

How adoption of sustainable fashion in the Middle East can reduce waste, cut carbon emissions

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DUBAI: Of all the retail-industry business models held responsible for the growth of unsustainable consumer habits, few come close to matching the bad reputation acquired by fast fashion – the design, manufacturing and marketing methods behind the production of mass-produced clothing.

The environmental costs keep rising as fast-fashion brands release as many as 52 micro-collections each year, which constantly show up on roadside billboards, online banner ads and social media sites teasing the best deals in trendy clothing.

On the bright side, ethical fashion, quality second-hand clothing and other more environmentally friendly alternatives are increasingly available to consumers, who have a big role to play in countering the harmful effects of fast fashion.

Still, experts say businesses must take responsibility for their actions and governments must develop regulations to encourage eco-conscious shopping habits and promote sustainable fashion.



Employees working on a production line of clothes for export at a factory in Xiayi county, in Shangqiu in China's central Henan province. (AFP/File Photo)

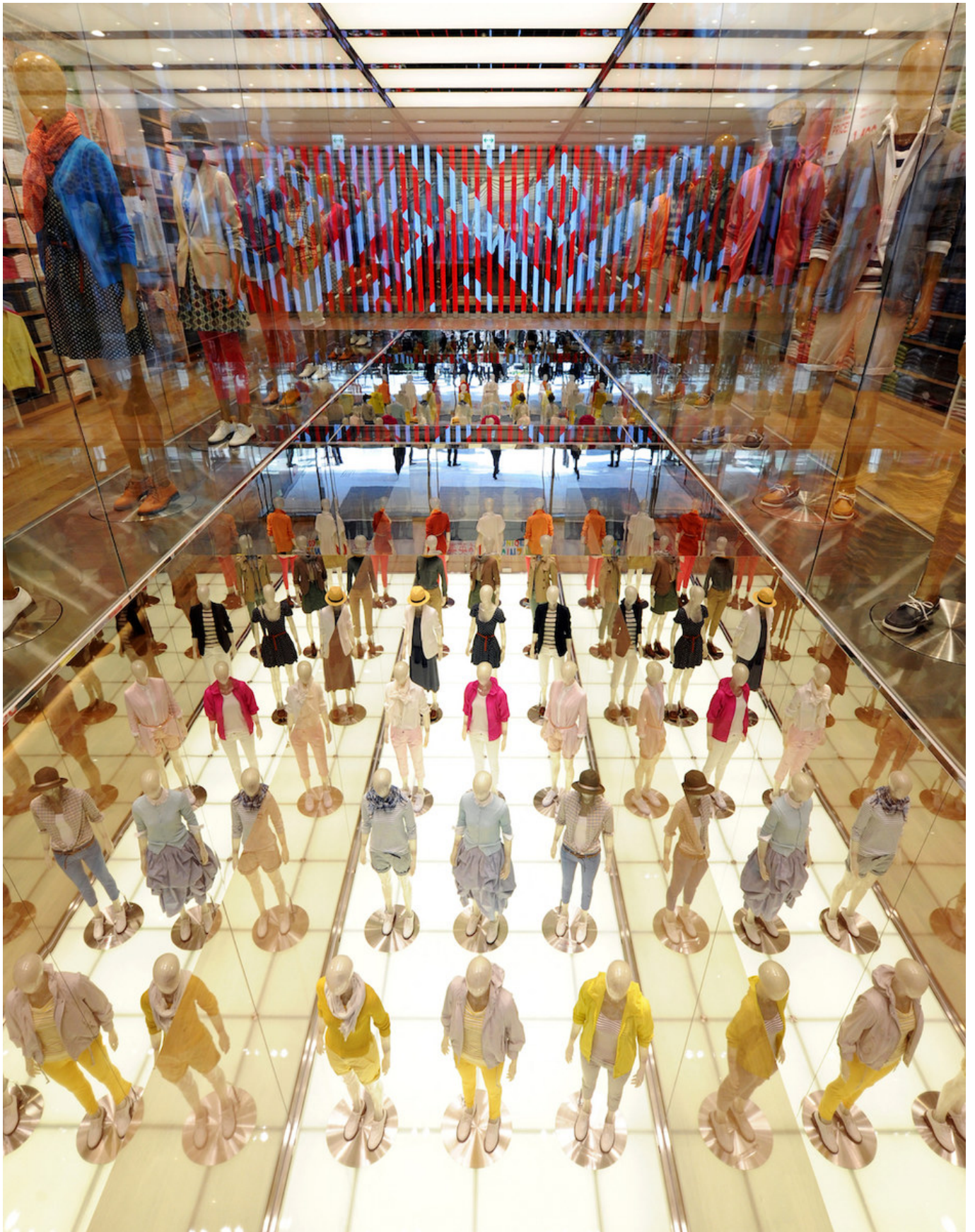
The challenge is, to put it mildly, daunting. As brands devote big budgets to digital marketing and subliminal advertising in response to a seismic shift away from in-store sales, consumers who spend hours browsing websites for the best deals seldom connect their purchasing decisions to environmental (or socioeconomic) issues.

