Moroccan king seeks new development model, points out inadequacies

Mohammed VI spoke on the 20th anniversary of his accession to the throne.

Saad Guerraoui
Casablanca

A major cabinet reshuffle is underway in Morocco following King Mohammed VI’s call for new faces in political, economic and administrative institutions, including the government, as he expresses the need for a “new development model,” which is to be unveiled in the autumn. The committee is expected to suggest reforms in several sectors, including education and health care.

Morocco has made major leaps in several sectors that have diversified the country’s economy in the last two decades. The construction of Tangier Med Port, a high-speed rail line linking Tangier and Casablanca, and energy plants are among Morocco’s achievements under the king’s rule. Improvement of infrastructure has been at the forefront of his priorities and a lot of work needs to be done to boost the economy in both eastern and southern regions.

Moond Alabbasi
London

Israeli parties submit election lists but no end seen to stalemate

Mamoon Alabbasi

One stumbling block in Netanyahu’s road to renewed leadership of the country is the staunch objection of right-wing politician Avigdor Lieberman to work with him as the prime minister.

Despite new alliances on both the left and right, no one is able to form a majority coalition due to Lieberman’s stated opposition to join either a centre-left coalition or a right-wing coalition with Netanyahu and the ultra-Orthodox. That basically means he will support only a ‘unity’ government made up of Blue and White and Likud if Netanyahu is forced out,” said Hugo Lovatt, a policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

“The other possibility is that Netanyahu forms a centrist coalition with Blue and White without Lieberman, perhaps under the pretense of responding to the Trump administration’s peace initiative.”

Netanyahu is not leaving matters to chance but the numbers aren’t on his side yet. At this stage, it is difficult to see how the right-wing political system can avoid repeating the deadlock of the last election but, of course, a lot can still change over the next month and one should never discount Netanyahu’s political acumen,” Lovatt said.

“Netanyahu’s answer is to expand the pool of right-wing votes by ensuring that far-right parties such as Zehut and Otzma make it above the electoral threshold but, according to recent polling, even that still has the right-wing bloc falling short of a majority.”

Netanyahu’s opponents do not appear to be in a better position, either.

“On the centre-left, Ehud Barak’s ‘unity’ government without Netanyahu as prime minister does not appear to be in a better position, either.”

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That does not mean that Israelis are happy with their prime minister. “The Israeli public is frustrated with Netanyahu and his never-ending attempts to ensure his re-entry into politics and the formation of a new Democratic Union list seem only to be shifting votes around within the centre-left bloc — rather than expanding it,” said Lovatt.

The creation of the Joint List is important from the point of view of Palestinian political agency but it is not a game-changer for the centre-left and, in any case, Blue and White continue to oppose working with them.”

Despite polls predicting 11 seats for the Joint List, Palestinian citizens of Israel are not expecting a shift in Israeli politics towards their community, which they say will remain marginalised.

“It is clear that the Jewish Israeli community has no progressive voices on the political left to speak of and the political centre seems to be falling out,” Sam Bahour, Palestinian businessman and commentator, said via e-mail.

“Netanyahu will not go down without a fight, which means all eyes should be on an Israeli military aggression on Gaza, yet again. Sadly, governance by fear is all that’s left for Israeli political parties,” he said.

Mamoon Alabbasi is Deputy Managing Editor and Online Editor of The Arab Weekly.

Looking ahead. Morocco’s King Mohammed VI delivers a speech marking the anniversary of his accession to the throne in Tetouan, July 29.
Palestinian Israelis look for elections to fight discrimination

Youssef Alhelou

Palestinian citizens of Israel are often referred to in the media as “Palestinians” or “Palestinians in Israel.” They are the indigenous inhabitants of the historical Palestinian lands that remained in what became Israel in 1948.

They live in “Green Line areas” or what they refer to as “the 1967 lands.” They make up about 21% of Israel’s total population of 9 million people, the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics said.

They have no faith in the Israeli justice system or the country’s democracy because of what they describe as the “isradication policy” in which they are forced to abandon their historical roots and strip them of their national identity as Palestinians.

They largely identify with the Pal­estinians and have long complained of discrimination.

Never in the past was a decision of this kind has been taken because it would serve the policy of Israeli occupation. “They are the minority in the country.”

The Alliance of the four parties in the Oslo agreement led to create a structure for electricity, water, coordination or Israel’s control of the dependency ties between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Israeli occupation.

This is not just about security coordination or Israel’s control of border crossings and of imports and exports to and from Palestinian territories. The entire infra­structure for electricity, water, energy and basic needs in the PA areas is connected to Israel. What the Oslo agreements led to was the Palestinian Authority under Israeli occupation.

It is worth noting that Israel’s Avigdor Lieberman, who is often accused of racism against Palestinians, helped enact a law that determines that a party can only win in the parlia­ment elections if it receives 3.25% of the vote. Therefore, the only way Arab par­ties could surpass Netanyahu’s han­dle is by uniting.

Those parties each have a strategy to draw more people to their political project. PA’s need to include all components of the Arab parties in the parliament to have a stronger influence in parliament and fight for equal rights for the larger minority in the country.

In addition to facing discrimina­tion from the state, the parties face challenges from their own commu­nities. They boycott the elections because they say they would legitimate the racist policies of the state without being able to act upon them.

The September elections will almost certainly not be a chance, especially that there are calls from some members of the community to boycott the elections because of what they say would legitimatize racist policies. The state will not be able to act upon them.

Nor is betting on the results of the elections to get out of the Oslo Accords

Majed Kayali

The Palestinian leadership cannot get out of the Oslo Accords unless it is betting on the implementation of the decision announced by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to stop observing agreements concluded with Israel, some of which are more than 25 years old.

There are several reasons such a bet is a losing proposition or, at least, unrealistic.

First, this is not the first time a decision of this kind has been made; this is perhaps the third time. Four years ago, the Palestin­ian Central Council had taken a similar decision and reaffirmed it during a meeting last year.

During that meeting, it was decided to call for the dissolution of the Palestin­ian Authority (PA) with Israel and the council threat­ened to withdraw its recognition of the state of Israel in the event of an Israeli stop security co­operation with the PA and end the PA’s economic dependency on Israel as specified in the Paris Agreement of the 1993 Oslo Agreement.

Second, as repeatedly stated by the PA has other options available to it in case of impasse.

He has said the PA could be dissolved, which would put Israel in the position of an occupying power. On more than one occa­sion, it threatened to simply “go home,” meaning to resign.

Some Palestinian leaders have waved the card of reverting to the option of a one-state solution. Their intent was to move threat­ening Israel than to advocate for a real option. What those leaders meant was that they would abandon the project of having a state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in favour of fighting for another pro­ject based on demanding rights on the entire land of Palestine.

It certainly cannot be for lack of options to back it up, not counting the results of the second Camp Da­vid negotiations (2000), quashed the one is betting on the results of the September elections will almost certainly not be a chance, especially that there are calls from some members of the community to boycott the elections because of what they say would legitimatize racist policies. The state will not be able to act upon them.

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The Palestinian leadership is acting as if it has realised this only now, unfortunately, and not because of what Israel has been doing for years in the occupied territories but because of its “disenrolment with the United States, the “honest sponsor” and “neutral mediator” of the peace process.”

This friend of the Palestinians recognised as the uni­fied capital of the state of Israel and transferred its embassy to it, dropped the issue of Palestinian refugees from its agenda arguing it had become outdated, stopped its funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, gave up the right to build illegally in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the West Bank, began promoting a re­gional settlement deal that would remove the Palestinian cause from the agenda and simply ignored the Palestinian leadership.

This leader of the free world is trying to mislead the rest of the world about the fact that, in light of the turbulent conditions of the region, the Palestinians no longer have a role to play or can no longer influence war or peace in the region.

Majed Kayali is a Palestinian writer.
The Morocco of Mohammed VI

Tunisia's Islamist chief steps up to legislative race but presidential vote will go first

Lamine Ghanmi

Tunisia

Islamist Ennahda Movement President Rachid Ghannouchi, backing reports that he would not seek political office, is likely to enter into the electoral fray to safeguard his party's assets. If he does well in the elections, he could win as the springboard for continued power as speaker of parliament or head of government when his term as Ennahda's president ends near next year. The party's succession battle is expected to be a bruising fight, analysts said.

No fewer than 15,737 candidates were set to contest for seats in the 217-member parliament, a new electoral law, which extends the number of candidates from 15 after President Beji Caid Essebsi died July 25, leaving a gaping hole in the country's political landscape as other leaders' personas pale in comparison to him. His death created another problem for parliamentary candidates. They will have to run after and not before the presidential elections as previously scheduled.

The first round of the presidential vote is set for September 5. Most Tunisian political experts expect the choice of the president to create a ripple effect on the legislative elections. Despite the additional hurdle this creates for Ennahda, it is unlikely to hold a credible presidential candidate, analysts said. The party's toppling of the list of Ennahda's candidates selected through an internal voting process of the party, other top figures removed from the list of candidates challenged Ghannouchi's style of managing the party.

The king has found its place. It is close to the war on poverty and the disappearance of chauvinism in Tunisia. He is an Arab leader, and that is dangerous for the party's unity, " said Ennahda Vice-President Abdelhamid Jelassi.

The next step is to go to the polls September 15. Turnout, with 2 million-3 million times that of Chahed.

Polls indicated that Nabil Karoui's Qalb Tounes party could win 28.5% of the vote in parliamentary elections, with Ennahda second at 16.8%. Polls also showed Karoui to be the front-runner in the presidential contest with the support of 23% of those asked, more than three times that of Chahed.

Chahed said his party approval fell from 16.5% in May to 8.6% in July.

Another surprise in the polls was the strong performance of Beji Caid Essebsi's Free Destourian party, which provided the government with a majority of 3.1 million votes, or 23% of those asked, more than three times that of Chahed.

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Dubai

Diplomats from Iran, Germany, France, Britain, China, Russia and the European Union met in Vienna for emergency talks aimed at reducing tensions involving Iran and saving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the formal name for the nuclear deal, from collapse.

Recent months have seen tensions between Iran and the United States soar and a growing number of countries have been pulled into the dangerous standoff.

