

Project to benefit Lebanon as well as Kuwaiti tourists

KFAED lends Lebanon \$76 million to build highway

BEIRUT, Nov 7, (KUNA): Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) signed Friday a \$76 million loan agreement with Lebanon to finance a portion of the construction of a highway linking the towns of Hazmiyah and Sofar.

The agreement was signed by KFAED's director Abdulwahab al-Bader and Lebanon's chairman of the Growth and Development Council Nabil al-Jiser who said the highway, once completed, would alleviate traffic congestion in addition to linking Beirut with Mount

Lebanon and Bekaa region and onto the Syrian border and beyond with neighboring Arab countries. This loan supplements a similar one — for the amount of \$37 million — for the same highway project which KFAED provided to Lebanon at an earlier time,

said al-Jiser, who expressed his country's appreciation to KFAED for its help in the highway project and in other projects it has been undertaking in that country. Work on the Hazmiyah-Sofar highway is expected to start next Spring and to last at least four years.

On his part Al-Bader underscored the vitality of the highway project as it is going to be part of the so-called Intra-Arab Highway Project which is supposed to link Beirut with Damascus — in its infant stage — to thereafter develop into a massive project that would connect

many Arab capitals together. The Hazmiyah-Sofar project will not only benefit Lebanon but also Kuwaiti tourists who customarily flock to that country in the summer time for vacation. These tourists will find the highway an easy way to get around, he said.

the Aljefawi files

Concept problematic in region

The 'Other' in Arabic education and culture

By Khaled Aljefawi



Aljefawi

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "Other" refers to both an adjective and a pronoun used to "refer to a person or thing different from one already mentioned or known." Other meanings of the word "other" designate an "alternative of two" or "those not already mentioned (p. 388)." However, figuratively, the "Other" can also refer to "the ultimate signifier of everyone the subject [one who does action] is not, as well as everything the Subject does not have (Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism, p. 216)." In uses that are more mundane, or let us say in everyday language, the "other" is that "one" who is not "me" or who is different from "the I and us." Throughout human history, the term "other" has always been associated with those individuals whom the majority of the population decides to portray as "outsiders" or "foreigners." These somewhat differing perspectives of the "Other" underline the ambiguous meanings one can assign such a vague term. In rare cases, especially in highly-advanced societies, such different connotations of the word "Other" seemed to have opened windows of opportunities for exploring the possibilities one can achieve by cooperating with those who are different from "us."

Unfortunately, however, the "Other" in our Arab/Middle-Eastern social and cultural environments tends to include whomever the government or the Arab public are determined to alienate or forcibly banish from the local environment, usually any individual or group who are either non-Arabs or non-Muslim or whoever the dominant local group deny the right to be different!

Therefore, there seems to be a resolute effort in typical Arab culture and society to manipulate the term "Other" for many different national or local purposes. As a case in point, in the Arab world and due to a historical, haphazard designation of its human identity, the "Other" must always become the "enemy of the people" or the "enemy of the faith." Such Arab/Muslim discourse continues to create rifts between the outside world and the Arab/Muslim worlds. Though all Arab countries have signed the 1995 Unesco Declaration of Principles on Tolerance in human societies, our general cultural awareness about the "Other" places it in the role of the enemy. Without being able to understand the "Other" as a normal human being who happens to be different from the rest of the population, many Arab generations continue to invest in misrepresentations of those who are different.

For example, in schoolbooks of most Middle-Eastern curricula, the "Other" is usually portrayed as the enemy. He or she tends to be non-Muslim, preferably Christian or Jewish, and sometimes another Muslim individual who happens to hail from a different Islamic sect. In the case of Christians and Jews, a typical Arab curriculum usually represents them not as real, individual persons who breathe, eat, suffer, and die just like Arabs or Muslims, but rather as members of a threatening, alien group, using techniques of dehumanization and demonization. At times, it is taken to the extreme and calls for the annihilation of the "other." Excerpts from the curriculum of a major Arab country are illustrative: "The struggle of this nation [i.e., the Muslim nation] with Jews and Christians goes on, and it will last for ever...Jews

and Christians are enemies of the believers [i.e., the Muslims]... (pp. 148-149); "The Day of Judgment will not arrive until the Muslims fight the Jews and the Muslims will kill them (pp. 148-149)." There are, however, some glimpses of progress in attempting to reach out to the "Other" and trying to understand and accept its difference.

