

# In Iraqi Kurdish city, women gain power without parity

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HALABJA: In the Kurdish city of Halabja in northeastern Iraq, municipal director Kwestan Faraj recalls the day when being a woman saved her life. Though equality may be a distant reality for many women in Iraq, in Halabja women have reached top levels of local government.

Mayor, university dean, director of the veterinary department, and health spokesperson are some of the senior posts held by women in the city of around 115,000 inhabitants.

It marks something of a departure for Iraqi Kurdistan, where public affairs have long been dominated by a handful of men. Tradition and conservative values have meant that women face routine discrimination and are largely confined to the private sphere.

"When you are a woman, climbing the ranks comes with a lot of sacrifices," Faraj, 55, said.

A former deputy head of the municipality for 15 years, Faraj launched her political career many years earlier when as a student she handed out leaflets against Saddam Hussein's regime, which carried out an infamous chemical attack on the city shortly before the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988. She recalled one day when an armed man arrived demanding that she sign dubious paperwork. She refused.

"I thought he would pull out his gun and shoot," she said.

"He got up and told me: 'If you weren't a woman, I know what I would have done'."

She said that in her city the drive for gender equality was largely led by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), one of two historical parties in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Yet some residents complain that the advances are largely cosmetic and aimed at masking the shortcomings of public services.

A junior partner in the Kurdistan regional government in Irbil, the PUK holds the post of speaker in the regional parliament, which it also awarded to a woman, Rewaz Faiq.

The party "believes in equality between men and women in all domains," Faraj said.

"This has allowed us to achieve gender balance in administrative posts in Halabja," said the head of the municipality, who has held the post since 2016.

Halabja prides itself on having had a woman mayor, Adela Khanum, in the first decades of the 20th century. Now it has another, Nuxsha Nasih.

It also has Kurdistan's first female university dean, Mahabad Kamil Abdullah. "The Islamist parties were among the first to congratulate me when I became the president of Halabja University," she said.

But it is by no means representative of the situation of women in Kurdistan as a whole. A 2018 UN report found that women in the workforce represent barely 15 percent of the women of working age. About three quarters of those work in the public sector.

In Iraq's Oct. 10 parliamentary election, more than 90 women were elected according to preliminary results, exceeding the minimum 83-seat quota established for women in the 329-seat chamber.

Though the Kurdistan region has cultivated an image of relative stability and tolerance, women's rights activists say key issues like forced marriage and female genital mutilation have gone unaddressed.

"It is not enough to have women in high posts. There need to be more women in the lower ranks," said Gulistan Ahmed, who heads the governmental commission for human rights in Halabja.

Many residents are more preoccupied with the failings of public services than with seeking gender equality.

"There have been no notable changes in the city under their mandate, whether at the level of public services or with the launch of new projects," complained Wshyar Abdulkarim, a 45-year-old spice merchant.

Female market trader Mujda Ahmed said having women in top jobs had yet to lead to an improvement in services for women.

"I have worked in the market for six years and not a single person has built public toilets for women," she said.

"I have the impression that they are being used by their parties, which simply want to improve their image on the issue of equality, nothing more."



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## [Ancient and modern fuse together at the Indian pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai](#)

Thu, 2021-10-21 21:41

DUBAI: Stepping into India's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai is like being instantly transported from the skyscraper-dominated skyline of the Middle East's commercial capital to the hustle and bustle of South Asia.

The pavilion, located in Al-Forsan Crescent in the expo's Opportunity District, is one of the largest at the event. Designed by CP Kukreja Architects in Delhi, it features an innovative kinetic facade made up of 600 individual blocks in assorted hues of brown and beige – not entirely unlike the desert landscape outside – arranged in a mosaic of panels, each of which rotates on an axis.



The Indian pavilion's design represents the country's dynamism and forward-thinking vision, echoing the theme of an "India on the move." (Credit: Supplied)

The design is intended to represent India's dynamism and forward-thinking vision, echoing the theme of an "India on the move;" a country rooted in its rich heritage but also avant-garde and innovative in its approach to technological and economic advances.

The pavilion is also a nod to the nation's fight against COVID-19 and the various reforms implemented by the government to prepare for what is hoped will be a period of high and accelerated growth as India strives to become a \$5 trillion economy.



Combining both its heritage and its ambition, the Indian pavilion features yoga demonstrations alongside displays on its space program. (Credit: Supplied)

"The pavilion takes visitors through the numerous phases of development and the unparalleled growth trajectory that India has experienced in all sectors, ranging from health and wellness, climate change, biodiversity, food agriculture to accomplishments in space," Aman Puri, the pavilion's commissioner general and the consul general of India in Dubai, told Arab News.

"We have a wide assortment of festivals and celebrations to offer at the pavilion, which provide our visitors with a once-in-a-lifetime experience to get the ... feel of the diverse Indian culture."

Visitors are greeted warmly as they arrive at the state-of-the-art pavilion, which occupies a 1.2 acre site and showcases the nation's cultural treasures and technological marvels.



Combining both its heritage and its ambition, the Indian pavilion features yoga demonstrations alongside displays on its space program. (Credit: Supplied)

As they move along a winding pathway they pass by a live yoga display in an area surrounded by greenery, a demonstration of Ayurveda, India's ancient art of wellness, and a sharply contrasting area dedicated to India's space program.

Visitors then move up through several levels that offer insights into various aspects of Indian culture, heritage and modern-day achievements. Massive floor-to-ceiling LED screens show images of Indian dancers and traditional ceremonies, and showcase the nation's successes in the fields of robotics, energy, e-commerce, healthcare, cryptocurrency and blockchain.

A number of conference rooms and meeting spaces will be used to host talks and networking events in the coming months in an attempt to encourage the forging of new international business relationships with India.



