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Monday, 15 October 2007 • Issue No. 1094 • Price 40 Yemeni Riyals • Founded in 1991 by Prof. Abdulaziz Al-Saqqaf www.yementimes.com



Freedom House Report: Yemen (2007)

Yemen held presidential and local council elections in September 2006. President Ali Abdullah Saleh was reelected with 77 percent of the vote, and his party, the General People's Congress, overwhelmingly won the municipal elections. The balloting was marred by some violence and opposition accusations of fraud. Serious press freedom violations, including the closure of newspapers and detention of journalists, also accompanied the election season.

As the site of the ancient Minaean, Sabaeen, and Himyarite kingdoms, Yemen has a history stretching back nearly 3,000 years. For centuries after the advent of Islam, a series of dynastic imams controlled most of northern Yemen and parts of southern Yemen. The Ottoman Empire ruled many of the cities from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century, and the British controlled areas in the southern part of the country, including the port of Aden, beginning in the nineteenth century.

After the imam was ousted in a 1960s civil war and the British left the south in 1967, Yemen remained divided into two countries, the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen). The two states ultimately unified in 1990 after decades of conflict and tension. In the face of widespread poverty and illiteracy, tribal influences that limit the central government's authority in certain parts of the country, a heavily armed citizenry, and the threat of Islamist terrorism, Yemen has managed to take limited steps to improve the status of political rights and civil liberties in the years since unification.

Yemen's April 2003 parliamentary election, its third in a decade, took place despite concerns that popular unrest resulting from the war in Iraq might lead to a postponement. International election observers noted that Yemen had made substantial improvements in electoral

management and administration.

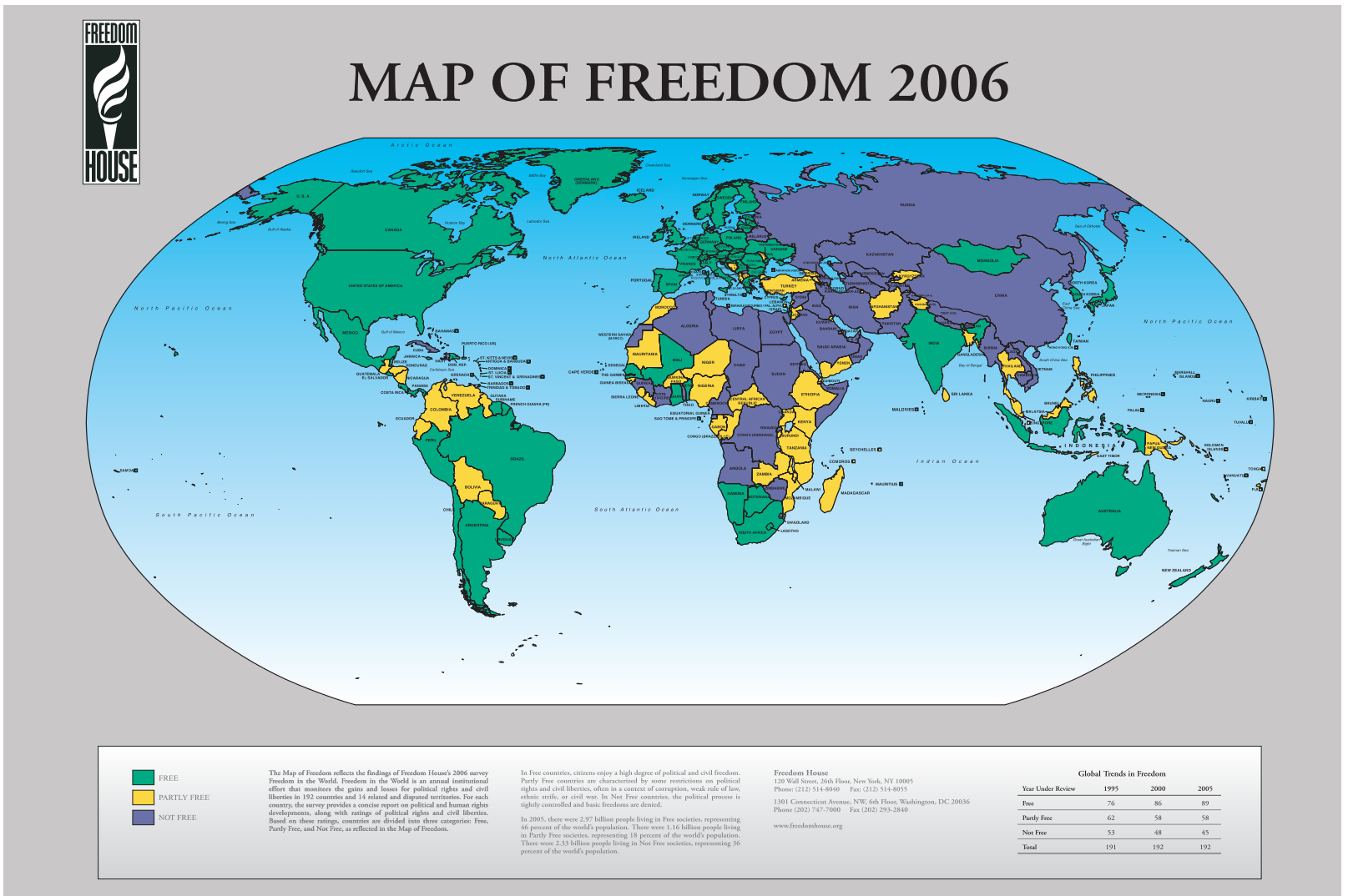
Democratic success
 In September 2006, Yemen held its second presidential election since unification. President Ali Abdullah Saleh was reelected, receiving 77 percent of the vote. That year marked his 29th as president, since he had served as North Yemen's leader before unification. He had become Yemen's first directly elected president in 1999, winning more than 96 percent of the vote. The 2006 election was the first in which a serious opposition candidate challenged the incumbent. Saleh's main opponent, Faisal Ben Shamlan, was supported by a coalition of Islamist and opposition parties and received 22 percent of the vote. Final results for the concurrent local elections indicated that the ruling Grand People's Congress (GPC) party won more than 80 percent of the vote for the provincial councils and 70 percent for the district councils.

The election period was marred by a number of deaths. In September, 50 people were killed and more than 200 injured when a stampede broke out at a stadium packed with thousands of Saleh supporters. Days before the balloting, eight voters were killed in election-related violence.

The European Union's Election Observation Mission, which monitored the elections, characterized them as "free and fair" even though the opposition rejected the initial count and threatened to call for large street demonstrations to protest alleged voter manipulation and fraud. The election secured Saleh's rule for another seven years, and opened the door for the possible political candidacy of his son.