US President Donald Trump carried through his promise to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018 and initiated strict economic sanctions against Iran as punitive measures for its wider regional activities, particularly in Yemen and Syria.

Tehran is sustaining its defiance of the United States and has engaged in what can only be seen as an escalatory strategy that raised alarms across the region, particularly in the Gulf.

The tensions around the Strait of Hormuz continue to be critical of recent US moves. Days later, Washington imposed sanctions against Iran's nuclear facilities in response to a series of core issues. Ultimately, the US and the United States will need to reach some degree of implicit understanding for any future scenario to be workable between their drift apart continues.

The United States is signalling otherwise. Washington announced it would renew sanctions waivers against Iran's nuclear activities, which allow international cooperation at the Bushehr nuclear plant, the Fordow enrichment facility, the Arak nuclear complex and the Tehran nuclear reactor. The goal of ending the waivers was reaffirmed.

The European Union is open as international players take positions across a series of core issues. Ultimately, the United States will need to reach some degree of implicit understanding for any future scenario to be workable between their drift apart continues.

The talks in Vienna heralded a controversial move.

Iran, recently reiterated a suggestion from Iranian President Hassan Rouhani that Iran would resume work at the Arak reactor, where potential production of heavy water could open a route to a nuclear weapon using plutonium rather than uranium.

The proliferation risk is low, said Peter Jenkins, former British ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). "The IAEA reported in 2016 that the original reactor core had been rendered unusable (under JCPOA terms). In May 2019, the agency reported that Iran hadn't pursued reactor construction at Arak based on the original design," Jenkins said.

"Rearing in mind the slow pace at which construction occurred prior to the JCPOA in 2015, I think it likely that a heavy-water reactor is years away from completion."

Even with a functioning Arak reactor, Iran would need the capacity, which it lacks, to extract plutonium from spent fuel, Jenkins pointed out that the IAEA unearthed evidence only of small-scale research into relevant technologies before the JCPOA, and that its May report said Iran no longer carried out such research. "The probability, it seems, is that acquiring a reprocessing..."
In showdown against Iran, US sees a front next door

Emily Przyborowski

Washington

T he pursuit of its multifaceted war against Iran, the United States is cracking down on Hezbollah’s activities as far as in Latin America, recently convincing Argentina to designate the Lebanese group a terrorist organisation.

US Senator Ted Cruz, a Republican from Texas, introduced a resolution that, fellow sponsor of the measure, Senator Mark Rubio, a Republican from Florida, said aims to “recommence to helping the government of Argentina seek justice for the victims and their families” through the designation of additional funds to the country.

US Representative Lee Zeldin, a Republican from New York, introduced theCountering Hezbollah in Lebanon’s Military Act of 2019, which would withhold 25% of US military assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), unless the president can certify the LAF has “stopped to end Hezbollah and Iran’s influence over the LAF.”

The United States provides the LAF with more than $300 million in military assistance. The funding is meant to stymie the influence of Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon but there is evidence that Hezbollah has influence over the military. The reduction in funds would threaten the LAF’s ability to protect Lebanon’s border with Syria.

The US Department of Justice has taken a major role in trying to curtail Hezbollah’s influence. “In January, then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions created the Hezbollah Financing and Narcoterrorism Team, or the HFNT, and asked me to lead the team,” said Deputy Assistant Attorney General John Cronan during a Latin American Counterterrorism conference in July.

“The decision, to stand up the HFNT reflected a recognition of the ongoing, sophisticated and global threat posed by Hezbollah to the United States — and that this threat demands an aggressive and coordinated law enforcement response. ”

Cronan said the squad was working with international allies to identify, sanction and prosecute Hezbollah financiers.

Joseph Buhaise, executive direc- tor of the Centre for a Secure Free Society, since US President Donald Trump’s election and the establishment of the HFNT, there has been “a noticeable change in US and other American governments’ attitudes toward Hezbollah.”

The US strategy of targeting Hezbollah aims to increase pressure on Iran, which is struggling under US-imposed economic sanctions. As part of the drive, Washington is likely to continue trying to convince partners in Latin America to join US efforts against Iran.

US senior officials said Latin American countries have done little to combat Hezbollah, allowing Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon to widen their encirclement near the United States.

Emily Przyborowski is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Washington.

Ghosts of terror. AIMA President Ariel Eichbaum (L), US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (C) and Argentine Foreign Minister Jorge Faurie attend a memorial service on behalf of the 85 people killed in Argentina’s worst terrorist attack, in Buenos Aires, July 19.
What Tunisians were celebrating at their president’s funeral

Oussama Romdhani

Above all, Tunisians of all hues, old hands and revolutionaries, conservatives and progressives, were celebrating their freedom.

Saying thank you. Tunisian women bid farewell to Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi at his funeral in Tunis, July 27. (Reuters)

Editorial

Two decades in the life of Morocco

In July 30, Morocco celebrated the 20th anniversary of King Mohammed VI’s accession to the throne. For the 35 million people of the kingdom, it was an opportunity to look back at what has been achieved over two decades and to soberly examine the challenges lying ahead.

Moroccans are appreciative of the stability their country has enjoyed at a time when much of the region remains shaken by upheaval since 2011. If the kingdom has been spared the ill effects of such turbulence, it is in great part because of the prudent foreign policy of King Mohammed VI.

Early on, at the end of the reign of King Hassan II in 1999, King Mohammed VI turned the page of past abuses and established new standards in human rights and political pluralism. In 2004, he established the Equity and Reconciliation Commission to investigate human rights violations during previous years. He implemented the commission’s recommendations, including compensation to victims of state human rights violations.

In 2011, King Mohammed VI introduced constitutional reforms reducing his own powers and expanding the prerogatives of parliament and regional bodies. He also engaged a wide-ranging process of economic modernisation and social reform.

Today, Morocco is blessed with stability and progress. Anyone visiting the kingdom will find a country that is clearly on the move. Its achievements span across an impressive array of fields. The kingdom is a pioneer in solar energy, boasting the Noor Power Station in Ouarzazate, considered the world’s largest concentrated solar power complex. From this station’s production, 45% of Morocco’s power needs will be supplied from renewable energy sources.

Meanwhile, Tangier Med Port, with a tripled capacity in 2019, has become the Mediterranean’s largest maritime cargo facility. Morocco’s high-speed railway line, which opened in 2018, is the first of its kind on the continent.

On the 20th anniversary of his accession to the throne, King Mohammed VI acknowledged that major achievements were the development of the system and that there are lingering inadequacies in the development model.

“I realise that, though important, infrastructure development and institutional reforms are not enough on their own,” he said. “Let me say this clearly and frankly: What undermines this positive result is that the effects of the progress and the achievements made have not, unfortunately, been felt by all Moroccans.”

The king is clearly worried about the destabilising effect of social inequalities. Much like other countries of the region, Morocco is troubled with high youth unemployment and sluggish growth. To generate more jobs and opportunities for young people, who often look for greener pastures abroad to meet its, the country must forge higher growth.

Achieving higher rates of economic growth will require more efficiency, greater investment flows and less red tape.

In his speech, the king pointed to “the challenge of accelerating economic development and enhancing institutional efficiency” with “the aim of building a strong, competitive economy by creating new opportunities for private entrepreneurship, in addition to launching new programmes for productive investment and creating more jobs.”

There are also socio-economic inequities and regional imbalances to be tackled. Drawing from the lessons of the 2005 unrest at home and of the social discontent in other parts of North Africa, King Mohammed VI set a strategic challenge for his country: “The challenge of social and regional justice” and the aim “to complete the building of a nation of hope and equality for all, a country where there is no place for blatant inequalities.”

Efficient security has been a factor in bolstering the kingdom’s stability. To its credit, Morocco, which has previously suffered from terrorist attacks, has made no effort in dealing with extremist violence and addressing its deep roots. The creation of the Mohammed VI Institute for Training Imams, Morchidines and Morchidates and the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema in 2015 has imbibed hundreds of Arab and African imams with values of moderation and tolerance in Islam. The effort will go a long way in curtailing radicalisation in the region and beyond.

International anti-terrorism agencies often laud Morocco’s invaluable collaboration. On more than one occasion, European and other experts have acknowledged the kingdom’s role in preventing bloody acts of terrorism.

Morocco has reason to celebrate. Its prosperity and stable growth are an asset for people and for those of the Maghreb, the Arab world and Africa. So is its ability to correct course when circumstances warrant.
Can the world afford changing the rules?
Rashmee Roshan Lall

If the Western world no longer feels obliged to provide refuge to poorer countries, at the very least it should cease destabilising Arab and African countries for geopolitical gain.

The Trump administration has decided to rescind the Temporary Protected Status given by the United States to approximately 700,000 Syrians. The decision is likely to approximate 700,000 people from countries affected by war or other extraordinary conditions—other extraordinary conditions.

The 18-month extension announced August 1 merely defers the uncertainty. It stays in place until conditions in the refugees’ home countries improve but for the Syrians in Donald Trump’s America, their legal right to stay is uncertain.

In the name of getting tough on immigration for refuge, the Trump administration has been making it harder for people fleeing violence and trafficking for asylum to enter the United States and lodge asylum claims.

Trump recently met a Yemeni woman from Iraq and a Rohingya refugee along with other victims of religious persecution recently but apparently. It was a set-piece event and a sign Trump would do anything to provide refuge to people fleeing fear.

Reports stated that the administration was considering a total overhaul of refugee admissions next year, a policy change that could affect thousands of Iraqis. The US Department of Defense has championed their admission because they risked their lives fighting against ISIS.

The issue of migrants seeking asylum is hardly less fraught in Europe. The European Union has promised to check into a BBC investigation into the brutal treatment of migrants trying to enter the bloc via Croatia.

The report said that every week, 14-year-old Mustafa from Egypt—who was booked on a flight to Italy—and He and other migrants were robbed by Croatian police, who were reportedly engaging in so-called “pushback” operations meant to prevent people from seeking asylum in the European Union.

Is a dream of being in their own state’s willingness to comply with the 1951 Geneva Convention, which defined the status of refugees, set rights of individuals granted asylum and the obligations of nations.

