



SOMA Digest is a subsidiary of KHAQ Press & Media Center.

### 'Autonomy is sufficient'

An American professor underscores the similarities between the Kurds and the Albanians of Kosovo in their aspirations for statehood, and their centuries' long resistance to foreign occupation.

REGION page 3

### Strength of nation

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) are in talks to unite their Peshmarga forces under the jurisdiction of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

REGION page 4

### The lost children

Halabja families continue to pray for the children they lost in the 1988 chemical bombardment after 21-year-old Ali Asmin returned to find his biological mother.

COMMUNITY page 6

### Redemption and resilience

The Amna Suraka stands testament to Iraqi Kurds' courage to incorporate their painful past into their promising future. The world needs to know their story.

IEWS page 11



[www.soma-digest.com](http://www.soma-digest.com)  
[editor@soma-digest.com](mailto:editor@soma-digest.com)

### GIRL POWER



## 400 valiant women serve on Kurdistan's Peshmarga forces

The women's Peshmarga forces of Kurdistan are a formidable 400 strong team that have served their country alongside the male Peshmargas during three decades of turmoil. The female Peshmargas have ensured that their presence in conflict ridden areas has been recognized as a protective force able to

secure the areas which they have been assigned to. These women Peshmargas played their role in securing terror hotspots such as Kirkuk and Khanaqeen. Their valor and bravery has earned them the respect and attention of not only the men who doubted them but the society who felt such a role was better performed by men.

## FIFA ban to hit Erbil hardest

Darya Ibrahim

SLEMANI

FIFA's decision to put an end to Iraq's participation in international tournaments will have an adverse effect on Iraqi football in general, but particularly on the progress of the Kurdistan Football Association. Critics have panned the decision as undue 'political interference'.

The FIFA Emergency Committee suspended the Iraq Football Association (IFA) last November after the Iraqi Olympic Committee dissolved the IFA and security forces seized control of its headquarters. FIFA gave 72 hours for order to be restored. The warning was not heeded and clubs and representative teams of Iraq now cannot compete in international matches.

Mahmud Aziz, Secretary of Erbil Sports Club, believes that the ban was intended to reign in the progress made so far by the Kurdistan Football Association.

He pointed out that in recent years, there had been a number of visits by teams from neighboring countries to Kurdish cities. The Kuwait Club and Palestinian Team, to name a few, had both visited Erbil, and the Swedish Club had come to Slemani to inaugurate the city's stadium. The region's capital Erbil had also extended an invitation to the Youth Football Society of Asia for training and practice.

"These events certainly motivated Baghdad to seek to place barriers in front of the Kurdistan Region's football teams, as such developments were not taking place elsewhere in Iraq," claims Aziz.

The Kurdistan Football Association has held many meetings with the Iraqi Football Association to find a way to reverse FIFA's decision.

"We have contacted former IFA members, who are trying hard to reverse the de-

cision even though they no longer have any authority," says Aziz. "We have also made contact with the new IFA. The decision is unfair, but at least we can still participate in domestic Iraqi football games even if we cannot take part in the Asia championship."

Aziz believes that Erbil's team in particular will lose their capacity if they do not take part in matches, whether friendly or competitive, both at home and at the international level.

Insofar as pressure applied on the Baghdad and Kurdistan regional governments to find a solution, Aziz says: "We tried hard through the Regional Olympic Committee. We sent a delegation to Baghdad to meet with Raed Hammudi, Head of the Iraqi Football Association. Afterward, an official invitation was sent to Hammudi by Mala Bakhtiar, Head of the Regional Olympic Committee, to meet in the Kurdistan Region. All agreed that there should be cooperation among all parties. It was announced that all the problems were solved, but after Hammudi's return to Baghdad, all promises were broken."

The Asia Football Association delayed the championship by three days in the hope that the clubs of Erbil, Najaf and Nawroz would be able to take part, but in vain.

The FIFA blockage is linked to the Iraqi Olympic Association's decision to dissolve the Iraqi Football Association.

"FIFA says that the decision is meant to punish the Iraqi Football Association, including referees, teams and supervisors," says Aziz. "We will have no right to participate in any international activities until Iraq's Olympic Committee reverses their decision. Otherwise, FIFA will not change their position."

Iraq's Olympic Committee and the IFA have had a long-running dispute over who controls the game in the country.

### COOL RIDERS

Two wheelers all the rage

COMMUNITY page 8



### TURNING THE PAGE

Burning books in Kirkuk

CULTURE page 15



### HENNA HUES

Color me beautiful

CULTURE page 16



## STAFF

**PUBLISHING HOUSE:** Khak Press & Media Center

**MANAGING EDITOR:** Tanya Goudsouzian

**DEPUTY EDITOR:** Lawen A Sagerma

**COLUMNISTS:** Dr Sherko Abdullah, Agri Ismail, Dr Joseph Kechichian, Maureen McLuckie, Dr Denise Natali, Anwar M. Qaradaghi

**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:** Iason Athanasiadis, Karokh Bahjat, Linda Berglund, Devarjan Bose (New Delhi), Ilnur Cevik (Ankara), Patrick Cockburn, Thomas Davies (Damascus), Dr Rebwar Fatah, Basit Gharib, Dr Harry Hagopian (London), Hemin Hussein, Hewa Jaff, Fakhri Karim (Baghdad), Vania Karim, Namo Abdulla, Mohammed Ali Bapir, Jamal Penjweny, Asoz L. Rashid (Baghdad), Kurdawan Mohammad Saeed, Dr Tan Azad Salih, Dr Hussein Tahiri (Australia), Qubad Talabany (Washington, DC), Abdul Karim Uzery

**REPORTERS:** Awat Abdullah, Zheno Abdulla, Darya Ibrahim, Dana Hameed, Hemin Kakayi (Kirkuk), Saz Kamal, Barzan Kareem, Sazan Mandalawi (Erbil), Galawizh H. Rashid, Dana Rashid, Jen. A. Sagerma

**CULTURE WRITERS:** Roshna Rasool, Kamaran Najm

**UK CORRESPONDENTS:** Lara Fatah, Raz Jabary, Sara Naz

**LANGUAGE EDITOR:** Anwar M. Qaradaghi

**PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR:** Aram Eissa

**PHOTOGRAPHERS:** Kamaran Najm, Soran Naqshbandy

**CARTOONS:** Ako Gharib

**DIRECTOR OF DESIGN:** Darya Ibrahim

**MARKETING MANAGER AND ARCHIVES:** Brwa Abdulrahman

**CIRCULATION MANAGER:** Rashid Khidr Rashid

**WEBSITE:** Avesta Group for Software Solutions

**PRINTING HOUSE:** Hamdi Publishing House (Slemani)

Our offices are located at KHAK Press & Media Center, on Shorosh Street, Slemani, Iraq.  
Tel: 009647701570615  
Fax: 0044703532136666

SOMA Digest strives to offer its readership a broad spectrum of views on Iraqi and Kurdish affairs. As such, all opinions and views expressed in these pages belong to the writers, and do not necessarily reflect the position of the publication.

## CONTENTS

CURRENT AFFAIRS .....	3
COMMUNITY .....	6
WORD ON THE STREET .....	9
VIEWES .....	10
LETTERS .....	12
BUSINESS .....	13
CULTURE & MORE .....	15
LIFESTYLE .....	17
HISTORY .....	18
SOCIETY .....	19
CHAIKHANA .....	20

## LOST IN TRANSLATION

SOMA Digest wishes to introduce some Kurdish phrases and expressions, which the visitor to Kurdistan will find useful.

Judy Roberts, an American school teacher, has been teaching English in a school in Slemani for over a year. At the school, she has met Aso, a Kurdish colleague, and their relationship has grown and become serious enough to result in formal engagement. In this episode Judy and Aso discuss the recent Jazhni (Feast of ...) Qurban in Kurdistan.

Aso: Darling, what did you think of Jezhni Qurban?  
*Azizekem, Jezhni Qurban chon boo lelat?*

Judy: It was my second Jazhni Qurban and my fourth Jazhni here. It was a long holiday.  
*Ame duhem Jezhni Qurban u chwarrhem jehzhim bu lera. Pishuyeki*

## Kurdish for beginners

ANWAR M. QARADAGHI

*drezh bu.*

Aso: How do you compare it with the practice in the US?

*Chon legul neriti Amreka berawirdi dekait?*

Judy: Our public holidays are much shorter, such as Christmas and New Year.

*Pishua gishtiakani eme zor kort trn, weku Christmas u Sally Taza.*

Aso: What else would you like to say about our Jazhni in general?

*Che tr be gishti hez dakait bleyt sebarete be Jazhn?*

Judy: It was a good re-union with relatives and friends and useful for me as I met some more of your relatives and friends.

*Beyek gevesh tenevayeki chak bu legul xizm u dostanda u bo mnish*

*be kelk bu. Hendi xim u hawrey deqay ttom nasi.*

Aso: Thank you my darling. They were also very pleased to meet you.  
*Supas gyaneke. Awaneesh zor dix-osh bu ba nasenit.*

### Glossary of key words:

Feast - Jazhn  
Four - Chwar  
Fourth - Chwarhem  
Rest - Pishu  
Compare - Berawirdi  
With - Legal  
Short - Kort  
Shorter - Korter  
What else - Chetr  
Relative - Khzm  
Friend - Hawre  
Useful - Basud  
Thanks - Supas



## Everybody reads



An Iraqi-Kurdish Digest

To advertise in Iraqi Kurdistan's one and only English-language news digest, write to

[adverts@soma-digest.com](mailto:adverts@soma-digest.com)

[www.soma-digest.com](http://www.soma-digest.com)

# 'Autonomy is sufficient'

Kurds can develop a model political and economic society.

Lawen A. Sagerma

**SLEMANI**

**T**he US-led NATO war of liberation waged by then President Bill Clinton in Kosovo, gave some Kurds the hope that they too would see independence when the Americans came to Iraq in 2003.

Henry H. Perritt, Jr., a Professor of Law at Chicago-Kent College of Law, underscores the similarities between the Kurds and the Albanians of Kosovo in their aspirations for statehood, and their centuries' long resistance to what they have perceived as foreign occupation.

"The differences involve a much more uniformly negative view of Serbia at the time, compared to the present hopes for a unified Iraq; the strategic importance of Turkey, which is opposed to independence for Kurdistan, compared to the absence of any such power concerned with Kosovo," he said, in an interview with SOMA Digest.

There was also an absence of any real political autonomy for Kosovo at the time of the intervention compared with the existence of bonafide autonomy for Kurdistan now, he added. It is this autonomy that Perritt believes Kurds should stick with.

"At the present time, autonomy is sufficient for further political, legal, and economic development; independence now would produce regional instability and distract the Kurds from building the institu-

tions of genuine and effective self-government," he said.

Despite endemic instability in the rest of Iraq, the Kurdistan Region is relatively secure. Perritt expressed the hope that the option for independence will be given to the Kurdistan Region but warned that they must be cautious: "The move toward independence must not be precipitous lest it destabilize relations between Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq and between Kurdistan and Turkey."

"The best course is one in which Kur-

**'The best course is autonomy within Iraq...'**

distan's autonomy within Iraq is zealously guarded, in which relations between Kurdistan and Turkey are strengthened, and in which the Kurds continue to build a genuine democracy and rule of law," he said.

Iraq's protracted transition to democracy is being met with difficulties especially in terms of enforcing the rule of law. Tribal and religious leaders continue to wield a great deal of power and influence.

"The elected political leadership must have the political capital and the courage to insist that decisions be made by the formal institutions of government and not through



informal means," said Perritt.

"They must demonstrate that the formal institutions are worthy of citizen trust and respect. A good start would be for the KDP to appoint some PUK judges and for the PUK to appoint some KDP judges."

Despite efforts by the Iraqi government to push forward democracy, its successes are overshadowed by its weakness to take and be in full control of the reigns.

"For Iraq overall, the main obstacles are continued resistance by Sunni Arabs to understand that they cannot run Iraq anymore and continued ambition by Shia Arabs to run Iraq without taking into account the interests of Sunni Arabs and Kurds," he said.

Another problem plaguing the Iraqi government has been the unpredictable and violent attacks by terrorist groups operating across the country. While outsourcing has helped provide some protection, it has also been an indication of the inability of the Iraqi forces to secure their own country.

Without doubt, incidents such as the Blackwater imbroglio have tarnished both America's reputation and the strides Iraq is taking towards democracy.

"Security functions must be performed by Iraqis and not by American contractors," said Perritt. It remains to be seen whether

the Iraqi forces will be up to the challenge after the completion of the withdrawal of US troops but if recent bombings are anything to go by, Iraq needs a continued US military presence.

Perritt explains that the elections slated for March 2010 are very important in changing the political demographics of the country and a unified Kurdish front is essential.

"Kurdish candidates and representatives must present a united front with respect to maintaining the autonomy of Kurdistan, while also being flexible in seeking a mutually acceptable solution to Kirkuk," he said.

The new Iraq is still emerging, and there remain challenges to overcome. The Kurdistan Region's marked progress toward democratic governance has been a source of encouragement. As such, Perritt admits that 'destination democracy' is reachable especially with respect to Iraqi Kurdistan.

"The conditions exist within the current political autonomy, for the Kurds to develop a political and economic society that can be a model for the region. It's too early to tell whether the conditions are adequate for the same thing to happen in the rest of Iraq," he said.

# 'Kurds are fighting for land not oil'

**T**he fate of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk has been at the center of political debate for decades. But some observers believe that matters have taken a turn for the better since 2003.

"Under the dictatorship of the old regime, the city was corrupt, the inhabitants had no rights and no freedom of expression," says Ahmed Askari, a member of the Kirkuk Provincial Council. "Now people of the city have a right to choose their representatives and to speak out when they are not content with decisions made by the authorities. This is a big step."

Kirkuk took the spotlight immediately after the US-led war, when mayhem broke out throughout the city.

"Terrorists from all over the world used Iraq as a base, especially Kirkuk which is known to be multi-ethnic and as such, easy to disrupt," states Askari.

"Also, a lot of people were against peace, among them remnants of the old Iraqi regime. A lot of people were also without jobs so they were easy recruits for terrorist groups," he adds.

Al Qaeda has been blamed for much of the terrorist activity in the area, but other groups have also had a hand, some of which have links with the old regime.

## Uncertainty

The major reason for the current tension is the uncertainty of Kirkuk's future, and the opposition to Kurdish demands for the return of Kirkuk to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), explains Askari.

Some claim that Article 140 is the only real solution to resolving the Kirkuk dilemma.

"Implementation of the article needs time as it is a deep problem with historical roots dating back 40 years to the old Iraqi

regime," says Askari. "It requires a lot of time and patience. It doesn't matter how long it takes to get the article put into practice so long as we are successful."

Kirkuk is an oil-rich city which is clearly a major point in drawing interest in the city. But are the Kurds fighting for oil?

"The Kurds are fighting for land not oil. Others are standing in the way of this because of the oil," says Askari.

"The problem should be resolved internally with the people of Kirkuk reaching a solution. The UN and US can help to organize and supervise the process as they have experience with such problems."

