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University of Hodeidah is venue for regional event

Red Sea at crossroads

By Irena Knehtl
irena_knehtl@yahoo.com
For The Yemen Times

The University of Hodeidah, jointly with the Center for Red Sea Institute of Arab & Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter in UK, will be host an international conference "The Red Sea at the Millenium" Dec. 8 to 11. This event, the first of its kind, is under auspices of Yemen's President Ali Abdalla Saleh. Regional and international experts, researchers and students will explore a wide range of issues such as the geopolitics of the Red Sea Region, economic concerns, environment, dynamics of islands, ports and cities, as well as the socio-cultural entity of the Red Sea region. The aim is to stimulate debate during which concerns will be addressed and creative ways can be found to help the region prosper.

Brimming with life
The Red Sea means different things to different people. Some know it as a divider of continents, or Tanker Alley, since it's a crucial waterway, every since man first took to the sea and boats. It's history is full of adventure, excitement and discovery. One description of it notes, "The journey through remote mountains ranges was dissected by mystifying Wadis, among the isolated people with rich cultural backgrounds - seemingly untouched by time, and a mysterious and rarely seen power and beauty of this Desert Sea Region..."

Barren along its shores, yet brimming with life - there are now new wonders to be found in its southern depths in the Yemeni Red Sea realm. An endless variety of configurations, corals, serving as castles, where fish and water have become one. While the southern half of the Red Sea is set amid some of the most isolated territory in the world, this area is one of the most interesting coral ecosystems in the world.

One seldom sees such striking display of reefs diversity. A world of endless variety, shapes, shadows and lights. The Red Sea also harbors a wealth of endemic marine creatures - one fifth of the species found nowhere else. One can marvel at the forest of algae growing like popular trees from the reef of Yemeni Jibal Zuqar Island.



The Red Sea, 1,300 miles long, is among the world's greatest water routes.

This unique desert sea is a place that seems to protect - even to enshrine - the life of the reefs. With designs beyond imagination - the Red Sea presents an ever shifting kaleidoscope of colors, and behavior. **History**
No water has greater historical interest than the Red Sea - 1,300 miles long with the Gulf of Suez - at its northern reach extended by the manmade Suez Canal to provide navigation from the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. It is one of the first large bodies of water mentioned in recorded history. A major traffic route today, it is serving an outlet to the oceans for its littoral states, and on its other helps links the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean.

The Red Sea served as bridge between richest area of Europe and the Far East but never managed to attract to its shores any significant portion of the wealth which flowed through the waterway. The Red Sea is moderately integrated into the regional level, but more it's deeply integrated into the international level. Meanwhile profound changes have been occurring at the core of the international system, and the effects of these changes will continue to ripple through the international system and affect relations between external powers and the Red Sea states. Issues of free navigation, nuclear disarmament, environmental pollution will remain of paramount concerns to the states of the region.

Continued on Page 5

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Yemen's historic architecture (Part 2 of 4)

Scientists explore the Tarimi Palaces

By James Conlon,
Pamela Jerome
and Selma Al-Radi*

Dar Dawil turned from a rectangular plan into a T-shape, dividing the original palm grove into two courtyards. The eastern gatehouse dates to approximately the same period and functioned as a school for the family's children. The ground and first floor of the northwest kitchen wing, to the west of the north gate, are from this period.

Two garages connected Dar Dawil to the eastern gatehouse. Umar bin Shaikh eventually married four wives and as the family grew, so did the size of the complex.

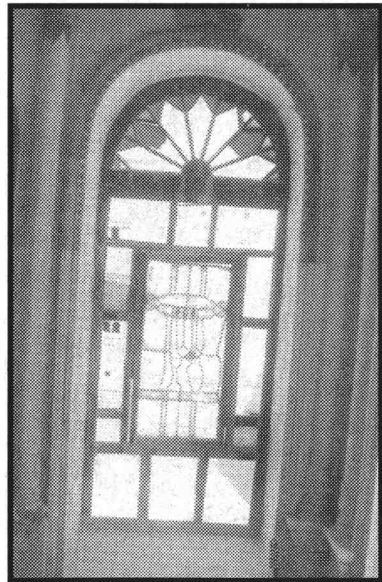
The main building was built at the southern end of the site in the 1920s. Soon thereafter the upper stories of the northwest kitchen wing were constructed and another wing added onto the southwest corner. It is unclear when the southeast and final wing was erected in the 1930s.

Local community members contributed this information while the different styles of stucco decoration and historic photographs support the existence of multiple construction sequences. From 1970 to 1991, Qasr al-'Ishshah was expropriated by the government of the people's Democratic Republic of Yemen (south Yemen) and divided up as multi-family housing.

The house has now been returned to the al-Kaf family and legal ownership rights are shared amongst many of Shaikh al-Kaf's descendants. In 1997 the Historical Society for the

Preservation of Tarim rented half of the house in order to present the building to the public as a house museum, the only one of its kind in the Hadhramawt. Three years later the society rented the rest of the house, but has been unable to present it to the public due to its poor state of preservation.

On both its exterior elevations as well as on most interior surfaces, Qasr al-'Ishshah exhibits some of the finest examples of lime plaster decoration (malas) in the city (Jerome 2000). The decorative program of the exterior south façade finds its antecedents in Mughal royal architecture, as well as in the colonial forms of the Near East,



south Asia, and Southeast Asia. Interior stucco decoration differs from room to room, including Art Nouveau, Rococo, Neo-Classical, and combinations of the three (Beamish 1985; Damluji 1992; Myntii 1999; Scharabi 1989).

The ornamentation often incorporates pilasters along the walls framing openings, built-in cabinetry with skilled woodcarvings, elaborate column capitals, decorated ceilings, niches and kerosene lamp holders, as well as complex color schemes. Since our initial feasibility study of 2001, a larger portion of the central section of the west elevation has collapsed.

The collapse not only took down the load-bearing walls of the façade, but also a large portion of the interior rooms on the West Side of the building. Karai Faraj al-Tumur, a Tarimi master mason (usta), conducted a survey of the damage, estimating the cost of repair at 1 million YR. 'Umar Abdalaziz Hallaj, an architect working with German Technical Aid (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, GTZ) on the Shibam Development Project, confirmed al-Tumur's estimate. Without repair the structural integrity of the remainder of the west elevation is at risk. The collapse has caused extensive structural cracking as the floors in adjacent rooms settle.

In many cases plaster finishes and detailing in these rooms have also been damaged due to the movement of the building. In addition to the damage on the west façade the roof and floors of the northwest kitchen wings have col-

lapsed through three stories. A significant portion of Dar Dawil also collapsed approximately three years ago.

We ascertained that the northwest section of this same structure collapsed several years before that. Non-structural material failure is taking place in sections of the complex not in the immediate vicinity of these collapses. The plaster of the ceiling in room 110, a finely decorated bath, has already fallen. Several other rooms face similar dangers.

As a preliminary measure, additional funding has been secured from the Yemen Social Fund for Development to rebuild and restore the collapsed western façade and interiors. These funds will also be used to put a temporary coat of lime on the roof of the main southern building to prevent further deterioration. Many other elevations and roofs show severe damage, and both interior and exterior surfaces in the entire building complex demonstrate extensive deterioration in the mud brick and plaster fabric. For example, the roof of the gatehouse is also in extremely poor condition. Plaster finish has been lost in many areas or separated from the mud brick substrate.



In addition to the deterioration in al-'Ishshah's mud brick and plaster, there is some termite damage. A significant number of the wooden elements, windows and soars are damaged beyond repair. The extensive loss of the Art Nouveau stained glass windows in room 110 is one such example, although others may be found throughout the complex.

The scale of deterioration and the nature of earthen construction indicate that irreversible structural coating, functioning's as both protection and

decoration, and if not maintained, the load-bearing mud brick substrate will be at an even greater risk. As a consequence of the relationship between the protective plastering, mud brick and the seasonal rains, construction requires regular maintenance. When neglected, damage occurs exponentially. *To be continued*

* Reproduced with permission from *Yemen Update Bulletin of the American Institute for Yemeni Studies - Issue No. 45/2003.*

A Yemen Times series on great Islamic figures

Al-Khattab, the 2nd Caliph



BY SULAIMAN M.
AL-HABOOB
FOR THE YEMEN TIMES

Bani Udai was a coterie where Omar Ibn al-Khattab belongs and he was also famous for doing justice and arbitration in Quraish, one of the strongest tribe in Mecca.

Doing justice and settling disputes among people at that time were one of the noble traits of Bani Udai.

