

Kuwait's youth shake up traditional diwaniya concept

Fri, 2020-10-16 23:00

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait is a small country in the Gulf with a high-income per capita rate, most of it made from oil exports, similar to the economic climate seen in the more affluent countries of the region.

Yet, what sets this country apart is its hybrid government, comprising a hereditary monarchy and a semi-democratic political system.

While democratic and constitutional forces are at work at the top level, the socio-political undercurrents that influence the state and especially Kuwait's youth are also equally hard to miss.

Kuwait's youth groups were largely formed out of a common need to address issues pertaining to their future such as unemployment and gender discrimination, as well as broader issues including corruption, judicial reform, and the fundamental need for their voices to be heard at the highest level.

The Cross Cultural Diwaniya (CCD) is one such popular initiative – the brainchild of Faisal Al-Fuhaid and Leanah Al-Awadhi – which started out hosting gatherings to encourage an open dialogue on various topics across different communities.



The Cross Cultural Diwaniya (CCD) – brainchild of Faisal Al-Fuhaid and Leanah Al-Awadhi – started out hosting gatherings to encourage an open dialogue on various topics across different communities. (Supplied)

“Back in 2013, there used to be a lack of public spaces where individuals could converse with others openly within a safe circle,” Al-Awadhi said.

“There were only traditional diwanis, which were mostly restricted to Kuwaiti men, thus not enabling their networking and knowledge-sharing advantages to the wider society.”

According to Al-Fuhaid, the aim was to start conversations “in and around topics of social and global significance and to be a networking platform.”

Initially, the reception was not particularly warm, as many Kuwaitis were not used to attending diwanis outside societal norms where individuals would be welcomed regardless of their socio-economic position, corporate hierarchy, gender, or age, Al-Fuhaid said.

Over the years, however, the group’s influence has gradually widened and the diwanis have become a popular platform among youth. Their main challenge now is choosing relevant topics and crossing language barriers, as the diwanis are open to all and attended by citizens and expats, Al-Awadhi added.

As part of the forum’s formula of exploring solutions to some of the country’s challenges, the team sometimes engages attendees to develop case studies where they work together in groups and look at issues from multiple angles.

Collaborations with groups such as the Kuwait Transparency Society, Equate Petrochemical, and Kuwait Commute mean some of the suggestions put forward at the forums lead to changes in the country’s urban infrastructure.

“Some of the solutions proposed by the attendees are then taken into account when policies are drafted or decisions made,” added Al-Fuhaid.



Faisal Al-Fuhaid, the co-founder of the Cross Cultural Diwaniya (CCD).
(Supplied)

Earlier this year, as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak took hold, the country was rocked by several high-profile corruption and human trafficking scandals. But with elections fast approaching, it remains to be seen whether initial measures will be followed up with stricter reforms.

“It is vital that all citizens make use of their voting powers to elect parliamentary members that have the country’s best interests in mind and confront officials who actively engage in corruption, no matter who they are. No one should be above the law,” Al-Fuhaid said.

In recent times, Kuwait has also faced criticism for its human rights record and perceived xenophobia toward the expatriate community. The CCD aims to highlight and address these challenges.

Al-Awadhi said: “Everyone is welcome, regardless of their nationality, gender, or religion. We have hosted multiple sessions discussing xenophobia and human rights and work tirelessly to make sure that the CCD is a space where all participants listen to and learn from each other. The only way to progress is to coexist.”

This report is being published by Arab News as a partner of the Middle East Exchange, which was launched by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of

Dubai to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region.



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Treat Arab youth as a driver of development: UAE Youth Minister

[MEA runs first flight with all-female crew](#)

Fri, 2020-10-16 22:20

BEIRUT: On October 13, an all-female crew staffed a Lebanese Middle East Airlines (MEA) flight for the first time in MEA's history.

Captain Rola Hoteit piloted the round trip to Cairo and told Arab News that

it was only once the crew had boarded that they realized the plane was being flown by an all-female staff.

“We were all surprised,” Hoteit said. “Such an arrangement happened by coincidence. We did not know that it was a pioneering event. The computer specifies the work schedule and no one – neither in the management of the company nor in the airport – knew that the crew would be an all-female one. We were very excited. We took a lot of photos since coincidence only happens once.”

The crew consisted of Hoteit, her assistant and six flight attendants. Hoteit posted about the flight on social media on Wednesday and said she cannot believe the amount of positive feedback she has received.

“It was a full plane on the way to Cairo and there were around 100 passengers on the way back to Beirut. However, none of the passengers knew that the whole crew is made up of women only, and we did not inform them that, fearing that some of them might be concerned,” she added. “We did our job perfectly and we later found out, through comments, that people accepted the matter and that everyone is ready to accept change.”

