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# YEMEN TIMES

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**Inside:**  **5** OPIC is Coming to Yemen  **7** The niqab: Between veneration and tradition  **10** Water and environment are major concerns in Yemen

*Two teenagers and 5 engineers still held in 7 month kidnap ordeal*

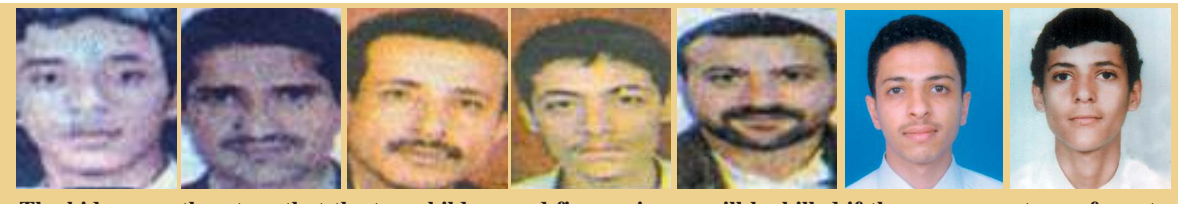
## The hostages endure terrible conditions

By: Almgidat Mojalli

Sana'a, 23 March — The kidnapper of two Yemeni teenagers and another five Yemeni engineers has threatened to kill the hostages if the Ministry of the Interior use military force to secure their release. The kidnappings took place in Bani Dhabian, Khawlan, 50km east of Sana'a. Abdrabu Altam, the principal captor, warned the Yemen Times in a telephone conversation: "We lay all responsibility on the Ministry for anything that happens to them".

Before he releases the hostages, Altam has demanded a ransom of YR150 million as well as his YR70 million share in a disputed plot of land. According to Altam the government is liable for its failure to help him resolve a dispute with three business partners, and should help pay the ransom to release the hostages.

The two teenage hostages involved in the case, Abdul Allah Ali Saleh al-Komin (15) and Mohammad Yahya Naser al-



The kidnapper threatens that the two children and five engineers will be killed if the government uses force to release them.

Komim (17) were kidnapped in Sana'a in June 2007. According to security statements, the teenagers were isolated a remote district of Bani Dhabian when they were taken. Altam's involvement in a land dispute led him to kidnap the boys because they shared the same surname (al-Komin) as one of the protagonists in the dispute. Their families have continuously emphasised their innocence.

On Jan. 8, 2008 after the case had stagnated for six months, Altam's frustration led him to take further hostages. Five engineers, who were surveying a road project in Bani Dhabain, were kidnapped

by Altam, increasing his group of hostages to seven. These five men, according to Ismail al-Moayed, their manager at Yemen Rock Office, had no relation to Altam's dispute.

"I know that neither the two children nor the engineers should take any responsibility for my problem, and I know that they have no blood relations to my opponents. I kidnapped them to oblige the government to help me take my rights from my opponents", said Altam. He added, "...there is no government. We live in a jungle that has no law or justice otherwise the state would have helped me

resolve my problem."

At the centre of the dispute is an area of land located in the al-Safiya neighbourhood of Sana'a. Altam claims that he part-owned the land and that he had agreed with his fellow proprietors to sell the plot to Ali Mohsen al-Ahmer, the head of the northwest military district. But Altam claims that despite the successful sale of the land, he never received his share of the proceeds. Instead his partners, Ahmed Obaid Sherief, Saleh Najj Khassa'an and Abdullah Al-Kumaim, sold the land to al-Ahmer for YR70 million and never gave him his share.

Rafeeq Radman, one of the kidnapped engineers, affirmed that the hostages have to endure terrible conditions and are monitored by a strict guard detail. According to Radman, he and his fellow hostages suffer from disease and malnutrition, but have no access to the necessary medicines or even to basic ablutions. Without a bathroom, a toilet, or running water, he commented, "We all live together in one room and have eaten only two kinds of food, Ased [local food], and beans, since we were kidnapped three months ago." Three food-strikes on consecutive days brought no reward and, as Radman added, "one of my colleagues is suffering

from stomach sores and needs medicine". The engineers and the parents of the two captured teenagers have appealed to the President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to help free them as soon as possible.

Dr Mansour al-Zendani MP said that the parliament had summoned the Minister of the Interior, Dr Rashad al-Alemi, to explain the security issues in the country and the question of the kidnapping. The discussion, however, was waived in favour of a debate about disarmament and its consequences. Al-Zendani added that the parliament will question the minister about the issues of the kidnaps on today, March 24.

## Palestinian movements reach reconciliation deal

By: Yemen Times Staff

SANA'A, March 23 — Representatives of the Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah ended on Sunday their five-day negotiations with signing the Yemeni initiative: "Sana'a Declaration" saying they "accept Yemen's initiative as a framework for resuming dialogue to restore normalcy".

The two factions reconvened in Sana'a earlier in the day after the dialogue, launched last week by Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, came close to collapse several times.

"We, the representatives of Fatah and Hamas, agree on the Yemeni initiative as a framework to resume dialogue between the two movements to return the Palestinian situation to what it was before

the Gaza incidents," the declaration issued read.

The talks, based on a seven-point plan proposed by Saleh to end the dispute between the Palestinian rivals and rebuild the shattered Palestinian Authority, briefly broke down Thursday but were back on after Hamas' top leaders reviewed the final draft of a statement signed Sunday.

Azzam al-Ahmed, deputy prime minister and leader of Fatah lawmakers in the Palestinian Parliament, and Hamas' deputy leader Moussa Abu Marzouk, signed the "Sana'a Declaration."

The Yemeni initiative calls for the situation in Gaza to return to the way it was before Hamas seized the area in June after routing Fatah forces loyal to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

The violence left Hamas in control of

Gaza and Fatah in control of the West Bank and entrenched divisions as the two movements vied for power and influence among the 4 million Palestinians in the two areas separated by Israel.

"Resumption of dialogue must take place to implement the Yemeni proposal and not to deal with it as a framework for dialogue because this will not lead to any result. We want the implementation of the proposal. We do not want talks over its articles," the Fatah-led Palestinian presidency said in a statement.

A senior Hamas official said talks would begin on April 5 with the first round being held in the Palestinian territories, but the Palestinian ambassador to Yemen, Ahmad Deek, said Yemen would issue invitations for talks there early next month.

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh had been pressing the Palestinians to begin their dialogue in April and said Yemen would ask the Arab Summit in Damascus on March 29-30 to endorse the initiative as a joint Arab plan.

Saleh requested Hamas and Fatah to stop the media provocation campaign against each other and acknowledged that "there are some difficulties" but that "the good will expressed by the two sides will bring great achievements."

The Yemeni initiative calls for the creation of a national unity government and rebuilding security forces loyal to a common government rather than to factions. In addition, it calls for Arab states such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Jordan, to form a council to oversee the implementation of the Yemeni plan.

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## In brief

## SOCOTRA

## 128 tourists visiting Socotra

Two Yemenia airplanes carried tourists on a voyage to Socotra Island. Of the 128 tourists 36 were from Greece and they would be the first Greek tourists visiting the island. As a consequence of the increasing demand to visit the island, Yemenia airlines has provided an additional trip to Socotra. The island is nominated to be one of the seven natural wonders of the world.

## SANA'A

## Ninth school theatre festival

Presenting over 40 theatrical performances, students of Capital Secretariat schools will participate in the five day school theatre festival. The festival started on Sunday and is an annual event in which students are encouraged to perform and be creative. It is also an opportunity to discover talents among the students who will win awards at the end of the festival. The event is organized by the Ministry of Education's office in coordination with Shaqaiq Al-Noman schools.

## African influence on Music in Yemen and Oman

A seminar on the Liwah dance and the influence of African on music in Yemen and Oman is conducted today at the French Institute for ... and social sciences. The seminar talks about how the similarities in the folklore dances and music between Yemen and Africa and how they are probably the result of trade relations and immigration over the centuries. The seminar is organized in coordination with the Yemeni Traditional Music Center. Dr. Nizar Ghanim director of the Health Cultural center and Dr. Mohammed Sibani from Paris University are speaking in the seminar.

## MUKALA

## Women advocacy training

Twenty participants from around Hadramout governorate are participating in a three day training on advocacy and campaigning for women's rights in Mukala. The training aims at promoting women's political participation especially with regards to the coming parliamentary elections in 2009 wither through the quota system or through open competition. The training is organized by Cultural Development Programs Foundation and is targeted to civil society activists.

## Swiss photographer's exhibition on Yemen

On the sidelines of the investment conference to commence in Mukalla coming Wednesday, European photographer Edgar Schlag will be holding an exhibition of his photographs on Yemen. The photos range between 30 years old to today and will be displayed on large presentation slides during the conference.

## ADEN

## Chess championship concludes

The winner of the first place in the national chess championship, Basher Al-Qadimi, deserved his trophy and gold medal along with 100,000 YR. The championship which was organized by the General Union for Chess, lasted for one week between March 15 and 22.

## MANAKHA

## Cleaning campaign

A four day cleaning campaign in Manakha concluded Saturday in Manakha. Construction waste, plastic bags and garbage were collected from the streets and around the houses. The town is a tourist attraction and its roads were rock paved recently in an attempt to make it more attractive for tourists. The campaign was organized by the cleaning and governorate enhancement fund in coordination with the local council and environmental protection authority. In order to maintain this new look, garbage cans and waste baskets were installed around the town, and shop owners are obliged to maintain the cleanliness of their surroundings otherwise they will be fined.

## Ja'ashin victims tell their story

Many displaced citizens from Ibb's Ja'ashin district complained of the torture and inhuman treatment they have been suffering in the private jails of influential sheikh Mohammed Ahmad Mansour, who is also an advisor to President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

By: Yemen Times Staff

SANA'A, March 23 — During a news conference held Thursday at the head-office of Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC) organization, displaced peasants narrated what happens to the locals in Mansour's private confinements, adding that the powerful sheikh forces them from their homes, deprives them of eating and drinking, destroys and loots their property, and threatens to kill them.

Tawakul Karaman head of the organization declared that her organization is ready to prepare a documentary film on the conditions of Yemeni jails and how inmates are treated in these jails.

Giving his testimony against acts of the powerful sheikh, Abdu Mohammed Qaied, one of the displaced victims, complained that he has been jailed for three months in the Halaba Jail, one of Mansour's notorious prisons, disclosing that he was handcuffed and his legs were chained. The victim went on to say that the sheikh's militias used to torture them, throw cold water on them at night, adding that the jail inmates sleep overnight without any mattresses or blankets to protect themselves from cold weather.

Qaied said that the sheikh's followers brought a black snake to frighten him in jail after the sheikh deprived them of eating and drinking. "As a result of

hunger while being in jail, I found myself obliged to eat a rabbit without having it cooked," he revealed.

Ahmad Abdu Abdullah, another Ja'ashin victim, revealed that he was exposed to physical beating, saying he was beaten by the sheikh's soldiers in a private confinement and his fingernails were pulled out. One of the district's teachers cried that he has been jailed in the notorious Halaba prison where he was handcuffed, and therefore suffering hunger and thirst for more than two weeks.

All displaced peasants reviewed the threats Mansour practices against them, complaining that the powerful man destroys their homes, confiscates their cattle, shoots at their women and children to frighten them and forces them to evacuate their homes if they resist to pay illegal ransoms to him under the guise of Zakat (alms).

Sana'a University professor Mohammed Abdulmalik Al-Mutawakil held President of the Republic and prime minister accountable for what happens in the Ja'ashin district. Having listened to some victim's testimonies at the news conference, he told them, "It is a shame that you tolerated oppression, injustice and insult for such a long time period. We are living in a society that should be completely changed."

At the beginning of the conference, lawyer and human rights activist Khalid Al-Anisi, Executive Director of the National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms, known as HOOD, commented on a bid made by Interior Ministry to resolve Ja'ashin citizens' issue and arrest their perpetrators, but on condition they must not disclose conditions of the sheikh's notorious jails during the conference. The ministry added if these peasants want to have their problems solved, they have to cancel the conference.



Ja'ashin's residents said that they have been jailed for many months in the Mansour's private prisons, where they were handcuffed.

Al-Anisi pointed out that it is usual for Yemen's interior ministry to behave this way and it is not the first time for the ministry to make such a bid. He said that security authorities did not allow citizens to perform Friday prayers at the Square of Liberty, where they stand in solidarity with the victims.

According to HOOD's executive director, Ja'ashin citizens rejected the interior ministry's condition, saying the oppressed citizens are strong enough to tolerate extortion and pressures practiced against them. "Those oppressed peasants will continue their peaceful protests until the government protects and ensures their legal rights," he maintained.

Karaman said at the conference, "It is remorseful and regretful for Yemen to see such conditions in the 21st century. It is sorrowful to see that people are

enslaved fifty years after the Yemeni Revolution broke out."

"A tribal sheikh, who is also a Shoura Council member, treats citizens as if he owns them, considers what they have as his own property. He obliges them to grow sheep and cows for him to eat," Karaman regretted. "Mansour evicts Ja'ashin citizens from their homes whenever he wants. He jails them in his notorious confinements whenever he wants and however he wants," she added.

HOOD called on all Yemeni journalists to express solidarity with the oppressed Ja'ashin citizens and communicate their issue to the public opinion, as well as help displaced citizens who have been suffering hard conditions in Sana'a for 20 days during their search for 'missing justice'.

Many displaced Ja'ashin peasants are gathering at Yemen Female Media Forum, claiming the relevant authorities in the government to rescue them from Mansour's cruel treatment and oppression. They held a sit-in on Wednesday before Parliament, protesting against the policy followed by Mansour obliging poor citizens to pay large sums of money, amounting up to YR 10,000 under the guise of Zakat, which is supposed to be paid to the government and not to the powerful sheikh.

Minister of Local Administration Abdulqader Ali Hilal promised displaced citizens from Ja'shin's Unaisain village on March 3 to form a committee to be in charge of investigating their complaints. He warned them against politicizing their issue, saying "there is no need to throw more oil into the fire" since the country experiences unprecedented unrest. He assured the homeless citizens that from now onward, they can pay Zakat to the relevant government agencies after 40 years of paying it to Sheikh Mansour.



During the conference, some of the victims showed the methods by which they were abused.

## While its prevalence remains a challenge, TB infection is decreased



Khazna has suffered T.B since a year.



Taher Rasam, has been suffering T.B for three months.

By: Hamed Thabet

SANA'A, March 23 — The number of reported TB cases has decreased by 3.7 percent between 2006 and 2007 according to the National Tuberculosis Combating Program. The program stated in its 2007 study that there were 8,700 cases reported in 2006 compared to 2,300 cases in 2007. However, the disease remains prevalent around the country and especially less developed governorates like Al-Hodeidah and Haja, according to Dr. Faker Ali Al-Qobati, a professor in respiratory diseases at the medical collage of Sana'a University, and a consultant at Al-Thawra Public Hospital.

This decrease is not only in Yemen. Other developing countries such as in Africa also witness a decrease in reported cases. According to World Health Organization statement on the occasion of World Tuberculosis Day March 24, the average rate at which new TB cases were detected has slowed down. The statistics released in the Global Tuberculosis Control Report 2008 showed that the detection rate decreased from 6 percent per year in 2005 to only 3 percent worldwide. WHO emphasized on the need to improve detection systems in order to eliminate the disease completely.

"We have entered a new era," said Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General. She added, "To make progress, firstly public program must be further strengthened. Secondly, we need to fully tap the potential of other service providers. Enlisting these other providers, working in partnership with national program, will markedly increase diagnosis and treatment for people in need."

