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Ceasefire committee resumes negotiations in Amran and Hamdan

■ Amal Al-Yarisi

SANA'A, July 2—The field committee assigned to resolve the conflict between the Houthis and the 310th Armored Brigade resumed negotiations with the warring parties in Amran governorate and the Hamdan district of Sana'a on Wednesday with the objective of getting both sides to withdraw their forces.

Amer Al-Marani, Houthi representative in the ceasefire committee, accused Brigadier Hamid Al-Qushaibi, commander of the 310th Armored Brigade, of refusing to hand over positions taken since the outbreak of violence. Al-Marani said the Houthis would evacuate their locations when the other party



After a ceasefire deal proposed by the Defense Ministry on June 23 failed to materialize, negotiations have resumed between the belligerents under the auspices of a ceasefire committee.

does so.

The committee visited Al-Jami-ma, Bani Maimon, Al-Mihshash Mountain and Bait Shuqair areas, according to Al-Marani.

"The two parties will evacuate their positions late Wednesday," he added.

Ali Al-Sermi, a leading member of the Islah Party in Hamdan, accused the Houthis of routinely breaking the truce, adding that the military should not have to evacuate its positions as it represents the state.

Although the Defense Ministry

proposed a truce on June 23, sporadic clashes between the Houthis and tribesmen backed by the military have continued.

The Arhab tribe, whose stronghold is in north Sana'a, accused the Houthis of opening a new fighting front in Arhab. The tribe said the Houthis launched attacks in Arhab on Sunday and Monday. "Houthi militants shelled many areas in Arhab in an attempt to provoke Arhab tribesmen and to open a new fighting front," read a statement by the tribe.

Yemen loses \$1.8 million after Norwegian oil company suspends production

■ Ali Saeed

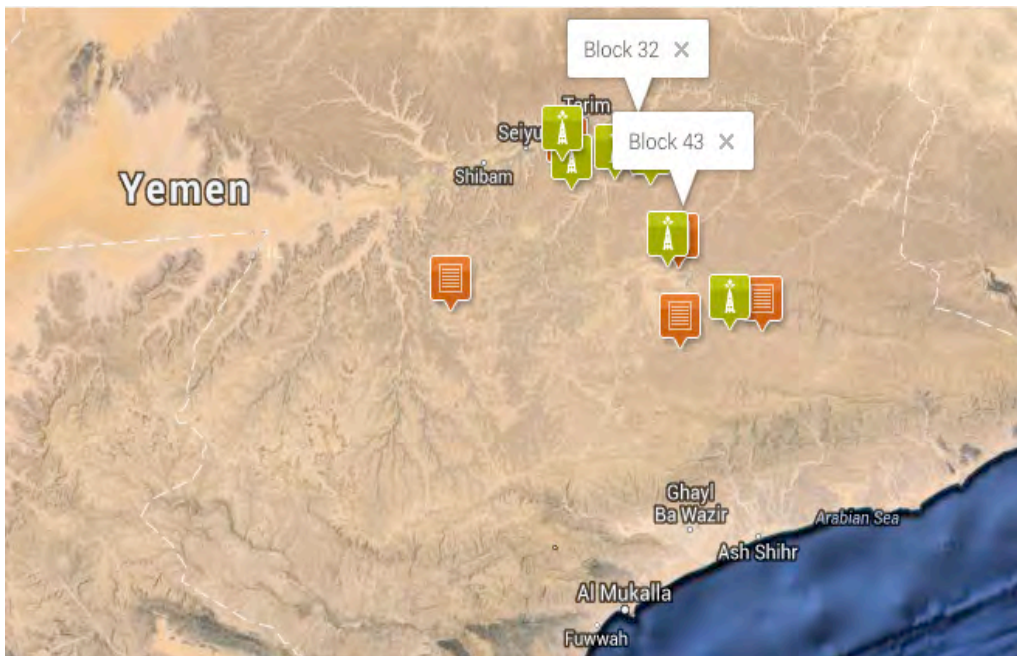
SANA'A, July 2—The government of Yemen lost \$1.8 million (YR387 million) in ten days after a strike at DNO, the Oslo-listed oil and gas company operating in Hadramout governorate, began on June 22, according to the company.

On June 24 the company announced the suspension of production at its Block 32 and Block 43 operations.

The suspension took place shortly after around 80 local DNO workers began a full strike demanding an increase in their monthly salaries and full medical insurance for their families, according to Riyadh Al-Jaradi, coordinator of the DNO Workers' Union in Hadramout.

The total production of the two blocks under normal conditions is 3,400 barrels of oil per day (bpd). Of this, 1,600 bpd is apportioned to the company with the remainder going to the government of Yemen, according to a company statement.

"The company is committed to resuming operations in Yemen where it has been active since 1998 and is engaged with the government and the unions to resolve the outstanding issues," the DNO statement read.



80 DNO workers went on strike over a wage and benefits dispute.

The suspension of production caused a total loss to both the company and the government of \$3.4 million (YR731 million); the government sustained \$1.8 million (YR387 million) in losses, and DNO \$1.6 million (YR344 million). These figures were calculated based on the ten-day period between June 22 and July 1. However, the suspension remains in effect and losses continue to mount.

Anees Al-Hitari, head of the DNO Worker's Union in Sana'a, said

in a conversation with the Yemen Times that the Ministry of Oil set up a committee to resolve the issue between the company and the workers following the start of the full strike on June 22.

Representatives of the DNO Workers' Union met on Tuesday with the Ministry of Oil committee and the company administration, according to Al-Hitari.

"The committee sided with the company and said that the company is unable at the moment to

increase workers' monthly salaries," said Al-Hitari. "The strike will continue until they increase our salaries."

In addition to Block 32 and Block 43, DNO has a stake in four other blocks in Hadramout. Block 47 has yet to be opened due to local disputes, despite being established in 2010; DNO is a partner in Block 53, which is run by a different company; and blocks 72 and 84 are still in the exploration phase.

For the Yemeni government, suspension of oil production is very damaging because oil exports make up 70 percent of government revenue. Oil production has been in sharp decline since January of this year because of the repeated sabotage of oil infrastructure by various armed groups.

In the first quarter of this year the government only generated \$597.24 million (YR128 trillion) from oil, whereas the fuel imports bill amounted to \$974.9 million (YR210 trillion) for the same period.

Fighting in Amran paralyzes Hajja

■ Ali Saeed

SANA'A, July 2—Residents of Hajja governorate are in need of urgent assistance due to ongoing fighting in nearby Amran governorate between the 310th Armored Brigade and Houthi rebels which resulted in the electricity lines linking the two governorates being cut 20 days ago, leaving residents of Hajja without power. Repairs to the electricity wires were prevented when unidentified militants fired on repair workers Sunday.

"The electricity in Hajja has been off for about 20 days. The governorate will experience a humanitarian crisis if the situation continues un-

resolved," said Ali Hassan, a local journalist in Hajja who reports for the state-run Al-Jumhuria newspaper.

A technical team from the state-run Public Electricity Corporation failed last Sunday to repair the damaged electricity wires in Amran after unidentified militants fired at the team, according to the Defense Ministry's website.

Two people accompanying the technical team were shot at and injured: Ahmed Ameen Al-Qudami, the son of the Hajja Local Council's secretary general, and Abdullah Utaifa, a guard for the secretary general. The secretary general was not harmed in the incident.

The Houthis, an armed group based in Sa'ada, and Islah, the main opposition party, exchanged accusations over the incident through their respective websites. The Houthis maintain that the commander of the 310th Armored Brigade is loyal to the Islah Party.