Hoteit has been a pilot for 25 years, and said her ambition has always been to fly with an all-female crew on board. “I had the privilege to be the pilot on Tuesday, with a crew consisting only of women for the first time in Lebanon,” she said. “I expected this event (to happen) on International Women’s Day, for example, as a sign of women’s power in Lebanon and their ability to excel in all areas of work. However, (my) dream was realized by coincidence.”

While women account for more than 50 percent of MEA’s administrative staff, according to airline management, Hoteit is the only female pilot currently on its books, along with six female first officers. Over 85 percent of the airline’s flight attendants are women.

Claudine Aoun Roukoz, president of the National Commission for Lebanese Women, said women are also playing an increasingly important role in the military, in line with Lebanon’s commitment to international resolutions, including the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which urges the increased participation of women in all defense and security forces.

Lieutenant Rita Zaher, 27, was the first female pilot in the Lebanese Air Force, followed by First Lieutenant Chantal Kallas, 28. Women have also joined the maintenance, testing, and administrative departments. The percentage of women in the Air Force is now 8.51 percent, Roukoz said.

Women also account for 43 percent of students in Lebanon’s military academy and 5.5 percent of soldiers. Five women currently hold the rank of brigadier general, according to Roukoz.



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[Video shows missile fired where Turkey cleared way for S-400 test, prompting US warning](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Fri, 2020-10-16 18:00

ISTANBUL/WASHINGTON: A missile was fired into the sky on Friday on Turkey's

Black Sea coast where the military was expected to test its Russian-made S-400 defense systems, according to local video obtained by Reuters, drawing a strong warning from the US State Department.

The video, taken in the coastal city of Sinop, showed a narrow column of smoke headed high into the blue sky. In recent days Turkey had issued notices restricting air space and waters off the coastal area to allow firing tests. Tests of the S-400s, if verified, could stoke tensions between Turkey and the United States, which sharply opposed Ankara's purchase of the weapons from Moscow on grounds they compromise shared NATO defense systems.

State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said the United States has expressed to the most senior levels of the Turkish government that the acquisition of Russian military systems such as the S-400 is unacceptable, adding that Washington has been clear on its expectation that the system should not be operationalized.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

"We have also been clear on the potential serious consequences for our security relationship if Turkey activates the system," Ortagus said.

"If confirmed, we would condemn in the strongest terms the S-400 test missile launch as incompatible with Turkey's responsibilities as a NATO Ally and strategic partner of the United States," she added.

A US official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, confirmed that Turkey had tested the S-400 system on Friday but did not provide details.

Turkey's defense ministry said it would neither deny nor confirm missile tests.

Washington reacted last year by suspending Turkey from its F-35 jet program and has threatened sanctions.

Defense analyst Turan Oguz said a preliminary assessment of the color, intensity, angle and route of the smoke in the video coincided with S-400 missiles. The angle of the column suggested the target "must not be too high," he added.

Last year the military conducted radar tests of the surface-to-air defenses, which is among the world's most advanced and can spot and track incoming aircraft at medium and long ranges.

Turkey signed the S-400 deal with Russia in 2017. Deliveries of the first four missile batteries, worth \$2.5 billion, began in July last year.

Last week – after reports of the planned tests circulated – two US senators called again for President Donald Trump's administration to impose sanctions on Turkey.



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[Finance minister says Iraq's leaders willing to make reforms](#)

Author:

By SAMYA KULLAB | AP

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Thu, 2020-10-15 15:25

BAGHDAD: Iraq's finance minister said Thursday there is growing political will to undertake drastic reforms needed for the country to tackle a daunting liquidity crisis, which has pushed Iraq to the brink of collapse. "There is more will now than there was five months ago," Finance Minister Ali

Allawi told The Associated Press. "Now, I think there is recognition that unless oil prices go up miraculously, this is something we have to cope with and manage."

Low oil prices have slashed state coffers in the crude-exporting country by nearly half, and over-reliance on oil has limited the government's ability to seek out other income. A widening month-to-month deficit has cast uncertainty over how future payments will be made for public wages, external debts and essential imports of food and medicine.

Iraq's unsustainable economy, laid bare by fiscal pressures spurred by spiraling oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic, is a long-standing problem that has flummoxed reformists for over a decade.

This week, Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's government issued a much-anticipated 95-page "white paper" for economic reform that, if implemented, would prompt a drastic overhaul of the entire system within three to five years.

"It is a paper designed to create a strategic and policy framework for a new Iraqi economy," said Allawi. "In the end of this period of change and reform ... we are supposed to have a restructured and more dynamic economy, that is the point of it."

The absence of support from major political elites has undermined similar efforts in the past. Al-Kadhimi's government still depends on an endorsement by Parliament for the vision to gain steam.

"There is less denial, before it was all denial," said Allawi.