For example, a pair of jeans might seem like a fairly harmless purchase. In fact, the production process behind this wardrobe staple requires about 2,000 gallons of water – equivalent to the amount the average person will drink in seven years.

This explains why the \$3 trillion fashion industry, which accounts for 2 percent of global gross domestic product, has been alternately identified as the second or third largest polluter in the world year after year, just behind oil.

The industry might be responsible for as much as 10 percent of global carbon emissions, which is more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined, according to the UN Conference on Trade and Development. Clothing factories, mostly located in developing countries, churn out well over 80 billion garments every year, with fast-fashion brands dominating the retail market.

“As fashion changes so quickly, consumers tend to want to buy instantaneously and then, when fashion changes again, they want to dispose of it,” Kris Barber, founder and CEO of DGrade, a sustainable brand in the UAE that produces clothing from recycled plastic bottles, told Arab News.



Mannequins stand in line on the stairwell first floor and second floor at the flagship store of Japan's cheap-chic clothing chain Uniqlo at Ginza shopping district in Tokyo. (AFP/File Photo)

According to the 2015 documentary "The True Cost," an expose of the fashion industry directed by filmmaker Andrew Morgan, about 400 percent more clothing

was being produced worldwide at that time compared with 20 years previously. The figure is probably much higher now.

This, coupled with a steady fall in prices, mean that garment purchases are more affordable to a much larger section of the global population, pushing consumerism in the sector to an all-time high.

For better or worse, people now own five times the amount of clothing their grandparents did – and are more likely to throw clothes away after minimal use.

Surveys suggest that some items of clothing are worn an average of only seven times before they are disposed of, and most women use as little as 20 to 30 percent of the contents of their wardrobes.

“Generally speaking, the retail business model for products that have an inbuilt disposable element – not just in textiles but across the board, from mobile phones to televisions – is all about overproduction and driving down the unit cost,” said Barber.

His journey in eco-fashion began 12 years ago and, along with his colleagues at Dgrade, he is working to improve the quality of recycled fibers. The company produces more than 250 types of fabric that are indistinguishable in quality from those made from virgin fibers.



Members of Extinction Rebellion Argentina are seen dressed with model designs created with recycled elements by Trash Couture fashion designers, during a demonstration against fast fashion industry, at Florida pedestrian street in Buenos Aires. (AFP/File Photo)

“Production of each of our T-shirts, which are made of 100 percent recycled polyester, consumes 10 plastic bottles on average,” Barber said.

DGrade, which also produces customized clothing for businesses, recently expanded operations at its manufacturing plant in the UAE, where more than 1,000 tons of polyethylene terephthalate, or PETP, plastic bottles are recycled every month to make fabrics and food packaging. There are about 50,000 empty bottles in each ton.

