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Yemeni children at risk due to Chinese toys, experts warn



"These toys have toxic substances like lead, which is a bluish-gray metal that when ingested or inhaled, can cause nervous-system failure and permanent brain damage. Lead is used in jewelry and plastics. Also they have cadmium, which is a natural element that irritates the lungs, causes kidney failure and is carcinogenic. It's used in batteries, [paint] pigments and plastics," explained Saeed.

"The Yemeni government still does not consider Chinese toys to be a health hazard. The Ministry of Health itself does not have any awareness campaigns about this subject," said Saeed. "However, we certainly hope that there will be a plan in order to give some attention to this issue and to control the import of Chinese products to the Yemeni market. Once we get the support, we will work in this field."

There aren't any current studies about Chinese products in Yemen, and although many countries have started preventing hazardous products from entering their countries, Yemen has not yet taken any steps or paid attention to this issue, said Jamal Al-Motareb, member of the Chamber of Commerce.

Dr. Afif Al-Nabahei, head of the scientific council in the Anti-Cancer Organization, confirmed that combating the toy issue seriously would require funds and support for studies. In the meantime, Yemeni parents will have to take the extra steps to ensure their children's toys are safe all by themselves.

Harmful Chinese toys are smuggled into the Yemeni market. Other countries have recalled thousands of Chinese-made toys.

By: Hamed Thabet

SANA'A, March 29 — Although the Yemen Standard, Metrology & Quality Control Organization banned many Chinese toys, such products are still widespread in Yemeni markets causing negative medical impacts, said chemist Ahmed Al-Bashah, vice general director of the organization.

Al-Bashah confirmed that the toys entered into the country illegally by smuggling. However, he also pointed out that some of the toys entered Yemen legally through borders, but traders paid

bribes to border officials to bring their goods in.

"The monitoring system is weak due to unqualified staff, and weak mechanisms used at the borders are also among the reasons which lead to these products being smuggled. We don't have a large enough budget to improve our staff and the monitoring mechanisms," added Al-Bashah.

The organization made a list of banned Chinese toys because they contained lead, mercury, magnetic pieces, and some small metal particles that cause cancer and other diseases for children, said Al-Bashah. Some of the Chinese products banned include the Nora doll, toy cars, musical tools, Mattel toys and Sesame street toys. Al-Bashah noted that the other dangerous toys will be on the list as soon as possible. The list was issued in April 2007.

"The list that we made for the banned Chinese toys hasn't been activated yet. These goods are not yet subject to seizure and examination, so they enter Yemen easily," said Al-Bashah.

Many product recalls on Chinese goods, especially toys, have been enacted by the US government's Food and

Drug Administration (FDA) in order to ban those items harmful to the general public. Countries around the world, like the USA and Arab Gulf countries, have a control system in place on their markets for these particular Chinese products.

The US put out mass recalls in 2006 and 2007 for some Chinese products related to children, such as toys and baby cribs, that were sold at discount stores around the country. Qatar was the first country in the Arab gulf to monitor the import of Chinese toys, though the other Gulf countries followed quickly behind its lead.

Fadhal Moqbel Mansur, deputy of the Consumer Protection Assembly in Yemen, insisted that 90 percent of the goods in Yemen - including toys - are smuggled into the country and do not meet international safety standards. He criticized the Yemen Standard Metrology & Quality Control Organization, saying that the organization has been lax in conducting research on Chinese toys and other products that might harm consumers. "Until now, I can say that they did not do anything and we cannot see any action," said

Mansur. Although there is a lack of scientific studies in Yemen linking the existence of these toys to Yemeni children's health, many doctors confirmed that such toys may cause a real problem.

"Lead and poisons that can be found in toys can be deposited to the soft gum tissue and then spread through the oral cavity, which can lead to different diseases including oral cancer," said Dr. Moein Pourahmari, a dentist and maxillofacial surgeon.

Available statistics show that the only two national centers for cancer treatment in Yemen receive approximately 10,000 new cancer patients annually.

Dr. Nadim Saeed, Director of the Cancer Center in Yemen, said that lead is used as a stabilizer in the plastic and sometimes in the paint on plastic toys. Because children like to play with toys by putting them in their mouths, it has become a hazard to their health. While lead in paint is illegal, it's commonly used as a stabilizer in plastics and as an additive in metals. Cadmium and phthalates, known to cause cancer and birth defects, are also used in many plastics without regulation, said Saeed

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WHAT IT MEANS...

Can humanity still be saved?

By: Koichiro Matsuura

We have inherited a single planet. But what have we made of it? The Earth is today an endangered heritage, and the species itself is at risk.

UNESCO has just published Making Peace with the Earth (Berghahn Books/UNESCO Publishing) the third anthology in the « 21st Century Talks » series edited by Jérôme Bindé. With the collaboration of some fifteen leading scientists and experts, such as Paul Crutzen, Nicolas Hulot, Javier Pérez de Cuellar, Michel Serres, Mostafa Tolba, Asit K. Biswas or Edward O. Wilson, we offer a future-oriented analysis of the global ecological crisis, together with some proposals for action, which are the substance of this article.

Are we fully conscious, even after the latest assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Bali Conference, of the colossal challenges that humanity will have to meet, within timeframes that have already been overrun? I shall not labour the diagnosis yet again: climate change, desertification, global water crisis, deforestation, ocean degradation, air, soil, water and sea pollution, and the increasing erosion of biodiversity - the picture is all

too familiar. The economic and geopolitical consequences of this situation are just starting to be quantified. The cost of our war on the planet is liable to be comparable to the cost of a world war, as the Stern Review points out. There is moreover a risk that the war on nature could lead to war in general, given the growing scarcity of fossil fuels and natural resources and the 150 to 200 million eco-refugees anticipated by futures studies.

Yet what we call problems - starting with climate change - are more in the nature of symptoms. The real problem, in fact, is that of material growth in a finite world, which was identified back in 1972 in the Report to the Club of Rome, Limits to Growth. But in 1972, as the Report's joint author Dennis Meadows points out, "humanity was within its limits, now it is beyond them". This is borne out by the data on the ecological footprint of the human species calculated by the team of Mathis Wackernagel. In 1972 we had reached 85 per cent of these limits. Today human resource consumption stands at about 125 per cent of the level sustainable in the long term.

So can humanity still be saved? Yes, we can do so, and without preventing the human species from developing and combating poverty. We need to combine growth and sustainable development, rather than seeing them as opposites. But how can this be done?

We shall need more knowledge, more restraint, less matter, more concreteness, and more - rather than less - ethics and politics. What this adds up to is another contract, a natural contract and an ethic of the future.

More knowledge firstly: there are many who regard techno-science as the enemy. Yet the sickness contains its own cure. We shall not succeed in saving the planet and its guest, the human species, unless we build "knowledge societies" that prioritize education and research. To address the challenges of sustainable development, we must strengthen our capacity for foresight and prospective analysis. UNESCO's work of compiling a global knowledge base on the environment and sustainable development goes back several decades, to a time when there was still little awareness of the problem! In 1949, UNESCO launched the first international study on arid zones; in 1970, it created the "Man and the Biosphere" (MAB) programme; and its global scientific programmes on the oceans and the geosciences are recognized as unique resources. The IPCC has drawn very fully on this database, which must continue to be developed and expanded in the future.

More restraint: we need to invent new modes of consumption that are less wasteful and more efficient. For, given the increasing spread of Western modes of development and

consumption to the emerging economies of the South, what other choice do we have? Three or four planet Earths would be required if the current consumption patterns of North America were to be extended to the planet as a whole.

Less matter: we shall have to "dematerialize" the economy and growth. For it is probably impossible to halt growth. We shall therefore have to reduce the consumption of natural resources and raw materials for each unit of economic production, whether it be energy, metals, minerals, water or wood. This shift of the economy towards the immaterial has already begun with the revolution that replaces atoms by bits, which is central to the rise of the new technologies and knowledge societies. "Dematerialization" of the economy could even favour development in the countries of the South, if the countries of the North were to commit themselves to dematerializing a little more than the countries of the South for a period of about 50 years.

But the greatest transformation of our societies will be in the realm of attitudes and behaviour. How can we dematerialize production if we remain materialistic? How can we reduce our consumption if the consumer within us devours the citizen? Education for sustainable development will be the key to this change. More concreteness: concrete and realistic projects, including at the inter-

national level, will be needed to bridge the gap between utopia and the tyranny of the short-term. Take the case of biodiversity. To safeguard the 34 top priority ecological zones, which cover only 2.3 per cent of the Earth's land surface but contain 50 per cent of the known species of vascular plants and 42 per cent of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, the cost is put at some \$50 billion, or less than 0.1 per cent of global GDP.

A natural contract: if we are to cease being the Earth's parasites, we shall have to sign a new peace treaty with nature. We had the social contract, which binds human beings together, and we must now bind ourselves with nature. The idea will seem strange to some, but it follows on logically from the growth of ecological awareness. If in future we protect endangered species, if we preserve landscapes in natural parks, we shall gradually be recognizing nature as embodying genuine rights. Foresight will be an absolute precondition of the true democracy of the future. The ethic of the future, which demands that we transmit an inhabitable world to our children, will supply the link between the economy and ecology, between growth and sustainable development.

Koichiro Matsuura is the Director-General of Unesco.
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What it means is an analytical feature of Yemen Times, in which Yemeni topics are discussed and analyzed by Yemeni and international experts. Contributions and comments are welcomed, they could be sent to yteditor@gmail.com.

US report criticizes human rights in Yemen

By: Yemen Times Staff

SANAA, March 30 — The US State Department has criticized the status of human rights in Yemen in its report for 2007, released on March 11. Entitled "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices", the annual report highlights human rights violations that ranged from arbitrary arrests, to killing civilians, and curbing freedoms and rights.

"There were reports that the government committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year. There were no known politically motivated killings by the government or its agents; however, security forces reportedly killed or injured suspects during arrests and public demonstrations, actions that

appear to have been politically motivated," the report said.