Omar Ibn al-Khattab was nominated as the second caliph after Abu Bakr. He possessed bravery, power, and jealousy for his religion.

Before converting to Islam, he used to humiliate the weak people in his time, particularly those who converted to Islam.

During the emergence of Islam, Omar opposed the prophet and his followers and openly complained to the prophet about Omar's bad intentions.

He narrated: "I was one of the most hostile people for the God's messenger. I came to the prophet at sat in front of his hands and took my dress and said: Oh, Ibn al-Khattab! Embrace Islam! May God guide him!"

"And I said: "I call upon as a witness that there is no god but God and that you are the only Messenger of God! As I utter these words, Muslims have glorified God where their voices were heard in the Mecca routs and I heard the prophet asking in supplication. "Oh, Lord, Make Islam glorified with Omar or with Abi Jahl Omar Bin Hisham." "

Omar openly embraced Islam, that Muslims were protected by his sword, and he also declared to Quraish his intention to immigrate.

He was a sagacious ruler in his time, sharp-witted and shrewd.

As one of the forerunners to embrace Islam, he was nominated as

a consultant when Abu Bakr nominated as the first Muslims' caliph at Bani Saeda.

When he was nominated as the second caliph after Abu Bakr, he was known for his asceticism.

He carried on his back flour and water to be distributed to the poor and the needy.

He used to patch his garments and above all his armies conquered one of the largest and strongest empires in the world.

The removal of one of his dearest relatives, Khaled Ibn al-Waleed from leading the Islamic armies in Yarmook was Omar's own decision.

He ordered Abu Obaidah to lead Islamic armies instead of Khaled Ibn al-Waleed, the Islamic army commander who led a massive war against the apostates.

During his caliphate, Omar was one the first who employed non-Arabs.

During his time, coins were minted; management as well as judiciary system were reorganized and reached its pinnacle.

He founded the treasury, statistics and accounting.

During his reign, he could send armies to Islamic states and could also consolidate soldiers to guard border inlets.

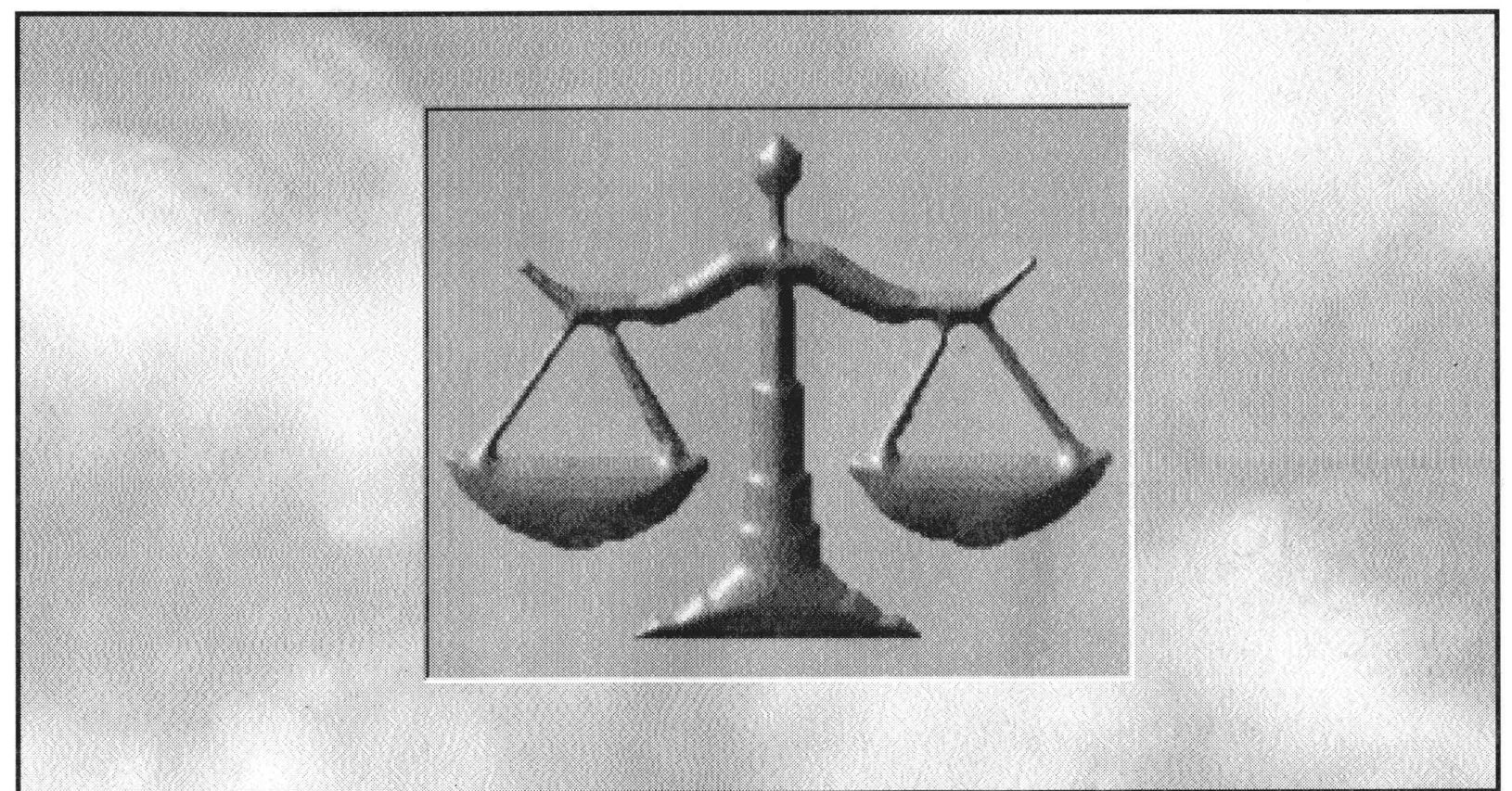
He was described by the great scholar, Abdullah Ibn Abbas as one the sources of pride for Islam, a harbor to the orphans, supporter for the weak people and a reference for the knowledgeable.

He was for justice a fort for God's right, a patient follower until God has made the religion rise.

He glorifies God in countries, plains, hills, suburbs, and spots. He is in weal and woe always thankful to His God.

He is a strict ruler and a judge for people during his reign.

He organized leaders' removal and



new strict instructions were adopted by him.

Orders were given by him to design cities such as, Basra and Kufa, improve navigation services in Hijaz and Egypt.

Sending Islamic armies and conquering countries is not a matter of a desire to occupy as some pretend. It was just for spreading Islam in those countries, liberating those countries from slavery of their kings and oppressors.

He first implanted and founded the religion before founding the Sultan as a foundation for the Islamic rule.

May God have mercy upon the just caliph, Omar Ibn al-Khattab. We are in need to his rule these days and to quench our thirst for his just rule.

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Easter Island's decaying statues await facelift

By IGNACIO BADAL RANO RARAKU

VOLCANO, Chile, Nov 19 (Reuters) - The steep side of the dormant Rano Raraku volcano is the most photographed spot on mysterious Easter Island.

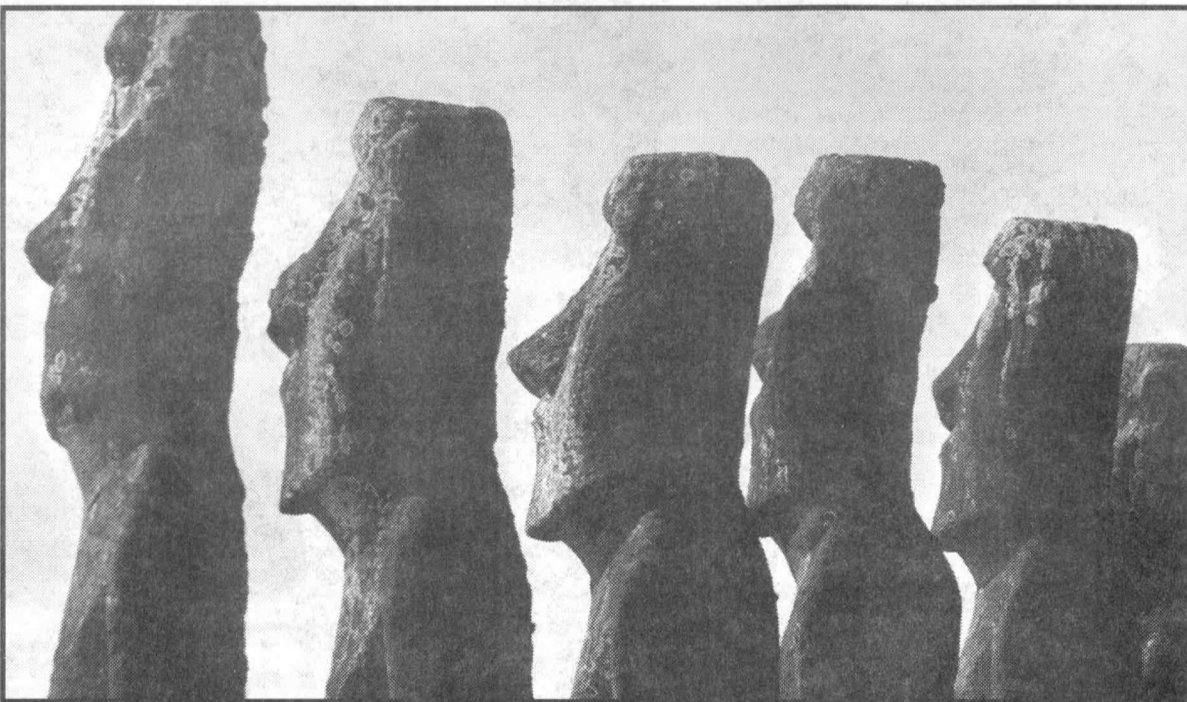
Polynesia, 1,800 miles (3,000 km) away, or the even more distant mainland of South America. And there are many theories but no facts about how the people who carved these statues 400 to 1,300 years ago moved monoliths up to six metres (20