The scale of the global issue the business is addressing is huge. Currently, the equivalent of one garbage truck filled with textiles is sent to landfill or incinerated every second, worldwide. Studies show that unless the fashion industry takes major steps to reduce waste, it will use up a quarter of the world’s carbon emissions budget by 2050.

Experts within the industry broadly agree on the need for checks on the production of garments, shoes and fashion accessories. Whether consumers will be willing to pay extra for more environmentally sustainable items is another matter altogether.

Juliette Barkan, co-founder of Palem, a sustainable fashion brand in the UAE, said that awareness of the industry’s environmental footprint and responsible consumption ought to go hand in hand.

“Unless consumers put pressure on industries and opt for more durable items, choosing slow fashion, quality and timeless pieces over fast fashion, the changes will remain anecdotal,” she told Arab News.

Based on her experience, Barkan says the role of social media in shaping consumption habits cannot be overstated.

INNUMBERS

*** \$3tn – Value of global fashion industry.**

*** 2% – Fashion industry’s share of global GDP.**

*** \$3bn – Projected value of KSA online fashion market.**

*** 75% – Middle Eastern poll respondents who said they buy from eco-conscious fashion companies.**

“In a world where we are all our own brand, our need to dress up has increased considerably, creating constant need for newness,” she said. “The demand is so big that the leaders of the sector are now investing in the metaverse to fill the demands of digital fashion.”

Palem uses natural fibers made from 100 percent sustainable materials, such as organic cotton, sustainable viscose or recycled fabrics in its fashion lines. To encourage more manufacturers to become equally sustainable, Barkan

says, consumers need to become more aware of what they are buying.

“The good news is we feel that there is an awakening, a new-found awareness among consumers in the Middle East,” she said. “People are starting to ask questions and take ownership of the subject.”

This is reflected in the number of sustainable fashion brands emerging in the region and the establishment of the Middle East Fashion Council in the UAE, which was founded jointly by Simon Lo Gatto and Payal Kshatriya Cerri.

The fashion council was set up as “a dictionary” for designers in the region and “a guide for whether a designer was looking to become more sustainable,” said Lo Gatto.



Women search for used clothes amid tons discarded in the Atacama desert, in Alto Hospicio, Iquique, Chile. (AFP/File Photo)

Added Cerri: “Our place in this narrative is to bring together the leaders, challenge the way we think, challenge the way the sourcing and manufacturing is done to brands based in the region from other countries, as well as to be able to provide a platform and support for manufacturers within the region.”

She believes the fashion industry in the Middle East needs to adopt innovative methods, in particular the use of blockchain and 3D printing, to help reduce waste and increase transparency in the production process. A greater localization of production would also help.

“Dubai is a massive retail hub for all brands but homegrown brands are where the fight is,” Cerri said.

With sustainability at the core of its values, the Middle East Fashion Council has partnered with Dubai's Sustainable City, the first net-zero energy residential development in the emirate, to host two fashion shows, one this month, the other in October. Going forward, the organizers hope to host a sustainable fashion week showcasing eco-friendly brands.

The fashion market in Gulf nations and the wider region has grown exponentially in recent years. The first edition of Arab Fashion Week, following in the footsteps of long-established events in New York, Paris, London and Milan, took place in Dubai in 2015. It later became the first floating fashion show when it was staged aboard the Queen Elizabeth II cruise ship in 2018.

In Saudi Arabia, the online fashion market was worth \$715 million in 2018 and is expected to reach \$3 billion this year, making it the largest in the region. Over that same period, the online fashion market across the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council area is expected to have grown from \$140 million to \$500 million, and in Egypt from \$125 million to \$300 million.



Juliette Barkan, co-founder of Palem. (Supplied)

This regional growth means the adoption of more sustainable production and consumption habits are all the more pressing. Despite the growth of e-commerce and the emerging fashion scene in the Middle East, however, many designers who attempt to take a more sustainable approach continue to face challenges to their efforts to grow their brands.

“Many new sustainable brands are not PR ready,” said Cerri.