Unlike the previous year, there were killings by security forces during demonstrations. During protests between August and September in the southern governorates, security forces killed at least seven persons and arrested and injured hundreds, the report added.

Yemen has witnessed several protests nationwide against price hikes, illegal government practices towards retired soldiers, and bad living standards.

The country, according to local observers, has been going through such circumstances since the end of the 2006 presidential and local council

elections.

According to the US report, other incidents of fatal shootings and violence continued throughout the year, and security forces reportedly beat detainees and prisoners. The report cited the example of Azim Hasan Al-Wosabi, a citizen who was beaten while arrested for stealing on May 14.

Additionally, the report noted that Yemeni law prohibits such practices,

but according to human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and former detainees, authorities tortured and abused persons in detention.

"During the year, the Political Security Office (PSO), a security agency reporting to the president, denied that torture occurred at their facilities and noted that PSO officers when entering service must sign an internal document that certifies that they recognize that torture is illegal according to the laws and constitution of the country and that those who torture prisoners will be punished according to the law," it said, adding the government severely limited access to PSO prisons by independent human rights observers.

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For the whole report on Yemen, please visit: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100464.htm>

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Historic homes in Old Sana'a crumble as government watches

By: Hamed Thabet
hamed_thabit@hotmail.com

While Yemeni government officials celebrate the fact that the Old City of Sana'a has been on UNESCO's World Heritage List for more than two decades, many historic homes in Old Sana'a are in danger of crumbling into nonexistence, according to Dr. Abdullah Zaid Ayssa, chairman of the General Organization for the Preservation of Historic Cities in Yemen, or GOPHCY.

In the eyes of the government, the decision makers and laymen, history is just an undeveloped past and such people have no time to care or think about it, states Yassin Ghalib Al-Ariqi, an architect and preservation consultant who often advises GOPHCY.

However, the Old City of Sana'a's architectural heritage won't be around much longer unless someone helps reconstruct damaged homes. For instance, at midnight on May 15, 2002, nine historical homes beside the Grand Mosque collapsed, forcing their occupants to vacate.

Al-Ariqi notes that cement often is used during periodic repairs to the homes' foundations, thereby making the existing mud, plaster and al-qutra (the material commonly used for such foundations) unstable when all of these elements are combined.

Because foundations also are made of mud, when sewer water touches the foundation, it dissolves the mud, making it pliable. Humidity also plays a big role, first causing swelling and then contraction in the mud, which weakens the foundation and causes cracks that eventually bring about the home's collapse, as architect and GOPHCY deputy chairman Khalid Al-Jubari explained.

A Korean-Yemeni project installed water pipes in Old Sana'a in 1986. Authorities and GOPHCY noticed afterward that many of the water pipes weren't tightened properly, thereby allowing water to infiltrate the homes' foundations. However, neither the responsible authorities nor the residents themselves did anything about the water problems and simply neglected the homes, Al-Ariqi said.

Immediately after these homes collapsed in 2002, a joint committee comprised of GOPHCY, members of the water sanitation sector and architectural specialists went to Old Sana'a to study and report on the damages.

The report noted that at least YR 10 to 11 million is needed for the first phase of repairing and restoring the nine collapsed homes. In the beginning, the Executive Committee to Preserve the Old City of Sana'a, the Sana'a governor and the Ministry of Culture thought to purchase the ruined homes for the Grand Mosque in order to expand it, Ayssa said.

Because of this mosque expansion plan, the homes' restoration was halted for three years until the idea of purchasing the homes was abandoned. The idea became unfeasible for two reasons: the historical importance of the buildings, which date back 600 to 700 years, and the owners' steep asking prices.

The Executive Committee to Preserve the Old City of Sana'a requested the Ministry of Culture release YR 20 million from Yemen's National Heritage Fund, which is related to the ministry and provides government financing for projects like these. However, this didn't come about because the National Heritage Fund claimed it didn't have the amount that GOPHCY wanted.

GOPHCY later directly asked Prime Minister Ali Mujawar, who in turn directed the Finance Ministry to allot the YR 20 million from the government's appropriations center, which provides emergency funding. However, Al-Jubari noted, "We only received YR 5 million and were promised the other YR 15 million after the job was finished. All of this took place in July of 2007."

In order to commence the buildings' restoration, the residents were asked to leave their homes and rent other accommodations. Sana'a governorate offered to pay their rent for the first six months. After that, if the restoration work was still ongoing, the Ministry of Culture would take over the financial responsibility for the renters, Ayssa noted.

"Between 140 and 150 people left their homes, and now, after the first six months, the Ministry of Culture hasn't paid them, as per the agreement," Al-Jubari said, "For this reason, many who are poor have returned to their homes while others are paying the rent from their own pockets."

Al-Jubari added that the residents who continue to rent are afraid to return to their homes because of the danger of collapse during the rainy season, which will begin soon.

The repair work was supposed to take six to eight months and when the first YR 5 million was spent, GOPHCY asked the Finance Ministry to turn over the remaining YR 15 million. Instead, the ministry cut YR 5 million from the 2008 restoration budget and currently is holding on to the other YR 15 million.

"We've sent a letter to the Sana'a governor, the prime minister and the Executive Committee for the Preservation of the Old City of Sana'a to determine a solution because the work has stopped," Ayssa said.

The restoration project went for only three months, during which GOPHCY used the funds it received to erect pillars inside the homes to prevent their further collapse and repaired the façade of only one house.

Ayssa says he has contacted the Executive Committee to Preserve the Old City of Sana'a, the governor of



At midnight on May 15, 2002, nine historical homes beside the Grand Mosque collapsed, forcing occupants to leave. The historic homes in the old city of Sana'a date back 600 to 700 years.



Many residents are afraid to return to their homes because of the danger of collapse during the rainy season. Some of them returned to their destroyed houses, because they have no other choices.

Sana'a and the Ministry of Culture to let them know that his organization won't take responsibility for further damages or destruction that might occur due to the approaching rainy season.

"I've worked since this project began. Halfway through, we were short of money, so the work was stopped," construction manager Mohammed Al-Arusi said, "Due to the weakness of these homes, the rains could cause great disaster. If we had had the money, we would've finished the restoration and the residents would be resettled in their homes by now."

"The government has no knowledge in the historical field," Al-Ariqi stated, "Never has the Ministry of Culture or any other authority conducted an awareness program for citizens about caring for our city and its valuable history."

He added, "It's a disgrace to our country to be careless about our history and its importance to us and to the outside world. Everything can be changed except history."

Experts working to restore and maintain historic homes must be well equipped with the knowledge and history about the importance of these buildings. However, in today's Yemen, most technicians and architects are only trained to construct or repair modern buildings, which also can cause complications for extensive restoration projects such as this.

"The new generation knows nothing and has no information, while the older generation, which has some knowledge, isn't made use of," Al-Ariqi added.

Al-Jubari noted that Old Sana'a's local council has offered to donate YR 10 million and that the restoration project again will use this financial source

until it hears from the Culture Ministry.

The displaced residents have requested that UNESCO stop supporting the Old City of Sana'a because they feel that the money UNESCO donates doesn't go to the projects for which it was intended, such as restoring these historic homes. Since 1986, UNESCO has listed Old Sana'a among the international heritage cities on its World Heritage List.

Ibrahim Al-Mu'ayyad, one of the evacuated residents of a historic home, states, "I'm not a beggar asking for money from the government, but they asked us to leave our homes by offering us rent, which wasn't provided."

Another victim of the Old Sana'a

home collapse, Yahya 'Usda'a, said, "Old Sana'a is a victim in the hands of the officials. We're ashamed of the government treating us like refugees, with no rent and no repair for our homes. UNESCO and the world must look into this problem."

UNESCO provides no financial support to the Yemeni government to maintain historical sites. Since the Old City of Sana'a was added to its World Heritage List, UNESCO has publicized the site and agreed to provide technical support to the government while Yemen's part of the agreement is to preserve the site using its own finances.

"It's now our nation's responsibility to show [UNESCO] that we deserve to

be one of its World Heritage sites," Ayssa points out, "UNESCO only offers guidance and no financing, so people must understand that the responsibilities is entirely ours."

While the Yemeni population's role in historical preservation still is being developed, experts stress that Yemenis must be made more aware of their historic sites and take pride in them.

"The problem is that they hold the government responsible for everything, which isn't right," Al-Ariqi noted, "On the other hand, the government must be concerned about assisting in its preservation - without any outside help - thereby adding to the glory of Yemen's history."



"Between 140 and 150 people left their homes, and the Ministry of Culture hasn't paid them, as per their agreement."

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Basic Education Support and Training

Project Executive Assistant

A full time position is now available for a Project Executive Assistant for a USAID-funded, five-year Basic Education Support and Training (BEST) Project. This position will be located in Sana'a and may require occasional trips to and from project sites across Yemen. The Project Executive Assistant is supervised by the BEST Chief of Party (COP).

The duties of the Project Executive Assistant will include, among others, the following:

- Anticipate project personnel needs and arrange for temporary help as authorized by the COP, making necessary arrangements for work space, supplies, furniture and equipment in accordance with the scope of work for each employee.
- Complete and reconfirm in a timely manner all travel arrangements, hotel reservations and other appropriate preparations such as pre-arrival steps for International visiting staff and local staff travel details.
- Brief new and visiting staff on office procedures and services, including relevant forms, available supplies and equipment and the like.
- In close coordination with the COP provide oversight and timely responses to the day-to-day activities and needs of project personnel.
- Organize office activities in such a manner so as to facilitate timely and proper completion of the work to be done.
- Arrange regular and called meetings of the project personnel with the COP for the purpose of coordinating work and addressing planned and pending activities.
- Arrange regular teleconference calls with the project home office staff and project Senior Management Team; managing all other in-coming calls in the absence of the COP.
- Report to the Chief of Party on a daily basis on progress, providing suggestions regarding improvements in project office management and staff performance.
- Arrange a weekly in-depth briefing meeting for the COP, including plans for the coming week, anticipated needs and reports on activities underway and accomplishments of the past week.
- Perform other functions as assigned by the Chief of Party.