The challenges for Yemen's TB programs are even higher as the population growth rate is one of the highest in the world at 3.1 percent. According to Dr. Ali Al-Mudhwah, Director-General of Family Health at the Health Ministry incursion of dirty, crowded areas, and the type of lifestyle forced upon Yemenis due to poverty, such as eight or 10 people sleeping, smoking, and chewing qat in one room, helps the TB to spread among people in Yemen. "Our social habits and customs, such as eating together from the same dish, drinking from the same cup and sitting with infected patients in the same room contribute to spreading the disease quickly. Sometimes a father, mother or other family member will take an infant and kiss it; consequently, he or she transmits the disease to the infant." Said Dr. Ahmed Al-Hammami, Bronchoscopy specialist and a professor at Sana'a University.

"In the past, the Yemeni government gave free monthly portions of food-stuffs such as flour, wheat and sugar to TB patients while they received their daily medication at the TB units," said Dr. Adel Mahyoub, director of Information Management at Yemen's Ministry of Public Health and Population.

Today, the Ministry of Health is unable to catch up with the increasing demand for the medications. Dr. Nashwan Al-Attab, emergency unit officer at Al-Thawra Hospital explained that sometimes patients go to public centers where free medicines are provided only to find that there are no more medicines. An interruption of treatment is dangerous because TB medications must be administered for six to eight months without interruption.

## US embassy attack suspects cleared

SANA'A, March 23 — Five suspects who were thought to be involved in the attack on the US embassy were released yesterday as the search for the criminals continues. According to the Ministry of Interior the investigation is still on going and so far nobody is charged with the crime.

"There are people working on the issue, and the capital secretariat security office is on top of the investigation," said Mohammed Al-Qawsi deputy Minister of Interior.

The US embassy personnel have recommenced working since Saturday although still on their guard because the criminals are not caught yet. The Department of State authorized the departure from Yemen of non-emergency American employees of the U.S. Embassy and eligible family members.

Meanwhile, the significant security presence that was seen last week in the main road to the embassy that was blocked post the incident has been opened since

Saturday.

"We are cooperating with Yemeni authorities and we know that certain units at the Ministry of Interior are working on the case, although the embassy is operating, we have taken appropriate precautions to ensure safety of our staff and citizens," said Embassy Public Affairs Officer Ryan Gliha.

On its travel warnings site, the Department of State urged U.S. citizens to consider deferring non-essential travel to Yemen at this time. It declared the security threat level as high due to terrorist activities in Yemen. It also advised U.S. citizens who remain in Yemen to keep a low profile and avoid hotels, restaurants and crowds.

Although the recent attack last Tuesday did not hit the embassy itself, the three mortars that are thought to have been launched from a pickup truck on the road hit the all girls school adjacent to the embassy.

One government security officer who was stationed at the area was killed while 13 of the students were injured. Three of the injured students are being treated in Jordan on the expense of the Yemeni government.

Five soldiers stationed at the site were also injured at the incident.

The American ambassador visited the victims the following day to the attack, and expressed his and his people's sympathies. After a two-day halt the students reluctantly returned to the school with a large absenteeism percentage. The families and teachers are still insecure and shocked at how vulnerable they are being adjacent to the embassy. On Saturday morning the school administration held an assembly with the students in support of the victims and to condemn the attack.

In an attempt to lift spirits the Ministry of Education awarded the school a national recognition for its efforts in environmental awareness and protection.

## Yemeni Gitmo detainees not to return yet

By: Amel Al-Ariqi

SANA'A, March 23 — Contradicting to official Yemeni media, the Yemeni government denied making an official request for the release of thirteen Yemenis detained in Guantanamo Bay Prison.

Currently more than one-third of the prisoners at Guantanamo are from Yemen. Most have been detained without any charge and in brutal conditions for over six years; however, their return to Yemen remains questionable.

"The Yemeni government — through the foreigner ministry— always demands the release of all the Yemeni detainees at Gitmo, but we haven't recently asked the U.S government to release the thirteen Yemenis in question" said Khaled Al-Akwa, deputy Foreign Minister.

The Yemeni Defense Ministry website said on Saturday that 13 Yemeni detainees in Guantanamo will arrive to Yemen in the coming days while others will be following in groups. It website reported that the release comes as a response to a recent official request made by the Yemeni government. In return, Yemen promised to try and imprison any of the returned detainees if proved to be involved in terrorist acts or violence.

However, Marc Falkoff who is an American lawyer representing 16

Yemenis detained in Guantanamo accused Yemen of not acting up to its words in this issue.

"We have heard many times over the years that the Yemeni government has "requested" or "demanded" that their citizens be returned home from Guantanamo, but so far these pronouncements have proven to be nothing but hollow rhetoric."

According to USA government previous statements, it needs to ensure that the detainees when returned will be treated humanly and in accordance to international laws, while ensuring they are not allowed to re-engage in terrorist actions upon handed over to Yemen.

In a press conference earlier this year, US ambassador to Yemen told media that previous experiences have substantiated this concern as some of former Al-Qaeda members were set free by Yemeni government and have been involved in terrorist acts.

Yemeni government has created a program to rehabilitate former Al-Qaeda members in an intuitional way. The program which is known as the Dialogue Program includes intellectual religious dialogues to correct misleading concepts through holding sessions with religious scholars. The Intellectual and Religious Dialogue Committee responsible for the program declared that it was successful in

convincing a lot of people to renounce the extremist thoughts.

Accordingly, Falkoff indicated that there is a statement signed by more than 30 attorneys from the United States who represent Yemeni men held at Guantanamo saying they do not believe the detainees would be tortured if returned to Yemen, and called for all of the Yemeni detainees to be released and repatriated.

"It is unacceptable that the Yemeni and U.S. governments have not come to an agreement to bring these men home. There is absolutely nothing which should prevent their return to Yemen, read the statement.

So Far, of the 109 Yemeni men detained by the U.S. government since January 2002, only 13 have been returned to Yemen to be re-arrested again. Currently all of the returned detainees have been released after spending months in Yemeni custody without facing trails or charges.

"The Yemeni government understands that it must reach terms with the United States — just as the Saudis and Bahrainis did — if it wants their countrymen repatriated.

If that means signing a piece of paper pledging not to torture or abuse the men once they are back in Yemen, then why wouldn't the government sign such a document?" Falkoff wondered.



WHAT IT MEANS...

What it means is an analytical feature of Yemen Times, in which Yemeni topics are discussed and analyzed by Yemeni and international experts. Contributions and comments are welcomed, they could be sent to the feature's coordinator: Dr. Abdullh Al-Faqih (dralfaqih@yahoo.com).

# OIC debate on Islamophobia Dakar 13-14 march

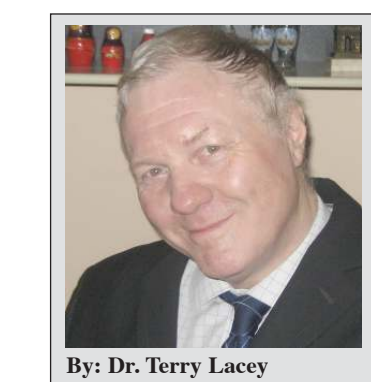
The Indonesian political magazine Tempo recently published a satirical version of the Last Supper by Leonardo de Vinci. Instead of Jesus it showed ex President Suharto, who died late January, having dinner with his six children. Catholic groups protested and asked the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs to look at Blasphemy charges under the Indonesian Criminal Code. The magazine offered an apology. The Indonesian Bishops Conference and Communion of Churches then declared the case closed.

Indonesian journalist Pak Nurrohmah asked how blasphemy can be a crime when the Indonesian constitution guaranteed religious freedom and freedom of expression. Journalist Samsudin Berlian argued Tempo should not have apologized, that Church leaders who called the case closed should note that no serious or mature conversation about religion can take place under threat of "people power" to silence others.

Christian and Muslim communities are both confronted with occasions where freedom of expression for secular society can result in images, especially via cartoons and films, which some religious people find very offensive. The earlier movie "The Life of Brian" was a satire on the life of Jesus Christ, but was generally perceived in Western society as quite funny. This did not provoke rioting, although some people were offended.

The Danish cartoons, including a satirical presentation of the head of Islam's prophet with a turban designed to look like a bomb with a lit fuse, published by Jyllands Posten in September 2005, created a bigger international row than the Last Supper in Tempo or the Life of Brian. Protesters died in Afghanistan and Somalia, while Danish and EU embassies and offices were attacked in Syria, the Gaza Strip, Iran and Lebanon. Danish products were boycotted in some Muslim countries.

Jyllands Posten reprinted the cartoons February 13th this year, after three men were arrested on suspicion of plotting to kill the cartoonist. A dozen Danish papers reprinted



By: Dr. Terry Lacey

cartoons in support of press freedom, this time to mixed reactions from Muslims.

There are several reasons why reactions were different from September 2005.

First, the cartoons have become part of history and will end up in history books and museums, including the Danish Royal Library and Danish Media Museum.

Second the cartoons are all over the world wide web and on prominent sites like Wikipedia, the web based Encyclopedia. In 2005 they were printed in Germany, France, Spain, Italy and Norway and in 2008 in Sweden, the Netherlands and Spain. Now there is much wider access to news on the cartoons for millions of people by computer.

Third the climate has changed in Denmark, the Muslim world and globally. The key players (and activist imams) who led and internationalized the protest in 2005 have gone. Syrian born Naser Khader, head of a new centrist Party, says Muslim leaders now speak more moderately, reject violence and live in harmony with Danish law.

The renewed calls for economic boycott are having some short term impact and being widely circulated by Muslim students on the web but the global reaction to re-publication is more measured than the first time. Any serious boycott movement against Denmark could be raised within the EU and lead to EU counter measures. In 2006 EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson made it clear that a boycott of Denmark would be regarded as a boycott of the EU. At the moment support for a new boycott call in 2008 is not so strong

as to cause a major political or trade problem.

Although some local Muslim pressure groups such as the Danish Muslim Society led by Kasem Said Ahmad regards the re-publication as provocative they have resolved to ignore future provocations. Other groups like the British Muslim Initiative reportedly exist to campaign against Islamophobia but are not likely to initiate large scale protests.

More seriously Islamic leaders are debating Islamophobia at the 57 nation Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) held in Dakar, Senegal, on 13th & 14th March. The OIC will discuss the Danish cartoons issue and the proposal of Netherlands Parliamentarian Geert Wilders, to make an anti Muslim film portraying the religion as fascist. The cartoon issue gets to the root of the clash between increasingly strongly secular societies, including many religious people who prefer secular values, as opposed to the strong feelings of more orthodox religious leaders and followers or of those who espouse religious identity politics to rally against the West. The secular side sees blasphemy charges as an assault on freedom of expression and the free press and believe that religious activists are politically motivated to take away their freedom and bring in religious censorship. The religious activists believe freedom of speech is not absolute and should not be used as an excuse to defame religions or religious symbols. The Egyptian Ambassador to Indonesia pointed out in the Jakarta Post on Tuesday 11th March that the context for debate is an upsurge in racism, xenophobia and discrimination against members of religious communities. The OIC should certainly be concerned at the rise in Islamophobia. This reflects the political fall out of 9.11 and the mishandling of the war on terrorism, particularly by President Bush, but it also reflects more fundamentally the growing social and cultural fall out of globalization and migration. This has provoked a strengthening of right wing political parties in the EU, sometimes parallel to greater solidarity between EU liberals and leftists with Muslim countries and communities against US foreign policy.

The OIC is not seen as a particularly effective

organization in terms of global outreach, especially towards non Muslim countries, and it will be interesting to see how it reacts, tactically or more strategically to the growth of Islamophobia.

The more skilful reaction would be to build coalitions with people of other faiths, especially its monotheistic cousins, Christianity and Judaism, by trying to identify some common religious values and sensitivities about religious symbols and by making it clear that similar attacks on Christian or Jewish symbols were also to be regarded as offensive. Then to reach out to the secular society by supporting press freedom and freedom of expression, but asking for some understanding and some reasonable limits to its exercise. However such skilful diplomatic moves would require dialogue, even with strong secular groups, and more than the usual set speeches. Even more fundamentally the weakness in the Muslim case emanates from two main sources. Firstly the post 9.11 association between Islam, Muslim culture and terrorism has been simplistic and vastly exaggerated with intellectually inconsistent definitions of terrorism including everything from Al Qaeda, to political and tribal militias, sectarian factions and local separatist and resistance movements, some of which have spent more time fighting each other than the West. These associations are still made in spite of the evidence offered by opinion polls and democratic election results. A recent survey of world Muslim opinion confirmed less than 10% of Muslims felt any sympathy with Islamist movements, militancy or terrorism. Recent elections in Pakistan and Malaysia, along with earlier elections in Turkey and Indonesia confirmed strong trends towards modernization, increasingly led by non sectarian, secular or multi cultural parties.

Second there is a more fundamental weakness which the OIC must address which is the lack of sufficient progress in the modernization of Muslim countries, which leads Islam and Muslim culture to be overly linked to backwardness and underdevelopment, which in turn undermines attempts to be taken more seriously as a force for modernization and

moderation at global level. In mid March 2008 Indonesia is hosting the 7th E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting of Education for all (EFA) focussing on 70% of world illiteracy located in just nine countries - Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India, Mexico, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan and Indonesia. Four out of the nine are large and Muslim led, two more with large poor Muslim populations. The Muslim world remains disproportionately poor and illiterate.

It is almost a decade since the charge of terrorism was thrown at Muslim society and there are at last some signs that Muslim communities are now beginning to feel more confident about their own identities and aspirations. The Malaysian elections were a wake up call that old fashioned religious identity politics are not enough and that the rising Muslim urban middle class and internet generation want faster progress and a new synthesis between Islam, Muslim modernization and global economics and politics.

It is not ritual conflict over cartoons that will improve the world climate for Muslims, but the assertion of countervailing power based on growing economic and political strength, and increasing acceptance that Muslim can mean moderate and modernizing. If the OIC wants support from its own grass roots to help attract more international respect for Islam and its symbols, and for Muslim cultures and communities, then it also has to connect better with the economic and social aspirations of the Muslim street, and the small business backbone of the Muslim world, and make better use of Islamic finance, alongside Western funds, to finance social infrastructure and reduce the gaps between the haves and have nots. This will help provide the mainstream global Muslim leadership that has been sadly lacking and help fill the gaps which are otherwise filled by radical groups.

Dr. Terry Lacey is a British Muslim with a background in economic and social development in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean Basin, and the Middle East. For further information on modernization in Indonesia the author can be reached at [terrylacey2003@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:terrylacey2003@yahoo.co.uk)

## Their News

### Al-Arabi Magazine golden anniversary



Kuwaiti embassy in Sana'a in coordination with the Story club celebrated 50 years since the establishment of the well-known magazine Al-Arabi at the Cultural House on Thursday. First issue of AL-Arabi was published in December 1958 in Kuwait. It was dedicated to an Arab dream of communication and integration and came in a time of turmoil and political changes in the region.

The magazine adopted a slogan of "Know your nation" in order to bridge between Arabs and create a common intellectual base launched from Kuwait.

In his statement at the celebration, Kuwait's ambassador to Yemen Salim Ghasab Al-Zamanan indicated that Yemen was present in the publication right from its early issues in 1958 through topics about Qat, the historical places and intellectual personalities of Yemen.

He even indicated that renowned Yemeni writers and poets such as Ahmed Al-Noman and Mohammed Al-Zubari were of the consultative body for the magazine and the ones who nominated its managing staff.

The golden anniversary of the magazine was celebrated around the Arab world and there will be an event in Paris organized by UNESCO on May 5 to celebrate the magazine.