Consumers in the GCC area are intensely loyal to big, well-established brands, says Alia Jashanmal, the co-founder of Aloushi’s, a sustainable lifestyle e-commerce store. But attitudes are beginning to change.

The good news is that attitudes are beginning to change. “I believe our society is adjusting to promote homegrown businesses,” Jashanmal told Arab News. “People are educating themselves on how to identify and support sustainable fashion.”

In its “Global Consumer Insights Survey 2021,” which was published in December, professional services network PwC identified a growing awareness of social and environmental sustainability among consumers in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt.



Kris Barber. (Supplied)

Among those surveyed, about 65 percent said they had become more eco-friendly over the previous six months, while seven out of 10 shoppers said they engage in sustainable behaviors.

In fact, the respondents from the region consistently outscored global survey participants on a range of questions related to this issue. For instance, about 75 percent of Middle Eastern consumers said they buy from companies that are environmentally conscious, compared with 54 percent globally.

While fast fashion no doubt remains ascendant for now, it could also be the retail business model du jour. Which is why, for Barber and his colleagues at DGrade, the consumer survey's findings ought to be viewed as an incentive for the industry to do better.

“Without entirely blaming the fashion industry,” he told Arab news, “I think it’s more about trying to create products that are of very good quality, products that last longer and that people are going to use and wear more often.”



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How AI is advancing the Middle East's goal of sustainable fishing
Collaboration key to build sustainable future: Princess Lamia

[Iraqis queue for fuel as stations protest government](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Thu, 2022-04-14 20:56

BAGHDAD: Motorists in Iraq formed long queues for fuel Thursday after some owners of filling stations shut off their pumps to protest government policies on fuel distribution and pricing.

Some government-run fuel stations have been ordered to operate around the clock to meet demand, the official news agency INA reported.

Dozens of vehicles were lined up at stations that remained open. Some owners of petrol stations have denounced the method of fuel distribution imposed by the authorities, complaining they end up paying more for the quantity of fuel they receive from the government than what they say it is worth.

Iraq is the second largest producer in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and oil provides more than 90 percent of its income.

But the country, with a population of about 41 million, is also grappling with a major energy crisis and regular power cuts.

In recent days, private stations had already suspended their activities in the southern city of Najaf, according to INA.

The government has played down the problem, saying it is limited to "certain stations" in the capital Baghdad and the central and southern provinces, said Ihsan Mussa Ghanem, deputy head of the Iraqi agency in charge of distributing petroleum products.

In a statement, his agency said the owners of the closed stations were "manufacturing crises and obstructing the distribution of gasoline to citizens."

Owners do not have the right to stop supplies, it said, and "inspection committees will identify all stations that contravene instructions."

Those that have shut their pumps face having their licenses suspended and supplies of oil stopped, the statement said.



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Iraq's Mosul revives shattered cultural scene with traditional music festival

Three Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in West Bank raid

Author:

Thu, 2022-04-14 20:34

RAMALLAH: Three Palestinians were killed and 14 injured on Thursday by Israeli forces during their latest raids into the West Bank flashpoint district of Jenin.

At dawn, the Israeli forces stormed the towns of Yamoun and Kafr Dan in Jenin, where violent confrontations erupted. Six civilians were injured by bullets, three of them seriously.

In a clash near Jenin on Thursday morning "two youths died of injuries sustained in an Israeli attack," the Palestinian Health Ministry said.

Hours later, the ministry announced the death of a 45-year-old Palestinian father of six who was "critically wounded by Israeli bullets" on Wednesday in Beita, south of Nablus.

Those attending the three funerals raised slogans denouncing the "crimes" committed by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinians.

Ramallah and Jenin observed a commercial strike on Thursday in protest against the killings.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, the Palestinian presidential spokesman, said Palestine is "at a crossroads due to the dangerous Israeli escalation," and accused Israel of "playing with fire through its provocative actions, chaos and daily hysteria against the Palestinians."

Talking to Arab News, Palestinian security officials expressed deep concerns over the rapidly deteriorating security situation in the West Bank, especially as younger generations rushed to engage in the clashes.