Askari vehemently rejects allegations that Kurdish "outsiders" are moving to the area to sway the results of the referendum: "The Kurds returning to the area are the ones that were forced out by the previous Iraqi regime. Of course the numbers would

be increased now as many of these were children at the time and now have families of their own."

Kirkuk was a controversial point in the discussions of the recently approved elections law.

"Had Kirkuk not been included in the upcoming elections it would have meant that the elections were not a successful process as it would not have been a full representation of the Iraqi population as all would not have been included."

## Referendum

Asked what he hopes for Kirkuk in the next five years, Askari answers: "I hope that the referendum takes place so that the people can decide the future of their city and hopefully we will see a return of Kirkuk to the Kurdistan Region. I also hope for Kirkuk to be a place of peace and democracy with the people cooperating together to achieve this."

— BY ARIZ ASKARI  
IN KIRKUK

# Replay

"The crime committed by the Blackwater security firm occurred in 2007, when the company's personnel were granted immunity in accordance with decree no. 17 of the Interim Provisional Coalition Authority. It is for this reason that the Iraqi judiciary did not have the right to try those who committed the crime..."

**JUDGE ABDULSATTAR AL BIRQIRDAAR**, Spokesperson for the Supreme Judicial Council, on why the Iraqi judiciary did not try the Blackwater security guards.

"The figure includes both internally-displaced Iraqis and refugees outside the country in accordance to the ministry statistics. There are other families that returned to their homes but have not been registered yet. In Syria there were 215,000 Iraqis registered at the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), but now this number has decreased to 158,000. More than 3,000 efficient professionals returned, including 2,500 in the health ministry and 500 in the higher education ministry."



**ABDULSAMAD SULTAN**, Iraqi Minister of Displacement and Migration, on return of 78,000 families to their original homes during the past couple of years.

Work is underway to unite the Peshmarga forces and veer them off political alignments.

## Strength of nation

Lawen A. Sagerma

### SLEMANI

**A**s a testament to the political changes occurring in the Kurdistan Region, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) are in talks to unite their armed forces (known as 'Peshmarga') under the jurisdiction of the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Peshmarga Affairs.

"The unification of the Peshmarga forces is the hope of all Kurds and is something that we are all in agreement with, us and the KDP. This is not something we have talked about only today. We have held tens of meetings on the topic over the past two years," says Mustafa Chawrush, veteran PUK Peshmarga and head of PUK's Peshmarga Organization Center in Slemani.

"Even when there were two administrations we always spoke about having one Peshmarga force. We have gone forward stage by stage and everything is ready to unite our forces," he adds.

Chawrush explains that in the last meeting of the PUK politburo, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani urged Sheikh Jafaar, Minister of Peshmarga Affairs, to hurry with the unification of the forces.

"Both PUK and KDP are more or less in agreement but when you ask for the unification of these forces, it cannot be

done in a day or two. It's going to take a lot of work," says Chawrush, adding that in the past these forces were used against one another in the civil war.

The decision for the unification is formal and the several meetings held between the two political parties suggest that much work has been done to achieve this, but Chawrush concedes that it will take three to four months for a complete implementation.

"The issue of headquarters, budget for the salaries of all the Peshmargas, administration, arms were all real concerns. We want to slowly make sure that our Peshmarga forces do not belong to a political party. We want them to be the nation's forces," he says.

"One of the reasons why it is necessary that we hurry with this unification process is because of who we are surrounded by, the terrorists, all those who do not believe in the freedom and rule of Kurds in Iraq," adds Chawrush.

### 'The Kurdistan Region has the right to its own troops; these troops are a part of Iraq's defense.'

The Americans are another reason as to why both the PUK and KDP are eager to unite their forces as Chawrush explains that the Americans have explicitly said that they will not help them unless

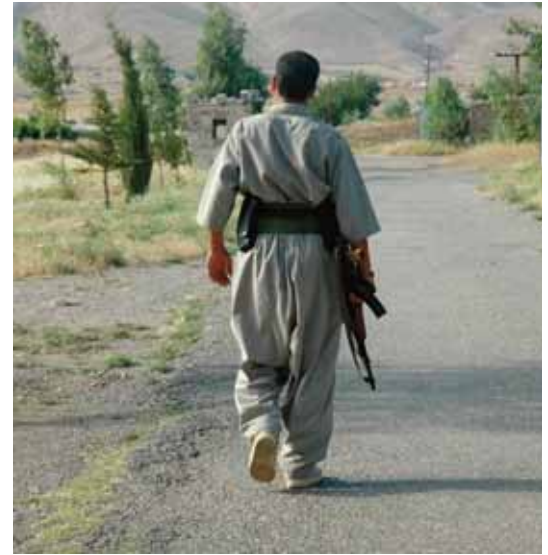
they are united.

It remains to be seen whether the practicalities of such a unification will bring about the change that moves the Peshmargas away from political alignment and more towards national alignment irrespective of political ideologies and affiliations.

"In theory we all say that the force shouldn't be politically motivated but we need to prove this in practice," maintains Chawrush.

At present, there are more than 100,000 PUK Peshmargas and roughly the same number of soldiers under KDP command. Bringing together such a vast number of Peshmargas will no doubt pose challenges, but it is the next logical step in the alliance forged between these two main Kurdish parties.

Simultaneously, the Peshmarga forces remain a contentious issue for the Iraqi federal government with many blocs refusing to acknowledge the right of the



The two Peshmarga forces of the PUK and KDP will soon be unified. (photo by Aram Eissa)

look at what they do for themselves in terms of arms and necessities," says Chawrush.

"Two years ago the federal government said that they would create two forces and that they would receive their wages in June. We have the decree which was signed by Nouri Al Maliki, the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Interior but now 2009 is over and we have received nothing," he adds.

Chawrush explains that presently Kurdish border guards are part of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense.

"We haven't separated ourselves from Iraq; it is they that work along that men-

tal. We consider ourselves as a part of the Iraqi defense," he says.

The number of Peshmargas, the budget and the creation of two forces are all issues that need to be resolved and it is said that either Maliki will visit the Kurdistan Region for this purpose in the New Year or a Kurdish delegation will go to the Iraqi capital.

"We are a part of Iraq's defense and the Kurdistan Region has the right to have its own troops and these troops are a part of Iraq's defense, they are a part of Iraq," stresses Chawrush.

Iraqi Kurds react to Turkey's ban of pro-Kurdish DTP party, claiming such measures serve to justify violence.

## Concern over DTP closure

Namo Abdulla

### ERBIL

**T**he closure of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) by Turkey's Constitutional Court on 8 December has been met with concern by the European Union and other countries around the world.

The party's closure, prompted by alleged links to Kurdish separatist rebels, has heightened the sense of anxiety and disappointment felt by Kurds in neighboring Iraq.

Iraqi Kurdish parties as well as average people have been vocal about their disapproval of Turkey's action to ban the only pro-Kurdish party in the Turkish parliament. The office of the President of Kurdistan issued the following statement: "The presidency was pleased with the recent reforms and conciliatory policies introduced by the Development and Justice

Party to engage with the Kurds and hopes that the court's decision does not derail this important process from going forward."

On 13 December, the Kurdistan Parliament held a meeting in which it also expressed its concern over the ban of the DTP.

During the meeting, outside of the parliament building in Erbil, hundreds of Kurdish demonstrators took to the streets to protest the Turkish verdict, chanting "Yes, for the unity of all Kurds."

Three days later, a larger demonstration occurred to protest the DTP ban.

Over 50 Kurdish journalists in northern Iraq have issued an appeal against the verdict of the Turkish Constitutional Court, saying that it casts doubt over the validity of Turkey's democracy and only serves to strengthen the separatist PKK's cause.

Halgurd Samad, a Kurdish journalist based in Erbil, says: "This decision legitimizes the PKK's fight; it tells Kurds

don't go to politics, you won't find anything in the political process, go to the mountains."

As Iraq's Kurds have seen their political situation improve within Iraq, their political and economic relations with Turkey have also improved. Kurdistan has proven to be a business-friendly region for over 500 Turkish firms such as Genel Energy.

But with the new verdict, observers predict a deterioration in relations between Iraq's Kurdistan and Turkey, which resumed diplomatic ties two years ago.

Omar Nuraddin, a Kurdish Member of Parliament from the Kurdistan Alliance, expressed his concern over the ban: "We hope that this decision does not reflect the Turkish government's overall position against the Kurds. Of course, anything that happens in Turkish domestic affairs between the government and Turkey's Kurds will directly affect relations between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Turkish Government."



Having realized the negative impacts of the Turkish verdict, the Turkish Interior Minister Basir Attalal did not leave much time pass before visiting the Kurdistan Region two weeks after the DTP closure. Attalal met with both the President of the Kurdistan Region Massoud Barzani and Prime Minister Barham Salih.

Twana Ahmad, Press Secretary of the KRG Prime Minister, told SOMA Digest that Turkey's Interior Minister and Prime Minister Salih encouraged free trade between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan.

"The Turkish Interior Minister consid-

ered this visit to be very important. Prime Minister Salih, for his part, asserted that the Kurdistan Region should not be used as a doorway through which any group makes cross border assaults," said Ahmad.

The closure of the DTP comes at a time when Turkey is trying to open a consulate in Kurdistan. Turkey has long asked Iraqi Kurds to assist in the fight against the Kurdish rebels of the PKK who are based in northern Iraq's mountains. However, the Kurds have said they cannot cooperate, claiming it is beyond their capability.

# A common destiny

American author maintains that only compromise by all parties can yield solution to Iraq's problems.

Lawen A. Sagerma

**SLEMANI**

The Americans were hailed as heroes as they came and rid Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of a dictator that had tormented his people for over 35 years. But this war of liberation soon became more complicated as the country descended into chaos and became a hotbed for terrorists that took the opportunity to further destabilize the situation.

"The proximate cause for Iraq's travail after Saddam's overthrow was the theological idiocy of the American neo-conservatives who induced George W. Bush to go to war in the first place. They knew next to nothing about Iraq and succeeded in sidelining those Americans who did," said Jonathon Randal, author of *'After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness? My Encounters with Kurdistan'* and a former foreign correspondent for the Washington Post for nearly 30 years.

"What passed for serious post-war plan-



Jonathon Randal

ning was deliberately overlooked. That was a formula for disaster. But the real cause of the post-war disorder was the 35-year-long Baath party rule which extinguished whatever slight democratic traditions had ever existed in Iraq -- and they were slight indeed," he added.

Randal also explained that a further complication was the Americans' inability to hold out any "carrots whatsoever to the Sunni Arabs [which] meant [that] those who traditionally had run the show in Iraq felt that armed resistance was worthwhile, indeed a necessity."

Many have linked the terrorism in Iraq to Al Qaida insurgents who opposed the American-led invasion and now seek to weak as much havoc as possible.

"I have always thought that Al Qaida in Mesopotamia was basically a franchise operation which waxed and waned without real direction from Al Qaida 'central' run by Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden," said Randal, adding that this does not mean that Al Qaida in Iraq is a 'toothless tiger' but rather that their 'operations are relatively few and aimed at undermining the [Prime Minister Nouri Al] Maliki government."

Iraq has always been a divided country, religiously (Sunni, Shiite), on an identity

basis (Arab, Kurd etc) and differ greatly on ideologies. As such, there is inevitably a real concern for a unification to stabilize the country or real national reconciliation. But Randal is optimistic.

"The British stitched together Iraq out of disparate Ottoman Wilayets, but nearly a century of cohabitation, even one marked by so much barbarity, does mean that the various parts have come to share a common destiny. I realize that many Iraqi Kurds will disagree violently," he said.

While it remains a Kurdish dream that one day there will be an independent Kurdish state, Randal concedes that this may not be a wise move.

"I do not think that independence is reasonable option for land-locked Iraqi Kurdistan no matter how much Iraqi Kurds deserve and may dream thereof. Obviously there is hope, but how much any government now can be expected to accomplish remains a conundrum," he said.

What has also endangered any progress the country has made and caused Kurds unease is the phased out withdrawal of American troops in Iraq. There is the fear that the security apparatus is not capable to deal with the predicted surge of violence that may ensue after the last American soldier leaves Iraqi soil.

"So far, everywhere except Kurdistan, Iraqis have demanded in public that the Americans leave and end the occupation. One thing seems clear: the pro-war enthusiasts who back in 2002 and 2003 thought the United States would station troops in Iraq ad infinitum were indulging in wish fulfillment," said Randal.

"They pointed to the presence of American troops in Germany and Japan more than a half century years after the end of World War Two and assumed once in Iraq the American military would never leave," he said.

**Echoes of Vietnam**

Randal explains however that a more realistic assessment was to be found in American views of Vietnam.

"The USA got out of Vietnam in 1975 and Americans forgot the Vietnam conflict for a generation," he pointed out.

The issues of Abu Ghraib, Haditha, Blackwater and to a lesser extent Guantanamo enraged Arabs around the world and more so Iraqis at home and were quite possibly the ingredients in the strengthening of anti American sentiments.

"I somehow feel that the principal and negative impact of Abu Ghraib, Blackwater and Guantanamo was on America's reputation at home and among its allies as the bulwark of human rights," said Randal.

"Perhaps cynically, I would argue that Iraqis of all walks of life and all religious and ethnic backgrounds looked on those excesses as hardened survivors of even worse excesses that they had endured during 35 years of Baath party rule."

Randal added that this was not to 'to ex-



cause the short-sighted brutality of the United States. Rather it is testimony to the Iraqi genetic code long used to violent misrule."

Iraq or the Kurdistan Region cannot be mentioned without the issue of Kirkuk and Article 140. As it stands, Kurds have made the most concessions on the article and its implementation seems to have hit a dead end.

"Article 140 and the whole Kirkuk problem are so fraught with emotion and political complications that by now any sensible observer would be tempted to conclude that only a thorough political compromise could start to solve the problems involved," said Randal.

"No party is going to get everything it feels is its due. And that is embarrassing for Kurdish leaders who have nailed their colors to the Kirkuk mast," he added.

Despite the bloodbath in the rest of the country the Kurdistan Region has managed to come out of the liberation process relatively unscathed and acts of terrorism are a rarity.

"The Kurds so far have managed to avoid the worst violence largely because the principle struggle for power has been played out among Iraqi Arabs, Shiite and Sunni," said Randal.

He added: "The principal reasons terrorism has been limited in the KRG areas is a) the Kurds have fought a 'forward' war in Mosul and elsewhere and b) [Kurdistan President Massoud] Barzani and [Iraqi President Jalal] Talabani at long last decided to operate in different arenas rather than continue to fight for supremacy in Kurdistan."

'Article 140 and Kirkuk are so fraught with emotion that any observer would conclude that only compromise could solve the problems involved...'

music  
**YOUR**  
Way  
FM  
www.x-fm.net  
Your Kurdish-English radio station

# COMMUNITY | LOCAL NEWS & PERSONALITIES

## XFM plays music your way

A brand new English radio station is bringing in the listeners in Slemani. Staffed with talented young music lovers, XFM offers good entertainment, interesting information and even comedic adverts with their two stars 'Aba and Raza' who have quickly achieved stardom, locally at least.