The celebration at the Cultural House in Sana'a was attended by Minister of Culture, Minister of Information and a number of Yemeni intellectuals.

### World Summit on Innovation & Entrepreneurship, 1-3 April, 2008



As economic turmoil begins to rock the global economy, perhaps only the true innovators and entrepreneurs will survive. Perhaps there is no better time to explore the issues facing the business, technology and political arenas than at next month's 2008 World Summit on Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Dubai. Brilliant minds, including world leaders like the President of Rwanda HE Paul Kagame and New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark plus top business executives and technology experts like Padmasree Warrior of Cisco Systems, Inc. and CTO IBM Nick Donofrio, and futurists from seventy nations will convene at the three-day summit to develop practical solutions to address the most important issues facing emerging nations and to inspire the development of the next generation of entrepreneurs and innovators. The Summit provides a stage for global icons to collaborate and engage the most innovative people worldwide to strike partnerships, challenge the policies of business-as-usual, and celebrate the World's most remarkable achievements through a series of illuminating performances. More than 800 attendees are expected for three days of innovation theatre, interactive workshops and thematic experiences.

The WSIE speakers' list is an impressive collection of the most remarkable designers, policymakers, technologists, communicators, economists, humanitarians, chief executives, and musicians from across the globe.

Some global policy speakers include: Hon. Zakia Mandani Meghji, Minister of Finance and Michael Ahern Minister of Innovation Policy of Ireland. Also, on the agenda, a global Blue Communities Call To Action from His Highness Shaikh Mohammad

Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. Almost two-thirds of the world's population lives in coastal communities and a large amount of development is taking place in these locations. The Call to Action has been issued by Nakheel, Dubai's premier development company, and the announcement of the Blue Communities. The World Summit on Innovation and Entrepreneurship (WSIE) and event presentation partner Nakheel, whose celebrated developments like The Palm and The World in Dubai, will utilize the world stage to challenge delegates in playing an active role in developing initiatives and collaborations for The Blue Communities a three year, 200 million dollar global! 1 campaign for ecological longevity in coastal environments.

### Web site for Arab female journalists launched



The Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) launched a Web site titled "Arab Women and Media" on the occasion of International Women's Day, March 8. According to a press release made available to IJNet, the Web site is "an online interactive space which copes with the rapid changes of the image of women and enriches the dialogue and the debate on the issue of women and media." The Web site encourages networking among Arab journalists through the presentation of more than 50 resumes of journalists working on women's issues in the Arab world. It also provides portraits of renowned Arab women journalists in 17 Arab countries, in addition to news on media development in the Middle East.

## SAFER IMMEDIATE JOB OPENINGS

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# OPIC is Coming to Yemen

**M**r. Lawrence Spinelli, Director of Public Affairs for the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) has been recently in Yemen, looking into the opportunities of joint US-Yemen investment projects in Yemen. OPIC is preparing now for its 2008 conference which will focus on the Middle East. It is going to be held in the Dead Sea on May 5-7 covering some Middle East countries including Yemen. On OPIC plans for the Middle East countries and Yemen and the conference, *Mohammed al-Qadhi* spoke to Mr. Spinelli and filed the following interview.

**Q- Could you please give us a brief account about OPIC?**

A- Let me tell you a little bit about the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). First of all we can provide financing for U.S. businesses that want to come and invest. Let's say your company finds a project they would like to invest in or do something here in Yemen and they go to the WB in the United States to try to get financing for their project and the WB says they cannot help, they can come to OPIC to get a loan. So this is one thing that we do. The second thing that we do is provide something called political "risk insurance." It helps to give peace of mind to a U.S. investor who is coming to another country, maybe to a country they do not know very well and they have never invested in before. They may be a little bit concerned about the long term security of their investment. So this political risk insurance that we provide guarantees that if something happens that they don't expect for their investment in the country that is politically motivated, we will protect them and they will be ok. So it is a way to encourage them to invest. OPIC operates in over 150 emerging market countries and we have a worldwide portfolio in terms of the active projects we're supporting right now of about \$13 billion. We have had a bilateral agreement with the government of Yemen for about ten years. Every country that we open for business in we have to have a treaty separate from whatever other treaties the United States government may have as that is between OPIC and the country in question, in this case Yemen.

**Q- Why are you in Yemen?**

A- I am here first to tell people about the conference and secondly to encourage your local businesses who maybe want to find a U.S. partner and encourage somebody to come to Yemen as part of an investment project or maybe even look for partners with companies in other countries of the region to encourage them to come to this conference. In a way it is a very easy opportunity for somebody to take advantage of in two and a half days for a Yemeni company to come to the Dead Sea. If you want to meet all these people on your own you'll have to come to the United States and spend many weeks traveling from city to city to city. So in a sense, we sort of do the work and we hope that we will get a good representation of local companies from Yemen to come and that it will be the beginning of what we see will be some increase in investment by U.S. companies here in Yemen.

**Q- How can businesses and companies in Yemen attend this conference?**

A- If people want to be able to get some more information on the agenda and also if they want to register and some they should visit the OPIC website at: <http://www.opic.gov>. I will say I know that people usually have a tendency to postpone making decisions to say, "Well that is in May and I am not going to worry about it. I'll worry about it later." But if I can say one message to your readers, based on our previous conferences every one of the previous conferences we've held has been sold out. For people who waited to the last minute, unfortunately there was no room left at the conference. So I would encourage any of your local companies that are interested to register for the conference as soon as possible so that they can come and take advantage of this opportunity.

**Q- Is OPIC supporting any projects in Yemen in time?**

A- There are not any OPIC projects in Yemen right at this moment. Of course we would like to see that change and it's one of things that brings me here to

Yemen today because every year for the last five years OPIC has organized and put together an international investment conference that has focused on a particular part of the world or a region of the world. What we do is we bring together U.S. businesses, local businesses that could be partners, financial institutions, banks, private equity managers and we bring them all together and we look at opportunities in a particular region and we look at if we can do matchmaking and what we can do to sort of encourage investment to go forward. It is a way for us to sort of serve as a catalyst to encourage this for people to look at maybe a country or region that they would never think of to say they here are really some opportunities here.

**Q- What is the outcome of your visit to Yemen?**

A- We are going to be meeting with business organizations. Obviously, in limited time frame, I cannot meet with individual businesses. But through the business organizations and the chambers we can get the word out to businesses that they would know about this conference and that they would be encouraged to come. I also met with Yemen's embassy in Washington D.C. and briefed them and I also had a meeting today at the General Investment Authority to talk about the conference and also to seek their help and also letting the people know about it. So I am very encouraged with the reaction. I think that I get a sense that there is great interest here in getting more U.S. investment and looking for ways that we can make that happen.

**Q- Why does OPIC focus on areas of conflict such as Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Yemen and usually businessmen are not encouraged to invest in areas of conflict?**

A- I think one of the things that I would say to you in response to that question is that business is really what OPIC's job is. OPIC's job is to encourage and support investment in places where perhaps it is not the easiest place to invest because we take a role where the private sector won't. So in the places that are easy to go to and perhaps easier to invest in and where a U.S. investor may find that they cannot get the support from the private sector, our job is to encourage people to look at other countries where there are also opportunities. That's not to say there aren't also challenges in some of these areas but the fact is, often times where there are challenges there are also greater opportunities for the return on your investment to be that much greater if you're willing to take the chance and to try to invest it. I will tell that we're supporting investment in places like Afghanistan and even in places like Iraq which are challenging places for investors but there are people who are willing to go and take the chance.

**Q- How does OPIC try to overcome security challenges?**

A- Well I think that ultimately every business has to make the decisions that they are going to make on an individual basis on where they want to go and how they feel about those security challenges and how they're going to readdress them even in a country different parts of the country the challenges could be different. But I think ultimately if you could have investment in Iraq - in which OPIC is supporting investment - and in Afghanistan and in West Bank/Gaza, I think you're able to overcome those security challenges as you look to invest in other countries and as I said that ultimately the investors are going to have make that decision.

**Q- Do you think there are many American investors who are willing to**



Mr. Spinelli

**go to such places to invest?**

A- Yes there are. We have talked to many American investors and we certainly got a sense that there are people who are willing to do as this is obviously not everybody is going to want to do that. It takes a particular kind of investor who is willing to take the chance because they see the enormous opportunities and in a way they want to take advantage of that and they're willing to perhaps consider and assume certain amount of more risk in order to get more return. It is like anything. The greater the risk the greater the return can be. So if you willing to assume that risk and to take a chance then your potential for return is that much greater. Also and by the way there is a great opportunity to get involved in a country at the beginning and at the level in which investment is beginning to start and to be able to have a presence there rather than after the country has developed and then the market places are very crowded. So a lot of businesses look at that also.

**Q- It seems it is not only a desire of American investors to do but also a U.S. policy to support these countries?**

A- It certainly a policy of the U.S. government to encourage investment in these countries because this is what our mission is. We're trying to support economic development and as you know our government says President Bush was in the region not too long ago and one among his messages was the desire to continue to strengthen the economic relationship between the U.S. and the region and we at OPIC try to do our part of that by supporting investment. So that certainly is a commitment of the U.S. government, however; having said that I will also tell you that the way OPIC operates is we need somebody to come to us with a project so it is not we can say that we want to support more investment and we can have a conference to encourage investment but at the end of the day we also need the businesses to step up to the plate and decide that this is what they want to do. That is the value of the conference because they can hear about opportunities, they can hear about what other people are doing, they can meet with local businesses to learn about they're doing and to see if there are some possibilities of partnerships. So you're really learning this first hand rather than just reading about it somewhere and that is the value of this as you get to see people face to face and I think that is really what we see as the value of this conference. This is a business private sector conference and the focus is on making deals happen and on making investment happen. It is not a lot of talk. It is reality.

**Q- Any examples of OPIC's success in bringing U.S. investment to such areas of conflict?**

A- For example I can tell you right now we're working on two things: we have a lending facility that is available in Lebanon. We're in partners with Citibank which is a U.S. bank. Citibank would not have done this by themselves but with the support of OPIC through financial support through a long guarantee. They have actually made money available in Lebanon for small and medium size Lebanese companies that actually receive loans for business development there. This is one example that is going on as we speak. The other area where we're working on in a similar kind of facility is in West Bank/Gaza working with the

Palestinian Authority and again with a U.S. bank and OPIC as a partner to make this available so that they would be capitals available for people to do investments in West Bank/Gaza. As you know, you can have the best idea for a business or a project or an investment but if the capital is not available it does not matter as it is going to stay in your head and it is not going to be realized. So one of the roles that OPIC can play is to make sure that the capital is available by partnering with a U.S. bank that might not go otherwise into an area like the two I have just mentioned. Afghanistan is also a place where we're involved in several projects. One of them is a project where we're providing financial support for the building of a Marriott hotel in downtown Kabul. So this is an area that certainly has its challenges and here is an investment that is going with the support of OPIC. So I think those three pretty good examples I gave you that obvious have their challenges yet investment is happening because of the role that OPIC can play in making that happen.

**Q- How do you see the U.S. business and investment presence in the Middle East region right now?**

A- It is definitely growing. We definitely see an increase in interest in that. I think that this conference just from the reaction that we've gotten from U.S. companies as we've talked about it. I think there is going to be great interest in this conference and I think this conference is going to end up being a very much sold out event because I think people are looking and taking a second look at the opportunities that are here and want to take advantage of them. So I definitely would say that that is the case.

**Q- Talking to Yemeni officials and businessmen do you think Yemen could be potential for U.S. businesses and investments?**

A- I think that the economic reforms that have taken place here although there is more to come and more that need to happen has sent a very positive message to U.S. investors that there is a serious commitment here in Yemen by the government to create the kind of positive investment climate that investors look for. They want to see these economic reforms and they want to see commitment to transparency, rule of law and respect for contracts. Those are all of the things that investors look for when they make a decision where they are going. I think there has been great progress here and I said more still need to happen as we go forward but I think that there has been a lot of progress here and that people would see this in a very very positive way.

**Q- In your opinion what is the most potential sector for investment in Yemen?**

A- As far as the sectors I think there are several of them but I think probably the obvious of them is the tourism potential here. I think people would say there is some interest in that but I think really across the board such as tourism, certainly infrastructure, information technology and I think even in terms of perhaps housing. I think that would be

some opportunities here for investors definitely.

**Q- What are the major challenges facing foreign investment to come to the Middle East?**

A- I think the biggest challenge is probably to make sure that people know what the opportunities are. You know the unfortunate thing is particularly, and I can only speak for U.S. investors, in the United States and because we are a big country, it is easy to just keep your business in the United States and not think about opportunities overseas. Americans do not maybe naturally do that or if they do, they maybe look at places that are geographically close by. They need to understand the fact that there are opportunities in other countries in places like Yemen. They need also to be made aware of the fact there has been a lot of changes and reforms here that I have talked about that make the climate investment and that government is really committed to having more foreign businesses here and to work with businesses to make that happen. I think we need to get that message to more U.S. businesses. That is the biggest challenge to get people to pay attention to understand that and that is one of the things I think that this conference will help to accomplish because people will begin to see the opportunities and understand some of the changes and some of things that are different from what they may have thought of or from what they might read in the newspaper.

**Q- Any final words?**

A. My hope is that we will have a good representation from the businesses here in Yemen to come to meet with U.S. companies and to encourage them to come and invest here in partnership with them so we can see an increase in U.S. investment and hopefully the next time I come back here that I am going to be able to talk about some OPIC projects that we now have in Yemen.

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# Forcing students to pay for "free education"

By: Hamed Thabet  
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Layla Yasin Ghalib Al-Ariqi, a 10th-grader at Al-Thowra High School for girls in the Hadda area, still hasn't received her test results from last semester because her teachers and the school's administration have asked her to pay YR 20 in order to get them. She refused.

"When I finished my exam last semester, the teachers told us, 'If you want your results, you must pay YR 20,'" Al-Ariqi explained, "Their excuse was that the school's security guard doesn't receive a government salary and they don't have the resources to pay him, so the students must pay."

Although Yemen's Constitution stipulates that education is for free for all students in public schools, most children must pay up in order to have their educational needs met. Because the Education Ministry doesn't provide enough financial support to cover school supplies, teachers frequently ask their students for money.

Thus, instead of being good examples for their students, teachers and school administration are depicted as extortionists.

As Sana'a governorate education director Hamid Qutran explains, "Since there's no budget from the Ministry of Education for schools to print exams, certificates or results, it's normal that students are requested to pay a minimal fee – anywhere from YR 5 to YR 20 – to meet the costs."

"When a teacher comes to me and asks me to make 5,000 copies of an exam, from where can I get the paper?" asks Fatima Al-Hussam, principal of Al-Thowra School (a different school with the same name as the Hadda-area school) in Azal district.

She goes on, "We don't have money and no one supports us – and it's not possible to write the exams on the wall – so this is why students are charged YR 5 per subject for their monthly exams."

Families become angry when their children are asked to pay, but nothing can be done about it. "My daughter came to me crying because her teacher requested YR 20 for her to get her results," Layla's father Yassin Ghalib Al-Ariqi recalled, adding, "It's not a matter of the YR 20, but rather the idea itself. Teachers should be an example, not a nightmare!"

However, as Na'if Al-Ansi, a teacher at the Azal area Al-Thowra School, explains, students have no choice but to pay YR 5 per exam for each subject. "We must collect money in order to print exams and their results."

His fellow teaching colleague, Ismail Al-Theeb points out, "Until now, we haven't asked the Education Ministry because we're sure our problem won't be addressed; however, they must provide us a budget, as per the rules."

If teachers know that certain students are unable to pay, they sometimes pay for such students themselves instead, Al-Thowra history teacher Za'fran Hashem notes.

