



'CANNOT ADVANCE WITH PRESENCE OF EXTREMIST THOUGHT'



Saudi Crown Prince defends austerity steps, liberalization

Prince Mohammed voices hope for good relations with Iran

In this Feb 20, 2021 file photo, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman wears a face mask to help curb the spread of the coronavirus as he attends the Saudi Cup award ceremony during the final race of the \$20 million, the Saudi Cup, at King Abdul Aziz race track in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

RIYADH, April 28, (AP): Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman laid out a vigorous defense of his domestic policies and the thinking behind his push to transform Saudi Arabia economically and socially during a wide-ranging interview broadcast across Saudi television channels late Tuesday.

pressed hopes for good relations with rival Iran and said that Saudi Arabia and the Biden administration in Washington were in agreement on most issues of mutual concern.

The bulk of the interview, though, was spent laying out a dizzying array of economic figures and milestones to explain why the government has raised taxes, cut subsidies and embarked on unpopular austerity measures to hit targets in the so-called Vision 2030 plan.

stc reports KD 69.8mn revenue for Q1 of 2021

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Opinion

Lebanon ... mafia, militia and drugs

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

THE Lebanese must choose to either return to becoming people who love and strive for freedom, and seek to restore their country's position as an icon of affluence, openness, culture, and sophistication, or continue accepting subservience to a sectarian gang that destroys their country — their only refuge.

This gang has turned Lebanon into a drug factory and a platform to smuggle drugs to the Arab countries ... the "Ali Baba" cave to plunder the deposits of people — Lebanese and Arabs — who chose this country to deposit their money when it assured confidentiality and privacy of its clients, parallel to Switzerland, and safety for them.

Regarding the Lebanese who have accepted their media platforms — financed by Iran — to become an arena for insulting the Arabian Gulf states and their people, they should emancipate themselves from the bondage of the immoralists among them who describe Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE as nomads (Bedouin), backward and fragile, through brutal media campaign perpetuated by the Hezbollah and those who revolve around it.

There is no doubt that these insults will not change the fact that the large quantities of drugs confiscated in the Gulf region, not only in Saudi Arabia, are sufficient to destroy 400 million Arabs. It is no longer acceptable to cover up with flimsy arguments.

The Lebanese security services really need to work on controlling the borders and putting an end to the smuggling operations. These security services should stop taking orders from the gang leader living in the burrows — Hassan Nasrallah ... Otherwise, Lebanon will be isolated internationally, as the European Union has begun suffering from the influx of drugs coming from Lebanon.

The people of Lebanon should take notes from the living conditions in Iran, which happened due to the policy of the evil tyrants occupied by the illusions of the dark Middle Ages.

These delusions that run through Hezbollah are the ones that the gang uses to justify its drugs manufacturing and trafficking operations, as it considers this as one of its weapons, and does shy away from it ... In fact, it is proud of these operations.

One of the leading clerics within the gang said with all brazenness through several media outlets, "Smuggling is a sacred duty ... It serves the resistance" ... How wretched is this resistance that is based on drugging people and killing them slowly?!

For all these reasons, there was nothing wrong with the stance of the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, against Lebanon and the Lebanese. Protecting people from crimes against humanity is the duty of state leaders. Is there a more horrific crime against humanity than destroying generations with drug addiction?

This Lebanon, which used to be a hospital in the Middle East, is now moaning about the wear and tear of its health system. Its schools and universities, which used to be a beacon of knowledge and enlightenment, have turned into incubators for extremism, sectarianism, and fanaticism.

The illiteracy rate in Lebanon has increased from 3.5 percent to 25 percent after the gang of wickedness and ignorance took over. Lebanon used to be the preferred destination for tourists from Gulf countries, other Arab countries and Europe, but today everyone is fleeing from that country.

Regarding this situation, the Lebanese have no choice but to revolt against this mafia militia in a bid to emancipate themselves from the agony caused by this gang. However, if they continue to surrender, they will kill their future, destroy their homeland, and will not find anyone to help them when the matter gets out of hand. This is because the drug smuggler hiding behind the cloak of religion and resistance is only concerned about serving his Iranian masters.