Rawand Karadaghi, manager and owner of XFM, said that the station has great ambitions to help bridge the gap between foreign and Kurdish cultures.

So far, the radio station only covers the city of Slemani but there are plans to air in the rest of the Kurdistan Region and 105.7FM will soon be available in Erbil. To interact with listeners, they have launched their own website ([www.x-fm.com](http://www.x-fm.com)) and created a Facebook group where fans have shown their support.

The station plays up-to-date music and all new releases are available with the top 10 and top 40 played weekly.

The main language of presentation is in English as large numbers of Kurds have returned from abroad. Karadaghi aims to use music and entertainment to narrow the social gap between locals and returnees.

As the programs available on XFM are mainly in English, some might feel marginalized because not everyone in the Kurdistan Region is fluent in English. However, XFM aims to familiarize locals with the English language and there is Kurdish input in their programs.

Shalaw Ahmad, presenter of the upcoming morning show, says that he aims to inform the local youth about music, and to show them that there is a wider range of music available besides hip-hop and R&B.

Most of XFM's staff have returned from abroad themselves and understand all too well the cultural barriers.

Tawar Rashid, co-presenter of the R&B show, says: "I think XFM is a way for young people to get their voice heard and tell the world what it is they really want and need."

XFM plans to have at least five hours of live programming a day in the New Year, in which listeners can participate by calling in.

Kurdoz Salih, co-presenter of both the R&B and Hip-Hop shows, says: "I want to entertain the youth of Kurdistan and keep them updated on music, and I am really excited about our big plans for the future."

— BY LAVA TALABANY  
IN SLEMANI

Halabja families hope to find the children they lost in 1988 bombings.

## The lost children

Awara Jumaa

### HALABJA

She saw her mother on the ground, lifeless. Assuming she was dead, 11-year-old Azheen Faqradeen took her six-month-old brother in her arms and went to look for her father. She never found him.

Faqradeen Salim Hama Yusuf was not in the city at the time of the attacks, he recounts, but he returned to find his wife in a precarious mental state, informing him that their two children had gone missing.

"The gases had made her unconscious and she wasn't aware of her surroundings even when she did come round," he says.

"One family had said that they had seen my daughter with my son in her arms and they had assumed that my wife was dead. The family said they heard my daughter say to my son: 'Mom is dead, I'm going to take us to dad.'"

### No doubt they are still alive

Yusuf has heard nothing of his two young children since that day, but he has no doubt in his mind that they are still alive.

"I don't think they are dead. I still believe that they are alive. News of my children had reached me that they had

been seen in Bu Ali Hospital in Iran, and had been with a known charitable person who had said she wouldn't give them to anyone but their family," he says.

Yusuf explains that there was renewed hope when Ali Asmin, hailed as 'the lost son of Halabja', was found last month.

"I haven't ever been hopeless in finding my children, but when Ali was found, it gave me even greater hope for finding my children," he said.

Yusuf believes that although the Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs has offered some help, they haven't been as effective as he would have liked. However, he hopes that the return of Ali will improve their efforts in finding the other lost children.

Alwan Ali lost four siblings during the chemical bombardment of Halabja in 1988 but she is adamant that they are still alive.

"I know for sure that my siblings were alive because up until Kirmashan in the hospital they were with us, and in regards to their health, they were really well. However after they were taken by one of the nurses, they did not return and were lost," she recalls.

"After the chemical bombardment we started making our way to Iran. The children were washed at the hospital and their names were registered."



**Hope after tragedy.** The atrocity of Halabja continues to haunt the residents of the chemical bombed town who lost their loved ones. (photo by Aram Eissa)



**The lost children.** The families of those who have lost their children frame their pictures on the wall and believe that they will one day return. Alwan Ali who lost four of her siblings is hopeful after the return of Ali. (photo by Mibraban Salam)

Ali lost both her parents in the chemical attacks on Halabja and her grandfather assumed the role of parent. She recounts that even up to the uprising in 1991 her grandfather continuously searched for her lost brothers and sisters.

"In 1991 we finally lost hope that we would ever find our lost children," she says.

The return of Ali Asmin ignited much hope for those families who continue the search for their lost children.

"My brother has come back from Europe and now with Ali and a group of representatives they have gone to Iran to try and find the lost children of the chemical bombardment of Halabja," says Ali.

Finding Ali was an initiative of the former Minister of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs but their efforts seem to have been in vain as many concede it is not enough.

"I don't feel as though they have done anything to help find our children, but I really hope that the sixth cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government will now take a serious step in doing what they can in their power to help find the lost children," says Ali.

### More will be found

"After Ali was found I thought that one of our children had returned; it made no difference. All that was important was that a lost child from Halabja had returned and it gave us hope that many more will be found," she adds.

Araz Abid Akram, vice president of the committee for those affected by the chemical warfare on the city of Halabja, explains that when they were formed in

1993 the first thing they asked of the government back then was to help find the lost children of Halabja. The last count added up to 42 lost children.

"At that time the Ministry of Martyrs had not been established and the Kurdistan Regional Government did not have strong relations with other countries such as Iran in order to ask them for help to find the lost children," he says.

### Media must raise awareness

"We have visited Iran many times and spoken with members of the Iranian

government concerning the lost children. We had asked that through their media they increase awareness and help in finding the children. They agreed but we later saw that what was promised had not been carried out," laments Akram.

Akram is even less satisfied with the work of the KRG and its Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs.

"There were no more officials left that we hadn't asked for help from but they kept none of their promises. Ali gave us hope that there are children who were lost but who are still alive, and this was a wake-up call for the government."

According to Akram, finding Ali was proof for the government that their demands were not for nothing and that they were right in attempting to find the lost children.

"Now, on the demands of the families of the people of Halabja, Hero Ibrahim Ahmed has created a board using the KurdSat channel to visit Tehran to create a network and relations between the media here and there," says Akram.

'After Ali was found, it gave us hope that many more of our lost children would return to us...'



Kurdish asylum seekers forcibly removed from UK.

# Booted out

Raz Jabary

LONDON

**F**ifty young Kurdish refugees living in the UK were deported to the Kurdistan Region on 17 December 2009 by British authorities in a move expected to coincide with the recent tightening of the country's immigration policies. The British government now considers the Kurdistan Region in Iraq to be relatively safe and stable and therefore does not see the necessity in granting a large proportion of refugees from the region the status of citizenship.

The travel advice given by the British Foreign & Commonwealth Office makes a clear distinction between the Kurdistan Region and the rest of Iraq, describing 'a continuing high threat of terrorism throughout the country except in the Kurdish Region.' Nevertheless, Kirkuk is not regarded as inclusive to this exception.

Serkawt Ali, 23, arrived in the UK in 2003 after fleeing Kirkuk from the scene of the Iraq war. His father was killed in 2004 in a terrorist bomb attack.

"The authorities here know of my father's assassination. It serves as proof of the kind of personal dangers I would have been exposed to in Kirkuk," says Serkawt. Still, Serkawt has not yet been granted the status of 'indefinite leave' which would authorize his permanent stay in the country.

"There are no human rights in this country with regards to refugees as opposed to other main EU countries," says Serkawt.

He criticizes the British authorities: "Some young desperate refugees are not granted a work permit. What are they

supposed to do? How does the government ensure that these men do not end up in the illegal trade to make a living?"

Ever since he left his hometown, Serkawt has not seen his family and wishes to one day see his mother – now a widow – again. Recently, Serkawt even had a one-to-one meeting with his constituency Member of Parliament John Butterfill, attempting to make progress on his case. His scenario is a

**'How does the gov't ensure that these men do not end up in the illegal trade to make a living?'**

valid representation of those faced by many similar young Kurdish men who are in personal disarray.

Mariwan Azad Mahmoud, 26, was one of the 50 Kurdish refugees who were put on a plane back to the Kurdistan Region. Mariwan had been in the UK from 2000. He was working – without a permit – in a food outlet in Bournemouth when immigration officers entered the premises and put him in captivity.

A source close to Mariwan who wishes to remain unidentified tells of how he spoke to him on the phone before he was put on the plane.

"He was being held in a cell and told me he was planning to hang himself,"

the source says, indicating the young man's sheer desperation with the prospect of 'removal'.

There have been reports that members of the ASAISH, the Kurdistan security forces, have been involved in forcefully dragging resistant returnees off planes arriving in the Kurdistan Region from the UK, sometimes allegedly by means of violence.

Ahmed Mahmoud (unrelated to Mariwan Azad), 30, arrived in the UK as a refugee and is now a British citizen. He says he is 'disgusted' by the rumours of the way of handling by the ASAISH forces.

"It is far from being acceptable behavior," he remarks.

Ahmed further criticizes what he terms as being the 'ill-fated efforts' by the British immigration authorities in lumping together cases from the three northern Iraqi governorates of the Kurdistan Region as opposed to those from the Kirkuk governorate, saying "cases vary greatly from individual to individual, independent of geographical location. Someone from Kirkuk could face a different threat than someone from Sharazur or Chamchamal, but both have very real and valid reasons for being granted the right to be harbored safely in the UK."

Many of the refugees arriving in the UK from the Kurdistan Region are young men looking for a way to financially sustain themselves and their families back home. Despite this the British government has been regarded as being adamant in enforcing less strict policies towards refugees arriving from the same districts but as families – often with small children – compared to individual asylum seekers.

The matter of immigration is currently a very dominant topic in the UK, seemingly further emphasized now due to the upcoming general elections planned for May 2010.

Indeed, the ruling Labor Party's adoption of a tougher stance on immigration with the elections just around the corner is believed to have had some effect. A poll conducted by the Guardian newspaper published on 15 December 2009 showed Labor closing in on the Conservatives with only a gap consisting of single figures remaining.

Voters' general impatience with what they believe to be the ineffective tackling of the problem has nationally fuelled favorite perceptions of the British National Party (BNP), often referred to and regarded by other political parties – including the Labor Party – to be 'fascist' in nature.

Immigration is the major subject by which the BNP likes to distinguish itself from the other parties, claiming to be the 'only party opposing mass immigration to the UK,' as stated in its 2007 manifesto which is still in employment.

Estimates of the total number of ethnic Kurds in the UK have remained vague so far, worsened by the non existence of a 'Kurdish passport'. This number ranges from 70,000 as claimed in the 'Communities in Britain' book series to 100,000 according to the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) and Council of Europe.

**Help us help the Children**

With 18 years of experience we know how you can make a difference

Find out how to help on [www.ksc-kcf.org](http://www.ksc-kcf.org)

# Cool riders

Two wheelers are all the rage in the region's capital Erbil.

"The average ages of those that come to buy motorcycles range between 18 and 55 years of age," he says.

In the market, there are a number of new bicycles and motorbikes displayed inside the showrooms, and in front of the shops are the second-hand bikes. This not so subtle separation illustrates the difference in the price ranges of the new and used bikes.

The most expensive motorbike on the market has a price tag of US\$30,000, and is known as the 'Oday', named after the son of the former dictator of Iraq, possibly an allusion to the man's taste for extravagance and speed.

In the same market, there are others especially the second hand ones that sell for as little as US\$200. There are many mechanics available, not only to fix and check the motorbikes but to aid in assembling them. Everything one could possibly need for their motorbike can be found in this market.

## Shipped from China

Most of these bikes are shipped over from China to Basra and then transported overland to the region's capital, Erbil.

According to Karim Oman, another motorcycle merchant, those who purchase motorbikes from Erbil aren't always residents of the area.

"It is an open market and we get many people from all over the Iraqi region from Kirkuk, Slemani, Salahadin and other areas that come especially for the motorbikes," he says.

In regards laws and guarantees for motorcycles, Ahmed says: "There are no

guarantees. Any motorbike that is brought comes with a form, which is filled in, and a copy of the identification card of the buyer. The form and a copy of the identification card are taken to the Vehicle Registration office." This is all the paperwork that is involved for a purchase of those mode of transport.

There are many motor transportation vehicles that are available in this same market for all types of uses and ages. Quad bikes have also become a popular buy on the market.

"I want to buy this for my 18 year old son as we have a big area of land and it's good for him to keep busy. I much rather he has the quad bike to ride than a motorbike that he would take onto the dangerous roads," says Mam Ali.

It is more common to see motorbikes on the roads of Erbil where the roads are better than those in Slemani, for instance. But problems arise with the buying and selling of second-hand bikes as Ahmed explains.

"Sometimes a bike is stolen in one city and is brought to Erbil to be sold on the second-hand range, and this causes a lot of chaos once it's sold and later known to be stolen," he says. "The issue here is that due to the low price it's sold, many do not ask for the paperwork and this is why problems arise."

The market is not only full of prospective buyers, but also those who wish to 'window shop' or experience what it's like and see the art of mechanics displayed on the market.



Demand is on the rise for motorcycles in the Kurdistan Region. The vehicles are mostly shipped from China, complete with all the paperwork, to Basra. They are then taken overland to Erbil.

## Roshna Rasool

### ERBIL

The city of Erbil has become a source for bicycle and motorcycle lovers who feel that two wheels are much cooler than four.

Those merchants that sell these vehicles do so in the bazaars which are opened mostly on Fridays, despite most places being closed on this day as it is a day of rest in the country.

Kawa Ahmed, a motorcycle vendor, explains that people of all ages and backgrounds come to buy from him.

## We were promised jetpacks



### THE BORNE IDENTITY

AGRI ISMAIL

This is my last column of the decade. That struck me, for some reason, for the very first time today. I remember sitting on the floor of my friend's house in the early hours of new year's day 1990 reading comics and whispering, with the sort of amazed anticipation we had for the prospect of another Star Wars-movie, that in another 10 years it will be the year 2000! Surely by the mythical 2000, we would have the hoverboard from Back to the Future II, flying cars and various jetpacks at our disposal.

Then, the year 2000 came. After the

celebrations, I was sitting in a café on the Champs Elysees drinking a Coke that cost a whopping 76 Francs with some friends, the faint ghost of a hang-over beginning to haunt my head in that gradual crescendo that accompany all hauntings. By this time that most anticipated of films, the Phantom Menace, had turned out to be both boring and incomprehensible, and no flying cars had materialized although there was this newfangled thing called the Internet. We used to hang out in chat rooms and talk to strangers. We surfed the web using HotBot and Altavista. My e-mail address at the time was something like

1764133.1762@compuserve.com. I had 14 mp3s on my computer, which took about an hour each to download on the boxy modem. I had a mobile phone the size of a brick. We had six months before we would graduate from high school and have to enter the Real World. The first half of the next decade was spent at university, which we thought was adult life but really wasn't. While in Sweden at the won-

derful university of Linköping, we had a university broadband network so fast that to this day, a decade later, my internet in London is still slower. I remember the first time I saw the download speed reach 800 kb/s. Google took over from Yahoo as my main search engine.

Napster came, changed the world of internet sharing forever, and went. At one point I had an AIM account, an ICQ account and an MSN account simultaneously. The possibility of downloading movies and watching them on one's laptop became a reality.

In Iraq, mobile phones and internet cafés began connecting us to our friends and families again. Then three planes crashed into three buildings and changed the world forever.