Al-Houthi insurgents
 Yemen has faced security challenges from terrorist and secessionist movements over the past decade. There were minor clashes in 2006 in the northern region of Saada as part of an uprising by some members of Yemen's large community of Zaidi Shiite Muslims. Hundreds have been killed since fighting broke out in 2004. The clashes temporarily declined after the September 2004 death of Hussein Badr Eddine al-Houthi, a Zaidi cleric who had led the movement, but a second round of violence broke out in the spring of 2005. Separately, in September 2006, five days before the presidential election, Yemeni security forces foiled two simultaneous suicide attacks on oil facilities. The authorities blamed the attempts on militants linked to the Sunni Muslim terrorist group al-Qaeda. Oil exports accounted for 70 percent of the national budget, and the loss of that revenue would have been catastrophic.

Yemen continues to be plagued by serious economic problems, including widespread poverty. Economic growth has been slow, and according to the World Bank, 42 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. In March 2005, Yemen experienced two days of demonstrations over the introduction of a sales tax. During that period, dozens of Yemenis were killed in riots when the price of fuel increased by nearly 150 percent.



cent. Fuel subsidies had been lifted as part of an International Monetary Fund reform program.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties
 Yemen is not an electoral democracy. The country appears to have a relatively open democratic system, with citizens voting for president and members of Parliament. However, Yemen's politics are dominated by the ruling GPC party, which has increased the number of elected Parliament seats it holds from 145 in 1993 to 237 in the current Parliament. The government structure suffers from the absence of any significant limits on the executive's authority.

Yemen is headed by a popularly elected president serving seven-year terms, with a bicameral Parliament composed of a 301-seat, popularly elected House of Representatives and a Majlis al-Shura, or Consultative Council, whose 111 members are appointed by the president. The House of Representatives, elected for six-year terms, has legislative authority, and the Majlis al-Shura serves in an advisory capacity. Local council members are popularly elected, with recent elections having coincided with the presidential vote. Yemen is one of the few countries in the Arab world to organize regular elections on national and local levels. There is limited competition among the ruling GPC party, two main opposition parties (Islah and the Yemeni Socialist Party), and a handful of other parties.

Corruption is an endemic problem at all levels of government and society. Despite recent efforts by the government to fight corruption and institute a civil service reform program, Yemen lacks most legal safeguards to protect against conflicts of interest. Auditing and investigative bodies charged with fighting corruption are not sufficiently independent of the executive authorities. In November 2005, the U.S. government's Millennium Challenge Corporation suspended Yemen's eligibility for assistance under its Threshold Program, concluding that after the country was named a potential aid candidate in fiscal year 2004, corruption had increased. Yemen was ranked 111 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Independent media
 The state maintains a monopoly over the media that reach the most people—television and radio. Access to the internet is not widespread, and the authorities reportedly block websites they deem offensive. The government has pursued a concerted campaign to restrict press freedom in recent years. Journalists continue to face threats of violence, kidnapping, death, and arbitrary arrest, and often encounter unclear judicial processes. These violations increased amid 2006 election disputes and due to the February 2006 publication of Danish cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad. The

latter controversy led to the temporary closure of three publications—the *Yemen Observer*, *Al-Hurriya*, and *Al-Rai al-Aam*—and the detention of three journalists. Also in February, three journalists were sentenced to prison and banned from writing for six months for offending the president with articles about government corruption. In the weeks after the September 2006 elections, over 50 rights violations against independent journalists were recorded.

Article 103 of the Press and Publications Law outlaws direct personal criticism of the head of state and publication of material that "might spread a spirit of dissent and division among the people" or "leads to the spread of ideas contrary to the principles of the Yemeni Revolution, [is] prejudicial to national unity or [distorts] the image of the Yemeni, Arab, or Islamic heritage."

Although President Ali Abdullah Saleh called for an end to prison sentences for press offenses in June 2004, government authorities continued to use the Press and Publications Law to restrict press freedom. By the end of 2005, the Ministry of Information had presented a new draft press law to the Majlis al-Shura that would end the jailing of journalists for press offenses.

However, restrictions concerning criticism of the president or offense to the national interest would remain, and the requirements for practicing journalism would be stiffened. The Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate objected to the draft law, saying it aimed to further restrict press freedom in Yemen. The government in May 2006 suspended the initiative until such objections could be resolved.

Continued on page 2

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Continued from page 1

Freedom House Report: Yemen (2007)

Civil society movement

Article 2 of the constitution states that Islam is the official religion, and Article 3 declares Sharia (Islamic law) to be the source of all legislation. Yemen has few non-Muslim religious minorities, and their rights are generally respected in practice. The government has imposed some restrictions on religious activity in the context of the rebellion in the northern region of Saada. Mosques' hours of operation have been limited in the area, and imams suspected of extremism have been removed. Strong politicization of campus life, including tensions between supporters of the ruling GPC and opposition Islah parties, places limits on academic freedom.

Yemenis have the right to form associations, according to Article 58 of the constitution. Yemen has several thousand nongovernmental organizations, although some observers question their viability and independence. Yemenis also enjoy some freedom of assembly, with periodic restrictions by the government. The authorities were accused of using excessive force against protesters and rioters demonstrating against fuel-price increases in 2005; more than 40 people were killed and hundreds were injured in the violence. However, opposition political rallies were permitted across the country during the 2006 election season.

The government respects the right to form and join trade unions, but some critics claim that the government and ruling party elements have stepped up efforts to control the affairs of these organizations.

Weak judiciary system

The judiciary is nominally independent, but in practice it is weak and susceptible to interference from the executive branch. Government authorities have a spotty record of enforcing judicial rulings, particularly those issued against prominent tribal or political leaders. Lacking an effective court system, citizens often resort to tribal forms of justice or direct appeals to the executive branch of government. In 2006, Yemen restructured its judicial system to remove the president as head of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), which oversees the judiciary. It would instead be led by the chief justice of the Supreme Court, and the judiciary would have an independent budget under the new arrangement. Also that year, some three dozen judges were retired, suspended for possible disciplinary action, or referred for prosecution. In September 2006, a female judge was appointed to the Supreme Court, and

another woman was appointed as the head of the civil court of appeals for Aden governorate. Meanwhile, five women were admitted to the Higher Judicial Institute. The various changes in 2006 were part of a larger judicial reform program begun with support from the World Bank in 1997.

Arbitrary detention occurs, partly because law enforcement officials lack proper training and partly because senior government officials lack the political will to root out the problem. Security forces affiliated with the Political Security Office (PSO) and the Ministry of the Interior torture and abuse detainees, and torture remains a problem in PSO prisons, which are not closely monitored.