Because they either can't or don't want to pay, many students become embarrassed in front of their classmates and teachers have been known to ask their students – in front of the class – why they can't pay, requesting proof that the student truly is poor.

Sa'eeda Al-Faqih, a 12th-grader at Azal's Al-Thowra School, maintains that whenever students talk to school administration, they are ignored. "They say, 'No problem, just pay it,' or if you're poor, 'We'll pay it for you,'" she says.

In other Gulf countries, it's the

Education Ministry's responsibility to pay for basic school supplies, but Yemen's Ministry of Education is paying nothing – including no attention – at all.

"In past years, schools charged every elementary student YR 150 and every high school student YR 200," Qutran noted, "The ministry stopped this, but there's been no provision in the budget to offset it. It's the ministry's responsibility to spend on schools."

The Yemen Times attempted to contact the Ministry of Education on numerous occasions without success. The ministry hadn't returned the calls as of press time.

In previous years, the YR 150 per student registration fee designated six percent for the particular district and nine percent for that governorate's education office.

"We've asked the ministry for finances because we're really suffering," Qutran explains, "However, when we asked the government to improve the education sector, they exempted the students from paying the YR 150."

The Sana'a governorate education director notes that his office used nine percent of the total registration fees to fund his staff's visits to schools and maintenance at their office.

Of those students who spoke to the Yemen Times, nearly all are unhappy about having to pay to take their exams and obtain their results.

"Teachers and administration threaten us, saying that we won't be allowed to sit for our exam or get our results if we don't pay," says Kawkab Mutaher, a 12th-grader at Al-Thowra School in Azal district.

"My daughter Safiah is in fifth grade, and every month, her teachers ask her to pay for paper and chalk," Ahmed Al-Qurashi notes, "It's a shame that the government can't control its teachers and doesn't support its schools. For this reason, I've decided to send her to a private school with better facilities."

Azal district Al-Thowra fifth-grader Safia Al-Qorashi says, "Why should I pay? My friends and I have refused to do so on some occasions and the authorities have no alternative but to allow us to sit for the exam. However, in order to get our results, we must pay double the price, so we have no choice."

"In the 20 years that I've been here [at Al-Thowra School], we haven't received even one riyal from the Education Ministry – just empty promises regarding appointing committees and doing studies," manager Al-Hussam adds.

She continued, "While foreign nations and various organizations support [Yemen's] education sector, we in the public schools receive nothing, so we must devise our own ways and means."

"It's right that many organizations support our education sector with millions, but other things are more important, such as building schools, salaries, training teachers and providing teaching materials," Qutran said.

Schools and the Sana'a Education Office say they've asked governorate and local assembly officials to come up with solutions to their problems. According to Qutran, Yemen's education minister said he would look into the situation, but the problems have continued.

Zainab Al-Harazi, a psychologist at Azal's Al-Thowra School, says in some cases, students claim to be fasting on that particular day, which is why they have no money. However, students must know that it's in their own interest to pay because it's only YR 5 to YR 10 per subject.

Students also are forced to pay for their chairs, chalk and chalkboards. According to Wafa Ajlan, a 12th-grader at Al-Thowra School in Azal district, she pays

YR 50 every month for a chalkboard, but no new board has materialized yet. Her sister, sixth-grader Alia, was asked to pay YR 50 for new chairs for her classroom.

"If a student's guardians visit and they are well-to-do, very often they'll give us a donation," Al-Hussam noted, adding, "In order to fix or replace broken desks or chairs, we have no alternative but to collect money from students."

In the past, students who were late to school were fined YR 20, but because most poor students couldn't pay, it was discontinued, Al-Harazi said.

Al-Hussam says she wants to improve her school, making it a haven for knowledge, but in order to do so, the school needs at least YR 2 million and as of now, they have nothing.

"For this reason, we must beg others for help. In order to solve this problem, the Education Ministry must provide us finances because education is free. But how can we work when there's no support?" she asked.

"Let the officials come and then they'll know why we seek support," Al-Hussam continued, "We aren't beggars. We just want to raise up and educate a good and responsible generation for our nation's future."



Many students must pay money in order to get their results and exam papers.

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# The niqab: Between veneration and tradition

By: Rihwan Al-Saqqaf  
and Mariam Saleh  
Aden Bureau

Since olden times, wearing the niqab (a face covering or veil) has been known as an ancient Arab tradition practiced by those living in the Arabian desert, where a man would wear a scarf on his head and then cover his face with a piece of it to protect himself from the dust.

Likewise, Arab women practiced the same tradition until Islam emerged in the fifth century A.D. and obliged Muslim women to cover their entire body.

Despite Islamic legislators who differ over the Islamic niqab, they unanimously agree that Islamic Sharia law stipulates that a Muslim woman must conceal her beauty and charms, as cited in the Qur'an. All four Islamic sects are in consensus that concealing one's charms is mandatory for every Muslim woman. Thus, the habit spread among various Arab and Islamic societies, including Yemen.

Students in the 1980s attended classes in coeducational schools and universities in the southern governorates (known as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen prior to reunification), particularly in Aden, a city known to the outside world since the British occupation came to Yemen in 1839 and spread liberal western culture without restrictions.

With all of its positives and negatives, such liberal culture remained until Yemen achieved independence from the British in 1967. Even after they left South Yemen, part of that liberal culture remained in existence, with citizens there knowing nothing about the niqab, except those in rural communities.

Thus, the emergence and spread of the tradition of wearing the niqab seemingly is traceable to a well-organized Islamic awakening.

The Yemen Times surveyed members of the local community, who provided



Ishraq Tawfiq,

*Young girls don the niqab due to harassment by boys, so it may help them avoid such problems.*



Hamasat Al-Mihdhar

*"Some girls exaggerate wearing the niqab, doing so in order to look more charming or attractive"*



Tharwa Ahmad Mohammed

*"Women wear the niqab because the tradition has become commonplace."*

the following viewpoints regarding the tradition.

Some girls favor wearing the niqab out of respect for Islam while others wear it as a fashionable style of dress. Some prefer wearing it to protect their complexion, mainly those living in hot areas, while others have mishandled the practice of the habit.

Also known as a burqa, the niqab is a veil a Muslim woman wears to cover her face, as stipulated in several Qur'anic verses and prophetic hadiths.

Not all Muslim women practice the tradition in the same way, as it varies according to her personal liberty and viewpoint, the community where she lives and prevailing customs and habits.

While wearing the niqab has become common among women and young girls, the purpose of exercising the tradition notably varies due to multiple factors, some of which are cited above. For example, wearing the niqab has become one of the easiest means for schoolgirls to cheat on their exams.

Asked whether women wear the

niqab out of respect for their social or religious principles, as a result of environmental factors, for fashion, to imitate others or some other reason, housewife Tharwa Ahmad Mohammed replied, "Women wear the niqab not because of personal contentment or being fond of the tradition or due to pressure by male relatives, but because the tradition has become commonplace."

"When a girl is over age 13, she feels obliged to cover her face before strangers (those who are unrelated to her) because it's shameful when a female teenager uncovers her face before strangers. For this reason, the habit was inherited from our forefathers."

She continued, "However, if a woman wears the niqab, it doesn't mean she won't be exposed to harassment or indecent molestation because we often find that neither wearing it nor leaving the face uncovered will help a woman to avoid harassment or molestation."

According to Ishraq Tawfiq, a civil engineering student at Aden University,

young girls don the niqab due to harassment by boys, so it may help them avoid such problems. However, she adds

that some girls do cover their faces out of respect for their religion, whereas those who mishandle the practicing of the tradition are extremely few and can be counted on one hand.

"Some girls exaggerate wearing the niqab, doing so in order to look more charming or attractive and thereby disrespecting Islam and social values. They also use perfume and apply makeup on their eyes, which can be seen by others, despite wearing the niqab. As a result, those who meet such girls, particularly boys, insult or consider them disrespectfully," fellow university student Hamasat Al-Mihdhar noted.

#### No difference

Journalist Nawal Salem maintains that culture and community are two reasons why women wear the niqab, noting that they are responsible for mishandling the practice of the habit, especially those who wear tight abayas to show off their bodies. Such women also wear attractive niqabs and gesture with their heavily made up eyes, thereby drawing others' attention to them.

"In my opinion, there's no difference

between a woman wearing a niqab and another with her face uncovered," Salem says, adding, "I personally respect those who uncover their face, but don't use cosmetics or perfume."

According to Faris Mohammed Mahmoud, a third-year university student enrolled at Aden University's Faculty of Arts, there's no difference between a veiled and an unveiled woman, provided both behave decently and have good intentions for either practicing or quitting the habit.

"I highly appreciate and respect unveiled women, whereas I disrespect those who use it as a means to attract others," he said, "Generally, unveiled women behave better than veiled ones because the former fear misbehaving because they can be easily identified."

Mahmoud continued, "Boys and youths only respond to the behaviors of veiled girls if they are tantalized. Frankly speaking, I prefer a woman who doesn't care about wearing the veil. I prefer my mother, sister or wife to go out in the street with her face uncovered as opposed to wearing the niqab but with a tight abaya."



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## Words of Wisdom



It is in the hands of the people in charge of this country to make our transformation towards democracy real and meaningful. It would be unfortunate if the change in Yemen remains merely a show or something superficial. Our politicians need to believe in preparing for the 21st century. To do that, they have to internalize some new values.

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

OUR  
OPINIONSanitation and  
dirty consciences

This year's World Water Day celebrated on March 20, was dedicated to sanitation. UN General Assembly declared 2008 as the International Year of Sanitation, in an attempt to raise awareness and to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target to reduce by half the proportion of the 2.6 billion people without access to basic sanitation by 2015.

UNDP 2006 Human Development Report on power, poverty and the global water crises categorized Yemen as an emergency case, indicating that Yemen has one of the world's lowest fresh water availability and the amount is dropping far below the global average.

A 2005 Yemeni parliament report indicated that 55,000 children die annually due to diseases related to water pollution. The report, which warned of the spread of contaminated water use, confirmed that 50 percent of childhood death cases in Yemen are due to water pollution, 20 percent due to diarrhea and 30 percent due to malaria and typhoid.

According to the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) there were more than three million death cases registered in 2000 due to water pollution-related diseases mostly among rural people who represent 77 percent of Yemen's population. Polio, typhoid, hepatitis, cholera, diarrhea and bilharzias are diseases caused by contaminated water and very common in Yemeni villages and countryside where people are forced to use unsafe surface water for drinking.

However, this is only half of the story. In a press release by Transparency International on water and corruption it highlights that the same UN report on water and development, says that corruption is the primary reason why clean drinking water remains unobtainable for 1.1 billion people.

Corruption ranges from petty bribery in water delivery to procurement-related looting – from covering up industrial pollution to manipulation and distortion of fundamental water management and allocation policies. Whether within governments, between them and the private sector, or between officials and consumers, corruption in the water sector hurts everyone.

Households pay with their physical health, as poor quality or non-existent water supplies increase their vulnerability to deadly diseases. Irrigation and hydropower are made unviable, shutting the door to more abundant crops and sustainable electricity.

Young children are kept from school, forced instead to collect the household's daily water supply. The poor must often pay bribes to connect their households to water pipes or tankers. Corruption helps inflate the cost of small-scale infrastructure like boreholes, and diverts irrigation water away from poor villages through biased distribution decisions. For many, daily life is a constant struggle for access to water.

In its Global Corruption Report 2008: Corruption in the Water Sector, Transparency International delves into the obstacles and opportunities for making the water MDG a reality.

Yemen cannot cope with the water crisis it is facing as it is, and with corruption the problem is made worse. What we need is a transparent, just and effective governance of water for safer water and better health for our people.

Nadia Al-Sakkaf

Can we preserve our  
identity and culture?

By: Abdullatef Al-Jabri  
abdullatef-aljibri@yahoo.com

It is a humiliating phenomenon when we divest ourselves of our culture's roots and abandon our identity to run after the mirage of modernization and blind imitation of Western cultures. This colonial phenomenon has crept noticeably into our culture and spread across Arab and Islamic societies aimed at stripping them of their identity, their culture and their nationalism all under the guise of globalization.

The tendency toward hatred that we face nowadays is a fatal weapon to destroy our identity and culture. While our national culture is the only thing stabilizing our identity with its deep-rooted principles, they use their hidden plans to westernize us via progressive illusions making us like feathers swaying in the winds of subordination.

It's a good trend by national cultures to extend the ground of acquaintance between them with the different cultures all over the world. Meanwhile, the term of 'globalization' has been making the rounds clouded in suspicion and with a stealthy desire to stylize all national cultural identities into one Western manner. Inasmuch as culture is the most important aspect of humanity with a firm relationship to identity and nationalism, the matter here deserves distinction and preservation.

The concept of our identity and nationalism joined in culture can never be ignored, as it's a geographic, historical, spiritual and human actuality. Arabic language unites us. Our history is the inspiration for our present and moral principles are the foundations of our desired civilization. We have unified cultural spiritual trends and shared historical pains and hopes, which usually are

similar and rarely different.

National culture in Arab society is an important aspect of our identity. It's an inclusive frame of cultural meanings and religious principles and shared roots, as well as aspirations. It's a source of power, at least an incorporeal power, which ought never to be sacrificed for the misunderstanding of modernization and advancement.

Today, while we stare in amazement at far-reaching Western societies with their urbanization and modernity, a feeling of frustration devours most of us, propelling us into a blind imitation of Western cultures and burying our identity and morality in the mire of modernization.

Even more bitter is the fact that we regard ourselves as adherents to advancement and modernity. The degree to which the West portrays its cultures – whether via mass media or by its adherents in our societies – affects the intensity of feelings about our religious and cultural identity.

I'm sure all of us are bitterly disappointed to see many of our nation's sons behaving in their conduct and appearance like what they've learned from these morally destructive propagandists. Moreover, they replace religious and moral principles with the absurdity of Western culture, which conflicts with our traditional tribal and religious values.

Modernization and being civilized is their pretense in order to be imitated in everything and this is what the West wants. So the question is: Is imitation important in order for us to be civilized?

Undoubtedly, our society still suffers due to its underdevelopment and it's inevitable that we'll adopt some of what the West has. However, the method of our imitation must be in science, knowledge, seriousness and the determination to

rush toward wide-ranging progress. Thus, a clear understanding of modernity is important in order to preserve our identity and culture.

The light of knowledge should be taken wherever it appears – north, south, east or west – as the truth is useful wherever it emerges. What's important is to strengthen ourselves with that; otherwise, it will be the straw that broke the camel's back and we'll lose ourselves in the bog of blind imitation and civilized illusion.

Western cultures obviously have achieved a scientific revolution and modernization, but we still have our own identity, national culture and heritage, which once led the world, and which we should preserve today in order to reassert ourselves again.

The only thing we need is self-confidence and trust in our deep-rooted culture, which is an important element of our desired civilized personality. Self-confidence is certainly regarding our historical and cultural heritage, which helps us know how to go forward toward modern civilization using our intellectual ability, sciences and the unlimited desire of discovery and knowledge. This certitude keeps us from surrendering to our backwardness.

Maintaining our identity is realizing that humans are the target of any progress and there's no real value in this progression if humans lose their self-esteem, as well as their spiritual, moral and human values.

What's more, we must thoroughly perceive the grave danger that threatens our national and cultural identity, as well as to protect and save it. A sense of jealousy regarding our nationalism, our identity and our culture should remain. We should be more aware of the twin challenges of westernization and modernization and the fact that our identity is the most important part of modernization – not an obstacle to it.