Qualifications:

- Bachelor's Degree, preferably in Business Administrations or related field.
- Minimum of five years of related experiences
- Demonstrated strong organizational skills
- English and Arabic proficiency, spoken and written
- Relevant computer skills such as MS Office, Excel, and PowerPoint.

Project Driver

A full time position is now available for a Project Driver for a USAID-funded, five-year Basic Education Support and Training (BEST) Project. This position will be located in Sana'a and will require extensive driving to and from project sites across Yemen.

Among other responsibilities, he/she will:

1. Serve as driver of project vehicles, at all times strictly observing traffic laws, sound safety procedures, and courtesy toward passengers, pedestrians, and other vehicles;
2. Report to the specified location at or before the specified hour, properly attired, and ready to depart without delay;
3. Be constantly aware of the mechanical condition of project vehicles and promptly inform his/her immediate supervisor of necessary repairs and of any other matters pertaining to operation of the vehicles;
4. Maintain project vehicles in good order at all times – cleaning, washing, polishing, tightening and all other similar details – as required and as specified in the daily/weekly check lists;
5. Promptly and accurately complete and submit all reports required in connection with travel, maintenance and expenses, including travel logs;
6. Carry out specific missions, sometimes without assistance; and
7. Perform other duties as directed by the Chief of Party of the project.

General Requirements and Qualifications:

- Possess a valid Yemeni Driver's License;
- Have maintained an excellent driving record over the last five (5) or more years;
- Preferred candidates should have at least seven (7) years of successful experience as a driver with an international or Yemeni NGO;
- Possess excellent interpersonal communications skills useful in a project that is built around a strong team approach to project implementation;
- Proficient in basic English language; and
- Be available to work in excess of a regular eight-hour workday, traveling as required on rough roads to remote communities and schools served by the project.

Qualified candidates should send their CV's with cover letters in English no later than one week after the date of this announcement. Please include the names of three (3) references with their phone numbers so as to substantiate the above. Completed applications are to be forwarded to one of the following addresses by email, mail or fax:

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Yemen Press Review



Al-Wahdawi.net, affiliated with Nasserite Unionist Popular Organization (NUPO) Saturday, March 29

Top Stories

- Popular rally: seawater is salty, what about promises made by Mr. President ahead of 2006 election
- Yemen hands four Qaeda suspects to Saudi Arabia
- Protestors hold government accountable for poor living standards and rampant corruption
- JMP Higher Council accuses ruling party of blocking path of change
- Hood discloses private confinements and human rights abuses in Ibb
- President Saleh quits Damascus Summit due to pressure from Saudi Arabia

Political observers attributed President Ali Abdullah Saleh's absence from the Damascus-based Arab Summit to pressures from Saudi Arabia on him during his most recent visit to the bordering kingdom, the website reported. "The Yemeni government's declaration that Vice President Abdurabbo Mansour Hadi would be head of its participating team in the summit came after Saleh conducted a short visit to the Saudi capital Riyadh on Tuesday, during which he deliberated with King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz on the level of representation at the summit" it went on to say. In addition, different local and international media outlets quoted a Yemeni official as saying, Friday, that Yemen president will skip the summit and plans to dispatch Vice President Abdurabbo Mansour Hadi as the head of his country's delegation to

Damascus. The official note that the Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh will not attend the summit because of "special circumstances" without mentioning details. The Yemeni decision comes following the decision of the Jordanian monarch King Abdullah, the Saudi King Abdullah Bin Abdel Aziz, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak not to personally participate in the summit.

Damascus is blamed for blocking the presidential elections and for this reason the leaders of the Arab countries that are friendly to Lebanon are boycotting the summit and sending low level delegations. Lebanon is the only Arab country that has decided to completely boycott the summit. Jordanian Minister of Information and Communication Nasser Joudah declared Friday that the Kingdom's representative at the Arab League Omar Rifai will head his country's delegation to the Arab summit to be held in Damascus on 29 and March 30. Syrian president Bashar al Assad officially invited Jordanian King Abdullah bin Hussein to attend the Arab summit to be held in Damascus.



26 September.net, affiliated with the Yemeni Army Saturday, March 29

Top Stories

- Vice President: Saleh excused himself from attending Damascus Summit for emergency circumstances
- Successful conclusion for functions of Yemen's Cultural Days in Jeddah
- Shabwa local source denies authenticity of Sahwa.net reports with regard to tribal fighting casualties

- Government call on religious scholars to condemn any western behaviors disgracing Prophet Mohammed
- Hamas urges Arabs to back Yemen-brokered reconciliation agreement

The website reported that Hamas wants this weekend's Arab summit to back a Yemen-sponsored reconciliation agreement between the group and its Palestinian rival Fatah, adding that Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, in exile in Syria, was also quoted as urging Arab leaders at their Damascus summit to support its fight with Israel. But he reiterated the Islamist group was open to a conditional truce with the Jewish state.

A Gaza-based Web site said Meshaal wrote to Arab leaders requesting support for Hamas-Fatah dialogue, after a Yemen-brokered agreement to revive talks between the rival factions appeared to falter this week. Meshaal called on Arab leaders to "shoulder your national and brotherly responsibility to foster a Palestinian-Palestinian dialogue," according to the report, which was also carried by London-based pan-Arab newspaper Al-Hayat.

Hamas seized control of Gaza last June after routing Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah forces. Abbas then sacked a Hamas-led unity government and pursued U.S.-backed peace talks with Israel. After months of hostilities, the factions agreed this week to restart direct talks to "return the Palestinian situation to what it was before the Gaza incidents." But an apparent dispute quickly broke out.

Hamas has said talks will start on April 5, while Abbas's office insisted the Islamist group must first relinquish control of the Gaza Strip — a condition Hamas has rejected. According to the Web site, Meshaal also urged Arab leaders to support the group's fight

against Israel and to protest against an Israeli-led blockade of Gaza, defending militant cross-border rocket attacks from Gaza as self defense.

Hamas has said any ceasefire would depend on an end to Israeli acts of "aggression" in Gaza and the West Bank and the reopening of Gaza border crossings. Egypt, with U.S. blessing, has been trying to broker a cessation of hostilities between Israel and militants in Gaza.



Aleshteraki.net, affiliated with the Yemeni Socialist Party Saturday, March 29

Top Stories

- YSP Secretary General criticizes the way authority deals with peaceful protests
- Information Ministry bans printing of Al-Sabah Magazine's most recent issue
- At least 8 Yemeni soldiers killed in Jabal Tair Island Volcano
- Military Prosecution prevents Al-Nuba's defense-advocate to meet his client
- Political detainee dies in government jail as a result of deteriorating health
- Amnesty International discusses file of political detainees over Sa'ada fighting in Sana'a

The YSP-affiliated website reported that it obtained information from well-informed sources that an Amnesty International team has been, for an entire week, discussing the file of political detainees jailed over alleged connections with Sa'ada rebellion, led by Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, brother of slain cleric Hussein Badraddin Al-Houthi who was killed by the army in

2004.

The London-based organization's team is headed by the international rights activist Mr. Omari Shiruf, who is known to be always concerned about human rights abuses and public freedoms violations in Yemen. Once, Shiruf was in charge of discussing the file of 1994 Civil War detainees, and at that time, he urged the Yemeni government to release all those detained over alleged links with the war.

According to the same sources, Amnesty International team leader and other team members met many security officials and NGOs leaders in Yemen and discussed with them the file of prisoners detained in several government prisons countrywide over being allegedly loyal with Houthi rebellious movement in Sa'ada.



Al-Sahwa.net, affiliated with the Islah Party Saturday, March 29

Top Stories

- Shabwa citizens: we drank from the sea in protest against poor living standards and looting of resources
- Aden governorate's leadership gives plots of land to Bureiqa citizens
- Al-Sahwa.net discloses ruling party's tricks against local authority
- At least 4 killed, another 4 injured in Shabwa tribal fighting
- Islah Shoura Council calls for escalating peaceful struggle

The Shoura Council of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Islah), the nation's main opposition party, has called Islah and other Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) members to escalate peaceful struggle and stand by the

oppressed people, stressing the importance of combating corruption and arbitrariness practiced by the authorities, website reported.

The Shoura Council also affirmed in its regular round concluded on March 17 that terrible political and economic situations and living standards endanger all classes of Yemeni people and that such situations were an inevitable outcome, which is symptomatic of the poor policies followed by the ruling party.

The council discussed the dangerous updates in the Southern and eastern governorates, expressing deep concern over the catastrophic consequences coming up as a result of the authorities' wrong policies which jeopardize national unity. It expressed solidarity with citizens in the southern governorates and their fair demands through peaceful struggle and refused any illegal practices, asking the authorities, in the meantime, to give the military and civil retirees all their entitlements.

The council warned the ruling party of amending the state-constitution individually and apart from its political partners, showing concern over the economic decline which led to severe poverty, unemployment and lack of equal opportunities. The Islah's Shoura Council also warned of any potential risings of oil derivatives, demanding relevant authorities to reveal names of oil smugglers.

Regarding Saada conflict, it called for faithful and devoted efforts and tackle threats associated with the fighting, slamming the secrecy and silence about the Qatari-mediated deal, which the signed with Houthi rebels. It further stressed citizens' rights to demonstrate and protest through peaceful means, as well as to possess private media outlets, renouncing the authority's interference in syndicates and NGOs.

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) invites **Yemeni Nationals** to apply for the following positions with its project **Disaster Management Programme**.

1-Post Title: Administrative & Finance Assistant

Responsibilities:

- Handle day-to-day petty cash.
- Maintain detailed and comprehensive record of income and expenditures.
- Maintain and update the project budget (assist in the preparation of budget revisions).
- Monitor project expenditures, prepare and maintain necessary financial control reports.
- Compile financial statement for contributions received.
- Prepare necessary requests with required supporting documents and other documents

Qualification:

- University degree in accounting, financial management, business administration or other relevant areas.
- Good Knowledge of accounting and budget handling.
- Good computer skills, especially in Excel sheet, in both English and Arabic.
- Excellent oral and written communication skills in English and Arabic.
- Previous experience in working with UNDP projects is an asset.

