes and helmets littered in the compound of the police post."

Dipak Rijal, a local journalist, said



Nepalis look at a bomb crater in a government building where a day care centre was located in Kritipur, outside Kathmandu, Dec. 16. Maoist rebels are suspected of the attack on Wednesday. REUTERS

crude, unexploded bombs were found on some village roads. "I can also see blood stains on the roads," he said.

Security forces said reinforcements had been sent to the area and a search was under way for the attackers who fled into nearby jungles after the attack.

Violence has increased in Nepal in the run-up to a Jan. 13 deadline set by

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba for rebels to join peace talks on ending the revolt that has killed more than 10,000 people. The rebels rejected the deadline.

The rebellion has wrecked Nepal's economy, which depends on tourism and aid, and has triggered a political crisis and forced thousands of villagers to flee their homes.

Philippines begins to rebuild flood-hit areas

MANILA, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Hundreds of army and civilian engineers have begun massive construction work in the northern Philippines to rebuild flood-hit areas that have been cut off from the rest of the country for weeks.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said on Saturday that the reconstruction was in full swing.

"Today, we begin the rehabilitation phase of our response to the disaster of the four storms," she said in the town of Infanta on the east coast, which bore the brunt.

Damage to crops, fishing and infrastructure is estimated at 4.69 billion pesos (\$83 million). It will take weeks to restore power to the worst-hit areas, clear roads and rebuild bridges.

Teams of army and navy engineers have begun repairing half a dozen bridges after clearing 35 km (20 miles)

of highway to Infanta, one of three towns that were badly hit.

Also on Saturday, the U.S. Marines turned over \$1 million worth of tents, generators, blankets, medical supplies and water containers to Philippine disaster officials as it pulled out 650 troops after two weeks of relief operations.

Nearly 1,800 people are dead or missing in eastern and northern provinces on Luzon island after a typhoon and three tropical storms in two weeks set off torrents of water, mud, boulders and logs that swept away villages and bridges.

Close to four million Filipinos have been affected. With disease a major worry, the U.S. Marines helped speed up efforts to get food, clean water, medicine and shelter to 880,000 people marooned by floods and landslides.

Arroyo thanked Washington for its

help in the relief effort, saying the role played by U.S. troops in delivery of emergency rations "speaks of the mighty ties that are shared by time-honoured allies across the Pacific".

She said the \$7 million in total U.S. assistance was the biggest contribution by an individual foreign government to her government's relief efforts.

Manila has received close to 100 million pesos (\$1.8 million) in cash, emergency rations and equipment from the international community, including foreign non-government organisation.

International aid agencies continued to appeal for support to combat potential disease outbreaks in flood-stricken areas, saying more than \$8 million in additional aid was needed during the next three months.

Congo fighting rekindles war fears in eastern town

GOMA, Congo, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Music pours from wedding celebrations, the traffic is bustling and ladies ferry baskets of vegetables to the market — but the people of this eastern Congolese town are nervous.

Goma's residents may have been hardened by years of war, the influx of a million refugees and a volcano which sent lava sweeping through their town centre two years ago.

But several weeks of renewed clashes in the wilds of Congo's frontier region with Rwanda have stirred violent memories in this dusty provincial capital.

"We hear about the fighting in Kanyabayonga and Walikale. This is war again and it is serious. People are fleeing," said Viane Mapendo, selling mobile telephone vouchers from a shack on a street corner.

"We're scared that it will come to Goma. We walk around during the day, but not at night — this is when the war may come."

If it does come, it would be the third war in Congo in the past decade. The last one drew in six countries and killed more than 3 million people, mainly through hunger and disease.

Government soldiers sent to reinforce the east have clashed in recent days with former Rwandan-backed rebels, supposedly part of a unified army, in Kanyabayonga, 180 km (112

miles) north of Goma.

Pro-Kinshasa forces had to retreat northwards and several dozen of their men were killed. But they later seized control of the notoriously wild mining town of Walikale, 120 km to the west of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province.

The upsurge in fighting a year and a half after Congo's 5-year war officially ended after Rwanda threatened to send troops into Congo and Kinshasa's decision to send reinforcements east.

Rwanda has repeatedly threatened to launch incursions to track down Hutu extremists based in eastern Congo, some of whom took part in its 1994 genocide.

Mutual distrust

Unifying Congo is taking time. North Kivu is still dominated by RCD-Goma, a former rebel group now part of a fragile transitional government in Kinshasa but mistrusted by many for its strong links with Rwanda.

"We have seen the soldiers but we don't know what they have come to do," says Hazizi Nzigiye, a vegetable seller who often travels south of Goma, where RCD fighters and pro-Kinshasa forces are building up on each side of the provincial border.

"I don't understand why there is so much fighting. These people are on the same side. We hope the war will end soon," she said from her stall in

Goma's marketplace, surrounded by solidified lava that spewed into the town during an eruption in 2002.

All the belligerents from Congo's war have joined the government after signing up to a peace deal that is supposed to lead some 60 million Congolese to elections in June next year.

But suspicion remains among the parties and little progress has been made in integrating several hundred thousand armed men into a cohesive national army, many of them based among the east's vast riches of gold, diamonds and coltan.

A heavily-protected government delegation, sent to Goma to try and pacify the province, has been shuttling between meetings with local politicians, new military commanders and community leaders who oppose the troop deployments.

But rumours of Rwandan infiltrations and of weapons being distributed to civilians give few of Goma's residents much grounds for optimism.

"This situation is bad. We hear that weapons have been distributed and the Rwandans have already sent soldiers into Congo," said pastor Ephrem Binja.

"The government has abandoned us to our fate here. They should do more for us," he said.

Russia to sell YUKOS unit on Sunday, Gazprom to bid

MOSCOW, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Russia looks ready to sell the key production unit of beleaguered oil group YUKOS on Sunday and put it back in state hands after almost a decade under private management.

State-owned gas monopoly Gazprom is favourite to buy the Yugansk unit at an auction after Russia said on Friday it would go ahead with the sale despite a U.S. bankruptcy court order seeking a halt for 10 days.

YUKOS is widely seen as the victim of a Kremlin campaign to crush the political ambitions of its main shareholder, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, and regain control over strategic sectors of the economy sold off in chaotic privatisations in the 1990s.

Khodorkovsky was arrested in October 2003 and put on trial for tax evasion. He faces 10 years in jail if convicted.

Three little-known firms have also applied to bid.

By putting Yugansk on the auction block the government is seeking to claw back part of a massive \$27.5 billion back tax claim against YUKOS, one of the country's biggest oil companies.

The Yugansk sale will effectively



A worker checks equipment at Yuganskneftegaz oil processing facility, the core unit of oil company YUKOS at Mamontovskoye oilfield outside the Siberian town of Nefteyugansk, Dec. 18. Russia looks ready to sell the key production unit of beleaguered oil group YUKOS on Sunday and put it back in state hands after almost a decade under private management. REUTERS

represent the demise of YUKOS in its present form, as Yugansk accounts for almost two thirds of the company's oil output.

YUKOS has said the sale of Yugansk at the minimum auction price of some \$9 billion would destroy shareholder value, citing an appraisal by investment bank Dresdner

Kleinwort Wasserstein which put the value of Yugansk at \$14-\$17 billion.

YUKOS has filed for bankruptcy protection in the United States and won a 10-day restraining order on the sale from a court in Houston. Moscow has said U.S. courts had no jurisdiction in Russia.

The U.S. court decision forced a

syndicate of Western banks, including J.P. Morgan, Deutsche Bank, ABN Amro, BNP Paribas, Calyon and Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein, to delay a 10 billion euro loan to Gazprom to help it buy Yugansk.

Gazprom's down payment

But Gazprom made a 49.33 billion rouble (\$1.77 billion) deposit payment for the auction, while its head held talks with Chinese oil group CNPC about the bid.

CNPC has long been rumoured to have been considering a joint bid with Gazprom.

Economy Minister German Gref has said no Russian firm can buy Yugansk on its own but Gazprom could put in a joint bid with another Russian oil firm such as Surgutneftegaz, which is flush with cash.

The government could also give Gazprom more time to pay for Yugansk if it makes a winning bid.

The three small firms which have also applied to bid at the auction could either be acting in partnership with Gazprom or are simply shell companies set up to create the semblance of competition, said analysts.

Argentine diplomats in trouble over Cuban dissident

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Argentine President Nestor Kirchner ordered that two diplomats be fired for letting a Cuban dissident enter the country's embassy in Havana after Cuba had barred her from visiting family in Buenos Aires, newspapers reported on Saturday.

Kirchner moved to dismiss Raul Taleb, the ambassador to Cuba, and senior foreign ministry aide Eduardo Valdes, leading newspapers Clarin and La Nacion said in reports that cited unnamed sources.

The center-left president acted after the diplomats allowed Hilda Molina, a renowned Cuban neurosurgeon and dissident, to enter the Argentine embassy with her elderly mother on Wednesday and stay there overnight.

Molina denied widespread

speculation that she had intended to seek political asylum.

But Argentina's actions put the South American nation at odds with Cuban President Fidel Castro, who had earlier rejected a personal request by Kirchner that Molina be allowed to travel to Buenos Aires to visit her son and grandchildren.

Tension between the two countries grew when Molina's son, Roberto Quinones, made an emphatic plea for Kirchner not to abandon the family's cause and said he feared for his mother's health.

An Argentine foreign ministry spokesman declined to confirm or deny the reports that Kirchner had ordered the firings.

The newspapers said the foreign ministry was drafting a document to try to justify Valdes' actions and avert his dismissal.

Three Brazilian activists in landless claims slain

BRASILIA, Brazil, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Masked gunmen killed three landless activists in the past two days in an area of northeast Brazil known for violent land battles, federal officials and the radical Landless Workers Movement (MST) said on Saturday.

Two MST activists, brothers Edilson Rufino da Rocha, 37, and Francisco Manuel de Lima 27, were shot in their beds by armed gunmen on Friday near the town of Passira, 66

miles (107 km) west of Pernambuco state capital Recife.

A third, Josuel Fernandes da Silva, 33, was gunned down by three assassins on Thursday in Sao Jose da Coroa Grande, around 68 miles (110 km) south of Recife, an MST leader said.

"They were victims of landowner gunmen in reprisal attacks," MST leader Edilson Barbosa said by cellphone from a funeral for two of the dead activists.

The latest killings came weeks after five landless activists were shot by gunmen in the central Brazilian state of Minas Gerais.

They marked a rising number of MST land occupations meant to speed President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's slow-moving land reform.

Brazil's human rights secretary Nilmario Miranda was set to attend the funeral of the two activists and investigate the killings which follow MST attempts to occupy a local

ranch, state news agency Radiobras reported.

Under Brazil's constitution, farmland that is not used can be expropriated by the government and redistributed to some of the hundreds of thousands of peasants waiting for plots in encampments across Brazil.

The MST grabs land to force legal decisions on possible expropriation. The invasions prompt clashes with landowners who form militias to protect property.

Nurse beheaded, another stabbed in French hospital

PAU, France, Dec 18 (Reuters) - A nurse was decapitated and another stabbed to death overnight in the psychiatric hospital where they worked in this southwestern French town, a medical source said on Saturday.

The head of the decapitated nurse was found on top of a television in the geriatric ward, the source said. The second nurse had been stabbed in the neck.

"This is unspeakable, scandalous and horrible," said Health Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy, who rushed to the hospital in this town just north of the Pyrenees Mountains. "It was certainly someone very sick who did

this."

Hospital workers arriving for the Saturday morning shift found the two nurses dead, a medical source said.

Local prosecutor Eric Maurel said there were indications that a hospital window had been forced open.

"Five people are now in police custody," he told journalists, without giving details of the deaths. "We are investigating but we cannot say whether these persons are directly linked with the event."

During his visit, Douste-Blazy — who is a physician by training — met relatives of the victims and then spoke to shocked hospital staff.

Romania's centrists get closer to forming new govt

BUCHAREST, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Romania's centrist alliance won crucial backing on Saturday from the kingmaker ethnic Hungarian party (UDMR), an important step to forming a government after inconclusive polls in the EU candidate country.

The governing ex-communist PSD and the alliance have almost equal strength in the parliament elected last month and have been locked in a tug-of-war over who will lead the Balkan state into the EU in 2007.

The pro-business alliance of Liberals and Democrats, buoyed by a presidential election victory of their leader Traian Basescu, has been piling pressure on the PSD to abandon its bid to cling to power or face snap polls.

"The UDMR voted unanimously to back the alliance and start negotiations with them to form a government," Peter Eckstein-Kovacs, a senior UDMR member, told Reuters.

But even with backing from UDMR, the alliance would still need the support of the small pro-business Humanist Party (PUR), which ran on a joint election ticket with the PSD, and 18 independent deputies to win parliament majority.