Yemen is relatively homogenous ethnically and racially. The Akhdam, a small minority group, live in poverty and face social discrimination.

Women

Women are afforded most legal protections against discrimination and provided with guarantees of equality. In practice, however, they continue to face pervasive discrimination in several aspects of life. A woman must obtain permission from her husband or father to receive a passport and travel abroad. Unlike men, women do not have the right to confer citizenship on a foreign-born spouse, and the process of obtaining Yemeni citizenship for a child of a Yemeni mother and a foreign-born father is more difficult than that for a child born of a Yemeni father and a foreign-born mother. Yemen's penal code allows lenient sentences for persons guilty of "honor crimes"—assaults or killings committed against women for alleged immodest or immoral behavior. Laws requiring that a wife obey her husband were abolished by presidential decree in 2004.

Women are vastly underrepresented in elected office. Despite the best efforts of women's rights groups to increase the number of women in Parliament, only one woman won a seat in the 2003 parliamentary elections. The number of women registered to vote had increased nearly sevenfold in a decade, from half a million in the 1993 parliamentary elections to more than three million in the 2003 elections. A study produced by the Women's National Committee in 2004 found that women represented less than 3 percent of all government employees. According to the UN Development Program in 2005, Yemen has one of the largest gaps in the world between boys' and girls' primary school attendance rates.

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A failed Yemen is bad for GCC

By: Walid Al Saqaf

Amidst the growing recent problems in Yemen, some believe that it's best for GCC countries to ignore what's going on with their neighbour. As for Yemen's ambitions to join the GCC, some think they are mere hallucinations and unrealistic ambitions.

Indeed, I'm not exaggerating when I say that a majority of Gulf citizens believe it is not possible for Yemen to join the GCC, nor is it helpful for the GCC if Yemen is allowed entry to the "rich club" of the region.

But in the midst of this cynicism, there have been steps to admit Yemen to the council of ministers of education, health and social affairs and to the Gulf Football Cup.

Recently, it was reported that Yemen's deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Dr Abdulkarim Al Arhabi announced the establishment of "a common committee represented by Yemen and the General Secretariat of the GCC to discuss integration issues".

Beyond that, however, there is not much going on.

Let's analyse the arguments of some sceptics of Yemen's integration into the GCC. Apart from the ridiculous argument by a small minority that Yemen cannot be a GCC member because it does not have a coastline on the Gulf, many of those sceptics give other more subtle reasons in claiming that it is near impossible for Yemen to be part of the GCC.

Among the most common reasons given is the enormous economic gap between Yemen and the GCC.

Indeed, Yemen's living standards today cannot be compared to those of the GCC. In fact Yemen is more analogous to some African countries in this regard.

Ranked 150 out of 177 on the 2006 UNDP Human Development Index, Yemen has a per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$1,000 (Dh3,670) compared to GCC's average

of \$26,000 (2007 est.).

The economic trends also reflect a widening gap as Yemen's GDP annual growth average of 2.6 per cent is far below GCC's average of 5.9 per cent.

Security challenge

Yemen's problems are not confined to the economy however. Literacy and life expectancy, for instance, are among the lowest in the world, supporting the argument that its integration into the GCC is extremely difficult.

Perhaps one of the most worrisome problems is the high number of arms and the tribal nature of a significant portion of the population, which makes establishing security a major challenge.

Coming to the focal point of my argument and contrary to what some would believe, all the above mentioned numbers, which are usually used by sceptics, should in fact be the main reason why it will be vital for the GCC to have Yemen join in and not be left to face its potentially devastating fate all alone.

Thinking about it rationally, one can see that allowing a country to collapse on the GCC's doorstep is the recipe for disaster for all. We're talking about more than 20 million people having nowhere to go but to the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean or the GCC.

There are in fact reports already coming out this week that hundreds of Yemeni tribesmen from the improvised Al Jowf province have plans to move in large numbers towards Saudi border seeking shelter and help after reaching biting levels of poverty and hopelessness.

The trends that we are seeing right now point to one conclusion: if Yemen continues to remain on the same path, it will become a failed state and possibly disintegrate into smaller states, which would definitely have a grave impact on all surrounding GCC countries.

This is not a hypothetical assessment, but rather a concrete conclusion based on statistics and real studies and observations.



What GCC countries must understand is that Yemen's problems will come to haunt them and the plans that they are engaged in now in terms of building their countries' economies regardless of what is happening on the other side of the fence are a reflection of an unsound strategy.

Assuming that GCC countries have acknowledged the potential disasters that could hit them hard if Yemen becomes a failed state, integrating Yemen into the GCC will come naturally.

It is important to understand that the aim is not to make Yemen a Gulf country per se, but rather to improve its living standards and avert a potential economic and humanitarian disaster.

The widening gap between Yemen and the GCC should be the first motive for the GCC to act in helping Yemen integrate because if the situation remains as it is, Yemen may well find itself cornered and become a danger to the whole region in terms of instability and extreme poverty.

It could also become a long-term burden on all. What better way to encourage Yemen to apply urgently needed reforms than to give it hope of becoming the seventh GCC member?

Though it may look like a far-fetched comparison, the issue of Turkey's accession to the European Union can be a source of inspiration.

The Turkish government had reiterated time and again that the ultimate goal of all the reforms it has been implementing is not only to join the EU but, more importantly, to raise the overall economic and living standards to match those of the EU.

Looking at how far Turkey has gone today, one can see that the EU made a strategically sensible decision in signalling the country's right to be admitted if certain goals are met.

Millions of Yemenis have lived and worked peacefully in several GCC countries, where they are seen as hard working and loyal.

Most of those Yemenis have also experienced a better life than what they had in their home country and hence would certainly approve reforms that would make Yemen approach the level of GCC living standards.

When integrated, Yemen could do more good to the GCC than one could predict. But if ignored and if things go terribly wrong there, Yemen may well do more damage than anyone could ever imagine.

It's simply a matter that cannot be ignored - not any more.

Walid Al Saqaf is an information communications technology and media consultant. This report was published in Gulf News.

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Tomorrow's crises today: The humanitarian impact of urbanisation - overview

Somewhere, some time this year, a baby will be born on the 25th floor of a city hospital or the dirt floor of a dark slum shack; a first-year college graduate will rent a cramped apartment in lower Manhattan or a family of five will finally concede their plot of farm land to an encroaching desert - or sea - and turn towards Jakarta or La Paz or Lagos in search of a new livelihood and a new home. The arrival of this family or graduate or baby will tip the world's demographic scale and, for the first time in history, more than half the human population will live in cities.