The convention is legally binding but compliance is not enforceable by the United Nations Commission for Refugees. That agency cannot make Trump accept asylum seekers or grant them refuge. It can only force the US government to maintain protections for Syrian refugees in the interest of the country.

The 18-month extension of asylum is being abused by those seeking asylum as an opportunity, not those fleeing persecution or flight.

The same sort of view is increasingly taking hold in Europe, all of which suggests wanting support for an internationally accepted obligation to provide a safe haven to those fleeing conflict.

What comes next? What should the West do? I’ve never consciously replace the old one for this essay. Writing about a new paradigm? Who might conceivably replace the old order in the Near East? One thing is clear. If the rich Western world no longer feels inspired to refuse it. Equally, those who do not want to provide sanctuary to their enemies in the US. Equally, those who do not want to provide sanctuary to their enemies in the US.

There is a need for Israelis to see the Palestinians as more than digitised faces. There is a need to see them as human beings with histories, dreams and national aspirations.

If anyone should have no trouble overcoming and realising the injustice committed daily against Palestinians living under occupation, it is the Israeli people. Their books are filled with chapter upon chapter of injustice committed against the Jewish people, dating from biblical times through the modern era. Yet they seem oblivious to the suffering of an entire nation.

If Jews understand what it means to crave for a land they have called their own, they have always been engaged in a David and Goliath struggle against overwhelming odds, suffering terrible losses along the way. Over centuries. The Palestinians are no different.

If Jews understand what it means to crave for a land they have called their own, they have always been engaged in a David and Goliath struggle against overwhelming odds, suffering terrible losses along the way. Over centuries. The Palestinians are no different.

The Arabs tried defeating Israel militarily and economically throughout the 1967 war. Militarily, they waged five major wars against Israel in 1948, upon the creation of the state of Israel, 1967, the Six Day War, 1973, the October (Yom Kippur) War; 1979, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. There have been limited diplomatic efforts since the 1996 Oslo Accords, between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

On the economic front, the Arab League’s boycott bureau may think its actions serve the greater good of the Arab cause. Like most other Arab League initiatives, its effectiveness cannot be measured by the number of bureaucrats it has created.

Israel prides itself on its technological prowess and has been referred to as the Silicon Valley of the Middle East but it falls short in recognising the needs of its neighbours: the Palestinian people. Israel has hindered new technologies from other countries in the region, the development of facial-recognition technology to control the movement of Palestinians across its borders shows its scientific knowhow, it failed to recognise one basic fact: Injustice to a whole people under its occupation is not a scientific technology is needed to see that. Only the old-fashioned ability of its boycott targets is sufficient.

The sad irony for thousands of Palestinian day labourers lies in the fact that they only work they are likely to find is in building a better world for the very enemy they have to contend with or to work in construction. The Emirate of Qatar has a policy solution allowing the Palestinians to establish a full-fledged Palestinian state.

The United States has long opposed progress to global rules that would force tax where economic activity is actually occurring but for the so-called Financial Services Act, a recent released deal by Donald Trump from a law firm in the Indian Ocean tax haven of Mauritius rocketed. US Citizenship.

US Department of Defence has championed their admission because they risked their lives fighting against ISIS. The rights promulgated by the UN and are nowhere on the horizon.

The Jews survived. From the creation of Nazi Germany, whose citizens who, forced by economic...
Cairo

Ahmed Megahid

Egyptian and Jordanian leaders discussed Middle East peace during a recent regional tour, including a visit by Jordanian King Abdullah II to Cairo. They also discussed maintaining support for the Palestinians, the Egyptian president said in a statement, following the July 29 meeting between Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

King Abdullah's visit to Cairo was his second in less than five months. He visited in March for a summit with Sisi and Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi. The July visit was less than a month after the Egyptian-Jordanian committee meeting and just before the king's meeting with US President Donald Trump and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Kushner started a regional tour July 29 with stops planned for Cairo, Casablanca and Riyadh. He was in the region to promote a blueprint for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, widely known as the Deal of the Century.

Egypt and Jordan were represented at a relatively modest level at a workshop in Tehran on the economic part of the plan in June. The two countries represent different visions about the plan, especially following Egypt's political changes.

Egyptian and Jordanian stances are crucial regarding Middle East peace, especially for the only Arab countries to have signed peace treaties with Israel and maintain close relations with the Palestinians.

Not any solution. Jordanian King Abdullah II (L) walks with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi at Cairo International Airport, July 29. (AFP)

Gaza is a real threat to Egypt's national security. "Egypt has to use the cards in its hands to pressure Hamas to stop reaching out to Iran," said Samir Ghazas, a member of the Egyptian parliament. "Iran's influence in Gaza is a real threat to Egypt's national security." (AFP)

Egypt, Jordan coordinate stands on Deal of the Century

Ahmed Megahid

Egypt

Cairo

E gyptian and Jordanian leaders discussed Middle East peace during a recent regional tour, including a visit by Jordanian King Abdullah II to Cairo. They also discussed maintaining support for the Palestinians, the Egyptian president said in a statement, following the July 29 meeting between Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. 

"We have a clear position on this deal," he said. "The two countries will surely reject any settlement that will not give the Palestinians their full rights," said Ahmad Badreddine, a political science professor at Cairo University. "The Palestinian-Israeli conflict cannot be resolved at the expense of neighbouring countries." (Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian reporter based in Cairo.)

Egypt wary of Hamas reviving ties with Tehran

Amr Emam

Cairo

E gyptian political analysts achieved mixed results about the Egyptian influence in the Gaza Strip, referring to potential instability in the region and deteriorating relations between Hamas and Egypt.

The return of Iranian influence to the Gaza Strip will adversely affect the region, political analyst Ammar Ali Hassan said. "Apart from potentially ending the calm between Hamas and Israel, this influence will harm Egypt's relations with Hamas." Egypt watched closely as a delegation from Hamas visited Tehran on July 20, the first such trip since December 2017. The delegation was led by Hamas Politburo Deputy Chairman Saleh al-Arouri. Egypt reportedly prevented Hamas political chief Fawzi Hamiyeh from leaving Gaza, which shares borders with Egypt and depends heavily on its airports for the travel of its residents, the Egyptian delegation to Tehran. This was why Arouri, who lives in Beirut, led the delegation.

In Tehran, the Hamas delegation met with several senior officials, including Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on July 22. They gave Khamenei a letter from Hamiyeh, in which he thanked Iran's supreme leader for supporting Hamas politically and militarily. Khamenei praised what he described as "resistance" by Hamas and other Palestinian factions to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories. "Victory can only be achieved by resistance and struggle," he said.

The visit of the delegation followed a freeze in relations with Tehran, which was induced by Hamas's failure to stand by the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad when the Syrian war was erupted in 2011. Hamas fumed anger after Tehran, when it cracked down on pro-Iran groups in Gaza, including the Sabih Movement, which is also aligned with the Lebanese Hezbollah movement. Hamas accuses the Sabih Movement of spreading the Shia faith in predominantly Sunni Gaza.

In December 2016, Hamas police raided the homes of Hezbollah leaders and arrested one of them. In February this year, Hamas police arrested Omer Hamid, an Israeli citizen in the Gaza Strip, who was released the following month.

Rising concerns. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (R) meets with Hamas Politburo Deputy Chairman Saleh Arouri (2nd R) and other members of a Hamas delegation in Tehran, July 22. (Reuters)

Amr Emam is an Arab Weekly contributor in Cairo. |

Not any solution. Jordanian King Abdullah II (L) walks with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi at Cairo International Airport, July 29. (AFP)
**News & Analysis**

**Libya**

**Egypt seeks opportunities in Libya's reconstruction**

Hassan Abdel Zaher
Cairo

**Egypt is working to ease the entry of tens of thousands of Egyptian workers to eastern Libya as that part of Libya becomes more politically stable. Egyptian and Libyan authorities have established two coordination offices along the countries' borders to coordinate the entry of Egyptian workers into Libya for reconstruction purposes. The parliament and the Labour Ministry work to ease the participation of Egyptian workers in Libya's reconstruction in coordination with Libyan authorities; said Ab- del Fattah Mohamed, a member of the Labour Committee in the Egyptian parliament. "Improving security conditions in Libya will increase the flow of local workers to this country."**

**Millions of Egyptians worked in Libya before the country descended into chaos in 2011. Egyptians worked in all sectors of the Libyan economy, especially in construction. After 2011, Egyptian nationals were targeted by Islamist militias, a drive that manifested itself brutally in February 2015 when the Libyan branch of the Islamic State killed 21 Christian workers. Egyptian and Libyan authorities recently established two Coordination offices to coordinate the entry of workers into Libya for reconstruction purposes.**

Soon after that incident, a huge number of workers returned home, swelling the ranks of the unemployed in Egypt.**

These reruns was viewed by security analysts as a conspiracy by Egypt’s regional rivals, especially Turkey and Qatar, who sponsor Islamist militias in Libya, given the keenness of neighbors to stem the flow of workers by the workers as well as the burden their return constituted to the Egyptian economy.**

To avoid the possible unrest stemming from the inability of those returning from Libya to find work, Cairo initiated tens of billions of dollars in construction projects, including new cities, roads and bridges. Those efforts were also part of Egypt’s overall development plans.**

**Labour trade union officials visit Cairo to hammer out deals and direct the needs of the needs of post-war Libya to Egyptian construction companies. A Libyan Trade Chambers Association delegation visited Egypt in March and met officials at the Federation of Egyptian Industries. Mohamed Raidi, who led the delegation, referred to strong demand in Libya for Egyptian construction companies and workers. A delegation of Egyptian businessmen visited eastern Libya in May to assess business opportunities and needs.**

"Our companies are ready for Libya's reconstruction at all levels," said Walid Gamal Eddine, chairman of the Construction Materials Export Federation. "Apart from being an opportunity for Egyptian labour, Libya's reconstruction opens business opportunities for Egyptian construction material producers, especially in the presence of huge surpluses. In 2018, for example, there was a cement production surplus of about 31 million tonnes. Egypt's overall cement production was expected to reach 100 million tonnes by the next year. Libya's infrastructure, tourism, electricity and communications sectors are especially of interest for Egyptian companies. Projects in the first phase of Libya's reconstruction are expected to cost approximately $12 billion to implement, the Libyan Trade Chambers Association said. Major Egyptian construction companies are reportedly contacting financing agencies, including the African Development Bank, the World Bank and the European Investment Bank, to bankroll projects in Libya. However, shaky security conditions could scare companies away from Libya.**