The state of Qatar, for example, is almost the only Arab country to implement positive changes in its national curriculum. By introducing new perspectives about spreading tolerance through education, as part of a comprehensive educational reform program, designed to provide pupils in both the K-12 system and Post-Secondary Education with world-class education, Qatar has become a role model, which other Arab countries need to emulate if they wish to provide their younger generations with the same. Qatar launched this project with the help of The RAND-Qatar Policy Institute. The RAND Corporation is an internationally known think-tank helping policy makers around the world improve decision making. The outcome of such progressive educational programs in our Gulf region will no doubt help open a healthy debate about the position of the "Other" in our societies.

Positive reform was undertaken by Tunisia as well, and Tunisian textbooks emphasize the importance of tolerance, peace and dialog with the "other," equality between all human groups, openness toward the "other" and its culture (the West), use of religion for universal rapprochement, rather than alienation, and restriction of the ideals of jihad and martyrdom to historical events. The following excerpts are illustrative: "A funeral procession went by [in Medina] and the Prophet [Peace be upon him] stood up and we stood up [as well]. We said: "O Messenger of God, this is a Jew's funeral." He said: "Is it not a soul? Whenever you see a funeral procession, stand up!" (Islamic Education, Grade 9 (2007) p. 32); "Tolerance, therefore, represents the basic idea in the Quran. How come, then, that some people have made the Book of God a tool of bigotry and narrow-mindedness? ([Literary] Texts, Grade 9 (2007) p. 159); "It is impossible today to perceive our existence outside of the dialogue connection with the 'other'... The 'other' is essential and the dialogue with him — in whatever form — is necessary ([Literary] Texts, Grade 13 — Sciences (?) p. 154)."

The concept of the "Other" has always been "problematic" in most ME cultures, and misrepresentation of this human identity in Arab media and culture constitutes a real obstacle to progress and development. It is no longer acceptable to ignore international conventions relating to the protection of the rights of racial, cultural, and religious minorities in our region. In fact, one of our enduring obstacles in the ME is the reliance on outdated educational curriculums that hark back to the supposed glories of a romantic past, while ignoring the opportunities awaiting us in the future.

As mentioned in the Unesco Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, countries and their societies need to emphasize the need for spreading tolerance among our human family. Many people in the Arab world due either to ignorance or an inability to communicate with people from other cultures continue depicting the "Other" erroneously. Starting a debate in the Arab world about the historical treatment of the "Other" in our educational systems is a step in the right direction. Tolerance of difference strengthens our human commitment and enables us to live in a peaceful world where the ordinary people of the ME, like their counterparts in many Western countries, will be able to achieve their human potentials. It will be useful to us as Arabs and Muslims to accept our distinguished cultural identities and to accept that "other" people around the world also have the right to be different from us.

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'Kuwait gathering timely'

Egyptian economists praise upcoming economic summit

CAIRO, Nov 7, (KUNA): Two Egyptian economists indicated Friday that the upcoming Arab economic summit in Kuwait next January could afford Arab states a golden opportunity to bypass the current global financial meltdown through agreements to establish intra-Arab projects to revive the region's economic picture.

Chairman of the economic committee at the Egyptian parliament Mustafa al-Saeed acknowledged the enormity of the financial crisis gripping the world and attributed it in a great part to over-consumption by the American citizen in such a way that has overburdened the American budget, which has been in recent times reeling from rampant expenditure.

This has led the US to borrow from others in a bid to balance the budget or at least address the deficit in it, he said.

Former chairman of Egypt's Ahli Bank, Mahmoud Abdulaziz, sounded quite sure that the world financial crisis would not in any way affect his country, bragging that Egypt's banks are not within any danger or risk of default.

Underscoring the notion that the Egyptian financial system is not a reflection of that in the US, and therefore could not be affected by the latter's gyrations, he however called his country's government to reduce interest rates as a measure of energizing the economy.