"It's great news. The important thing is to save the Moai," said Petero Edmunds, the mayor of the island, and promoter of the preservation plan. The German project comes in addition to an ongoing \$600,000 Japanese programme to weatherproof some statues,

fact that the figures are in a national park that protects most of the island. In the 1900s tourists headed to the island and some broke Moai. Others were burned as the Rapa Nui cleared land with fire. "It's impossible to control the animals and the people," said park guard Carlos



A view of "Moai" statues at "Tongariki" bay on Easter Island, 4,000 km (2486 miles) west of Santiago, October 27, 2003. Easter Island's mysterious "Moai", giant head statues carved out of volcanic rock, are in danger of being destroyed by years of tropical rains and wind as well as careless humans and farm animals. REUTERS

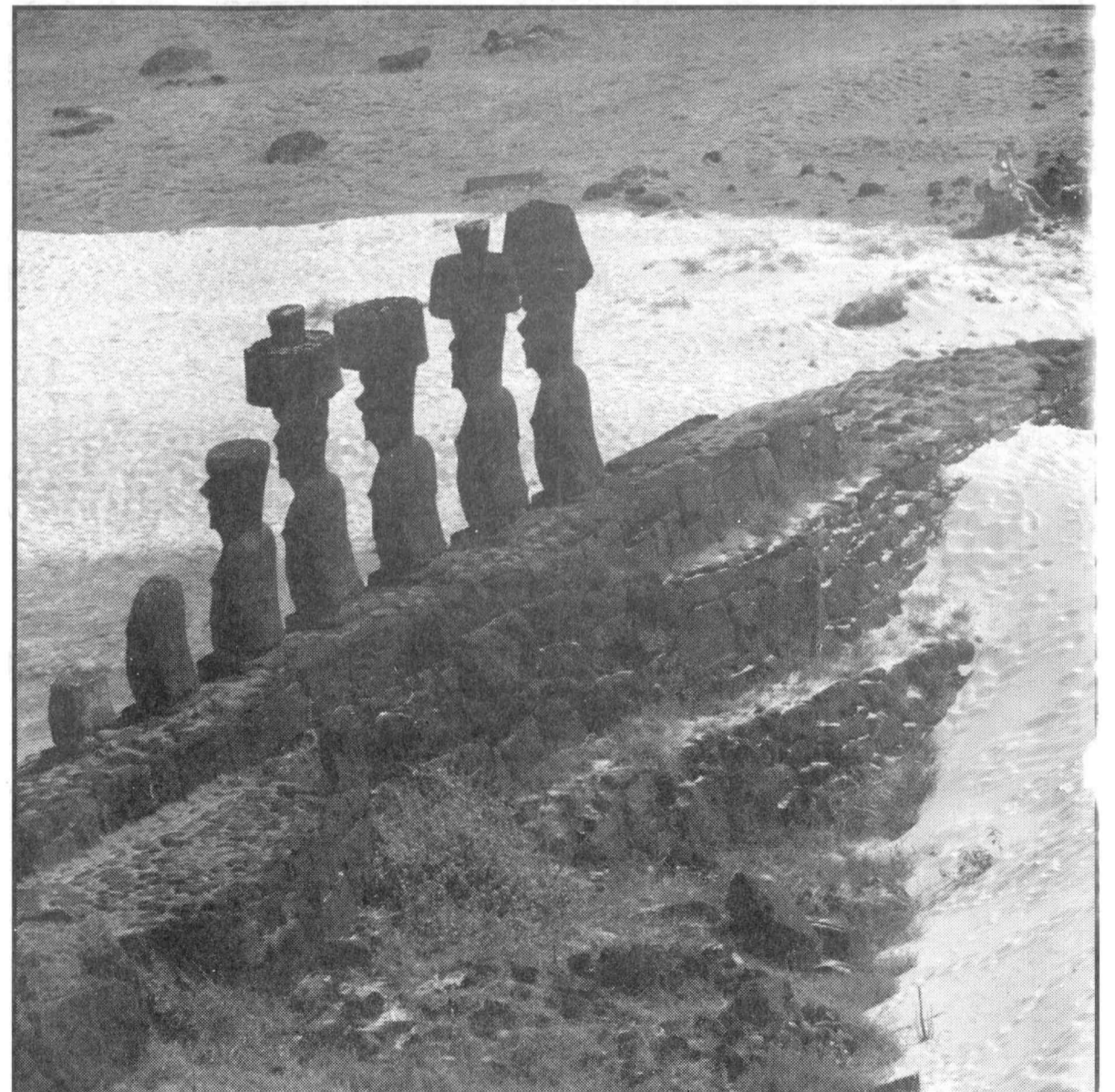


A view of "Moai" statues in Ahu Akivi, on Easter Island, 4,000 km (2486 miles) west of Santiago, in this photo taken October 31, 2003. Easter Island's mysterious "Moai", giant head statues carved out of volcanic rock, are in danger of being destroyed by years of tropical rains and wind as well as careless humans and farms animals. REUTERS

Tourists crowd each other to shoot photos of the statues known as Moai in the native language. The enormous long faces of these best-preserved examples look down on their eroded brothers at outposts along the coast of Rapa Nui, as the local call it. All of the existing 870 Moai sculptures were born here in a quarry of unique volcanic tuff rock. The statues that were never moved from the quarry were protected from destructive rain, fire, animals, and souvenir hunters that have destroyed other Moai and threaten to ruin the island's unique archaeological treasure and tourism attraction. The impassive charm of the Moai -- and the double mystery over the origin of those who carved them and how they were moved -- draws 20,000 tourists a year, and \$3 million in revenue, to this tiny triangle in the South Pacific, the most remote inhabited island in the world. No one knows if the creators of the statues paddled to this 166-square-mile (430-square-km) island from

feet) tall and weighing up to 82 tonnes -- the equivalent of two sperm whales -- down the steep slopes of Rano Raraku to huge platforms near the shore, using only primitive tools. Caretakers of the cracked and crumbling Moai fret that a piece of history is deteriorating before their eyes. "Something must be done immediately. If the Moai are destroyed, the island is destroyed because without tourism this island is nothing," said Rapa Nui expert Francesco Di Castri, former deputy director of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and former president of the World Science Institute. But good news came in early November when UNESCO awarded German company Maar Denkmalpflege an \$11.5 million contract to treat the statues with chemicals starting in 2005. The chemicals are meant to prevent moisture passing through the porous tuff and stop the widening of large cracks that are now forming rapidly.

including 15 well-known ones on the so-called Tongariki platform built by the Rapa Nui people from rock and earth at Anakena beach. But some experts are taking a wait and see attitude on the German project, remembering broken promises of funds from other sources in the past. "This type of project is often proposed with a total lack of knowledge about the conservation priorities here," said Francisco Torres, director of the island's archaeological museum. WEAKENED IN TRIBAL WARS The ancient Rapa Nui people take the first blame in the history of damage to the statues, as they tore them down in tribal wars. "Man was the first (to harm them), delivering them a big shock by toppling them," Torres said. Wind, rain, earthquakes and tidal waves did further damage. Europeans, who arrived on the island in the 1800s, hastened the deterioration, bringing sheep, horses and cows who stepped on and rubbed up against fallen statues and still do despite the



tourists walk next to "Moai" statues in the Anakena beach on Easter Island, 4,000 km (2486 miles) west of Santiago, October 29, 2003. Easter Island's mysterious "Moai", gigantic busts carved out of volcanic rock, are in danger of being destroyed by years of tropical rains and wind as well as careless humans and farms animals. Experts have called on the international community to commit funds to preserve the monoliths, whose mystery draws tourists to the world's most remote inhabited island. Picture taken October 29, 2003. REUTERS

Salinas. But the park's caretakers are learning to get strict with tourists. "Sometimes they (guards) go to far; they don't even let you stand close for a photo," complained a Spanish tourist at the 15 colossi on the Tongariki platform.