**Competition from Chinese and Turkish construction companies is another challenge for Egyptian firms, especially for the most competitive companies from those counties not having the same financial and technical problems companies face. Egypt, economies said, is in a good position to win a share of Libya's reconstruction because of its geographical proximity to Libya and the strong relations between Cairo and eastern Libya authorities.**

"State authorities have to offer backing to national companies as they try to be part of Libya's reconstruction," said Yumn al-Hamag, an economics professor at Cairo University. "Egypt has to take Libya's reconstruction very seriously before it is left out of this process, especially in the presence of fierce competition from other countries."**

Hassan Abdel Zaher is a Cairo-based contributor to The Arab Weekly.**

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**Libya**

**Sarraj government rattled by UN envoy’s criticism**

Michel Cousins
Tunis

**UN Special Envoy to Libya Ghassan Salame briefed the UN Security Council on the situation in Libya, as he does every couple of months. This time his presentation, with criticism meted out in equal amounts to both sides of the divide in the conflict, caused a serious political rumpus. The UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, headed by Fayez al-Sarraj, took offence at Salame’s criticism, accusing him of bias and misrepresentation.**

The GNA was particularly rattled by Salame’s statement that extremists had been allowed to join the fight. It is highly sensitive to the allegation, which is constantly reaffirmed by the LNA, and has tried to refute it; the decision to extradite the brother of the Marcher commander to the United Kingdom was seen very much in that light.**

Following the Security Council briefing, the GNA demanded that the UN National Accord provide details of a number of those fighting with the GNA but sanctioned by the UN National Accord which have been published in Libyan media. Sarraj’s appeal to the GNA to stop using the city’s only functioning airport, Mitiga, for military purposes was ruled out in a point-blank denial by the Transport Ministry, despite photos of destroyed Turkish combat drones at the airport widely circulated on social media.**

Since the denial, the LNA published additional photos of a Turkish-made drone destroyed at Mitiga, supposedly on July 29, when the airport was closed twice after coming under missile attack. For ordinary people in Tripoli and other areas controlled by the GNA, Salame’s intervention is of little significance. “They don’t give a [expletive] about him,” a senior Tripoli official said in very down-to-earth English, adding that most people felt the same way about Sarraj as well. Far more important, he insisted, are the daily power cuts, the cost of living and lack of money, particularly with Eid al-Adha days away. By the beginning of August, state salaries for June and July still had not been paid and the cost of a small sheep to sacrifice was as much as $12,750 with little expectation that prices would go down. There were long queues outside banks. Making matters worse, banks refused to provide credit against unpaid salaries and limited cash withdrawals to 1,000 dinars ($715).**

Many families have had to accept that there will be no sacrificial sheep this year, which boosted favourable comparisons with the Qaddafi era. “Under (Muammar) Qaddafi, when it was Eid, we always got our salaries well in advance so we could spend what was needed,” one Tripoli resident said. Now into its fifth month, there is as Salame noted in his Security Council briefing – no sign of one side or the other winning the fighting for Tripoli. The death toll at the end of July was put at nearly 1,300, including 106 civilians. The overall figure is widely considered an underestimate.”**

**Libyan figures who oppose Haftar, such as Grand Mufti Sheikh Sadig al-Ghariani, demanded Sarraj be removed and the Tripoli militia was reported to have issued threats against the UN envoy.**

As Salame also noted, neither side shows signs of wanting a ceasefire. Once again reassured of full Turkish support at the end of July, Sarraj and the GNA believe their forces can repulse the LNA. Conversely, LNA sources enthusiastically predicted yet another offensive that would result in Tripoli being captured before Eid, which seemed unlikely.**

While causing the LNA advance in Tripoli to stall, the GNA is equally unable to move it out. Its plans to take Tarhouna, the LNA’s main forward base in the Tripoli offensive, or force it into neutrality appear to have been put on hold.**

As for the attack on Jufra and subsequent GNA claims that it would soon fall into its hands, that is just wishful thinking, the Tripoli official added, “The GNA does not have any local support there.”**

Michel Cousins is a contributor to The Arab Weekly on Libyan issues.
Simultaneous attacks in Aden reveal coordination between Iran-backed Houthis and jihadist groups

Saleh al-Baidhani

Aden

O bservers said there was strong coordination between the Iran-backed Houthis and the jihadist groups of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in carrying out simultaneous attacks in which at least 47 people were killed.

The attacks August 1 also highlighted Iran’s role in enabling the massacre by providing the Houthis with advanced weapons, observers said.

Yemeni Prime Minister Maceen Abdulmalik Saeed said the attacks by the Houthis and jihadist groups confirm “coordination and complementarity” under clear Iranian management.

The militants attacked a military camp in southern Abyan province with rocket-propelled grenades and automatic rifles around midnight, setting off clashes that lasted until early morning of August 2. The troops targeted were members of a force trained by the United Arab Emirates, part of the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Houthis rebels since 2015.

The Yemeni Interior Ministry said 13 people were killed in a “criminal attack” on a police station in Sheikh Othman in Aden district. The Islamic State (ISIS) affiliate in Yemen claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing.

The ministry said an attack on al-Shamsa police station in Aden, late July, also killed 36 people, including the commander and some of his lieutenants.

The Houthis claimed responsibility for the attacks, issuing a statement saying a military parade was targeted with a Qasef 2 drone and a medium-range ballistic missile. UN reports have pointed out that the Houthis have developed and manufactured Qasef 2 with the help of Iran.

Some observers cast doubt on the Houthis’ claim, saying the attack exceeded the size and range of the Houthis’ usual military planning, especially considering that it coincided with the Houthis’ declaration believed to have been carried out by al-Qaeda and ISIS. However, the timing of the attacks could suggest coordination between the Houthis and jihadist groups.

While observers focused on the coordination between the Houthis and other extremist groups, sources raised the issue of the role played by Iran in the drone attack because of its supposed supplying the Houthis with advanced weapons.

The internationally recognised Yemeni government said the “source and purpose” of the attacks were the same.

“The two attacks prove the Houthis militia rebels and other terrorist groups are sharing roles and complementing each other in a war against the Yemeni people,” the government said in a statement.

Yemeni Prime Minister Abdulmalik Saeed said the attacks by the Houthis and jihadist groups confirm “coordination and complementarity under clear Iranian management.” He insisted that the Houthis attack “is an indication of their open rejection of peace efforts.”

Manour Saleh, deputy director of the Media Department of the Southern Transitional Council, said the attacks targeted one of the top military commanders in the war against the Houthis.

Saleh quoted an investi-“We have suffered massive losses,” said Saleh. “The Houthis are a threat to the security forces and the military and are of great strategic importance to the Houthis.” gation was under way to determine who was responsible for the attack, saying the Houthis’ declaration of coordination should not be taken at face value. He pointed out that the Houthis were eager to claim victories, especially when they indicate an ability to attack Aden.

Experts warned of additional at-“The weekend’s attacks, which exceeded the size and range of the Houthis’ usual military planning,” said Saleh, “are a strong indicator” of working with “terrorist organizations” the Islamic State and al-Qaeda.

Yemeni Prime Minister Maceen Abdulmalik Saeed said the attacks by the Houthis and jihadist groups confirmed the Houthis’ declaration of coordination should not be taken at face value. He pointed out that the Houthis were eager to claim victories, especially when they indicate an ability to attack Aden.

Experts warned of additional attacks in Aden following reports of significant activities by al-Qaeda and the Islamic State and threats by Mohammed al-Bahlil, a Houthi leader, who said commanders of the Security Belt Forces in southern Yemen were prime targets.

Fahd Mustafa, chairman of the Faran Centre for Policy Research, said the simultaneous targeting of the al-Jala Camp with a ballistic missile and of the Sheikh Othman police station with a car bomb confirms the high degree of coordination between the Houthis and al-Qaeda.

Mustafa said the Houthis and other extremist organisations faced a debilitating crackdown in Aden and liberated provinces. They must have realised they could no longer face the combined efforts of the Houthis and Saudi forces except through joining forces to prepare and execute the operations, he said.

Saleh al-Baidhani is an Arab Weekly contributor in Yemen.

China backs Russian proposal for Gulf security

Sabah Khan

Dubai

C hina is backing a Russian proposal for stability and consultation in the Gulf region, which has been rolled out the US and Europe, observers said.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said Beijing, while welcoming the Russian proposal, “would also like to see cooperation, coordination and communication with all the cor-responding parties.”

Russia’s proposal envisages an international conference on security and cooperation in the Gulf, with a view to establishing a regional secuirty organisation.

Moscow has called for “energetic and effective action” for “improving and further stabilising the situation” and suggested a new process of bilateral and multilateral consultations between key stakeholders, including the UN Security Council, the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

Hua said Beijing views “peace and stability” in the Gulf to be “of utmost importance to ensure safety and development of the region and the world as a whole,” stressing the need to “establish good neighbourly relations based on mutual respect.”

Following talks July 29 in Vienna between Iran and the other signatories of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), observers called on the United States to drop its “maximum pressure” policy against Iran and to avoid creating “new obstacles” that jeopardise the nuclear accord.

Fu Cong, China’s delegation head at the emergency talks in Vienna, said the parties at the meeting “expressed their strong opposition against the unilateral imposition of sanctions.”

European officials have told US that the recent unrest in the Gulf was a “strong indication” of working with “terrorist organisations” the Islamic State and al-Qaeda.

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US sanctions against Zhuhai Zhenrong add a new dimension to US President Donald Trump’s trade war against the world’s second-largest economy. The US-China relationship is increasingly strained, particularly in the Far East over disagreements on territorial dis-putes. The Chinese Foreign Min-istry labelled the recent unrest in the US approach to the crisis between the world’s two largest economies “the most critical moment in history.”

