

## PET

## PALACE

## people & their pets

Look out for the Arab Times series, the Pet Palace, and read about how people and their animals enrich each other's lives.

The Palace welcomes submissions by our readers. If you'd like to tell the world about your pet, send us a photograph and accompanying article for publication. — Editor



A police officer and his dog attend a ceremony to officially retire 61 police dogs in Quito, Ecuador, May 9. (AFP)

By Stefanie Glinski

In the early morning, smoke from burning cow dung rose over hundreds of animals sleeping tightly side by side, with children dotted between them, warming their hands in the smoke, their faces covered in white ash to fend off flies and mosquitoes.

The cattle camps — where South Sudan's nomads migrate to find pasture during the December to May dry season — are some of the world's most remote, nestled between the arms of the Nile in Lakes State's swamps.

"My days are busy," 24-year-old Mary Amal told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, standing between hundreds of cows and holding her baby, Gok, in her arms.

"I came here with my brother to take care of our cows and I'm expected to clean up the camp's cow dung and prepare food, while also taking care of my eight-month-old daughter."

The camp was full of children who work as herders, cooks and cleaners. For many, it was also their first chance to learn to read and write, calculate sums and learn about hygiene.

Aid agencies are starting to provide mobile education in the remote cattle camps amid fears that South's Sudan's latest civil

war is creating another "lost generation" of uneducated adults and country risks becoming a failed state.

"The cattle camp is like a village," said Amal. "We have our tents here, we have small shops and even a church. It's important to have a school here too."

The United Nations (UN) estimates almost three-quarters of the adult population is illiterate — one of the highest rates in the world — and three-quarters of children are out of school.

Tens of thousands of people have died and 4.5 million people have fled their homes since clashes between troops loyal to President Salva Kiir and former vice president Riek Machar broke out in the oil-rich new country in 2013.

South Sudan's cattle camps are not only a cultural tradition, but provide a lifeline for millions in the world's youngest country, enabling them to trade and store their wealth as hyperinflation has rendered the currency almost worthless.

In the camps, everything evolves around the animals — their milk provides nutritious meals for children, manure lights fires and urine is used as a disinfectant hand and face wash.

Education rates among young pastoralists

are particularly low because they are often on the move, the UN says.

Teachers receive training, textbooks and a solar-powered radio with pre-programmed lessons on basic subjects, relevant to them, as well as practical life skills, said Ezana Kassa of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

Also:

**QUITO, Ecuador:** Walking down a red carpet on all fours as an honor band plays Ecuador's national anthem, 61 police dogs were officially retired after years spent sniffing out illegal drugs.

The majority of the dogs — Labradors, German shepherds and Golden Retrievers on the whole — were taken in by their former trainers. But the rest were adopted by families who opened their homes to a police inspection as part of a rigorous selection process to ensure the canines have a dignified retirement.

Police dogs in Ecuador on average serve for 9 years. Most of their work revolves finding cocaine smuggled through Ecuador. But 16 of dogs retired in Wednesday's ceremony helped locate victims trapped under rubble following a 2016 earthquake that left more than 600 people dead. (Agencies)

## Kuwait



A Kestrel spreading its wings as it flies high over Julaia beach. (Gino Raphael — KUNA)

## New Look

### First Kuwaiti feature film earns praise at int'l festivals

# Sa'ad Al Faraj retains old charm in new plays

This is the third in a series of articles on Sa'ad Mubarak Al Faraj, an outstanding playwright and star actor.

— Editor

Lidia Qattan

Special to the Arab Times

The play, "I Lived and Saw" opened with a scene in an orchard of Al Fontas where an old farmer and his son are tilling the soil from dawn to dusk, while a new life is unfolding all around them. The young man grumbles, resenting the living conditions his father is forcing him to adopt, while he is trying to reason with him that times are changing and they can have a better life, free of the misery and suffering of poverty.

But the father sees only his field and the life he has always known; he tries to persuade his son that what is going on in the country could lead to regretful consequences if not taken gradually. He insists that the land is the true source of life and he must not forget that.

In another scene of the play, in the village the impact of schooling on the children carries the influence of a new world into the home, inevitably the media and mass communication infiltrates the life of everyone, and even to old folk begins to realize that things are not what they used to be, and even people's attitude is changing.

They talk of the phenomenon in a mixture of criticism and apprehension, fearing that some day all their cherished values will be swept away.

In another scene the saga of father and son continues. In the end a serious conflict develops between them, the young man, exasperated by the arguing, and seeing no other way out of his misery, jumps into the well and kills himself.

The circumstance of his tragic death causes serious concern among the older people of the village. It is a warning they cannot ignore, and although they view with suspicion the new social developments, they begin to realize that they cannot stand in the way of progress.

When discordant notes fill the air, if they are brought forth in the form of a comedy, people laugh, but they are also prompted to think.

In his play Sa'ad shone a new light on what was best of the old days: Life was simple and frugal then, but there were good social values, such as contentment, true friendship, a feeling of community, honesty and lack of ostentation, which regrettably were fading — away in the haze of the new day.

After his first success Sa'ad produced "Dicat Al Sa'a" (The Hour Struck), which apparently was the continuation of the first play.

It was produced by Al Arabi Theater and directed by Hassein Saleh.