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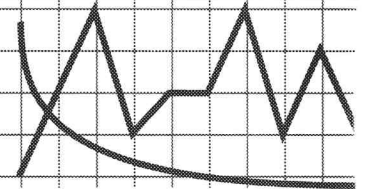
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YT Business

The "New" Red Sea region:

Development strategy

By Irena Knehtl
irena_knehtl@yahoo.com
For The Yemen Times

The aim of the Hodeidah initiative is to bring people, specifically businesses and organizations of the region together, and provide added value to both people and businesses. It also aims to provide a solid base for a future regional and local system to be created during the next decade.

But this will be only possible if littoral states will overcome their weakness and consolidate economic, political and strategic cooperation. Such cooperation would not only foster peace and stability in the area, but will also increase the prosperity and welfare of the peoples of the area.

The Red Sea region should look to their own interest down the path of regional cooperation and seek out new qualities in their relationship and cooperation. Foreign policies should be geared for maximum flexibility in the global economy in order to connect local needs with global resources.

Such policies should be aimed at economic growth and employment opportunities, sustainable development models through mobilization of resources.

Today two distinct worlds, the traditional and modern, prevail in every sphere of the region's life, including scientific and technological. These two worlds will have to come closer and pool their talents and resources together

to improve the lives of people and make countries and their economies stronger and healthier.

To focus the attention not just on the products of technologies, but also the materials, processes, knowledge, skills and organization.

Matters relating to airlines, shipping, satellite communications, banking and tourism, deep sea mining, wave tidal energy from the sea, or working out economics of electricity production or in searching out regional economic similarities in the area of market for goods, cooperative industrial and resource development and regionally generated investment funds are equally strong arguments for regional cooperation.

Promising or uncertain future?

The Arabian Peninsula Seas contain two of the most important strategic waterways in the world: Bab alMandab and Strait of Hormuz. Without them much of the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa and South West Asia would make little sense. Approximately 10 percent of Europe's oil supplies passes through Bab AlMandab which is in the territorial waters of Yemen, Djibuti, and Eritrea. Of these, Yemen is well placed to exercise direct control of the shipping lanes.

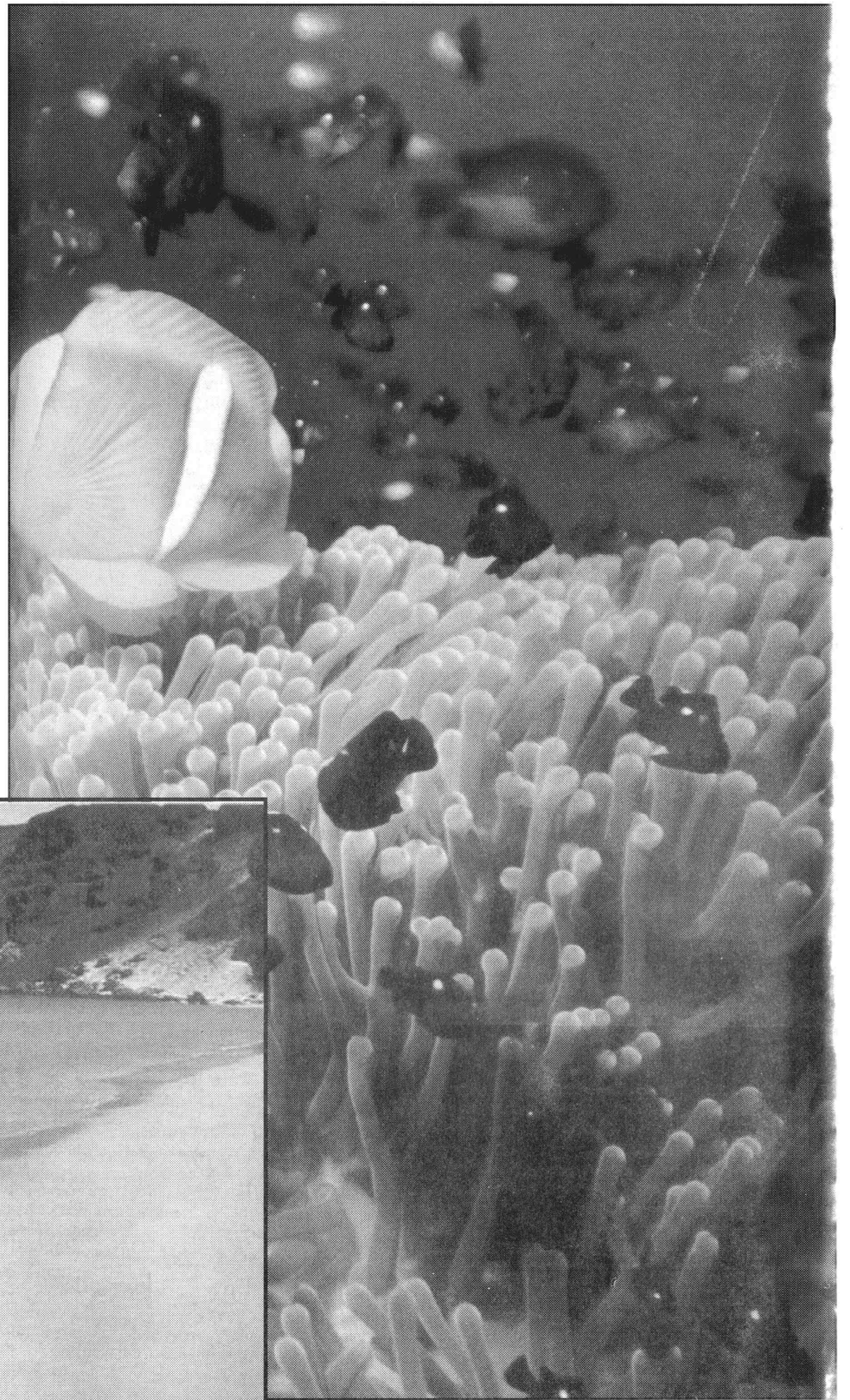
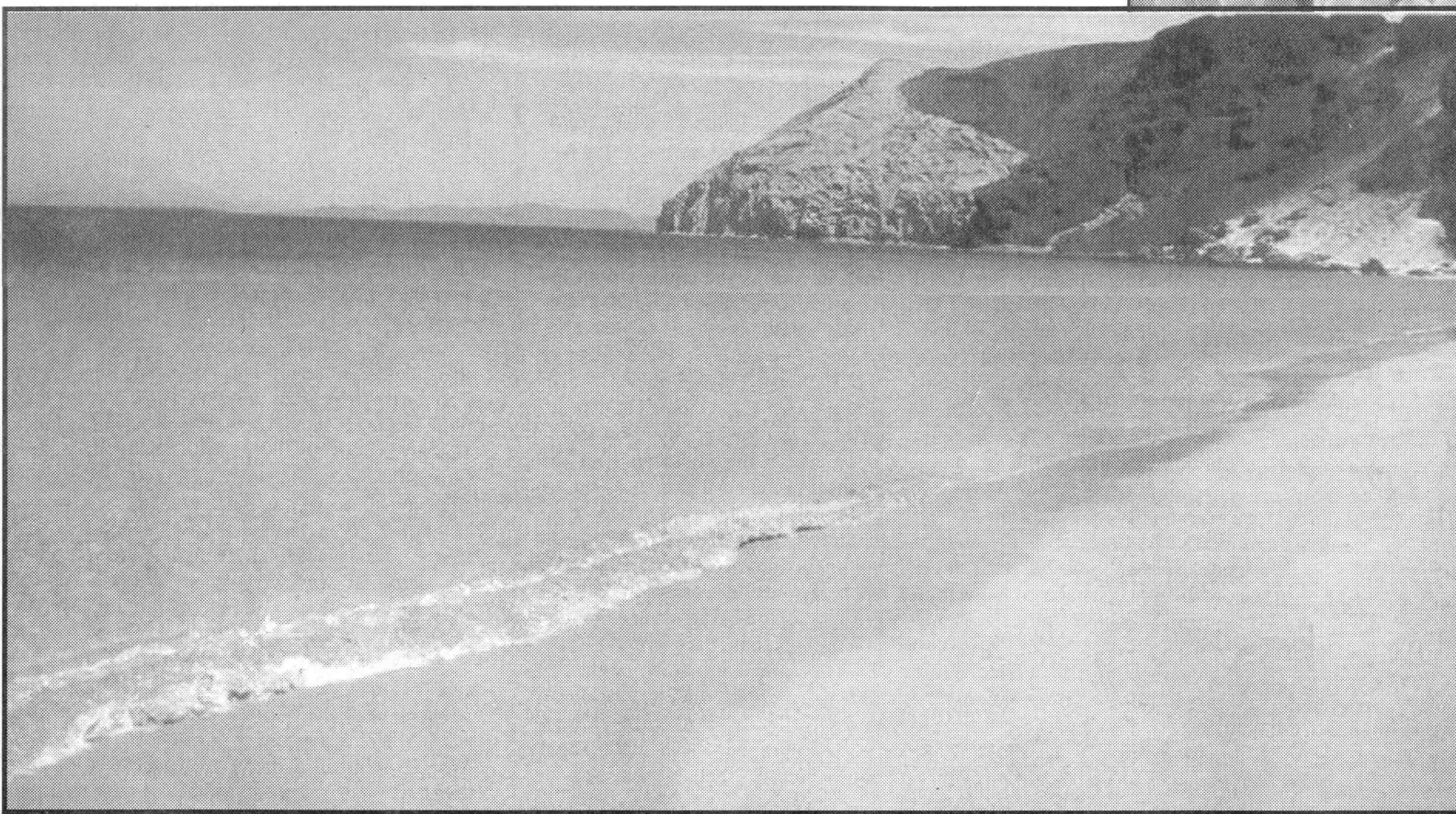
Observes Slovak academic Slavomir Janacik: "The Sea will further gain in its importance. After completing the enlargement of the