Beijing is unlikely to play a role in the US-China trade talks to come to an agreement. The US and China have become the subject of new tariffs as a dangerous trade war heats up.

Yet with increasing mistrust between the world’s two largest economies, major breakthroughs in US-China trade talks appear to be low.

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Saudi tourists shun Turkish destinations as government relations deteriorate

Mohammed Alkhereiji
London

With the summer season in full swing, Gulf tourists, particularly Saudi nationals, are shunning traditional holiday destinations in Turkey because of the deteriorating relations between Riyadh and Ankara.

The Saudi Foreign Ministry, in a statement July 17, warned Saudi tourists to travel with extra precautions, particularly from scan artists targeting tourists.

The Foreign Ministry warning was the latest official statement urging Saudi nationals to remain vigilant while in Turkey. Sky News Arabia reported that this was the fifth travel warning regarding Turkey issued by the Saudi government in the last year.

Issues between the two countries are also ideological, with a post-9/11 Saudi Arabia shunning political Islamic movements while Turkey has become a safe haven, particularly for the Muslim Brotherhood movement.

Both the kingdom’s traditional and new media have been discouraging tourism to Turkey, with reports claiming it is a dangerous destination. Some social media users referenced the killing of seven Saudi nationals in Istanbul on New Year’s Eve 2017.

Before the latest travel warning, the Saudi Embassy in Turkey had urged citizens to exercise caution after incidents of passport and money theft were reported in various parts of the country.

Headlines such as “Don’t go to Turkey” and “Turkey is not safe” have appeared in Saudi publications in recent months. Social media users called on Saudis to boycott Turkish tourism and Turkish products.

“As the Turkish leadership and its media (keep Tayyip Erdogan) continue their hostility and target the kingdom’s leadership, we call more than ever before to boycott them... in all areas - imports, labour and dealings with Turkish companies,” Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry Chairman Ajjal Al-Ajlan posted on Twitter in June.

The Saudi travel warning came while Turkey is dealing with significant economic woes. “The already suffering Turkish real estate market could be further damaged by a mass exodus of Saudi property holdings,” said Hussein Ibish of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

Saudi Arabia has closely sought tourists, with the ability to make any holiday destination in the summer season a success, as has been seen in countries such as Lebanon, which was on the receiving end of a recently overturned Saudi travel ban for a number of years that adversely affected its tourism industry.

Agence France-Presse, citing a 2018 study by Riyadh’s King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies, reported that Saudi nationals, who are among the top property owners and investors in Turkey, spend an average of $350 a day as tourists in the country, significantly higher than European visitors.

The Saudi tourism strategy seems to be working. The Economist said Saudi tourist arrivals were down 3% in the first five months of 2019, compared with 2018.

A major contributing factor to current relations between Saudi Arabia and Turkey is Ankara’s handling of the killing of Jamal Khashoggi last October in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, which Saudi officials say was exploited by the Erdogan government.

However, issues between the two countries are also ideological, with a post-9/11 Saudi Arabia shunning political Islamic movements while Turkey has become a safe haven, particularly for the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Saudi Arabia and its allies, including the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, do not see Turkey as the kingdom’s political or security partner for the Muslim Brotherhood, which is outlawed in all these countries.

They also oppose the Turkish government’s backing of Qatar, which the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt severed ties with in June 2017 over what they described as Doha’s interference in their countries’ internal affairs and support for radical groups, such as Hamas, the Taliban and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Turkish soap operas, once a significant weapon in Ankara’s soft power arsenal, have also suffered because of the country’s frosty relations with Gulf nations. Major regional networks, including Saudi-owned MBC, have pulled Turkish-produced melodramas off their air.

Mohammed Alkhereij is the Gulf section editor of The Arab Weekly.

Muslim Brotherhood’s strategy in the Gulf is failing

Omar Ali al-Badawi

It is as if the Arab region – the Gulf in particular – was sitting on a powder keg, waiting for the right time to explode. In the face of the people of the region, the governments and their stability.

We’ve learnt that Kuwait handed over to Egypt wanted members of the Muslim Brotherhood to gain power everywhere and by any means. The Brotherhood has for many years been putting in place plans for penetrating social and political groups and state and social institutions. It quietly and patiently invested time and energy to bring them to fruition. Unfortunately for the Brotherhood, those plans did not succeed and have been shrinking as the organization has crossed red lines because they thought that the time was ripe to move onto political power. However, they have toned down their rhetoric about the Kuwaiti people and leadership when Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, along with Egypt, cut ties with Qatar and the Brotherhood. We see them today change their voices and return to insulting Kuwait because of the incident mentioned above. Some of the voices raised from inside Kuwait were sceptical but the traditional Brotherhood propaganda platforms in Turkey described Kuwaiti authorities as treacherous.

In the Gulf, the Brotherhood has always had a double discourse. It seemed harmless but does not hesitate to spring its claws. When the iron grip of the security apparatus looms, it lies low and adopts a flattering discourse. However, as soon as the loosens and regional conditions during the day, it quickly takes off its tongues and knives.

The Muslim Brotherhood has always considered the Gulf a suitable backyard for its projects. It has planted its roots deeply in some Gulf countries and relocated operations headquarters there after it was kicked out of Egypt. Unfortunately for the Brotherhood, international and economic pressures on Turkey are likely to make Ankara impatient with the Brotherhood and take an opposite path.

The Muslim Brotherhood pawns in the Gulf have always adopted a policy of covert confrontation with their traditional adversary, the government. They hide and manoeuvre and their reactions vary with events and conditions but they are always ready to pouce on any public displeasure anywhere and exploit it for their rebellion.

There is no doubt the pro-regime sentiment in Kuwait was a huge blow for the Muslim Brotherhood. However, it seems that nobody swallowed its poisoned fruit this time and that its flip-flopping caused it to fall in the trap of its own evil machinations. It appears the near future is going to be full of unpleasant surprises for the Brothers. The Muslims can certainly look for a tighter grip on their operations in the Gulf and their rosy dreams of empowerment slowly evaporate in the Gulf.

The Muslim Brothers can certainly look for a tighter grip as more cells are dismantled and their rosy dreams of empowerment slowly evaporate in the Gulf.

Changing mood: A Saudi man walks out a Turkish Airlines office in Riyadh.

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Omar Ali al-Badawi is a Saudi journalist.

A matter of security. A Kuwaiti man is searched by security members outside a mosque in Kuwait City.
Baghdad-

Despite years of negotiations between the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government over a series of thorny issues, a positive outcome for the talks has remained elusive. Complicating the divide between Baghdad and Erbil are increasing divisions among Kurdish parties in Kurdistan and the Baghdad government’s preoccupation with broader problems that the country as a whole faces.

Tensions between federal authorities and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) peaked when Massoud Barzani, then KRG president, called an independent referendum on September 2017 that Baghdad branded unconstitutional. The Iraqi government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, imposed punitive measures against the KRG, forcing Barzani to back down and eventually resign as president.

Abadi also retained most of the territory taken by the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014 and later lost by ISIS to Kurdish peshmerga forces, with military help from the United States.

The KRG has since selected a new president — Barzani’s nephew Nechirvan Barzani — and the country has a new prime minister in Abdul-Mahdi, who is known to have good ties with Kurdish officials. Good relations between Nechirvan Barzani and Abdul-Mahdi, however, may not be enough to iron out disputes between the central government and the KRG. Among the topics of contention are the KRG’s exporting of oil, the annual budget for Kurdistan and who should control the province of Kirkuk.

Iraq’s 2019 budget allows the KRG to export 250,000 barrels per day (bpd) via Iraq’s State Oil Marketing Company but Kurdish officials have continued to directly export up to 500,000 bpd to Turkey.

“We want to keep our oil markets for future speakers on the world market,” said Nechirvan Barzani.

The Iraqi government has not been afraid to use firmer measures to ensure compliance and to create an effective pushback against malign Iranian influence in the KRG.

The opposition to the KRG, however, is itself divided. The Future bloc includes politicians who recently broke from the New Generation, another opposition bloc in the Kurdistan parliament. Sarwa Abdul Wahid, a former bloc lawmakers of being “opportunistic parliamentarians” who departed their original party.

“We hope they will change the political reality in Iraq and not be part of the lame political process,” Abdul Wahid said.

As a freelancer journalist in Iraq.

The US needs to force Iraq to act against Iran’s militias

Talibah Abdula-trraz

The United States must no longer mollycoddle the Iraqi administration and must use firmer measures to ensure compliance and to create an effective pushback against malign Iranian influence.

There was more than a month and a half since US officials concluded that an attack on Saudi Arabia’s oil pipeline was orchestrated by Iran, and about the same amount of time since US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo raised the issue with the Iranian government.

Despite US “pressure” on the Iraqis to act, Baghdad denied the involvement of pro-Iran militia groups in the attack or that an attack was launched from Iran and stuck to Iranian government positions and have given copious amounts of government-supplied US arms.

The United States must no longer mollycoddle the Iraqi administration and use firmer measures to ensure compliance and to create an effective pushback against malign Iranian influence. Washington could halt sanctions waivers for Iraq and force it to comply with international arms controls, or risk catastrophic economic damage. This may serve as a sobering reminder for Baghdad to stop risking the Iraqi people’s stability and future by putting them in the middle of a fight for influence between the United States and Iran.

Talibah Abdula-trraz is a researcher at the University of Exeter’s strategy and Security Institute in England.
Astana talks achieve mixed results although crucial issues broached

Simon Speakman Cordall

August 4, 2019

Tunis

R

esults from the 11th round of Astana talks on Syria were limited, as expected, but there was reported progress in establishing a cease-fire, forming a constitutional committee and rival reconstruction. The talks August 1-2 in Kazak-

stan were sponsored by Russia, Turkey and Iran. Representatives from Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and the United Nations attended as ob-

servers.

Expectations for the Kazakhst

an talks, which began when the coun-

dry's capital, now Nur-Sultan, was

chosen, were limited. Beg-

ning in January 2017, the nego-

tiations were intended to com-

plete the United Nations' Geneva

process on Syria, which stated in

2014.