At present, 3.3 billion people live in urban centres across the globe. By 2030 this number is predicted to reach five billion, with 95 percent of this growth in developing countries. Over the next three decades, Asia's urban population will double from 1.36 billion to 2.64 billion, Africa's city dwellers will more than double from 294 million to 742 million, while Latin America and the Caribbean will see a slower rise from about 400 million to 600 million, according to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

While megacities appear more frequently in headlines and on development agendas, overall growth in urban centres of 10 million or more inhabitants is expected to level out. Instead, over the next 10 years, cities of less than 500,000 will account for half of all urban growth.

Two sides of the urban coin

All this growth is not necessarily a bad thing. As David Satterthwaite of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) points out, the speed at which a city grows - if it is responding to economic opportunities - is a benefit, not a problem. "A very large part of the economic value in any country is being generated in the urban areas," Satterthwaite says. "Even in [developing] nations, where 60 to 70 percent of the population is in rural areas, you still have more than half the economy - and often more than that - generated in urban areas."

The problem is not growth, but unplanned growth. In 2001, 924 million people, or about 31 percent of the world's urban population, were living in informal settlements or slums, 90 percent of which were located in the developing world. By 2030, the number of worldwide slum dwellers is projected to reach two billion. In the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka, 3.4 million of the city's 13 million residents live in 5,000 slum and squatter settlements. Sixty percent of Nairobi's city dwellers are packed into more than 130 informal settlements occupying only 5 percent of the city's total land area, while the squatter settlements of Mumbai are growing 11 times faster than the city itself, with 300 people arriving from the countryside each day.

What this translates to is abject poverty, disease, and appalling conditions. Take Dhaka: every time the river level rises, it floods the illegal clusters of tiny stilted huts built on the flood plain with smelly water full of factory effluence. In Delhi, the water problem is one of scarcity as slum dwellers fight each other to gain access to the one working standpipe in their area and often go without for days at a time. Malnutrition is often highest in slums, as unemployment means people are too poor to purchase produce that could be grown on the land.

Defining a 'slum' and the 'urban poor' invariably focuses on what people lack - access to education, social services, employment, safe and affordable water, sanitation and housing, and residential status. In many cases, they live in sub-standard housing, in public spaces, or in squatter settlements near major urban areas.

It is generally assumed that urban poverty levels are lower than rural poverty levels, but the absolute number of poor and undernourished in urban areas is increasing. "In general, the locus of poverty is moving to cities ... a process now recognised as the 'urbanisation of poverty'," the UN Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) noted in 2003.

If the locus of poverty is moving to

cities, development aid has been reluctant to move with it. CARE USA chief Helene Gayle makes a blunt assessment of urban development capacity: "The NGO community is dependent on outside donor funding [and] its priorities often depend on where donors have put their focus," with the result that "neither the NGO community nor the donor community has co-evolved in the direction of facing urban poverty as rapidly as urban poverty has occurred".

More threatening than the village' Throughout the 20th century, city growth was largely fuelled by rural to urban migration. Today, however, cities are mostly growing from within - more people are born than are dying in urban centres. This process of urbanisation - what demographers call 'natural increase' - is partly an indicator of medical advances across the developing world and of better access to healthcare in urban areas specifically.

But the fact that mortality rates are generally lower in cities masks a health crisis in slums. Worse, those most affected by this urban healthcare divide are children. A 2006 analysis in the International Journal for Equity in Health found that in 15 sub-Saharan African countries the difference in child malnutrition within cities was greater than the urban-rural divide.

As the UN's 2006/2007 State of the World's Cities report notes: in Ethiopia, child malnutrition in slums and rural areas is 47 percent and 49 percent respectively, compared with 27 percent in non-slum urban areas; in Niger, child malnutrition in slums and rural areas is 50 and 52 percent, against 35 percent in non-slum urban areas; and in the slums of Khartoum, the prevalence of diarrhoea among children is 40 percent, compared with 29 percent in rural areas. "Living in an overcrowded and unsanitary slum," the report concludes, "is more life-threatening than living in a poor rural village."

Access to water

Access to water and sanitation in urban areas, like access to healthcare, is generally better than in rural areas. But again, comparing aggregate urban and rural numbers hides the fact that - for example - in the Mbare neighbourhood of Harare, Zimbabwe, 1,300 people share one communal toilet with six squatting holes.

As urban populations increase, the number of people without access to improved water sources is also rising, doubling from 108 million in 1990 to 215 million by 2010. In dense city environments - and in even more dense slum environments - communicable diseases can quickly become epidemics, making the consequence of unsafe water and poor sanitation much more severe than in rural areas. And more people are affected due to city concentrations.

In addition to the outwardly identifiable impacts of poor access to water, sanitation, and health services (pneumonia, malaria, diarrhoea, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS), a dearth of services also perpetuates poverty. The urban poor spend a higher percentage of their income on treating illness, and are more vulnerable to lost wages and have less job security when they are forced to miss work - all of which erodes their coping capacity, and can keep potentially mobile families trapped within a cycle of poverty.

Unnatural disasters

In the last quarter-century alone, 98 percent of the people injured or affected by natural disasters were living in 112 countries classified as low income or low-middle income, according to the World Watch Institute's 2007 State of the World Report.

And while tsunamis and earthquakes continue to grab the headlines, flooding and landslides affect a much larger number of the urban poor. While the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami accounted for about 90 percent of that year's natural disaster death toll, the 2.4 million people affected was a relatively small number compared with the 110 million people hit by flooding in Bangladesh, India and China the same year, according to the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) 2005 World Disasters report.

With little available land in urban areas, the poor, by necessity, live on floodplains, unstable cliff sides and in the shadow of industrial facilities. In the developing world an earthquake or a hurricane is not a disaster, but a catalyst for disaster - exposing poor infrastructure, substandard housing, haphazard city planning, and often nonexistent response measures - all of which constitute the true disaster for the urban poor.

Urban warfare

Poverty has long been considered a key driver of violent crime. In recent years, however, this relationship has been challenged as too simplistic. A 2004 article on urban violence and insecurity in the journal Environment and Urbanization identifies inequality as a primary driver, noting that "interpretations based on statistical modelling have demonstrated that with regard to national-level data on murder rates, inequality is more influential than poverty, with income inequalities being generally more marked in urban than in rural areas".

A World Bank study on violence in Latin American urban areas showed that homicide rates ranged from 6.4 per year per 100,000 in Buenos Aires to 248 in Medellin, Colombia. Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Mexico City, Lima and Caracas account for more than half their countries' national homicides.