Much of Hajja's water supply has also been cut off as a result of the electricity cut. According to Hassan, two major public hospitals have partially suspended operations due to the lack of electricity, fuel and water. Hotels in Harad and Abs, two major cities in the governorate, have been forced to close.

There has been an increase in the price of diesel on the black market

in Hajja, from YR4,000 (\$18.6) per 20 liters to YR9,000 (\$41.8). The official subsidized price is YR2,000 (\$9.3).

Even operations at the Al-Tawal border crossing with Saudi Arabia in Harad were suspended for hours on Monday and Tuesday because the computers were inoperable due to the lack of electricity, according to Khaled Al-Bajili, the on-duty security operations officer in Harad.

"Nobody can find even a cool bottle of water in Hajja because there is no electricity," said Hassan. "The people are running out of patience and violence might be triggered at any time because of the government's neglect."

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460 tons of dates blocked or confiscated



Over the past year Yemen imported 26,000-28,000 tons of dates, mostly from Saudi Arabia, according to the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

■ Madiha Al-Junaid

SANA'A, July 2—The Yemen Standardization, Metrology and Quality Control Organization (YSMO) said on Sunday that a total of 460 tons of dates that had expired or otherwise did not meet consumer standards were confiscated or sent back at customs ports around the country over the past year.

The dates were either sent back to the exporting country or destroyed and “more than 28,000 tins of dates were prohibited from entering the local markets,” according to Ibrahim Al-Hasr, the deputy general manager of technical affairs at the organization.

YSMO is a governmental body described by the International Organization for Standardization as “the only national authority specialized in standards and specifications. Its objectives are to prepare standards for the fields of production, construction services, hall marking as well as the distribution, importing and exporting of goods.”

Al-Hasr said that the organization does not monitor local markets and is only responsible for the country's customs ports. He said there are two main reasons the dates were rejected or disposed of—the first is that they were “brought into the country by other governmental authorities as if they were for personal and not commercial use and the proper procedures were not followed;” and the second being that the dates had expired.

Both the YSMO and the Ministry of Trade and Industry say that the expiry date of dates is a maximum of one year after the date of packaging. Mahmoud Al-Naqeeb, the general director of the Consumer Protection Department at the Ministry of Trade and Industry, said that dates can expire earlier than the one year maximum depending on storing conditions, which many distributors and retailers fail to comply with.

“Many people think that the dates sold in the markets are from this current season, however, they are mostly from the last season,” Al-

Naqeeb said. “Because importing season starts [one or two months after Ramadan] in August, date sellers store the dates for the next year until Ramadan comes.”

Al-Hasr said the harvest season for dates begins in August or September, and therefore, dates from the current year have yet to be harvested. For this reason consumers buy last year's dates during Ramadan.

One step in reducing the quantity of expired dates, Al-Hasr believes, is for “the countries importing dates to Yemen to begin by fulfilling local market needs before selling to other countries.”

According to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, about 90 percent of dates imported to Yemen over the last year have come from Saudi Arabia, with smaller amounts from Iraq and the United Arab Emirates.

Dates are sold in large quantities during Ramadan because by tradition they are the first thing fasting Muslims eat for iftar to break their fast.

Leading Ethiopian opposition figure detained in Yemen

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

SANA'A, July 2—The Ginbot-7 Movement for Justice, Freedom and Democracy, an outlawed political organization in Ethiopia, claimed on Monday that the movement's secretary general Andargachew Tsegie has been detained in Yemen since June 23.

According to the organization's website, Tsegie was arrested at Sana'a International Airport while in transit from Ethiopia to London. Tsegie is an Ethiopian with British citizenship.

The circumstances of his arrest remain unclear.

In a press release published on the official Ginbot-7 website on June 30, the movement said that it had tried for a week to release Tsegie, adding that it had asked the Yemeni government not to hand him over to the Ethiopian government. “We will retaliate in any way and at any place for any harm done to the body, spirit and life of Andargachew Tsegie,” the movement warned.

Khalid Sheikh, the director of Sana'a International Airport, denied any knowledge of Tsegie's alleged detention.

The Yemen Times contacted the Ethiopian Embassy in Sana'a, which claims to have no informa-



Tsegie's Ginbot-7 is classed as a 'terrorist group' by Ethiopia's government.

tion on Tsegie's alleged arrest so far. The British Embassy could not be reached.

Ethiopian news website Awramba Times cited a senior Ethiopian official as saying “Yemeni authorities will definitely issue an extradition warrant and he will face justice based on the Ethio-Yemeni Security Pact (EYSP), which was signed in 1999 between the late Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Yemeni's former President Ali Abdullah Saleh.”

The website's article did not give

any further details of the arrest.

Ginbot-7 is a political movement that was founded by Dr. Berhanu Nega and that, according to its mission statement, aims to establish a national political system in which political authority is gained through peaceful and democratic means.

The Ethiopian government listed Ginbot-7 as a “terrorist group” in June 2011. Tsegie allegedly survived an attempted assassination in November 2013 in Asmara that Ginbot-7 holds the Ethiopian regime responsible for.

Land dispute in Shabwa claims 17 lives

■ Amal Al-Yarisi

SANA'A, July 2—Seventeen were killed and three others injured Tuesday in a land dispute between the Al-Balharith and Al-Tuhaif tribes.

The land in question lies on the border of Shabwa and Marib governorates. It is believed to be rich in resources and is in close proximity to oil facilities.

Tension between the groups has

been ongoing for approximately one year. Tribal mediation efforts briefly yielded a cooling down of tensions after both sides pledged not to take over disputed land.

Nasser Al-Mulaish, the Shabwa deputy governor, said that fierce fighting prompted security forces to intervene.

According to Al-Mulaish, both sides have used rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and machine guns, which have so far claimed 17

lives. However, he insists that tribal mediation is the best method of resolving conflicts between tribes.

Ahmed Salem, from the Al-Tuhaif tribe, said that the situation calmed down on Wednesday. He added that there has been no military intervention or tribal mediation efforts to end the clashes.

In similar tribal clashes last year as many as ten people were killed. The security apparatus failed to resolve the problem.

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

International Business & Technical Consultants, Inc. (IBTCI), a U.S.-based international development consulting company, is seeking a Communications Officer to lead its communications and outreach activities. This is a full time position based in Sana'a, Yemen, under the Yemen Monitoring and Evaluation Program (YMEP) implemented by IBTCI.

YMEP provides M&E services and support to USAID/Yemen and its implementing partners, with a central goal of assessing the effects of Mission programming on stability in Yemen.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

A. Strategic Communications Management:

1. Works closely with the Mission to maintain and update the Communication Strategy and for assuring its adherence to USAID policy and to the US Mission's Strategic Communication Plan.
2. Facilitates information access and sharing among implementing partners (IP) and USAID/Yemen. Provides advice to USAID staff on the selection, targeting, and placement of potential information consistent with the Strategy.
3. Responsible for proposing, articulating and implementing USAID/Yemen outreach and communication policies and procedures. This may include working with IPs and USG staff to clarify roles and responsibilities and provide templates for various communications tools, standards for creating and finalizing materials, and guidelines for planning and managing events.

B. Media Affairs:

1. Works closely with the US Embassy's Public Diplomacy Office (PD), the USAID mission and its IPs to manage a coordinated media relation effort.
2. Reviews the daily press to keep abreast of coverage that relates to development in Yemen and USAID activities.
3. Advises and works with PD to expand opportunities for coverage of USAID assistance, including all media formats. Works with YMEP communications subcontractor and helps USAID's Technical Office and IPs to define prospective activities for coverage, participates in field inspections and final selection, and accompanies TV/radio crews to site locations.
4. Plans, researches, drafts, and/or edits press releases and fact sheets on behalf of USAID/Yemen. Coordinates these with the USAID, IPs and PD to produce and release timely, accurate, and useful written material for local media and other media.