For many Western observers, the Astana process was considered a bid by Russian President Vladimir Putin to stake his claim to a con-

trol seat at the diplomatic table as the conflict in Syria drew down. While progress across both processes has been faltering, they have main-

tained a dialogue between many of the conflict’s principal actors.

On completing the latest round of talks, all parties expressed satis-

fied with the establishment of a con-

stitutional committee.

However, there was no indica-

tion as to who might sit on that body, only that it would be convened in Geneva at the earliest opportunity. Delegates committed to reducing civilian casualties within the con-

flict while protecting Syria’s terri-

tory.
We need to hear rational voices point out the danger inherent in objecting to a cultural performance such as Mashrou’ Leila’s concert at Byblos. The base and vile language used to object to the band reveals the rot that has infected the Christian situation in Lebanon. Above all, it reveals the Christian inability to rise to the level of the challenges facing all of Lebanon with its Christians and Muslims.

The majority of young Christians in Lebanon is to emigrate.

Then again, what can be expected of a country where there is no longer a Christian voice that can call for a pause and wisdom? Where were we and where did we get to when we failed to deal with these legal, social, economic or political collapse.

Back in the spotlight. Lebanon’s Druze leader Walid Jumblatt (R) attends talks at the parliament building in downtown Beirut.

While Bassil is central to the government, he is not for his personal sensitivities, but for his political and military power. In a recent television interview, Nasrallah took off the gloves and accused Jumblatt and other critics of Hezbollah of conspiring against the Islamic Republic and its finance ministers, to be attacked at any cost. It is true that Jumblatt does not have the strength he did a decade ago. In May 2008, he and his Druze supporters repelled a Hezbollah invasion into areas under their control and helped form a coalition against the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. However, while Jumblatt is waffled, he still stands as a symbol of resistance against Hezbollah and, perhaps more importantly, as a champion and protests of Syrian opaqueness, which both Nasrallah and Bassil are eager to deport.

Lebanon’s Christians have had a historic role in the region at every level. They played a major role in preserving the Arabic language by introducing the first printing presses into the region and in the monasteries of Lebanon. However, the stirring of Lebanon’s Christians well. Each of them, they suffered and their equal power quota, can save Lebanon’s Christians from dumbing down into the shortest way to disaster.

The Lebanese Christians must not recognize any supposed rights by relying on Hezbollah’s weapons. Only the Taff Agreement, which secured their equal power quota, can save them from the illusions they fell victim to when Lebanon Franghieh became president of the republic in 1970. Franghieh was a strong president and no one can doubt his integrity and his patriotism. Every time Lebanon had to think about how to protect itself, someone or something came along and stirred sectarian instincts, especially among Christians hoping to drag them into a dangerous game that brought nothing but disaster to them. This is not the time for stirring instincts or the time for objecting to a Mashrou’ Leila concert. Rather, this is a time for serious reflection on the economic crisis facing the country, a crisis that threatens to bring down all of Lebanon and its banks.

The黎巴嫩的基督徒们深受政治和经济危机的影响，他们不再寻求任何政治解决方案，而是寻求更长远的解决方案。黎巴嫩的基督徒们拥有历史性的地位，在国家政治和社会生活中扮演着重要角色。然而，他们的权利仍然没有得到充分的保障，因为他们面临着来自政治和宗教压力的挑战。黎巴嫩的基督徒们需要找到一种新的方式，来应对当前的危机和挑战，以保持其独立性和身份认同。
Turkey hints at new Syria operation as domestic pressure over refugees grows

News & Analysis

Turkey

Not much of the equation is likely to change unless the opposition gets its act together and accumulates energy through daring displays of a popular starting to feel the pain of economic hardship.

Yavuz Baydar is a Turkish journalist and political commentator for The Arab Weekly.

Turkey's irresolute opposition gives Erdogan time to recover

Not much of the equation is likely to change unless the opposition gets its act together and accumulates energy through daring displays of a popular starting to feel the pain of economic hardship.

Yavuz Baydar is a Turkish journalist and political commentator for The Arab Weekly.

August 4, 2019 | The Arab Weekly | 15
Trump takes on congress to protect US-Saudi ties

Gregory Aftandilian

5 President Donald Trump has used his constitutional powers to veto congressional resolutions designed to block US arms sales to Saudi Arabia. The legislative action will have the effect of keeping US ties to Riyadh intact but will contribute to a widening gap between the White House and Congress, even among Republicans.

Trump’s Middle East policy, as many in the region have noted, has been largely Saudi-centric. From the beginning of his presidency, Trump sought to cultivate the Saudi leadership, including making Riyadh the first foreign capital that he visited as president.

Part of this policy was to emphasize Saudi Arabia’s military posture to counter Iran and its activities across the wider region, such as in Yemen. In addition, the Trump team saw close relations with Saudi Arabia as helping to build Arab support for its own vision of a political settlement in the Palestinian peace process, which has yet to be revisited or re-engagement. This was demonstrated by the friendship that developed between Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, then Saudi crown prince and minister of interior, and the former US president Barack Obama.

In Yemen, however, took a much different view of the relationship. Therapy of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul led to London and Riyadh impounding by British Royal Marines, prompting Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to detain the British-sponsor of terrorism.

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As all parties wrestle to preserve their interests, Iran signalled an important reminder to European partners and Britain that that protection of the Arabian Gulf is a task that rests squarely with European partners can endorse as a united campaign pledges in 2016.

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The US Congress, however, has been largely Saud-


The introduction of such legislation indicates that Trump’s unyielding support of Riyadh remains highly contentious in Congress.

Gregory Aftandilian is a lecturer in the Pardee School of Global Studies at Boston University and a former US State Department Middle East analyst.

Transnational transactional partnership. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz (R) shakes hands with US President Donald Trump during their meeting on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Japan, June 29. (AFP)

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Transnational transactional partnership. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz (R) shakes hands with US President Donald Trump during their meeting on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Japan, June 29. (AFP)
Foreign language teaching issue bullying Morocco's ruling Islamists into crisis

Saad Guerraoui

The vote on an education bill in Morocco's parliament was marred by disturbances in Sale and Casablanca on Tuesday. A total of 241 representatives voted July 22 in favour of the bill, with 44 abstaining in a session that was marked by the absence of about 20 Justice and Development Party (PJD) deputies.

Article 2 of the bill, which pertained to the teaching of scientific subjects in French, saw the abstention of 57 PJD deputies.

Two days before the vote, former Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane and Saadaoui, on Facebook in which he slammed PJD deputies for abstaining during the committee vote on the reform of education bill and on articles relating to the use of foreign languages for teaching scientific and technical subjects.

“We agree with the framework law because it contains several positive points but we definitely do not agree with replacing the Arabic language in the teaching of science subjects in French,” said Benkirane.

“In my conviction, if you’re going to pass the law, it means there will be nothing left for you to carry on in this government. The legitimacy with which you came to the government has ended,” he added.

He lashed out at the Moroccan Prime Minister Saad Eddine El Othmani, saying it was the first serious error made by the PJD since it was placed in power in 2011.

“How can a party with Islamic foundations abandon the Arabic language and replace it with the language of colonisation?” he asked.

It was the government’s third attempt to block the bill, which he described as a “catastrophe” for the education system.

Fez Mayor Driss Azami resigned, as head of the PJD’s parliamentary group in the upper House of Coun-

celler after Benkirane’s video was posted.

“Most of those who criticise the text have simply not read it, although it is available on the internet and accessible to all,” Othmani said during a speech at the party’s youth forum.

“Many rumours have circulated around this law that must reform the education system. We fixed it and corrected some things,” he said, stressing the need to put interests of the country before those of the party.

Moroccan Minister of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education and Scientific Research Said Amazizi said the text constituted the first enacted law in education and scientific research.

“The framework law will allow our country to have a binding reference text for all, which guarantees the sustainability of the reform of the education-training system as well as the conditions for a new development of the Moroccan education,” Amazizi said during the plenary ses-

He said he considered the framework law as a map for implementing reforms with clear objectives, precise mechanisms and deadlines.

The measure stipulates the generalisation of integrated education for all children, compulsory pri-
mary education for the state and families, positive discrimination for children in rural and peri-urban areas as well as in vulnerable ones.

It includes the right of access to education and training for children with disabilities or special needs in addition to the fight against the school drop-out issue and eradica-
tion of illiteracy.

Moroccan media slammed op-
ponents of the bill for their dou-
ble standard, noting that most PJD politicians send their children to private and French mission schools.

Abdellah Mrini, election of education at the Research Centre for Economics Applied to Development Rachid Sidi Boumediene in Algiers.
Saudi Arabia, South Korea expanding trade ties

Aramco highlighted the fact that Saudi Arabia deposits $250 million into central bank of Sudan

Dubai's financial regulator said it had fined Abraaj Investment Management $352 million on two affiliates of the collapsed Abraaj equity fund group for misused assets and misusing investors' funds.

The two companies are affiliates of the Abraaj Group that once was the leading private equity firm in the Middle East with nearly $15 billion under management.

The ministry said companies whose privatisation or liquidation is expected in the future, would resume production, but they would not be in the same line of business as the original companies with the government, said the document, which was a memorandum signed by Yemeni Oil and Minerals Minister Aws Abdulilah Al-Asef.

Shell not taking British-flagged tankers through Hormuz

Royal Dutch Shell is not taking any British-flagged tankers through the Strait of Hormuz amid heightened tensions with Iran in the vital choke point for oil shipments.

The two companies are affiliates of the Stras Group in the Strait of Hormuz, which means they are not permitted to enter the strait.

The grant is aimed at alleviating pressure on the Sudanese pound and achieving stability in its exchange rate, the ministry said.

Aramco's purchase of a majority state oil and gas firm Saudi Arabia. South Korea is fifth among countries that import from Saudi Arabia. Saudi exports totalled $26 billion last year, up from $18 billion in 2018.

Metal products topped the list of Saudi goods exported to South Korea, in addition to organic and inorganic chemicals, copper and plastics and their derivatives. Vehicles and their parts emerged as the main goods imported by South Korea from Saudi Arabia, followed by electrical appliances, machinery, iron and steel.

The ministry said South Korea's exports to Saudi Arabia accounted for 1.3% of the kingdom's imports.