European Union, the natural space for "growth" will be the Mediterranean region, its southern and eastern parts, Northern Africa and the Middle East. The European Union continually step by step develops its framework of cooperation with these territories, bilateral, multilateral relations, associations and cooperation, agreements, dialogues, partnerships, cooperation programs, networks, regional policies, strategies.

Perhaps, the Red Sea region can in one generation become the interface, a crossing between "Greater" Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Russia, Indian sub-continent and other Indian Ocean countries.

Promising future or uncertain future? What lies between the hope and fear? I think it is life: freedom, ambitions, dignity, anger, beauty, temptation, unity, misgivings, silence, envy, generosity, indifferences, capability, power, poverty, praise, critics, science, belief, civilization, sun, stars...."

Thus the Sea which is a potential source of disunity is also a powerful argument for cooperation. The Red Sea states may yet to recognize the value of united political front on matters associated with the sea while gaining space for formulation ideas for their own development and future. It is the geo-strategic significance of the Red Sea as resource which the Red Sea countries themselves have yet to explore in full.



Poverty leading to more violence against women

By MAHYOUB AL-KAMALI YEMEN
TIMES STAFF

A social study published recently has concluded that there are a number of social and economic factors behind the increase in violence against women in Yemen.

The study has confirmed that poverty, deprivation, and illiteracy are leading causes in the increase of

crimes against women.

Results of surveys indicate there is rise in families under the line of poverty, now past 35 per cent, and the proportion of unemployment, also over 35 percent. Women occupy 18 per cent.

Added to those factors are the rise in population, and a drop in the woman role in economic activities.

Also, new values alien to the society such as bribery and nepotism and swindling and cheating are a result of the economic, social, political and cultural changes that contribute to weaken the social structure and ethical values.

Other factors contributing to the problem is a spread weapons in society, and the negative side of infor-

mation, in addition to migration from countryside to towns.

There is also the information negative effects a result of absence of monitoring. Added to those causes and factors is the internal migration from the countryside to urban areas and the cultural shock it causes to conservative families.

All the above mentioned factors and causes have expanded the circle of effect on life of women, depriving them of work and movement and arousing the spirit of crime and its increase among the society circles, particularly the women.

According to official statistics the registered yearly averages of crimes reach to about 3,000 various types of crimes. Results of a study

conducted in six governorates have clarified where there are woman prisoners and in 14 governorates where there are no women prisoners

Crimes among woman circles are mostly physical attack, fraud, taking intoxicating liquors and attempted murder. The study also said that a group of women are exposed to injustice of the family and restraints resulting from its traditional social system, as well as depriving women of their legal rights to protection and dealing with them according to the valid law.

The study also indicates that some families leave women in prison and remain there without trial, and even in case of the trial the woman spends her sentence period

in prison and after the end of the sentence period some women remain in it as the society would not accept the crime she had committed.

Some working women are exposed to acts of confiscating their rights and dispensing of their dues by their bosses under justification of family expenses and facing requirements of living.

The study also stresses the importance of taking care of this social segment, founding certain establishments for their qualification and education, providing opportunities for them and helping them to be able to face life problems and consequently live with rights and a stable life.

Words of Wisdom

The atmosphere in Yemen is ripe for change - real change. The country needs reform, and the political leadership seems willing and able to introduce the needed change. Political, economical and military changes have taken place & on a massive scale. But the acid test for the transformation will only come if & when economic change occurs.

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



OUR OPINION

Lessons to learn

Lessons should be learned from a failed USA presence in Iraq, and the consequences this failure would cause to the world and the USA.

The first lesson is to always think before hearing others. Americans in particular should not be driven away from reality and should not see the world with rose-colored glasses.

I advise American readers who support the war to throw away those glasses and look where they are living. After all, we are living in one planet, and are all sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. Getting to know the world around you is a must to realize what the truth.

Americans started to realize after 911 that there other nations out there. There are continents, countries, and people, who have emotions, priorities, and beliefs they would die or live for.

The isolation of the American people in a world of their own has made them too unaware of the rest of the world, and this is due to many reasons. The US media is quite poor in bringing pictures from the world. Those US networks have so much to cover within the country, that they feel they should not be involved in reporting about other happenings unless they concern US policies or citizens.

It is time for US nationals to try to figure out how others think about the USA, and its actions and policies. Five minutes of discussions about how others view your country every day will make you understand why all those things happened in the past, and what would happen in the future if things continue in the same fashion.

American citizens need to understand that it is them who will suffer most if the Iraq conflict goes on forever, simply because the world has indeed become a small village, and the more arrogant, imposing, and selfish the US administration acts, the more people throughout the world would chant anti-US slogans.

Just look at how the Brits received Bush in London lately. Did they receive him with roses and praises because he 'liberated' Iraq and minimized security threats facing the 'free world'? No, he was simply booed, protested and denounced.

You would want to know why and you would want to learn what went wrong, wouldn't you?

Then forget you are an American for five minutes a day and try to look at what your administration has done and is doing in many countries throughout the world. Look at what it has done to Palestinians. Look at what it has done to Iraqis. Look at what it has done to Arabs by supporting their dictatorship regimes for decades, and continue to today.

Don't be misled. Just try to listen, read, and analyze to know why the USA is in the position it is in today.

You can send me hate mails saying that I am anti-American too. I will accept that, and I will respect your point. But you also need to tell me why millions others are also called anti-American. Could it be that all of us are wrong? Why can't you question yourself for one time: Could it be that we are wrong? Why not start a dialogue for us to understand the other?

Or am I asking for too much? **The Editor**

Symposiums, conferences and workshops

Just for money?

BY YASER AL-MAYASI
YEMEN TIMES STAFF

The last few months of this year have seen in Yemen a number of conferences, symposiums, and workshops where vital issues have been discussed.

Some studies and researches related to these activities are of great significance.

A number of politicians and academicians observe that the most successful workshops can have some effect.

For my part, some of these workshops and symposiums, however, do not convey any real meaning. They are just hankering after material interests.

This manifests itself clearly through excessively spending on them.

As a result of this invisibility, or

let's say the ambiguous outcomes of those working papers, it has become difficult to apply them in reality. This is because they don't correspond with our reality.

Holding intensive activities during the recent months of this year have caused unusual bewilderment, and nothing positive has come into being due to holding those workshops and symposiums.

Not even a simple objective has been applied into reality. Some haven't gained any interest or consideration such as media coverage.