C. Public Events Management:

1. Works with USAID to plan, schedule, publicize, and carry out activities to present USAID/Yemen programs to the public, including a range of communications tools and distribution to a variety of audiences, with particular field trips to specific events or activities, as well as outreach and media coverage for overall programming.
2. Advises USAID and IPs on events and media activities and confirms cultural sensitive and coherence with the Communications Strategy.
3. Coordinates drafting of press releases for placement in the Yemen press and on the USAID website homepage. Oversees the arrangement of translation or interpretation services by YMEP to the Mission.

D. Production of Public Information and Publicity Material:

1. Oversees the production of high quality, targeted information and briefing materials, ensuring suitability to audience and message coherence.
2. Ensures that all materials produced by YMEP meet USAID branding guidance and advises USAID and IPs on USAID branding policy.
3. Identifies communication products requiring Arabic translation and coordinates with YMEP subcontractor to ensure completeness and accuracy. Makes recommendations for distribution of Arabic language materials and other communication products.
4. Maintains an up-to-date file of information on where USAID programs are working in particular regions of Yemen, including tracking successful site visits and lessons learned for future visits and for reporting purposes. Manages and updates country-specific background information, including economic, political and human development indicator summaries, sub-regional and sectoral information and maps to be relied upon for briefings and other purposes.
5. Responsible for updating (and redesigning as necessary) USAID/Yemen's website to ensure that its content will have optimal impact in providing information about USAID/Yemen and its programs for a wide range of audiences as well as the YMEP Project Website. Responsibilities include coordinating the selection of information displayed on the website, clearing content, and overseeing placement.

E. Editorial Quality Control:

Acts as editor of YMEP documents, reports, and correspondence. Responsible for ensuring that documents meet quality standards.

QUALIFICATIONS:

Minimum Requirements

- A. Education: A bachelor's degree in journalism, communications, international relations or development, public administration, public relations, or a related field is required. A master's degree in one of the above fields is preferred.
- B. Prior Work Experience: Seven years of progressively responsible experience in related fields is required, with at least three years of experience in public relations and/or journalism. Previous work experience with USG or another international development organization is highly desirable. Experience in stressful environments with high workload, especially conflict and post-conflict environments, is highly desirable.
- C. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:
 - i. Superior writing and communication skills and a keen editorial eye for detail and quality of communication products.
 - ii. Demonstrated skills and extensive hands-on experience in public and media relations are required.
 - iii. A broad understanding of issues related to international development in general and stabilization programming in particular is required.
 - iv. Demonstrated organizational, workflow management and the ability to work in a diverse team environment is required.
 - v. The qualified person must be a strategic thinker with operational planning experience, analytical ability, excellent communication skills, and the capacity to convert planning concepts into firm plans to meet a variety of contingencies.
 - vi. S/he must be comfortable working independently, managing several activities at once, and working under pressure to meet very short deadlines.
 - vii. S/he must have management ability to plan and execute media campaigns and programs.
- D. Language Proficiency: Native speaker of English; excellent written and oral communication skills are required. Basic Arabic language skills are a very strong asset.
- E. Computer skills: Excellent working use of MS Office, MS Outlook, and MS PowerPoint are required. Familiarity with various new media applications and online sharing tools is required. Basic web design and maintenance is desirable.

TO APPLY

Please send a cover letter and full Curriculum Vitae (CV) by e-mail to recruiting@ibtci.com with subject line: YMEP – Communications Officer. No phone calls please. Only finalists will be contacted.



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UN calls out Southern Movement for its treatment of children

■ Yemen Times Staff

Yemen's Southern Movement, or Hirak, was named Tuesday in a report about the abuse of children in conflict areas released annually by the UN Secretary General.

The report listed several parties that recruit and use children in operations, kill and maim children, sexually abuse children, or attack schools or hospitals. The Southern Movement was not one of the parties officially added to the list, but it was mentioned in the text of the report.

Once added to the list, the UN intensifies its engagement in the affected country and includes potential Security Council sanctions.

"Such sanctions can include arms embargoes, travel bans, asset freezes, and referrals to the International Criminal Court against the officials responsible for violations," according to a statement released by Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Tuesday.

"For government armed forces or non-state armed groups to be removed from the list, the UN must verify that parties have ended the abuses, primarily with time-bound action plans."

The Southern Movement was started in 2007, following accusations of unfair division of resources between the former North and South, as well as other grievances, including the forced retirement of thousands of military officers and civil workers following the 1994 civil war. Many in the movement continue to call for secession, a return to the pre-unity days of 1990.

According to a recent UNICEF re-

port, separatists have gone as far as physically preventing children and school staff from entering schools.

"Every Saturday and Wednesday, nearly 50,000 children in Aden governorate in the south are denied access to their schools... [the Southern Movement] has called for 'civil disobedience' in the governorate to draw attention to their demands," reads the report.

"Through this, many schools are forced to close, while staff and students risk attack or intimidation."

In March, Ahmed Obaid, a military analyst and former deputy head of monitoring in the Personnel Department of the Defense Ministry, told the Yemen Times that the official number of registered child soldiers employed by the Defense Ministry was 20,000, in addition to the children recruited privately by warring parties in Yemen from 2011 through 2013.

Eight new parties were added to this year's list of abusers, including the Nigerian group, Boko Haram, accused of attacks on schools and the killing and maiming of children, according to the report.

However, HRW says it cited inconsistencies in the UN monitoring, "which may reduce the report's effectiveness."

"All groups on the secretary-general's list of shame for their serious violations against innocent children deserve the world's contempt," said Bede Sheppard, deputy children's rights director at HRW. "All parties named in the UN report need to work with the UN to put a stop to abuses against children and to protect them from harm."

The human rights group also criticized the UN for not holding the Taliban to the same standards in Pakistan as the group does in Afghanistan.

"Taliban forces make the list for their attacks on schools and teachers in Afghanistan, but not for similar attacks in Pakistan," the statement read.

It also criticized the UN for dragging its feet in adding Thai rebel group BRN-C to the list for violations in southern Thailand. This is the first year BRN-C made the UN's list, but the UN Secretary General has referenced attacks on schools dating back to 2010 and HRW has documented the group's recruitment of children and attacks on schools since 2007.

"Child soldiers and schools in India, Pakistan, and Thailand deserve the same protection from the United Nations as children suffering from other conflicts," Sheppard said. "Unless all groups are rebuked and punished for similar offenses,



The Southern Movement was mentioned in a recent UN report but was not added to the official UN Secretary General's list of parties that recruit and use child soldiers.

the credibility and impartiality of the UN process is threatened."

Yemen did not make the list, despite admissions from government officials that the Yemeni government continues to use and recruit child soldiers.

In March, Ahmed Obaid, a military analyst and former deputy head of monitoring in the Personnel Department of the Defense Ministry, told the Yemen Times that the

official number of registered child soldiers employed by the Defense Ministry was 20,000, in addition to the children recruited privately by warring parties in Yemen from 2011 through 2013.

These children, he said, were between the ages of 14 and 17. In fact, the US had to waive its Child Soldiers Prevention Act in 2011 in order to move forward with tens of millions of dollars in military assis-

tance.