### Pain

This play together with "Ist wa Shift" (I Lived and Saw) was translated from Kuwait dialect into simple Arabic language. It was an experiment Sa'ad never repeated; for it involved too much of his time, as well as considerable pain to translate the content of the drama into its true form and value.

The year 1964, marks a new phase in the development of indigenous drama, actors and directors were becoming more seriously involved in their productions; first among them were Sa'ad Al Faraj with his play "I Lived and Saw", and Abdul Aziz Al Srayer with "Al Joo" (Hunger) by which they set the stage for the written play.

Improvisation, which had been the trend in acting since the beginning of the movement, became a phase of the past.

Incidentally the atmosphere of dilettantism and holiday that began in the seventies and gained momentum in the following decades encouraged the return of improvising during performance.

This trend especially affected the comedy in which actors sought to improvise on the original dialogue to make it more funny, but nowhere was the genuine spirit of the old-comedy, whose freshness and charm enticed the crowd.

True art is the daughter of enthusiasm; it

could never flourish among indifference.

From 1964, Masrah Al Arabi became an independent enterprise. It was founded with the objective to foster the classic drama and develop the local stage into a higher form of art, but people's mood was changing, the original enthusiasm for true art was dying. The pressure for light comedy was on.

The new theatrical groups that formed were commercially oriented. Their major attraction was special effects and their play's main objective was to entertain rather than educate people.

In this scenario even Al Arabi eventually yielded to the holiday mood, though maintaining a certain style and standard of its own.

In spite of the new vogue attracting others, Sa'ad Al Faraj tried to keep the enthusiastic response of his public alive through the quality of his production.

From the sixties and into the nineties his plays were a continuous success. Some works were more successful than others but the standard has never been lowered.

The sixties and seventies were decades of great social changes, people's mentality was increasingly verging on materialism, and Sa'ad pondering on the issue, produced "The Hour Struck" and "Kuwait 2000". Both plays are a melodrama inspired by a new evil, which was unknown in the older days, when life was too frugal, too close to the rock-bottom of its economy, to allow "ruffianism" (the darker side of flattery) to take root and spread.

Easier times brought new elements in society, which the author was quick to notice and criticize in his plays.

### Purpose

In Kuwait 2000 the author holds a pessimist view of the future.

The play begins with a scene of luxury and of affectation, people are bored and unproductive, living a life of dependence on everything money can buy. Oil revenues can never last, to live one has to think ahead, but no one is concerned of tomorrow, no one cares except a man who, disdainful of the frivolity of the others, chose to live by his industry and labor in order to find purpose and contentment in life.

He tries to warn the others, but he is held in



Sa'ad Al Faraj

contempt.

In another scene of the play the drying-up of the last oil-well sends a wave of panic through the people who are suddenly faced by the spectrum of poverty. In town donkeys and carts have replaced the golden Cadillac. Consternation and despair assails everyone, except the man to whom everyone flocks, seeking a way out of the predicament. He teaches the old skills of survival and a new life begins.

A creative artist reflects more than his surroundings; for beauty, goodness and truth are never obsolete, they are the mainspring of mental culture, the beacon for those who strive to create a better world than the one they live in.

Living art is the expression of the true spirit of mankind; it is a link with the past and an insight into the future.

In the play "Kuwait 2000" Sa'ad reflects the atmosphere of the seventies; through his own pessimism he reflects the concern of the honest man in the developing phenomenon.

In 1966 Sa'ad Al Faraj wrote a short story "The Last Journey", which was produced and directed by Khalid Al Siddik in a 20 minutes TV film.

When presented at the Alexandria TV Festival, it gained the admiration of all the critics. In it Sa'ad himself is playing the part of an

old Kuwaiti sailor. He was the first Kuwaiti actor appearing on screen.

The whole scene evolves on the shore of Kuwait where the old sailor is staring at the wreck of his old wooden ship, abandoned on shore.

The sun high on the horizon appears as the symbol of a new day; a day brightened by modern technology in which the old Kuwaiti spirit seems to have lost its value under a wave of indifference.

In the monologue the old sailor speaks of the old days aboard that ship; of the men's struggle fighting against the changing moods of the sea and the sudden gales threatening their lives.

The life he lived was hard and dangerous but his old heart longs for it, it yearns for the contentment felt in that simple life and for the faith that knew no doubts. No matter how dangerous the odds, his spirit knew no defeat.

### Generation

The ship was his home; his companions were his family, every one was closer to everyone else in happiness and sorrow, no one was ever alone.

Now that ship, which witnessed so much pain and hardship, so many hopes and dreams, was condemned to oblivion like the old sailor himself.

A new generation of ships and sailors has replaced the old, new dreams, new rising expectations are nurtured by the promises of the new day, in which the old was but a phase of a past gone and forgotten.

The new world is alien to the old sailor; in spite of its splendor and glow it has no warmth for him; hypocrisies have replaced genuine feelings.

He fixes his stare upon the placid vastness of the sea and dwells in thoughts.

In 1970, when Khalid Al Siddik produced and directed "Bess Ya Bahar" (Cruel Sea) — the first Kuwaiti feature film, he engaged the playwright skill of Sa'ad Al Faraj for the dialogue, and gave him a leading part in the film, which when presented at various international film festivals, gained several awards that brought pride to every Kuwaiti.

To be continued