We've always heard people say things like "where were you when Kennedy got shot?" and here we were with our own historical focal point. The following years, I heard of people sitting in cafés in Vietnam where there was applause at the attack, to people changing the channel in a Burger King to watch the news only to have a worker change it back to MTV because "that's the channel we have to

show". Me? I was sitting on my living room floor in Sweden after having received a phone call from my aunt. I switched on just before the second plane hit. Of course, there was one moment this decade that rivaled 9/11 in its importance as far as I'm concerned, and that was Operation Iraqi Freedom. We forget how well it all started. How a lot of people as well as the world's media were seeing it as a Good Thing. Then, of course, came the numerous blunders. Blackwater. Abu Ghraib. The lack of WMD's. Still, back in 1999, could anyone have hoped to see the day that Saddam Hussein was no longer in power? And while you think about that, think about this: Mam Jalal is now the President of the Republic of Iraq. Can you believe it? Could that have been imagined 10 years ago? The day of his inauguration I went to one of the student bars in Linköping to have a celebratory drink. A Kurdish man had just become president. If that's not something to one day tell the grandkids, I don't know what is. It's difficult to come to terms with, but all of this had happened before Facebook was created. Even YouTube didn't exist be-

fore 2005. So the second half of this decade saw WiFi enter our homes, saw the internet become a place to get lost in for hours. We suddenly started to pay a lot of attention to Paris Hilton, though nobody can still understand why. We found out, after 20 years, that the Scourge of the Jedi was that Anakin killed a couple of children. Deep Throat came out of the closet. George W Bush, who had gotten re-elected to the great shock of the rest of the world, was continuing his decline into unpopularity. Saddam Hussein was, after a mismanaged and rather botched trial, executed in a way that was also mismanaged. I moved to Baghdad, then to Dubai, then to Suly and finally to London. Adult life, completely different from student life, had finally arrived. There was Harry Potter and Twilight. The iPhone made it possible to check e-mails while on your way to work. I tried and failed to understand Twitter. Obama got elected. Rage Against the Machine became the UK's Christmas number one. But we still don't have any jetpacks. And, as the name of a very good Scottish indie band indicates, we were promised jetpacks.

# Word on the street

**Aram Eissa** asks average Kurds their thoughts on the dissolution of the Iraq Football Association and what their take is on sports in Iraq in general.



**Kale Ali 38, (athlete)**  
 What do you make of the decision?  
 "I think the decision came more from a political and tribal source and not a from a sports mind because everyone knows very well that Iraq has progressed and needs more attention not more neglect."  
 What do you make of sports in Iraq?  
 "Everyone says that sport has progressed but I think the progress is little in comparison to all those youngsters who dedicate themselves to sports especially young women. The government should take into consideration that we almost have no social problems like those in the past."



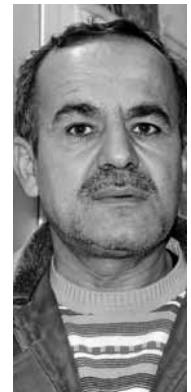
**Ibrahim Qasim 49, (head of Kurdistan Football Association)**  
 What do you make of the decision?  
 "This decision will affect every single individual in football in Iraq. The Olympic Union must be independent and this decision should be canceled then the old union should come back."  
 What do you make of sports in Iraq?  
 "I think all the different sports must be supported equally but this depends on the people who encourage that particular sport. I think now people realize what sports they like to do or watch so it is up to them."



**Salah Muhammad 60 (international referee)**  
 What do you make of the decision?  
 "The decision to dissolve the Football Association is not practical; it is a very quick decision and not an official one. This has disadvantages for Iraqi sport and especially for Kurdistan's sport which will mean Erbil's players can't participate."  
 What do you make of sports in Iraq?  
 "Sport is progressing, our stadiums are rebuilt and in Slemani alone we have four stadiums, which are exemplary in the whole of Iraq. In addition our players are participating in international games."



**Sherwan Kamal 35 (referee)**  
 What do you make of the decision?  
 "The political decisions will have a big impact on sports. FIFA's decision is correct, but it should have excluded Erbil Club and allowed them to participate in the Asia Championships as they have been preparing themselves for a long time."  
 What do you make of sports in Iraq?  
 "Sport in Slemani is lagging behind Erbil and Dohuk which is caused by the lack of a suitable budget for Slemani's club. But Erbil and Dohuk are supported by the political parties."



**Fazil Abdulrahman 52, (civil servant)**  
 What do you make of the decision?  
 "I'm very sad about the decision but it is a conflict between Hussen Said and Ahmed Razi but there is a hand of the government in it also. I do think that FIFA's decision is 100 percent right. Until the elections, the situation should remain like this."  
 What do you make of sports in Iraq?  
 "We say that sport has progressed but sports are not only for males as unfortunately female participation in sports has been delayed. Seminars and sports gatherings should be held for that purpose and also financial support must be provided."



**Sardar Hama 48, (football player)**  
 What do you make of the decision?  
 "FIFA's decision is right 100 percent because the government has mixed politics with sport; tribal conflicts have entered into sport too. They don't want Erbil clubs to go outside and participate because they envy that Erbil has become the sports gate of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region."  
 What do you make of sports in Iraq?  
 "The Ministry of Sports is not doing and hasn't done any important achievements in sports; the progress that came to sport especially in football is because of the Iraqi political and international situations."



**Rekan Kamal 20, (sports institute student)**  
 What do you make of the decision?  
 "This is a political decision and politics shouldn't have a place in sports. This will be of a great disadvantage to Erbil because Erbil's clubs have long been trying very hard to progress."  
 What do you make of sports in Iraq?  
 "The government doesn't support the sports clubs enough and the organizations don't support the national teams enough either."



**Bakhtiar Muhammad 52, (retired teacher)**  
 What do you make of the decision?  
 "The government can't interfere in sports affairs. This is political interference which will make the situation worse so I think it should carry out elections in the Unions without governmental interference in the process."  
 What do you make of sports in Iraq?  
 "The progress of sports is related to the support it receives from the government. The government has not provided enough equipment and there are not enough halls and stadiums for practicing which has also had a negative impact on sports in the country."

## VIEWS | EDITORIALS & COMMENTARY

# THE KIRKUK QUESTION

NAMO ABDULLA

**A**fter many parliament sessions, the passage of the election law was made possible through US pressure on the Kurdish leadership to compromise over the extra parliament seats. The Kurds agreed to gain fewer seats than what they thought they were entitled to. In return for this Kurdish concession, the White House expressed its support for the implementation of Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution.

US support for Article 140 is seen by Kurds as US support for the annexation of Kirkuk to the Kurdistan Region. Whether or not the US will keep its promise does not change the fact that Iraq's security and its politics are still dependent on the United States. The difficulties that the passage of the election law entailed also displayed how unlikely it was for Iraqis to be able to solve their difference on their own.

Iraq's Vice-President Tariq Al Hashimi, the main representative of the Sunnis in Iraq's politics, vetoed the first approval of the election project because he thought it did not grant enough seats to expatriate Iraqis. Most of the Iraqis living abroad are Sunni Arabs who fled from the country in protest over what they perceive is the Shiite domination of Iraq in 2003. Throughout the modern history of Iraq, the country had been

dominated by Sunni Arabs.

The Kurds objected to the second proposal of the election law on grounds that the 50 additional seats had been unfairly distributed against the Kurdish governorates. They questioned why a Sunni-Arab populated province like Mosul were granted 12 additional seats, while no extra seat was assigned to Slemani, a Kurdish populated province.

The political battle over the parliament seats were mainly fought between the Sunnis and Kurds. The Kurds were the second powerful group in Iraq after the Shiites thanks to the Sunni boycott of the 2005 elections. But this time the Sunnis, as their population is almost equal to that of the Kurds, want to replace the Kurds. Even one seat could play a decisive role in the Sunni-Kurd struggle to become second and, in turn, win the office of the president of the Republic of Iraq.

The Kurds have already backed down for a US promise of Kirkuk. The Kurdish compromise showed two things. First, that the Kurds still trust the Americans more than they do any other Iraqi. They still believe that their being openly pro-America and pro-West makes them more favored by America. Secondly, Kirkuk was more important for the Kurds than having better representation in Baghdad.

While drawing down violence and restoring normalcy to Iraq had topped former president George W. Bush's agenda since the overthrow of the late dictator Saddam Hussein, Kirkuk is expected to take political center-stage for Obama in his dealing with post-2010-election Iraq.

Kirkuk is a multi-ethnic province inhabited by Kurds, Arabs and Turcomans. It is also home to 25 percent of Iraq's oil reserves. It has often been considered a "ticking time bomb" that could explode anytime if wrongly handled. One living in Kirkuk or familiar with the city's people knows that the residents there have no problem with each other. The problem has been politicized by political figures.

The Arab elites of the city, backed by the Shiite-led central government, and Turcoman leaders, aided by Turkey, have a fairly similar view on Kirkuk. Instead of formulating a clear policy for Kirkuk, they are opposed to its annexation to the Kurdistan Region. Both Turkey and the Baghdad government fear a scenario whereby the Kurds would declare independence as soon as they control Kirkuk's oil.

The Kurds have a similarly narrow view. They follow a blind ethno-nationalist rhetoric, that is, Kirkuk should return to Kurdistan. They have done so, instead of proposing fair arguments and to convince the Kirkukis to favor Kurdistan. The Kurds should abandon this way of speaking and free Kirkukis to decide about the future of their city whether they want to join Kurdistan or not.

The main reason why opposing parties do not approve of Kirkuk becoming part of

Kurdistan is due to the city's oil reserves. However, on 1 July 2009, the Kurds assured everyone that they are ready to end even their ownership over their oil reserves just for the sake of the resolution of Iraq's problems. They allowed the production of the oil of its two main reserves of Tawke and Taq-Taq to be distributed by the central government equally to all Iraqis. If Kirkuk gets annexed to Kurdistan, the KRG should still allow the central government to be responsible for all oil matters. This should be set by the law.

However, for the Kurds, Kirkuk is not only about oil. It is more symbolic. It stands for their honor and dignity. It is the issue of a land for which thousands of Kurds have perished throughout the last 50 years on order by successive Arab-dominated gov-

ernments in Iraq. If the Kurds could make concessions over anything, it is unlikely they would abandon Kirkuk.

Kirkuk cannot be left unresolved by the Americans. Doing so could bring disastrous consequences. On the other hand, the second major ethnic group of Iraq, the Kurds, cannot be ignored. This issue would delay US withdrawal, if a quick solution is not found. The best and easiest way for US President Barack Obama is to be frank with all Iraqis and persuade everyone that it is in their best interest to respect the constitution of their country.

*Namo Abdulla is an Erbil-based journalist and editor-in-chief of Hawler Tribune (htribune.net) online newspaper.*



## Sectarian warning signs



### DEMOCRACY IN IRAQ

DR JOSEPH KECHICHIAN

**W**hen the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Berri, called on his government to form a National Committee to Abolish Sectarianism in the country's political life, ostensibly to rid the Land of the Cedars from this ugly legacy, many called foul. Similarly, when the public was told that another mass grave was discovered west of Kirkuk, or when fresh attacks against civilians, allegedly committed by elements disguised as Iraqi security forces, Iraqis were rightfully horrified. What is one to make of this renewed emphasis on sectarianism, whether in Lebanon, Iraq, or elsewhere throughout the Muslim World? What would it take to alter

existing compacts that prevent political evolutions, precisely to avoid mass graves, and perpetual conflicts?

In many ways, Iraq and Lebanon resemble each other, although the latter's endowments are more modest. Naturally, the major difference between the two countries must hover around the practice of civil wars, an established and sad reality for Lebanon throughout contemporary history. With weak central authority, Lebanon's 18 recognized religious communities honed the art of individualism, which literally prevented the creation of a nation even if existing institutions guaranteed basic freedoms. In Iraq, under the monarchy, military regimes as well as the previous dictatorship, sectarianism was practiced with a vengeance even if it was always hidden behind lofty rhetoric. Few were empowered to offer alternatives since no one dared to speak of reconciliation. No one could admit to the existence of sectarian problems because everyone shared a common destiny.

Yet, and just like Lebanon, Iraq is composed of various religious and ethnic communities with common as well as divergent interests. It seems elementary that Iraqi politicians should be aware of existing divergences precisely to avoid the type of catastrophes that the Lebanese lived through.

Truth be told, Iraqis cannot afford political divisions that threaten to separate citizens from one another, and it seems that the mass graves or bombing attacks will not end until such time when officials will address basic ethnic and religious concerns. On the contrary, unless Baghdad adopts fresh initiatives, the potential for an all-out civil war in Iraq cannot be ruled out.

How could Iraqis avoid a potential civil war in the months and years to come as occupying forces gradually withdraw? While what follows might be an optimistic proposition, the time is most propitious for Baghdad to call for a Constitutional Compact, similar to the 1989 Ta'if Accord for Lebanon, which proposed to abolish political sectarianism. Of course, the Lebanese postponed Ta'if's application sine die, which is the reason why their national reconciliation is in the doldrums, something Iraqis may wish to avoid. What is sorely needed in Baghdad is for the leadership to appreciate how nefarious sectarian mobilization can be as the country emerges from decades of warfare. Courageous voices to eliminate domestic privileges are seldom heard but that is exactly what Iraq could use these days. Inasmuch as the public is against the idea of abolishing sectarianism, Iraqi leaders must refrain from stroking the egos of advocates who sponsor sectarian divisions. To be sure, some support such methods on the grounds that political parties

defend communal interests while, in reality, they only do so to preserve positions of power or promote narrow objectives.

If Lebanese sectarian politicians call for abolishing sectarianism, their Iraqi counterparts promote policies that ensure sectarian differences, which cannot be good for the country.

In electoral maneuvers or various appointments, considerable suspicions are generated, with leaders questioning each others' motives and long-term goals. As Iraq witnessed recently, sophisticated death squads have spread havoc, further inflaming sectarian fighting. Inasmuch as the purpose of these death squad killings is to undermine the public's confidence in its own security forces, Baghdad confronted an impossible dilemma.

By purging thousands of "suspect" security forces from the nascent and still largely haphazard Iraqi Army and police, Baghdad cleansed the ranks according to ethnic and religious criteria, which prevented reconciliation. Needless to say, such steps are not conducive to effective nation building, because those who were dismissed formed a ready-pool of putative militiamen capable and willing to oppose the state. Iraqi Sunnis in particular feel increasingly disenfranchised, while Shiites desperately try to avoid sectarian violence, even if blaming recent attacks on "tribal disputes" clarifies little.

At this stage of Iraq's nascent democratization efforts, it may be useful to carefully study the situation in Lebanon. Calls for secularism, which would presumably abolish sectarianism, are not popular in Beirut because Lebanese politicians never bothered to create the necessary domestic consensus after the Ta'if Accords were signed. Baghdad may wish to embark on the opposite track, to build up genuine consensus that no arms must be tolerated in the hands of any sect or militia, if the country is to contemplate a secular model. Can Iraqi leaders identify clear objectives, avoid suspicious motives, and reject the sectarian option?