More difficult than measuring crime within urban areas has been differentiating between underlying structural causes (like unequal power relations), and trigger risk factors (such as alcohol and drug abuse), which can often precipitate gender-based violence.

The danger in mapping and measuring urban violence is that perceptions of violence are then reinforced; because statistically-speaking, urban centres (and especially slums) are subject to more crime, violence can become institutionalised, and more dangerously, a stereotype of slum dwellers as criminals is perpetuated.

From shanty to State House

In 1990, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) released its first Human Development Report. The fifth chapter dealt exclusively with the humanitarian effect of urbanisation in the developing world. Addressing the role of local and national governments in service provision for the urban poor, the report's authors recommended that governments "shift from directly providing services to enabling others to provide them - be they formal and informal producers, community-based and non-governmental organisations or the urban residents themselves".

By 2007, this outsourcing paradigm had come full circle. As author Rasna Warah noted in her assessment of the Kenyan government's role in urban development, "The answer to Nairobi's slum problem lies in stronger and more integrated intervention by government ministries and agencies."

The promotion of healthcare, education, access to water and sanitation, together with the prevention of violence and the response to natural disasters, depends on active and accountable local and national governments. Indeed, underneath almost all aspects of urban development and poverty reduction are issues of governance.

At the most basic level, good governance involves recognising slum and squatter residents' legal right to exist, and formalising this right through land tenure, ownership, city zoning regulations, etc. The realisation that government was missing from urban planning coincided with the realisation that the urban poor had been, at best, passive recipients and at worst, completely absent from the planning and implementing of slum upgrading projects; and that the urban poor were in the best position to advocate for their rights vis a vis local governments, and design and implement slum-upgrading schemes.

At present, urban development actors are struggling to define their roles, and to establish a more cohesive, active approach to urbanisation. CARE chief Helene Gayle sees her NGO as a link between governments and communities: "We are not saying that we are marching on the halls of power within countries neces-

sarily, but instead really looking at how we help at the grassroots level to give people a sense of their own ability to engage and make their government accountable to them."

Cities of half-light

The UNFPA 2007 World Population Report states: "Cities concentrate poverty, but they also represent the best hope of escaping it ... The challenge is learning how to exploit [a city's] concentrated population."

Over the next months IRIN will produce in-depth articles and interviews examining how this challenge is being met. The interviews will include conversations with leaders in the urban development field - from the heads of international NGOs to academics - and slum-dwellers themselves. The in-depth articles will explore issues of urban healthcare, resource scarcity, violence, disasters and the role of governance.

Is the rural model of top-down donor funding workable in urban areas? Is Millennium Development Goal 11 to improve the lives of 100 million slum-dwellers attainable? Does the fact that more than half the world's population will now be living in cities represent a turning-point around which development practitioners and governments can begin to narrow the already wide gap between urbanites, or is it just a number?

For the urban poor the stakes are high. As the IIED's Satterthwaite warns, "What we have now is a perfect example of what the future scenario is if we continue failing to change governments' and international organisations' response to urbanisation. Half of urban populations have infant and child mortality rates 20 times what they should be, with at least half of the urban populations housed in squatter settlements. We would obviously begin to see strong resistance movements creating civil unrest and possibly civil war.

Source: IRIN

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Words of Wisdom



The fall-out from technology advances, notably globalization, is clearly ahead of us. We need to grapple with this and the sooner we assess the issues and decide on what we need to do, the better prepared we will be. A main component of globalization is liberalization.

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



OUR OPINION

Sorry, we are keeping fast come back after Eid

Eid Al-Fitr is a special religious celebration observed throughout the Muslim world. It is considered a reward for Muslims for keeping fast for the whole of Ramadan month.

In concept, Ramadan means Muslims endure hunger and thirst for one whole month while they practice their daily lives and got the work done. Whereas in Yemeni reality it means a nice one month long holiday where night becomes day and day becomes night. Schools close down, so there isn't much education during Ramadan. Also government work is stalling. Ramadan is a part of a three-month judiciary vacation where the courts are closed. It is a month when the business is slow. And it is defiantly a month when a lot of social visiting and spending takes place.

Around the Arab world, this month has been used commercially by TV and Radio channels. Programs are designed especially for this month, so that the lazy people who have turned into batmen and women would enjoy watching programs until the early hours of morning. It also means a lot of cooking to compensate the fasting during the day. A fact that contradicts with the reason why fasting was initiated in the first place, i.e. to learn endurance and empathize with the poor.

As a newspaper, we have had many disappointments while trying to reach people in order to get our work done. People are either sleeping most of the day, or no body picks up the phone in the offices. A usual reply we get, if someone finally answers, is to call back after Eid, apparently they are keeping fast, so they can't work, or think for that matter.

And after one month of hibernation, there is an even bigger celebration. It is Eid Al-Fitr where people whether they have the money or don't, buy new clothes and make a large feast. People beg, borrow or steal in order to get the money for Eid expenses. With the deteriorating level of income this has become a difficult task today more than ever.

And once this whole period of about one and half months is over, most Yemenis are drowning in debts. And the country's economy overall has lost at least one and half months of valuable time which could have been used in production. But then again, who's to say? Happy Eid every one.

Nadia Al-Sakkaf
Editor-in-Chief

For oil, Iraq set aflame and Americans die

This is the slogan of new conservatives in Washington. Hundreds of thousands are killed or injured while the terrible sound of the war cannot arouse any clear conscience on the part of those who are dreaming of controlling oil blocks in Iraq. They also have dreams to gain billions of dollars stained with blood from the oil blocks existing around the war-ravaged country.

For the gang of new conservatives, it is very clear that the life of human beings – be they Arabs, Americans, Muslims or Christians – has no meaning or means nothing. This is the behavior of war traders every time and everywhere. If life of human beings had had a meaning on the part of these conservatives, wars would have stopped in the early weeks of their breakout or would have never erupted.

It is very evident that oil, specifically the Iraqi oil, is not prevented from being exported to the United States of America, nor is it being monopolized by a certain rival. Instead, oil has been mer-

chandized in markets with reasonable prices, but the new conservatives don't like to buy oil. They have a strong desire to dominate oil, control oil blocks and monopolize oil markets.

This is the real motive behind the U.S. occupation of other countries, particularly the oil-rich ones. The Americans unveiled the hidden facts by declaring that they will remain occupying the Arab country as long as there is much oil. Peoples and rulers in the region should have realized and understood risks of the American occupation at the short and long terms. They are recommended to secretly prepare themselves in order to confront the dangerous occupation and any long stay of foreign troops in any Arab country, which is an indispensable organ of the Arab body.