Some say the reasons behind such disinterest is the stumbling accompanied with these workshops.

Before the months that proceed the Holy Month of Ramadhan, there has been a certain kind of rapid emulation to hold symposiums and workshops in

different aspects

Some commentators say that holding such workshops just exhaust high amounts of financial allocations before the closure of files and documents during the end of the current year.

The destiny of holding aimless symposiums and workshops is at length a failure.

Nowadays, organizations and international donors are completely convinced of their fragility day after day.

They have expressed their concerns over the random holding to some workshops and symposiums.

At last, organizers of those symposiums should determine the goals before performing or holding any activity, therefore taking into consideration if they are scrupulously performed.

Spinning in their graves

BY PAUL MCGEOUGH
FOR THE SYDNEY MORNIN HERALD

The fighting in Iraq is real. But there is a traditional aspect of war that Americans now see only in the movies - it is the solemn homecoming for the dead.

There was a time when the United States paused as the TV cameras panned over rows of coffins flown home from battle, when it was impossible not to share the sorrow of the families there to receive them, and when there was a genuine sense of shared pain when the president or very senior members of his team attended memorial services.

But George Bush has fenced off himself and his team from the cemetery, and there is a ban on cameramen entering the central military morgue at Dover, in Delaware, where hundreds who have died in Iraq are received. It is also difficult for the photographers to get past security at the Walter Reed Army Medical Centre in Washington, where thousands of the wounded have been treated.

So the American dead and the injured from Iraq pass through a politically imposed void, until their coffin - or stretcher or wheelchair in the case of the wounded - arrives in the back blocks of Idaho or Texas, by which time they have long ceased to be a prime-time or national story. Usually only family and friends witness the handing over of the triangulated Stars and Stripes to grieving spouses or parents.

It wasn't like this during the Vietnam War. Even in the Afghanistan war, flag-draped coffins were filmed, and during the Kosovo conflict, president Bill Clinton was on the tarmac to receive the US dead. The repatriation of the bodies of the American servicemen who died in the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000 was a national story - with images - and presidents Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter, respectively, attended services for the 241 Americans killed in Beirut and for the troops killed in the failed hostage-rescue in Iran.

But it was during the Panama conflict, in 1989, that the first President Bush, George sr, dropped his media guard. At the precise moment that servicemen's caskets were being offloaded at Dover, he did a goof-walk for the cameras of the White

House press corps, to demonstrate the effect of pain he suffered in his neck. At least three of the national networks split their screens, showing viewers an apparently thoughtless commander-in-chief acting the fool as the bodies of men he had sent to war were removed from a military transport.

Retribution was swift. The media were banned from Dover and the traditional body receive ceremonies were ended. Over time the ban came to be ignored, but in the days before this year's Iraq war, the Pentagon ordered that it be observed to the fullest.

The media manipulation of this Bush's team borders on paranoia. They go to great lengths to set the scene - carting specially produced backdrops around the country for his public appearances and even flood-lighting the usually darkened Statue of Liberty for one of his New York night-time speeches.

The words get the same care and attention - death in Iraq is bad news, so he doesn't talk about it. He has met some of the families of the dead in private and they all get a letter of condolence, but he is happier talking about the grand scheme of the war on terrorism or, better still, the economy.

Some Republican commentators are beginning to question the President's aloofness. But the spin from the White House, as told by one of his aides to The New York Times, is that Bush would seem insensitive if he publicly acknowledged some, but not all, the deaths.

Asked about the remarkable presidential silence that greeted the death of the 15 servicemen in the downing of a Chinook helicopter in Iraq early this month, Dan Bartlett, his communications director, dissembled: "If a helicopter were hit an hour later, after he came out and spoke, should he come out again? [The public] wants the commander-in-chief to have a proper perspective and to keep his eye on the big picture and on the ball. At the same time, they want their president to understand the hardship and sacrifice that many Americans are enduring at a time of war. And we believe he is striking that balance."

It is all part of the Bush Administration's ongoing war with the media: when it is not denying them access to Dover, it is attacking them for not reporting the "good

news" out of Iraq; denying reports of its own cavalier prewar predictions of finding Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and of a warm welcome in Iraq; and rejecting allegations from within the intelligence community that, after Iraq, it is now deliberately exaggerating the threat from weapons of mass destruction posed by Syria, Libya and Cuba.

But there is a question of how long its media management can be sustained. Increasingly, the rising disquiet is not just about Bush's refusal to acknowledge the dead or to attend their funerals, but about the things he does find time to do instead.

While families and whole communities grieve about their losses in Iraq, he storms the country with his hand out for tens of millions of dollars in donations for his forthcoming re-election campaign. While he talks about the war dead in only the most general terms, he goes on and on about signs of economic recovery.

He avoids the photo-op with the mothers of the dead from Iraq, but he had the time in his busy schedule on Thursday to wheel three judicial nominees into the Oval Office as a backdrop for his gripes about the Democrats blocking their appointments to the bench.

The pragmatism - some might call it cynicism - is understandable in terms of pure political strategy because, despite all the talk about patriotism and the defence of freedom and liberty, Americans are getting sick of this war.

For the first time since the opening attack on Baghdad on March 20, most Americans - 51 per cent - disapprove of the President's handling of the war. In a Washington Post-ABC News opinion poll taken before the Chinook helicopter disaster, 87 per cent of respondents said they feared the US would be bogged down in Iraq and 62 per cent rated the death toll as unacceptable.

With the passing of each week, the war touches thousands more American family circles in the most direct way. The Pentagon talks of a 20 per cent reduction in total US numbers in Iraq by next northern spring, but in the past two weeks 85,000 army and marine forces have been told they will be going to Iraq so that others can be rotated home. That's more worry and anxiety to feed into the next batch of opinion polls.



COMMON SENSE

By Hassan Al-Haifi

Sodom and Gomorrah

It is imperative that we should never take the important Biblical stories as merely a form of entertainment, but rather as a learning experience from which to draw upon, as we shape our personal decorum and as we try to set up a decent well bred family, not to mention the importance of establishing the appropriate social order that will prevent social decay. The Holy Quran reveals to us many a nation and people who have decided to take their own course in life and set aside all the Divine efforts to try to set mankind straight on a course that will insure social harmony and cohesion and provide all the needs of the society, economically and socially. In addition, each of these nations had their prophets and messengers, who were sent by the Almighty to help guide these stray nations out of their evil course and onto the path of righteousness. This is revealed clearly in all the Scriptures, Judaic, Christian and Moslem. Yet, even after having seen these nations collapse as a result of some calamity or another brought on by an angry God, who does not take kindly to have his authority questioned, or his Messengers and prophets ridiculed or tortured, it seems that mankind will continue to be prone to live drenched in evil and will even go further than that and go against the natural instinctive traits that God has endowed man with, to quench a preposterously sadistic thirst, which has no real concentric value in terms of providing physical pleasure or satisfying a spiritual inclination. On the contrary such pleasures are the scorn of human behavior and often bring about infectious plagues or physical pain that may linger for many years.

The unusual news that one is receiving from the United States, which is supposedly the most modern societies of our times, strikes a great parody to such Biblical and Quranic stories and may entail that the United States is really getting out of hand with the amount of freedom that peoples should have. While there are many social ills that exist that perhaps are not clearly visible in the social fabric of such a complex urban culture, there are indeed many ills that are clearly out of the question, in terms of spiritual acceptance and surely defy all natural instincts and taste.

A couple of weeks ago, we heard that the State of Massachusetts has for all practical purposes legalized the marriages of couples of the same sex. That such a phenomenon exists without any form of legal contract is already a great abomination in itself, but when the society insists that it is all right and provides a license for it, surely entails that the relevant social order is seeking its own decay and degeneration. This is in total defiance of the ordinances of God, the natural physique of the human build and the safety and health of the society as a whole. Suffice it to say that this represents a total insult to the concept of family and child rearing functions that human beings are entrusted with. This is indeed what Sodom and Gomorrah are all about and it is no wonder that the Almighty in his infinite wisdom deemed it necessary to completely eliminate them in the worst way. He rained upon them with burning stones from hell until nothing is left of them and their remains are no where to be even viewed. Their past is clearly well known to us, though it is only revealed to us in the Scriptures and the Quran, in gross detail, and we have no doubt that they are the truth, as it is God who is relating the tales to us and nothing of human concoction can reach the level of literary finesse as that of the Quran, to permit us to dispute their credibility. It is said that there are around eight million gay people in the United States alone, that is more than the number of population of some thirty individual countries in the world. It is no doubt a frightening number that should be taken into consideration by the policy makers of the United States, who should really be worrying about that than the imaginary WMD of this nation or that nation. In fact that is a WMD within the society itself, which is bound to bring in the wrath of the Al-Mighty and eventually the decay and the degeneration of the United States as a novel and model society.