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Saudi petrochemical giant faces challenges

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Banking system aims to make sure young Moroccans are included

Roufan Nahhas

An initiative has been introduced in Jordan to serve young people with opening an account in the financial system to help it become more inclusive.

Learn, Inspire, Network and Create (LINIC) is a subsidiary of Cairo Amman Bank designed to encourage young people and women to be part of the banking sector. Its main target segment is people aged 18-40, including students, young adults and the tech-savy.

Jordan’s Financial Inclusion Strategy 2018-20 stated that approximately 67% of Moroccans older than 35 do not own an account giving them access to the formal financial system; 38% of adults are excluded from formal financial services and 24.8% of adults are excluded from formal and informal financial services.

Kamal Al-Baki, CEO of Cairo Amman Bank, said LINIC aims to involve young people more by creating tools that cater to their needs.

“LINIC is a digital lifestyle bank designed to serve youth and tech-savvy individuals by providing digital banking solutions in addition to non-financial, value-added services,” he added.

“The value proposition of LINIC is to create an efficiency and convenience among customers during their everyday life or looking for their next career step,” Baki added.

“The non-financial solutions we have come up with include partnerships, insurance and embedding of third-party services in LINIC self-service, mobile, web and ATM channels. Third-party services will offer educational content, seminars, workshops, local news covering events and cultural activities, in addition to offering career and entrepreneurial support services,” he said.

Jordan’s Telecommunication Regulatory Commission is a body that regulates telecommunications and information technology sectors, said there were approximately 9.1 million internet subscribers in Jordan in 2018 as compared to 8.7 million in 2017 and up from 127,300 users in 2000. Jordan’s population totals 9.5 million people and is one of the youngest in the world, with 63% of Moroccans under the age of 30.

Approximately 95% of Jordanian households had a smartphone, 89% had an internet subscription and 73% had computers in 2018, the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship said.

“Jordan is one of the highest countries in the region regarding internet penetration,” Baki said. Most of the target segment was born with internet connectivity and smart devices being available but this segment is the most underserved with financial products and services.

“The need for an adaptive and embedded banking has become a daily necessity for the youth of today. With digital financial wallets being available in Jordan, a lightweight digital bank is the most logical choice to tackle this rising challenge,” he said.

He said focus group studies indicated young people in Jordan prefer using technology in social and networking but also formal requirements. “This was the reason behind the look and feel we have today for LINIC,” Baki added.

The bank signed agreements with major universities in Jordan before inaugurating LINIC and about 250,000 students have enrolled in the programme.

“There are a few other programmes that serve youth in Jordan, most of the banks that have such programmes targeted students or youth with an age range 16-27,” Baki said. “While their offering is part of the bank’s initial products and services, LINIC is a stand-alone concept offering just products but a whole new lifestyle for youth and digital financial solutions and value-added services.”

Of course, as any programme that involves young people, there are issues.

Jordan’s Financial Inclusion Strategy 2018-20 states that approximately 67% of Moroccans older than 15 do not own an account that provides them access to the formal financial system.

“As the population of university-enrolled youth transition to the workforce, the demographic presents a unique opportunity for Jordan but this does not come with out its challenges. The population must be fully skilful to tackle the ever-growing challenges of today’s market needs,” he said.

“LINIC will come in. This is why we created the four main pillars of LINIC to help combat this challenge through Learn, Inspire, Network and Create,” Baki said.

Developed to be Jordan’s first youth bank, LINIC will soon be unveiling additional offers. LINIC is working with local and international third-party suppliers.

“Our Value Partners are here to fill in the gaps with their value-added offerings, ranging from discounted course offering, cultural and events ticket purchases and coverage to job applications and start-up funding,” Baki said.

Roufan Nahhas is a journalist based in Jordan.
Saud women gain new freedoms, including right to travel, access to work opportunities

The Arab Weekly staff

Beirut

Saudi authorities have granted women more control over their lives and families, including the right to travel without the permission of a male guardian and equal access to work opportunities.

Royal decrees published August 2 in the official gazette stipulated that a Saudi passport would be issued to any woman who applies for it and that any person older than 21 years does not need permission to travel.

The amendments to regulations also grant women the right to register children, marriage or divorce, to be issued official family documents and be eligible as a guardian to minor children.

The way in which the decrees were announced and the language used in the decrees signal how sensitive the moves are among conservatives in the country.

Riyadh has long endured international censure over the status of women. Rights groups said Saudi women were often treated like second-class citizens under rules requiring them to get the consent of a male guardian — father, brother or son — for important decisions throughout their lives.

The decrees expanded work opportunities for women, who represent a large segment of unemployed Saudis. They stipulated that all citizens have the right to work without discrimination based on gender, disability or age.

The move is believed to have been led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, who has waged social re-

The controversy over Mashrou’ Leila’s concert started July 22 when a lawyer filed a complaint with the public prosecution calling on the government to prosecute the band for insulting religious rituals and inciting sectarian tensions.

The same day, the Maronite Eparchy of Byblos said the band’s songs “offend religious and human values and insult Christian beliefs” and demanded that the Byblos Festival cancel the performance.

Mashrou’ Leila has been known for its criticism of various social, religious and political issues in Lebanon. Its songs are deemed “Daesh-style” and offensive to some individuals and religious groups in Lebanon as offensive to Christianity.

The Lebanese Constitution guarantees freedom of expression “within the limits established by law,” but the Lebanese penal code also criminalizes insulting religious rituals and denigrating or distort-

The changes eroding the heavily criticised male guardianship system came at a time of heightened scrutiny over Saudi Arabia’s human rights record.

They were widely condemned by Saudis on social media, including with memes showing people dashing to the airport with luggage and others hailing the 33-year-old crown prince.

Muna Abdulaziz, a former talk show host, took to Twitter along with thousands of other Sau-
di women to celebrate what many said was a new era. “A generation growing up completely free and equal to their brothers,” Abdulaziz said, referring to the freedom to travel.

The changes also drew backlash from conservatives, who posted clips of senior Saudi clerics in past years arguing in favour of guardianship laws.

“We are a Muslim community, not a Western one, may God keep our daughters safe from all evils,” Sarah, a Saudi woman in her late 40s who declined to give her sur-
name, told Reuters. “Imagine if your girls grow up and leave you and don’t return, would you be happy?”

Still in place, however, are rules that require male consent for a woman to leave prison, exit a dom-
estic abuse shelter or marry. Women, unlike men, cannot pass on citizenship to their children and cannot provide consent for their children to marry.

Saudi women fleeing domestic abuse and the guardianship sys-
tem occasionally drew interna-
tional attention to their plight, as 18-year-old Rahaf al-Qunun did before Canada granted her asylum.

The stories of runaway women created negative headlines for the kingdom.

The way in which the decrees were announced and the language used in the decrees signal how sensitive the moves are among conservatives in the country. For years, state-backed preachers told the Saudi public that women should not travel longer than a night alone and that this was not en-
couraged in Islamic practice.

While transforming the lives of many women, critics said the re-
forms will be cosmetic for others until the kingdom abolishes the guardianship system that gives men arbitrary authority over their female relatives.

The Arab Weekly staff

Beirut

Homophobia, sectarianism and church pressure stifle Mashrou’ Leila appearance

Samar Kadi

Beirut

While it appeased the Maronite Church, the cancellation of a con-
cert by Lebanese band Mashrou’ Leila on August 9 at the Byblos Inter-
national Festival raised concerns about the state of freedoms in Leb-
anon, once considered the most liberal in the region.

Human rights activists de-
nounced the decision by the festi-
val’s committee, which they said was forced to cancel the event follow-
ing a defamation campaign in-
spired by the church. It mobilised scores of its members, triggering a social media war between the band’s supporters and critics.

The festival committee issued a statement citing security consid-
erations for cancelling the concert, saying it wanted to avoid “vio-

“Things happened so very dan-
grous,” said Georges Azzi, executive director at the Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality. “It is also part of a series of attacks on all religious and cultural expres-
sion in Lebanon that has been go-
ing on for several years now.”

“It is really disastrous the way used by the church to mobilise this amount of people around silly ra-
mours such as the existence of se-
cost plans to destroy Christianity,” said Azzi, who described the hate speech against Mashrou’ Leila as a “Daesh-style” campaign. “Daesh” is the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State.

“There were death threats (against the band and concertgo-
ers) and the church appeared to have no problem with that. I be-
lieve the ‘Daesh’ thought or way is not linked to a particular religion but it is a way of thinking that can find in all religions,” Azzi added.

While it appeased the church, the cancellation of a concert by Mashrou’ Leila at the Byblos International Festival raised concerns about the state of freedoms in Lebanon.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) de-
nounced the cancellation, accusing Lebanese authorities of resorting to “abusive laws to stifle and cen-
sor activists, journalists and art-
ists.”

“The government’s decision to take action against Mashrou’ Leila while ignoring serious threats against the band and its supporters is a clear example of how the state is using insult and incitement laws selectively to censor divergent opinions,” Lama Fakih, HRW’s act-
ing Middle East director, said in a release.

This incident demonstrates how criminal defamation, incite-
ment and insults laws in Lebanon are exploited by powerful groups and how they fail to protect mar-
ginalised voices and those who have divergent opinions,” Fakih said. “Lebanon is joining the ranks of abusive governments in the re-

gion that trample on free speech rights, pushing out the talent and debate that have made this country happy?”

Will not perform this time. Musicians Haig Papazian (L), Carl Gerges (C) and Hamed Sinno of Mashrou’ Leila pose for a picture in New York.

Moving ahead. Saudi women arrive at Abha Airport in the popular Saudi mountain resort of the same name.
The women speak emotionally about football and about La Liga. Mohammed Maws, a 15-year-old refugee wearing a Granada foot-
ball club jersey, said: “Football has become part of my life, and I’ve develop my skills and fill my free time at the camp. Now we are able to put our time in something useful and constructive.”

Looking at post-Qaddafi Libya through the eyes of female footballers

Karen Dabrowska

London

A

Looking at post-Qaddafi Libya through the eyes of female refugees

Karen Dabrowska is an Arab
Weekly contributor in London.

Amman

The film begins with an eerie

An alternative narrative. A scene from the “Freedom Fields” documentary.