Following the US-led invasion of Iraq, the country has become merely an extra burden on the



By: Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Maqaleh

unorganized Arab nations and the Arab League, which did nothing before or after the US-led invasion of the Arab country. In the coming days, this league will do nothing for the sake of the occupied Arab land or any other Arab states, which it claims to protect.

Blood for oil is a dangerous and inhuman equation. It is an immoral crime against both the Iraqi and American peoples. Irrespective of the high interests traders of such terrible wars are earning, the historic curse, which the barbaric traders caused on the United States, will remain bothering them forever. Insistence on annihilating peoples for the sake of controlling and dominating oil blocks is one of the unprecedented crimes in history. Those who felt ashamed of what happened in Vietnam cannot now find the appropriate formula to express their deep shame and concern over what is being committed in Iraq.

The one who constantly

observes what the American press writes about this terrible crime is bound to find that there is a furious reaction and strong rejection of the daily massacres and incursions the new conservatives commit in Iraq. In addition, these conservatives work on paving the way for fragmentations, divisions and bloody conflicts among factions and sects of the war-torn country, which had been a prominent example of coexistence between different forces and ethics.

The U.S. Occupation has found an available material of historic and long-dated disputes, which have become forgotten in the state of contemporary Iraq. Recently, no attention was paid to these disputes for any reasons since nobody had been willing to react to them. The foreign occupation succeeded

only to fuel these disputes based on the faith that they constituted the most successful means for weakening unity of the Iraqi people and depriving them of any access to wealth. Consequently, it has become very easy for the invaders to dominate the oil blocks, control people and crack down on any national resistance. But the real-life situation contradicts the aspirations and dreams of adventurers, who forced the American army into a swamp of blood, thereby adding much more misery to the situation of troops.

Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Maqaleh is Yemen's prominent poet and intellectual. He is the director of the Yemeni Center for Studies
Source: Al-Thawra State-run Daily

There is a weapon behind every calamity

By: Badr Bin Aqil

Today after the end of bloody clashes and political conflicts and under rule of the leader, who achieved reunification, political stability and rapid development, established the democratic system, enhanced respect for human rights and built the state of law and order, it is time to eliminate the phenomenon of the arms bearing and trade. Such a destructive phenomenon should be exterminated in most of the Yemeni governorates by passing firm laws and bylaws and working hard on reinforcing any concerned regulations.

On their part, civil community organizations, religious scholars, educated people and media have to play an important role in increasing awareness about the risks of arms bearing and trade.

According to numerous researches and studies of relevance to the phenomenon, it has been made clear that wherever there is a piece of fire arms, the incidents of murder, kidnapping, assaults on human beings, human rights abuses and intimidation of children are on the rise. We shouldn't forget that wherever people carry fire arms and exercise arm trade without any monitor or observer, the elements of terrorism and vandalism exploit the chance to easily launch inhuman offensives against innocent people.

Yemen, which is now enjoying the National Unity and its blessing, the modern road networks connecting between cities and rural areas and cooperation between natives for enhancing social justice and partnership, no longer needs its citizens to bear arms, it does not need to hear the noise of bullets and quarrels between natives. In Yemen, which occupies a prestigious stage among the world countries, enjoys a distinctive geographic location and has become a destination for attracting foreign tourists and visitors, thanks to its unique history and civilization, we don't expect to realize any gap or space for arm trade. Arm trade and the spread of weapons in any country are responsible for the poor tourism and slow development in that country.

Our beloved country, which has entered a new stage of construction, investment and development in various areas, no longer needs people who carry arms. It needs loyal citizens to bear the hammer of construction

and the flag of knowledge and science. Our cities that contain different military, security and civil institutions and installations and private sector companies disgust those who bear arms. Arm bearers are considered irregular individuals and are not eligible to be good citizens in these cities.

The vision of schools, institutes and universities, which are crowded with new promising generations, have the weapon of science and knowledge. Such vital educational institutions should encourage us to quit the habit of arm bearing and trade. The phenomenon means a trade of death and murder at the expense of our generations and their future. It is a trade of assassinating our sought dreams and hopes. So, why do we behave this way?

No wonder, the phenomenon of arm bearing played a great role in establishing the immortal Revolution of Yemen, helped the nation score great victories and founded the pillars for building the National Unity. But, as the country enjoys the blessing of security, stability and prosperity, it is time for us to think about using other types of arms, which are more useful and feasible. These are the arms of hard work, science, construction and development. It is time for the laws concerned with restricting arms bearing and trade to be placed in effect and passed on everyone without any exception. It is time for us to see Yemen free of any weapons except the ones owned by the state and the military and security authorities.

Source: Al-Thawra State-run Daily

SILVER LINING

Jabal el-Tair volcano and plight of soldiers

Interviewed the survivor from the volcano of Jabal el-Tair island Ahmed al-Jalal the same day he was survived by the Canadian navy October 2nd. The 22-year old man told me a horrible story on how managed to fight for 22 hours in the sea for life. This is terrific. However, what is more horrible is the situation soldiers had to face in the unpopulated island that is 140km away from the coast of Hodeida. Can you imagine? No one of the soldiers sent to serve over there have been trained how to swim. Al-Jalal told me that he used to exercise swimming in swimming pools in his village and this is why he managed to stay this long time struggling against an imminent death. The soldiers do not have a safety boat to escape any emergency incident that might take place. He told me that they were a batch of 800. After receiving their routine military exercise, they were sent to Hodeidah. Those who had support of influential people were dispatched to serve inside the city while those very poor people were exiled to the island. It was a sort of punishment for their poverty and lack of backup. He has spent there over a year for a monthly salary of 19,000 Yemeni riyals only.

They had no housing. They had to build their own cottages to protect themselves. "What is your business at the island? Do you monitor the shipping route?" I asked him. He said no tasks were assigned to them. They were ordered to "just distribute watch shifts among yourselves lest the Eritrean people come to slaughter you." More worse, they are not provided with heavy arms to defend themselves against any potential attack. We remember when the Eritrean military attacked the Hunaish islands and occupied them in 1995 without any resistance from the part of our military staff positioned there. Our plight is that our military brigades and their heavy weapon depots are stationed inside the cities, mainly the capital.

