

Other Voices

Lebanon poised to reform, open a new chapter

By Khalaf Ahmad Al-Habtoor

Those of us who have a deep abiding love for Lebanon are devastated watching this amazing country blessed with so many of God's gifts fall to its knees, especially because Lebanon's descent into darkness is not due to any natural disaster.



Al Habtoor

We are crying for Lebanon's beautiful, bustling capital Beirut, much of it now destroyed or damaged by an explosion, so massive that its fallout resembled that of a small nuclear bomb. We are crying for the families and friends of all those who lost their lives and for the seriously injured in hospitals. We are crying for the parents hurting from the loss of a child. We are sad for the churches, mosques and hospitals shattered by the blast and feel sorry for those who witnessed their homes and businesses razed to the ground.

Lebanon was once portrayed as God's heaven on earth. It is a land that nurtures culture, artistic endeavours, business acumen and unbreakable family ties. It is a land

that bore renowned artists, poets, writers, actors, designers and entrepreneurs, many of whom left in search of greater opportunity. But those who took themselves out of Lebanon soon discover that Lebanon can never be erased from their hearts.

Lebanese people of all ages outside the country have stood with their homeland, supporting their compatriots irrespective of their religion. In a crisis, they stand united, and for that they should feel very proud. I salute all those who have offered material help according to their means. Many who have been given are not wealthy, but they felt duty-bound to make a contribution. I salute these people even as Lebanese billionaires and multi-millionaires with few exceptions have yet to come forward.

I have also been touched at the way the Lebanese have opened their homes to strangers so that nobody is destined to sleep on the street and I highly respect the young people who took it upon themselves to clean up the areas that suffered the blast. The spirit of the Lebanese following this disaster has been nothing short of inspirational.

People from all corners of the planet have recently expressed their love for Lebanon as well as their admiration for the way the Lebanese refuse to let life's knocks, no matter how hard they may be, stifle their natural joie de vivre.

That said the youth is tired of having to put on a brave face; they want more. They are demanding a brand-new political system capable of delivering a future constructed on a solid foundation of stability and security which can only be achieved when sectarian loyalties come second to patriotism. The day when every son and daughter of Lebanon link arms and say in unison, "We are all proud Lebanese" will be the dawn of the country's blossoming.

I have been penning articles for many years pleading with the Lebanese to put the love of country before all and to work at ridding themselves of their divisive and antiquated confessional political system. The Lebanese know what must be done, but they've been out-maneuvred by the old guard.

Reform is always on the table, and that is where it stays, promises and pledges conveniently forgotten which is the reason negotiations with the IMF on a US\$ 10 billion loan collapsed and a virtual donor conference hosted by France and the UN drummed up a mere drop in the ocean. The country is in immediate need of billions, but donor nations insist that aid is conditional upon the implementation of reforms.

This is the moment for the world to pressurize Lebanon to free itself from its cancerous political system with demands for a

constitutional shakeup. This will allow for free and transparent elections towards the appointment of honest, hardworking citizens of all faiths and sects purely based on their qualifications and experience rather than where they congregate to pray.

The Lebanese must be ready to escape from a crippling political time warp that has inextricably bound religion and state, one that keeps them locked into different – and sometimes feuding camps. Elections should be closely monitored and verified by international bodies.

On Tuesday, the Lebanese prime minister and his cabinet resigned in response to street protests. Still, they will remain as a caretaker government until the people can once again cast their ballots. Hopefully, elections will soon be scheduled and this time the Lebanese will choose competent individuals with a clean track record.

No new government has a magic bullet to solve problems but provided its members are open to making reforms and to working with friendly nations like France and many countries around the world that have Lebanon's interests at heart as well as the IMF and the World Bank, the country will ascend to new heights.

A renewed constitution as a prelude to fresh trustworthy faces in the cabinet and parliament will open the door to mega

investments, so grand that Lebanon will only need short term loans to begin reconstructing infrastructure and rebuilding its economy.

Financial support from foreign nations at this juncture is necessary but it is just a temporary respite. Unless the system and those who have been profiting from it for decades is changed, Lebanon could find itself struggling alone. I strongly believe that the people are hungry for change; their patience has run dry and the powers that be understand that.

I am certain that once the first rung of this new ladder is climbed in the form of a revised constitution and new elections, whichever comes first, the whole world will stand with Lebanon. We must all assist the country in resurrecting itself as one nation united under one cedar flag.

I cannot wait for the day when my beloved Lebanon gets back to a firm footing enabling its brightest and best to shine. I look forward to experiencing Beirut's carefree ambience again and to celebrating its reconstruction just as I did when the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, a great man whom I considered a friend, rebuilt the capital's stunning Downtown. In that case, we on the outside looking in should prepare to be astonished. My gut feeling tells me the good days are yet to come but come they will...and soon.