Local authority and the  
awaited development

By: Abdurrahman Saif Ismail

Before we talk about local authority and the awaited development, we should first indicate that development reflects the community needs for progress and prosperity amid growing poverty and unemployment, plus social inconsistencies and varied resources and savings.

Economic and social development has turned to top the list of priorities in all the world countries despite their different political systems and economic policies. Economic and social development has become the only concern for countries worldwide while the growing interest in development at the world level is a natural product of the negative consequences, which the World War II left behind. Those consequences include mass destruction in the various areas, notably in countries that were parties in the war.

These days, development suffer from fatal destruction as a result of the party-oriented policies waged by the United States of America and its western allies against nations around the globe, thereby connecting the world economies and developments with their destructive policies.

Due to such a dire situation, comprehensive development has become a social and human necessity sought by peoples worldwide while the development process is presented today as one of the basic options for building capacities of backward or underdeveloped countries, as well as improving their development and construction tools.

Development by itself is a vital process that involves all community members and the various social and political institutions. Therefore, governments and social revolutions moved toward specifying their top priority activities in line with the comprehensive development.

What does development mean? It is a process of positive transformation of the standing economic and social situations into what is better. The successful development is the one that is closely correlated with peoples and their basic needs. It is the one directed by good planning or preplanned actions.

Planning doesn't necessarily mean development by itself, however, it is one of the indispensable tools for achieving development. Good planning helps in achieving objectives and suggesting workable means required by these objectives. It is also the means of intervention and control, but if the goal of control is to manage natural resources and exploit them in an ideal way, the process will be named 'economic planning'. And, if the goal of control is to utilize human resources to the maximum possible, the process will be called 'social planning'.

The local authority may play a dis-

tinctive role in this regard, thanks to its very close relation with the local communities and its being aware of their basic needs. This authority undertakes urgent duties to create good social dynamics and then direct them toward development and effective development planning.

Repeated failure of economic planning is attributed to negligence of social planning. As a result, we perceived this fact at an early time while man or human resources turned to be always present in our development plans and steps. For the time being, the local human resources are not given any priority in our programs and agendas due to the weak financial provisions, on the one hand, and poor social awareness about this subject on the other. Man or human resources constitute the cornerstone in development, its objective and ultimate goal.

When we say that the local authority has made a real revolution, we then perceive what such a system made, plus the other essential and comprehensive changes it will make in favor of effective development action, but on condition we managed well this action and restructured it in a way serving the comprehensive local development.

Additionally, successful development necessitates that the local authority's role must be aware enough to lead to creating responsive social dynamics within the executive bodies that enjoy preparedness and constructive foundations needed for building the modern state of Yemen. In order to achieve the sought-after objectives, this process should move toward local governance with broad powers because development becomes more able to achieve certain objectives sought by the local communities under this system (local governance).

Under the local governance system, development seems to be independent, and primarily depends on the economic, social, financial and local resources, as well as on the strong competition between the various regions and their local resources. Another condition required by development is that of stability and security, which may not be satisfied as long as local councilors feel oppressed and that their community wealth is wasted in issues that have nothing to do with development.

Also, development requires the kind of administrative division that fulfills local community needs for security and stability. Such a division must develop geographical and historical loyalty among community members. Another essential condition that needs to be met in this regard is that of distributing resources fairly and establishing an urban center for each administrative unit having even the simplest components required by good civilization and development.

Source: Al-Thawra State-run Daily.

Doha-brokered deal and  
implementation theories

By: Mahdi Mohsen Hamid

Through our pursuit of the efforts so far expended by the mediation committees and teams and what has been so far achieved in this regard, we can say that there should be serious wills to overcome any difficulties encountered in implementing of the agreement.

A serious will is needed irrespective of the various obstacles that were about to foil efforts exerted by the presidential mediation committee as a result of disputes and differences originating from within the committee. Such problems and the likes were created with the malicious intention of impeding progress of the agreement and depriving the war-ravaged province (Sa'ada) of peace and stability while having a serious will and strong determination is their effective remedy.

At this point, I think that the time period spent by the Qatari mediation team leader traveling between Doha and Sana'a since the first day of March – a deadline assigned for releasing detainees jailed over alleged connections with Sa'ada fighting – has now yielded its fruitful results. Such results are represented by the Qatar team leader's return to Sa'ada following a meeting with President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Hodeida, during which both officials agreed upon certain points for executing the Doha-brokered Peace Deal.

At that time, President Saleh

gave directions to Commander of Northwest Military Flank Gen. Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar and Sa'ada Governor Mutahhar Rashad Al-Masri to pull troops out of the schools and mosques belonging to Zaidi people. Saleh also directed questioning any military commanders or officials intercepting commuters of these mosques and schools, which was described as 'a good addition' to the mediation efforts.

It is obvious that any direct communication in this respect is pondered upon as a distinctive turning point, as well as a good step toward removing any mystery or ambiguity that may lead to mutual misunderstanding between the conflicting sides over certain points in such peace deals. Direct communication is always an indispensable means for any mediation or peace efforts to succeed.

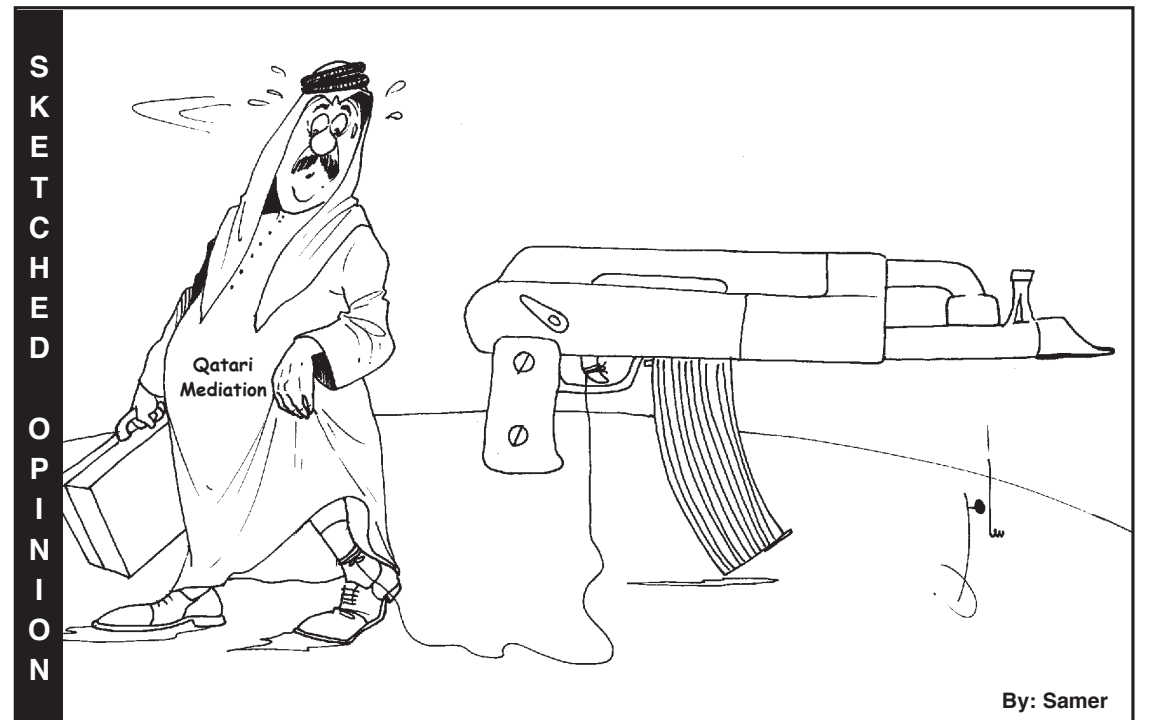
For the Sa'ada crisis to be resolved, the Qatari and Yemeni mediation teams still need to show further tolerance and have more patience until they get the most suitable chance to bring the conflicting sides together and convince them abide by and remain strongly committed to the peace deal's terms, one by one. Seizing the most suitable chance helps mediators avoid several mistakes, which they may otherwise make. Mediators should bear in mind that hurriedness breeds unavoidable mistakes.

Behaving this way can ensure reaching successful achievements, particularly as the issues is limited to implementing the first step of the

peace deal through mutual understanding. And, any subsequent efforts will proceed spontaneously, thereby necessitating nothing more than establishing confidence and trust between both conflicting sides and assuring them that they will never be exposed to post-comprise tricks or deception.

Nothing is standing in the way of implementing the peace deal except for the fact that each party fears being exposed to tricks or deceived by the other as a result of the lack of mutual trust.

Source: Al-Ahali Weekly



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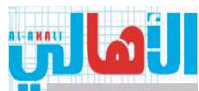
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# Yemen Press Review



**Al-Ahali Political Independent Weekly**  
Tuesday, March 18

**Top Stories**

- Wheat price expected to exceed YR 10,000 per 50 kg in the coming few months
- Authority plans broad cabinet reshuffling in response to UN resolutions
- Aden's branch of Islah Party condemns violations responsible for JMP candidate's fall
- Judiciary employees give leaders a 30-day deadline to cash their hardship allowances
- Bajammal: We ratified EU recommendations with the aim of getting European support

According to the independent paper, Secretary General of the ruling General People Congress (GPC) Abdulkader Bajammal – former prime minister – confessed that his party and Joint Meeting Parties' commitment to implement recommendations, suggested by the European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM), headed by Chief Observer Baroness Emma Nicholson of Winterbourne, was a big mistake made by the ruling party's secretary general assistant for foreign affairs Abdurrahman Al-Akwa'a. The recommendations in question were suggested by EUEOM following the presidential and local council elections in September 2006.

It quoted Bajammal as saying to JMP leaders during a conversation "We were hypocrites with the Europeans and agreed to implement their recommendations with the aim of winning their support at

the Consultative Meeting that took place in London two years ago." The weekly said that this information was confirmed by Head of the Islah Party's Technical Office Ibrahim Al-Haer.

Al-Haer warned the government of being indifferent toward reshuffling the financial, administrative and technical systems in the Supreme Commission for Election and Referendum, adding that if the authority is not serious to review these systems, the commission will be merely a symbolic decoration that has no meaning. He confirmed that SCER's administrative and technical systems were constituted contrarily to the law that stipulates transparency in the appointment and selection of SCER's staff on the basis of competence and eligibility.

In the same context, Country Director of International Foundation for Election Systems Peter Williams urged what he called 'servant of the people' – hinting to Yemeni President – to pass the law on citizens without bias, pointing out that Yemen has unique democracy, but Yemeni people still need to be involved in decision-making.



**Al-Wahdawi Weekly, Mouthpiece of the Nasserite Unionist Popular Organization (NUPO)**  
Tuesday, March 18

**Top stories**

- Ja'ashin Sheikh's followers threaten to burn bereaved women of displaced citizens
- Police raid internet cafés, prevent them to remain open after midnight
- Media and human rights activists

visit a little girl who was subjected to rape in Amran

- NUPO General Secretariat discuss press violations
- Al-Wahdawi editor to appear before Press Prosecution for being sued by influential official in Hodeida
- Yemeni citizens protest against regular blackouts in many governorates
- Parliament questions Interior Minister over rampant corruption and poor performance in security agencies

Interior Minister Rashad Al-Alimi is due to appear before Parliament on Wednesday to be questioned about spread of corruption and poor performance in different security agencies affiliated with his Ministry, the weekly reported, adding that Parliament members want to interrogate the official over the repeated incidents of citizen kidnapping in the various governorate. Al-Alimi was summoned by Parliament for questioning over the repeated incidents of citizen kidnapping amid absence and ineffective role of relevant security authorities, which, according to MPs, are not committed to applying the concerned security laws. Parliament also put part of the blame on the poor performance of judicial bodies.

According to the weekly, many MPs from opposition caucuses and independents called for selecting a new parliamentary committee to be concerned with defense and security issues after the standing committee failed to play its required role and dropped responsibility in dealing with such critical issues that seem to threaten social peace and stability.

The NUPO mouthpiece went on to say that many MPs lashed out at the interior minister for not responding to previous Parliament's summoning amid the worsening phenomenon of kidnapping, cou-

pled with poor performance by the relevant security agencies. Parliament's last week meetings discussed several heated issues, mainly price hikes of basic foodstuffs, child trafficking, poor security performance and repeated incidents of citizen kidnapping.



**Al-Sahwa Weekly, Mouthpiece of the Islah Party**  
Thursday, March 20

**Top Stories**

- Opposition MPs expose corruption scandals, Prime Minister refuses to name oil smugglers
- Hajja appeal court declares Islah Party candidate's victory in Shahlil local elections following a year-long prosecution
- Security sources deny that there were explosives or casualties in Keraiter blast
- Mahweet prison inmates complain of inhuman torture, lashing with electrical wires and dire conditions
- U.S. Ambassador to Yemen: our embassy was targeted but schoolgirls were wounded in Sana'a blast
- Economic expert urges government to set up comprehensive plan to meet price hikes
- Yemeni government disbands magazine for publishing 'inappropriate picture of President'

Yemeni government disbanded a new private magazine, named 'Abwab' on Sunday for publishing a picture of the nation's president deemed "inappropriate" by authorities, the Islah Party's mouthpiece quoted the magazine's head editor

Nabeel Al-Sofi as saying.

According to the weekly, Abwab's editor said the security authorities banned the first issue of the magazine because they believed the picture of President Ali Abdallah on the cover made him look dour.

They told me the picture reflects a crisis," al-Soufi told the Associated Press. The weekly reported in its front page story that the editor said the picture was a reprint and speculated that the magazine was rejected because one of its articles addressed the political tension between the northern and southern areas of Yemen. Yemeni authorities have frequently banned publications for carrying articles the government considered hostile. Al-Soufi said the backers of the magazine planned to republish the issue without the picture on the cover. Over the past few years, international organizations concerned with press freedom labeled Yemen among the worst countries that restrict press freedom, disband independent newspapers and harass any active journalists for criticism.



**26 September Weekly, Organ of the Yemeni Army**  
Thursday, March 20

**Top Stories**

- President Saleh launches two new satellite channels, declares March 19th 'Day of Yemen Media'
- Parliament and Shoura Council members condemn terrorist attack on 7 July Girls' School
- Shabwa tribal leaders warn Al-Nuba and BaAum of entering their

province as their activities harm unity

- Ninth Conference of Yemen trade unions concluded
- Yemen sends relief aides aboard two planes to affected citizens in Chad and Sudan
- Norwegian trade union leader praises Yemen's democracy and public freedoms
- Cabinet approves YR 3,000 bonus for public sector employees

The Cabinet approved on Tuesday to grant all state employees of both higher and lower levels a bonus of 3000 riyals per month to their salaries while pensioners will get 50 percent of the approved bonus, the army's organ reported in its front page, adding that the Cabinet decided during its Tuesday's meeting to raise subsidies for the social security welfare to 100 percent.

With regard to President Saleh's directives concerning the considerable impacts of rising prices of basic foodstuffs, the Cabinet stressed the necessity of controlling prices and taking strict legal measures against violators, monopolists and tradesmen who play with prices. It also emphasized the necessity of promoting Yemeni Economic Institution to focus its business on the area of wheat, flour, rice and other basic foodstuffs, charged Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, who is also Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Abdulkarim Al-Arhabi with keeping contact with donors to provide soft loans for the institution in order to foster its wheat and flour-related activities through establishing grain silos.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet urged the Ministry of Industry and Trade to activate its role in controlling and affixing food-stuff prices in all Yemeni governorates and refer violators to the relevant judicial authorities.

## John McCain, human nature and Gaza strip

On March 20, U.S. Republican presidential candidate John McCain visited Sderot, an Israeli town frequently hit by Palestinian rockets from nearby Gaza Strip. His visit was part of a fact-finding mission to the Middle East, he said.