Political analysts said the UDMR deal boosted the chances of forming a centrist-led government: "It's a move of paramount importance but it's not enough. The PUR party must be lured somehow to join the lines. I think Basescu will manage to do so," Sorin Ionita of the Romanian Academic think tank told Reuters.



Romania's President-elect Traian Basescu waves to supporters at the end of the convention of his Democrat Party in Bucharest Dec. 18. Basescu gave-up presidency to his party to comply with Romanian constitution. REUTERS

No decision yet
The PSD said it would still try to form a majority with its small ally

PUR, but that party said it had yet to take a final decision.
"PUR will meet again for discus-

sions on Monday," it said in a statement... from the point of view of political morality, we would remain with the PSD."

Basescu, who handed over the Democrat party leadership on Saturday as required before he can take over the presidency, hailed the UDMR move, saying he hoped to have a new government approved in parliament by Dec. 31.

"I expected they would choose a democratic solution and stop backing a mafia system run by the PSD," he said.

Basescu, who replaces veteran ex-communist politician Ion Iliescu next week, campaigned on a platform of radical tax cuts coupled with zero tolerance for corruption and political patronage, which he said was rampant under the PSD government.

The PSD appeared to lose the Hungarians' backing after Iliescu pardoned the leader of the rioting miners who toppled Romania's first post-communist government in 1991.

Iliescu cancelled the pardon of union leader Miron Cozma on Friday, after public outrage, but UDMR said it was too late.

"We couldn't be in the same boat with the people who freed the miners' leader," UDMR President Marko Bela said in comments broadcast on television.

The EU agreed on Friday to sign an accession treaty with Romania and neighbouring Bulgaria in April next year and to admit them as new members in 2007.

Polish PM calls on leftists to decide vote date

WARSAW, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Poland's Prime Minister Marek Belka on Saturday appealed to his ruling party's congress to quickly decide when to hold general elections.

Belka said he favoured polls in the first half of 2005, several months ahead of their compulsory date, as promised by the ruling ex-communists.

But the party, fearing an election rout after seeing its support slump to less than 10 percent in opinion polls from the 41 percent it had in 2001 after a string of sleaze scandals, has signalled it may back out of its pledge and delay a decision until February.

"For me the key thing is that a clear decision is made as quickly as possible," Belka told almost 1,000 party delegates.

The timing of the polls will determine whether the current government or a successor prepares the 2006 budget, crucial for Poland's euro adoption plans.

The congress is seen as the Democratic Left Alliance's (SLD) last chance to make a clean break with the past and try to forge a broader alliance to limit the damage and escape total annihilation at the hands of the centre-right opposition.

But with the old guard running for leadership this weekend and the party

bent on closing ranks in the face of a feared right-wing backlash, any radical changes looked elusive.

"We do not want the left to be associated with arrogance, cronyism and dipping in the till," a group which split from the SLD earlier this year said in a letter read out to the congress to jeers from the audience.

"Either you should do something about that or dissolve your party and stop tarnishing the leftist image."

A standing ovation that greeted retired general Wojciech Jaruzelski, who ordered martial law to quash the Solidarity pro-democracy movement in 1981, showed that many in the SLD were not ready to reject their communist-era heritage.

The race for SLD leader pits present chief Krzysztof Janik, 54, against Jozef Oleksy, 58, parliament speaker and a former prime minister.

Janik called on the party rank-and-file to rally behind Belka and said the splintered left should unite and field a joint candidate in presidential polls, also due next year.

Since taking power in May, Belka has successfully steered clear of scandals, but has alienated party backbenchers with his push for unpopular budget reforms and close ties with SLD rebels, suffering several defeats in parliament.

Words of Wisdom



Gentlemen, Yemen does not need more money! It needs a system. Yemen need accountable officials, and it needs people with some decency in the way they work. If the IMP, World Bank and other organizations pump loans into Yemen, where will it go? More importantly, how will it be paid?

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

OUR
OPINIONDon't forget
your roots

While I was in Washington DC for a short conference last week, I decided that this time, unlike earlier attempts, I must go visit representatives of the Yemeni community in New York City. After all, it has always been my deep desire to see what the largest Yemeni community in the USA was thinking about Yemen and its future.

With the assistance of Yemen Times NYC correspondent Shaker Lashuel, I was able to do this. It was an excellent opportunity to share thoughts.

But even before we went to the deep issues, I felt that they all missed their home, Yemen. Even if some of them did go to visit recently, it was obvious that the are still attached to their homeland.

Then a question was raised to me about how Yemeni immigrants in the USA could help Yemen in its development, and how they could assist those who are trying to develop the country from within.

I wanted to make clear that the minimum that one should do as an immigrant is to remember his country and not abandon it. "You should always think of yourself as Yemeni American and not forget where you come from. Once in a while try to remember your village and

grandfathers and grandmothers. Don't let your children forget where they come from," I responded.

Indeed, that is the minimum Yemeni immigrants should do. Even for children of the second generation of Yemenis, this principle should be applied. It is healthy to show children of immigrants photos of villages and landscapes, of people and even animals, and to remind them that they have a duty towards that land that they belong to.

I felt tat this created emotions in the Yemeni immigrants I met, especially as we are going through a transition period with thousands of Yemenis now that are not able to even speak their original language because they have merged into the American community fully. Some readers in Yemen may think that this is an easy task. But from what I saw, it is extremely difficult to raise children to know their original language and be attached to their country. So immigrants who are able to do this need our appreciation and respect.

Some may try to blame Yemeni immigrants for not sharing the agony, misfortune and suffering that their countrymen may be going through in Yemen, but I could see that they also want this to change and for Yemen to go back to its glorious days of prosperity. They seem to have the intention to make change, and that is what made me happy and enthusiastic.

So, for all those Yemeni immigrants reading this, I want to reaffirm that even by reading this newspaper, you are supporting your country as it shows you still have bonds that would never be broken by time. Just keep up the faith in the future of your country, and keep on thinking about it. That in itself is a great contribution.

The Editor



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First English Newspaper in Yemen, founded in 1991
by Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Saqqaf

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East and West



By JAMIL ABDUL KARIM

Christmas satire

Let's not live like
a bunch of Yahoos

So, it's Christmas. On December 25, much of the world celebrates the birth of Jesus. As it should. For many, His presence is as real as it was 2,000 years ago.

The image of Santa Claus will also be seen, especially in the West. Santa, of course, may not be real. But look at those letters he apparently gets. So, in that spirit, here's a copy of my annual letter to the jolly fellow.

To each of you, have a blessed Christmas. And let's hope we all work to make 2005 a little brighter for the children of the world.

Dear Santa:

Thanks for that gift from last year, the Gulliver's Travels book. Very nice choice. The Houyhnhnms, those horse-like characters were so bright, so noble. And those savage Yahoos: so dim, so lost. Poor Gulliver couldn't see himself in them.

But that Gulliver really was a traveler. Like you Santa. Which is why I'm writing. We've got distribution problems. Now experts say the North American toy market is flat. Seems everyone there buys all year long.

So I've made a new Christmas toy, a board game. It's called Children of the World. Roll the dice and land on a square that offers a free toy. Then get a question about children of the world. Answer right and get the toy.

Say you land on Bob the Builder, a fine toy about work. Its question is, how many kids are victims of child labour? Answer? 250 million. Yes, rather than in school, these kids are in places like the streets of Sana'a, where they sell things like bottled water to

help their families survive. That's if they're not smuggled into Saudi Arabia to work there.

It could be worse. They could have no water. Or food. Roll and land on the Easy Bake Oven and get asked, how many kids worldwide are malnourished? Answer? 160 million. You get the idea.

Do you think kids in Sudan might want some Easy Bakes? Then again, if they starve to death, they won't need a toilet. And that would reduce the couple of billion people who don't have access to clean sanitation. Plus it would trim the world's 12 million refugees.

Personally, I think there are better ways to die. For example, land on the X-Box and learn that while North Americans spent \$10 billion on video-gaming last year, 300,000 of the world's children were forced to fight wars that aren't theirs.

Yes, video games have their own special brand of killing and maiming. And you can't beat that, because children who have these kinds of creative toys are better-adjusted, happier, and more popular with their peers. Oh, and real war? Worldwide, countries now import \$30 billion of arms annually.

Sounds like a lot, but it's not much to fight advertisers. Play my game and learn that North American advertisers alone spend over \$15 billion yearly just targeting kids. Too bad there's never cash for vaccines and supplies to save the 11 million children who now die every year before their fifth birthday.

So many toys, so little joy. It's enough to drive one to drink. Which is okay, because this season folks in some countries have extra wine. Could you turn some into water? Then back again?

Letters to the Editor

To Haifi: excellent article

I would like to tell Hassan Al-Haifi that the recent article about US casualties in Iraq was excellent! Thank you for writing it.

Mr. Bush is not only a danger to the US but to the world. The problem is that a slight majority of Americans enjoy the killing. Recently it is stated that over 20,000 US troops from the invasion of Iraq have been wounded and treated in Germany. In addition, it is said that since the invasion, 100,000 more Iraqis died than normally would have. And the US has had over 1200 killed. But this won't be enough blood to satisfy the right-wing extremists in the US. The world can expect hundreds of thousands of deaths at the hand of the Butcher Bush in the next four years.

Mr. Bush's "religion" teaches him two things:

1) Power comes from the barrel of a gun.
2) He can hire half the poor to kill the other half.

In essence, there are great similarities between Bush and bin Laden. Both are fighting a religious war and the innocent will continue to suffer.

Robert Lindh
lindh@swnebr.net

Why is qat a drug?

I still remember the article I sent to you in which I asked you to explain the reasons that lead you to name qat as a drug. I have not, however, received any logical reasons for this statement.

I would like to tell you that criticism requires evaluation. We have to accept alternative opinions to avoid bias.

Ashwaq Al-Gose
ashwaq-m@maktob.com

Dear Ashwaq,
I understand your complaint and I value your feedback. However, when I said drugged nation what I meant

should not be literally understood as it is unwise to call the whole Yemeni nation drug addicts. What I meant is that the use of qat is turning hard working active people into citizens who are addicted to qat sessions, which absorbs their time and money. The objective of the editorial was to make the nation wake up from its habit of chewing qat. If you have a counter opinion that you think is appropriate, you can have it sent to us for it to be published.

Thank you for your feedback

— The Editor

Haifis' double standards

Regarding Hassan Al-Haifi's column entitled "Don't blame Islam", the author comments on a writer's points by saying: "First, you and everyone has the right to request but what you don't have the right in doing, is labeling the Muslim nation."

Yes the writer does. She has the right to say as she pleases. That's called freedom of speech, something you don't seem to understand in others, but demand for yourself, because, in condemning her right to "label" others, you proceed in your response and do precisely that to her and to Western culture. This is a double standard policy.

M. Hand

Slaves still exist

I write this in response to a writer who recently denied the existence of slaves in today's world. Food, clothing and shelter is a priority in the Islamic religion, but the bigger picture is Zakat which protects the Ummah, marriage, divorce, child-custody, crime victims, and believers around the World. It is especially important for freeing the slaves.

If you say" there no slaves

in the World" I have to say 'take your head out of the sand, my brother'.

Khatib Abdurrahman
khatibabdurrahmaan@yahoo.com

Look into your problems!

I was afraid that no one in the Middle East is looking within the society to realize that the problems are not the West's fault. With all the resources that are used to spread destruction, why not upgrade the lives of your people instead of destroying them?

Brenda Cotton
bcotton131@aol.com

The water shortage crisis

I am a member of technical staff with a leading oil company in the UAE. I wish to thank the Yemen Times for giving us this opportunity to convey our message to the world.

However dear brothers and sisters, much has been said regarding the situation of water shortage our country, but is anyone giving it the attention it deserves? Please let us make use of the media and all other means we have to avoid an impending disaster.

Awadh M. Al-Jabri
ajabri@yahoo.com

Yemeni friends,
please unite!

A few years ago I first wrote some small articles for the Yemen Times. My interest was in the archaeological sites there. But soon I was drawn to the country, its people and their love for Allah. I visited Yemen in the spring of 2001 and produced a documentary film about the country and tried to encourage tourism. Then the tragedies on September 11 occurred.

As late as 2002, well before the Iraq war, I accepted a position as Director of the Modern American Language

For the poor I'd recommend a white Valle Berta Gavi. It's rich, but crisp. Clean, unlike those people without toilets.

Yeah, for some, this Christmas kind of stinks. But it's easy to cover the smell. Just roll the dice and get Giorgio or Hugo Boss. It's nice for the guys. For the ladies, go for something more romantic, but still stylish for the times.