Why such ordinary soldiers are exiled in this way and are left to manage their life alone inside a far off island while high-ranking military officers are pocketing their due supply? These military officers exploit the need of such soldiers for a single riyal. Al-Jalal said after the horror he had seen that he would go back to the island or any other island to serve as there is any alternative. I understand it is the duty of our military people to serve whenever there is a need. However, their people in charge should take into account the situation these soldiers have to face. Moreover, the soldiers at the island used to report the earthquakes hitting the island on a regular basis, mainly the last two months. There was no response to their messages. I do not find an explanation for such indifference to the lives of people. WHY? These soldiers are Yemeni citizens and the government that sends them to such remote areas is responsible for protecting their lives. I guess if the NATO ships were not at the spot to save them, all the staff members could have died.

Mohammed Al-Qadhi (mhalqadhi@hotmail.com) is a Yemeni journalist and columnist.



By: Mohammed Al-Qadhi



By: Samer

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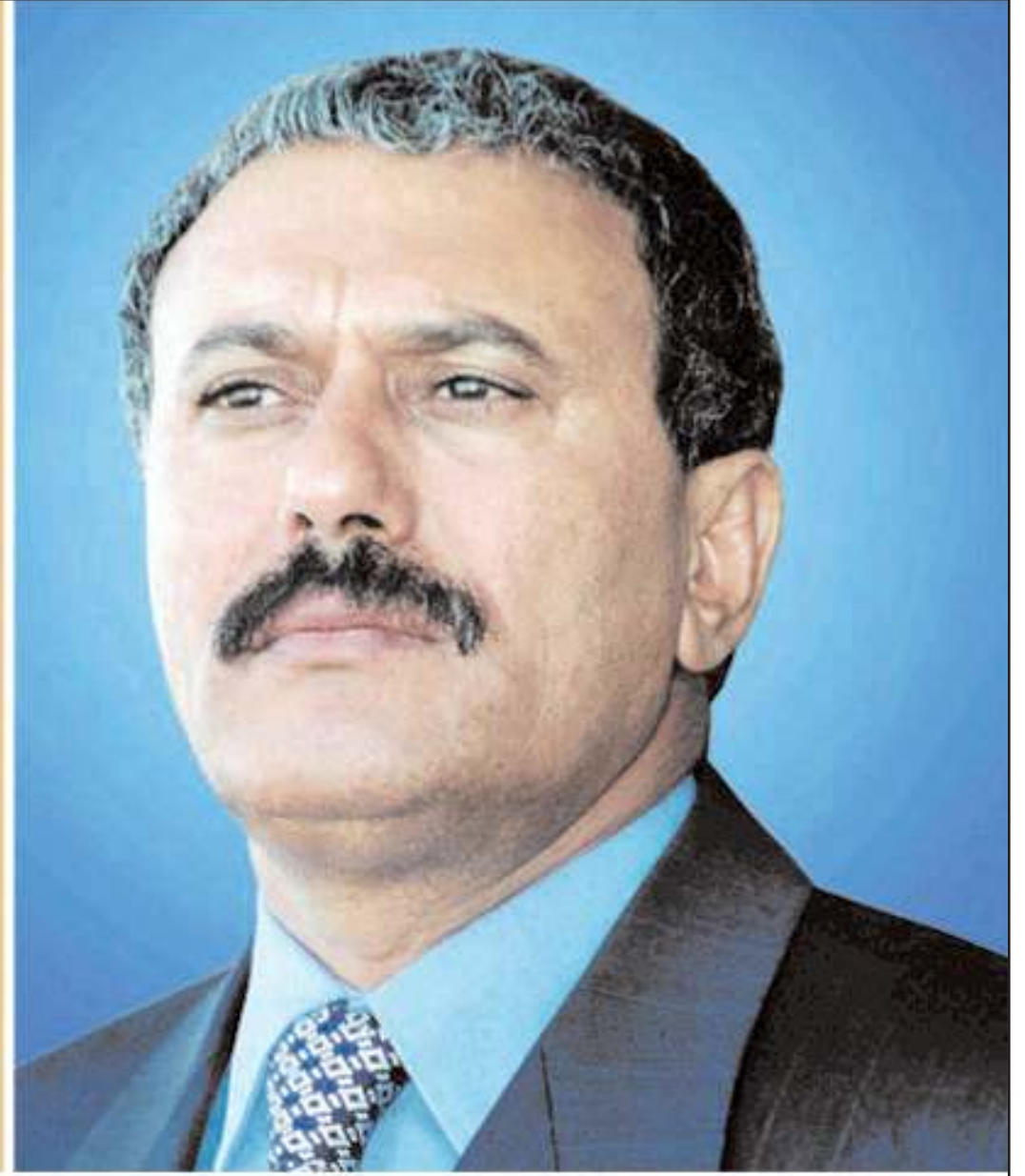
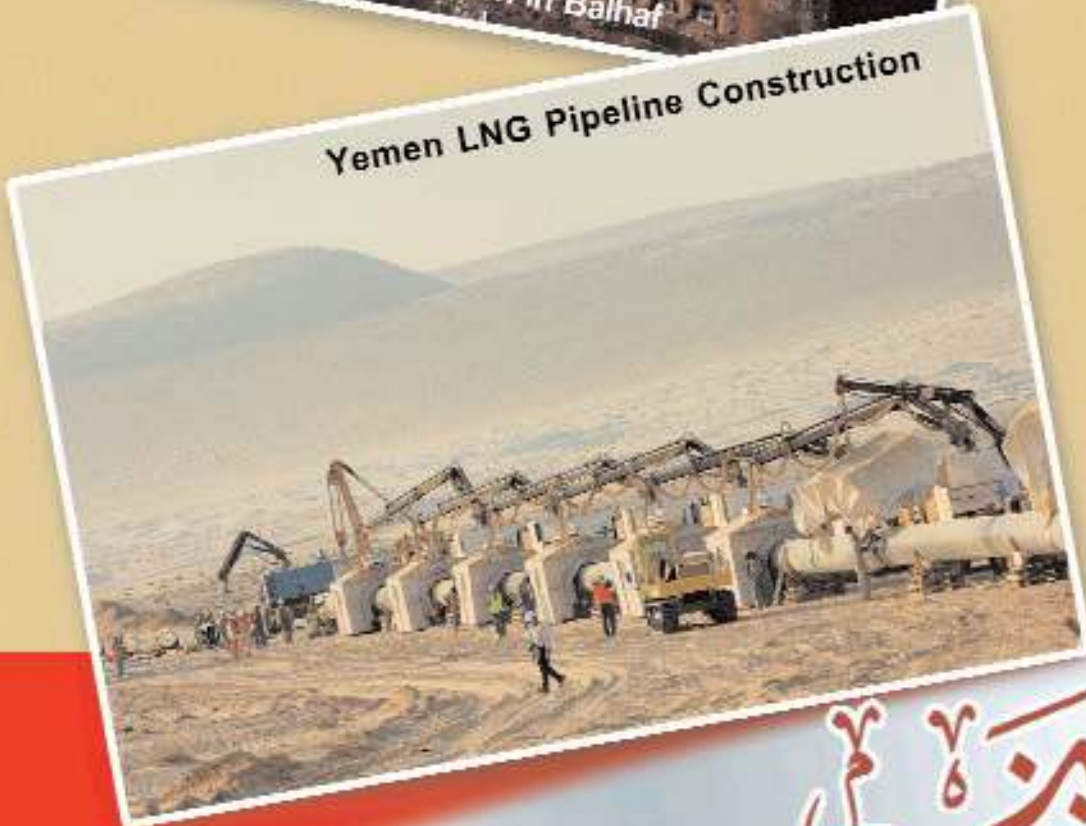
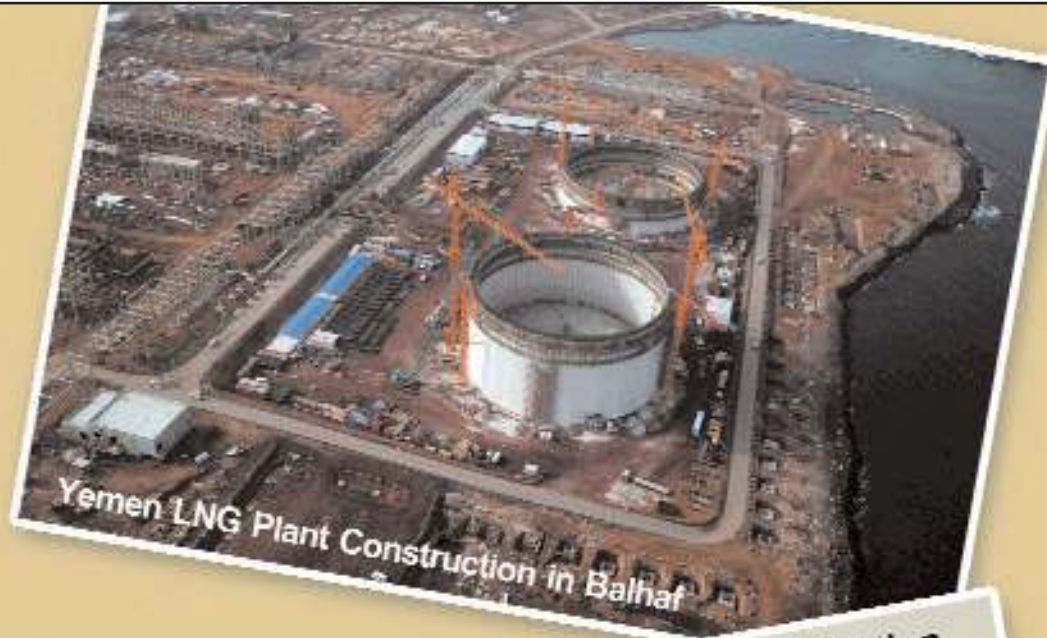
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"Grenades can make a big explosive" - a child