With oil prices not expected to rebound in the near-term, only reforms will see Iraq avoid an economic catastrophe, top officials in al-Kadhimi's government, including Allawi, have repeatedly said. The future of the project faces a major test: Parliament endorsement in the form of a binding resolution or legislation.

Later, aspects of the plan outlined in the paper will be incorporated into the 2021 budget, said Allawi, something that will also require a parliament vote. Government subsidies in the electricity and oil sectors will face particular scrutiny.

In September, Iraq made \$3.16 billion in oil exports, which accounts for 90% of state revenue – less than half of the \$7 billion needed to pay for salaries, pensions, imports and debts. September salaries were delayed and the payment of October wages depends largely on the government borrowing internally. A previous bill allowing for \$12 billion in internal borrowing has been used up; a new one, asking for \$35 billion, faces a parliament vote. "I hope parliament will approve it," said Allawi of the bill. "If it doesn't, we have potential for other alternatives, but it will be more difficult." Iraq's dollar reserves stand at \$53 billion.



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RAF destroys Daesh cell in Iraq
Iraq militia claims halt to attacks on US forces

[Atomic energy watchdog seeks details on secret Iranian nuclear site](#)

Thu, 2020-10-15 22:17

CHICAGO: Officials of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have asked the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) to provide details of their claims that Iran maintains a secret nuclear site hidden from the world as a UN-mandated nuclear arms embargo on Iran expires this week.

Lifting the UN arms embargo against Iran will allow Tehran to purchase and sell military arms with neighboring countries like Syria, Iraq and Yemen, a panel of experts hosted by the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW) said Thursday. They said Iran will be able to purchase weapons from

China and Russia, including hi-tech fighter jets, sophisticated missiles and other weapons, and they agreed that it would allow Iran to pursue its nuclear agenda.

Iranian Parliament-in-Exile member [Ali Safavi told the Arab News-sponsored Detroit radio program "The Ray Hanania Show" on Wednesday that the NCRI has evidence that Iran has been operating a secret nuclear facility.](#) During the radio interview, Safavi said the NCRI will disclose the information publicly at a press conference that is scheduled for Friday.

Iran's plans for building a nuclear weapon have been checked by a UN-mandated embargo that was imposed in July 2007 under the terms of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The JCPOA expires on Oct. 18. US President Donald Trump said he will impose an embargo on Tehran, but experts said they expect European countries to sell weapons and equipment to Iran once the UN embargo expires.

Those weapons could include "armored combat vehicles, large-caliber artillery, combat aircraft and attack helicopters, warships and more significantly cruise missiles and launchers," said panel host Hussein Ibish, AGSIW resident scholar.

"All of this has become possible precisely because the US effort to use the JCPOA grievance mechanism didn't work and nobody wanted to go along with the extension," he added.

Thursday's discussion titled "After the Embargo: Iran's Weapons Agenda and its Regional Impact" also included AGSIW Senior Fellow Ali Alfoneh, AGSIW Non-Resident Fellow David Des Roches, and National Defense University Associate Professor Kirsten Fontenrose.

The military and arms experts agreed the embargo's ending will not fuel an arms build-up by Iran's non-state clients, like Hezbollah, but said they expect an increase in Iranian weapons purchases and sales with countries like Syria, Iraq and Yemen, impacting regional security concerns.

"Hezbollah would not be following UN Security Resolutions in any chance," said Ali Alfoneh. "The biggest impact would not be on the non-state clients of Iran like Hezbollah."

The lifting of the embargo would open the door to regional governments like Iraq and Syria possibly purchasing weapons from Iran to bolster their arsenals.

"The Iranians have smuggled many embargoed items to their affiliates in the region. But with the embargo being lifted, it makes that volume and that flow much more significant," Fontenrose said.

"The failure of the JCPOA was a huge shock to the political leadership in Iran," Alfoneh said.

"The future is very insecure. Even if that administration changes, I am not entirely convinced that presidential candidate Joe Biden would go back to a

JCPOA as it was before. It is very likely there will be some changes made to the JCPOA.”

Fontenrose anticipates that regardless of who wins the upcoming US election, she can foresee scenarios in which Israel would strike at Iran’s nuclear facilities with support from their Emirati partners, especially if Israel believes that the US is “too soft” on Iran.

“You are going to have hardliners in Tehran who slow-roll a nuclear deal and either have no deal with the Trump administration ... or you will have Iran at the table but agreeing to very little with the Biden administration,” Fontenrose said.

“What you see is Israel saying we need to do something about this nuclear program if Iran continues to escalate it. If it stays in place it is a different story. But if Iran continues to ramp up its withdrawal from the JCPOA or ramp up its production, I can see Israel undertaking strikes again against their facilities. And at this point, will we see the UAE involved in the planning, not execution, of those strikes?”



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Iranian activists claim regime has hidden nuclear facility Saudi Arabia backs IAEA calls for access to Iranian nuclear sites