Palestinians have endured spates of fatal shootings and indiscriminate detentions since the beginning of Ramadan, which have cast a pall of gloom over the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

April has witnessed a sharp escalation in cases of extrajudicial executions by Israelis. Fourteen civilians have been killed, dozens injured, and some 1,000 have been detained in the nightly West Bank raids.

Hussein Al-Sheikh, a member of the Fatah Central Committee, told the Voice of Palestine radio that the Israeli government has taken a clear decision to raise the pace of killings by instructing its army to kill without hesitation, pointing out that "what is happening is a real massacre that cannot be tolerated."

Sheikh condemned aggression witnessed at Al-Aqsa Mosque, with continuous incursions by Israeli settlers and their attempts to worship in its courtyards.

He made an urgent appeal to national factions, including the Hamas movement, to sit together to achieve national unity, stressing that aggression can only be defeated with national unity.

The Israel Defense Forces said its raids are conducted to arrest wanted persons and confiscate weapons.

The Israeli army has raised the level of alertness as the Jewish Passover festival looms on the horizon. A decision is expected to be taken regarding the imposition of a complete closure on Palestinian territories.

The state of high alert has continued around the Gaza Strip front in light of the escalation of threats by the Palestinian factions.

"The purpose of the ongoing Israeli military and security activities in various parts of the West Bank these days is to prevent terrorist attacks against Israelis. It is interested in giving Israelis a sense of security to celebrate the upcoming Passover," said Roni Shakid, who worked as a correspondent for a prominent Israeli newspaper, Yedioth Ahronoth, for three decades, and lived through the first and second intifadas.

He said: "Without the support from the Palestinian community violent armed attacks against Israeli citizens would not have happened."

Shakid added that popular uprisings have become integral to the long Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The new Palestinian generation, he said, is not aware of what happened in the intifadas of 1987-1993 and 2000-2003 and wants to put its name in the record of the Palestinian struggle.

Palestinian political analyst Ghassan Al-Khatib, the vice president of Birzeit University in the West Bank, told Arab News that the current Israeli government continues to oppress the Palestinians without the slightest consideration of its impact on the status of the Palestinian Authority.

"The situation will worsen, and no one knows where things will go, especially since Israel has focused on the economic solution and Palestinians see no hope for a political solution," Al-Khatib said.

Meanwhile, the Israeli Ministry of Education has asked those in charge of educational programs in schools that belong to Palestinian Israelis not to include any material in the curricula that covers commemorating the Nakba –

the destruction of Palestinian society and homeland in 1948, and the permanent displacement of a majority of the Palestinian Arabs.



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Israeli forces kill Palestinian in Jenin raid2 Palestinians shot dead by Israeli army in Jenin clashes: medics

[Turkish citizens warming to NATO and EU as new cold war bites](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-04-14 18:01

ANKARA: A new survey has found that Turkish public opinion is more oriented toward international organizations such as NATO, reflecting a positive stance on the country's EU membership bid.

The survey, titled "Turkish Perceptions of the European Union," was conducted by the German Marshall Fund of the US with the field study carried out in March by Istanbul-based Infakto Research Workshop across 29 provinces of Turkey through face-to-face interviews with 2,180 people.

The survey revealed that 48 percent of respondents expressed trust in the EU, a rise from the 40 percent who said the same last year; 39 percent voiced support for NATO, a jump from 32 percent in 2021.

As a candidate for EU accession for 23 years and as a powerful member of NATO with increasing economic and military dependency on Russia, Turkey is now trying to find a place in the changing European security and political architectures.

NATO's tough position on the Ukraine conflict also turned the public opinion in favor of the alliance, seeing it as a key pillar of Turkey's security.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, the Ankara office director of the German Marshall Fund, said the relatively higher trust shown by the younger generation in Turkey toward international institutions is a reflection of their frustration with the conditions in Turkey.