By: Saddam Al-Ashmouri
For Yemen Times

Essam M. Al-Haimi, 13, has started making local grenades as he was inspired by a friend of his in the school. He comes home carrying a can containing chemical substances, gasoline, and tin rolls to make manual grenades. "Grenades can make a big explosive," he said.

Essam explains how to make his grenades saying: "I buy a petroleum substance (that is used with paintings), another chemical substance that is special for cleaning and, and tins. I then collect empty bottles. I mix those substances, and put them in a bottle with a piece of tin. This process results in a great explosive. The explosive is as big as the mixed materials are."

"All children do know this way. They do it especially in the small neighborhoods where security bodies are not widely available," he added.

Al-Haimi said that the lack of fire cracks in the shops makes him impatiently wait for the school vacation to search for another alternative.

During Ramadan and Eid, Yemeni children very often play with fire cracks in. Recently, the government has prohibited the use of fire cracks and selling them in the market. However, children began to use tricks and inventions so as to not deprive themselves from having fun, especially during Eid.

Fire works still available

Nabeel Sultan, a shopkeeper, said, "When the government prevented traders from importing fire cracks, children sought for another alternative. At earlier times fire cracks were widely available at the beginning of Ramadan months."

"We used to spend much time in



Boys like to use hand-made grenades as for their fun.

streets at night playing with these fire cracks. That became a habit. We also used to play with them during Eid days. But now at the end of Ramadan, fire cracks become available and we will buy them in order to have fun."

Girls also love to play with fire cracks. Samah Me'yard, 12, said, "My friends and I buy fire cracks playing with them in our neighborhood. At the beginning of Ramadan we did not find them in the shops. Boys are playing with hand-made grenades

"This is because they can go out and buy some materials to make them. We can not do the same. However, fire cracks are available. We might have known how boys could get money to buy them."

Mu'tasim Al-Harazi, one of the children of Sana'a city said, "We purchase fire cracks from our own pocket

money given to us by our parents on daily basis. In case we can not find fire cracks in the shops, we collect enough money to buy two bottles that contain chemical substances used for cleaning. Each bottle costs YR 400; one container of gasoline for YR 350; and one tin roll for YR 250. We also collect empty water and juice bottles available from streets. The quantity is enough to play for two or three days long."

"We are very happy to see fire cracks back to us. They make us have fun as they produce sounds, lights and movements on the ground. Some of them fly in the sky. Our invented fire cracks make only explosives without flashing. Glasses are to be scattered into the streets as they are made of glass bottles. They leave the streets dirty as well as annoy people," Al-Harazi added.

Ahmed Al-Najar, a prominent figure at Hadda city, said what children do in these fire cracks is really annoying people due to their massive explosives at night. "We attempted to prevent the use of fire works and hand-made grenades but we couldn't as they are available in abundance," he added.

He went on to say that shopkeepers started to provide children with fire cracks as the later is less dangerous than the grenades made by children. Some new fire cracks cause panic among people due to their big explosives, he added.

"If these fire cracks explode in the hand of the children, they can claim their lives. We hope that everybody will cooperate with us to get rid of such fire cracks whether locally made

or coming from outside the country."

Ali Al-Tawili, a shopkeeper, sells these fire cracks secretly. He brings a small amount of fire cracks to his shop fearing that the security men will send him to prison. When asked how he gets these fire cracks, he said, "let people get sustenance".

Mu'ath Al-Absi, 14, said, "When we buy these games, the shopkeeper sells them provided that we keep it secret. If we tell others, they will file a complaint against him because they disturb people. This is the only secret children can keep."



Firecrackers are available during Eid.

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