"The fact is that I come from a border state. If people were rocketing my state, I think the citizens from my state would advocate a very vigorous response."

There's absolutely no doubt that these are 100 percent true words, but one can change his words slightly. He said if people were rocketing his state, but what if those people occupied his state and forced its citizens from their homeland? Perhaps his words might have been like the following:

The fact is that others have occupied our state by brutal force, killing many innocent citizens and forcing us from our

land, so it's natural to attempt to regain our land via a very vigorous response.

If a portion of their land was returned to them, but all control remained in the hands of their occupiers, then his words might have been like this:

The fact is that a small portion of our state has been returned to us, virtually without any rights. But because citizens in our state want their full rights and their land back, our occupiers have made our lives miserable by not providing our basic necessities, instead using them as a tool for collective punishment. Surely, this sparks a very vigorous response.

Perhaps the last paragraph best describes the situation in Gaza, particularly Gaza Strip, where 1.5 million live in a territory 25 miles long and six miles wide, making it one of the world's most densely populated areas.

Unemployment is 80 percent and thousands more have lost their jobs since

last June. Approximately 79 percent of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip live in poverty. For example, 80 percent of the population is dependent on food aid, with at least 130,000 Palestinians estimated to be food insecure.

This situation isn't new, as residents there have been suffering for more than 40 years. Israel pulled its troops and settlers out of the Gaza Strip in 2005, 38 years after capturing the territory in the 1967 Middle East or Six Day War. However, it still controls Gaza Strip's borders, airspace and coastal waters, in addition to completely fencing it in, essentially making it the world's largest prison.

Hamas won the 2006 elections and seized control of the territory from the Fatah faction in fighting last June. Since then, Israel has tightened its blockade of the Gaza Strip, worsening the situation there and creating a humanitarian crisis.

What McCain said regards simple human nature that if someone attempts to attack us, we will defend ourselves. Simply pressuring humans isn't the answer to achieve anything. Everyone knows this, so why do people twist words in their favor and forget the others? McCain and others in the U.S. administration believe that it is Israel's right to take revenge against rocket attacks on its towns. Let's suppose their judgment is right.

On February 27, one Israeli was killed in rockets attack on Sderot. It actually was the first of its kind in nine months. Israel immediately launched a military offensive in Gaza, killing 120 Palestinians – mostly civilians – including women and children.

In fact, Israel has killed thousands of Palestinians over the past 40 years. Since 2000, more than 2,600 mostly civilians have lost their lives due to Israeli

aggression and millions have been forced from their land, living in refugee camps in various countries.

So, who are the victims? If attack is the basis for revenge, then who should take revenge?

While there have been many efforts to bring peace to the area, no real gains have ever been realized. The basic reason for the failure of peace talks between Israel and Palestine is that the peacemakers (mainly the United States) primarily feel the pain of those who've actually inflicted more pain on the other side.

There's an unofficial ceasefire between Israel and Hamas these days and Egypt is attempting to broker a peace deal between the two, while the U.S., the European Union and Middle East nations are interested in a long-term peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians.

However, peace comes with justice. Just as Israelis have the right to live

peacefully, the same is the right of poor Palestinians also. Neither Israel nor anyone else can achieve any type of peace via force. That's our human nature. McCain and others know this well, but they also must consider the situation from a Palestinian perspective as well.

Imran Khan has a master's degree in commerce and is assistant director of the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority, or NEPRA, in Islamabad, Pakistan.

Several prestigious newspapers and web sites have published his articles, including: the Morocco Times, the Yemen Times, the Brunei Times, the EU Observer in Belgium, The World Security Network in Germany, The Journal of Turkish Weekly, Turkish Daily News and Today's Zaman in Turkey; the American Chronicle, Peace Journalism, Global Politician and WZArv.com in the United States.

## Rescuing the two-state solution

By: Jonathan Freedland

Here's a truism of Middle East diplomacy. Everyone knows the outline of the eventual settlement: there will be two states, one Israeli, one Palestinian, alongside each other, their borders roughly in line with the parameters set out by Bill Clinton in late 2000. Everyone knows that. Yet somehow the two sides cannot seem to reach this apparently obvious destination. Even back in 2000, when the Israeli cabinet was packed with doves and the peace process was led by a US president engaged in every last detail, the deal remained elusive. Since then, it has fallen ever further out of reach.

The conventional explanation blames the leaders, weak on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides and fatally disengaged in Washington. The result is that the peoples themselves, even if they yearn for peace, have grown cynical about the two-state solution that would make that peace possible.

"More than three-quarters believe it's not feasible," veteran Palestinian pollster Khalil Shikaki told me from his office in Ramallah yesterday. Palestinians doubt Israel's intentions: instead of giving up land, Israel continues to settle on it. Witness Monday's announcement of another 750 housing units in the Giv'at

Ze'ev neighbourhood, on the wrong side of the Green Line that marks the 1967 border.

What's more, the two-state solution now carries some unattractive baggage: its lead advocates are the Bush administration, seeking a legacy; the Israeli government, seeking relief from the demographic prospect of ruling over a population in which Jews and Arabs have numerical parity; and an unpopular Palestinian elite represented by President Mahmoud Abbas. If those are the cheerleaders, it's hardly surprising that few Palestinians are waving the banner for two states.

Among Israelis, the idea fares little better. They say they have withdrawn from occupied territory twice recently – from southern Lebanon and Gaza – and their reward has been a hail of rocketfire. Besides, while the Palestinians are divided between Hamas and Fatah, there is no viable Palestinian partner who could rule a neighbouring, peaceful state.

If that's the situation, what could change it? The current strategy, trumpeted at Annapolis, is to get Israel and Abbas to come to an agreement. Never mind that Abbas's writ does not run in Gaza, and so such an accord would only be hypothetical – "a shelf agreement" – it would, say its advocates, have great impact. It would restore faith in diplomacy, and Hamas would soon have to fall in

line.

That's how Tony Blair, part-time international envoy, sees it. He argues that Hamas should be kept out of any peace process until a deal is done. Once it has, and especially if the accord is popular, Hamas will come under pressure from its own people to sign up. Advocates add that the Israeli public would also lose its cynicism once the elected leaders of Israel and the Palestinians had shaken hands on an agreement.

It sounds straightforward enough, but there's precious little sign of it. The Israeli prime minister is hardly stretching every sinew to get such a deal. Instead, as the Giv'at Ze'ev decision shows, he's bowing to pressure from headline elements in his own coalition. Nor, says one Israeli government insider, are rocket attacks and terrorist murders in Jerusalem the ideal "atmospherics" for negotiations. And yet there is all too little countervailing pressure in the pro-peace direction from the one player that could make a difference: Washington. Haaretz editor David Landau despairs at the lack of urgency in the talks, contrasting it with the "frenetic" pace back when Clinton was in charge. "There's nothing like that now," he says, despite all the fine words at Annapolis.

Even if there were an agreement, it might not help. If an accord ended up gathering dust, it would discredit the two-

state idea even further, confirming its status as inherently impractical. And both sides fear such a text would end up being the starting point for a future round of talks, from which they would have to compromise yet further.

There is another way: not to wait, but to bring in Hamas now. Already, an unofficial channel between Israel and Hamas via Egypt, though denied, has brought a lull in fighting. The talk is of a tahdi'a, a temporary ceasefire. Israeli sources tell me they could accept that, so long as Hamas doesn't use the pause simply to regroup and re-arm. If there is an end to Hamas weapons smuggling, as well as rocket attacks and terror operations, Israel will agree to hold its fire.

Plenty want to go further, including Hamas in the diplomatic search for an agreement. Each week seems to bring another eminent, if retired, figure from the Israeli security establishment suggesting talks with Hamas. In a Haaretz poll last month, 64% of Israelis said they would approve.

The prize would be great indeed: an agreement with the entire Palestinian nation, rather than just part of it. The risk would be high, too: Olmert could lose his coalition and could see Palestinian moderates eclipsed (just as talking with Irish republicans eventually eclipsed more moderate nationalists).

Finally, there might be a way to rescue

the two-state solution that does not involve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict so much as swerve around it. It's been tried at least three times before and come tantalisingly close. The plan: to make peace with Syria first.

The rewards for Israel would be obvious. Instantly, it would have what its founding prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, dreamed of: peace accords with all its immediate neighbours, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and therefore Lebanon. Moreover, the potential spoilers to any two-state solution – Hamas, Hizbullah and Syria itself – would no longer be a threat. "Syria is a lung through which Hizbullah breathes", says Palestinian negotiator and analyst Hussein Agha: if Syria reconciled with Israel, the organisation would have to end its confrontation with Israel. Hamas would be in the same position. Even Iran would have to alter its behaviour. The problem of the two-state notion was never its content, says Agha, only its context – and this would be the right context.

Suddenly Israel would feel much safer in coming to an accord with the Palestinians, even a united Palestinian entity that included Hamas. The two-state solution would look less like an impossible dream and more like an item of unfinished business.

Is it possible? Syria, conscious of the expectations of Arab solidarity, would be

unlikely to make a separate deal with Israel at the apparent expense of the Palestinians: there would have to be some careful sequencing to show progress on both tracks. But the good news is that a rapprochement with Syria is discussed at the highest levels in Israel, even forming part of an intelligence briefing for the prime minister this very week. The bad news is that Israel insists it has not yet had sufficient evidence that Damascus is ready to do what it takes to make peace. It also has to be seriously doubted that Olmert is strong enough to play his part – and give up the Golan Heights conquered in 1967.

There is one last obstacle in the way of a Syrian-Israel peace. Those in the know say flatly that the Bush administration will not allow Jerusalem to talk to Damascus, which it deems an associate member of the "axis of evil". Put it down as one more reason why the world waits, ever more impatiently, for January 20 2009 – the day George W Bush will at last be gone.

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**Minister of Water and Environment to the Yemen Times:****Water and environment are major concerns in Yemen**

Yemen is one of the world's most water scarce countries, with an average per capita share of renewable water resources of 125 cubic meters annually, according to government estimates. This is one-tenth of the average in most countries of the Middle East and North Africa and one-fiftieth of the world average.

According to a recent UNICEF report, Yemen has the world's fourth fastest growing population, which increasingly reduces each individual's available share of fresh water. Experts in the government and from donor nations describe the problem as a looming national disaster.

Additionally, other relevant reports indicate that Yemen faces a chronic imbalance between population and water resources due to its increasing population and scarcity of water resources.

The National Water Resources Authority, or NWRA, estimates that the country's total renewable freshwater resources are just 2,500 million cubic meters (MCM) a year, of which 1,500 MCM is surface water and 1,000 MCM is groundwater. However, experts say current annual demand is 3,200 MCM, resulting in a shortfall of 700 MCM.

The Yemeni government has raised the possibility of changing the nation's economic base so that citizens switch from water-based activities to non-water based activities, but this is politically very sensitive in a country where 50 percent of the population works in agriculture.

In an effort to gain further information about this worsening phenomenon, *Ismail Al-Ghabri interviewed* Yemen's Minister of Water and Environment, Abdul-Rahman F. Al-Eryani, who highlighted the fact that water and the environment are major concerns in Yemen.

**As Yemen is marking World Water Day in conjunction with other countries worldwide, how do you assess our nation's water situation?**

Water shortage is an intricate problem in Yemen, while the individual average share of water – estimated between 120 and 125 cubic meters of water annually for drinking, industry, agriculture and other purposes, places Yemen on the list of most water scarce countries.

Such a fact can't be changed, particularly when Yemen is experiencing rapid population growth directly affecting its development. Additionally, Yemen is one of the few nations suffering scarce rainfall.

Another problem is poor water management. We at the Ministry of Water and Environment concentrate on two primary issues, the first of which relates to providing water and sanitation services to the maximum possible portion of the population.

Progress in this regard mostly depends on available funding. Up to 60 percent of the urban population and 45 percent of the rural population now has access to water and sanitation services and this rate is expected to grow over time.

**According to studies, Yemen may become the world's most water scarce country. In your opinion, what is a workable solution to this problem?**

Good water resources management remains a pressing issue in Yemen and requires cooperation and joint efforts by younger and elder citizens. Neither the Ministry of Water and Environment, the National Water Resources Authority nor governorate leaders have suggested pos-



Ministry of Water and Environment  
Abdul-Rahman F. Al-Eryani

sible solutions to this phenomenon. Just like fighting corruption, terrorism or poverty, resolving this water crisis necessitates a nationwide program incorporating all citizens' efforts to improve water management.

The Yemeni government now is giving top priority to harvesting and collecting rainwater during the rainy seasons through various means, including both large and small dams, which, in addition to providing large water reserves for watering agricultural crops during non-rainy seasons, also feed groundwater.

As a first step toward preserving groundwater supplies from random depletion, the Yemeni Cabinet recently issued a decree directing relevant agencies within the agricultural sector to study various means of water harvesting and collection, in addition to required measures rationing water consumption for agricultural purposes.

Underground reserves are known to be our nation's main water source, but these reserves now are being exposed to waste or random depletion. Frankly speaking, we at the ministry have reached an impasse. We have laws and regulations governing water consumption and we notify relevant agencies of any violations concerning random drilling of artesian wells, but these agencies don't interact with us seriously because most of those committing such violations are powerful tribal leaders.

**Last year, the Ministry of Water and Environment began reviewing the National Water Strategy. Please briefly describe the strategy, its significance and any relevant efforts.**

Deliberations and discussions were held more than two years ago at a broad level involving relevant officials from the Ministry of Water and Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, local authorities and both the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, who participated in developing the first National Water Strategy.

We're now reviewing the strategy to see how it is addressing the national water situation in light of its objectives. An initial review of the strategy, which we're conducting this year, is expected to be completed this summer.

**Despite the Ministry of Water and Environment's strategic plan – once described as one of the best strategies in the Middle East – Yemen's water shortage continues to worsen. Do you have other solutions to the problem?**

Any water strategy or investment in the

water sector that ignores, neglects or underestimates irrigation is doomed to fail because irrigation consumes up to 90 percent or more of available water resources.

If there's neither effective participation by irrigation officials nor an agreement on a unified national vision concerning the irrigation sector's involvement, any work we undertake will be limited because we can only provide 10 percent of the water needed for industry and household use.

**Last year, you called for a national conference on water management. Are you still planning to do so?**

Yes, we're planning a meeting this year involving Parliament and Shoura Council members and other relevant officials. It's scheduled to take place after the National Water Strategy's annual review, which is being conducted by irrigation officials, is completed.

We're also planning to brief participants at this meeting on the strategy and its annual review, as well as suggest a consensus vision for water management because Yemen's water crisis continues to worsen.

**How do you assess 2007 achievements in the areas of water, sanitation and the environment?**

While we pursued some good efforts, limitations still exist, so we hope our performance will improve. For example, we assisted local corporations concerned with water and sanitation to realize several achievements and attain notable progress in water management, in addition to briefing them on how to choose competent staff to manage water consumption, which must be done neutrally and based on competence and experience.

Some problems in the water sector regarding construction work are symptomatic of poor performance by local agencies, but we're working to suggest possible solutions to such problems.

I don't think we're up to the task of passing a new water law, considered one of the region's best pieces of legislation. We're frustrated because the relevant authorities don't cooperate with us in applying the law. The entire community must apply such laws, not just the agencies that enacted them. We want people to respect the water law, which is considered one of the commendable achievements thus far reached with the aim of improving water management.

Achievements also were made in the areas of sanitation and the environment, including ratifying international conventions and agreements regarding a clean environment and reducing harmful gas pollutants. In this regard, we enacted a law to reduce harmful pollutants and keep the environment clean, in addition to encouraging the private sector's cooperation in this respect.