"The secretary-general's annual report is one of the most effective ways that the UN has to push for real improvements in the behavior of parties to armed conflict toward children," Sheppard said. "It's critically important for the UN to be unquestionably impartial as it reports on abuses against children during war and presses all parties to halt their abuses."

No food while the sun's up, no electricity while its down

■ Khalid Al-Karimi

As power cuts and petrol shortages continue to plague Sana'a, residents in the capital complain that it is the first time they have experienced such long hours of darkness during the month of Ramadan.

"I have been living in the capital city since my birth, but I feel the situation this Ramadan is very bad in comparison with previous years. The power is off day and night. If it goes on, it remains on for a few hours only," said Rafat Abdulla, a college student at Sana'a University.

Abdulla is not alone in suffering from the repeated long power cuts. "The majority of my neighbors have generators to overcome the dark hours during the Ramadan nights. Relying on generators is the only way to avoid this situation," she said.

Electricity cuts are chronic in Yemen. Disgruntled tribesmen repeatedly attack the electricity lines in Marib and Sana'a governorates, in an attempt to bring attention to their demands, which typically include the provision of basic services or the release of relatives imprisoned by the government. The Marib-Sana'a power lines were sabotaged on Tuesday in the Al-Masha'l Hudhailan area of Marib, according to the state-run Saba News Agency.

According to the Ministry of Electricity and Energy, the repeated power cuts are made worse by the lack of fuel needed for power stations. On Wednesday the state-run September 26 newspaper cited a ministry statement: "a group of armed tribesmen in Marib confiscated oil tankers [transporting fuel to] power stations in Sana'a. This is the reason behind the repeated power cuts in the capital city."



Many Sana'anis complain that electricity shortages during this Ramadan are worse than in previous years.

In addition, a source at the Department of Operations at the Ministry of Electricity and Energy said armed tribesmen have been confiscating oil tankers since Tuesday afternoon on the Mab'd Al-Shams road in the Al-Muaili area of Marib. Because the fuel has not arrived on time the power stations in Sana'a have reduced operations, according to the department.

Ramadan is the month in the Islamic calendar when Muslims fast during daylight hours. In Yemen, as in other countries observing Ramadan, life is quiet during the day and busy during the night.

Busy streets, such as Al-Qiyada and Jamal streets in the capital, are bustling with shoppers during Ramadan nights. Shop owners have been using generators in order to continue their business activity when the electricity goes out.

Mohammed Abdulaziz has a clothes shop on Al-Qiyada street in Al-Tahrir district. Every Ramadan he makes a considerable amount of money due to the spike in demand

for tailored clothes. However, he thinks this Ramadan will not be as profitable as the last.

"I depend on electricity to operate my shop. Unfortunately, there have been countless outages this Ramadan. It is not the first time power is cut during Ramadan, but the electricity situation this year is the worst," said Abdulaziz.

Now Abdulaziz has a generator to keep his business afloat. However, the generator consumes over 20 liters of gas every night, costing him YR2,500 (\$12).

Though some residents in the capital can afford to buy generators and light their houses and shops during power outages, many others are unable to do so.

Abdulfatah Al-Shaibani works for a private university in the capital city. He said even though he can afford to purchase a generator he cannot afford to fill it with gas every night.

"I buy candles instead and sit with my family members during the Ramadan nights," he said.

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Politics of Qat: The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen

By Peer Gatter

Book review and extracts
Nadia Al-Sakkaf

The cover page shows an old man with an apprehensive look in his eyes, half-smiling as he hands you a bunch of qat leaves. In the background there is a wild-eyed teenage boy, cheeks swollen from the qat that fills them, peering into the camera. This 862 page hard-cover book published by Reichert Publications is a

weapon in all senses of the word. Besides documenting the ever growing role qat plays in Yemen and in the life of Yemenis, the book also analyses Yemen's qat policy, the tribal qat economy, and the qat connections of our decision makers.

I had this huge publication lying by my bedside for months before I summoned the courage to pick it up and start reading. This was not only due to its intimidating size, but probably even more

so due to its topic. Qat, and the political and economic schemes around it, was to me as a Yemeni always a well known problem. I just was too afraid to read for myself and acknowledge how I as a citizen am part of a society that enables this culture of qat.

I don't chew Qat and personally I am ardently opposed to it. But I live in a society where Qat prevails. After years of research, Peer Gatter, the author of this

book, published it in 2012, offering to the world an insight into this drug and what it has done to my country. Gatter was working for many years for the World Bank and UNDP in Yemen and is now heading the Integrated Expert Program for Afghanistan of the German Development Cooperation (GIZ-CIM).

To read more about the book go to www.qat-yemen.com



PART 4/10

The British qat ban of 1957/58 in Aden



Probably one of the oldest pictures depicting qat chewers. When magnified, one sees discarded qat branches and leaves in front of the third man from the left and first and second man from the right. Labelled on the overleaf in French, "Réunion des Séyèdes et des Ulémas à Sanaa." Postmarked in Beirut in 1898.

The rise of qat imports was considered socially and economically dangerous by the British administration and the sums paid for qat benefited only a few people in the colony. Upon the initiative of Arab and Indian members of the Aden Association, the Legislative Council passed a motion on Feb. 28, 1957 recommending a ban of the importation, sale, possession and consumption of qat. An ordinance came into effect on April 1, 1957 which prohibited qat in Aden Colony, but not in its hinterland, the Aden Protectorate.

The effects of the ban on the daily life in Aden Colony were dramatic. The Arabs became "more lively, more obstreperous," as observers noted, and demonstrations in favor of qat filled Aden's streets. These manifestations and processions were described as "non-violent but abusive" and reflected the agitated depression following the withdrawal of qat. The number of officers in the municipal police rose to 1,111 and a state of emergency was declared.

The performance and efficiency of the employees of government departments and large commercial firms improved, and the use of aspirin and laxatives dropped noticeably, indicating that fewer Adenis suffered from the unpleasant side effects of qat ingestion. The monthly sales of acetylsalicylic acid dropped from 760,000 tablets before the ban, to just 400,000 tablets after the ban, which took effect in April 1957. Also, the daily motor race of qat importers from the distribution point to the markets ended, making Aden's streets safer.

The authorities had intentionally enacted the prohibition of qat in the beginning of Ramadan, assuming that the rules of fasting would facilitate abstention from qat. Initially, this assumption seemed to be correct, but soon a true migration from Aden Colony to the adjoining Sul-

tanate of Lahj set in, where qat could still be lawfully obtained.

Since the British had been unable to impose their ban in the protectorate states of the Aden hinterland, qat shipments kept flowing to the colony's northern border. Several thousand qat consumers made the journey from Aden to Lahj each afternoon—one report speaks of some 5,000 individuals daily—and on a particular Sunday police even counted "in the neighborhood of 18,000" persons.

During the first month of the ban, qat arrived in the Aden hinterland in growing numbers, especially from Al-Dhale, Yafi', and the northern Imamate. Quantities of Yemeni qat sold in Lahj skyrocketed from 72,856 pounds during March 1957 to 314,615 pounds in the month following the ban. Ethiopian qat, which so far had been unknown in Lahj's markets, also made its appearance there but initially in very small quantities. In April 1957 only 550 pounds of Harari qat were sold in the sultanate, but by November and December of that year, Ethiopian qat deliveries had reached 44,836 and 101,615 pounds, respectively.

The British had to realize that a ban could not stop the drain of financial resources from the colony. Its side effects were heavy losses in revenues of an estimated £50,000 per annum from taxes and duties on the leaf, in addition to losses by Aden Airways, which could no longer service Ethiopia and fly across this strategically important African territory as Ethiopian authorities had revoked Aden Airways' license as a reaction to qat export losses.