An alternative narrative. A scene from the “Freedom Fields” documentary.

Soumya / The Arab Weekly

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translated material
the total volume of
translated in the
Arab world does not exceed 1% of the
Arabic works are published in
France. In other words, Arab
literature has conquered the
world, as if it were part of a
legend that is not yet over. What
is striking is that nobody
really paid attention to major
projects of translating Arabic
literary and cultural production
into other languages.

Many translation projects,
despite their importance, were
riddled with shortcomings. Four
years ago, former Egyptian
Minister of Culture Emad Abu
Ghaziz, presenting a paper about
government publishing in
Egypt, stated that there had
been a negligence in translations
by which Arab literature has
conquered the world through a
massive change and a
cultural shift. The result is that
the situation in the Arab world is a far
cry from that of the other translation
centuries ago. What is being translated in the Arab
world does not exceed 1% of the
total volume of translated material.

"I have learnt a lot from both Sau-
di and UAE-based artists and their
various experiences," she said.
"Academically, I’ve been focusing
on my research. I try to find a
balance between my focus on my
art and my academic research and
try to improve both. I would like
to start writing my own scientific
art-based research papers and help
push the educational standards at
the university level even higher.
I am also very focused on my
students and trying to help them
improve their creative process,
develop their skills and become
the best artists they can be,"

N.P. Krishna Kumar is an Arab
weekly contributor in Dubai.

What is being translated in the
Arab world does not exceed 1% of
the total volume of translated material on Earth.
Karen Dabrowska

London

In a heart-wrenching drama titled “X-Adra,” Hend, Ayat, Ali, Mariam, Nour, Rowaida, and Kenda – Syrian activists who had been held in the notorious Adra Prison near Damascus – speak eloquent soliloquies about their experiences.

The actors surprised the audience in London’s Battersea Arts Centre by rising from seats among the spectators and beginning their stories.

X-Adra was one of London’s festival of contemporary Arab culture in July.

The performances ranged from the 1980s until after the 2011 pro- tests. Each person, with simple gestures and quiet intensity, cre- ated a panel of reflections from the escape of a loved one, the prison and their hopes and dreams for freedom.

Ayat Ahmad left her husband and became involved in civil mobilisation through various associations, which led to imprisonments in 2012 and 2015. Hend and Ayat were im- prisoned in 1982 for distributing leaflets calling for the withdrawal of the Syrian Army from Lebanon. After her release, she resumed milit- ant activities for the Communist Labour Party and was arrested in 1988.

Ali Hamidi, a transgeneric person, returned from Jordan to take part in peaceful demonstrations in Damas- cus in 2011. He was transporting deserters fleeing to Jordan when he was arrested in March 2012. Mariam Hayed also participated in the demonstra- tions and was accused of belong- ing to a terrorist group. Rowaida Kanaan was arrested three times: for terrorist activities, for trans- porting medication to rebels and forൾכוחacy.

Kenda Zaour was arrested in 2012 in Damascus for wearing a wedding dress in the Medhat Basha market to ask for the release of civil prison- ers. The soliloquies were brief but full of the burning faith of inspi- red movements. The former prison- ers spoke in Arabic and an Eng- lish translation was projected on a screen above the stage.

The play started with the words of an unknown prisoner: “Anyone here, anyone? Can any- one help me? I don’t know where I am.”

“The police forces held me hos- pital somewhere unfamiliar. Every- thing I remember is that they have beaten me a lot. I don’t know what to do. The investigator asked a lot of questions. Whatever answer I had, I got beaten,” the prisoner says.

Describing her detention, Mari- am said: “They forced me to have a TV interview in which I (wrongly) confessed how we butchered the fake demonstration. I was ready to do whatever they wanted just to put an end to my pain in the (deten- tion) centre and get transferred to Adra Prison.”

“He is still thinking of the film because he was exhausted from their torture. I wanted to tell my family that I was alive,” Mariam said.

Kenda spoke about the “wedding dress” protest: “We received the signal. With the blink of an eye, we took off our black abayas to reveal the wedding dresses we had under- neth.

The stories of courage, resilience, pain and triumph demonstrate the women’s unspeakable faith in the cause they are fighting for – a free Syria.

“We lifted up our demonstration banners and signs. People started reading our banners, which read: ‘Syria is for all of us. The civil so- ciety demands the cessation of all military operations in Syria.

“The security services immedi- ately came and arrested us. We were in detention for two months.”

Director Ranaa Choukair was working in Mersin, Turkey, in May 2015, when he met Mariam, who had just been released from prison. “I was overwhelmed by the story of her detention,” Choukair stated.

“... It was during my stay in Tur- key that I conceived the project of creating a play with the stories of former Syrian female prisoners to emphasise their prominent role in the revolution. I started contacting them in Berlin, Paris, Madrid and Istanbul through different NGOs,” Choukair said.

“At that time, I didn’t have any idea about the shape of the play but I told them I was sure about one thing: If we are going to present your stories in a play, then please know that no one is better to tell them than you because they belong to you,” he said.

The women’s testimonies were taken during a 4-week workshop in France and the play evolved. The premiere was in January 2018 at the Flaminio, Scene Nationale – Mul- house in Alsace, France, and was followed by a tour of France and Europe.

The stories of courage, resilience, pain and triumph demonstrate the women’s unspeakable faith in the cause they are fighting for – a free Syria. Choukair said the play allows the women to present their lives and touch the audience with their humanity and dignity.

The artistic resistance of Ahwazi Arabs in Iran

Shima Silavi

When Iran came under the rule of Shah Mo- sammam Reza Pahlavi in the mid-20th centu- ry, the Iranian government took aggressive policies to create a “Persian-Iranian” state.

Pahlavi’s attempt at “Persianis- ation” of non-Persian communities started with banning education in languages other than Persian. An- other measure was the establish- ment of “Fathangestani” (language academy) in 1933 with the mission to purify the Persian language from Arabic words and other foreign vocabularies. The creation of new Persian words for the main centres of the Ahwazi region, as well as the use of the Ahwaz and Khalij dialects by the central government to com- bat the multi-ethnic nature of Iran at that time, led to the destruction of a language that transcended monolingual “Persia.”

In 1939, Iranian philos- opher Aleksander Swietochowski described the process of forced as- similation or “Persianisation” of Ahwazi Turks’ community in Iran as follows: “In the quest of impos- ing national homogeneity on the country whose half of the popula- tion consisted of ethnic minorities, the Pahlavi regime imposed in quick succession bans on the use of Ahvaz on the premises of schools, in the- atrical performances, religious cer- monies and, finally, in the publica- tion of books.”

Consequently, the culture, iden- tity and language of non-Persian communities, which had borders for centuries, were sup- pressed violently. The fascist Ital- ian dictator Benito Mussolini in the same years established a similar academy and took drastic measures against foreign words in It- alian. Mussolini fined business own- ers who used foreign words in their logos or product names.

The United Nations reported in 2013 that the Ahwazi Arab population of Iran was facing “forced assimilation” but the demands from the Ahwazi community demands the cessation of all artistic, religious and linguistic minorities. The art pro- duced by Ahwazi Arabs, for exam- ple, ends up having very strong humanitarian and dignity.

Some artists, such as Yarrahi, use both Arabic and Farsi in their work and tackled not only the resistance of the Ahwazi Arabs in the face of forced assimilation but also the demands of all the people in Iran.

In January, the Economist maga- zine reported on the story of Me- hdi Yarrahi, the Iranian pop singer whose song “Pare Sang” (“Broken Heart”) became emblematic for the history, environment and many other issues that preoccupy Ahwazi people.

Some artists, such as Yarrahi, use both Arabic and Farsi in their work and tackled not only the resistance of the Ahwazi Arabs in the face of forced assimilation but also the demands of all the people in Iran.

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Shima Silavi is an Ahwazi Arab activist based in Brussels.
A breathtaking landscape in Asrir oasis.

The unspoiled landscape of Morocco’s Guelmim-Oued Noun

Saad Guerraoui

Guelmim

Known as the gateway to the desert, the Guelmim-Oued Noun region in western Morocco is a quiet tourist destination with unspoiled landscape and inexhaustible cultural riches because of the oases and historic trade road that linked Moroccans with Timbuktu in the 19th century.

Some of its most famous cases are Asrir and Tighmart, which are, respectively, 7km and 15km from Guelmim. Their lush fields ornamented by palm trees make them little heavens on Earth.

As soon as visitors reach Asrir, there is a sense the surrounding houses have been abandoned and life in the village is almost non-existent but not for long because children wearing FC Barcelona and Real Madrid jerseys soon appear to play football.

Decades-old palm trees, cactus plants and fertile green farms await visitors at the entrance of the oasis where serenity fills the air and where the past remains. The oasis is a treasure trove of Morocco’s history, architecture, and culture, as well as a haven for visitors seeking a tranquil escape.

The oasis can be reached by driving for about an hour from the city of Guelmim. The journey is worth the effort for its captivating scenery of lush verdure, rocky cliffs, and the vast expanse of the desert.

Asrir is the home of the Al-Ashur tribe, known for their hospitality and traditional culture. Visitors can experience the local way of life by staying in traditional guesthouses where they can learn about the traditions and customs of the region.

Tighmart, on the other hand, is a smaller oasis located about 8km from Asrir. It is known for its ancient kasbah, which dates back to the 15th century and is a perfect example of traditional Berber architecture.

Visitors can explore the kasbah and its surrounding area and enjoy the peace and quiet of the oasis, away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

The area is rich in history and culture, with ancient Berber and Roman ruins that are worth visiting. The region is also known for its traditional crafts, such as pottery, weaving, and leatherwork.

Asrir and Tighmart are perfect destinations for nature lovers, history buffs, and anyone looking for a peaceful retreat.

Tourism plays a crucial role in the region’s economy, with many hotel owners and private entrepreneurs turning their houses into guesthouses to accommodate visitors. The hotel industry has been growing in recent years, with more and more tourists discovering the beauty of these oases.

Tourism in the Guelmim-Oued Noun region is expected to continue growing in the future, as the area is rich in natural and cultural attractions that are sure to attract visitors from all over the world.