Remember Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette? While their Versailles parties were swinging, revolution was brewing. Eventually things exploded with a real bang. That left everyone with the smell of blood. That's less pleasant than frankincense for sure.

Frankincense was valued for trading in ancient Yemen, which was known as "the ends of the earth." I think for the right person it's still a great gift idea. Naturally, that person is you, Santa. Frankincense and myrrh from the ends of the earth. Merry Christmas.

Do enjoy it. After all, Christmas really is all about you. It's about your honour and your glory. You don't think Christmas is about Someone else's glory, do you? No Santa, you're the one who loves us so much. You'd even give your life for us, right Santa? Yes, without you, we really are so lost.

Anyway, I think my family has all we need this year. But please, teach us to be thankful. Help us to be generous. And wherever our travels may lead, please do help us all find some horse sense, so that we don't live our lives, short as they are, like a bunch of Yahoos.

Jamil
Jamil Abdul Karim is an editor at the Yemen Times.
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COMMON
SENSE

By Hassan Al-Haifi

To whom does the
future belong?

“There was a time when all you could think about was what your future will be like, when all this studying is over and done with, wasn't there?” asked Marwan.

His older brother looked puzzled and tried to figure out an answer which he hoped would be in the context of his younger brother's question: “That is quite normal of all students at your age, as they are about to complete their high school and look forward to go to the university to learn a profession, and it was normal when I was a student 15 years ago and it was normal when our father was a strident?” He figured by going across a couple of generations he might hit at just what Marwan was trying to get at.

“Ali, nowadays, you just hope that you do not have to contemplate where you are going even after high school. When you finish high school, you know you are going to face the awesome challenge of getting a university degree. You know that you will have difficulty getting accepted, because you do not have the right connections in any of the universities that will push your application through. If you are convinced that a university education isn't going to get you anywhere, and you hope to learn a skilled vocation, the competition for technical or vocational institutes is also fierce and then the quality of the education is substandard. If you seek a scholarship overseas, you will find that the privilege has become confined to the offspring of middle level or higher level public servants or social dignitaries and rich merchants, who can afford to buy colleges overseas, with all the money they have accumulated from exploiting the Yemeni people all these years with the cheap products they import or 'manufacture'. So, where does a poor student like me expect to make a future for himself?” Marwan was really hopeless about his future.

Just then Ali's wife brought them some refreshments and cookies: “I am sure Marwan that your brother can help you find the right university to learn the profession that you like to enter. He does know a few people here and there”.

“Aziza, the bleak story does not end there. Even if you are lucky to get through the university education, you find that your degree will not get you the job that will sustain you, let alone pave the way for a prosperous future, in which you can raise a family and do all those normal things that people aspire to do with their lives. If you get any half way decent job, you find that you are not adequately educated or trained for it and you will find yourself competing with students who graduated from academic institutions overseas and are equipped with a foreign language or better scholastic qualifications than our inadequate universities are able to make of us. Thus, any chance of promotions are blocked right there, because employers don't invest in advancing the capabilities of their employees. They would even go through the expense of hiring expatriates to undertake the most minor jobs, rather than try to improve the skills of local labor.”

“Look Marwan, I am sure that things will improve by the time you finish the university and you will find the right job that will fulfill all your ambitions. Don't forget, I went through the same thoughts a decade ago and now you see that none of my pessimism was justified”. Ali was trying to reassure his brother that the future should not be all that bleak.

“Ali, you were lucky, because you were able to get a scholarship overseas and met some of our officials there, who you took around because of your excellent knowledge of French. They landed with a good job with a French company that was under contract with the Government and thus you were among the few that were able to enjoy some benefit from our oil resource. But for people like me, the hope of going overseas is now dimmer than ever, because the government says we do not need to send students overseas. Since none of my relatives know anyone in the government, there is no chance of getting access to a scholarship overseas.”

“Marwan, there are some embassies that are sponsoring studies abroad in their home countries. You might try out for getting acceptance to any one of their scholarship programs.” His brother's wife pointed out an avenue of hope for Marwan.

“No, Aziza, it is not all that simple. By the time you get to the door of the embassies, you are already under suspicion of being a terrorist because of the long beard you might have grown, because you can't afford to buy shaving blades and shaving cream. Do you see how much security is around these foreign embassies?”

“Look, Marwan, maybe you can just write to these embassies and do not have to go to call upon them” said Ali.

“Write to them? Come on Marwan, you know I can't write any foreign languages and their application forms may sometimes cost a fortune to obtain, if you can find someone who will connect you. So, the first thing I need to do is borrow some money from you to get shaving blade and a suit to be able to reach the gate of any of these universities, without having to arouse any suspicion of being a security risk. Then, I need to find a contact inside the embassy to get the application forms etc. Then there is the processing with all the government agencies involved and so on. By the time you are finished and you get lucky and your application is accepted, you would have lost half your weight and half of your marbles.”

“What about the local universities?” asked Aziza.

Marwan was quick to answer: “So far the only university that has accepted me is a private university that was just set up two years ago. All they offer is political science and I simply have no desire to get enmeshed in any politics in this country. My only hope is just to keep this beard and simply find a nice corner in the Grande Mosque, where I can hopefully make some money reading the Quran for kind-hearted illiterate suq merchants, who wish to thank the Lord for getting them out of the quagmire that people like us have to go to etch out their future”.

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Putin's ark

By Konstantin Akinsha

Recently I visited Moscow after five years away. The city, which looked different and strange, impressed me by its ability to change. My days back in Russia were divided between official meetings, hours wasted in traffic jams, and nights spent with old friends who tried to show me the best of Moscow nightlife.

On my first free evening, I was invited to a place called "Shinok." The restaurant had many of the traits found in ethnic restaurants everywhere. Different bits of kitsch, this time Ukrainian, were richly represented. But the interior decoration had one unique element – an artificial wall with windows separating a part of the restaurant hall. Behind the wall was a stage set of a village yard.

A real cow, as well as chickens and geese populated that ersatz farmyard. At times an old woman in traditional dress appeared to feed the animals. Visitors enjoying borscht and pirogi observed her efforts with satisfaction. "She works for the restaurant," my acquaintance explained. "She feeds animals and sits in the yard to create the rustic ambience."

Shinok was just an introduction to today's new wave of Moscow

restaurant culture. A few days later, I visited "The White Sun of the Desert," another ethnic hangout. The White Sun existed in Soviet times. Back then, it was called "Uzbekistan" and was nothing more than an obligatory culinary demonstration of the supposedly unbreakable union of the USSR's fifteen fraternal republics.

Although the restaurant interior had completely changed since then, its decorative themes remained the same. Nowadays, however, the establishment is named after a popular Soviet borscht-western (or "eastern") filmed in 1969 and set in Central Asia during the 1919 Civil War. The restaurant is decorated not only with oriental carpets, but with life-size figures of the movie's heroes firing machine guns or sitting on crates of dynamite. This Soviet "orientalism" is reinforced by pretty waitresses dressed in sexy outfits more inspired by the Arabian Nights than by any Central Asian reality – then or now.

But the Soviet past, not ethnic motifs, are the biggest element in contemporary Muscovite restaurant design. The club-restaurant "Major Pronin" is conveniently located in the vicinity of the KGB-FSB headquarters. It is named after the hero of bad Soviet-era spy novels, a figure who was also the butt of many underground jokes.

The restaurant's interior is decorated

with various pieces of espionage equipment. But the main attraction is a shooting gallery where patrons can test their skills between courses. Targets depicting serial killers and drug dealers have mottos like "Save a woman" or "Save a boy" on them. In the middle of the wall is a target representing New York's World Trade Center being approached by an aircraft, with the inscription "Save America."

A new club called "Zone" – Russian slang for a concentration camp – is designed to reproduce the feeling of gulag life. Barking Alsatian dogs, stern guards, and waiters dressed in inmate uniforms work hard to recreate the gulag's sinister atmosphere.

Russian literature is not forgotten. If the restaurant "Pushkin" on Tverskoy Boulevard not far from the monument to the great Russian poet is designed to recreate the "aristocratic atmosphere" of the early nineteenth century, the combined bar and diner called "Gogol" on Stoleshnikov Lane is an attempt to recreate a vanished Soviet institution called "rumochnaia." A "rumka" is a vodka glass from which exhausted proletarians could revive themselves. Of course "rumochnaia" had nothing in common with Nikolai Gogol, but the establishment named after the famous writer does have a skating rink that is used once a day by a man dressed up as Gogol.



After my return to Washington, I had a dinner with an American politician who had just visited Saint Petersburg. As a special honor, his Russian hosts organized an excursion to Strelna, the "Russian Versailles," which was recently restored from ruin to become the Petersburg residence of President Vladimir Putin.

The palace didn't impress the American. The amount of marble used for renovation seemed excessive, and the understanding of what constitutes luxury appeared to correspond to the standards of a Holiday Inn. The American's excited Russian hosts

asked him constantly for his opinion of the palace. Throughout the tour, the American answered with polite exclamations like "exquisite" or "striking."

Finally, they reached the attic. At last, the American was excited. The attic of the presidential residence was designed as a belly of the seventeenth-century ship. "The last time I saw something like this was in a Hamburg beer hall in the 1960's," the politician told me.

How perfect, I thought, as I imagined Russia's president climbing the stairs to the attic of his palace to play the role of

Peter the Great. Like the customers in that Ukrainian-style village restaurant, perhaps Putin found his attic ark reassuring in some unconscious way. A historical wave beyond his control had lifted the former KGB lieutenant colonel from out of the shadows to the pinnacle of power. But fate might also just as suddenly wash him away. What could be better than to have an ark at hand if one day the political tides turn?

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America's coming social democracy?

By J. BRADFORD DeLONG

Almost all of the world's developed countries consider themselves, and are, social democracies: mixed economies with very large governments performing a wide array of welfare and social insurance functions, and removing large chunks of wealth and commodity distribution from the market. The United States is something different. Or is it? Whatever it has been in the past, the US in the future will have to choose whether, and how much, it will be a social democracy.

Once upon a time, according to mythology at least, America had little downward mobility. On the contrary, before the Civil War you could start out splitting rails, light out for the Western Territory, make a success of yourself on the frontier, and wind up as President – if you were named Abraham Lincoln. In the generation after World War II, you could secure a blue-collar unionized manufacturing job or climb to the top of a white collar bureaucracy that offered job security, relatively high salaries, and long, stable career ladders.

This was always half myth. Setting out for the Western Territory was expensive. Covered wagons were not cheap. Even in the first post-WWII generation, only a minority of Americans – a largely

white, male minority – found well-paying stable jobs at large, unionized, capital-intensive manufacturing companies like GM, GE, or AT&T.

But if this story was half myth, it was also half true, particularly in the years after WWII. Largely independent of education or family, those Americans who did value stability and security could grasp it in the form of jobs with "a future." Even for those not so lucky, economic risks were usually fairly low: the unemployment rate for married men during the 1960's averaged 2.7%, and finding a new job was a relatively simple matter. It was during this era – roughly from 1948 to 1973 – that sociologists found that a majority of Americans had come to define themselves not as working class, but as middle class.

The post-WWII period stands as a reference point in America's collective memory, but it was in all likelihood an aberration. In the early postwar decades, foreign competition exerted virtually no pressure on the economy, owing to the isolation of America's continental market from the devastation of WWII. At the same time, the war left enormous pent-up demand for the products of mass production: cars, washing machines, refrigerators, lawn mowers, television sets, and more.

Government policy back then began with a permanent military program of spending and R&D and continued

through massive public works program and suburbanization, underpinned by the Federal Highway Program and subsidized home ownership loans from the Federal Housing Administration. The regulatory institutions and behavioral norms that originated in the New Deal and developed during WWII came into full force: social security, a system of unionized labor relations, market regulation.

Favorable macroeconomic circumstances, the absence of foreign competition, a system of government support and regulation, and large-scale private provision of what in Europe would have been public social insurance all combined to give post-WWII America many of social democracy's benefits without the costs. The economy did not stagger under the weight of ample benefits or high taxes. Americans – at least white, male Americans – did not have to worry about tradeoffs between security and opportunity, because the US offered the advantages of both. Corporate welfare capitalism substituted for what in Europe would have been government provided social democracy.

America was thus a special place. It had its cake and ate it, too: a combination of security with opportunity and entrepreneurship. It seemed that this was the natural order of things. Hence there was little pressure for government-sponsored social democracy: Why bother?

What would it add?

Now things are very different. The typical American employer is no longer General Motors. It is Wal-Mart. Private businesses are providing their workers with less and less in the form of defined-benefit pensions, health insurance, and other forms of insurance against life's economic risks.

Sharply rising income inequality has raised the stakes of the economic game. A government that cannot balance its own finances cannot be relied on to provide macroeconomic stability. Indeed, former Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Paul Volcker sees the US as so macroeconomically vulnerable as to be running a 75% chance of a full-fledged dollar crisis over the next several years.