"Economic challenges such as high inflation, eroding real earnings and unemployment, decreasing quality of education and the polarized political environment frustrate young people who are increasingly looking abroad for a way out," he told Arab News.

Support for Turkey's EU membership is high (58 percent) and even higher in the 18-24 age group (73 percent). However, the confidence that Turkey will become an EU member remains low, with average expectations for the accession timeline ranging between 10 to 15 years.

"In terms of realpolitik, both the Ukraine conflict and Syrian refugee crisis have definitely underlined to many policymakers in the EU about Turkey's geostrategically important location," Paul T. Levin, director at Stockholm University Institute for Turkish Studies, told Arab News.

"But this occurs against a deep unease with the current regime's foreign policy and poor democratic record. Both sides are in a sense thrust together by geography and events and are struggling to find ways to coexist and collaborate despite serious value divergences and a defunct EU accession process that puts a premium on these divergences."

The survey also revealed tendencies regarding other global actors and regions and showed that Russia's invasion of Ukraine obliged Turkey to reconsider its relationship with Russia and the West.

Thirty-eight percent of respondents want Turkey to play a more active role in the Middle East, Balkans and North Africa, while 59 percent would prefer Ankara to deal with its domestic problems first.

One-third of the respondents think Turkey should cooperate most closely with EU countries on international issues.

Galip Dalay, a fellow at the Centre for Applied Turkey Studies at the German Institute for International and Security affairs, told Arab News that the increased public support for the EU accession bid and NATO reflects the pursuit in Turkey for democratization and more openness on the global scale.

Regarding the Ukrainian conflict, 44 percent of the respondents said Turkey should mediate between the parties, while 40 percent said Ankara should remain neutral.

“The survey clearly highlights that the Turkish public doesn’t want their country to be entangled in the war Russia is waging against Ukraine. The Turkish government’s policy of staying out of the conflict and attempting mediation has a strong public backing,” Unluhisarcikli of the German Marshall Fund said.

The survey also found that 58 percent of respondents consider the US its biggest threat, followed by Russia (31 percent, rising from 19 percent last year) and Israel (29 percent, rising from 24 percent in 2021).

“Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has significantly lowered the support to cooperate with Russia and increased the unilateralist tendencies rather than increasing support for cooperating with the US or the EU because pro-Russian sentiment in Turkey has always been another manifestation of being against the West,” said Unluhisarcikli.

When asked about how the conflict in Syria should be resolved, 50 percent of respondents said Syria’s territorial integrity should be maintained and the Assad regime replaced. But 21 percent said that Syria should go back to its status before the civil war under Assad’s leadership, with 17 percent believing that the Syrian opposition should have their own territory.

“The survey shows that roughly half of the Turkish public thinks that Assad should go and Syria’s territorial integrity should be maintained. This is also Turkey’s official policy. Those who support returning to the pre-war status quo under Assad’s leadership are less than 25 percent,” said Unluhisarcikli.

He added: “So I don’t think there is an expectation by the Turkish public to change the Syria policy. However, there is an increasing tendency to expect Turkey to solve its own problems rather than playing an active role in the neighborhood.”

In the meantime, 51 percent of respondents said Turkey and the EU had conflicting interests in the Syrian civil war.

With rising global risks around Turkey, which neighbors several conflict zones, Dalay said that the Turkish people will be inclined to take a cautious stance to minimize potential challenges.

“Despite the restrained approach of Turkish public opinion regarding the Syrian conflict, I don’t expect a quick normalization process with the Assad regime apart from some bilateral engagements at the intelligence and security levels,” he said.

Dalay believes that the dip in support for Russia and the enhanced trust in Brussels does not mean more leverage for Washington over Ankara.

“The reason is simple,” he said, “the EU is considered a domestic matter for Turkey thanks to its agency for uplifting the country’s democratic standards. However, the relationship with the US is often framed as a foreign policy and security matter where both sides have seen serious crises over the previous years. Therefore, the cautious stance in Turkey toward Washington is mostly linked with the traces that were left from the latest diplomatic blows.”