Considering the political developments in the region and the spread of Arab nationalism, British Colonial Authorities feared that the nightly gatherings of thousands of discontented people at the colony's Lahj border could give rise to grave security problems. The qat gatherings could easily provide political

activists a platform for their anti-British agitation and thus help the independence movement in gaining momentum.

On Dec. 24, 1957, William Tucker Luce, Governor and Commander in Chief of the Colony of Aden, thus appointed a Qat Commission of Inquiry at recommendation of the Legislative Council "to review the arguments for and against the importation and possession of qat... [and] to review the situation which

has arisen as a result of this ban; and to make recommendations."

The commission came to the conclusion that despite the ban, just as many Adenis chewed as before. Some users now chewed on fewer occasions and saved some money, but many others had to spend much more on qat than before the ban since they were forced to either purchase expensive smuggled qat or pay the fares to Daar Sa'ad where it was available and where they had to hire



A water pipe merchant at Bab al-Sabah in old Sana'a takes an afternoon rest in his shop while chewing qat.



The present qat market in Suq al-Milh was once called Suq al-Sawti, as the finger-long sawti qat shoots from the Jabl Al-Sawt were sold here (2004 photos).

a cot and pillow in order to practice their habit with some comfort.

Also, nearly all wives of qat chewers pleaded for a lifting of the ban, since they were weary of their husband's frequent absence from home and their trips to Daar Sa'ad, where they could not be reached in case of emergencies. Children were deprived of the society and control of their fathers and the wives had to do without qat, since husbands came back late at night, after having consumed all the purchased qat themselves.

The colonial medical authorities came to the conclusion that unless used to excess, qat was not injurious to health. The consumption of the leaf was seen merely as "a bad habit rather than a vice akin to taking drugs such as opium, hashish and cocaine."

Since especially Ethiopia profited from the sale of qat to Aden prior to the ban, the commission recommended that "every effort be made to obtain for the Colony, and in particular for Aden Airways, a fair share of the profits from the transport and sale of Ethiopian qat." As a consequence of the commission's report, the import ban was revoked on June 24, 1958 and replaced by a system of import and retail licenses as a means to control prices and imports. Oddly enough this control system resembled very much the one that had just been abolished in British Somaliland.

By 1959 an estimated 60 percent of the 150,000 inhabitants of Aden were chewing qat and spent some five million shillings on the stimulant every month (retail price of ca. 33 shillings/kilo). By then, Ethiopian qat had regained its place in the markets of the colony and five tons of Ethiopian qat leaves arrived in Aden daily on two planes.

In late 1961, another short qat ban affected Aden Airways. The British aviation authority had ordered an end to qat flights as it disliked the idea that a British air carrier was directly involved in the drug trade. But as Aden Airways was by that time only profitable due to its qat flights that produced a monthly surplus of £5,850, the ban could not be upheld for long by policy makers. By March 1962 the qat-peace had been re-established.

Qat and the resistance to British rule

Following the Egyptian revolution of 1952 that brought Jamal 'Abd Al-Nasir to power, anti-British sentiment and communist ideology swept rapidly across Southern Arabia. In the early 1950s, in many local shops pictures of Nasir appeared and every transistor radio seemed to be tuned to Cairo stations that were attacking British imperialism and corrupt feudal Arabian elites that acted as British puppets. The colonial administration tried to channel social dissatisfaction by forming labor unions following the British model.

The first of these was the Aden Harbor Pilots Association, founded in 1952. By 1956, most trades had formed a Union, among them the Qat Sellers' Union. British-sponsored unions did not, however, live up to the hopes of colonial authorities. In the local tangle of grievances, economic and nationalist interests were difficult to differentiate and economically motivated strikes often turned into purely nationalist, violent rallies.

Discontented unionists soon began to find outlets of political expression in other forms of organization. "The Free Officers of the South" was one of them; a qat chewing club housed in a wooden shack in Crater. Here, in a setting of qat chews, heated debates on how to overcome British rule were held and deadly plots against British army posts masterminded.

When the government of Aden Colony implemented the Customs Union of the Federation of South Arabia with the rulers of South Yemen's Sultanates and Emirates in 1962, discontent with British rule also spread inland. The agreement entailed an abolition of tolls traditionally collected by tribesfolk on the Mecca-Aden caravan route. Resenting the loss of their most important incomes, namely the duties on the coffee and qat trade, Qu'aybi tribesmen attacked British forces in the Radfan hills southeast of Al-Dhale. The Radfan insurgency was soon to become more than a battle for a share in the lucrative qat trade. Aided by North Yemen and Egypt, rebellious tribes people began to smuggle arms on the ancient caravan route to resistance fighters in Aden.



Houthis' recent expansion stems from 2011 Uprising

■ Khalid Al-Karimi

In February 2011, unprecedented numbers of protesters calling for change took to the streets in many governorates of the country. A political tornado was sweeping through the region, passing from Tunisia to Egypt, and on to Yemen. Masses of people protested against the regime of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Political factions opposing the former regime joined the call for an end to Saleh's 33-year-long reign. The Houthis, a militant Zaydi Shia group with a stronghold in Sa'ada governorate, were among the protesters. They later joined the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) as Ansar Allah (Supporters of God—the official name the movement goes by today).

In spite of Yemenis having broken their silence in demand of positive change and democratic reforms, the people of Yemen remain faced with multiple crises, both new and old. Among these is the ongoing conflict pitting the army and allied tribal militias against the Houthis in areas close to the capital Sana'a.

In recent months the Houthis have launched daring attacks against military positions in Amran governorate and some areas of Sana'a governorate, gaining ground in northern Yemen. The root cause of this success stems from the 2011 uprising.

Prior to the uprising, the Houthis controlled parts of Sa'ada governorate, but were able to capitalize on the breakout of political turmoil in 2011 and the ensuing security vacuum, eventually taking over the entire governorate. This territorial gain was only the beginning of the Houthis' advance in the wake of the uprising.

The Houthis also mobilized in Sana'a during 2011, pitching tents alongside other protesters in Change Square. However, in hindsight many activists have said that

they were deceived by the Houthis, whom they accuse of double standards by engaging in national dialogue initiatives while simultaneously waging an armed rebellion.

The Houthis entered six rounds of fighting with government forces from 2004 to 2010. Since then, renewed fighting has periodically broken out and is currently underway.

"I had never imagined the Houthis would displace thousands in Amran and kill many others. Though they took over Sa'ada and some areas in Amran by means of violence, I am sure this is a loss on their part... They think their expansion is a gain that serves their purpose, but they will realize that what they have done is a risky undertaking," said Hashim Al-Abara, a leading revolutionary youth who participated in the 2011 uprising.

Moreover, the transitional government in August 2013 issued an apology to the people of Sa'ada, blaming the former regime for being primarily responsible for the conflict in Sa'ada. The apology demonstrates that the Houthis' gains since the 2011 uprising were not just territorial, but also perceptual—in the eyes of many, they were the victims.

"The government admits that the former authorities were primarily responsible, but were not only to blame for the... Sa'ada war and [its] consequences," read the statement.

Youth activists, including Al-Abara, say the Houthis have been given an opportunity but have no serious desire for reconciliation.

"The Houthis' participation in the NDC was an opportunity, yet now they have missed it. They have shown their real identity and serious attempt to restore imamate rule. They are relying on violence to realize their unreasonable goals," said Al-Abara.