Concerning lead-free gasoline, we're giving top priority to the subject, in conjunction with the Ministry of Oil and Minerals, which currently is rehabilitating the Aden and Marib gasoline stations. The ministry plans to prevent the use of any gasoline containing lead because it causes problems for children's mental development.

**Why is qat not allowed to enter Socotra Island and does this measure contribute to improving the island's water situation and environment?**

In talking about qat, we unanimously agree that it's a destructive phenomenon.

Regardless, we have nothing to do with this initiative by Socotra's local councilors to prevent the entry of qat onto the island. While it's their initiative, we're proud to see these local councilors unanimously deciding that qat may negatively impact economic conditions for its citizens, whether they are rich or poor, educated or uneducated.

Unfortunately, other concerned agencies nationwide still are waiting for the Yemeni government to enact a law banning the entry of qat into main cities; however, thus far, they've never made an initiative like that of Socotra's local councilors.

**We often hear of planned investments in renewable energy, so can you tell us about any projects to be initiated in this area?**

Our role in this regard is to encourage investors to initiate businesses or projects because energy production is part of the Ministry of Electricity and Energy's duties. In this regard, we have attempted to obtain a project from the Global Environment Facility to develop a renewable energy strategy.

The strategy now is complete and there's a plan for renewable energy sources in Yemen, so this was a good work. To my knowledge, the Ministry of Electricity and Energy has begun applying the strategy and is enthusiastic about producing electricity from renewable energy. Our role will be restricted to providing technical support in this area.

**Until now, agricultural machinery still operates on diesel fuel, which emits carbon and harms the environment, and fuel oil still is used to generate electricity. Do you have alternatives to these methods and how is the Ministry of Electricity and Energy cooperating with you in this area?**

Producing energy from traditional fuel – specifically diesel, gas, oil and lead – pollutes the air and is more costly. In Yemen, we're moving toward using natural gas to produce energy, as well as using renewable energy from the wind and solar energy. Successful achievements in this area mostly depend on mutual cooperation with the private sector.

We're required to provide a good climate for the private sector and encourage businesspeople to initiate investment projects in this area by exempting such projects from taxes and custom tariffs and helping them reach an agreement with the government to purchase energy generated by such means at competitive prices.

There is mutual cooperation between the Ministry of Electricity and Energy, the Environmental Protection Authority and the Yemeni Cabinet, which is expected to help drive forward the wheels of development in Yemen.

**How do you react to the exchange of accusations between the Ministry of Water and Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation regarding the nation's water crisis?**

I don't think the issue has anything to do with accusations between the leaders of both ministries regarding disagreements about the water crisis. I previously noted that irrigation consumes up to 90 percent of Yemen's available water resources, compared to only 10 percent for drinking, industrial and household purposes. We're attempting to resolve this water shortage, which is an indicator of desertification and a vulnerable economy for any country.

Yemen still uses a traditional irrigation system, whose efficiency doesn't exceed 35 percent. This is unacceptable in modern times, but it's even more unacceptable in Yemen – one of the world's most water scarce nations.

The purported dispute wasn't between the leaders of these two ministries; rather, it was between water project contractors and irrigation officials. Yemen is one of the few countries suffering scarce water resources, so providing additional or extra water resources is impossible. Consequently, we need to concentrate on controlling the growing demand for water.

The Yemeni government must begin suggesting alternatives in order to overcome this water shortage, either through desalination or through cloud-seeding techniques, which may cost a lot.

The General Irrigation Department, which is affiliated with the Ministry of

supervision, but this doesn't happen in Yemen, most notably because the private sector and businesspeople have their own rigs to drill such wells upon citizens' request. These owners give people special discounts to encourage them to dig more wells because operating such rigs is their main source of income.

In my opinion, social and economic factors, including vulnerable conditions, are responsible for this phenomenon's spread in Yemeni society. One possible solution is for the government to take control of these rigs, approve compensation for their owners and then establish a government agency in charge of designating appropriate areas for drilling wells, as well as supervising the process. If this isn't done, it will be very difficult for the government to save groundwater supplies from random depletion.

**The Yemeni Cabinet issued a decree**



**Water shortage and poor water management and intricate problems in Yemen.**

Agriculture and Irrigation, has begun to behave as if it is a political body, at the expense of its being a technical body, because its staff don't work in line with specific objectives. Irrigation officials are to differentiate between resource management and resource usage in order to avoid any persistent mistakes or blame from other government agencies.

The role of any nation's agriculture ministry is limited to instructing farmers about the ideal use of water resources on their lands. However, a confusion regarding the duties and roles mandated to both of these ministries led to an exchange of accusations at a lower level.

Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation faces criticism and pressure from other government agencies over its poor performance in dam construction, coupled with lack of a clear vision in this regard.

**What do you recommend the Yemeni government do to save the nation's groundwater supplies from random depletion?**

As far as I'm concerned, high-ranking officials should make political decisions to save groundwater supplies from random depletion and prevent influential sheikhs and tribal leaders from drilling artesian wells randomly.

The government should act seriously, just as it did in reinforcing the arms-bearing ban after it remained ineffective for a long time, thereby preventing weapons from entering the main cities. Similarly, the government needs to reinforce the new water law in order to ban random depletion of groundwater supplies because if there's a political will to reinforce the law, community members will abide by such a law.

Drilling artesian wells is done in various nations under direct government

**banning the use of polythene bags in popular markets, considering them harmful pollutants to the environment. Has the government taken subsequent measures to reinforce the ban and introduced a system to measure pollution?**

I admit that we're not diligent in measuring air pollution. Instead, the Environmental Protection Authority should have certain devices or systems to measure air pollution. Unfortunately, government agencies are unconcerned about this issue because the state allocates nothing for the environment in its annual budget. However, we're trying to convince the government to support the Environmental Protection Authority.

Additionally, solid waste and polythene bags are responsible for environmental pollution and citizens are uncooperative with the relevant government agencies in charge of collecting solid waste and taking it to specified waste dumps.

The Ministry of Public Works and Highways is adopting a technical project funded by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, known as GTZ, and the Japanese government seeking to offer practical experience to local staffers at various government agencies concerned with water management and protecting the environment.

**Do you have any final comments?**

Because Yemen is a vulnerable country suffering a worsening water shortage and environmental pollution, both the government and the local community should pay close attention and give top priority to issues related to water management and environmental protection. Environmental pollution is a new issue in Yemen, which has weak institutions requiring further support to address such an issue.

**Who will foot the \$80 billion to halve the number of those without basic sanitation?**

By: Bobby Ramakant

How will Yemen and other world nations achieve the Millennium Development Goal, or MDG, target to reduce by half the proportion of 2.6 billion people with no access to basic sanitation by 2015?

On this year's March 22 World Water Day highlighting sanitation, the United Nations General Assembly has declared 2008 as the International Year of Sanitation with the goal of raising awareness and accelerating progress toward MDG targets to halve the number of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015.

But from where is the estimated \$10 billion annual cost to achieve this MDG target by 2015 going to come? Some \$80 billion will be required between 2008 and 2015 to achieve this target, which will halve the 2.6 billion people currently without access to basic sanitation. Even if this MDG target is achieved, this still

leaves the other half – 1.3 billion people – without such access.

While it seems steep, this amount is less than 1 percent of the world's military spending in 2005 and one-third of the estimated global spending on bottled water – or about as much as Europeans spend on ice cream each year.

"Private corporations, including bottled water companies – which largely have demonstrated a ruthless capital-intensive approach blatantly disregarding environmental or ecological aspects and depriving local communities of access to natural resources – should foot this bill, not the public sector or the governments of developing countries," says Dr. Sandeep Pandey, convener of India's National Alliance of People's Movements, or NAPM, and 2002 recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay award – named for the former Philippine president who served from 1953 to 1957 – for emergent leadership. Known as the Nobel Prize of Asia, the award honors individuals in Asia whose life and work are characterized by selfless



**2.6 billion people currently without access to basic sanitation.**

service that impacts the lives of the greater many.

Aggressive marketing targeting those with the ability to pay has contributed extensively to exacerbating the gap between rich and poor communities. Not

only has this jeopardized these underserved communities' basic human rights to life and dignity, it's also left the rich with a mountainous burden of lifestyle diseases to deal with.

Water is a public good, not a commod-

ity to be bought and sold; thus, increasing corporate control of water undoubtedly is alarming. "Corporations are contributing to and then profiting from the global water crisis," asserts Kathryn Mulvey, executive director of Corporate Accountability International ([www.stopcorporatetease.org](http://www.stopcorporatetease.org)). She further stresses that, "One of the greatest threats to people's access to water today is that corporate water use often is prioritized over people's daily use."

The funds required to achieve MDG goals by halving the number of those without access to basic sanitation are one-third of global spending on bottled water. "If one-third of the profits from bottled water companies can help 1.3 billion people gain access to basic sanitation, not doing this and allowing bottled water companies to mint money is outrageous," Pandey says.

As water becomes more precious, corporations such as Coca Cola, Pepsi, Nestlé, Suez and Veolia increasingly are attempting to control and profit from it,

while at the same time, attempting to position themselves as improving people's access to water.

As a natural right, water rights are usufructuary, meaning water can be used but not owned; thus, people have a right to life and the resources that sustain it, such as water. The necessity of water to life is why, under customary laws, the right to water has been accepted as a natural, social fact.

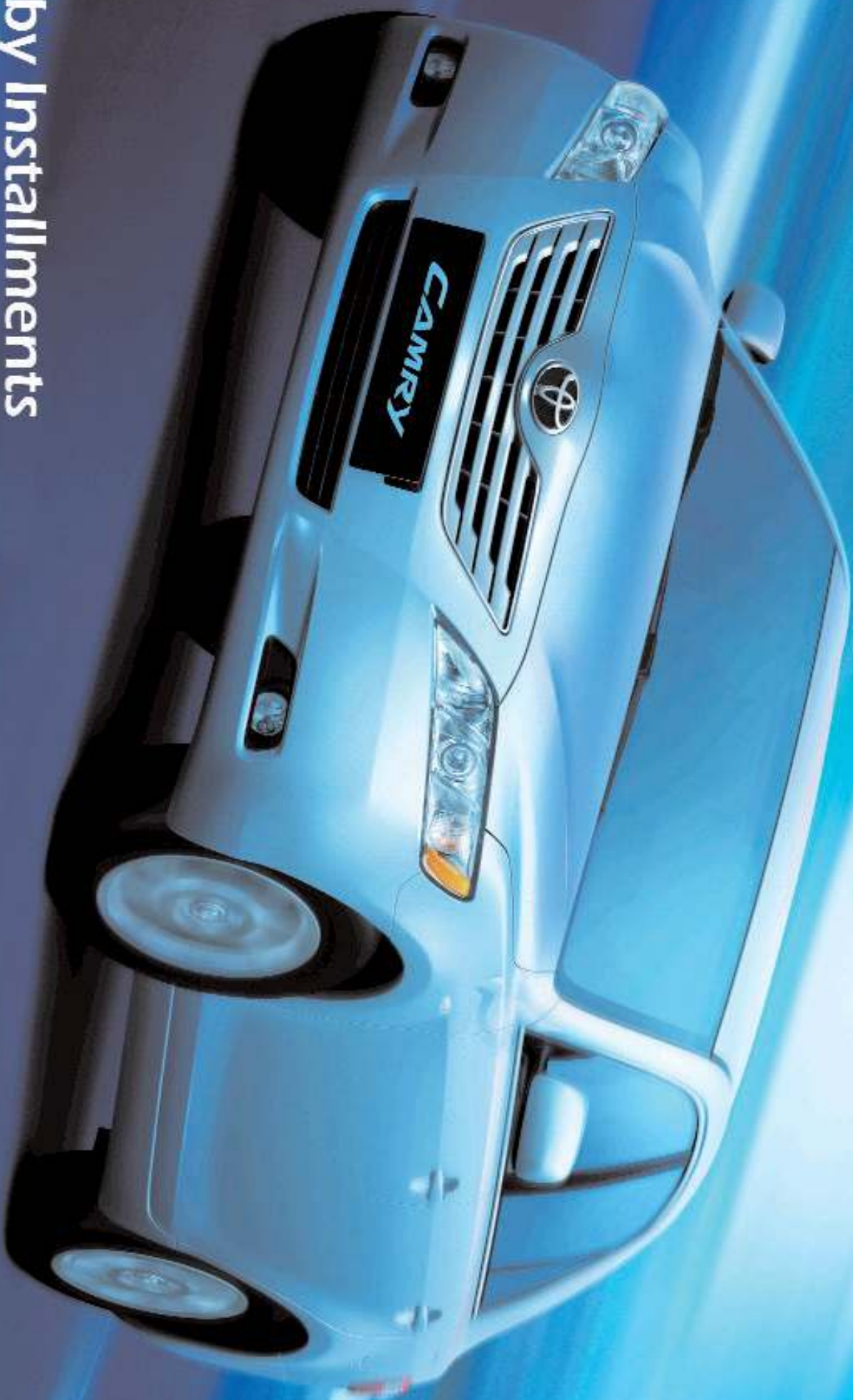
This is why governments and corporations can't alienate people from their water rights. On this World Water Day and beyond, not only do we need to challenge the alarming corporate control of water, but also stake a claim to financial and natural resources that rightfully should be utilized to provide basic sanitation access to all.

*Bobby Ramakant is a senior journalist and a member of the Network for Accountability of Tobacco Transnationals, or NATT. He can be contacted at [bobbyramakant@gmail.com](mailto:bobbyramakant@gmail.com)*



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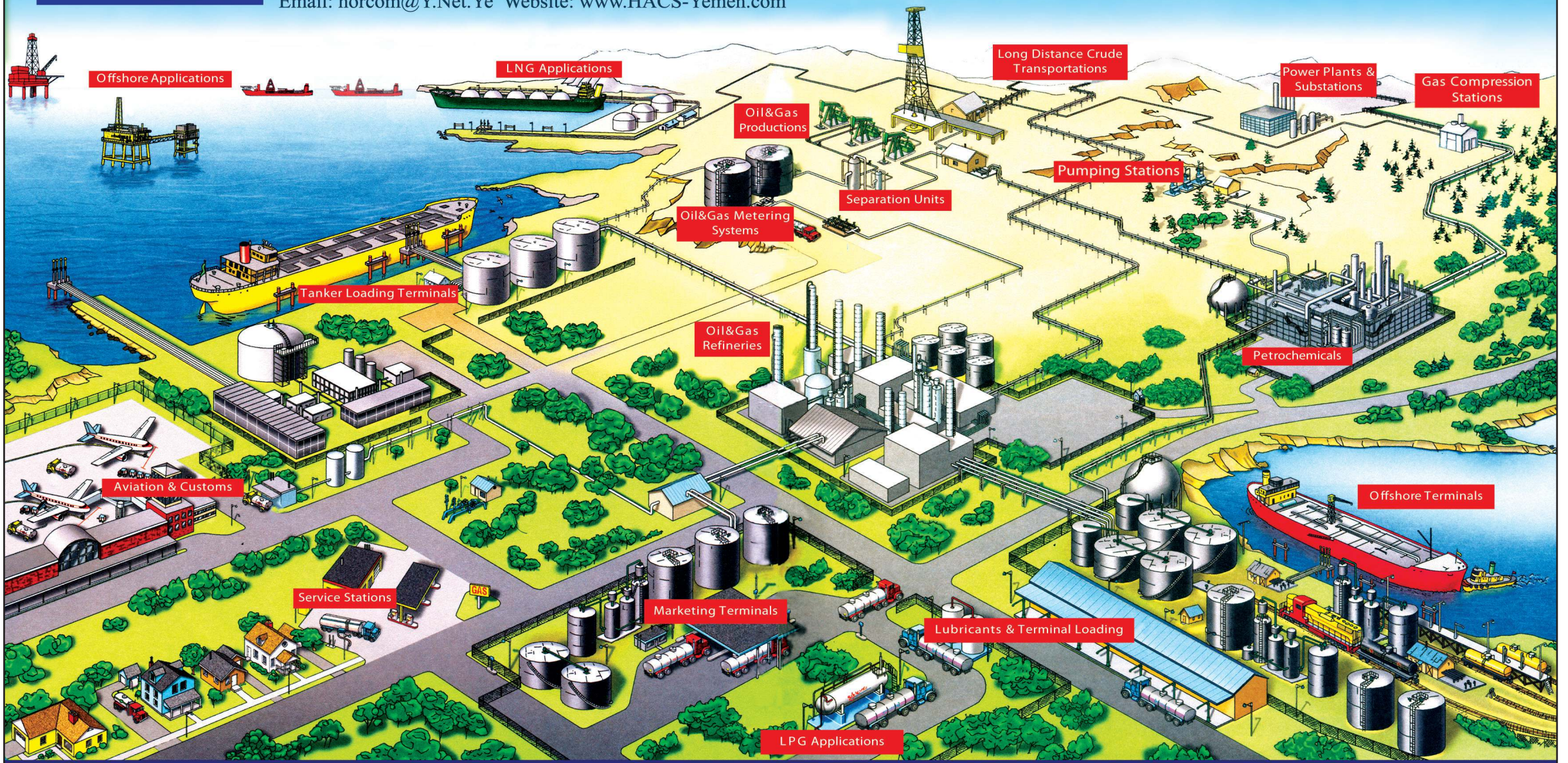


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## A Yemeni student in USA

# Recieved with open arms

By: Yemen Times Staff

"Americans are kind, but they always believe what they see in the media," says Mutaz Hamed, 16-year old Yemeni boy studying at an American high school for one year.