He furthermore affirmed the necessity to have an

open free market in Egypt with strong financial institutions that could easily fund vital economic projects without any red tape impediments. He asked that tariffs be eliminated at free trade zones.

In a speech commemorating his accession to power in 1987, President Zaineddin Bin Ali expressed hope that the January '09 Arab economic summit in Kuwait would actively contribute to the aspiration of Arab economic integration.

Addressing the general of public and private sector officials, lawmakers, local and foreign media from 20 countries, the president acknowledged the challenges facing the global economies and asked for speedy solutions to rising prices of fuel and food and the lack of environmental protection in development plans.

He urged more trade among North African states and sought closer economic ties between his country and Europe on one hand and with both American continents on the other.

President Bin Ali underscored Tunisia's penchant to support causes of peace and justice everywhere, most especially in the Palestinian territories.

With regard to domestic issues, he called for more social programs aimed at embracing the energy of the young and at promoting the Arab identity of all citizens through the glamorization of the Arabic language and its protection from being overrun, and consequently sidelined, by vital languages of Europe and America.

'Financial crisis will be taken up at Arab economic summit'

AIP tackles EU-Israeli trade deal: Kuwaiti MP

DAMASCUS, Nov 7 (KUNA): Chairman of the Arab Interim Parliament **Mohammad Jassem Al-Saqer** praised on Friday a call by Qatar's Amir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani to hold an urgent Arab conference for discussing impact of the global financial crisis.

Al-Saqer, in a statement to KUNA on sidelines of the current AIP meeting, declared support for the sensible call by Sheikh Hamad, but indicated that the financial issue would be addressed at the Arab economic summit to be hosted in Kuwait in January.

On most significant topics to be addressed by the AIP during its third session scheduled on Sunday, he said the two most crucial issues were the global financial crisis and fighting terrorism.

Asked on results of the Arab states' reinstating of ambassadors in Iraq, Al-Saqer said, "We support that the Arabs return to Iraq for restoring their political and diplomatic presence because this can be helpful for maintaining the security conditions." But he criticized the Arab states for taking a long time before restoring their representation in the Iraqi capital.

Security

He affirmed that security conditions in Iraq are now much better than two years ago will be even better in the future. Elaborating, Al-Saqer, added, "the security conditions in Iraq affect the security situation in neighboring countries and other parts of the world and I hope that the American forces do not withdraw quickly because this will create security vacuum in the country."

On inter-Palestinian conciliation efforts, Al-Saqer indicated that he exerted fruitless efforts to reconcile the main Palestinian organizations, Fatah and Hamas.

Asked to comment on remarks by the newly-elected US President Barack Obama concerning the Middle East, Al-Saqer indicated that the new president would not honor vows regarding the regional peace, he had made during the electoral campaign. He also expressed hope that Obama would remain committed to the pledge he had made to Israel that Jerusalem would be the permanent capital of Israel.

Among topics tackled by the Arab Interim Parliament (AIP) meeting on (Friday) was the EU-Israeli trade agreement and its impact on commerce in the Middle East region, a Kuwaiti MP told KUNA.

Issues

Marzouq Al-Ghanim, a Kuwaiti MP attending meetings of the AIP committee on finance and economy, said that the committee was poised to discuss a ream of issues, ranging from means of boosting intra-Arab investment and trade, to seeking ways to curb the seemingly continuous spike in prices of basic food staples in the Arab region.

The committee, he pointed out — being aware of the financial meltdown facing the global economy at the present time — will deal in its meetings with viable solutions which Arab economies could adopt to avert an economic crunch that might stymie their aspirations for growth and expansion.

He indicated that whatever the committee comes up with over its two-day meetings will be turned over for examination to a general AIP meeting scheduled for Sunday.

Another Kuwaiti MP, Abdel Wahed Al-Awadhi, taking part in the meetings of the AIP committee on legal and legislative affairs, told KUNA that the committee postponed looking into an issue on its agenda regarding war crimes against civilians in the Palestinian territories but discussed some procedural matters on membership cancellation at IAP.



The AIP session in progress at Damascus.