While it is a fact that Shiite Iraqis are a majority, "numerical democracy" is always a short-term phenomenon, which engenders political opposition. A more effective democracy, even a sectarian one during interim periods, is one that enhances minority perceptions of full justice regardless of sect or ethnicity. The Iraqi political establishment can avoid future mass graves and death squad attacks, or a myriad bombings, by adopting a visionary post-sectarian country that would promote secularism without neglecting private ethnic and religious affiliations.

*Dr Kechichian is an expert in Gulf Arab affairs and author of several books.*

# REDEMPTION AND RESILIENCE IN THE RED JAIL

The Amna Suraka complex stands testament to Iraqi Kurds' courage to incorporate their painful past into their promising future. The world needs to know their story.

DR CYNTHIA P. SCHNEIDER

The shell of a building that dominates the entrance to the Amna Suraka complex was illuminated with streaks of light, reminiscent of the bars of the cells once housed there, as the voice of an elderly woman broke the night. In the performance that marked the finale of the momentous first day of the First Annual Post War Arts Festival in Slemani, the mother of the Festival's organizer, British Kurdish artist Adalet Garmiany, revealed that she and Adalet had lived as refugees in this shattered building during the mid 1990s while Adalet was an art student. As had happened to so many other Kurds, their home in Kirkuk had been razed by Baathist forces. Although after 1991 they had been freed of the systematic persecution perpetrated by Saddam Hussein, the Garmiany's had no place to live. Demonstrating the astounding resilience that I came to associate with Kurdistan during my five day visit there in early November, the Garmiany's lived in deprivation for two years – no water, electricity, or even window panes to protect them – so that Adalet could finish his studies. What a powerful act of redemption to reclaim that same shell of a building as the dramatic backdrop for a performance that captured both the pain of the past and the hope for the future! And, standing among the spectators were the people who enabled the refugees to return to Kirkuk – Shanaz Ibrahim Ahmed and her sister Hero. When she read about the plight of refugees such as Adalet and his mother, Shanaz Ibrahim Ahmed set about raising the funds to build houses for them. Through her leadership a hundred families were able to move into new homes in Kirkuk.

Although extraordinarily moving, the story of Adalet Garmiany and his family's return to Slemani is not exceptional in Iraqi Kurdistan. Time and again I heard of people who had fled Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the 1980s to rebuild their lives from scratch in different parts of Europe, only to abandon it all to return to the Kurdistan Region to begin all over again after the fall of Saddam in 2003. Many more who were unable to flee the country kept rebuilding and moving within Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, living as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) or within the collective towns built by Saddam Hussein to keep a watch on the Kurdish people. Kurdistan seems to possess in abundance what southern Iraq so sorely lacks: a sense of unified identity. This is hardly surprising, given the people of Kurdistan's common history and background, as opposed to the patchwork of ethnic and religious diversity within the country whose borders were drawn by the British. Still, it is regrettable that more of the good news of Kurdistan's revival and renewal does not reach the outside world (or at least, the U.S. media).

Nothing personifies the dual qualities of redemption and resilience that characterized Kurdistan for me more than the reclamation of the infamous Red Jail as a museum and historical site. It is truisms that to reclaim history, to move beyond a painful past, one must first face that history, understand it, and preserve it as a lesson for future generations. The Amna Suraka complex accomplishes all these goals brilliantly. I was fortunate to have the honor of being introduced to the Amna Suraka by Lady Hero who described in detail how the prisoners were rounded up, taken secretly to the Baath security headquarters that was the Red Jail, and held there often for years on end. She showed us the small cells into which dozens of people, including women and children were crammed. She pointed out the cruel bureaucratic precision of the "family portraits" taken systematically of families outside their houses before they were taken away to be incarcerated, usually for no offense other than presenting a perceived threat to Saddam's government. A guide, who himself had been tortured in the Red Jail before 1991 when Kurdish fighters expelled the Baath army from Kurdistan, detailed the horrors that took place in the sound proof torture chambers.

Alongside these painful, but important reminders of Kurdistan's past, are galleries which house collections of clothes and other artifacts that tell the story of the society and customs of the Kurdistan Region, as well as a large gallery exhibiting contemporary art. While many of the works referenced aspects of Kurdistan's troubled history, just as many offered hope for the future, often in whimsical or witty artistic language. Zana Rasul's installation piece of bullet boxes and books (with an excellent commentary by Alan Attoof) moved me with its eloquent references to the violence that has overshadowed life in Iraqi Kurdistan for so long, the efforts of Saddam to destroy Kurdish culture and memory, but also to the resilience of the people of Kurdistan. The same boxes that carried bullets used to kill them were salvaged as bookshelves by students from Kurdistan.

The newly opened American University of Iraq-Slemani, further testifies to the renewal of Kurdistan. Legend has it that Prime Minister Barham Salih said as the bombs began to fall on Baghdad in 2003, "When this is all over, we will build an American University in Slemani." True to his word, Salih has been the driving force behind the American University of Iraq-Slemani (AUI-S), currently housed in temporary quarters, but destined to move to a new site, where it will be able to accommodate some 5,000 students. Unlike other universities in the region and in Iraq, the AUI-S is based on American liberal arts education, where courses are taught in English and where students are required to think critically and independently. The larger goal of AUI-S is to develop a civically engaged citizenry

capable of fueling economic and political progress.

AUI-S is operated as a meritocracy; anyone who has the potential can apply and succeed, provided he or she is willing to work hard to maintain the school's high standards. Acting Vice Chancellor, Professor Josh Mitchell (someone I am proud to call a colleague from Georgetown University) illustrates the significance of a merit-based university with two stories. One is that the member of the cleaning staff who spoke English so well that Prof. Mitchell persuaded him to apply to the University. Not only was he accepted, but the young man now aspires to study at Georgetown University in Washington DC. Additionally, Prof. Mitchell speaks with pride about the 16 percent rate of failure among the students. While it may seem odd to celebrate failure, Prof. Mitchell takes this as proof that the students' work is the only criterion on which they are judged. Everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed; no one is advantaged by their family or other connections. Prof. Mitchell believes, and I could not agree more, that this type of meritocracy is essential for the future economic and political health of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The signs of progress that are everywhere in Slemani also have a potential downside: the inevitable clash between modernity and tradition. What will be the future of society in Iraqi Kurdistan? A modernized version of Islam, tempered by the experiences of the people from the Diaspora who are returning home? Or the more traditional society that still condones forced marriages and honor killings? Will social mores around marriage adjust to accommodate the accomplished young women from the Diaspora

who were educated in European universities and those who will be graduating from universities in Iraqi Kurdistan in the future? A good sign is that these issues are aired in the open. An extremely powerful PSA (public service announcement) produced by the NGO Heartland Alliance condemns forced marriages through a heart wrenching video that compares forced marriages to imprisonment (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UU98YTHprc>). The PSA addresses the issue of forced marriages in human terms, and urges families of Kurdistan not to condemn their sisters and daughters to this fate. It is a brave and powerful message.

Finally, Slemani is known as the cultural capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, but people I met there, including artists, felt that the city had lost momentum in this regard. Artists felt uncertain about their future without a stronger artistic climate, community, or market. Hero Ibrahim Ahmed is an extraordinary patron, supporting young, avant garde artists as well as more established ones, but she cannot single-handedly support the arts in her region. Within the group of arts and cultural leaders invited for the Post War Arts Festival, were gallery owners from Iran and Turkey who had helped spearhead independent artists' movements in their countries. Their experiences might be helpful to artists in Iraqi Kurdistan. Hopefully, in future years, the Post War Arts Festival, and its speakers and guests, will interact more directly with the artists in Slemani, and exchange ideas about how to nurture artistic communities. That the Post War Arts Festival took place at all – and its success owed much to the support of Hero Ibrahim Ahmed, Khak Press and Media

Center, and the regional government (as well as the U.S. government which provided funds for the American invitees) – attests to the importance of culture in Slemani.

With all of the new construction in Slemani, a program that has worked well in the U.S. – the 2 percent program – might help jump start the artistic community in Slemani as well as beautify the city and foster national pride. According to this program, 2 percent (or less) of the total construction costs of new buildings in certain cities and states of the U.S. must be dedicated to newly commissioned art in and around the building. Typically, the "2 percent law" is enacted by urban mayors and applies to all new buildings – public and private. Additionally, simply refurbishing new government-sponsored buildings and complexes (such as the American University in Slemani) with works by living artists from Slemani and other parts of Kurdistan would pump much needed funds into the artistic economy.

I returned from my first visit to Kurdistan moved by the extraordinary resilience of its people, and full of admiration for their courage in incorporating their painful past into their promising future through the Amna Suraka complex. It is a story that needs to be told around the world, but especially in America, where little is known about the part of Iraq where not one person has been killed in conflict since 2003.

*Cynthia P. Schneider, PhD, is a distinguished professor in the practice of diplomacy at Georgetown University, and a Senior Non Resident Fellow at the Brookings Institution.*



# IDES OF MARCH

Many Kurds fear that the introduction of the Change Party will diminish the Kurdish position in Baghdad.

## ASOS ASKARI

After much deliberation, opposition and confusion, the Iraqi national elections are due to be held on 7 March 2010. The purpose of these elections is to determine the 325 members of the Council of Representatives of Iraq.

The membership of the Council of Representatives currently stands at 275 members and will increase to 325 so as to ensure that "all groups of Iraq's population are represented." The elections are seen as a crucial step to ensure that Iraq continues with its transition from dictatorial rule to democracy. The White House has described it as a "decisive moment for Iraq's democracy."

The elections were originally scheduled for mid January 2010, after an election law was passed by a majority in the Council of Representatives in November 2009. It took more than two months to obtain a qualifying majority, delaying the process severely. Furthermore, vice-president Tariq Al Hashimi used a veto to ensure that the election law was not passed straight away.

The vice-president only withdrew his veto when a deal was reached which he believed to be fair (to address Sunni Arab discontent) but many believe that it was only because of pressure from the United Nations and in particular, the United States, that the parties unanimously agreed to hold elections in 2010.

The proposed voting system is scheduled to be an "open list" system, which means that voters will have some influence on the order in which a party's or faction's candi-

dates are elected. This is in stark contrast to the closed list which was used in the last national elections, wherein voters voted directly for the party and did not have much influence on which of the party's candidates would represent them.

The issue of Kirkuk has been at the centre of Kurdish politics, with a vast majority of the Kurdish population believing that Kirkuk should be a part of Iraqi Kurdistan. There have been countless delays, cancellations and withdrawals by different groups when the issue of elections has come up in respect to Kirkuk. Arab and Turkomen groups wanted to give Kirkuk a "special election" to determine its fate but the Kurds have been against this from the outset.

The issue of Kirkuk and other disputed territories, such as Mosul, will only be provisionally decided, subject to an investiga-

Although the Kurds have adopted policy as per Iraqi law, the deadlines on Kirkuk have continually been ignored.

tion by a committee of the electoral commission. From a Kurdish point of view, it would seem that the Arabs, Turkomen and foreign powers do not want to see Kirkuk fall under the banner of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Although the Kurds have continually adopted and carried out policy in accordance with Iraqi law and the constitution, the deadlines on Kirkuk have continually been ignored with many factions ensuring an election did not take place, in fear of Kurdish success. I truly believe that if all the oil in Kirkuk dried out tomorrow, those who

oppose Kurdish rights over Kirkuk would not be as vocal when stating their opinion against elections and referendums, which they have done since 2003. Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution states that a referendum in Kirkuk should be carried out to determine whether Kirkuk (and other disputed areas) should be part of the KRG but to date no such referendum has taken place.

To many Kurds who live abroad, elections and in particular voting, does not have the same aura it once did. After the fall of Saddam Hussein and the subsequent national elections in Iraq, many Kurds went to the polling stations in many different countries. I went to vote in Manchester, England with family and friends. Every person I spoke to was not only happy to vote but felt that it was their right and their duty to fellow Kurds to vote. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case.

Many are disillusioned with not only the elections but with the whole political process in Kurdistan and Iraq. While acknowledging that progress has been made, many believe that the Kurdish administration led by the PUK and KDP did not reach its full potential (as they believed that the future offered so much more). Now, with the introduction of the Change Party (Goran), many see the Kurdish vote as a diluted vote and one which will no longer carry the same power it once did.

The fear is that the interests of the PUK/KDP alliance and that of Change will not coincide and lead to those who oppose the Kurdistan Region to exploit it. The people I have spoken to since the last election are in the belief that even if they did vote, their votes would not count and would therefore be meaningless. The problem with Iraqi politics is that there is so much mistrust and lack of transparency that many Kurds abroad believe that there is a huge chance for electoral fraud.

It is my view that although many of the Kurds abroad do not participate in politics, it is not for want of trying. Some Kurds abroad feel as if they have been abandoned but if given the opportunity, they would once again go to the ballot boxes in the same spirit as they did in the previous national election.

Whatever the outcome, there are going to be winners and losers but one thing is for certain: if Iraq truly wants to show itself as a democratic country in the Middle East, it must ensure that these elections are safe and just for voters and also show that Iraq is finally able to conduct its own affairs. Iraq as a country will need to show that it has and is attempting to neutralize the sectarian divide, for if it does not, then Iraq as a whole will ultimately suffer.

## LETTERS

### Lost and found

I was touched upon reading your report about young Ali Asmin, who tracked down his birth mother 21 years after they were separated during the chemical bombings of Halabja in 1988. I can only imagine the emotions felt by his mother, who had thought her son dead all these years. But I wish that a little more had been written about his adoptive mother, who gave the boy love and shelter all these years. Moreover, I sincerely hope that the Kurdish authorities are sparing no effort to locate the town's other lost sons, whose families have never given up on them.

Name withheld  
LONDON

I was equally delighted to learn how proud she is of her Kurdish origins, despite the fact that she has been raised outside of a Kurdish milieu and has had very little contact with Kurdish customs. I think the Kurdish people would be happy to welcome her to Kurdistan if she is serious about her intentions to explore her roots. May she achieve greater success in the coming years. And may I take the opportunity to convey my heartfelt thanks to the team behind SOMA Digest for a job well done.

Janna Shahbazi  
DUBAI



### A Kurdish superstar

Thank you for the interview with Rania Kurdi featured in your last issue ("Rania Kurdi: I'm proud of my name" p.6 issue #65). I'm a great fan of Ms Kurdi's, and I believe she is a great role model for young women in the region. She is by far a more respectable alternative to the more raunchy stars who have risen to fame in this region by exploiting their bodies. She stands for what a genuine female artist should be about; her art and not her sexuality.

### CONTACT US

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Want to be published in SOMA? We'd really like to know what you're thinking. If you've got a comment on one of our stories, or about an important issue, simply email it to:

[editor@soma-digest.com](mailto:editor@soma-digest.com)

Letters may be edited for purposes of space, clarity and decency.




When it comes to news we don't monkey around

[www.soma-digest.com](http://www.soma-digest.com)

# BUSINESS | INVESTMENTS & MARKET NEWS

## Banking on progress. Iraq's banking system needs a complete overhaul.

Few would dispute that America's war in Iraq has been good for business. Seven years after the US-led invasion ousted the former regime, Baghdad is seeking to pass laws to strengthen the country's economy, and no effort is spared in wooing foreign companies to form joint ventures with state-owned enterprises, mainly in the oil sector.