2-Post Title: Information Technology Associate:

Responsibilities:

- Collect and organize data and develop databases relevant to the different aspects of disaster management.
- Maintain the programme web page in all aspects and ensure proper information linkages of the Programme and contribute to the resource mobilization efforts.
- Procure hardware and software materials for the office as needed and according to the rules and regulations of UNDP.
- Support in arranging of various field visits and accompany media teams, donors, and other interested parties.
- Produce periodic publications on disaster management and disaster prone areas, and disseminate them to all concerned parties.

Qualification:

- Bachelor of Science in information technology, computer science, communication or relevant field.
- At least five years of information technology and public information experience.
- Demonstrated ability in soft-wares such as Geomedia.
- Excellent command of Arabic and English languages.
- Excellent computer and Internet skills in both Arabic & English.
- Experience with UN is desirable.

3-Post Title: Two Drivers:

- Drive the project vehicles for the transportation of authorized personnel (project staff, missions, consultants, UNDP staff etc).
- Responsible for the day-to-day cleaning and maintenance of the assigned vehicles (safety functions, engine oil, water, battery, brakes, tires etc).
- Perform minor repairs and arrange for other repairs when necessary and ensures that the vehicle is kept functional and safe.
- Maintain logs on official trips, daily mileage, gas consumption, oil change, greasing etc.

Qualification:

- Primary education, driver's license, knowledge of driving rules and regulations and chauffeur courtesies, skills in minor vehicle repair.
- Experience: Four years work experience as a driver; safe driving record.
- Language Requirements: Arabic and English.

Interested candidates are requested to visit our website at: <http://www.undp.org/ye/undp-vacancies.htm> for detailed terms of reference of the positions and may submit their applications indicating the title of the post applied for by mail to Human Resources Unit and response will only be made to short listed candidates.

UNDP, P.O.Box 551 Sana'a/Fax: 448892/E-mail: (hr.ye@undp.org)

The deadline for receiving applications is Sunday, 13 April 2008

UNDP is an equal opportunity organization and qualified female candidates are strongly encouraged to apply.



VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) invites **Yemeni Nationals** to apply for the following position in the UN Resident Coordinator's Office.

Post Title: National Humanitarian Affairs Officer (NHAO)

Responsibilities:

- Assist in raising awareness within the UN system and the Government of the various UN tools, services and mechanisms available for emergency response and response preparedness.
- Assist in promoting within the United Nations Emergency Preparedness and Response Team (UNEPRT) and the Government the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action in close cooperation/collaboration with the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNDP Regional Disaster Reduction Advisors RDRA, and International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) Secretariat.
- Provide support to the UNEPRT in strengthening its emergency preparedness for effective response including establishment of effective linkages with the national authorities and the humanitarian partners.
- Assist in updating the UN Inter-agency Contingency Plan Disaster Response Plan following the accepted methodology.
- Establish and maintain direct contact with the relevant national disaster management organizations, in order to assess their emergency preparedness and response capacity and strengthen synergies.
- Provide the Secretariat function to UNEPRT.
- Inform the UNEPRT about likely threats that could trigger an emergency/disaster in the country.
- Facilitate all emergency response preparedness activities in coordination with national authorities and humanitarian partners.
- Assist in promoting the setup of a Humanitarian Information Management System for disaster and emergency situations that could be used by the UN in the country as well as by the National authorities.
- Facilitate the implementation of the clusters approach (as appropriate) within the in-country Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in the emergency response and response preparedness.
- Identify training needs of the UNEPRT and the Government in the field of emergency response and response preparedness.

Qualification:

- Master degree.
- Minimum of **three years of experience** in management of natural disasters, humanitarian emergencies, emergency preparedness, crisis/emergency relief management, rehabilitation and development.
- Experience in the region would be an asset.
- Proven analytical skills and experience on timely delivery of written reports, prepared in an accurate and concise manner.
- Familiarity with the UN system and/or Red Cross/Crescent movement would be an asset.
- Computer literacy (Word, Excel, LOTUS, Internet).
- Ability to work with minimum supervision, with efficiency, competence and integrity with people of different national backgrounds.
- Fluent written and spoken English and Arabic;

Interested candidates are requested to visit our website at: <http://www.undp.org/ye/undp-vacancies.htm> for detailed terms of reference of the positions and may submit their applications indicating the title of the post applied for by mail to Human Resources Unit and response will only be made to short listed candidates.

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MDM in Yemen: Giving aid a human touch

By: Nadia Al-Sakkaf

Medecins du Monde (MDM) started working in Yemen in November 2007 after a six-month need assessment survey. The medical organization, known for its work in developing countries and for medical relief interventions during conflicts, has decided to start a pilot project in a rural area representative of most of Yemen.

"We wanted to work with people at the grassroots level on the priorities our research team has identified in the health system," said Nicolas Seris, departing country representative of the organization, who will be replaced by Claire Haduong. "We realized the health system is weak, and Yemen has environmental, infrastructural as well as geographical challenges that add to the burden."

After researching three governorates (Amran, Taiz and Hajja), the organization decided to launch its first initiative in Hajja governorate because of its remoteness and dire need of health services. The team found that people in the district of Bani Kayes, population 20,000, have to walk or ride on donkeys for over two hours just to reach the local health care unit, which provides basic needs and first aid by a health worker. It takes another three hours to get to the health center where there is a doctor, who might need to refer them to the city hospital, which is another hour's drive.

"People in such deserted rural areas are poor. It could cost around YR 5,000 simply for transportation to the health center or hospital. This is very expensive and the distance almost makes it futile. Many people with severe complications die on the way," said Seris, justifying the need to establish a health project in Bani Kayes.

Hajja Project

The two-year project in Bani Kayes aims at improving the quality of primary health care in a sustainable way. The project includes furnishing and providing medicine to the seven local health care units, in addition to building staff capacity.

The units did not have adequate furnishing, required equipment or medication to treat patients. The success of this project will be measured in one year, through reporting the number of patients who benefit from the health services provided by the units.

The main partner of MDM in Hajja is the health office, and MDM's focal point is Dr. Abulrahman Ba Makhrama of the health office.

However, three-member local community teams have been created, which include a local council member, a health office employee and a representative of the community. MDM encourages women to be a part of the community in order to create a better gender balance. It also encourages a sense of volunteerism and community participation.

"To ensure sustainability, we encour-

age the participants and our partners to volunteer and take ownership of the project. We know that if we start paying them to meet, once we stop the whole thing would collapse," said Seris on the community participation in Hajja.

MDM president Dr. Pierre Micheletti, who came to Yemen last week, visited the organization's program in Hajja and talked with officials in Sana'a. His visit aimed at acquiring a better understanding of the political and health conditions of the country and to meet the teams working with MDM in Yemen.

"I am not in a position to comment about Yemen in general, but I can say that there are many factors that disturb accessibility to health services and that the capacity of the state to face these challenges needs strengthening," said Micheletti.

During his visit he met with the Minister of Health, the Hajja governor and other officials who work with the organization.

Yemen as a country is not only facing developing challenges, but also has political tensions such as instability, internal conflicts in Sa'ada and the South, and the influx of immigrants from the African Horn.

Sa'ada Project

The MDM program in Yemen works in close partnership with local councils and health offices. In Sa'ada, the organization created a capacity-building project that was concluded last week. The project included training 300 locals in first aid and health education in order to mitigate diseases or injuries caused by bad practices or that could have been prevented by simple first aid. There was also a focus on how to encourage the community to trust the health service providers at the units and local community. Because many people do not have access to doctors or hospital care, they have to turn to health workers, who are usually midwives or people who had training for a year in basic health services. By strengthening the health worker's capacities and equipping the units MDM hopes to encourage locals to access the services available.

Dr. Ghaleb Mushabab is the organization's representative in Sa'ada and he works with the health office. Through him, and in cooperation with associations, community leaders and the education office, the education and training project was completed.

"We are now looking into expanding our work in Sa'ada to include health education in schools. We hope to create a sustainable system whereby the school health program is strong and effective," explained Seris.

However, MDM also carries out occasional medical relief initiatives in Sa'ada, which is a conflict zone. The organization distributed pediatric medicine to local health care centers and units in Sa'ada between May and August 2007, as the armed conflict interrupted the provision of such medicines.

"We work in Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan and other conflict areas. We consider ourselves as a relief organization," said Micheletti.

The organization's global mission is to provide medical care for the most vulnerable people when they are faced with crisis or exclusion from society.

MDM was established in 1980 when the founders of Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) argued over the way



A village in Bani Kayes, Hajja governorate. The scattered homes and difficult terrains are of the main barriers against access to health services.

MSF operated around the world. Some of the members wanted the organization to remain very technical and have high standards of operations and providing medical assistance. The others, who eventually created MDM, wanted a more human-centric approach that was flexible and could adjust to local situations.

"You can say that MSF puts the flag before the network, while we place the network before the flag," explained Micheletti.

Humanity changed and humanitarian aid must follow

MDM director Micheletti has a theory on how he believes humanitarian aid should work. He said that 30 years ago, aid providers were seen as superior,

with their culture, western standards, technical operations, etc., while aid receivers were rather passive, and their role was to be helped and be grateful for that. Today, Micheletti says the world has changed and has become more integrated, with the result that the clear lines between cultures has somewhat melted.

"You can't have a fixed module for aid and apply it anywhere around the world.

Now you need to take into consideration the local cultures and traditions, the beneficiaries' participation and acceptance, and design the projects in accordance to local factors and human aspects," he said.

This issue is also the differentiation factor between many international and

local aid organizations, i.e., whether to come with an international fixed mandate and apply it to local projects or create a local mandate within a wide agreeable framework.