The Houthis welcomed the government's apology. Ali Al-Bukhaiti, former NDC Houthi spokesperson, hailed it as a "positive step." How-



The Houthis were active in the 2011 Uprising, even in Sana'a, but many youth activists feel their actions were politically motivated rather than in line with the original protesters demands.

ever, in an interview with Sky News Arabia, he added that "this is not enough considering the apology was not issued by those who committed the crimes."

Al-Abara said that this phase of Yemen's history requires consensus, but the Houthis sound unwilling to compromise and coexist.

The group's founder, Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi, was killed in the first round of fighting that broke out in 2004. The former regime kept his remains in Sana'a for nine years but in early June of 2013, Al-Houthi was handed over by the transitional government and buried in Maran Mountain in Sa'ada governorate. The Houthis later built a shrine for their deceased leader.

The sectarian dimension to the conflict was underscored in October 2013, when clashes between Houthis and Salafis in Dammaj intensified. The former accuse the latter of recruiting foreign fighters.

In January of this year, under the terms of a government-brokered deal Salafis from Dammaj were relocated to Sana'a, thereby fulfilling the long-term Houthi objective of purging areas under their control of Salafism.

Seeing themselves as the dominant group in Sa'ada, the Houthis prepared themselves for further expansion. Violence between Houthi rebels and opposing tribesmen in Amran which erupted in August of last year intensified. The tribes-

men in Amran said at the time that the Houthis sought to expand their territorial control by force of arms. The fighting has left hundreds of casualties on both sides.

The fighting is not limited to Houthis and tribal militants, but now also involves the military. In March, security forces prevented Houthis from entering Amran city while bearing arms, the Interior Ministry reported. This is said to have triggered bloody clashes between the two sides that are still ongoing.

Although presidential committees were formed to broker ceasefire agreements, they have so far failed to achieve meaningful results. The latest ceasefire agreement was put

forward last week but has already collapsed.

Sana'a-based political analyst Adnan Al-Rajehi said "the Houthis have been expanding and their influence has been growing since the revolution, particularly after they partook in the NDC. Even their media outlets have increased."

According to Al-Rajehi, the Houthis have been struggling to realize their own goals but not the goals of the revolution.

"We are defending ourselves," Ali Al-Emad, a member of the Houthi Political Office, told the Yemen Times when asked for comment on clashes between the Houthi militants and security forces in Al-Jiraf neighborhood on June 20.



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OUR OPINION

Germany and Algeria: A legendary match

Was Arabs have an inferiority complex. It is true.

We feel discriminated against by the West and often perceive ourselves as third or even fourth class world citizens. We have so many reasons to feel so—poverty, low international status, the poor quality of education, even sports.

Thus, when Algeria qualified to play in round 16 of the 2014 FIFA World Cup, our hearts and hopes, against our better judgment, hung on this team's victory.

Unfortunately, the Algerian team had neither the professional support nor the enabling environment that was made available to its opponent. Towards the end of the match, Algerians also failed to keep up with the Germans' physical endurance.

Initially, I thought this match would be another embarrassment for us Arabs. But after the 50th minute of play my heart started to beat in excitement.

The Arab players were impressive. They fought back and the goalkeeper, Rais M'Bolhi, was amazing fending off shots.

Suddenly, the match was about redemption. I viewed Algeria's possible victory as a symbol of Arabs' and Muslims' recent renaissance. Emotions were over the roof and even Arabs who initially cheered for other teams were praying for Algeria to win.

The Algerian team was exceptional. It stood up to the Germans during the first 90 minutes. It was only during extra time that Andre Schürle and Mesut Ozil scored Germany's first and second goals. As Barry Glendenning, a sports commentator for the Guardian, put it, Germany's second goal was like “stealing the pennies from a dead man's eyes.”

Just when I was about to give up, when the inferiority complex returned, did Abdelmoumene Djabou score Algeria's first and only goal. It was as if he was telling me not to underestimate him or his team. It was also a lesson that heroism is not only about end results but also about struggle.

This game turned me into a die-hard fan of the Algerian team. I believe they deserve all the support and encouragement they can get.

But it has also reminded me that if we want to rise again as a nation, we should not expect things to just fall into place. We need training, patience and a lot of skill to be able to surface again.

Nadia Al-Sakkaf

A great unraveling, and a new map

Hazem Saghie
opendemocracy.net
First published June 27

The crisis around Iraq-Syria reflects the weight of a past that is no longer relevant to the region's peoples, says Hazem Saghie.

Some observers are looking at Iraq and Syria and making a hasty and facile argument: namely, that events have shown the only alternative to tyranny in the region is Islamist ultra-radicalism and chaos. It is a form of posthumous vindication of Saddam Hussein and Hafez al-Assad.

Many living in the region are justified in being afraid of the radical Islamist threat, which encircles them from every side. They may also be certain that a tyranny like that of Saddam and Assad will ultimately meet a wretched end, after which everything around it collapses. But the logical conclusion is not to pine for their tyranny, but to realize that entities able to survive only through tyranny are after all nonviable.

Hence, assuming that a dictator like Bashar al-Assad or a pro-dictator like Abdel Fattah al-Sisi or Nouri al-Maliki will defeat terrorism is also an absurdity that leads back to square one.

Yet it would also be delusional to think that saving these entities, and also preserving international security, can be done through the “war on terror” that emerged after 9/11 and led to two wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq with their vast human and material costs. Neither can the remnants of that war, such as drone-strikes, ever accomplish what the original war failed to do.

A blocked legacy

But while it is easy to criticizing the narrative of the war on terror, it is not easy to come up with alternatives that can benefit the peoples of our region and the world. There are many perennially good ideas, from economic development and poverty reduction to parliamentary democracy and representative institutions. But when the societies concerned are deeply divided, in a way that prevents them from reaching even the minimum level of consensus, such ideas remain closer to being empty rhetoric.

Moreover, the countries where Al-Qaeda and its ilk have spawned are also those where ruling elites have identified with particular groups, religious communities, regions or ethnicities to the exclusion of others. In the absence of traditions of coexistence, or ways to resolve disputes through political institutions, these countries have often been dominated by tyrannical regimes. In such cases the ruling power worked to repress society's unacknowledged contradictions, only to find the latter metastasizing in the shadows. The resulting deformities were reinforced by the cold war from the late 1940s until the late 1980s, which guaranteed the survival of these regimes and

the political units on which they were built.

To escape from this dysfunctional inheritance, the solution can only come from a reconsideration of existing national and societal arrangements. The latter, after all, are the true incubators of the conflicts that have now erupted in full. They too did much to contribute to later disasters, by curbing healthy interaction among religious, sectarian, and ethnic groups; forestalling any potential change; closing down avenues of public expression; and quickly turning even small-scale protest into open-ended civil conflict.

In Syria, for example, the national framework soon pushed the popular uprising of 2011 towards civil war. In Iraq, the chance of an inclusive nationwide movement against a corrupt government with authoritarian tendencies was thwarted by a centrifugal landscape of Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish questions. The same applies, albeit with different labels, to the situation in Libya, Yemen, and elsewhere.

A decree of separation

This inheritance makes any substantial reform difficult. It has been many decades since the Arab peoples believed the lies about nationalism and modernization, which they ignored in part by moving to live alongside their “compatriots”. This great demographic movement, which the ideologies of nationalism

and modernization sought to camouflage and distort, today makes any demographic separation harder than ever. And yet, in a situation where distinct communities have come to believe, or been made to believe, that they are nothing but mutual enemies, it is even more problematic to keep living side by side.