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Ramadan Timings

Iftar Thursday 18:23, Imsak Friday 03:22



This April 14, 2020 file photo, provided by the US Army shows the USS Firebolt in Manama, Bahrain. The Firebolt fired warning shots when vessels of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard came too close to a recent patrol in the Arabian Gulf, the US Navy said Wednesday. (AP)

Other Voices

The government and its inequality

By Ali Ahmed Al-Baghli Former Minister of Oil

OUR true Islamic religion and the rest of the religions, laws and constitutions — on top of which the Kuwaiti Constitution — stipulate the equality of human beings. This is a civilized behavior.

Consequently, we must first treat all citizens equally regardless of their ethnic, tribal, sectarian or regional affiliations, etc. The Constitution stipulates this in a clear and explicit manner that even the blind can see it. This is confirmed in Article Seven of the Constitution which states "justice, freedom and equality are the pillars of society, and cooperation and compassion are the firm links binding all citizens."

Equality before laws and others is one of the most important pillars of society. Article Eight also stipulates that "the State safeguards the pillars of society and guarantees security, tranquility and equal opportunities for citizens."



Al-Baghli

A person may find an excuse for the backward members of this community not to use these luminous flames. However, we found that the government - which is entrusted with implementing the laws, foremost of which is commitment to the Constitution and the principles of its articles — was the first to violate these articles.

For example, in employment - especially for the sensitive positions, we find these positions being limited to specific groups and other groups are excluded if the government is not satisfied with them. One, two or three analysts might be employed from among hundreds of qualified applicants; while some entities are known for excluding those who do not embrace their militant ideology that destroys the structure of society.

This is about the original Kuwaitis. Some sensitive government agencies separate them according

to the principles of selectivity and inequality.

Nevertheless, the stubborn inequality falls on the shoulders of our expatriate brothers in humanity except certain and well-known groups that fear rationality. The key to such a decision is the 'foreign' government. This is for those who are sick people getting higher advisory positions which even Kuwaitis are forbidden to occupy!!

We go back to racial discrimination in the treatment of a Kuwaiti and a foreigner ... I do not mean here that a Kuwaiti should be equal with a foreigner in terms of rights and duties. This is obvious and it is applied in all countries throughout the world.

I will delve into what many of my expatriate friends have asked me to write about — that they have been locked up in Kuwait according to the decisions of the young minister of health, Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah, for months now; far from their families. They have been vaccinated for some time and they want to go to their countries to be with their families.

One of them told me that one of his sons God gave him a grandson a year ago and he wants to meet him because he is the first grandchild. However, he knows that once he travels to his country, he will not be able to return to Kuwait.

This person has important business in Kuwait that he does for himself and others, including Kuwaiti individuals and companies. He is supposed to be treated like Kuwaitis, so he does not board the plane until after the examination. At the airport, he is tested for covid by the company appointed by Kuwait's Ministry of Health and then he sits at home for a week. So, why not deal with expatriate brothers we have known for decades in the same way we deal with Kuwaitis?

This is one of the sins of our rational government that implements the proposals of its young minister, the sheikh. He will be held accountable for this, because he and his rational ministry committed a number of mistakes and sins — the most recent of which include severing kinship ties and inequality between God's creation due to contradicting laws and decisions!!

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Shots fired

An American warship fired warning shots when vessels of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard came too close to a patrol in the Arabian Gulf, the US Navy said Wednesday. It was the first such shooting in nearly four years.

The Navy released black-and-white footage of the encounter Monday night in international waters of the northern reaches of the Arabian Gulf near Kuwait, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. In it, lights can be seen in the distance and what appears to be a single gunshot can be heard, with a tracer round racing across the top of the water.

The Navy said the Cyclone-class patrol ship USS Firebolt fired the warning shots after three fast-attack Guard vessels came within 68 yards (62 meters) of it and the US Coast Guard patrol boat USCGC Baranoff.