Micheletti also commented that locals should also try to differentiate between organizations and westerners, and not to generalize. He reflects on his visits to Afghanistan and described that many of the local Afghans did not distinguish between NATO soldiers, aid workers or diplomats. "We were all the enemy. We looked the same: white and speaking English. I don't blame them, because this is what they see and what they know. What we can do is explain to them that we are different and are there to help and have come in peace," he added.



Lab technician Wahid is one of the beneficiaries of the capacity-building training. MDM helped furnishing Toor health center in Bani Kayes district, where at least 7000 patients are treated every year.



From left to right: Claire Haduong, Pierre Micheletti and Nicolas Seris



Children captivated by the health care personnel in one of the community health education sessions.

Salt marshes in Aden affected by industrial waste

By: Almgad Dahesh Mojalli

A recent study conducted by the General Authority for Environmental Protection warned of environmental damage affecting the salt marshes on the coast of Aden due to the influx of dangerous heavy chemical elements such as lead, arsenic and petroleum materials as a result of industrial construction nearby.

Salt marshes are environmentally-sensitive lands that are considered to be the birthplace of one of the country's oldest maritime industries: salt collection. They are also home to numerous species of aquatic life and a sanctuary for many types of birds migrating to and from Europe and Africa.

According to the study, the laboratory analysis revealed the existence of industrial waste material, which not only ruins the environment for the salt indus-

try but also negatively impacts the habitats of aquatic birds, small fish and the marine vegetation that the wildlife depends on as an essential source of food.

Because of the residual effects of the industrial waste, the salt industry will decline due to a reduction in the areas of the cisterns used in drying salt.

The study clarified that the salt marshes are considered one factor in observing environmental safety, particularly pollution prevention, of the seas.

The study asked official governmental bodies, environmental NGOs, concerned authorities and society in general to maintain the salt marshes, as they are considered part of the protected wetlands that need protection in accordance with the Ramsar agreement, a treaty that safeguards wetlands and maritime species, which was signed in 1971 and endorsed by the Cabinet in 2002.

There are currently many industrial

facilities in the area, including a fiberglass factory, a plastics laboratory, a car wash and an auto repair shop. The study recommended removing the car wash station and car oil changing center as they deal with petroleum substances, grease and other derivatives that are dangerous for the environment. It also recommended preventing the creation and spread of any new industrial activities inside the district.

There were also recommendations to the environment protection authority to further study the current and future environmental influences on the salt marshes, along with alternative therapies to restrict the harm already done to the area.

The salt marshes span 6,504,421 square meters, in addition to Baja'a lake, which extends from the residential Remi district in the north to the water surfaces, water tanks and Al-Aresh district in the east and to the Caltex district

in the west.

According to Yemeni historian Abdullah Mohairez, the salt marshes were established in Khor Macksar as a result of the existence of saline, the plentiful swamps and the quick evaporation of water there which left salt deposits behind.

The salt marsh district in Aden governorate is considered one of the oldest historical proofs of the sea salt industry worldwide. The evidence for this comes from the existence of structures made of bricks covered with kathath, a strong white substance used in building before cement.

Historical documents affirm that an Italian company was established on March 25, 1886, on the eastern side of the salt marshes and visitors can still find traces of the windmills, bridges and canals there today. The company left Aden in 1955, though an Indian metal company was established on the western



waste Aden's salt marshes are affected by industrial waste, according to an official report.

side of the salt marshes in 1908, whose buildings are still in use today. The general salt corporation was established in 1970. The decision to add iodine to the salt collected there was issued in 1997. The study was prepared by a govern-

mental committee made up of employees of the water and sanitation sector, the environmental protection bodies and the Ministry of Industry and Environmental Health in Aden governorate and presented in Aden last month.

Iraq: Five Years On

“Respect and fairness for the Muslim World”

Five years after the Iraq War, Jürgen Todenhöfer, a prominent German media manager and former member of parliament for the Christian Democrats, travelled to Iraq to interview “resistance fighters” and al-Qaida terrorists. He recently published an account of what he experienced there. Interview by Hisham Adem



We have to treat the Muslim world as we would like to be treated ourselves, with respect and fairness,” says Todenhöfer.

Your recently published book, *Warum tötest du, Zaid? (Why do you kill, Zaid?)*, is the result of a dangerous research trip to war-torn Iraq. What made you decide to go on this journey?

Jürgen Todenhöfer: I decided to make this trip because over the past few years, reports about what is going on in post-war Iraq have shown the situation from the perspective of the occupying forces only. I wanted to show the situation from the perspective of the people whose country is occupied.

Based on your experience, what is the difference between the reality of

life in Iraq and the image portrayed by Western media?

Todenhöfer: We don't get to see the real war. Every day, American forces conduct about 100 military manoeuvres against the Iraqi population: bombardments, raids, shootings ... We don't get to see these manoeuvres because then the Pentagon would be forced to admit that it is still waging war against the Iraqi population.

Moreover, every day, the Iraqi resistance conducts about 100 military manoeuvres against the occupying forces. We don't get to see these either because such images would

force the American government to

admit that there is strong military resistance to American occupation, resistance that is supported by most of the Iraqi population.

Between two and three criminal suicide bomb attacks are also perpetrated every day by foreign al-Qaida terrorists, of which there are just under 1,000 still in the country. Although al-Qaida no longer plays a significant role in military terms, we get to see them almost every single day, because the American government needs them to back up its claim that it is waging war in Iraq against al-Qaida.

In reality, the United States is still fighting for oil; al-Qaida is nothing more than a “convenient” pretext.

At the heart of your very personal book is the 22-year-old “resistance fighter” Zaid, whose brothers were killed as the result of the negligence of American soldiers. Is his personal fate symbolic of the dilemma faced by the US occupying forces in Iraq and elsewhere?

Todenhöfer: Yes, Zaid's fate is symbolic of the fate of the Iraqi population as a whole. He did not want this war and only took up arms when the American forces shot his two brothers.

You say that the West's anti-terror policy is not successful “because most politicians have never seriously reflected on the phenomenon of terrorism.” Is the Western elite really so blind to the realities of this world?

Todenhöfer: Most western politicians do not know the Muslim world. They have never spent a few days with a Muslim family. They cannot see that it is our own violence that is coming back to haunt us in the form of terrorism.

You are of the opinion that the West is “not legitimized to take action against radical Islamist movements around the world” and does not have the right to “transform the world into a bloody, chaotic battlefield in



Nothing fosters terrorism more than the West's 'war on terror'," says Todenhöfer. "Muslim countries must resolve their problems with radical Islamism themselves"

order to impose its beliefs on the world.” If not the West, then who can legitimately assume - or would be in a position to assume - this regulatory role?

Todenhöfer: The countries themselves. UN special forces should only get involved in exceptional cases. The United States are not in Iraq to help people, but to safeguard their raw material interests.

You call for Western forces to be withdrawn from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia because “the war against terrorism will not be decided militarily, but in the hearts of 1.4 billion Muslims.” How can politics really win the hearts of people in the Islamic world?

Todenhöfer: We have to treat the Muslim world as we would like to be treated ourselves, with respect and fairness. If we were to treat the Muslim world as generously as we are - quite correctly - treating Israel, there would be no more “Islamic” terrorism.



Jürgen Todenhöfer has published ten thesis along with his book on Iraq. Thesis No. 1: "The West is much more violent than the Muslim world"

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The Islamism debate

God's counterculture

Political discourse without Islamist groups would be unthinkable in many Islamic-dominated countries. But what is Islamism actually? Is it more than a fanaticism of losers? And how should the West deal with the "moderate Islamists"? Answers from Sonja Zekri

From Rabat to Damascus, religious groups are proving to be an alternative to decadent, despotic regimes, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the oldest, largest, and most influential Islamist organization. Yet we notice no shift and hear no rejoicing. Palestine, the highly symbolic reference conflict for the entire region, is in many respects an exceptional case, but most important, the Islamist movements in the neighboring states have long since renounced violence.

"Our governments know very well that the Muslim Brothers are not planning a coup," says political scientist Daa Rashwan from the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo.

One of the vital questions in the Arab



"No one knows whether Islamists have a more than functional attitude toward democracy, whether they will actually allow themselves to be voted out of office", scruples Sonja Zekri.

world is whether the Islamist groups' commitment to nonviolence is sincere or merely tactical. Islam experts like Olivier Roy advocate dauntless positivism for the time being, however. Even Islamists must be judged by their actions, not their intentions: "Sincerity is not a political concept."

Nihilistic jihadism shocks the West with seemingly relentless terrorist campaigns across all borders, but moderate Islamism succeeds locally. In Morocco, the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) supported King Muhammad VI's "Mudawana," a startlingly progressive family law which grants women the right to a divorce, raises the minimum age for marriage to 18, and, in the event of separation, stipulates equal distribution of property. Muslim Brothers in Jordan condemned the Iraq War, while their comrades in Iraq sat in the Iraqi government.

Flexible pragmatism of Islamist groups

As a result of this flexible pragmatism, in many countries Islamists have risen to become the only serious opposition. In Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood is officially banned and puts forward only independent candidates, it would receive at least thirty percent of the votes in free elections, Rashwan estimates, and even more with a lower turnout at the polls, because their adherents can be

mobilized at any time.

Socialists, liberals, and nationalists have long been marginalized. The fact that many regimes use the threatening theocracy as a pretext to deal with the secular opposition at the same time only plays into the hands of the Islamists.

As countries like Egypt and Tunisia have demonstrated, the price of suppressing Islamism in the name of freedom is the undermining of democracy. This presents a dilemma for the West. Today Islamists are among the most passionate advocates of freedom of speech, fair elections, and pluralism – genuinely Western values.

Unlikely alliances are forming. The now marginalized Egyptian protest movement "Kifaya" (Enough!), a melting pot of diverse political forces, marched together with the Muslim Brotherhood against the Mubarak gerontocracy. In Cairo, bloggers and Islamists have long protested jointly for more freedom in the Net.