There are two prominent experiences in the region of the separation of hostile communities: namely, Cyprus and Iraqi Kurdistan. Both resulting states enjoy de facto if not de jure independence, and are in a far better position than their war-torn neighbors. The more recent case of South Sudan is a reminder that a successful secession requires the establishment of a freer, fairer, and less corrupt regime. But a viable argument can be made that a sine qua non for the revolution the Arab peoples need is a profound reworking of existing national frameworks and arrangements.

This is not a prospect Arab intellectuals—long preoccupied with dualities like “heritage vs contemporaneity” or “tradition vs modernity”, which often confuse more than enlighten—find it easy to contemplate. Yet their endeavors today should focus on understanding their societies as entities where many factors—most notably tyranny—have prevented a mature nation-state from evolving. The absence of such a state becomes critical where it becomes impossible to separate the belligerents in a civil

war, and prevent their work of wholesale destruction.

Yet it is only through such a separation that each side can be spurred towards inward thinking focused on the rational interests of their respective groups. This process will weaken the extremist, dogmatic tendencies that thrive on hostility to the “other.” Some would regard this as a conspiracy to “fragment the Arabs” though in fact it is the opposite—an attempt to save what is left of their energies and to put an end to their divisions.

Any reconsideration of existing frameworks will also require regional and international efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region. The circumstances that dictated the current map—the two world wars and then the cold war—are now in the past, and will never return. When their causes are gone, it is neither logical nor reasonable for their consequences to remain.

Almost a century after the region's political maps were redrawn with the collapse of the Ottoman empire, the demarcation of new lines that meet the wishes of the communities to govern themselves and live alone will be another political earthquake. But to do so, through an international conference or its equivalent, has become the only alternative to the violent earthquakes that have already occurred.

Hazem Saghie is political editor of the London-based Arab newspaper al-Hayat

Ramadan, socialism and the neighbor's beat-up car

Ramzy Baroud
middleeasteye.net
First published June 30

When I was a child, I obsessed with socialism. It was not only because my father was a self-proclaimed socialist who read every book that a good socialist should read, but also because we lived in a refugee camp in Gaza under the harshest of conditions. Tanks roamed the dusty streets and every aspect of our lives was governed by a most intricate Israeli “civil administration” system—a less distressing phrase for describing military occupation.

Socialism was then an escape to a utopian world where people were treated fairly; where children were not shot and killed on a daily basis; where cheap laborers were no longer despairing men fighting for meager daily wages at some Israeli factory or farm; and where equality was not an abstract notion. But since Gaza had little in terms of “means of production,” our socialism was tailored to accommodate every lacking aspect of our lives. Freedom, justice and ending the occupation was our “revolutionary socialism” around which we teenagers in the camp secretly organized and declared strikes on the walls of the camp in red graffiti, and quoted (or misquoted) Marx as we pleased, often at times out of context.

And when it was time for prayer, we all went to the mosque. We simply didn't see a contradiction, nor did we subscribe to (or care to understand) the inherent conflict between socialist movements and institutionalized religion in the West. True, we declared

solidarity with factory workers in Chicago and followed the news of union victories in Britain, but our socialism was mostly south-oriented. It was the revolutionary struggles of Guatemala, South Africa and Algeria that inspired our various socialist movements in Gaza and the rest of Palestine. Socialism was a call for freedom first, before it was a call for equitable salaries and improved work conditions.

There was little by way of Western-styled “atheism” in our refugee camp. Most of us prayed five times a day, communists and all.

A socialist and a Muslim

I went to the mosque for prayer as often as I could. I memorized chapters of the Quran at a young age. Starting in the second grade, I joined my peers for classes in Islamic stories taught by a kindly, semi-blind young man named Sheikh Azzam. In the stories, those with faith always triumphed in the end. The key to their victories, well, aside from the inevitable divine justice, was their unity and persistence. The characters were often, if not always, poor. The poor always triumphed in Islam, or the way Islam was taught in my refugee camp.

I was a socialist and a Muslim. It was my father, who was sometimes called a “communist” as a slur by some of the camp's ultra conservatives, who urged me not to miss my prayers, and rewarded me for reading the Quran. He was the same person who shared his treasures of translated Russian and other literature with me, all promising of a revolution, of a better world where a person was not judged based on his or her color, race, sect, religion or

nationality. If there was ever an inherent tension in all of this, I didn't see it. I still don't.

Naturally, a real socialist must have a nemesis. In many parts of the world, the archenemy is the multinational corporations and, in the US in particular, the use of military-driven foreign policy as a tool to maintain global hegemony; it is globalization used as a platform to enforce a new kind of imperialism that is no longer an exclusive western attribute. For me in the refugee camp, my nemesis was our neighbor Ghassan. He owned a car, a beat-up old Fiat that was actively decomposing back into its original elements. The color was a rainbow of old paint and rusting metal, and its seats were almost entirely bare from any evidence that leather chairs were once attached to the unpleasant iron beneath.

Nonetheless, Ghassan represented a “class” of society that was different than mine. He was a teacher at a United Nations-funded school, who was “getting paid in dollars,” and his likes received what was called a “pension,” a seemingly novel concept that Gaza cheap laborers in Israel didn't enjoy, needless to say comprehended.

Ghassan also prayed at the same mosque as I did. On the main Friday prayer, he wore a white jalabiya (robe) of white silk, manufactured abroad. He wore authentic Egyptian cologne, and along with his UNRWA colleagues, walked to the mosque with the unabashed grandeur of a feudalist.

In the month of Ramadan, as poor refugee parents struggled to make at least the first few days of the fasting month somewhat

special and festive for their children, Ghassan and his clique prepared feasts, shopped for the best vegetables, and adorned their iftar tables with meat, not once a week, but every single day of the entire month. And here is the part that I resented the most: to show gratefulness for how “lucky” and “blessed” they were, the rich refugees would distribute raw meat in carefully sealed bags to the less fortunate since Ramadan is the month of charity. And of course, the most qualified to give charity was a UN teacher paid in dollars and expecting a so-called pension.

Today I chuckle at the naïve notions of that Gazan child. In actuality, Ghassan was slightly less poor than the rest of us. His home was an improved version of the UN's “temporary shelters” it provided refugees following the Palestinian exile in 1948. He was paid around \$400 (YR86,000) a month, and his car eventually broke down and was sold to a neighboring mechanic for scrap metal.

Much of this was placed in context later in life when I worked in a rich Arab Gulf country. I spent two Ramadans there. Each year our company provided a “Ramadan tent,” not a metaphorical term, but an actual massive tent under which the finest of delicacies, cooked by the best of chefs, was served by cheap laborers who, although including fasting Muslims, were not allowed to break their fast until the rest of us did. The fasting men and women thanked God for giving them the strength to fast before they diligently consumed massive amounts of good food until they could hardly move. Some Muslim men would make

a mission of theirs to explain to our western, mostly female, guests the importance of Ramadan to cleansing the soul as Muslims give charity and feel the pain of the needy. Poor, often skinny, Bangladeshi workers would anxiously be running around filling trays as they quickly became empty, and apologized profusely for why one of the 20 types of meat offered was not tender or spicy enough.

Ramadan always takes me back to the refugee camp in Gaza, no matter where I am in the world. And when a TV sheikh preaches about what Ramadan is or is not about, I often reflect on what Ramadan has meant to me and my peers in the refugee camp. It was not about feeling the brunt of the poor, for we all were, Ghassan included, poverty-stricken. It was about sharing the hardships of life, a communal struggle against one's own weaknesses and a month-long introspection to uncover the collective strength of a beleaguered community. Ramadan was an exacting platform through which poverty and deprivation were devalued so that when Ramadan was over, we felt grateful for the little we had, before we resumed our struggle for the rights and freedoms we truly deserved.