Hamed is part of an exchange program run by the U.S. State Department, known as Youth Exchange Student (YES) that is trying to shift the perceptions of both Yemenis and Americans.

Hamed, who is from Aden city, was among 20 students from the city of Sana'a who were selected to be part of it. Each of the 20 students study at a public high school for one year in a different U.S. state.

He applied to through the America-Mideast Educational and Training Services (AMIDEAST) office in Aden.

Hamed is currently studying in the 11th grade at Medical Lake high school in Spokane, Washington. He loves school and takes six subjects: math, chemistry, English, business lab, U.S. history and physical education.

"Schools in the U.S. are one of the most wonderful things," he says. Every day I learn a new thing. I gain knowledge that I couldn't find in my country."

Despite its cultural diversity and the academic opportunities, Hamed thinks that the United States is a difficult place to practice Islamic moral values. There is no time to pray; terrorism allegations are often leveled at Middle Eastern people and parents give free reign to their teenage children.

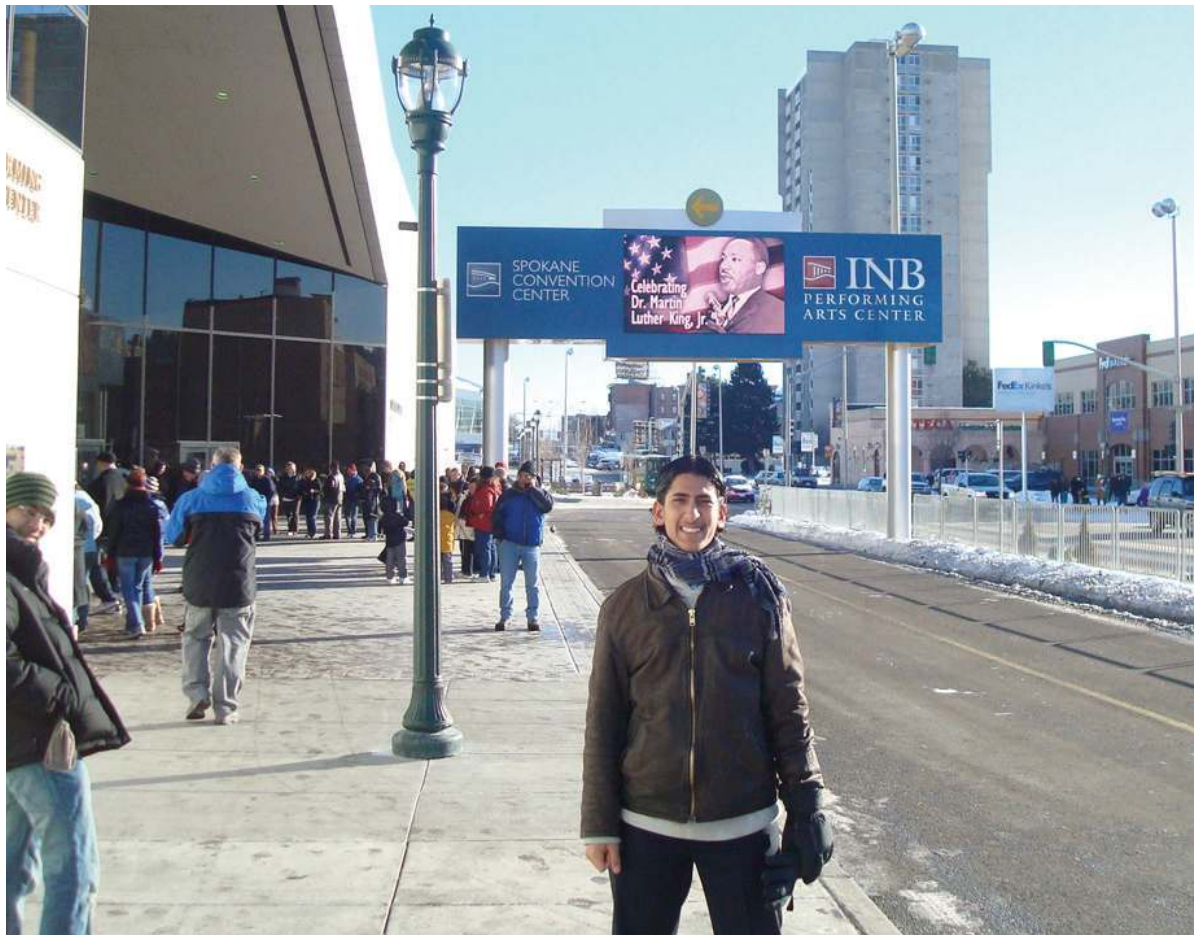
Hamed added that some of the Americans he has met don't understand Islamic culture or the five prayers and that some "bad kids" in his high school make fun of Arabs.

His new American family Luckily, Hamed, he lives with a host family that both cares for him and encourages him to realize his dreams.

Michael and Tina, their four children and their grandma all live together in a house with Hamed. He says he spends a lot of time with his host family because they treat him well. "I usually spend at least 75 percent of my weekend with them and most of the other time too, because I really learn a lot from them and we do fun stuff and activities together."

Hamed shares a room with one of the family's male children, and says he has a good relationship with his host brother. He says that he "can really talk" with him about their lives and cultures.

"The host family I live with now are really the nicest people I've ever know in my life. They help me achieve anything I am willing to do,"



Mutaz during Martin Luther King Day (official holiday in US). He went to watch and listen to the speech of the black people day.



With friends at Pullman college.

says Hamed. "Not only did they open their house to me, but also their hearts and made me part of their family. They take care of everything."

### Life in Spokane

He enjoys his new city's sights and says it's really a beautiful town. "It has a lot of places like the centennial trail, Spokane clock tower, Spokane

Sky ride, many museums, the Regal movie theater and the IMAX theater," says Hamed.

He was also able to go to the Spokane City Hall and meet the mayor of the town.

Although the people of Spokane are kind and nice, they are not as friendly as Yemenis, Hamed says.

"Their welcome is different, but I won't blame them because it's their culture and it's how they were raised." "Most Yemeni students are hard-working and they can handle responsibility; Americans are more spoiled," says Hamed. "But there is something in common between them: they are all nice."



Mutaz and his host family on the Thanks given Day.

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### British author Doris Lessing bags 2007 Nobel Literature Prize

By: Eyad N. Al-Samman  
For The Yemen Times

Although her name hadn't been circulated widely among literary and cultural circles for the 2007 Nobel Prize for literature, British author Doris Lessing won the prize, making her the 11th female ever to win the prize in literature.

Throughout her long and complex career, Lessing has traversed the savannahs of Africa, the crooked streets of London and the chilly reaches of outer space. Announcing her win, the Swedish Academy described her as "that epicist of the female experience, who with skepticism, fire and visionary power has subjected a divided civilization to scrutiny."

Born Oct. 22, 1919 in Kermanshah, Iran to immigrant British parents, Lessing and her family subsequently moved to the southern part of Africa, where she spent her childhood on her father's farm in what was then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Following the end of her second marriage in 1949, she moved to England, settling in London.

Lessing's fiction criticizes colonial attitudes toward race, politics and women's roles in society while her later novels envision a world where science leads to disaster. She once was described as "the archaeologist of human relations," writing persuasively about politics, feminism, communism and black-white relations in Africa.

Lessing's fiction commonly is divided into three distinct phases: the communist theme (1944-1956), during which she wrote about radical social issues, the psychological theme (1956-1969) and the Sufi theme (post-1969), which she explored in a science fiction setting in the "Canopus" series.

Her first novel, 1950's "The Grass is Singing," explored the complacency and shallowness of white colonial society in southern Africa and established Lessing as a talented young novelist.

Among her works is a volume of short stories published in 1964 as "African Stories" and a five-novel sequence, "Children of Violence" (1952-1969), a largely autobiographical account of the fictional central character, Martha Quest. The five books in the series are: "Martha Quest" (1952), "A Proper Marriage" (1954), "A Ripple from the Storm" (1958), "Landlocked" (1965) and "The Four-Gated City" (1969).

Lessing likely was awarded the Nobel Prize for her best-known novel, "The Golden Notebook"



(1962), which remains widely read and studied in universities, in addition to being awarded the 1976 French Prix Médicis for Foreigners.

The novel concerns Anna Wulf, a writer caught in a personal and artistic crisis, who sees her life compartmentalized into various roles – woman, lover, writer, political activist. Her dairies, written in different colored notebooks, each correspond to a different part of herself. Anna eventually suffers a mental breakdown and it's only through this disintegration that she's able to discover a new wholeness, which she writes about in the final notebook.

A prolific author, Lessing's other novels include "The Summer Before the Dark" (1973), a woman's journey into self-knowledge, and "The Good Terrorist" (1985), the story of a group of political activists who set up a squat in London. The book was awarded W.H. Smith's 1985 Literary Award.

"The Fifth Child" (1988) is the story of a family destroyed by the birth of a violent and brutal child, while "Mara and Dann: An Adventure" (1999) is the odyssey of two children and "The Sweetest Dream" (2001) is a family saga set in London and Africa.

Her short story volumes include: "The Habit of Loving" (1957), "The Story of a Non-Marrying Man" (1972) and "The Real Thing" (1992).

Lessing also penned two autobiographical volumes, which were awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1995: "Under My Skin: My Autobiography to 1949" (1994) and "Walking in the Shade: My Autobiography, 1949-1962" (1997).

Her recent books include: "The Grandmothers" (2003), a collection of four short novels centered on an unconventional extended family, and "Time Bites" (2004), a selection of essays based on her life experiences. Her latest and most recent novel is 2007's "The Cleft."

Harvard University awarded Lessing an honorary degree in June 1995. Other awards include the 1958 Somerset Prize for Fiction, the Man Booker Prize for Fiction for the British Commonwealth and Ireland (1971, 1981 and 1985), the 1999 Companion of Honor from Queen Elizabeth II, the 2001 David Cohen British Literature Prize, the 2001 Companion of Honor from the Royal Society of Literature and the Man Booker International Prize in 2005 and 2007.

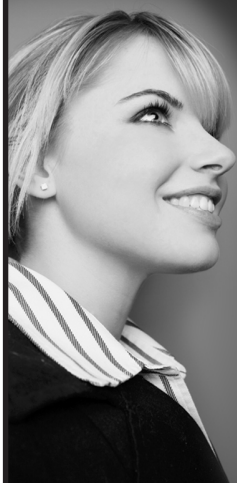
After winning the Nobel Prize for literature, Lessing, who still resides in London, commented, "Why do the Noble Prize officials admire me now after hating me in the past? Since they can't award a dead person, I think they've decided that it's better to grant me the award before I pass away!"

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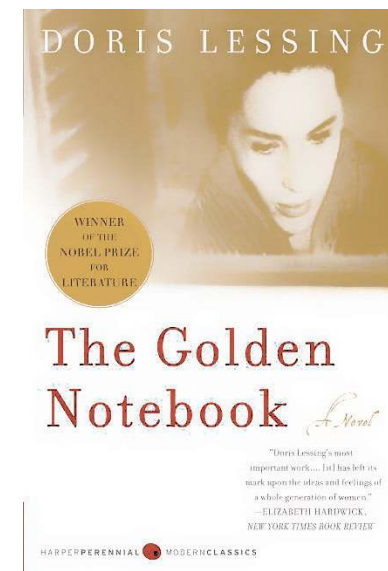
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# The legend of Sahn Al-Djinn



Sahn Al-Djinn view taking from the plane.

By: **Almigdada Mojalli**  
almigdads8@yahoo.com

**S**ahn Al-Djinn is a mountain located 50 kilometers to the west of Marib governorate. The top of the mountain has a form of a crater. Over time the mountain's crater filled with mud and water, creating a flat surface over the crater's top that resembles a plate full of milk, where the mountain gets its name, which means "Genie's Plate" in English. Every day, soldiers report seeing a whirlwind turning with heavy vertical dust on the top of the mountain. There are two stories explaining the mountain's name.

The first story came from some of the inhabitants nearby the mountain. They said that 100 years ago people from two neighboring tribes in Marib governorate used to live nearby and met one day at the mountain's top to negotiate the borders of their tribal land and decide if it included the mountain or not.

When the two tribes met, they brought a sheikh with them to determine the real borders. When the

sheikh found that neither of the two tribes had enough evidence to prove that the land was their possession, he subjected both tribes to a test. Each

tribe should go all the way back to its village and then come as quickly as possible back to the mountaintop," said the sheikh. "The tribe who

comes back first can have the land." The nearest village was 15 kilometers away.

The tribe that lost the race refused

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to accept the results ad instead began fighting with the winning tribe on top of the mountain and started by killing the judge. The fight turned into a massacre and the story goes that the whirlwind of dust is actually the souls of the people killed in that battle.

The second story about the mountain's name involves the military brigade that came to the district in 1994 when the civil Yemeni war was waged between the Yemeni Socialist Party forces and the government. At that time, a military troop moved from Saada governorate to Marib governorate, and its soldiers decided to stay next to the Sahn Al-Djinn mountain because it was cooler than the surrounding desert and there were also some inhabitants living nearby.

Because the top of the mountain looks like a plate, a popular local superstition says that when there is a

**4U**

If you know such phenomenon, please contact  
**Almigdada Mojalli** at:  
Almigdads8@yahoo.com

dusty vertical whirlwind, this means that djinns are fighting over their food; hence people came up with the name "the djinns' dish."

The geologist Ashraf Al-Jailani explained that the dusty vertical whirlwind occurs due to the coming of winds from two opposite directions, so when the crash they make dusty vertical whirlwind.

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