The coming generation will be one of massive downward mobility for many Americans. The political struggles that this generates will determine whether America will move more closely to the social democratic norm for developed countries, or find some way to accept and rationalize its existence as a country of high economic risk and deep divisions of income and wealth.

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Defending Japanese defense

By HIDEAKI KANEDA

Japan's government and National Security Council plan to revise the country's National Defense Program Outline (NDPO) by the end of this year. A draft of proposed changes submitted to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi assigns three key tasks to the Self-Defense Forces (SDF): effective response to new threats, participation in international peacekeeping activities, and defense against invasion.

Today's complex security environment, with terrorist attacks by non-state actors occurring alongside traditional state-to-state wars, demands a nimble, integrated strategy. The draft revision of the NDPO seems to recognize this, emphasizing the need for Japan's own defense efforts, cooperation through the Japanese-US alliance, and contributions to multilateral missions. Moreover, the National Security Council has indicated the need to introduce a new plan for multi-functional flexible defense forces.

Unfortunately, key components of Japan's emerging security strategy remain vague and contradictory. For example, while the likelihood of an invasion threat is judged to be low, the Defense White Paper of 2004 argues

that the SDF's "most fundamental function" is to prepare for the worst, because sufficient defensive power cannot be developed overnight. In other words, Japan will clearly assert its will to defend the nation, and to prevent invasion in combination with the Japan-US security system.

On the other hand, the National Security Council proposes "scaling down the size of defense forces," implying mitigation of the will to defend. Indeed, the failure to suggest any possibility of an "emergency expansion" of the SDF compounds this anxiety.

To be sure, the government is ultimately responsible for determining the appropriate scale of defense power in line with fiscal considerations. But it is also the responsibility of the government to prepare a detailed and realistic policy aimed at securing the necessary level of defense capability in the event of unforeseen threats. Japan's government should thus give a clear indication of a true will to defend the country's security.

Of course, defense capability cannot be judged solely according to force levels. The draft NDPO's vision of a new, more adaptable, mobile, flexible, and multi-purpose SDF, with advanced

technological resources and information gathering capacity, calls for a fundamental reassessment of the existing organization and equipment. In conformity with the international community's efforts to secure peace and stability, the draft also creates a core unit within each of the military branches, and establishes an integrated operational system.

The military reorganization that the NDPO envisages is far-reaching. Japan's ground forces are to reorient their current structure, which is geared to combat capability in response to large-scale invasion, toward increased adaptability for military action in less severe circumstances.

The navy is to shift its focus away from the anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capability of the Cold War era, creating a structure aimed at defending islands, monitoring and responding to ballistic missiles, and combating illegal spy ship activities. The air force is to continue its monitoring activities in neighboring airspace and maintain response readiness against air attack, while modifying invasion response tactics somewhat as the likelihood of an attack from the air diminishes.

One problem is the dilution of ASW capability. Japan needs to develop well-

balanced defense forces with the capacity needed to respond to new threats, such as the rapid build-up of China's navy, especially its submarine forces. The importance of ASW capability in the Western Pacific has not waned. On the contrary, recent illegal violation of Japanese territorial waters by Chinese nuclear submarines suggests that, rather than being reduced, ASW capability should be built up further.

If Japan does decide to scale down its defense forces in this respect, a bold and qualitative change is inevitable. In particular, this could mean the introduction of what has so far been viewed as somewhat taboo equipment, such as light aircraft carriers or nuclear submarines.

In this age of uncertainty, when even the nature of the threats that nations face is uncertain, Japan's strategic and military planners must continue to seek ways to adapt the SDF to today's myriad current threats. But they must do so in a way that provides genuine direction, and that Japan's people, military, and neighbors find convincing.

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Call in the Reserves

By HAROLD JAMES

The People's Bank of China and the Bank of Japan – as well as other central banks in Asia – are in trouble. They have accumulated vast foreign exchange reserves, estimated at more than \$2 trillion. The problem is that almost all of it is in US dollars – a currency that is rapidly losing its value.

All policy options for Asia's central banks appear equally unattractive. If they do nothing and simply hold onto the dollars, their losses will only increase. But if they buy more, in an attempt to prop up the dollar, they will only have a bigger version of the same problem. If, on the contrary, they try to diversify into other currencies, they will drive down the dollar faster and create greater losses. They are also likely to encounter the same sort of problem with other possible reserve currencies.

The euro has been touted as the replacement for or alternative to the dollar. Some enthusiastic Europeans encouraged Asians to diversify their reserve holdings. But the same scenario might well be repeated with the euro in a few years. Large fiscal deficits and slow growth might convince foreign exchange markets that there is little future in the euro, fueling a wave of selling – and hence losses for central bank holders.

There is a historical parallel to today's concern about the world's major reserve currency. The interwar economy, shattered by the Great Depression of the early 1930's, offers a whole series of painful, but important, lessons for the present.

In the 1920's, the world economy was reconstructed around a fixed exchange rate regime in which many countries held their reserves not in gold (as was the practice before the First World War) but in foreign exchange, especially in British pounds sterling. During the course of the 1920's, some of the official holders of pounds grew nervous about Britain's weak foreign trade performance, which suggested that, like today's dollar, the currency was over-valued and would inevitably decline.

Foreign central banks asked whether the Bank of England was contemplating changing its view of the pound's exchange rate. Of course they were told that there was no intention of abandoning Britain's link to gold, and that the strong pound represented a deep and long commitment (in the same way that US Treasury Secretary John Snow today affirms the idea of a "strong dollar"). Only France ignored British statements and substantially sold off its sterling holdings.

When the inevitable British devaluation came on September 20-21, 1931, many foreign central banks were badly hit and were blamed for mismanaging

their reserves. Many were stripped of their responsibilities, and the persons involved were discredited. The Dutch central banker Gerard Vissering resigned and eventually killed himself as a result of the destruction wrought on his institution's balance sheet by the pound's collapse.

Some countries that traded a great deal with Britain, or were in the orbit of British imperial rule, continued to hold reserves in pounds after 1931. During World War II, Britain took advantage of this, and Argentina, Egypt, and India, in particular, built up huge claims on sterling, although it was an unattractive currency. At the war's end, they thought of a new way of using their reserves: spend them.

Consequently, these reserves provided the fuel for economic populism. Large holders of sterling balances – Nehru's India, Nasser's Egypt, and Peron's Argentina – all embarked on major nationalizations and a public sector spending spree: they built railways, dams, steel works. The sterling balances proved to be the starting point of vast and inefficient state planning regimes that did long-term harm to growth prospects in all the countries that took this course.

Could something similar be in store for today's holders of large reserves? The most explicit call for the use of dollar reserves to finance a major program of infrastructure modernization has come from India, which has a similar problem to the one facing China and Japan. It will be similarly tempting elsewhere.

This temptation needs to be removed before the tempted yield to it. Reserve holdings represent an outdated concept, and the world should contemplate some way of making them less central to the operation of the international financial system.

To be sure, reserves are important to smooth out imbalances in a fixed exchange rate regime. But the world has moved since the 1970's in the direction of greater exchange rate flexibility.

Reserves are also clearly important for countries that produce only a few goods – especially commodity producers – and thus face big and unpredictable swings in world market prices. Dependency on coffee or cocoa exports requires a build-up of precautionary reserves. But this does not apply to China, Japan, or India, whose exports are diversified.

Today's big surplus countries do not need large reserves. They should reduce their holdings as quickly as possible, before they do something really stupid with the accumulated treasure.

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Don't Feed the Dragon

By CHARLES TANNOCK

The European Union, after a three-year spat with President Bush, is keen to be regarded as a world player to be reckoned with. Many EU leaders see newfound respect coming in the form of a “strategic partnership” with China that is designed to balance the power of the United States.

Some want that partnership to include trade in advanced weaponry—witness the recent push to remove the EU’s 15-year-old ban on arms sales to China. Although America objects strongly, a number of Europeans shrug off any opposition.

But China is no ordinary trading partner. If not openly committed to opposing Western values and interests, China’s interests in cowing Taiwan and in asserting regional hegemony across Asia certainly are not those of Europe and the West, not

to mention Japan, India, and the rest of Asia.

Indeed, China stood with Russia, Belarus, and a few other despotic regimes in prematurely recognizing the thuggish, ballot-stuffing Viktor Yanukovich as President of Ukraine. This should come as no surprise, as the Chinese government does not plan to hold free and fair elections soon. Indeed, perhaps Ukraine’s Orange Revolution, with those thousands of protesters in Kiev’s Independence Square served as a potent reminder to China’s leaders of the Tiananmen Square protests 15 years ago, and – in contrast to Ukraine – their own strategy of brutal repression.

If not as dark as 15 years ago, China’s human rights record remains abysmal. The British Foreign Office’s annual human rights report for 2004, the most comprehensive in the EU, condemns China’s extensive use of the death penalty (even for such crimes as corruption, pimping, drug offenses, and tax fraud), its sys-

tematic torture of dissidents, and its restrictions on freedom of speech – including the Internet – and religion.

All of these abuses are raised repeatedly at EU-China summits, to little or no avail. So is this the time to end the arms ban imposed by both Europe and America after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989?

China’s human rights record is not the only problem. It is bad enough that no mechanism exists to prevent China’s government from using EU arms for internal repression. But nor does any mechanism exist that would stop China from re-exporting the weapons to places like North Korea. Indeed, China has a track record as a serial proliferator, having helped Pakistan build its atomic bomb. Its role in providing missile and rocket propulsion materials to Iran remains unclear.

Yet France and Germany, with Britain and Italy not far behind, say such criticism is outdated. (They are strongly opposed by Holland, the

Scandinavian countries, and the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe, which are familiar with communist repression.) Supporters of lifting the arms export ban argue that this litany of sins does not reflect China’s real improvements in human rights and penalizes European armaments jobs to the benefit of Russia, which enjoys a lively arms trade with its neighbor (something it might one day regret).

For France, lifting the embargo is also an important symbol, one that recognizes China’s role in fighting Islamist terrorism. Libya had such EU restrictions lifted last October ostensibly for joining the fight against terrorism and abandoning its weapons of mass destruction. In addition, those in favor of reviving EU-China arms trade see such sales as a stabilizer in bouts of political turbulence and are loath to let bad politics interfere with good business.

China apologists claim that the 1998 EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports is sufficient to limit arms

sales. But they conveniently ignore the fact that the Code of Conduct is voluntary and thus not enforceable. This is why the European Parliament voted across party and national lines in November against lifting the ban until the EU Code of Conduct is made binding.

Can anything pull the Atlantic alliance’s policies on arms exports together? Trade with a country with China’s human rights record must not only make economic sense; it must also fit the wider aims of foreign policy. That means, above all, avoiding trade that makes it more difficult to pursue those aims.

Just as American presidents looked foolish when they bent US foreign policy to the dictates of American wheat farmers in the 1970’s and 1980’s, European governments that are prepared to mortgage Asian security to a restless China also command no respect. The lesson is clear: security interests must come before business interests.

So transatlantic coordination is

needed, to ensure that any trade of sophisticated arms and weapons-related technologies with China does nothing to enhance China’s military power, and that competition between Western producers of goods that may legitimately be sold to China does not damage Western political unity.

In the Cold War era, there was a mechanism for such trade. From 1949 until the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Consultative Group Coordinating Committee (Cocom) monitored and controlled the export of Western technology to the Soviet Union. It did so by a gentlemen’s agreement, and with reasonable success. Cocom provided an opportunity to settle squabbles and plug loopholes quietly. Something similar is urgently needed now.

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Keep Europe's Commitments to Turkey

By MARTTI AHTISAARI, MICHEL ROCARD, AND ALBERT ROHAN

The moment of truth has come. The European Union must decide on December 17 whether to open accession talks with Turkey. Is today’s Union prepared to reverse a course first charted by such titans as Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer four decades ago?

When European Heads of State and Government concluded in 1999 that, “Turkey is a candidate state, destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate States,” they did so in full knowledge of all the arguments for and against Turkish EU membership. The same is true for the decision they took three years later, when they promised to open negotiations, should they find in December 2004 that Turkey fulfils the political criteria and should this be recommended by the European Commission. The latter happened in October.

When offering its recommendation, the Commission highlighted Turkey’s progress, while indicating those areas where greater effort must be made. The Commission’s conclusions, however, were clear: it “considers that Turkey sufficiently fulfills the political criteria and recommends that

accession negotiations be opened.” Were Europe’s leaders to now balk at beginning accession talks with Turkey, they would not only contradict their own previous decisions; they would also be in clear breach of the Union’s repeated political commitments to Turkey.