'Design and implementation' system allows bribery: union

MPW warned against using system to execute projects

KUWAIT CITY, Aug 12: The Union of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and Consulting Houses warned against Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport's tendency to launch the third phase of the First Ring Road Development Project according to the design and implementation system, affirming the union's confidence in the keenness of Minister of Public Works and the Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Rana Al-Faris on preserving public money and fighting corruption, especially as the system allows brib-

ery and kickbacks, in addition to using poor quality products, reports Al-Qabas daily.

President of the union Bader Al-Salman expressed surprise "when the news leaked from the Roads Authority, stating the authority is proposing the third phase of the First Ring Road project according to the design and implementation system - a system we have repeatedly warned of its disadvantages".

He explained "the design consultant may not be placed under the contractor's umbrella, because it negatively affects the quality of the final products and puts the designer under the subordination of the contractor."

Al-Salman called on His Highness the Prime Minister, the Central Tenders Agency, Audit Bureau and the Anti-Corruption Authority to stand firm against various agencies in the country that resort to presenting their projects

under this system, which has proven its disadvantages to all through the delay of projects and many variation orders.

He indicated that "it does not achieve justice via bidding, evaluation and awarding, as it creates space for commissions, bribes, benefit and a trail of corruption Kuwait is noticeably suffering from."

Al-Salman stressed "the design and implementation system is only suitable for specialized projects such as oil installations in refineries and power plants, as well as projects in which the designer, manufacturer, supplier and implementer of the specialized project are under one body".

He explained that "it is better and more suitable to put forward the design phase, and the licensing and tender documents to local consultants, in cooperation with a list of specialized and qualified international consultants for road tunnel works, which local consultants qualified for road and infrastructure works join in."

He believes that separating the design and implementation works

makes the contractors bidding to have a clear knowledge and awareness of the tender documents, including designs, plans, licenses, quantity tables, and specifications."

Al-Salman pointed out that the union had previously warned against this system that opens doors to corruption, and endeavored to block it, especially in countering public money theft, money laundering, commissions and bribes.

He anticipated response from His Highness the Prime Minister, the Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Rana Al-Faris, Central Tenders Agency, State Audit Bureau, Nazaha and all monitoring tools, the media, and popular authorities keen on preserving public money and fighting corruption.

This is part of efforts to confront any attempts to circumvent the ways of proposing projects under this system, which opens the doors of corruption we have referred to and also violates the practice of engineering and consulting profession.

7,000 from 21 Arab nations participate

Arab Youth Priorities Confab highlights ambitions of youth

ABU DHABI, UAE, Aug 12: On the eve of the International Youth Day, the Arab Youth Center (AYC), headed by His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE and Minister of Presidential Affairs, inaugurated the first Arab Youth Priorities Conference. The event was held under the patronage of the Arab League and with the participation of the United Nations, Arab youth ministers, and representatives of youth sectors from the Arab world.



Sheikh Rashid



About Gheit



Al-Mutairi



Al Mazrouei

The conference announced the results of the Arab Youth Priorities Survey that was conducted by AYC and included the participation of 7,000 young people from 21 Arab countries who chose stability, education and healthcare as the top Arab youth priorities.

The conference, held via online video conferencing witnessed the participation of His Excellency Dr Ahmed About Gheit, Secretary-General of the Arab League, Her Excellency Dr Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary General, Head of Social Affairs sector at the Arab League, and Her Excellency Dr Dena Assaf, United Nations Resident Coordinator for the UAE.

Also present at the conference were His Excellency Dr Ashraf Sobhi, Minister of Youth and Sports in Egypt and Head of the Executive Office of the Council of Arab Youth and Sports Ministers, His Excellency Ayman Tawfiq Al-Moayad, Minister of Youth and Sports in Bahrain, His Excellency Dr Fares Braizat, Minister of Youth in Jordan, His Excellency Dr Taleb Ould Sid'Ahmed, Minister of Employment, Youth and Sports in Mauritania, His Excellency Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi, Director General of the Public Authority for Youth in Kuwait, and Nadia Benali, Secretary General of the Youth and Sports Sector at the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports in Morocco.

Growth Vehicle

His Excellency Dr Ahmed About Gheit, Secretary-General of the Arab League, said in his opening speech: "I thank His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Chairman of AYC, and AYC's employees for developing this important study that included the opinions of a wide segment of our Arab societies. This initiative will help us listen to the voices of the youth and their priorities in their own words, not as we choose to impose or establish them."

Arab Partners

In his opening address, His Highness Sheikh Rashid Al Nuaimi, Chairman of the Municipality and Planning Department in Ajman, Chairman of the UAE Football Association, and Vice-President of the Arab Youth Center, said: "The capabilities of our Arab youth are enormous. We have learned that investing in the youth will yield many great and sustainable results, and they are our true capital. AYC's study offers a clear and data-driven indication of the priorities of the Arab youth at present from their own point of view."