"Iraq's economy is based on a single product structure; oil. The revenue is then allocated to different sectors on a pro-rata basis," said Hawre Riwandizi, Marketing Executive of Crescent Petroleum Company.

However, at a time when giant energy corporations around the world are busy developing alternatives, most experts are calling for greater efforts to "diversify" Iraq's economy.

"Oil will cease to be the sole source of energy one day. If we continue to have this economy until then, we may all be broke the next morning! The fact is that Iraq has multiple resources that can be assembled to construct a sound and thriving economy. To name a few, agriculture, minerals, tourism and water resources," said Riwandizi.

The post-2003 leadership of Iraq has inherited a socialist economy that adopted extremely centralized methods of planning, where the capital plans, allocates and implements all service and development projects on behalf of all regions and provinces.

"This has partially worked under the former regime simply because the central power was not open for regional or provincial inputs," said Riwandizi.

Additionally, all economic practices were exerted on strengthening the political and economical grip of a certain political group. "With the advent of a democratic era, it was quickly understood that developmental needs vary from place to place and hence the need for a bottom-up planning process emerged as a necessity," said Riwandizi.

Iraq's GDP is incapable of achieving growth, as most of the national budget is allocated for the Operational Budget. The Capital Expenditure Budget is roughly 30 percent of the Total Budget. This is partially due to the inflated workforce of the government.

"To break this cycle, the government needs to stimulate the economy through encouraging Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the economy, whereby such workforce can be rehabilitated and trained to work in a different setup for the private sector," said Riwandizi.

The national budget must also be lib-

erated from Iraq's exaggerated subsidy system, he said, allowing for more funds to be available to the government to enter into Public Private Partnerships (PPPs).

"As in any free-market oriented economy, the government should monitor and administer those investors for their performance and certain regulations need to be passed to enhance this model," he said. "The KRG's Investment Law is one of these steps that need to be replicated in the rest of the country."

Ensuring stability and security is paramount to luring investors especially in a conflict ridden country like Iraq.

"Security is the most important element for any potential investment. When security provision becomes a budgetary burden on projects, it also creates a psychological deterrence, repelling investors from having on-ground presence in insecure areas," said Riwandizi. "Security has been one of the cornerstones of business growth in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq."

Riwandizi explained that as in any other process, transparency and accountability need to be realized before any action becomes tagged democratic. "There are currently parliamentary committees to oversee and participate in the budgetary process at the INA level. Nevertheless, insufficient and limited information that is made available to the public results in a budget which lacks the priorities and demands of the most important stakeholder in the governance portfolio of the government, the public."

Riwandizi pointed out that all basic service projects need to be addressed and implemented to ensure a social welfare system for Iraqis.

"The financing of those projects should be devised in a way to ensure affordability by average citizens and quality of services," he said.

The absence of a viable banking system has become an obstacle to economic growth for Iraq. According to Riwandizi, Iraq's banking system needs to be rehabilitated on par with the conditions prior to Saddam Hussein's rule.

"The banking system is, in fact, the flesh and blood of a robust economy. There are various banking institutions in Iraq that compete to deliver the best available services, yet the need for a contemporary and efficient banking system has never been greater than it is today."

— BY VANIA KAREEM  
IN SLEMANI



## Be our guest. Hotels in the Kurdistan Region reach for the stars.

Galawizh H. Rashid & Jen A. Sagerma

**SLEMANI**  
As the city of Slemani expands to meet the needs of a growing population, local businessmen attribute much of the progress and development to the stable security conditions in the Kurdistan Region.

Farouq Mala Mustafa, owner of Asiaceil and Slemani's five-star Millennium Hotel, also highlights a significant elevation in living standards, which has raised the bar for the service industry in general.

As such, the hotel business has become a highly competitive sector. At present, there are at least 100 hotels in the whole province of Slemani with 15 of them in Dukan and one in Rania. Some of these have been around since the establishment of the no-fly-zone in 1991, while roughly 75 percent opened after the ousting of the Baathist regime in 2003. The newer ones naturally offer more in the way of luxury, which has compelled the older ones to upgrade their services if they intend to compete and survive. The bulk of the clientele is no longer comprised of refugees, war-worn journalists or aid workers. Today's hotel guests are mostly foreign dignitaries, businessmen, tourists and even well-to-do families from other parts of the country.

"The hotel business in Kurdistan is lucrative now. There are people who want to

enjoy life and can afford to enjoy their stay inside Kurdistan," explains Mustafa.

No effort was spared by the Investment Board in Kurdistan to ensure that all new hotel projects meet the highest standards, says Mustafa. At the heart of this approach is the knowledge that these new ventures could otherwise never succeed, as the objective is to lure international firms to invest in the Kurdistan Region.

The owner of what could possibly become Slemani's grandest hotel cites the Lalezar, a boutique hotel in the Sar Chnar neighborhood, as the "classiest" hotel in Slemani at present.

### Bigger and better

"Lalezar is possibly the classiest hotel and restaurant right now in Slemani but it is next to none. We need more. Clients are demanding bigger and better," says Mustafa, who welcomes healthy competition in the sector.

A greater variety of quality hotels can help boost the number of visitors to the region, as well as upping the type of visitors. This is what revitalizing the sector is all about, says Mustafa.

Although the progress of development is clearly evident throughout the Kurdistan Region especially in the capital Erbil, Mustafa claims that he wants to do something different in his hometown.

The Millennium Hotel is currently under

construction over an area of 100 acres. It will consist of 270 rooms and suites, three or four cafés, five restaurants, a sports center, one main conference hall which will hold up to 1,000 guests, and another hall with a capacity of about 400 guests.

The Millennium franchise exists in more than 130 countries. More than 3,000 international designers are involved in this project, most of whom are English.

"We have dealt with more than 15 countries in the Middle East as far as quality contents, services and size to be able consider it a five-star hotel. We are monitoring everything carefully," says Mustafa.

The Millennium Hotel, as far as Mustafa is concerned, has been compared to the seven-star Burj Al Arab in Dubai: "I would consider it on par with the Burj Al Arab. The only difference is that instead of being surrounded by water, it is set against a mountainous landscape."

### Raising the bar

Lalezar is a recent addition to the list of hotels in the city of Slemani and it has, by all accounts, raised the bar in terms of hotel standards in the Kurdistan Region.

Silvan H. Jamal, Manager of the Lalezar Hotel, explains that he felt some things were missing in other hotels.

"The lobby is the central place of any hotel and requires a great deal of attention for it to become an ideal place where people can meet and get a service," he says.

No doubt, much attention to detail has gone into the family-run Lalezar for it to have become the highest standard hotel in the city. For his part, Jamal expressed the hope that other similar caliber hotels would soon crop up so as to "encourage tourism and the economy in the Kurdistan Region."

The Lalezar has 22 standard rooms and three suites with in-built Jacuzzis.

"Most rooms have a balcony to enjoy the view, which is important as people don't pay to stare at a blank wall," adds Jamal.

The rooms have a Scandinavian influence using good quality wooden furniture and an earthy color scheme. The finishings around the hotel are immaculate, unlike other hotels in the Kurdistan Region. The

## A greater variety of quality hotels can help boost the number of visitors to the region, and revitalize tourism.

hotel also offers a steam room, sauna, gym and restaurant.

This could set the ball rolling as most concur that the Lalezar is way ahead of the competition in the area.

"We had marble brought in from India, tiles from Dubai, lighting from Turkey, and numerous other decorative features from India, China, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Australia. Anything I couldn't find I had made specially using local carpenters and iron mongers," he explains.

# Legal barrels.

## Without an oil and gas law, Iraqi economy will continue to languish.

Zheno Abdulla

**SLEMANI**

The Iraqi budget for the New Year is nearly US\$70 billion, 90 percent of which is dependent on the export of oil. Nearly US\$20 billion will be in deficit.

One of the most important points economic analysts always draw attention to is that Iraq depends completely on the export of oil but the problem lies in the fact that oil prices are unstable in the international markets. The budget specialized for progressing oil production was US\$6 billion in 2008 and if one looks to Iraq's current year's selling chart, one can see that the price of oil has increased from US\$37 to US\$71 barrels per day (bpd).

Iraq's export rate has not changed reasonably over the last four years, which is a big problem for the country's economy that lacks a strong infrastructure. Some commentators referring to the situation when the exports stopped put the blame on the faulty policy of Oil Minister Dr. Hussein Al Shahrastani, who seems to be supported by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki.

Dr. Ali Hussen Balu, Head of the Oil and Gas Committee in the Iraqi Parliament, explains that more than 70 members of the Iraqi Parliament have submitted to withdraw confidence from Shahrastani, the Oil Minister.

"In the last few years, the export rate has not increased even though a lot of money has been spent in that sector," he points out.

The issue of a vote of no confidence for Shahrastani will be discussed again in the very near future, he adds.

Increasing the export rate will have a significant impact on the budget of Iraq for 2010 which is supposed to price a barrel of oil at US\$62 with an output of 2,000,100 bpd. But Balu explains that this rate is subject to change as oil prices are not stable and are dependent on the global economic situation.

The deficiency amount is evaluated at 21,682,000,00 Iraqi Dinars (ID) and 23 percent of the general budget has been allocated to the investment budget which amounts to nearly 23 trillion ID. The Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) share of the general budget is 17 percent which amounts to approximately

### Iraq's export rate has not changed reasonably over the last four years, which poses a problem



10,233,732,000,00 ID but some commentators claim that unnamed parties in Iraq are calling for the regional government's portion to be decreased because their seats in next year's parliament will be reduced.

"Certain parties are talking about the new number of regional seats in the Iraqi Parliament and saying that we have 43 seats out of 325 which makes up 13 percent of the seats in parliament but we are depending on the previous decision during Ayad Allawi's governance which allocated 17 percent of the Iraqi budget for the Kurdistan Region," says Dr Ismael Shukir, Deputy of the Finance Committee in the Iraqi Representative Assembly.

"It is impossible to let the regional portion be reduced from 17 percent and we, the Kurdistan List, reject any attempts to do this," he adds.

Sami Atushi, a member of the Finance Committee, explains that Kurds only have one note on the current Iraqi budget, which is supported by a decision by the minister of oil which says: "Any region or province that has an impact on reducing the budget

or increasing oil export should be compensated from their budget."

It is obvious that this point refers to the Kurdistan Region because it stopped exporting oil into the international ports from mid September. At the time, this was at the rate of more than 100,000 barrels a day and was supposed to have increased to 250,000 barrels a day.

**Oil export problem**

The regional oil export problem is not new. It began with the start of the oil contracts and now the central government has announced that it won't pay portions to oil companies which, as per the Kurdistan Region's oil contracts, must be paid by the government from the export money. This caused the Kurdistan Region to stop its oil exports in mid September of 2009.

This will have a direct impact on Iraqi oil exports. According to predictions, the Kurdistan Region's production should be 450,000 barrels a day but the Iraqi oil proposals will not reach 2,100,000 barrels a day if the Kurdistan Region's production is stopped.

"It is hard for Iraq to export that amount without the Kurdistan Region's production and while the world is in an economic crisis, the price of oil will not be stable until that crisis is solved," says Balu.

**Pressure from US, UN**

The oil problem in Iraq will be solved by an oil and gas law as well as a law for distributing the budget in Iraq which for the last five years has not progressed. Some people hold that the first barrier to solving those problems is Shahrastani and those who are close to Nouri Al Maliki.

For his part, Balu believes that there is a lot of international pressure especially from the United States and the United Nations to agree on a law with the Kurdistan Regional Government.

"If that law is enacted then the oil sector will progress in Iraq generally and in the Kurdistan Region especially, because there are many oil companies that work in the region and have presented their proposals," says Balu, who also believes that Shahrastani is the main obstacle in front of the law.

'Circumstances in Kurdistan are suitable for attracting businesses.'

**SINAN AL CHALABI**, Kurdistan regional trade minister, stressing the need for cooperation with international communities on the occasion of a ceramics fair held in Erbil last month.

'Missan's share of water through the Tigris River should be 180 cubic meters per second, but it receives only 40.'

**HASSAB LAZIM**, Head of Missan's Agricultural Committee, on lack of water causing 20 percent reduction of farmed areas in Missan.

'Iraqi traders have suffered a lot throughout this year because of the lack of a clear picture of the nature of the Iraqi economy and its duality - capitalism and socialism. Non distribution of the 2009 budget has affected Iraqi traders. Some companies have gone bankrupt and had to sell their assets to pay off their debts...'

**ABDULRAZEQ AL ZUHARI**, Head of the Iraqi Chambers of Commerce, on dual Iraqi economy and non-distribution of 2009 budget causing heavy losses to traders.

'There are no plans by the agriculture ministry in brotherly Iraq to stop granting licenses for Iraqis importing Jordanian agricultural products.'

**SAEED AL MASRY**, Jordanian Agriculture Minister, on Iraqi market remaining open for Jordanian agro-products.

'The public sector will not develop without cooperation and partnership with the private sector.'

**NOURI AL MALIKI**, Iraqi PM, on cooperation between public and private sectors.

'The budget to develop provinces allocated to Basra which reach 220 billion Iraqi dinars for 2010... is not enough to rehabilitate electricity stations. There are three plans or legislations if adopted the situation in Basra will be very good...'



**SHELTAGH ABOUD**, Basra Governor, claiming that Basra's share of the budget does not suit its population nor its economic and geographic importance.

'These allocations are very small compared to what those provinces need.'

**KAREEM MOHSEN**, Iraqi MP, criticizing 2010 federal budget for allocating inadequate funds to provinces.

'The project's first stage will last until 2011. The first team is for legislative reform, the second for institutional reform, the third for private sector reform, and the fourth for investment circulation.'

**ABDULHUSSEIN AL ANBAKI**, Iraqi PM's economic advisor, on plans to shift Iraq to market economy.

# Culture

INSIDE

Color me beautiful  
with natural henna

ROSHNA RASOOL IN SLEMANI

□ FILMS □ MUSIC □ LITERATURE □ HERITAGE

## Kirkukis famed for syrupy sweet *kahee*

**I**t is a traditional dish that is normally eaten in the mornings as breakfast with *kaymagh*, a very thick cream. *Kahee* is still made in the city of Kirkuk and many enjoy it as their morning treat.

Wasta Mohammed, 28, has been making *kahee* in Kirkuk for the past seven years.

"*Kahee* is made from dough of normal flour, oil, water, yeast, salt and a bit of bicarbonate of soda. Once the dough is made, it is left for an hour to rise. Then, it is kneaded with oil and cut into different pieces," he explained.

"The *kahee* pieces are baked in the oven and glazed with syrup before they are served to customers."

Many visitors that come to Kirkuk do not go home without buying *kahee*. The *kahee* shops even receive customers from Tikrit, Diyala and the cities of the middle and south of Iraq.

The traditional food is very much a hit with residents and visitors.

"Every time I come to Kirkuk I go and eat *kahee* because it is delicious. Although there is *kahee* in Erbil, the ones in Kirkuk have a distinctive taste. I always take some home with me," said 34-year-old Sangar Osman.