By nature and design, these negotiations must be directed at accession. They are expected to be long and difficult. But there is a benefit in this for Turkey, as it will give it time to continue – and deepen – the transformation process already underway.

For its part, the EU should make use of this interval to put its own house in order: to ratify the Constitutional Treaty and to conclude the integration of the new member states taken in this year as well as those – Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia – that may join as the accession talks with Turkey take place.

To be sure, this task is not beyond the Union’s grasp. If the challenge is met, by the time Turkey and the Union reach a final decision, both parties will have changed profoundly.

Because of Turkey’s specific characteristics – its size, geopolitical position, and religious traditions – accession to the EU presents both great challenges and huge opportunities for the two sides. None

of the problems, however, should be seen as an unyielding obstacle to Turkish membership. Indeed, in its report, the Commission has shown how to overcome them.

Most arguments put forward by skeptics about Turkish membership are, in fact, disingenuous and misleading. Surely, everybody must know that Turkey has always identified itself as a European state and was recognized as such by the rest of Europe decades ago. After all, how else could it be full a member of all European organizations and institutions except the EU?

In this respect, Turkey is fundamentally different from North African and Middle Eastern countries. It is simply not true that Turkish accession would open the floodgates to non-European countries.

Equally wrong is the view that Turkey’s Association agreement of 1963 holds little relevance for its membership in the EU because at the time the Community’s character was purely economic. From the beginning of the integration process, Europe’s founding fathers had made it abundantly clear that the ultimate goal was a political union, with economic integration being but the first step.

It is absurd to suggest that European visionaries such as Adenauer and de Gaulle failed to realize the

consequences of their decision to admit Turkey as an associate member of the EEC. Indeed, Commission President Walter Hallstein repeated three times on that occasion that, “Turkey belongs to Europe”.

When the European Council opened the way for Turkish membership in 1999, it fully took into account the establishment of the European (political) Union by the Maastricht Treaty years earlier. Moreover, members of the European Convention could not have been blind to the possibility of early accession negotiations with Turkey. Finally, there is no reason to believe that the new Constitution could not accommodate Turkish membership.

On December 17 European Heads of State and Government must take a clear and unequivocal decision in favor of accession negotiations with Turkey, honoring their own longstanding commitments and thus serving Europe’s most profound interests. This is a historic date; the credibility of the European Union is at stake.

Martti Ahtisaari is a former President of Finland, Michel Rocard is a former Prime Minister of France, and Albert Rohan is a former Director General of Austria’s Foreign Ministry.

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Interpreting Facts the Bush Way

By JOSEPH STIGLITZ

Last month’s American election saw the two sides throw facts, figures, interpretations, and counter-interpretations at the hapless electorate. It is an old trick: throw enough mud and some of it will stick. Confuse the voters enough, and eventually more will be likely to stay with the horse they know.

Most of the media not controlled by the right wing tried to play the role of honest broker, giving equal weight to each interpretation. If one side said the sky was blue and the other said it was orange, journalists would work hard, for the sake of appearing balanced, to find some academic, even a color blind one, willing to say that the sky was indeed orange.

But is it all just a matter of opinion? Are all interpretations equally valid?

I can answer that question only in my own area expertise, economics. With the election over, the debate itself has much to teach us about economics, economic policy, and media spin.

President Bush cited seeming huge job growth in the last 13 months, claiming that America’s labor market turned the corner. Is this true?

The claimed increase in jobs has barely kept up with growth in the labor force. Although job growth in October was robust at last, in September there were only 96,000 new jobs, 50,000 short of what was needed. But at this point in the business cycle, the United States normally should be creating jobs

at a rapid pace to make up for job losses earlier in the cycle – as it did in 1993-1995. In fact, this is the worst job recovery after any of America’s nine postwar recessions.

No spin can alter this fact. America has not turned the corner. On the contrary, most forecasters expect 2005 to be weaker than 2004, with growth insufficient to eliminate the “job deficit” – the gap between the number of jobs needed during the past four years to provide employment for new labor-market entrants and the actual number of jobs created.

But don’t blame Bush. The economy was in a downturn when he took office in 2001, and 9/11 and Iraq made matters worse.

True, the economy was slowing when Bush took office, but he also inherited an enormous fiscal surplus, amounting to 2% of GDP, which he transformed into a yawning deficit, equaling 4.5% of GDP. Normally, a fiscal turnaround of this magnitude would provide massive stimulus. The economy should be going gangbusters. Inflation – not jobs – should be the main worry.

This has not happened because Bush pushed a tax cut that was not designed to stimulate the economy, but to benefit the rich. A tax cut to low-income individuals or increased unemployment benefits would have provided far more stimulus to consumption, just as a temporary investment tax credit would have boosted capital spending far more than reducing taxes on dividends did. In fact, fixed business investment as a share of GDP is some 2% lower today than 4

years ago.

True, the terrorist attacks on America and the Iraq war hit the economy hard. But it was evident even before 9/11 that Bush’s medicine wasn’t working. In his annual economic report in February 2002, and again in February 2003 and February 2004, Bush confidently – and wrongly – predicted that his tax cut would create millions of jobs.

Finally, Bush cannot be given a pass on the Iraq war and its economic consequences. Critics warned that the war would cause instability in Iraq and the Middle East, and that this would lead to high oil prices. Bush ignored these warnings. But the critics were right.

Today, two factors threaten America’s recovery. First, high household debt means that if interest rates rise, as they do in a normal recovery, households will find themselves strapped. Moreover, real estate prices might fall dramatically, in which case many households may find the value of their mortgage exceeding the value of their house. US bankruptcy rates are already up 33% over four years ago.

But can Bush really be blamed for Americans’ borrowing too much? He can and should. Failure to design an effective fiscal stimulus shifted the burden to monetary policy. Interest rates were brought to new lows, which helped the economy, but without stimulating much investment. Monetary loosening worked only because households took on more debt, leaving the economy more vulnerable to rising interest rates.

The second threat to economic recovery is high oil prices. Bush’s failed Mid-

East policy is only part of the problem. He could, and should, have pushed for strong energy conservation measures; had he done so four years ago, America’s consumption – and oil prices – would be lower today.

Japan and other developed countries prove that a high standard of living requires only a fraction of the energy per dollar of GDP. Instead, Bush pushed for subsidies to oil companies to encourage more domestic production. This “drain America first” policy will leave America more vulnerable in the future.

We know from the recent US election campaign that facts do not always speak for themselves. Yet it doesn’t take much to work out where America’s economy is today, where it’s heading, and who’s to blame.

But more important than assessing blame is correcting mistakes. Unfortunately, President Bush has been as reluctant to admit the mistakes of his economic policy as he has in the case of his Iraqi misadventure. Without grasping what has gone wrong in either area, it will be difficult to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

Joseph E. Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, is Professor of Economics at Columbia University and was Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers to President Clinton and Chief Economist and Senior Vice President at the World Bank. His most recent book is The Roaring Nineties: A New History of the World’s Most Prosperous Decade.

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Top schools

The US is a great place to study

By Ambassador Thomas C. Krajeski
For The Yemen Times

The growth of the international student population in the United States over the years has been a source of pride and benefit to our institutions of higher education. As Ambassador, I have met the leaders of a number of American colleges and universities, and to the person, they have stressed the importance and contributions of foreign students in their respective academic environments. And here in Yemen, I have had the privilege of meeting the alumni of American institutions of higher education and hearing first hand of their experiences in the United States.

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), an independent non-profit exchange organization based in New York, the number of international students in the United States grew from about 34,000 in the 1954-55 academic year to nearly 600,000 in 2002-2003. The U.S. is home to many of the world’s finest educational institutions, and our colleges and universities remain eager to accept qualified students from abroad. International students bring cultural and intellectual diversity to our campuses and communities and promote greater understanding between U.S. citizens and people in other societies.

EducationUSA advising centers around the world provide advice and assistance to those students wishing to study in the United States. These centers assist millions of young people every year around the globe. (To find the center nearest you, visit the State Department’s website, <<http://educationUSA.state.gov>.)

We welcome and want to encourage international students to come to the U.S. TO STUDY. Although we have implemented new measures to make our borders and the traveling public more secure, we have not changed the basic criteria for visa eligibility to visit or study in the United States. Unfortunately, many international students mistakenly believe that our visa refusal rates have risen dramatically or, even worse, that it is impossible to obtain a visa to enter the United States. In fact,

our visa issuance rates are almost the same as they were prior to the events of September 11, 2001.

We are working to make the process of acquiring a student visa to study in the United States easier and quicker. The new SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) program electronically links the college and university admission process directly to our consular offices around the world, ensuring that this key information about student admission flows smoothly and quickly.

Now, thanks to a special program developed specifically for international students, U.S. Embassies and Consulates make special arrangements to ensure that all applicants for student visas receive expedited processing for an interview. In that way they can arrive in the U.S. in time to participate in international student orientation programs at their institution and, of course, to attend the first day of class.

The central theme of my message in this: we want students from other countries to take advantage of the exceptional educational opportunities in the United States. Among these are universities and colleges of all descriptions and types, from rural institutions to urban campuses, from small two- and four-year colleges, and women’s colleges, to large research universities.

Although U.S. colleges and universities are diverse, they do share many common attributes, flexibility, individual attention, close collaboration between students and professors, hands-on learning and access to the best facilities in the world. International students who enroll in a U.S. educational institution will also have the opportunity to live in and learn about our open and culturally diverse country.

If you are thinking about your own educational future, I strongly recommend that you consider higher education in the United States. With over 3,600 fully accredited institutions of higher education, America offers numerous options from which to choose. Please visit the EducationUSA advising center closest to you for more information. When you do, you will find that the United States is not only a welcoming, safe place to visit, but a great place to study.

From recent symposium

Culture's long wish list

BY MOHAMMED BIN SALLAM
YEMEN TIMES STAFF

For its annual program, Al-Afif Cultural Establishment organized a symposium titled "Culture in Yemen...Reality and Future Horizons," Dec. 13-15.

Many researchers in culture and science took part in the symposium as well as a host of interested people. The symposium came out with the following recommendations:

1- Freedom of expression and opinion and freedom of cultural

creativity.

2- Accurate assessment of cultural conditions in the country and recognizing citizen's cultural needs.

3- Integration in the comprehensive plan of the Arab Cultural Development.

4- Cultural diversity and openness to other human culture, and enhancing mutual links.

5- Decentralization in the cultural work.

6- Public participation in formulating and implementing cultural work.

7- New laws pertaining to the cul-

tural issue in a way compatible with political and cultural developments and international changes; developing the intellectual property law so that it covers protection of folklore and traditions; developing laws to protect historic cities and historic and natural sites and stopping the conversion of functions of cultural establishments.

8- Encouraging cultural investment and fostering the establishment of cultural industries.

9- Improving infrastructure and expanding cultural establish-

ments especially libraries, theatres, cinema, and galleries.

10- Establishing a national information network and disseminating information and communication technology.

11- Boosting cultural production and expanding the area of cultural and scientific programs on media means.

12- Encouraging bands of visual and audible arts and popular folklore.

13- Reducing book price by exempting books from tax duties and exempting papers and printing machines and their

accessories from tax duties and encouraging publishing houses to print out cultural and scientific books.

14- Independence of cultural establishments from political and ideological aims.

15- Encouraging civil community organizations active in the cultural domain.

16- Allotting prizes and awards for intellectuals and creators.

17- Integrating human rights culture into school curricula and media discourse.

18- Adopting a strategy for social and cultural reform based on

changing the traditional social structure and developing cultural orientations as well as developing institutions by means of social democratic forces.

19- Directing a message on behalf of the Prime Minister via all participants in the symposium to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in order not to cancel or privatize the National Cinema Authority and to activate its role in serving cinema and theatre.

20- Establishing a national library, theatre and archive.

21- Taking care of child culture.

The Spirit of Christmas

BY DR. P.A.ABRAHAM
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“Long time ago in Bethlehem, so the Holy Bible says, Mary's boy child Jesus Christ was born on Christmas day”. Writers have always been fascinated by writing stories with a Christmas background.

Charles Dickens in "Sketches By Boz" writes of a Christmas family party. "We know nothing in nature more delightful. Petty jealousies and discords are forgotten: social feelings are awakened in bosoms to which they have long been strangers; father and son, or brother and sister who have met and passed with averted gaze or a look of cold recognition months before, proffer and embrace and bury their past animosities amidst their present happiness. Kindly hearts that have yearned towards each other and have been withheld by false notions of pride and self-dignity are again united and all is kindness and benevolence."

During Christmas the family members living far away places try to get together, and a home with a missing family member is reduced to loneliness and emptiness. Louisa May Alcott in "Little Women" describes a heartrending scene where the father, away at war, is missing on Christmas morning.