If that was not enough, we recently have heard of the arrest of Michael Jackson, the well-known musical icon, who has been rocking the world for more than a generation. Artists are known for their overindulgence in abnormal social feasting and activities that sometimes go beyond the acceptable, not to mention the tendency to relish in drugs and other socially destructive mania. However the charge that Michael Jackson was arrested on was indeed a frightening one. That anyone would seek pleasure from an innocent child, if such charges are proven true, really bespeaks a horrible indulgence that will undoubtedly deserve the wrath of God and the displeasure of every decent human being, who enjoyed the artistic output of this talented individual. Yet, this sad development only highlights the unusual trends in the American social fabric that really need to be looked into, if the United States can lend credence to its claim of being a novel and modern society. The observer can only look back on the Biblical and Quranic tales of Sodom and Gomorrah to point out that social behavior is inescapable as a criteria by which God judges men and accordingly arranges their fate.



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What is American culture?

By Spengler A.
For Asia Times

How do Americans look at the world? Is there a characteristic American way of thinking, an American culture? Through what filter does information reach their brain, and by what mechanism do they respond to it? An essay we published recently (Why America is losing the intelligence war) blamed deep-seated characteristics of American culture for the failure of American intelligence. That begs the question of whether American culture can be characterized in any general way (apart from the well-worn bon mot that American culture is an oxymoron).

Writing of English culture, the poet and critic T S Eliot famously described it as follows: "The reader must remind himself as the author has constantly to do, of how much is here embraced by the term culture. It includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August [the start of the grouse shooting season], a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, 19th century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar."

After the fashion of Eliot, I have compiled my own list of characteristic features of American culture.

1. Driving slowly in the fast lane. Americans consider it their privilege to amble along in the fast (left-hand) lane, while swifter drivers overtake in the near-side lane (for which European policemen would arrest them straight-away). Clumps of slower drivers impede traffic and set the stage for pileups. This is the sad result of misguided egalitarianism. Americans believe that they should be able to drive wherever they wish, whereas class privilege rules the road in Europe. Faster cars belong in the fast lane and nudge slower-moving vehicles out of the way.

2. Burnt coffee at exorbitant prices. The most popular cafe chain, whose name decent people do not pronounce, burns its coffee beans to produce what Americans mistakenly believe is an authentic European taste. Proper coffee, by which of course I mean Italian coffee, is bittersweet, not burned. Americans evidently hate the wretched stuff because they drown its flavor in a flood of milk, in the so-called "latte", something I never have observed an Italian request during many years of travel in that country. By contrast, Italians drink cappuccino, mixing a small amount of milk into the coffee and leaving a cap of foam. If Americans do not like it, why do they buy it at exorbitant prices? They do so precisely because the high price makes it a luxury, but an affordable one for

secretaries and shopgirls.

3. Dishwater masquerading as tea. Order tea from an American, and you will receive a cup of lukewarm water and a tea-bag. No beverage on earth is more revolting than this. This and the previous item bring to mind a riposte attributed to Abraham Lincoln: "Waiter, if this is coffee, then bring me tea. But if this is tea, then bring me coffee."

4. Wood-flavored wine. Americans know as little about wine as they do about coffee. California winemakers throw oak chips into vats of fermenting chardonnay in order to simulate the effect of aging in oak barrels. That is true only for the cheaper wines, but the dearer ones taste just as woody. The American idea of a "big wine" is to suffuse cabernet sauvignon (properly used to produce a delicate wine) with the taste of oak. At best, American wines offer a soporific sort of smoothness, but never achieve the quirkiness, eccentricity and character which make European vineyards an enchanted realm.

5. Shopping-mall architecture. Most middle-sized American cities have disappeared into a suburban morass, while shopping malls have replaced the old town centers. Americans in most parts of the US have no other place to congregate. Even churches are relocating to shopping malls in order to accommodate the habits of their congregations. Unlike European cities (and older American ones) the public aspect of cities is entirely absent: churches, public buildings, monuments and so forth. The omnipresence of purely commercial architecture depresses the mind; Europeans accustomed to viewing well-proportioned buildings in their daily perambulations find it difficult to spend more than a day or two in such places.

6. A consensus national restaurant menu (Mexican-Italian-seafood-podge). A generation ago, one could be sure of obtaining sawdust sausages, Scotch eggs and pork pies in any British pub (and often a ploughman's lunch with Wensleydale cheese). Today, one can count on finding pizza, tacos, fried shrimp, Caesar salad and cheeseburgers in any American restaurant, as the American melting pot transforms various national cuisines into indistinguishable blobs of grease and dough. Unification of American cuisine is not much of a loss, as the local cuisine was wretched to begin with, but the result is nonetheless disheartening. Anti-globalists have made a target of the purveyors of fast food, but the chains have homogenized other cuisines, such as seafood, Italian, Mexican, steak and so forth. In the place of texture and flavor Americans receive grease and quantity, which helps explain why they are so podgy.

7. Chewing tobacco. What more can one say? Heinrich Heine, the greatest poet of mid-19th century Germany, wrote, "Sometimes I think of emigrating to America, but I am frightened by a country where human beings chew tobacco."

8. Hand-me-down high culture. Not to possess a high culture is no shame; the Pilgrim Fathers of New England rejected Western high culture as they found it in favor of a radical return to ancient Israel. Like Moliere's bourgeois gentleman, the Americans of the 19th century decided that a high culture suited their new respectability. Americans who would not recognize an allegory if it ate them alive by inches, and cannot read a line of Dante Alighieri or Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, gush over Herman Melville's confused and overwrought Moby Dick. American scholars who have not heard of the 16th century Lazarillo de Tormes claim that Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is a work of originality. Harold Bloom, the defender of the "Western Canon" against the barbarian hordes of deconstructionism, enthuses over Walt Whitman's onanistic (in the literal sense of the term) excuse for verse. Bloom dismisses the critics of the left as "resentniks", but is resentment not the other side of the coin of pretension? In any case, these are the embarrassing pretensions of two generations past, the putative classics beloved of American conservatives. University students today are more likely to wade through the works of black and feminist writers as a counterweight to the "elitist" high culture of Melville and Whitman, that is, if they are not occupied with courses on film and comic books.

9. Gullibility. If Americans will buy chardonnay saturated with oak chips to the point of resembling turpentine, burnt coffee disguised by sweet hot milk, chain-restaurant parodies of Italian food, and hand-me-down literary classics, what will they not buy? Itinerant European academics turn up on their shores in emulation of the gypsy Melchior in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude, from Paul de Man on the left to Leo Strauss on the right.

Man thinks with his entire being, not with mere abstract powers of ratiocination. Tactile, gustatory, olfactory and sentimental habits bear on our view of the world more than the philosophers we might have read in school. Culture is the glue that holds generations together; paradoxically, American culture makes a virtue of the ephemeral. Americans in consequence cannot imagine the frame of mind of those for whom a cultural connection to the past has become a matter of life and death. This sometimes charming, usually harmless trait of American culture turns into a tragic flaw in the context of America's encounter with Islam.

By John Brummett
For Arkansas News

It's in vogue to lament the unprecedented division and virulence in contemporary American politics. We are told that never before has the country been so evenly and bitterly split with partisans openly expressing hatred - Republicans for the Clintons and Democrats for George W. Bush.

Never before, we are told, has a partisan leader in Congress injected himself into congressional apportionment in his home state to impose absurdly gerrymandered districts enhancing his party's odds in the next cycle. Never before, we are told, has one party created a perpetual campaign culture by forcibly ousting a duly and very recently elected governor from the opposing party in our most populous state. Never before, we are told, has one party successfully imposed the Senate rule on filibuster to deny up-or-down majority votes on federal judgeship nominees recommended by the appropriate committee. Never before, we are told, has the House leadership



BY SAMER A.

Something wicked coming this way

By John Cory
For tuthout.com.au

Some people say Iraq is a quagmire. I disagree. I see Iraq as an oil slick, oozing and drifting across the currents, poisoning the basic source of life, damaging the environment beyond belief, and killing the Creator's defenseless and fragile creatures. True to form, there is no glory in an oil spill, only a sense of violation. And typically there is no containment until after the damage is done. Long, lasting damage.