Ali Abdulla, 40, concurs: "Every morning I come to this shop and eat it with *kaymagh*. I meet so many people from the other cities of the Kurdistan Region here and I have formed so many new friendships."

One piece of *kahee* costs a mere 750 Iraqi Dinars (ID) and more than 1,000 pieces are sold in all of Kirkuk daily especially during the holidays.

"*Kahee* is a strong and calorie-packed breakfast, which is great fuel especially for the laborers," said 52-year-old Muhammaed Mustafa, a *kahee* shop owner.

In Kirkuk alone, there are more than 20 shops that are specialized in making *kahee*. Some are owned by Kurds, others by Arabs or Turkmen. The most popular *kahee* shop is called *Kahee Al-Bahir*, which is owned by a Turkman.

Of course, not everyone is a fan of *kahee*.

As Ari Ata puts it: "I'm very surprised that they eat all that fat and sweet together, I think they will be sick."

— BY AWARA JUMAA  
IN KIRKUK



The former Baath regime's attack on Kurdish bookshops and literature has left its mark on the city of Kirkuk. Many students of the city lament that they cannot find suitable Kurdish sources. (photo by Dastan Nouri)

## Burning books in Kirkuk

Six years after the ouster of the Baathists, Kirkuk residents continue to suffer the consequences of the regime's attack on Kurdish literature.

Awara Jumaa

KIRKUK

**A**s progressive journalism developed in the city of Kirkuk, the Kurdish press centers played a crucial role in promoting intellectual advancement in the city.

Alongside journalistic growth, book shops were a very common place for selling newspapers, books and other publications. They had a significant impact on encouraging literacy and increasing the number of readers in the city.

If one looks to the history of journalism and press in the city of Kirkuk, it is clear that there were attempts to serve the city's information needs. With publications in circulation, there arose a need for a place to gather and access various reading material and possibly even to hold discussions.

Libraries were the only places that could serve this function. They quickly became popular venues where Kirkuk's educated classes would gather and hold discussions on a host of issues. Natu-

rally it was not long before these kiosks became targets of the former Baath regime.

The libraries were a good excuse for the regime to arrest the owners and close or burn down their libraries. Umar Bekas and Jabar Aso, both owners of shops selling Kurdish literature, were frequently arrested by the regime and were always hounded by the government. Their families also suffered as a consequence. Selling Kurdish books was something of a crime back then.

Another method utilized by the former regime in their attempt to reduce the number of educated people was to change the names of Kurdish libraries so that there was no indication whatsoever over what purpose that edifice served, and as such, reducing the number of customers for Kurdish books.

Abbasi Hirni, Asriya, Umar Bekas, Hamid Batasi were among the 36 bookshops in the city that had a positive impact on the residents of Kirkuk until they were persecuted. Now only a handful of them remain.

"I'm very sad that we don't have many Kurdish bookshops in the city anymore and this is a big factor in the

decrease in Kurdish readers," said Hewa Hasan, a university student who laments that it is sad that students have to depend on other sources rather than Kurdish ones because of the difficulties in locating good Kurdish sources.

"If we need to find sources for our research, we have to search on the inter-

net which is not good because most of the net libraries are not reliable," said Sozan Sherwan, a student of the college of education in the University of Kirkuk. She, too, is saddened over the lack of Kurdish bookshops in the city.

The public library in Kirkuk is an old one and doesn't contain much Kurdish sources.

"When the Baath regime came to power, it employed every method to erase the city's reality and history by changing cultures, languages and names of schools, even the names of the

districts, then the bookshops and finally it changed the name of the city from Kirkuk to Ta'mem meaning nationalization," said Arf Qurbani, a Kurdish journalist and writer.

Qurbani believes that the former regime reached its final and very dangerous limit when they tried to change the national identity of the city.

"It started with a very dangerous step which I think was the worst and this was through destroying Kirkuk's individuality by banning them from education," he said.

"When someone went to a library to borrow a Kurdish book they were told that that particular book had already been taken out by another reader when it actually was not and just kept in storage."

Qurbani recounts that this eventually culminated into a ban of sorts over Kurdish books.

The Baathists removed all Kurdish books from the library and put a ban on Kurdish books in the bazaar.

"After a period of time, they transferred all Kurdish books from the general library and put a ban on Kurdish books in the bazaar citing different excuses and then forced them to close the Kurdish bookshops altogether."

Qurbani believes that a chauvinistic Arab mentality has had a devastating impact on the city. Even six years after the liberation process, no more than two Kurdish bookshops can be found in Kirkuk, he pointed out, ruefully.

## Color me beautiful

Natural henna is preferred over chemical dyes.

### Roshna Rasool

#### SLEMANI

**G**listening in the sun, it is a beautiful burnt orange shade but a darker red or a deep purple are also options that are available to Kurdish women who use henna on their hair in their quest to emulate the look of Indian actresses.

According to some women, many years ago, before conditioners and dyes came to the Kurdistan Region, women used henna on their hair for these purposes.

Henna is made from dried henna leaves which are ground into powder. Henna is a beauty product popularly used throughout the region for its healthy properties.

Jamal Ahmed, a shopkeeper, spoke of the types of henna available in the bazaars: "There are those which are naturally made from the real leaves; however there are some that look like henna powder but contain more chemicals. The 'milkthwar' and 'gul' henna are the original types."

Ahmed added that 500mg of milkthwar henna sells for a reasonable 1,500 Iraqi Dinars (ID) in the bazaar.

Nasika Omar, a housewife, explained that she has been using henna frequently for

10 years: "It's more sensitive to my scalp and is more natural, and the colour I achieve is like an aubergine colour which I like."

Sawen Bakir, a retired beautician, says those who go to the salon go to get their hair dyed chemically but wouldn't go to the salon to get their hair dyed by henna: "The difference is that henna is more messy and time consuming and so it is often done at home, whereas the chemical dyes often need someone with some knowledge to do it well, and of course takes less time to achieve results."

There are some that use henna solely for the beauty benefits, but there are others who, after frequent use of henna, claim they get headaches or an itchy scalp when they stop using it. They believe the only way to relieve themselves of such irritations is to re-apply the henna. There are some women who use it solely for the pleasant smell it leaves.

The henna is made into a paste with warm water. Instead of using just normal water, some add tea or water boiled with fresh chestnut peels. This is believed to leave a richer color.

Once the paste is formed, it is applied on the hair and bound in plastic then a cloth and left for six hours or more. It is also common to leave it overnight. It doesn't cause any harm if one leaves it on for longer than eight hours and it is actually recommended that it be kept on longer for a lasting color, unlike the chemical dyes which can harm the hair and the scalp and leave an undesired color if left on for too long.

In the house, it becomes part of a love hate relationship as many women love to use it and find the smell appealing although it is common for men to hate it. In addition to its common usage as part of a beauty regimen, henna is used to celebrate matrimonial events.

## Mark of distinction

### Ancestors' tattoos now taboo.

#### Roshna Rasool

#### QALADEZE

**I**n many Kurdish villages, it is still common to find women with distinctive tattoos on their hands or even faces. In the past, women in the Kurdistan Region were skilled in drawing tattoos. Nowadays, due to the availability of new technologies in the art of tattoos, the traditional mode of application is not as commonly practiced.

The application of tattoos in the traditional Kurdish form had been common even up until the 1980s. Interestingly, tattooing was more common among women than men, and even the areas of the body where the marks were applied were different. Women would typically choose the face and hands, whereas men would usually have it on their chest and arms.

"The women who would do this in the past years were young women, often teenagers," explained Nazanin Mahmud, a village girl.

Hajia Miriam, an elderly woman, added that many of those women who got tattoos would do so during the months of spring as it was said that the weather helped in preventing infections and the area that was marked would heal quicker.

If one looks back to the previous years on how tattooing was performed, one would be surprised by its simplicity. A sewing needle or a needle of some sort was habitually used. The traditional patterns such as the dots often seen on the chin of many older females or on their foreheads were effected using that sim-

ple apparatus.

"There are many steps to take in order to achieve the final result of the required tattooing," said Hajia Miriam. "First the skin must be cleaned thoroughly. A bamboo is taken and dipped into a paste made of dried goat's milk which is mixed with ash."

This paste is placed over the desired pattern and then a needle is pricked hard onto the skin and very quickly to minimize the pain. The area needs to be stationary and the person should not move. The final color would be a bluish green shade and when done with such basic instruments, the patterns were not always clear or very complex in comparison to the tattoos of the modern age.

The popular areas for tattoos were at the end of their eyebrows, the cheeks, chin, and the back of the hand. However other areas, which were not as popular but not unheard of, were between the breasts, upper thigh, around the belly button, the back, and the arms. Often, women opted for these locations on the body so as to achieve more sex appeal for their husband. It is also said that back in the day people believed that tattoos on the body would keep away illnesses or even help cure them.

#### What's in a name

The patterns had special names such as "mangi yek shawa" literally translated to "month of one night". This was a vertical line marked from the hairline straight to just above the space between the brows. The line would end with an upside down C, representing the moon and a dot was placed below



Tattoos like this were all the rage once upon a time. (photo by Aram Eissa)

this arch.

Another popular mark was dotting. The dot was marked in the dimple, or cleft, of the chin and often had a line coming down from it stretching down the neck with dots on either side of the line.

The difference between the markings of men and women of that time, was that many men would not always have it on areas that were commonly exposed, such as the upper arm. The patterns of choice also differed in that men would opt for patterns of arrows and lions. It is very common to see older men with marks on their arms with the name of their first love.

Nowadays, tattooing has not only changed in terms of patterns, colors and instruments used, but also the acceptance of tattoos in society. Now tattooing has become somewhat unacceptable, but like previous generations, it is an art which appeals to the youth.

Men tend to get it done more than women as these days, it is considered inappropriate for women. If women do get a tattoo, it would be done on an area that is not commonly exposed, in stark contrast to the customs of yesteryear.

**your people should do  
what they're best at**

---

**our people can  
do the rest**

0750 448 7503

[spectrummideast.com](http://spectrummideast.com)

management | maintenance | cleaning | support



SPECTRUM

# Lifestyle

COMPILED BY  
AWARA JUMAA N IN ERBIL  
JEN A. SAGERMA IN SLEMANI

□ DINING □ FASHION □ INTERIORS □ LEISURE

## As modernity seeps into everyday life in Kurdistan, affluent young Kurds find ways to reconcile global trends with tradition.

As the Kurdistan Region ushers in 2010, society has come a long way since the dark days of the double sanctions when nothing was available except for what was smuggled through the black markets. Today, there is everything from high class beauty spas to restaurants serving an array of international cuisines. **Lifestyle**, a vista to an emerging society, shows how far we've come.

### IN FOCUS



London Spa offers a wide variety of treatments and services for the women of the city of Slemani. Their service with a smile makes the customer feel at ease straight away and has really set the bar for standards in the beauty and relaxation industry.

## She's got the look

There is certainly no shortage of beauty centers in Slemani due to the overwhelming grooming demands of local ladies but finding a place that meets requirements and ever rising standards has become a little easier now with the opening of the London Spa.

Construction of the spa started in July 2009 and it opened its doors to the public in September of the same year. It was not long before it became a favorite for those who like to be pampered.

Located to the right of the large shopping store Istanbul Bazaar on Salem Street, it is a discrete setting for the spa, away from prying eyes. This allows women to feel comfortable and without trepidation that a man may accidentally waltz in while they have a mask on their face, or their toe nails are being clipped. Albeit, some concede that this gives it a bit of a dungeon feel.

Its location is a bit hard to reach because of the traffic, but the wide range of treatments on offer all under one roof makes the

trip worth the drive.

London Spa is separated into different treatment areas with flowery curtains that add to the calming atmosphere.

The reception staff is friendly and their service with a smile makes clients feel at ease straight away. While the truly discriminating patron may deem their skills as falling short of European standards, for Slemani, they have well and truly set the bar. Owner Lana Ali is back from the United Kingdom and being a law graduate with a LPC from Oxford University, she decided to take a break from law and fill the inadequacy that she saw in the hair and beauty sector in Slemani.

The spa's client list comprises ladies of certain means who wish to enhance their beauty and come out feeling refreshed.

There is a broad range of treatments on offer that focus not only on the face but the entire body. In comparison to the other salons in the city, this is a first as many only concentrate on hair and makeup.

London Spa offers a wide vari-

ety of services and treatments, such as hair, makeup, face massages, bridal hair and makeup, pedicures, manicures, full body massages and much more.

The London Spa is an equal opportunity employer and as such, they employ a multicultural staff. In their employment is a lady from the Philippines who is specialized in manicures and pedicures.

The treatments may be a little pricey for most as a manicure will set you back 25,000 Iraqi Dinars (ID) and the nails are finished off with OPI color varnishes that are world renowned.

Finally, no spa can call itself thus if it does not impart a sensation of serenity and bliss during and after treatment. London Spa will no doubt set a trend in the Kurdistan Region, and one can expect a slew of imitations to crop up soon. Still, chapeau to London Spa for setting a new standard in the beauty and relaxation industry.

— BY DIDAR ABDULLA  
IN SLEMANI



Minaret Park in Erbil is a popular destination among residents and visitors alike.

### Choli Minaret

Choli Minaret, measuring 36 meters high, is a major attraction in the Kurdistan Region's capital city of Erbil. It has a large dedicated garden aptly named Minaret Park, which spreads over 15,000 square meters. Established by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 2006, the park has quickly become a popular hangout among residents and visitors alike. Foreign tourists especially enjoy the site. The Choli Minaret itself is the work of architect Wasta Masud Murad in the year 1232 AD. The construction of the minaret was approved by the ruler of Erbil at that time, Sultan Muzafar Kok Bariof. The minaret is the only remnant of the mosque that was destroyed many years ago.



Italian food lovers can count on Roma restaurant for an authentic and tasty meal.

### An Italian job

A taste of Italy has made its way to Slemani. Roma restaurant offers a range of pasta and pizza dishes, and now have added rice dishes to the menu all in generous portions and reasonably priced. The presentation of the dishes may not always be great but none fail to tickle the taste buds. There is a selection of salads and fresh juices to start the meal with and service is polite. Even the choice of music is in tandem with the concept of an Italian restaurant. One permanent fixture in the decor is a parrot, who can sometimes get over excited, but not enough to distract from your dining experience. As long as standards don't slip this restaurant will continue to be popular pick.