"The US crews issued multiple warnings via bridge-to-bridge radio and loud-hailer devices, but the (Guard) vessels continued their close range maneuvers," said Cmdr. Rebecca Rebarich, a spokeswoman for the Mid-east-based 5th Fleet. (AP)

Dubai knife fight kills 3

DUBAI, April 28, (AP): Police in Dubai have arrested 10 suspects in a massive knife fight that killed three people, authorities said Wednesday, a relatively rare outburst of violence in the Gulf Arab sheikdom.

The police said the melee stemmed from a dispute over money, with 13 men armed with knives and wooden bats fighting over 5,000 dirhams (some \$1,360). The brawl drew others in, killing three and seriously wounding more. Police did not identify the suspects beyond saying they were of Asian descent, or specify where the fight took place.

Dubai police rarely offer overall crime statistics, but previously have acknowledged similar incidents in low-income expat communities and labor camps, dormitory-style housing for many of the migrant workers from Asia, Africa and the Middle East who drive the machinery of daily life in the emirate.

leading global energy company. In 2019, the kingdom listed 5% of Aramco on the Saudi stock exchange in an effort to raise money for its sovereign wealth fund.

The interview was timed to mark five years since the launch of Vision 2030, Prince Mohammed's blueprint for transforming the kingdom from an oil-dependent, insular nation to an economic powerhouse that is open to the world. In his unveiling of the project in 2016, he acknowledged Saudi Arabia had an "addiction to oil."

One of the most important goals of Prince Mohammed as he prepares to one day inherit the throne from his 82-year-old father, King Salman, is to create millions of jobs for young Saudis entering the workforce. He aims to lower unemployment to 7% by 2030. The kingdom's unemployment shot to a high of 15.9% in mid-2020 before going back down to around 12%.

To boost government revenue last year and help offset the double shock of the coronavirus pandemic and downward slide in oil prices, the government tripled taxes on goods and services to 15%, which led to a rise in inflation and grumblings on social media.

The Crown Prince described the tax rate as a "temporary decision" that could last from one to five years and then be lowered to between 5% and 10%. He said difficult decisions had to be made "to avoid catastrophe and create opportunities."

On relations with Washington, the prince said Saudi Arabia and the Biden administration agree on 90% of issues of mutual concern, but are in disagreement on the rest, though he did not elaborate.

He said the world is "a wide place" with many nations to build strategic ties with.

"We do not accept any external pressure or interference in our internal affairs," Prince Mohammed said.

Relationship

President Joe Biden's administration has made clear it is recalibrating the US relationship with Saudi Arabia following four years of warm times with the Trump administration. Among Biden's first decisions was ordering an end to US support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen.

The interview aired on the same day that an explosives-laden boat targeted the Saudi port of Yanbu. Yemen's Houthi rebels, who are backed by Iran, have claimed responsibility for past attacks on Saudi oil targets.

"We want good relations with Iran," Prince Mohammed said of the kingdom's top rival. Problems with Iran stem from its "negative actions," such as its nuclear program, interference in regional conflicts and ballistic missile program, he said.

The crown prince's comments on Iran were more measured than in previous years when Donald Trump was in office. Iran is currently negotiating with world powers on how it and Washington can return to the 2015 nuclear deal that the Trump administration pulled the US from.

With backing by his father, the prince has lifted the ban on women driving, curbed restrictive male guardianship laws, opened the country to cinemas and concerts, and issued directives that have dramatically dropped the kingdom's rate of executions.

"Today we cannot advance ... with the presence of extremist thought in the kingdom," he said, adding that it would hamper economic growth and development. He cautioned that any Saudi with extremist views, even if that person hasn't yet committed a crime, "is a criminal."

He attempted to put distance between the kingdom and the teachings of the late Sheikh Mohammed Ibn Abdul-Wahhab, whose ultra-conservative teachings are known as "Wahhabism" and associated with some of the most extreme interpretations of Islam.