The soul of Christmas, a united family, is missing. Dylan Thomas in "A Child's Christmas in Wales" fondly remembers that "Uncles sat in front of the fire, loosened all their buttons...groaned a little and slept...mother, aunts and sisters scuttled around carrying things...the dog was sick...I would blow up balloons

and when they burst the uncles jumped up in fright and rumbled..." Dickens in "The Pickwick Papers" says that in families Christmas is a "time of old recollections...and dormant sympathies...and open-heartedness."

Christmas is also a time for unselfish giving- of giving all that is possible, of giving away the one thing that you love most. According to Poet John Greenleaf Whittier,

"The joy that you give to others is the joy that comes back to you.

And the more you spend in blessing

The poor and, lonely and sad,
The more of your heart possessing
Returns to make it glad."

English novelist Margaret Reed in her "Village Christmas" tells the story of two elderly spinster sisters, Margaret and Mary, whose lives are made richer when they befriend a poor family on Christmas morning. The sisters help deliver a baby and discover that the joy of Christmas lies not in gaily packaged gifts, but in the giving of time, love and a portion of themselves to someone in need.

One of my favorite Christmas stories is H.E. Bates' "The Goat and the Stars". A poor young boy listens intently to the Church's call to its parishioners to bring a gift for baby Jesus on Christmas day. "No gift would be too large, none too small."

Excited at the thought of being included in the church's Christmas festivities, the boy forgot that he had no toys, or treasures or even any money with which to buy a gift. The only thing he had was his pet goat which he loved more than anything else. This, he decided was to be his gift to baby Jesus, for it was his best.

Early next morning he went to church with his precious gift tucked inside his jacket. The rich people of the village brought beautifully decorated packages of all sizes. The

overpowering smell of the goat and its frightened bleats caused quite a stir and both the boy and his goat were chased away.

The parishioners and the priest were angry that such a boy could desecrate the sanctity of the church and disturb the holiness of the Christmas Mass.

The boy couldn't understand the commotion. Didn't the church call for a gift, "None too large, none too small? Was Christmas only for the rich folk? Did God not look down with love at the poor who brought their meager gifts? He was very confused.

God on the other hand who looked down and saw all this was heartbroken. For he could see into the hearts of men and knew their motives.

He knew too that they had brought only a fraction of what they had as their offering to him, whereas the little boy had offered his best and only possession, and that the gift of his goat was motivated by love. So he saw to it that Christmas that year was a calamity for the whole village with "No bells ringing out with joy."

The little boy and his goat snuggled against each other, when the silent stars above looked down kindly and blessed them with the peace promised at Christmas. It is not what you give that counts, but the motives behind the giving that illuminate the hearts at Christmas.

The true miracle of Christmas is the complete change of heart. Dickens' Scrooge is the most well-known example. To Scrooge the miser, Christmas and all the merrymaking associated with it was "humblebug...and a time for paying bills without any money." The miracle occurs when bad-tempered, stingy Scrooge gets touched by the spirit of Christmas. The change is amazing. He becomes caring and compassionate to the poor Cratchitts, gives generously and

surprises himself by enjoying the fruits of his generosity and love.

The master story-teller O.Henry, tells of another Christmas miracle-when the heart is able to let go of accumulated bitterness and hatred and allow love and healing power of Christmas in. "The Chapparral Christmas Gift" tells the story of the bitterness and anger of a jilted lover and the way goodness and kindness enters his heart during Christmas.

Christmas bells and Christmas trees have their own place in poetry too. To Henry Longfellow, Christmas bells were merry and joyous, bringing hope:

"I heard the bells on Christmas day
their old familiar carols play.
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, goodwill to all men."

Bells for Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Ring out the old, ring in the new...ring out the false ring in the true, ring out the feud of rich and poor, ring in redress to all mankind."

Christmas without Christmas trees is like a dance without music, or a poem without a rhythm, and every story that revolves around Christmas has its own descriptions. According to Wallac Stegner he went to bed, "soggy with self-pity" because father had left home and they were so poor and had no tree or hope of any gifts.

Next morning the children awoke to find a tree in the parlour "hung with popcorn, cranberries, tinsel and flickering with candles." There were

small packages under the tree too for mother had so thoughtfully gone without her share of everything for weeks before so that the children would have something. Shakespeare wraps it up as a time,

"when the nights are wholesome and no planets strike

No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm.

So hallowed and gracious is the time."

T.S.Eliot and Keith Patman look beyond the birth of Jesus and the joy associated with it and forecast his painful death. Eliot's "The Gift of the Magi" tells of the long cold journey of the kings from the east who came to see the new born baby:

"There was a birth certainly
We had evidence and no doubt
I had seen birth and death.
But had thought they were different.

The birth was hard and bitter agony for us

Like death- our death."

Could the spirit of Christmas last the whole year round? Wouldn't that be wonderful? For that, Christ must be born within us in Spirit. He must be born anew in our consciousness. That is the "second coming of Christ". It is not correct to celebrate the birth of Christ with feast and merriment only. That is alright; but the lack of deep, devoted communion with the spirit of Christ at Christmas time is a serious omission.

It is easy to celebrate the birth of Christ and even learn about his teachings; but to practise what he

taught is not easy. The need of the hour is to put into practice what Christ taught- "Love one another." This is the only way to achieve the "peace that passeth all understanding". "Glory to God on the highest and goodwill towards man", sang the angels on that first Christmas night.

The first Christmas carol ever sung gains added significance in today's world of confusion.

When you celebrate Christmas this year and about to enter a new year, "are you willing to forget what you have done for others and to remember only what others have done for you? Are you willing to ignore what the world owes you and to think of what you owe the world; to put your rights in the background and consider not what you are going to get out of life, but what you are going to give to life...look around you for a place where you can sow a few seeds of happiness. Are you willing to do these things for even a day?" asks Henry Van Dyke in "The Spirit of Christmas." If you are, then it can be Christmas every day.

Two thousand years ago, cold was the moon one night, but the heart of man was colder, and heavy was the hand of the oppressor. Then God intervened, and "Love was born at Christmas, stars and angels gave the sign. Thus the true spirit of Christmas is Love.

"Love shall be our token.
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to god and all men,
Love for peace and gift and sign."
Amen

Saudi universities' events in Aden

Aden University hosted events related to Saudi Arabian universities Dec. 14. Prof. Abdul Kareem Yehya Rassae welcomed participants from Aden, indicating that the good relations between Saudi Arabia Kingdom and Yemen make such events possible.

The exhibition contained science, health, environmental and architectural research relating to the Saudi universities book show, and the palm trees researches exhibition.

In attendance was Dr. Yehya al-Shuaiby, the governor of Aden Governorate.

This inauguration party was also

attended by AbdulKareem Shayef, the Secretary General of the Assembly - Deputy of Aden Governor, and Col. Abdullah Qeiran, Director of the Governorate. Dr. Khaled AbdulRehman al-Hamoodi, the Dean of the University, Vice-Chairmen of Aden University and other dignitaries.

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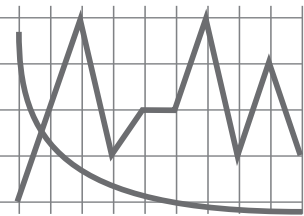
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YT Business



More meetings soon

Sana’a Grouping states strengthen ties

By MAHYOUR AL-KAMALI
YEMEN TIMES STAFF

Yemen is endeavoring to enhance and consolidate its economic and political relations with Sana’a Grouping states (Yemen, Sudan and Ethiopia) to help increase stability and development in the region.

Ethiopian economic, cultural joint committee will convene soon, will work for drawing up perceptions for upgrading and developing bilateral relations and open a market to economic growth and consolidation and trade.

The sources indicated to the significance the meeting acquires in the economic side, taking into consideration that this is the age of economic groupings.

Rapprochement and economic integra-

tion between Yemen and Sudan and Ethiopia is important to face economic challenges the world policy tending towards the free market economy and extension of strong bridges of economic partnership among the three countries.

The sources also confirmed that continuation of meetings contributes to enhance economic and historical relations that group the peoples of the three countries.

The joint committee had held its latest

meeting in Sana’a where it had reviewed the committee’s future activities in addition to bases and proposals for some joint venture projects.

Those projects include the construction of a navigation company for marine transport serving mercantile transportation movement between them.

Another of the proposals was the establishment of a tripartite council for businessmen in association with the three countries

ministries of trade in order to estimate the trade and industry of dairies, and that of tanning and leather as well as the establishment of a council specialized in trade of cereals and the insurance industry that are considered of the important and vital topics.

The tripartite grouping considers itself open to the region’s countries for coordination among themselves regarding regional efforts aimed at consolidation of economic and trade partnership in the Horn of Africa

Exchange Rate for the Yemeni Rial		
Currency	Buying	Selling
US Dollar	185.3500	185.5500
Sterling Pound	356.8800	357.2700
Euro	247.3800	247.6400
Saudi Rial	49.4200	49.4800
Kuwaiti Dinar	628.9200	629.6000
UAE Dirhem	50.4700	50.5200
Egyptian Pound	29.8700	29.9000
Bahraini Dinar	491.6400	492.1700
Qatari Rial	50.9100	50.9700
Jordanian Dinar	261.4200	261.7100
Omani Rial	481.4200	481.9400
Swiss Franc	161.3900	161.5700
Swedish Crown	27.5300	27.5600
Japanese Yen	1.7835	1.7854

Source: Central Bank of Yemen

region and the south of the Red Sea.

Saudi Arabia to support development projects in Yemen

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 16 Dec.- Crown Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister and Commander of the National Guard, received at his office at the royal court at Al Yamamah palace in Riyadh Yemen’s Prime Minister Abdul Qader Bajamal, who chaired the Yemeni side in the Saudi Yemeni Joint Coordination Council’s meetings.

Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Second Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Aviation and Inspector General, who chaired the Saudi side in the council’s meetings, also attended the reception.

During the audience, Bajamal conveyed to Crown Prince Abdullah the greetings of President Ali Abdullah Salih of Yemen. On his part, the Crown Prince sent his greetings to the Yemeni president.

Crown Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz, was briefed on the outcome of the meetings of the Saudi Yemeni council which concluded its deliberations in Riyadh.

Crown Prince Abdullah and Bajamal also discussed the overall incidents and developments at the regional and international arenas in addition to aspects of cooperation between the two countries.

The audience was attended d by Prince Abdul Aziz Ibn Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz, Advisor at the Crown Prince’s Court; Prince Dr. Bandar Ibn Salman Ibn Mohammed Al Saud, Advisor at the Crown Prince’s Court; ministers, senior protocol officials and Saudi Ambassador to Yemen Mohammed Ibn Mirdas Algahtani, Yemen’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Ahmed Mohammed Sofan; Director of the Prime Minister’s office Ameer Salim Al Aydarooos and Yemeni ambassador to the Kingdom Khalid Ismael Al Akqwa’a were also present at the audience.

In a historic move for two Arab neighbors, Saudi Arabia and Yemen signed a series of accords here yesterday to strengthen political and economic cooperation, while renewing the pledge to combat terrorism.

They also inked two other deals under which Riyadh will extend a loan facility of SR75 million to Yemen’s Social Fund for Development and SR50 million as grant for developing Aden Hospital, a premier health facility in that country.

A total of 11 bilateral agreements were signed on the sidelines of a meeting of the Saudi-Yemeni Coordination Council, which called for bolstering political, economic and investment cooperation besides joint efforts to combat terrorism.

The meeting of the council was co-chaired by Prince Sultan, Second Deputy Prime Minister Minister of Defense and Aviation and Inspector General; and Yemeni Prime Minister Abdul Qader Bajamal. The agreements were signed by the respective Saudi and Yemeni ministers.

The meeting was followed by a royal reception hosted by Crown Prince Abdullah in honor of Premier Bajamal. “Crown Prince Abdullah and Bajamal also held wide-ranging talks, which focused on the whole range of regional and international issues,” said diplomatic sources here last night.

The sources said that the reception was attended by Prince Sultan, Ahmed Mohammed Sofan, Yemen’s deputy prime minister; Prince Abdul Aziz Ibn Abdullah and Prince Dr. Bandar Ibn Salman Ibn Mohammed Al-Saud, advisers at the Crown Prince’s court.

Prince Sultan, who led the Saudi side at the meeting, highlighted the strong and historic ties between the two Arab countries. “Our nations have proved that their special ties will always lead them to agreement on all matters, realizing the interests of both states,” the prince said.

The council meeting saw the signing of an MOU for waste processing, a bilateral agreement for transportation of goods by land and sea, a customs cooperation agreement and agreements in the fields of Islamic affairs, oil and mineral resources, cultural cooperation, sports and youth welfare, postal service and agricultural cooperation.