# HISTORY

## Notes of a journey from Tabriz through Kurdistan

Maureen McLuckie

LONDON

*The following is an extract from the notes of Lieutenant-Colonel James Shiel entitled "Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, through Kurdistan via Van, Bitlis, Se'ert, Erbi and Suleimaniyeh in July and August 1836". This was printed in 1838 in the "Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London Volume 8". This Journal was a scholarly geographic journal published by the Royal Geographical Society from 1831 to 1880. Copies can be bought from <http://www.abebooks.co.uk> or from <http://www.amazon.co.uk> prices start from £12 sterling.*

August 14

We left Jelan at day-break, and travelling in the general direction of S.E. by S. for 10 miles, over low grassy hills, we reached Dab, a small village on the right bank of the Zab, which flowed from nearly north; after great detention in procuring skins to make a kelek, or float, we crossed to the left bank: the stream is rapid and about 100 yards in breadth, and said to be deep. The kelek is formed by tying a number of inflated skins under an open frame and covering the whole with branches of trees; it makes a very commodious conveyance. This was guided by two men, each of whom had a large hollow calabash under his arm: one of these watermen took a string in his hand and swam across, dragging the kelek with him, and putting one in mind of the horses applied to a similar purpose on the Oxus; the other pushed it from behind. After crossing the Zab, we travelled among hills in almost every direction, through the general course was S.S.E. for four hours, or 12 miles, we passed at a distance several villages, which were almost all deserted, the inhabitants having built upon some neighbouring cool spot a new village of huts formed of leaves and branches. On the approach of winter, they return to their less agreeable, permanent residences. We then travelled eastward for two hours, and came in sight of 'Ali Pasha's camp. It was now dark, and after scrambling for another hour through a very bad road among hills, we were at length unable to proceed, and halted near a stream, where we passed the night without any food for ourselves or our horses.

August 15

We marched three miles eastwards to an eminence, on which a portion of the army of 'Ali Pasha of Baghdad was encamped, under Mustafa Pasha; at the summit of the eminence was the small fort of Darvin, which had been taken two days before.

August 16

We left the camp at day-break, and pro-

ceeded in the direction of S.S.W. over low hills for 18 miles, and then travelled for four miles to the village of Beherkah, across the plain of the Tigris. In the evening we travelled 10 miles S.S.W. to Arbela: the road was excellent and level, and far to the left lay the mountains of Kurdistan: the town is placed on a large mound 60 or 70 feet in height, and 300 yards in length by 200 in breadth; it is enclosed at the summit, with a brick wall having bastions, with a few small guns in them: at the foot of the mound there is another town, enclosed by a mud wall, a great part of it being in ruins, in which respect it resembles both the upper and lower town; the latter especially is almost desolate. There are no ruins or remarkable buildings. A short distance to the west of the town, there is an immense brick pillar standing by itself in the plain: it looks old, but seems to be a mohammedan building; nothing is known of it excepting that it once



was the minaret of a mosque. I saw no river near Erbil, and the people declared that there is none. The troops of the Amir of Rawanduz made a short resistance at this place, but a small and ineffectual mine having been exploded in the mound, they were alarmed and surrendered. Erbil contains 6,000 people, three large mosques, and two baths. The next march being a long one, and the heat being very great, we halted at Erbil until the evening of the 17th; we then marched in a S.S.E. direction across a flat plain, and passed two villages at a short distance. After a fatiguing march of about 40 miles, we reached Altun Kupri at sunrise.

This town is placed on an island in the Altun Su (which I suppose is the little Zab) which we crossed into the town by a bridge, whence the town is said to have been named on account of the lucrative toll formerly levied, Altun Kupri meaning 'gold bridge'. The river was shallow, but is deep at other seasons, and about 50 yards wide before it dives: it was flowing from the N.E. and rises in U'shneh, a district of Persia, near the Urumiyah Lake. The chief of this

town was extremely civil; he gave me a room overhanging the river, and 30 feet about it, commanding a fine view of the country. This town is said to have formed the boundary of the acquisitions of the Amir of Rawanduz to the south. Altun Kupri, according to the statement of the chief, once contained 8,000 people, but plague and famine had greatly thinned it.

August 18

We left Altun Kupri in the evening and travelled S.S.E. and after halting four hours during the night, reached Kerkuk in the morning. The distance was said to be 25 miles; we were still accompanied by our very useless guard of Arabs, who, however, amused us by singing songs. Arabs, Kurds, and Persians, seem to think the chief excellence of music is loudness: these fellows sang, or rather roared, with wonderful vigour, but not pleasingly; their favourite song was that of their tribe, in praise of the nobility, courage, generosity, and hospitality of their Sheikh. Each line seemed to consist of three or four words, and then a chorus of the word Sheikh: the music was very monotonous, but without any of the disgusting trilling used in Persian singing, which I believe is in imitation of the nightingale. Three miles before reaching Kerkuk we passed several naphtha pits, which diffused a disagreeable odour to a considerable distance. In Kerkuk, naphtha is used for lights and fire. Kerkuk is a large open town in a plain, and, like all the towns in this part of the world, is in great part in ruins: plague, famine, and, I believe, cholera has almost destroyed it. Near to it is a fort built on a mound, not very high but steep. It is said to have no manufactures except a crude calico, but there is a considerable trade in gall-nuts, which are brought from the Kurdistan Mountains. The river of Kerkuk, called the Khaseh Chair, was now dry: here we saw, for the first time, date trees, which would have reminded us, if it were necessary, that we were now in a very hot climate. The women wear immense turbans which has a very strange effect to a person not accustomed to see females in the east with that head-dress.

August 19

We left Kerkuk after sunset in the evening of the nineteenth, and travelling in the general direction of east, arrived before daylight at an O'ba or summer encampment of Kurds, whose village was behind one of the neighbouring hills. The distance was about twenty miles, of which half was among hills, with a good deal of ascent.

August 20

We left O'ba on the evening of the 20th of August, and, travelling still in the same direction, arrived in the morning at a large village, which belongs to Suleimaniyeh, winding among defiles, with a great deal of ascent and descent: about the 20th mile we crossed a wide torrent called the Wai Su, which probably afterwards becomes the Diyalah, flowing to the south-west. All the people in this village were encamped in huts at a short distance from the village: we were lodged in a most comfortable hut, close to the tomb of a holy man, a descendant of the famous 'Abdul-kadir Gailani, who is interred at Baghdad.

## Management then and now



ANWAR M. QARADAGHI

### FLASHBACKS

**P**roblem solving and decision making are important skills that require training and practice. Learning to make good decisions is key, especially for senior managers.

There are different decision-making techniques that can be learned as part of a system of Human Resource Development that may be geared to senior members of staff. In such a system, instances from real-life situations are discussed within the sessions on how to approach the many choices of techniques that can be applied during the decision-making process.

In Kurdistan, while it is granted that progress has been achieved in a variety of fields and sectors from 2003 onwards, the subject of human resource management and development leave a lot to be desired. There may have been good reasons for this deficiency so far, but it is now high time that this subject is given due attention.

Perhaps if we go back to the state of affairs of some five or so decades ago, we may note that despite its raw modesty, compared to today's international progress and managerial demands, in Slemani in particular and the country in general, the right people were by and large, in the right places.

In every establishment, there was a document called 'personnel strength'. This was an approved list of the number of staff required together with their categories and post titles. This so-called 'personnel strength' was arrived at through a systematic process of analyzing the quantity and quality of work of each unit of that establishment and thus its need for the number and kind of staff necessary, the details of which were documented in individual 'job descriptions'.

These then provided for the salaries payable for each post and the qualities of their incumbents, their qualifications, experience, age and the skills required to do the job reasonably well.

There were also clearly announced policy requirements for change of job titles, and promotions should vacancies occur later on within that 'personnel strength'. Some of these requirements included the need for the individual to participate on specific training courses, or job rotations to

gain added experience, and/or appear for interview by a selective board. This led the individuals to continue persevering their self improvement and development. The individual progressing in this way, not only grew professionally but his self confidence was equally enhanced.

Yes, it could not be claimed that all promotions were objectively determined, and yes, there was also now and again one or two promotions that did not really look justified.

Nevertheless, you could not fail to feel that there was a system that clearly indicated that for you to advance you constantly needed to improve your skills, keep up with developments in your field and enhance your contribution to the overall work of your organization.

Based on this system, individuals felt there was esteem in their jobs. It provided for a sense of belonging to the team. The job title was not just a status symbol; it was a developed attitude of loyalty and maturity that ensured integrity, competence and no nepotism. This cannot be said of many of our present day managers.

The KRG managers are undoubtedly decent people who are alleged to have all contributed in many differing ways and thus feel they need to be rewarded. However, when compared to today's international managerial requirements and decision making skills, many of them do not compare very favorably. This can have the consequence of their not being competent and knowledgeable in their specific allotted functions and have negative effects on their performance and departmental contributions in catering for the people's requirements.

While in the past few years, many piece-meal training courses have been held here and there in our region, they have not been implemented as a part of a system that recognizes individual needs for specific goals. Examples from developed countries suggest that by expending a small percentage of its income on a proper system of Human Resource Development, the region would be able to generate around five fold extra income as a result of the managers' acquired skills. This would not only enhance the efficiency of the employees but also assist thousands of unemployed youth.

It is finally suggested that in each of the three main cities of Kurdistan, or at least in one of them, a properly established management training centre is founded that can be gradually developed to cater for the ever increasing demands of managerial disciplines, including the skills required for problem solving and decision making.

[anwarqaradaghi@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:anwarqaradaghi@yahoo.co.uk)

# SOCIETY | LIFE & TIMES

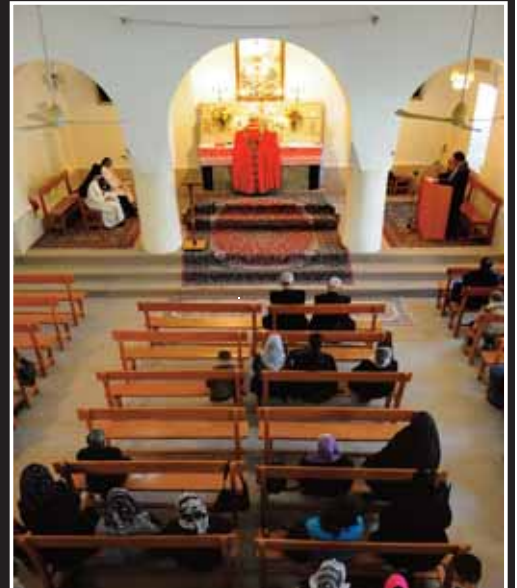


Ramzi Qotbaden's exhibition at Sardam Gallery. (photo by Aram Eissa)



A concert by Slemani Orchestra with Tawar Chorus Group in the Amna Suraka Museum. (photos by Aram Eissa)

The Kurdistan Region ushered in the New Year with hope, optimism and a slew of artistic and theatrical events that left audiences thoroughly impressed.



The Christian community pray at the old church in Slemani. (photo by Aram Eissa)



A mono-drama performance called Marsh at Tawar Hall. (photo by Aram Eissa)



The second Kurdish Film Festival at Slemani's Culture Hall which lasted for nine days. (photo by Aram Eissa)

The teahouse is a popular Kurdish institution, where wisemen (or, wiseguys) gather every evening to discuss life, politics and the future. **Dr Sherko Abdullah** lends an ear to the talk, and reports what Bayiz and Jwamer had to say...

**BAYIZ**

Do you see any similarity between Christmas and the political opposition?

**JWAMER**

Of course. There are too many similarities. For one, if Christmas didn't exist, it would be necessary to invent it. Same goes for the opposition.

**BAYIZ**

No. The opposition isn't as vital as Christmas.

**JWAMER**

So, why did they invent it?

**JWAMER**

Maybe because everything is immature.

**BAYIZ**

Whom do you mean exactly? The opposition, or the present situation?

**JWAMER**

So what is your major wish for the new year?

**BAYIZ**

Excuse me, I cannot tell you.

**JWAMER**

Why? Is it too personal?

**JWAMER**

Well, it's the most neglected issue in our country.

**BAYIZ**

Who should be blamed for this?

**JWAMER**

What else but oil?

**BAYIZ**

Oil? But the books tell a different story.

**JWAMER**

In the English books in the Kurdish books, oil is directed at destroying everything.

## At the chaikhana

I can't see any issues more vital than the economy.

**BAYIZ**

It's not invented. I heard that it is imported.

**JAMER**

Imported? Is it commercial stuff?

**BAYIZ**

Not purely commercial, but it is imported stuff. Just like Christmas.

**JWAMER**

No one imported Christmas. It came by itself. Do you know why?

**BAYIZ**

Yes I know, because children love it.

**JWAMER**

Not only this. At Christmas, everyone wants his past forgotten. Christmas is about the present, unlike the opposition which hates the present.

**BAYIZ**

That's crazy. Why should he hate the present? He can say whatever he wants. Just tell me why?

**JWAMER**

Full stop. It's better to start a new subject.

**BAYIZ**

I agree. We should look for a new subject, especially as we are beginning a new year.

**BAYIZ**

Sorry, I cannot mention it.

**JWAMER**

Oh c'mon is it a political wish? A historic one? Cut it short. Is it an economic one?

**BAYIZ**

What do you mean by economic?

How good is your vision?

**BAYIZ**

So do you wish for all the oil wells to dry up?

**JWAMER**

Why? To die of hunger?

**BAYIZ**

Do you think that we would starve without oil?

**JWAMER**

I am not the right person to answer this. Ask the political parties.

**BAYIZ**

They don't have time for such silly things. They are busy with vital issues.

**JWAMER**

Vital issues? I cannot see any issues more vital than the economy.

**BAYIZ**

How good is your vision?

*Sherko Abdullah is editor of Sekhurma Cartoon magazine.*



 UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE  
ESOL Examinations

# BULATS

Business Language Testing Service

**BULATS business benefits**

Enhances communication between offices and departments.  
Improves operational efficiency.  
Contributes to increased recognition through business awards such as ISO and Investors in People.  
Enhances language training programmes.  
Complements employees' individual development programmes.

**The BULATS Advantage**

Tests the communication skills that are needed in real business situations.

Allows flexible reporting to suit your business.

Provides high levels of professional support.

Offers in-company benchmarking and consultancy standards.

Assesses reading, writing, speaking and listening skills at all levels.

Offers flexible delivery.

**Worldwide recognition**

Many of the world's leading businesses have already discovered that BULATS is the most effective tool to assess the language proficiency of their staff and use the information gained to evaluate development and help with key decision-making.

Existing BULATS clients include:

Abu Dhabi National Oil Company	General Electric	Fluor
Arcelor	General Motors	Philips
BP	GlaxoSmithKline	PrinwaterhouseCoopers
British American Tobacco	Guinness	Procter & Gamble
Cadbury	Emirates Group	SASCO for Lanuf oil & Gas
Cobank	Heinz	Renault
Colgate-Palmolive	HSEB	Roche
Compag	IBM	Shell
Deloitte & Touche	Johnson & Johnson	United Nations
DHL	Kodak	Vodafone
Disney	KPMG	Vivaro
Dow Agrosciences	LeChiel	Wingy
ESSO	Masterson	Wyeth
	Nestle	
	Nissai	

[www.BULATS.org](http://www.BULATS.org)

**City & Guilds**

**International ESOL and Spoken ESOL**

This internationally recognized award is the perfect choice candidates looking for recognition of their English skills in listening, reading, writing and speaking.

**UK's leading provider of vocational qualification**

- \*Over 125 years of experience in education.
- \* 1.7 million certificates issued per year.
- \* 100 countries.
- \* 500 qualifications.
- \* 8500 examination centres worldwide.



[www.cityandguilds.com](http://www.cityandguilds.com)

0750 7211562

0750 7211563

0750 7477110