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Increasing drug use strains Yemen's services

IRIN

First published June 30

An influx of cheap counterfeit pharmaceuticals and illicit drugs, coupled with rising unemployment and an increasingly disillusioned society, is driving substance abuse in Yemen, according to civil society organizations, aid agencies, anti-drug campaigners and health and security officials, placing a growing strain on already stretched services.

"Drug abuse is a huge problem in Yemen and has become a bigger problem since 2011, especially synthetic drugs as they are more available and cheaper prices," said Golala Ruhani, a development consultant who recently worked on community outreach projects on drugs in Yemen.

The rise in substance abuse is affecting the long-term health of drug users and is contributing to already low morale in a country where half of all young people are currently unemployed, according to the UN Development Programme. It is also placing an additional strain on under-resourced police and health-care departments where the problem has been particularly pronounced, such as in the southern port city of Aden and Taiz, an industrial hub in central Yemen, both part of established smuggling routes.

"It makes it even harder to do our job"

"It is a phenomenon, there is no denying it," said medical doctor Rajeh al-Mulaiky, general manager at Taiz's al-Thawra Hospital who has seen a rise in substance abuse in the city since the popular uprising in 2011 that eventually ousted long-time Yemeni leader Ali Abdullah

Saleh. The problem is increasingly widespread, he said.

"It is well-known, the effects of drug use in general, but it's not just a health problem, it's a social problem," he said. "The addicts affect their surroundings. Under the influence, addicts attack people, they steal. It is also causing us a lot of problems, especially at the [accident and emergency department]."

A doctor at the emergency department at al-Gamhouria Hospital in central Aden echoes al-Mulaiky's account of the additional strain placed on the already hugely under-resourced healthcare system. "Every night we have people coming in who have got into fights, who have overdosed, or who are trying to trick us into giving them pills," the doctor says. "We already don't have enough doctors or rooms so it makes it even harder to do our job."

Abdulhakeem al-Ashwal, deputy head of security for Taiz, said substance abusers had been involved in rising numbers of violent incidents and petty crimes in the city, adding that they are often encouraged by their suppliers to sell drugs on to their friends, widening the network. Al-Ashwal describes an incident in Taiz in February where a young man at a wedding had taken a strong sleeping pill—sold on the street as "Crocodile"—and tried to fire a rifle in the air but instead shot several other guests at the wedding. "It is horrible. This young man's life is destroyed but also that of his family."

Underlying causes

With names like Crocodile, Gaddafi, Red Flow, Yellow Flower and King's Coma, users see drugs as something fun without necessarily knowing the risks they pose.

"Mohammed", a former addict,



Two boys enjoy a qat chewing session on the streets of the Yemeni capital, Sana'a. Upwards of 85 percent of all adults in the country chew the leaves, despite potentially harmful health implications.

said drug dealers were increasingly lacing their products with more dangerous substances. For example, marijuana, which has long been available in Yemen, is now mixed with sleeping pills and hallucinogens. Among the most common substances sold are strong sleeping pills, painkillers—including varieties that contain opiates, anti-depressants and anxiety relief drugs. It has recently become popular for substance abusers to inject Tramadol, a strong prescription painkiller.

Demand is driven by high levels

of unemployment and a growing sense of nihilism among young Yemenis, many of whom feel that the 2011 uprising was a failure and fear there is little hope for Yemen in the future.

"People want to escape from reality. They have no hope, no jobs, no dreams, no education," says Abubakr Ali Baabbad, 23, who works at the Youth Center, a community outreach project that deals with drug abuse in Aden. There is nothing for young people to do other than find escape through substance abuse, "so you chew khat or

you take drugs," he said, referring to the green-leaved stimulant chewed daily by many Yemenis. "The culture supports it."

Mohammed al-Shubaibi, president of Taiz University, said he had had to crack down on drug dealing at the university campus. He agreed that a lack of extracurricular activities on offer to younger Yemenis was a fundamental problem. "Even when they are at university, young people have too much time on their hands," he said. "There are no parks, no sports, no clubs. So there is no alternative."

To date, no reliable data has been gathered on the number of people abusing drugs in Yemen, or on the purported link between substance abuse, petty crime, and hospital admissions, making it hard to measure the exact extent of the problem.

"We really need to look at the problem in depth," says an Aden-based anti-drugs campaigner, who requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the topic. "I suspect that the findings would be surprising to many people. The level of drug use would be very high."

Continued on the back page

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Increasing drug use strains Yemen's services

Supply and demand

Yemen's drug problem is part of a wider nexus of issues. Security deteriorated visibly in 2011, when rival factions from within of the Saleh regime clashed violently under the cover of a popular uprising. Yemen's transitional government, in place

since December 2011, and its interim president Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, have since struggled to restore order, with factional forces loyal to the ousted leader continuing to wield influence.

The deterioration in security inside Yemen made it easier to sell drugs on

the streets.

Meanwhile, increased insecurity along Yemen's borders with Saudi Arabia and Oman—key destinations for both illicit drugs and smuggled pharmaceuticals in the past—led to a glut in supply and falling prices.

"[The problem] began in 2011,

with the revolution," says Baabdad. "Drugs started out with the pharmacies but they started appearing in the streets, for free. As much as you want. Some areas of the revolution were out of government control. The dealers used the squares [where protests were held]. The people got addicted there; the problem started there."

According to al-Mulaiky, supply is largely driven by smuggling, but also through illicit sales at pharmacies, and theft from medical facilities. The smugglers sell the drugs either to pharmacies or directly to addicts.

Many smuggling operations combine different cargoes, including drugs, arms, and East African migrants either looking for asylum, employment opportunities, or both, in Yemen or in the neighboring Gulf states, said al-Ashwal. Recently, traffickers have been opening up new channels of distribution by offering migrants the chance to pay off debts or make money by transporting drugs into Taiz and distributing them on the streets.

"It is a growing problem, especially over the last two years or so, but we are trying to control it," said al-Ashwal. "We don't know the exact source but smugglers bring the drugs from Africa. We did our best to control the source which is the sea. We are trying to arrest the traffickers."

Others see a political dimension to the problem. A number of people interviewed by IRIN believe that cheap pharmaceuticals were first distributed to protesters in 2011 either by pro-regime groups—in the hope that they would induce apathy among the protesters—or by anti-government forces, who thought they would embolden protesters.

Reversing the trend

Reversing the trend of increasing drug use will be long and difficult. "Tackling drug abuse in any country is complex and difficult—and there needs to be an involvement of families, communities, and national health organizations, education authorities, legal and social services," Ruhani says.

Unfortunately, she adds, the Yemeni government has done little so far to put together a comprehensive strategy to tackle the problem.

In Taiz, the local government has taken some steps to tackle the issue: Al-Ashwal, for example, has led efforts to monitor the sale of drugs at pharmacies in Taiz more closely.

An official working in local government in Taiz lauds both his and al-Mulaiky's efforts, but complains the central government has done little to support such initiatives. "Every department is stretched in terms of resources, time and money," he says. "Without support from [the capital] Sana'a, there is only so much they can do."

Most national police work is fo-

cused on preventing smuggling rather than uncovering distribution networks, anti-drug campaigners say. Meanwhile, Yemen has no specialized drug treatment centers, meaning that only the wealthiest Yemenis have access to proper care, in either Egypt or the US.

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