Islamists' uncertain attitude toward democracy

No one knows whether Islamists have a more than functional attitude toward democracy, whether they will actually allow themselves to be voted out of office, or whether their understanding of pluralism amounts to nothing more than Bernard Lewis's phrase "One man, one vote, one time" – everyone has a vote, but only once. The young sociologist Mohsen Elahmadi from Rabat, who lived in Paris for ten years and is studying Islamist movements in Morocco, argues that the Islamists operate with "holiness" on the unholy terrain of politics and history. "They have never understood that democracy is an essential value of our age."

But party arithmetic alone does not do justice to Islamism anyway. It is not a political phenomenon, not even a

religious one, but a giant social and cultural transformation. Elahmadi calls it a "counterculture," and the German Islamic studies specialist Gudrun Krämer compares it to the Greens.

"The Greens are not politically dominant today, but Green opinions are extremely influential. From a purely functional standpoint, it is much the same with the Islamists. They determine how one dresses, what one eats. In these areas, they are incredibly successful."

Giant social and cultural transformation

Even if the Islamists never come to power, they have transformed their countries. Not only with hospitals, kindergartens, and social services, which probably have a socially stabilizing effect as well. The headscarves in Rabat, Algiers, and Alexandria, where short skirts and sleeveless dresses were still fashionable thirty years ago, are only the obvious component of the change.

Prayer niches in Cairo's metro stations, the word "Allah" set with stones in the middle of the desert, prayer watches with compass (Mecca) and Hidschra mode (Ramadan) – despite all the tricks with which an individual avoids religious obligations, the religious saturation of society is nevertheless based on a widespread consensus.

There are demonstrations against Israel and America, against the Muhammad cartoons and terrorism, even against their own government, but never against Islamization – not even by women. In this respect, any attempt at a Marxist explanation that interprets religiousness merely as a reaction to poverty and need falls short. First of all, Islamists are recruited in particular from the middle-class, technically trained intelligentsia, and, second, the Gulf



As a result of their flexible pragmatism, in many countries Islamists have risen to become the only serious opposition to repressive regime.

States prove that affluence and reactionary narrow-mindedness are not mutually exclusive.

Thus, although Mohsen Elahmadi mocks the spiritual background noise – "We are fixated on the hereafter, as though we were going to die tomorrow!" – he also welcomes it as immunization against the great leveler, globalization. "The Islamist movements are the sign of a culture that is defending itself against an outside aggressor." The Islamic world just sets the imperialism of spiritual values against the imperialism of material values, he says. That sounds like Samuel P. Huntington.

Dialectics of Islamism

Even secularists counter the issue of the rights of women and social minorities by pointing to old people's homes in the West. Justice, consideration for weaker persons, tolerance toward people of different faiths – it is all in the Koran. Even the oppression of women cannot be blamed on the Prophet but rather his exegetes. Homosexuality is banned in

many Arab countries with secular governments – yet it exists. Hatred of Israel and America is not a prerogative of the Islamists; it is only with effort channeled by official bodies.

All attempts to isolate or neutralize religious persons have thus far resulted in bloody acts of terrorism (Algeria) or repression (Egypt). They have not been able to halt either the radicalization of individual groups or the creeping Islamization of the masses.

Old, cautious Europe, which achieved secularism and victory over nationalism and fascism only through wars involving heavy losses, views this utopian infatuation with even greater horror, since no country has ever been able to save another from a painful experience.

Most important, however, the dialectics of Islamism question the liberating effect of democratic processes in general. The phobic reaction to all demands for participation by Islamists is also the result of a profound European feeling of insecurity.

Source: *Qantara.de*

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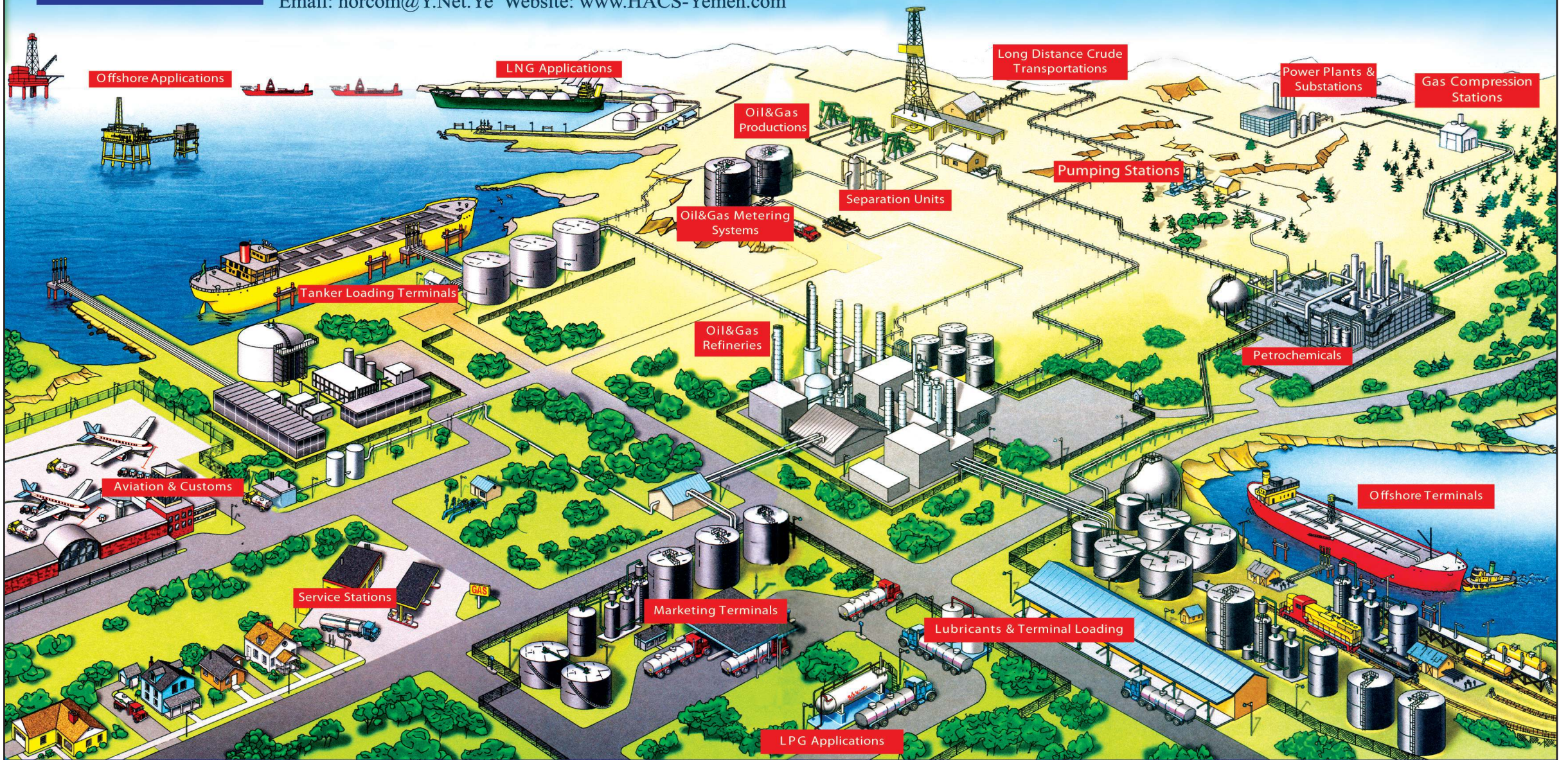


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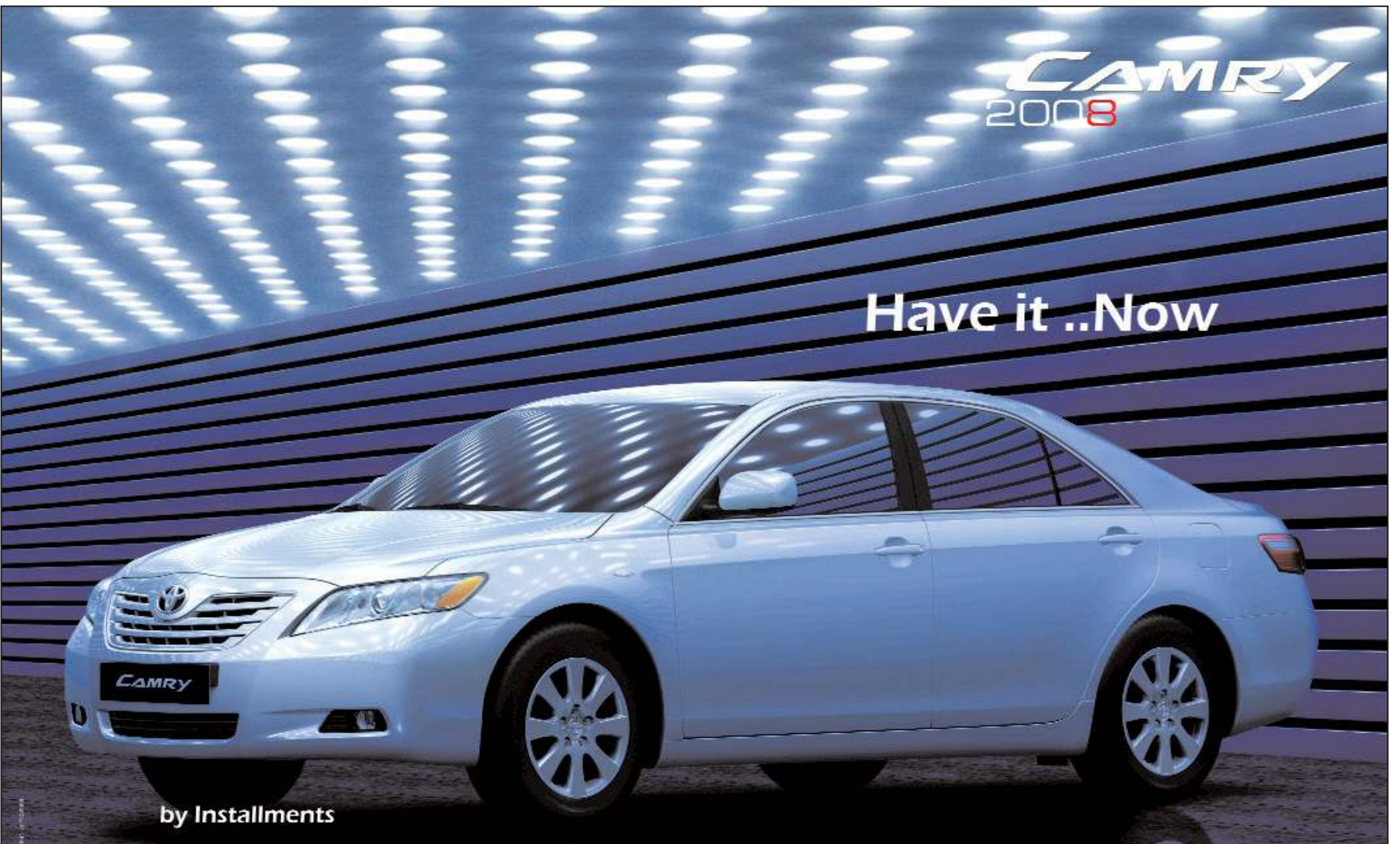
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Theatrical Performance and Cinema director to Yemen Times:

“Yemen lacks real theatrical performance”

By: Ismail Al-Ghabri

Yemeni theater flourished in the era from the 1980s until the beginning of the 1990s. At that time, there were at least 10 plays performed in the northern governorates and about 12 plays in the southern areas. After the 1994 war-related crises, the theater critically relapsed, affected by economic and political circumstances of the time. Until now, Yemeni dramatic arts in general and Yemeni theater in particular are in a state of depression.

The Yemen Times spoke with Hussein Mohammed Abdullah, Chairman of the General Corporation for Theatrical Performance and Cinema (GCTPC) about the state of theatrical performance in Yemen.

Can you tell us about the GCTPC's background?

GCTPC is considered the first cultural institution in the history of modern Yemen that combines activities of theatrical and cinema production within a unified institutional frame. It is one of the post-unity updated institutions, mainly following the Republican Decree No. 58 of 1990 that appointed leaders of cultural corporations and institutions including GCTPC.

GCTPC underwent two important stages, from 1990 to 1996 and from 1996 to 2003, the first of which saw preparation, establishment and organization of work. The second witnessed strong efforts expended by the executive, legislative and judicial bodies with the aim of helping the corporation overcome particular difficulties and obstacles.

One of the obstacles encountered by the corporation is that the draft law of its establishment, submitted in 1991, was not approved. The draft law was presented once again to the Cabinet in 1997, however, the Ministry of Culture withdrew it without any clear reason. The ministry also didn't pay attention to addressing the corporation's dire situation, nor did it complete the procedures concerned with improving the quality of theatrical performance.

Additionally, the corporation doesn't participate in any international theatrical and cinema activities, nor does it send delegates to countries, which are states parties in agreements of cultural and technical cooperation ratified by Yemen or to countries that are willing to extend financial and technical assistance to theatrical performance in Yemen.

What is the state of theatrical performance in Yemen today?

We cannot say that there is theatrical performance in Yemen. However, there



Hussein Mohammed Abdullah.

are theatrical elements scattered here and there. I know a director who is qualified and becomes more competent. I know a playwright who can be eligible and more able to create or produce distinctive masterpieces and so on. All of the theatrical elements, however, remain scattered, and therefore need to be brought together under a unified frame in order to demonstrate a satisfactory and independent performance. Like any school or college in the society, GCTPC has to establish a strong relationship with members of the society and touch upon their needs.

Unfortunately, all the theatrical components are only organized on any national occasions such as celebrations and festivals. Consequently, we find that theater-in-the-round is primarily exploited by the government to cover particular occasions or events. Theatrical performance in Yemen seems to be occasion-oriented at the expense of meeting needs of the society.

Similarly, the cinema doesn't play its role as required by the society. When I request the relevant agencies in the government to allocate a specific portion of public funds for increasing quality of cinema production, I usually find that my request is impossible to be processed or even considered. This is the situation of cinema and theatrical performance in the country.

What we persistently need is answer the three important questions of 'what, why and how?' Had we specified what we want and why we want it, it would have been very easy to answer how we can get things done. Regretfully, we ask how we can do something before we specify what we exactly want and why. This is a breach in the thinking process.

Attributing any failure to the political will of the country is impossible to suggest workable solutions to problems like those related to theatrical performance and cinema. Decision-makers should have their ideas reflected in specific decisions and specific policies

or plans. Development in Yemen doesn't proceed according to the scheduled priorities. As a result, any development project not based on cultural background is doomed to fail even before it is begun.

Do you think that Yemen's current climate can help improve the situation of theatrical performance?

It is possible to have good theatrical performance and cinema in Yemen's current climate. We are now working on developing digital cinema and have plans to launch new satellite channels. But as I said earlier: do we want something or not? The matter is associated with determination. If we want something, we can do whatever we want, because nothing is impossible.

What is impossible is that when someone has no control of what he/she wants to get done. We have capacities and facilities but they are scattered. Many international donors and countries may extend much aids and assistance to be used for improving theatrical performance and cinema, as well as achieving the sought-after goals. Such aid, be they funds or technical assistance, may help create financial and structural bases for cinema and theatrical performance, but they remain unused until they expire.

Did you submit proposals to international donors interested in culture and theatrical performance to assist you technically or financially?

Our tragedy is that we follow the same routine, coupled with the absence of a comprehensive vision to resolve pressing issues. Yemen's GCTPC is not a UNESCO member. However, the Yemeni government is a UNESCO member. The problem is that we don't know how to deal with things in light of standing situations.

Yemen's Ministry of Culture is supposed to adopt any theatrical and cinema matters or issues at each international event and via effective communication with international organizations interested in theatrical performance. [The Minister would] then ask me to conduct relevant studies. We need to exert hard effort to address such issues, as well as set up plans to strengthen our international relations with other countries. Through agreements of cultural and technical cooperation, we submitted proposals on how to create an effective mechanism to contain or activate any relevant agreements.

We sometimes find that minor or trivial matters turn out to be central or key issues and vice versa. Reversing things is an indicator of upside-down thinking. For instance, some government ministries lack effective plans,



All the theatrical components are only organized on any national occasions such as celebrations and festivals.

YT PHOTO BY MOHAMMED AL-JABRI.

while a minister appears to work in line with a ruling party's plan in the area of culture, tourism, transportation, education or higher education. At this point, the joint vision must be organized so that it is a joint responsibility. Developing a plan in any sector is a crucial task, which must undergo effective assessment throughout the different stages unless a periodic evaluation is conducted and a specific objective is set up in advance.

GCTPC seems to have been marginalized since Yemen's unity was established. What is the reason for this?

There are numerous considerations that we sometimes see as related to the state's vision or the government's vision of this culture that have not yet come into effect. In the event that the government's vision of this culture is reflected in plans and strategies, it is not applied in reality. This makes me liken GCTPC to a fetus outside the womb since it is existing in reality as a name and not as an institution.

Today, we are living the age of knowledge and media, which both constitute basic elements, plus a basic approach to the economic, social and political development. GCTPC receives only YR 40 million a year to pay for workers' salaries, facility rents, electricity, telephone and water bills, and transportation costs, plus other expenses. How one can imagine an institution receiving a very small budget to improve the quality of theatrical performance and cinema? Even worse, some GCTPC-owned facilities were plundered by influential individuals while others were used as mosques. From a religious viewpoint, mosques must be constructed in legally-owned

plots of lands. These things are part of the pervasive cultural violations, thus helping the nationwide cultural crisis worsen.

As people worldwide are marking World Theater Day (March 27, 2008), did you prepare anything for the occasion?

It is an international occasion through which people pay close attention to theatrical issues. The corporation is not newly furnished ahead of World Theater Day celebrations. However, this is needed to let other people know that Yemen has theaters and cinema.

"When I request the relevant agencies in the government to allocate a specific portion of public funds for increasing quality of cinema production, I usually find that my request is impossible to be processed or even considered."

What are the elements required to present theatrical performance?

These elements are facilities and competent human resources. The government should care about human resources, and train and develop them. Human resources need to be developed in a way enabling them to deal with elements of the theater while the concerned agencies in the government should start increasing people's awareness about the significance of theatrical performance.

If schools have no theaters, theatrical performance will be absent nationwide.

In addition, much attention should be drawn to drama, mainly as psychologists recommend that psychodrama should be applied while treating individuals suffering from mental disorders. What we need in this regard is to concentrate on drama as a key to education and upbringing, as well as to provoking emotions and activating mental faculties.

Did theatrical performance succeed as an experience in Yemen?

Undoubtedly, theatrical performance as an experience in Yemen, be it at the level of amateurs or professionals, reached commendable achievements and successes between 1910 and 1987. The theatrical experience played a pivotal role in forming various skilled bands, deep-rooting some theater-related traditions, as well as to let audience know about the theatrical art and attract theatergoers to watch performances and interact with them wherever they take place.

Despite the notable achievements and successes reached by the experience, which overcame numerous obstacles over time, it doesn't possess all the real components. For a considerable amount of time, theater fluctuated between failure and success, thereby failing to achieve the sought-after objectives. It also failed to meet people's expectations or attract more audiences to the theater.

Do you have any final comments?

We expect the government to pay close attention to theatrical performance and cinema, as well as care about distinctive actors and actresses in order for Yemen to occupy a prestigious status in the world of today.

Alaa al-Aswani,

The Arab World's Literary Taboo-Breaker

Alaa al-Aswani is currently the most successful Arab novelist. He was the only Arabic-language writer to participate in this year's lit. COLOGNE in Germany, the largest literary festival in Europe, where he read from his latest novel "Chicago". Samir Grees was listening

The room is packed; a sell-out. A full half-hour before the reading is due to begin a large crowd has already gathered; an audience composed of both Germans and Arabs, all eagerly awaiting the appearance of the writer of "The Yacoubian Building", contemporary Arab literature's most successful novel.