Awareness

Her Excellency Shamma bint Sohail Al Mazrouei, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Vice-President of the Arab Youth Center, said: "Listening to youth is our methodology. Three years ago, the idea of the Arab Youth Center was born from a dialogue in which His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan listened to a group of Arab youth as part of the activities of the World Government Summit. He was keen to translate their ideas and ambitions into reality and his enthusiasm led to the establishment of AYC."

Collaboration

For her part, Her Excellency Dr Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary General, Head of Social Affairs sector at Arab League, said: "The study highlights the

opinions of this broad segment of the society – the region's youth. We pay close attention to these opinions, as a regional Arab organization that firmly believes in the importance of collective Arab action as a constructive vehicle for the future. AYC's role is important for its services to the Arab youth. These priorities require cooperation to offer young people an opportunity to find solutions that can help them realize their ambitions."

Comprehensive Approach

Her Excellency Dr Dena Assaf, United Nations Resident Coordinator for the UAE, stressed that Arab youth priorities intersect to a large extent with the sustainable development goals set by the United Nations for the year 2030. She called for the adoption of a holistic approach to ensure the participation of all social segments, especially the youth and people of determination, because of their effective contributions to the future. She also highlighted the role of women in development since they are peacemakers, builders of nations and inspirers of people.

Competitiveness

His Excellency Dr Ashraf Sobhi, Minister of Youth and Sports in Egypt, expressed his appreciation for AYC's efforts in the field of youth engagement in the Arab world. He noted that Egypt gives young people all the attention that is their right due to their essential role in building the future and enhancing the competitiveness of the economy. He pointed out the importance of youth participation in all comprehensive development paths. The minister highlighted the efforts of the Egyptian Ministry of Youth and Sports in launching a set of programs and projects, including hosting youth conferences, to achieve youth leadership in development efforts.

Hope

His Excellency Ayman Tawfiq Al-Moayad, Minister of Youth and Sports in Bahrain, said: "Our priorities in youth affairs have been completely revamped. These priorities have been outlined as part of the National Program for the Development of the Youth and Sports Sector. We have adopted the mechanism of periodic surveys and focus more closely on communicating with youth while also adopting basic performance indicators. The program was updated to build on six priorities – security and stability, giving youth the confidence that their voice is heard in society, enabling them to feel supported by their community, ensuring they are our partners, that they have our trust, and most importantly, giving the youth a sense of hope that their present is better than their past and their future is sure to be better than their present."

Jordan

For his part, His Excellency Dr Fares Braizat, Minister of Youth and Sports in Jordan, said: "Arab youth have proven themselves today as a global intellectual and creative force through their local, regional, and international achievements. They competed with major countries through their ideas, projects, and actions to address many important topics and issues; translating challenges into opportunities."

Kuwait

Meanwhile, His Excellency Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Director General of Kuwait's Youth Public Authority, explained that the Kuwait Vision 2035 aims to transform Kuwait into a regional and global financial and commercial hub that attracts investment. He noted that the vision prioritizes human capital, and considers it a crucial asset.

He called for celebrating Arab youth every day, as they have achieved real successes and have proven their mettle to the whole world. He added that they only need an opportunity to advance and develop Arab societies.

Gulf Bank Winner

Sarah Musallam Braik AlAzmi

Claims Cash Prize worth 12 Times Her Salary

Gulf Bank congratulates this year's seventh winner of monthly Salary Account draw

Kuwait, 12 August 2020: Gulf Bank has announced the winner of its seventh monthly Kuwaiti Salary Account draw of the year. This month's lucky winner, Sarah Musallam Braik AlAzmi, will take home a cash prize worth 12 times her salary. The Kuwaiti Salary Account draw took place at Gulf Bank's Head Office in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce.

With the 2020 Kuwaiti Salary Offer, new customers who transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank are automatically enrolled in the monthly draws, giving them the chance to win cash prizes of up to 12 times their salary. Customers are also enrolled in a yearly draw of Kuwait's largest salary prize, a cash prize of up to 100 times the winner's salary.

Gulf Bank's Salary Account also gives new customers the opportunity to receive either a KD 100 cash gift upon transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank, or an interest-free loan of up to KD 15,000. Customers must have a minimum salary of KD 500 and are eligible for the offer following their first salary transfer to Gulf Bank.

Customers can also enjoy additional benefits like a Visa or MasterCard credit card free of charge for a year. They can also apply for a loan of up to KD 70,000 with a repayment period of 15 years, or a consumer loan of up to KD 25,000.

To find out more about Gulf Bank's Salary Account, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's 59 branches or log on to www.gulfbank.com. Customers can also contact the Customer Contact Center by calling 1805805 or direct their queries through the WhatsApp service on 65805805 for assistance and guidance.

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