Things are not good these days, insurgents in Iraq are creating havoc, election season is almost here, and all the news that's fit to print, is bad. The war in Iraq, for Americans, has become the old story about the farmer's pig. You know the one, about the city dude driving by a farm, spots a pig with a wooden leg and stops to ask the farmer about the poor critter.

The farmer proudly tells him that pig is a treasured family pet, having once saved the farmer's son from drowning, and how it used its snout to rut a furrow and free the farmer after he had been trapped beneath the tractor one day. The perplexed city dude asked why the pig had one wooden leg, and the farmer replied, "Why we love that pig so much, we're only eating him a little bit at a time."

Things are about to change. Bush and Cheney installed the Governing Council. It did not matter that most of these particular Iraqis had not been in the country for decades. It didn't even matter that Ahmed Chalabi an alleged bank swindler, and a murky accountant of millions of lost CIA dollars, was not supported by local Iraqis.

No sir, these guys would do what the US wanted and told them to do. End of story. Make it happen.

But now we learn that the Governing Council has problems, big problems. They don't show up for important meetings. They appear to be practicing Bush Republicanism by awarding their chums lucrative contracts, especially in the communications arena. Contracts that, whether or not they remain in power, will line their own investment portfolios nicely. This Council spends a lot of time out of the country, seeking new business contracts and development deals, mostly for themselves. The nerve. They should be dedicated to helping solve the problems of Iraq, not gallivanting all over the place raising funds and conducting business transactions. And on top of everything else, some of these guys actually believe that they are running things. This infuriates the Bush administration. To paraphrase an old song, "Isn't it ironic?"

Bush has studiously avoided the returning caskets, the wounded and amputees, fearing the stain of lies that saved this greedy war. When new deaths and body counts appear in the media, Bush and his minions rush to brag of real progress that goes unreported. But the flood of attacks and the brazen determination of Iraqi insurgents have caused the Bush administration to grab for immediate solutions. He may be able to raise reelection money from his political base, but sinking poll numbers require desperate and definitive action.

It's time to read the writing on the wall, folks. Of course, this is only a guess on my part, but here is what I figure is coming:

Voluntarily or involuntarily, Paul Bremmer is on his way out. Or at least

severely reduced in power and stature. The war is going over to the generals and hawks. This means that heavy bombing and more air strikes are coming. Mission Un-accomplished will now drive the return to major combat efforts. The war is back on, the peace can wait, at least until just before the US elections. Something big and violent must happen to prove that Bush and company are truly in-charge.

The Governing Council is due for a shake-up. Bush is already sending signals that a provisional government might be better, and to do that, he has to bomb like hell, or at least like Afghanistan, shuffle the ex-pat Iraqis on the Council around, and look to get local leaders to re-establish and recall the old military and police members, in order to ease the burden on US troops. Maybe bring back the draft for US citizens, what with Reservists and Regulars considering not re-enlisting.

The big push will be a clear and visible sign of an exit strategy. Milestones and creation of a hurried interim-Constitution will be paraded before the genuflecting press corps. Then sometime, somewhere before the Republican convention at Ground Zero, Bush will don a uniform and strut across the platform to announce the final blow to Saddam Hussein and his rag-tag band of guerillas.

And here is the chilling and frightening thing, to do this Bush will gladly sacrifice all the troops necessary to achieve shock-and-awe that any of us could ever have doubted him. He will stand tall on the graves of soldiers and citizens, and not bat an eye or blush a cheek in shame. The war for Iraqi freedom and democracy will be victorious, even if it kills us all.

Something wicked is coming this way.

Why the hatred? It starts with 'A'

held conference committee meetings and failed even to notify the appointed conferees of the minority party.

Why this seemingly new level of bitterness? I'll answer first by specifying a few things that aren't factors.

It's not personal. It is true that many Republicans say they are rendered nauseated by the very existence of Bill and/or Hillary Clinton and that as many Democrats are left similarly ill by the oppressive realization that George W. Bush draws breath. But inside the Beltway, where politics are interpersonal, Republicans will tell you they have found both Clintons likable and Democrats will tell you that Dubya is nothing if not personable.

It's not tax cuts. Republicans want to reduce them for rich people and make government smaller. Democrats want plenty of taxes progressively applied to keep government active. For the time being both get their way, thanks to a deficit that is a real problem only for the next generation.

It's not guns. Liberals have pretty

much resigned themselves to the political and logistical impracticalities of reducing or controlling them.

It's not drugs. Democrats want to move away from imprisonment and into treatment. Republicans feel the same way, at least for Rush Limbaugh.

It's not Iraq. Yes, Bush has made a mess of it with his bellicose democratic imperialism. But Bill Clinton talked incessantly of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. He said before the war that he'd do pretty much the same thing.

It's not really a culture war. Professed conservatives will buy their daughters Britney Spears CDs, never minding how unclothed she gets or how many times she writhes in sexual pantomime or how many persons of the same gender she favors with a deep kiss. But let Miss Spears become a pro-choice advocate and see what happens.

Yes, there it is. Abortion. Killing unborn babies versus depriving women of the right to make decisions regarding their own bodies. Treasuring all

God's living things or treasuring a woman's rights as equal to a man's.

Partisan combatants know that this is the prevailing passion and fuel of modern-day politics. Whenever Clinton was in trouble, he reminded his partisans of his importance to maintaining a woman's choice, both in terms of legislation and in judicial nominations. When Bush is in trouble, as now, he assembles Republican white men to stand behind him as he signs a bill to ban certain late-term abortions, then dispatches his party's Senate leadership to stage 30 hours of meaningless debate on the Democrats' blocking four of his anti-abortion judicial nominees.

Cynical? Breathtakingly so.

Only by political influence growing outward from the largely detached center, meaning from those who don't like abortion but understand it must remain legal, can we hope to restore a system in which the parties at least engage each other in hopes of occasionally attending to the greater public interest.

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Iran's women trade headscarves for haute couture

By Parinoosh Arami

TEHRAN, Nov 19 (Reuters) - Iranian women are associated more with hijab than haute couture.

Since Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979, hijab, the obligatory dress code, has required women to wear clothes which disguise the shape of the body and cover the hair.

The very hint of fashion has been frowned on by Iran's religious establishment. Fashion shows are normally held secretly in private homes, but last month the Iranian authorities allowed designer Mahla Zamani to hold one in public.

The show, a sign of a gradual relaxation of the dress code, was denounced by Tehran's conservatives as a plot to undermine Islamic values.

Held ironically in a Tehran sports complex called "Hijab", it was an all female affair and photographers were banned.

CONDEMNATION "It is a hypocritical attempt to realise the evil aims of foreigners by snatching the Islamic covering from Muslim Iranian women," thundered the conservative Jomhuri-ye Eslami daily.

For many clerics wearing the all enveloping head to toe shroud known as the chador, which literally means tent, is essential to protect a woman's modesty.

But enforcement of the dress code has relaxed in recent years. In public many young women wear long trousers with a knee-length coat, and allow as much hair as possible to spill out from under colourful silk headscarves.

Once behind closed doors, the coats and scarves come off, often revealing the latest dresses from top European fashion houses.

Zamani introduced a collection of traditional Persian designs that may augur a sartorial sea-change in what is Islamically permissible.

She believes she can add spice and colour to the wardrobes of Iranian women without offending the sensibilities of strict officials. Those pushing dress codes too far in public still risk being picked up by the police and fined. "It is a cultural endeavour to revive traditional costumes.

Why should we get fashion from the West?" she said.



An Iranian woman tests the colours of make-up at an upscale shop in north Tehran November 8, 2003. Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, women are required to dress in loose-fitting clothes that disguise the shape of their body and cover their hair. REUTERS

"My outfits are very well-received and they will bring about change in women's Islamic clothing," said Zamani, who also publishes Iran's first women's fashion journal, Lotus (www.lotusmagazine.com), launched earlier this year.

"Women should wear bright colours...less drab colours help them psychologically," said Bardia, 25, a dentist. Some psychologists say Iranian women suffer from depression because of the dark colours they normally wear.

EASTERN SUBSTITUTE

One woman in Zamani's audience said the new designs could serve as an Eastern substitute for a domestic surge in interest in Western-style tailored clothes.

"The costumes by Western fashion designers are not practical for us here," said Marjan, who wore a long loose robe.

But another patron thought the designs did not match up to those of Western designers.

"The patterns are not elaborate and complex enough to be compared with Western designs, especially couture. There is no real originality," said Leela, a 25-year-old aerobics instructor.

Tehran's fashion-conscious women have outpaced their male counterparts.

There are no men's fashion shows in Iran, although good-looking male models wearing Western clothes appear on advertising billboards across Tehran.

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