Prime Minister Bajamal, who led the Yemeni side, underscored the significance of the council’s meeting in promoting Saudi-Yemeni ties. “The meeting offers a good opportunity to strengthen cooperation in all areas,” the Saudi Press Agency quoted Bajamal as telling the meeting.

Saudi Arabia and Yemen signed a historic border treaty on June 12, 2000, ending a six-decades-long dispute and opening a new chapter in relations.

At that time, the two countries signed a contract worth \$986 million with German firm Hansa Luftbild to stake out their common border in detail.

Bajamal, who came at the head of a high-level delegation, extended greetings from President Ali Abdullah Saleh to Crown Prince Abdullah. The Yemeni premier spoke on the vast investment opportunities in his country and his government’s plan to carry out infrastructure projects especially in the areas of health, water, electricity and education.

Bajamal said at the closing session of the two-day meeting that the viewpoints of the two countries “were identical and in line with the resolve of the two peoples.”

The diplomats from Riyadh and Sanaa have evinced keen interest to boost commercial relations. Moreover, there are investment opportunities especially in oil and gas sectors and downstream industries as well as in tourism, telecommunications, energy, transportation, agriculture and fisheries in Yemen, said the diplomats.

On the bilateral front, the two countries have forged closer relations. The Kingdom recently made available over SR28 million for a technical institute in Sanaa. The project is part of a financial aid package of SR188 million from Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) to set up 19 technical institutes in several of Yemen’s provinces.

Another project named after Prince Sultan, which will be adjacent to the Military Hospital in the Yemeni capital has been funded by Prince Sultan himself. The total cost of the seven-story Prince Sultan Center is SR17 million.

The sixteenth session of the Joint Saudi-Yemeni Coordination Council began and the session was co-chaired by Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz, Second Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Aviation, Inspector General and head of the Saudi side in the Joint Saudi-Yemeni Coordination Council, and Yemeni Premier Abdul Qader Bajamal, head of the Yemeni side in the council. The session was attended by members of the council of the two sides.

In their statements, Prince Sultan and Mr. Bajamal stressed the importance of cooperation between the two countries and fighting terrorism.

Saudi Arabia and Yemen began the high-level talks in Riyadh to strengthen mutual cooperation and an informed Yemeni source said the talks would be crowned with the signing of 11 bilateral accords.

Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul-Aziz, the Second Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Aviation, and Yemeni Prime Minister Abdul Qader Bajamal presided over a coordination council meeting which also called for greater cooperation to combat terrorism.

“People all over the world, especially those in Arab and Islamic countries are looking forward to a world of peace and security where there will be no place for violence and terrorism,” Prince Sultan said.

Khaled Al Akqwa’a, Yemeni ambassador to Saudi Arabia, said the meeting would witness the signing of 11 agreements to promote political and economic cooperation between the two neighbours. He estimated Saudi investments in Yemen at more than \$400 million.

In his opening address, Prince Sultan underscored the historic relations between Saudi Arabia and Yemen and said Riyadh would use all its strength to maintain these ties.

He said the two countries would continue their efforts in combating terrorism and protecting their youths from its danger.

“During our meeting a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding will be signed,” Prince Sultan said, adding that the new accords would further strengthen bilateral cooperation.

Prince Sultan called for greater Arab and Islamic cooperation and unity to confront challenges.

He also hoped that the Palestinians would be able to establish their independent state and Iraq would retain its pivotal role in the Arab world.

Bajamal reaffirmed Yemen’s solidarity with Saudi Arabia in the latter’s fight against terror. “We’ll continue our cooperation with various security agencies to contain terrorism,” the Yemeni premier said. “The security of the two countries is inter-linked,” he said quoting a statement of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh. “The long borders between the two countries demand greater security coordination,” Bajamal said. “We are also looking forward to strengthening economic, commercial, investment and cultural cooperation...to achieve a real partnership relation,” he added.

During the meeting, the Saudi side was represented by top officials including Deputy Interior Minister Prince Ahmed Ibn Abdul Aziz, State Minister and Acting Finance Minister Dr. Abdul Aziz Al-Khuwaiter, Labor Minister Dr. Ghazi Al-Gosaibi and Higher Education Minister Dr. Khaled Al-Anqari.

On the Yemeni side, main participants were Deputy Premier and Planning Minister Ahmed Soufan and ministers of higher education, telecommunications and information technology, social affairs and labor, agriculture, and water.

Saudi Arabia and Yemen signed a landmark border agreement on June 12, 2000, setting the stage for a new era of relations. Interior Minister Prince Naif described the treaty as a good example for all Arab countries to emulate in settling disputes. The two countries signed a \$986 million contract with German firm Hansa Luftbild to stake out their common border in detail.

Saudi Arabia and Yemen have established a number of joint ventures in recent years. The most important among them are: The Yemeni-Saudi Hospital, the \$100 million Movenpick hotel in Sanaa, Holiday Inn hotel in Hadramout and two cement factories.

The Yemeni central bank has received an offer to establish a Saudi-Yemeni holding company with a capital of \$1 billion, Al-

Riyadh Arabic daily reported quoting high-level sources. The new company will specialize in tourism, the paper added.

Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz, Second Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Aviation, and Inspector General held at his palace a banquet in honor of Yemeni Premier Abdul Qader Bajamal and the accompanying delegation.

The banquet was attended by Prince Miteb Ibn Abdul Aziz, Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs; Prince Khalid Al-Faisal, the Governor of Assir Region; Prince Ahmed Ibn Abdul Aziz, Deputy Minister of Interior; Prince Sultan Ibn Salman Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Secretary General of Tourism Higher Authority; Prince Turki Ibn Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Assistant Minister of Culture and Information; ministers and senior commanders.

The Joint Saudi-Yemeni Coordination Council issued a joint communiqué at the end of its sixteenth session.

Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz, Second Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Aviation, Inspector General, led the Saudi side in the meeting while Yemeni Premier Abdul Qader Ibn Abdul Rahman Bajamal, headed his country’s side in the council.

On the political aspect, the talks tackled relations between the two counties. The two sides expressed confidence in the positive steps taken in support of and for developing fruitful cooperation between the two countries in all fields.

They reiterated their denunciation of terrorist acts, confirming that the principles of Islam are based on justice, mercy and tolerance and forbid attack of innocents and harm of human souls.

They reviewed the situations in the Arab, Islamic and International arenas, showing identical views towards all of them.

Special attention was paid in the talks to the Palestine issue.

The two sides agreed that the setback of the peace process in the Middle East was attributed to the intransigence of Israel and its aggressive policies towards the Palestinian people which categorically contradict the bases and principles of the peace process which is based on the principle of land for peace and the implementation of the resolutions of the international legitimacy, including the implementation of the road map and acknowledgement of the Arab peace initiative which is based on the initiative presented to the Beirut Arab summit by Crown Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Deputy Prime Minister and Commander of the National Guard of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, providing security and stability to all peoples of the region and guaranteeing a permanent, fair and comprehensive peace for the Arab Israeli conflict.

The two sides affirmed that peace could not be achieved through unilateral Israeli measures which work for creating news situations on the ground and making changes that affect the sensitive issues scheduled for the final phase of negotiations.

They condemned the continuous escalation against the Palestinian people and the insistence of the government of Israel to establish and/or expand settlements and use violence to destroy the infrastructure of the Palestinian territories.

The two sides stressed that the achievement of the international security and peace in the region necessitates that Israel should join nuclear weapons non-proliferation treaty and subject its nuclear facilities to international inspection and monitoring.

They emphasized the great importance of freeing the Middle East of the nuclear and mass destruction weapons.

The two countries expressed their best wishes of success for the Palestinian leadership to continue the march, the unity and cooperation in facing the coming challenges.

The two sides affirmed their keenness on Iraq’s territorial integrity, respect for its sovereignty and independence and commitment to the principle of non-intervention in its internal affairs.

They stressed their desire for Iraq’s peaceful coexistence with its neighbors.

The two sides agreed on continual cooperation in the security fields within the framework of the signed security agreement, emphasizing that the security of the two countries is integral.

The two countries signed agreements, memoranda of understanding and executive programs in the fields of dangerous waste processing; sports and youth cooperation; SR 75 million loan to Yemen’s Social Fund for Development; SR 50 million grant for rehabilitation of Aden Hospital; customs cooperation; Islamic affairs, endowments and guidance; petroleum and mineral resources; cultural cooperation; and agricultural cooperation.

The Kingdom agreed that the Saudi Fund for Development allocates 150 million U.S. dollars for developmental projects in Yemen and agreed on the allocation of 100 million U.S. dollars as a credit line to finance Saudi exports used in Yemeni projects and a grant of 1.5 million U.S. dollars for demining in Yemen for a period of three years.

The agreements and memoranda were signed by Saudi ministers and their Yemeni counterparts.

Agreement was reached on land transport of passengers, goods and materials, cooperation in the field of maritime transport, postal cooperation, continued cooperation in the field of fighting malaria, medical cooperation programs.

Discussions were held on exchange of expertise and cooperation in the field of water.

Work on existing cooperation between the ministries of higher education of the two countries was done to the satisfaction of the Yemeni side.

Yemeni Premier Dr Abdel-Kadir Bajamal arrived in Riyadh to lead the Yemeni delegation to the meeting of the Saudi-Yemeni Coordination Council.

He was welcomed at Riyadh Airbase by Prince Salman Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Governor of Riyadh region, and a number of senior officials.

The Yemeni Prime Minister Dr Abdul Qader Bajamal left Riyadh after heading the Yemeni side to the meetings of the Joint Saudi-Yemeni Coordination Council concluded.

At Riyadh Airbase Airport, he was seen off by Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz, Second Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Aviation, Inspector General and head of the Saudi side in the Council; Dr. Fuad Ibn Abdul Salam Al-Farsi, the Minister of Culture and Information; a number of ministers and senior officials .

Meanwhile Prince Ahmed Ibn Abdul Aziz Saudi Deputy Interior Minister acclaimed the Saudi-Yemeni drive against terrorism saying the bilateral cooperation in this regard is “strong”.

Speaking at the conclusion of the 16th session of the Yemeni-Saudi Coordination Council in the Saudi capital Riyadh, the Interior official said Yemen’s anti-terror efforts are “big and diverse”.

He affirmed that the economic and trade cooperation is binding the two countries together more and more and that Saudi Arabia would increase its support for development of the nation.

In Sanaa Prime Minister Abdul-Qader Bajamal met with the Saudi Higher Education Minister Khalid Ibn Mohammad Al-Anqari who is currently visiting Yemen.

In the meeting, they discussed the bilateral relations between the two brotherly counties, especially in the higher education and scientific research field. They confirmed the importance of visits exchange and making use of the two counties’ experiences in this respect.

The meeting shed light on creating communication between the Yemeni universities and their Saudi counterparts and the centers of researches in the both counties.

Bajamal highly appreciated the cultural activities of the Saudi universities held in the Yemeni universities, affirming the importance of such activities to enhance the brotherly ties.

Prime Minister Abdul Qader Bajamal said the Yemeni-Saudi ties are getting deeper and deeper as time goes on.

Opening the Scientific and Cultural Days of Saudi Universities within the Yemeni Universities in Sana’a, he pointed out to the “positive outcomes” of the 16th session of the Yemeni-Saudi Coordination Council which wrapped up last Sunday.

“The gathering of elite of scholars and intellectuals in Sana’a today is a wonderful manifestation of a cultural integrity that has no limits,” he said.

“Regional gatherings have to be moments of discerning our common causes and setting up further economic and political ties in precedence of joining globalization.”

He recalled a number of efforts for restructuring higher education and enhancing the quality of education for undergraduates.

“Universities in our two countries are bound to fulfill the enlightening process and preservation of the heritage.

For his part, Al-Anqari pointed out to the common desire to enhance the cooperation between the two counties, making it clear that the scientific and cultural cooperation between the two counties is natural reflection of good brotherly relations between the two neighbours.

Saudi Minister of Higher Education Dr. Khalid Al-Anqari and the accompanying delegation arrived in Sanaa on a several-day visit to Yemen.