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Turkish, British, Italian defense ministers to discuss Ukraine in Istanbul
Greek, Turkish leaders seek common ground over Ukraine war

Saudi Arabia expresses support for humanitarian aid mechanism for Lebanon

Wed, 2022-04-13 20:58

BEIRUT: Saudi Arabia has expressed its support for the people of Lebanon and its desire to bolster ties between the two nations following the return of its envoy to Beirut.

Walid Bukhari, the Saudi ambassador to Lebanon, told Lebanese President Michel Aoun on Wednesday that “the Kingdom is keen on helping the Lebanese people during difficult circumstances and strengthening relations between the two countries.”

According to the president’s media office, the two men discussed bilateral relations and Bukhari told Aoun about “the mechanism of the Saudi-French joint fund aimed at providing humanitarian support and achieving stability and development in Lebanon.”

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Gulf states recalled their ambassadors from Lebanon in October in protest against insulting statements made by former Information Minister George Qordahi regarding the war in Yemen.

Bukhari last met Aoun in March 2021. That meeting took place after a failed attempt to form a government led by former Premier Saad Hariri and the exchange of accusations of disrupting the process between Hariri and Aoun.

Since returning to Beirut, Bukhari has held talks with religious authorities, current and former prime ministers and interior ministers, foreign diplomats and other politicians.

Kuwaiti Ambassador Abdul-Al Sulaiman Al-Qenaie has also returned to Beirut. He said after meeting Prime Minister Najib Mikati on Wednesday that “restoring diplomatic relations and the return of ambassadors indicate the success of the Kuwaiti initiative.”

He added that both Lebanon and the Gulf states had mutually agreed that their long history was above everything else and that “what happened is in the past and the return of ambassadors will lead to further rapprochement and cooperation that benefit the brotherly countries.”

Wednesday’s developments coincided with the 47th anniversary of the start of the civil war in Lebanon. Hariri tweeted: “The suffering of the Lebanese is repeated in different forms.”

Meanwhile, the joint parliamentary committees were unable to approve a draft Lebanese capital control law on Wednesday.

Ibrahim Kanaan, chair of the Finance and Budget Committee, said: “We are making amendments to the current draft.”

Politicians have failed to pass the law since 2019 when Lebanon descended into a financial crisis that has paralyzed its banking system and frozen depositors out of their US dollar accounts.

Formal capital controls are a policy recommendation of the International Monetary Fund, from which Lebanon hopes to secure an aid package.

Lawmaker Bilal Abdullah said the draft contained “defects and needs amendments.”

He told Arab News: “The conditions of the IMF are harsh ... How will we face people if the flour and medicines are no longer subsidized? What is the point of competing for parliamentary seats in a bankrupt country?”

“Some people are preventing any progress toward the country’s recovery plan. However, some are forgetting that the country is bankrupt, and we must not stop negotiations with the IMF.”

Pressure is mounting on last week’s preliminary agreement between an IMF team and Lebanese authorities to implement the fund’s conditions to prevent a complete financial collapse.

The Depositors Outcry Association protested in Beirut against the draft capital control law. Alaa Khorshid, its head, said: “We cannot accept the theft of our money followed by the enactment of a law to protect the thieves.”

In another development, the US Department of State’s report about human rights in Lebanon referred to reliable information about “serious political interference with the judiciary and judicial affairs and imposing severe restrictions on the freedom of expression and media, including violence, threats of violence, arrests, unjustified prosecutions against journalists, censorship and the existence of laws criminalizing defamation, severe restrictions on internet freedom and the forced return of refugees to a country where their lives or freedom are threatened.”

The report mentioned “the presence of serious high-level and widespread official corruption” and added that “government officials enjoyed a measure of impunity for human rights abuses, including evading or influencing judicial processes.”

The report also cited “unofficial detention facilities by the terrorist Hezbollah party and Palestinian militias.”



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Saudi ambassador hits ground running on return to Beirut
Lebanon's grand mufti welcomes return of Saudi ambassador to Beirut