Alaa al-Aswani is a celebrity and the filming of his novel, with Egyptian stars such as Adel Imam, Nour al-Sherif and Yousra, has only served to increase his fame.

Al-Aswani is the only Arabic-language author to appear at the lit.COLOGNE. As he enters the room where the reading is to take place, the applause is warm and prolonged. The tall dark-skinned man greets his public with a smile, polite, yet with a touch of

reticence. But as he reads from his second novel "Chicago" and begins answering questions, he visibly warms to the situation, his reserve melting away, the confident successful novelist coming to the fore.

The "Patrick Süskind of Arabic literature"

Alaa al-Aswani is a phenomenon in modern Arabic literature, simply the most successful novelist ever. His literary success can be compared to the Patrick Süskind phenomenon in Germany, an accomplishment that has turned him into one of Egypt's most lucrative exports. His first novel "The Yacoubian Building", published in 2002, has sold more than 150,000 copies in the Arab world. Even the Egyptian Nobel laureate Nagib Mahfuz cannot match this volume of sales.

Al-Aswani's success is astonishing; especially in a region where the illiteracy rate is extremely high and there are very few readers per head of population. Writers in the Arab world in general are not high earners, works of fiction can expect print runs of one or two thousand at most, with sales spread over a number of years.

The writer who can afford to live on the proceeds of his literary endeavours is a rare beast indeed. Alaa al-Aswani is one of this select group. And yet he has preferred to remain a dentist. His studies took him to Cairo and Chicago, both of which cities have had one of his best-selling novel dedicated to them.

Panoramic visions of Cairo and Chicago

"It was clear to me from my first day on at Illinois University that one day I was going to write a novel about this unique cultural melting pot," al-Aswani tells his listeners in Cologne. By 2007 the dentist had committed his idea to paper and his second novel, "Chicago", which looks at the lives of Egyptian immigrants in the USA was published.

The real subject of the novel is Egypt rather than the United States, however. "Chicago" - like "The Yacoubian Building" - is a panoramic novel: peopled by an array of students, lecturers and their families, and American professors are the characters in this novel.

There are Egyptians who have been living in the US for years and now feel themselves to be American, while others

suffer - to varying degrees - from homesickness. Most are living a conflict between their old and their new lives; all are living under the watchful eye of the Egyptian secret service.

"Chicago" went through 11 reprints within a year and has now been translated into several languages. The German translation by Hartmut Fähndrich appeared in February, published by the Lenos publishing house.

Taboo-breaker for the Arab world

What is the secret of Alaa al-Aswani's success? His work goes down very well in the Arab world because, no respecter of taboos, a writer who skilfully, subtly and humorously probes the no-go areas of Arab culture: politics, religion and sex.

His books do not shy away from detailed descriptions of both homosexual and heterosexual acts. The deplorable political and social conditions prevailing in his country - endemic corruption, social injustice, but also the discrimination against the Egyptian Christians (Copts), as well as feigned piety and Islamism are all put to the sword. Al-Aswani's special skill lies

in his ability to deal with the big taboo subjects in a straightforward way and in a language that people can understand.

It's a style, of course, which leaves little room for the drawing of subtle distinctions or deep, convincing psychological analysis. An overload of cliché and melodramatic scenes is characteristic of both novels and led the Arabist Andreas Pflitsch to compare to "The Yacoubian Building" to a well-known German soap opera.

Sociology rather than literature

German press reviews were almost unanimous in their praise of Aswani's first novel, "The Yacoubian Building". Some critics were even moved to compare Aswani with the great Egyptian writer Mahfuz. The thing that was very striking about the reception given "The Yacoubian Building" in Germany was that it wasn't necessarily the novel's literary qualities that were praised, much more the way it reflected the social and political ills of the country on the Nile.

It was praised as a work that provided a key to understanding Arab-Islamic society and that gave an answer to the question of what it was that made a

terrorist.

So it came as no surprise when "The Yacoubian Building" scooped the Bruno Kreisky Prize for the best political book of 2007. It was also no surprise when "Chicago" failed to be nominated for a major Arab literary prize such as the recently initiated Arab Booker Prize.

Al-Aswani's willingness to challenge taboos, his sense of humour, clarity of structure, simple language and gripping narrative technique have brought him success not only in Egypt, Lebanon and Morocco, but in France, Italy and Germany as well.

Is the al-Aswani bubble about to burst? Are we witnessing a fleeting phenomenon, a literary shooting star about to burn itself out? One thing is certain; he has already proved himself a writer with the ability to captivate and enthrall a vast readership. And his talent is proving more durable than many in the Arab world were prepared to allow following the first novel. Al-Aswani is still brimming with ideas and enthusiasm. He is currently busily at work on his third novel.

Source: www.qantara.de

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Yemeni cemetery rituals and customs

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Like people in any nation, Yemenis have their own customs, rites and rituals that they observe at grave sites.

In some northern rural districts of Yemen, the relatives of a deceased person will go on the third day after his/her death to visit the grave site, bringing with them as many poor people and children as possible. The relatives also bring with them large quantities of food, which often includes bread, soup, meat, 'aseed or hareesh (a popular porridge made of wheat) and many other dishes.

They bring children and poor people to eat the food for charity in the name of the deceased. The relatives, poor people and children come to the cemetery in the early morning at half past six and stay there for about two hours before the entire group leaves the cemetery. The poor people and children eat the food until there is nothing left. The idea behind this is that the relatives of the deceased give to charity so that the poor and the children will pray for the soul of the deceased. Afterwards, the children leave the cemetery praying for the dead

loudly in chorus while the older people pray with quiet voices.

When they finished eating in the cemetery, the relatives of the dead pour ghee (clarified butter) on the children's heads. "People used to pour ghee on the heads of children as an indication that ghee, cows and children are examples of the mercy of God," said Arwa Othman, an author and cultural figure who researches Yemen's social customs and practices.

Before the 1960s, Yemen was so poor that many of its citizens couldn't even afford to eat. So when people enjoyed a large and rich meal, they would boast about it. Consequently, the children who went to the cemetery on the third day after a burial had a good meal and would then boast to their peers by showing off the ghee in their hair as evidence.

What's comic is that when children used to leave the cemeteries, they didn't go home to wash, but rather went to find their friends to show off their full bellies and ghee-dressed hair. But because of the sun's heat, the ghee quickly began to smell rotten.

"Visiting cemeteries and spreading food on poor people and children indicate that there is a kind of dialogue between the dead and his relatives," said Othman.

Another custom is that when children

and poor people see a funeral, they go to the cemetery and ask the relatives of the dead for money once they have finished with the burial. Sometimes, they insist on getting money or else they make a scene by shouting out that the deceased's relative are poor to the other mourners attending the funeral. "The biggest concern I had after the death of my father was how to provide money for the poor people and children who attended the funeral of my father. To do that, I was compelled to borrow money from some of my friends," said Mohammed Najji Musaed, a mourner who interred his father at Al-Mashhad cemetery. "My son died and I spent all my money and the money that I borrowed from relatives and friends. So on the day of his funeral, I didn't have any money with me to give to the children and poor people. I was compelled to avoid them," said Ahmed Al-Naqeeb, who buried his son at Al-Sayah cemetery.

Nowadays, the poor people and children who come to cemeteries seeking money during funerals are beggars and poor passers-by. They choose cemeteries because they know that the relatives of the dead always give out money as charity to entice God to forgive the deceased's sins. "According to a hadith of the

prophet Mohammed (pbuh), nothing reaches someone after his death except for four things, and one of them is charity. So we give money requesting God to wipe clean the deceased's sins," said Mohammed Al-Hammadi, an imam (preacher) at Ammar Bin Yasser mosque in Sana'a.

In some districts of Yemen like Dhamar, Al-Jawf and Amran, people hold superstitions about death and funerals. They believe that someone who has lost over six of their own children is able to know a recently deceased person's debts and sins, and whether they will go to heaven or hell. "In our village in Ans district, Dhamar governorate, a man lost eight children and people believed that in the evening, his soul visited people who died and knows the situations in their tombs," explained Younis Al-Ansi a villager whose grandparents passed away recently. "The relatives of the deceased used to go to him on the second day after the death to ask about their relative."

These burial customs might not seem crucial to follow or religiously mandated, but as Othman stated, "regardless of being true or false, these [traditions] indicate the strong relations between the dead and the living that God asked us to keep up."

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Yemeni folklore gets theatrical at French Cultural Center

By: Talal Al-Khawlani
Shawfiq Al-Homaid
For YemenTimes

SANA'A, March 26 — The French Cultural Center in Sana'a presented actress and director Brigitte Carle in a theatrical performance of French and Yemeni folklore kept alive over time through the oral storytelling tradition.

Carle entitled her performance "Petit Deviendra Grand," or "Small Will Become Big," which she said refers to the strong relationship between the wisdom of children and the knowledge of the elderly. The main theme of the performance was that children and the elderly are not separated by life stages, only by years, according to Carle.

The show, which also featured over 20 local actors and actresses, allowed French and Yemeni actors to exchange traditional tales onstage that recounted Yemen's history through fables, common sayings, jokes and poetry. The storytelling show also aimed to convey the importance of performance to young people and to cultivate Yemeni theatrical talent.

Carle's first visit to Yemen was 20 years ago, when she came as an adventurous tourist and left having discovered a love of Yemeni and tribal culture. Carle returned to Yemen in 2005 to visit tribal villages, mainly in North Yemen, for five weeks in order to acquire more folklore and tribal wisdom. She created a performance out of this experience called "Safar." Carle returned again to Yemen in 2007, but only for a short time.

"The stories and folklore are so rich and informative," said Carle. But she

warns that these oral storytelling traditions are fading away from Yemeni culture. In the past, stories were told orally and narrated continuously over time within communities, so they remained fresh and survived.

"It is really better for the Yemeni youth to go to villages and collect stories to be taught and narrated," said Carle. This was the second time she performed her work at the French Cultural Center in Sana'a.



The team that participated in the show.

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