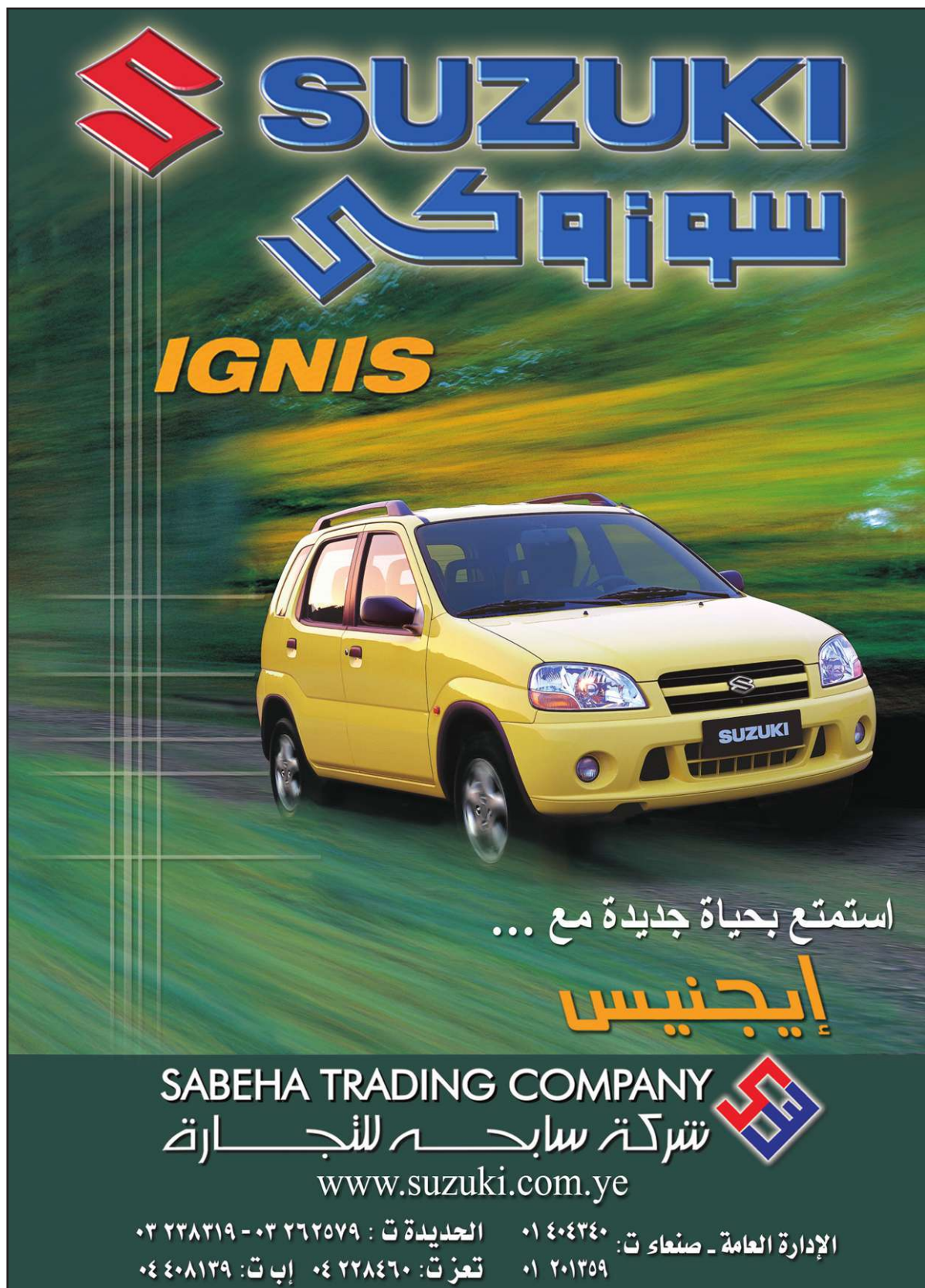
During the visit, he will lead the Saudi delegation to activities of the scientific and cultural days of the Saudi universities at their Yemeni counterparts.

In an arrival statement to Saudi Press Agency, the minister said the activities of the scientific and cultural days of the Saudi universities at their Yemeni counterparts will feature lectures and joint symposiums, reflecting strong Saudi-Yemeni relations.

Mohammed Ibn Mirdas Al Qahtani, the Saudi Ambassador to Yemen, held a banquet in honor of the Higher Education Minister Dr. Khalid Ibn Mohammed Al Anqari and the accompanying delegation currently on a visit to Yemen.

Dr. Al Anqari’s visit came to participate in the scientific and cultural days of the Saudi universities held under the Yemeni universities sponsorship.

The banquet was attended by Dr. Abdul Wahab Rawih, the Minister of Higher Education & Scientific Research; diplomatic corps members accredited to Yemen; and a number of officials.

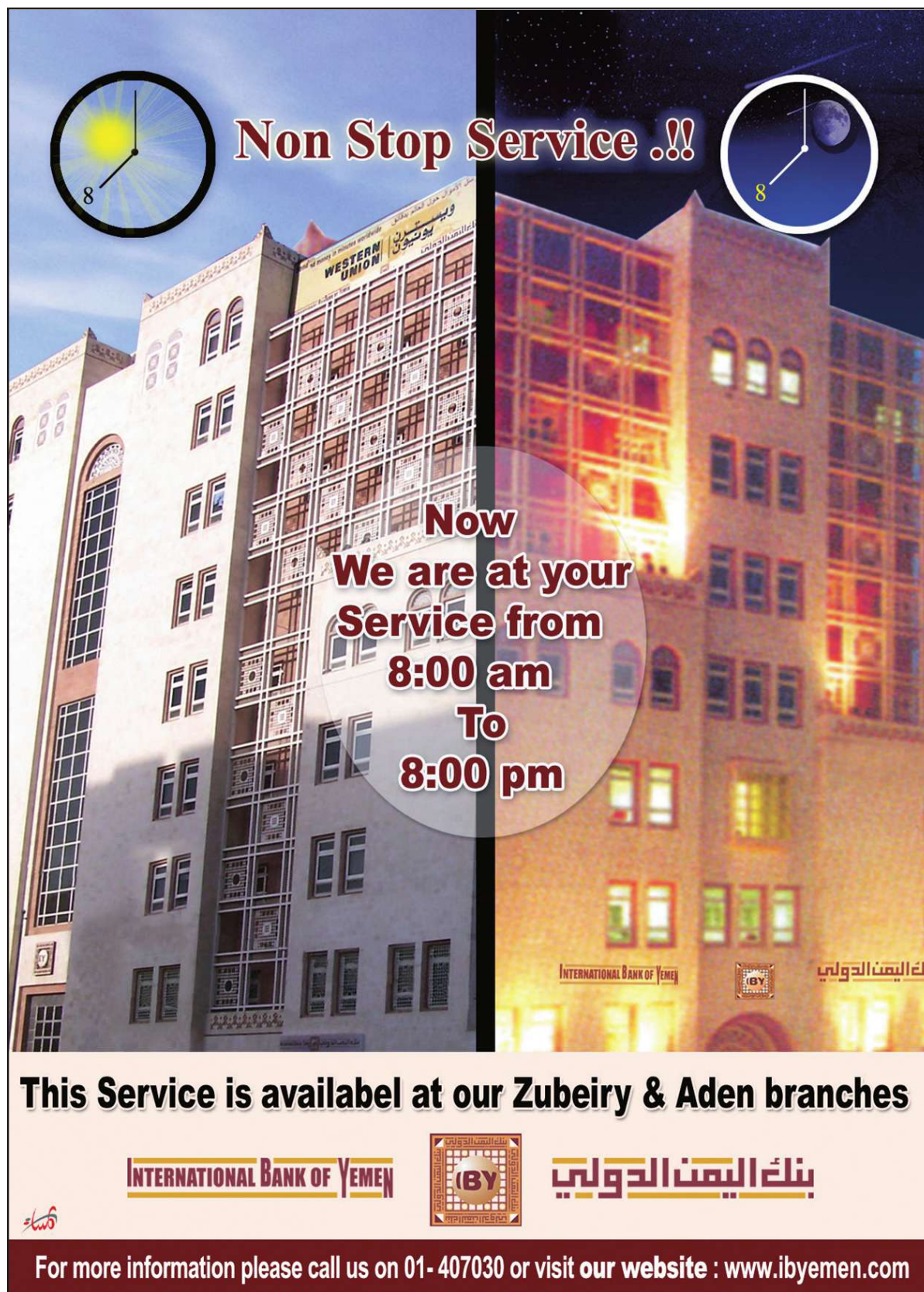


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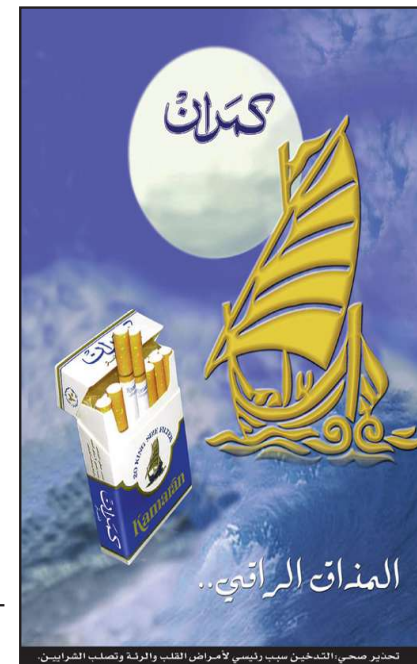
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Victims of Russia's 10-year Chechen war ask: why?

MOSCOW, Dec 17 (Reuters) - A decade of fighting, hostage-taking and bombing in Chechnya has ripped families, friends and a whole nation apart. Mothers, young men, Chechens and Russians are left with one question: why?

Russia's vast military might was sent to crush the tiny mountainous region's independence drive 10 years ago this month and victory is still as far off as ever.

Then-President Boris Yeltsin, in a national address on Dec. 11, 1994, said troops were moving in to "protect (Chechnya's) citizens from armed extremism".

Soldiers from the army that lost hundreds of men in the next few months as it smashed into the gritty resolve of Chechen civilians describe the war, and Yeltsin, differently.

"The war was a mistake and I

don't know what we should do with Yeltsin. We couldn't shoot him straight away, but maybe we should put him on trial," said Sergei Shumakov, a soldier who limps heavily from a wound sustained in Chechnya two years ago.

"There should have been political and economic methods used at the start, but they just decided to send in the tanks. The civilians had already got guns and it all fell apart."

The 26-year-old walks with a stick as he limps through the grounds of a military hospital in Moscow.

He was shot not by the Chechens, but by one of his own officers at a drunken party at a base in Chechnya's mountainous south.

As the lightly-armed rebels defeated Russia's army and won a three-year ceasefire from 1996, the weakness of the post-Soviet army and government was exposed for all the world to see.

Parents

Parents of the estimated 18,000 soldiers killed in a war that has also claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians are also angry.

"There has been so much loss, and for what? Why did Yeltsin start this war? And this new man, (President Vladimir) Putin, is just repeating all the mistakes," said Tatyana Dyakon, whose only son Yevgeny was captured and killed by the Chechens in January 1995.

"My new (adopted) son David is 14 years old. So in four years time, he will go into the army and what can he expect? The same," she said by telephone from the town of Elista.

"It is shameful to live in such country, people say it is better than the Soviet Union, but it's not. It's a thousand times worse. We had dreams then, we had hope, we had work."

Putin, prime minister at the time, sent troops into Chechnya in 1999

to crush the chaotic de-facto independence it had had from 1996.

Outgunned and outnumbered, extremist rebels increasingly switched to suicide bombings and hostage-taking raids. Such attacks on civilian and military targets have killed more than 1,000 people since 1999.

A wave of attacks linked to Chechens in 1999 gave Putin massive popular support in his bid to rein in the region, but many relatives of the victims blame official incompetence and corruption for their losses.

They say the government should have prevented attacks such as the Beslan school attack in September when 330 hostages died, and the 2002 Moscow theatre siege.

"I have no objections to the terrorists, my objection is with the government," said Tatyana Karpova, whose Moscow flat is covered with pictures of her son Alexander, one of 129 people killed in the theatre siege.

"Russia has not learned from (the theatre siege), it happened again in Beslan. The government has learned nothing ... The government puts no value on human life, I want to know why."

Atrocities

Such Chechen atrocities have dulled foreign criticism of human rights abuses from Russian forces, and driven Putin to refuse any suggestions of peace talks with his "ter-

rorist" foe.

His government has organised a referendum and two presidential elections in a unilateral peace plan designed to give Chechnya a government like any other region of Russia.

But Chechens have little faith in the administration and its security services which they say are riddled with corruption and are not helping to end a war that still claims lives daily.

"I fear for our brothers in the mountains. It was the soldiers that made them rebels in the first place by kidnapping and killing innocent people," said Murad, a construction worker recently visiting Nazran, a town just outside Chechnya.

"The Chechens have always had problems with the Russian government. I completely distrust the police and army ... The Chechen police have got more fierce, they kidnap people and people are scared."

And soldiers themselves do not expect a final victory any time soon.

"We don't ask why we are fighting, we just fight," said one of two special forces soldiers drinking vodka recently in the garrison town of Mozdok, a few kilometres from Chechnya's western border.

"We have no allies. We spend as much time fighting our so-called allies as we do fighting the rebels."



The picture depicts a view of the war-torn Chechnya.

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