News in Brief

Govt to implement law: "The government is about to implement the State Properties Law," says Minister of Finance Mustafa Al-Shamali, adding, "the government has no intention to amend any clause in the law," reports Al-Watan Arabic daily. The government is also planning to implement two major priorities of the executive and legislative authorities — the establishment of stock exchange authority and privatization project.

3,108 trademarks registered: As many as 3,108 trademarks and 24 patents were registered by the Department of Trademarks and Patents in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in the month of October, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Palestinian leader invited to summit: Envoy of HH the Amir, the Amiri Diwan Advisor, Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, delivered a written message from HH the Amir, addressed to Palestinian Mahmoud Abbas to attend the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit due in Kuwait on Jan 19-20. The message was handed over to the Palestinian ambassador to Egypt, Barakat Al-Farah, (KUNA)

Kuwait, Nato to conduct joint drill: Kuwaiti Army forces will conduct a joint drill with Nato troops at locations between the islands of Umm Al-Maradem and Garo on Sunday, the army said in a statement released on Friday.

The exercises will be held with live ammunition and conducted between 8 am and 7 pm, it said. The statement urged sea-goers to refrain from approaching the drill zone during the execution of the exercise. (KUNA)

Candidates to be announced: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will announce the names of candidates who have joined the diplomatic corps next week, reports Al-Rai daily. Sources say one of the candidates was

Call for uniform law

Gulf insurance forum wraps up

KUWAIT, Nov 7, (KUNA): The 5th Gulf Insurance Forum wound up here Thursday by stressing the significance of creating a common Gulf insurance market and sharing experience among Gulf insurers. In the final session of the forum, which was chaired by Kuwait-based Gulf Insurance Company Managing Director and CEO Khalid Al-Hassan, Dr. Mostafa Rajab, an insurance advisor in Abu Dhabi, set a plan of action for a common Gulf insurance market to be put in place.

The uniform law for supervision and control over insurance in the GCC member countries is a binding legislation, rather than merely a guideline document, so rules should be set for insurance companies, Rajab said.

He urged a decisive attitude towards non-Gulf insurers working in the GCC countries, categorization of insurance activities and separation between life insurance and

general insurance. Calling for enacting a uniform Gulf insurance bill, Rajab said insurance developments are a reflection of economic and social changes in the society.

For his part, Doha Insurance Company General Director Bassam Hussein recognized that the insurance sector in Qatar was facing several obstacles blocking its development.

He regretted that some legal and regulatory frameworks for foreign insurers working in Qatar failed to provide a just competitive atmosphere.

Therefore, he called for imposing no restrictions on the activities of insurance companies.

The two-day forum, which was inaugurated by Kuwait's Commerce and Industry Undersecretary Rasheed Al-Tabtabaei earlier on Wednesday, was held under the auspices of Minister of Commerce and Industry Ahmad Baqer.

taken in despite the fact that he was over 24 years in age. One of the ministry's conditions specifies that candidates should be below 24 years; "however, due to some pressures, the rule was overlooked and the percentage of marks required in the written test was reduced to 50 percent from 60 percent to take in this particular candidate," say sources.

Humanitarian law extended: "The basic motive behind enforcing International Humanitarian Law is to protect those who are not participating in wars

like civilians, POWs, injured persons and victims.

The law has now extended to buildings and other properties that do not have any links with wars," Al-Anba daily quoted a judge in the Court of Appeals Nayef Al-Mutairi as saying.

Justice Al-Mutairi made this statement while delivering a lecture on 'Jurisdiction of International Humanitarian Law' at the Legal and Judicial Studies Institute as part of the Third Regional Training Course for Arab Justices. Minister of Justice Hussein Al-Huraiti patronized the inaugural ceremony of the course.

Travel safe with NBK this summer

KUWAIT CITY, Nov 7: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), the leading bank in Kuwait and the highest rated bank in the Middle East, has offered once again its customers specially tailored NBK Travel Safe comprehensive insurance policy.

The comprehensive insurance policy covers individuals and families. Deputy General Manager — Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait, Abdullah Al-Najran Al-Tuwajri said "Travel insurance is needed. Travelers often overlook the insurance part and think they may not need it. This is completely incorrect. Holiday is important time to recharge, however, an unexpected injury or illness can be and unpleasant and expensive experience".

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