Prior to the pandemic, bilateral trade between India and the UAE was worth \$60 billion. As business begins to return to normal, the governments of both countries hope to facilitate investments totaling \$75 billion in the coming years.

“The expo is an important occasion to exhibit and invite the world to participate in India’s economic growth by utilizing the existing Indian talent base, creating additional employment opportunities, and empowering the secondary and tertiary sectors,” said Puri.

“The plethora of global discussions, business and investment summits will focus on creating synergies and providing opportunities to explore and accelerate trade partnerships.”

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## **INNUMBERS**

**8.5 million** – Population of overseas Indians in the Gulf states (2018).

**(Source: GoI, Ministry of External Affairs)**

Noting that India is “a country of start-up unicorns, and with an ecosystem

of more than 50,000 recognized start-ups,” Puri said that “the Innovation Hub at the India pavilion will host several leading startups from India. Expo 2020 Dubai will be an excellent platform for these startups to engage with the global market.”



As it emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, India has set its sights on becoming a high-tech, \$5 trillion economy. (Credit: Supplied)

Among the events the pavilion will host is a World Majlis, which includes a program of talks including: Lessons from Space, on Oct. 19; Cities on the Move, on Nov. 2; and Off the Beaten Path, on Jan. 13.

For those interested in sampling some of India’s heritage, arts and crafts, and cultural treasures, the pavilion features a retail area with shops selling gemstones, textiles and pashminas from Jodhpur, Rajasthan and Jaipur.

And of course there is also a food court offering a wide range of Indian delicacies, along with a fine-dining restaurant, managed by Taj Hotels, where visitors can feast on a selection of the country’s rich culinary offerings.

The pavilion will also offer a packed schedule of indoor and outdoor performances of traditional Indian music and dance. In addition, visitors are invited to take part in festivities such as Diwali, the festival of light, and Holi, the festival of color.



India's state-of-the-art pavilion, which occupies a 1.2 acre site, showcases the nation's cultural treasures alongside its technological marvels. (Credit: Supplied)

There are plans for the pavilion to remain as a permanent space for cultural

and business exchange after the expo concludes, a testament to the long-standing relationship between the UAE and India.

About 2.75 million Indian nationals live in the UAE, representing 27 percent of the Gulf state's population of about 10 million. The majority work in the service industry, which was badly hit by the precautionary lockdown measures during the pandemic. As a result, many Indian expats were forced to return home.

India's participation at the expo coincides with the Indian government's Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav initiative, also known as India@75, a year-long celebration of the upcoming 75th anniversary of independence from British colonial rule.



The Indian pavilion's design represents the country's dynamism and forward-thinking vision, echoing the theme of an "India on the move." (Credit: Supplied)

The Indian consulate has launched a number of special events, in addition to those taking place at the expo, to mark the anniversary, including competitions, documentary screenings and art exhibitions. The consulate is also reportedly planning a joint celebration to coincide with the 50th UAE National Day on Dec. 2, in celebration of the bond of friendship between the nations.

Expo 2020 Dubai is the 35th World Expo. The previous one was in Milan in 2015, and the next is scheduled to take place in 2025 in the Japanese city of Osaka, which also hosted the 1970 World Expo.



People attend the opening ceremony of the Dubai Expo 2020 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on September 30, 2021. (REUTERS/Ahmed Jadallah/File Photo)

The event dates back to 1851 and the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in London, the first of what came to be called World Expos. In recent years have been staged every five years in a host city for a period ranging from three to six months.

Since 2013, when Dubai impressed a selection panel in Paris with its bid for the 2020 event, the expo has been one the most talked about and eagerly anticipated events in the UAE.

Organizers say the expo, which was delayed by a year because of the pandemic and finally got underway on Oct. 1 this year, provides a showcase for more than 200 participating entities, including 192 countries, and features 60 events. About 25 million visitors are expected before it closes in April.

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Saudi Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai welcomes 23,000 visitors in one day  
Saudi Arabia's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai puts on a show for curious guests

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# Lebanon Christian leader summoned over deadly violence

Author:

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Thu, 2021-10-21 21:56

BEIRUT: The head of the Lebanese Forces Christian group, Samir Geagea, has been summoned for questioning over deadly violence that erupted at a Shiite rally last week, a judicial official said Thursday.

Seven people were killed in Beirut on October 14 during a protest organized by the Shiite movements Amal and Hezbollah to demand Tarek Bitar, the judge investigating Beirut's powerful port blast, be removed.

Hezbollah and Amal accused the Lebanese Forces (LF), which supports the probe, of being responsible for sniper fire against the protesters that ignited street clashes.

The Christian group denies the charges.

Fadi Akiki, a representative of the military court, had "instructed the army intelligence to summon Geagea and take his statement based on information provided by arrested LF members," the judicial official said.

Twenty-six people were arrested after the violence in the heart of the Lebanese capital, most of them LF members, the official said on Thursday.

The exact circumstances of the violence remain unclear.

Geagea has denied responsibility for the deaths, saying that residents of Beirut's Christian neighborhood of Ain Al-Remmaneh had "defended" themselves against "Hezbollah militiamen who tried to enter their homes."

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah said on Monday that his Iran-backed movement had 100,000 armed fighters at its disposal, and warned it is against sparking any "civil war."

On Thursday, Geagea told the Lebanon's MTV channel he was not aware of the summons.

"I am ready to appear before the judge, on one condition: that Hassan Nasrallah does it before me," he said.

Nasrallah has been in hiding since the war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006.

Tensions flared after Bitar summoned two Amal former ministers for questioning as part of the investigation into last year's devastating Beirut port blast.

The explosion of a huge stockpile of poorly stored fertilizer on the dockside on August 4, 2020 killed more than 210 people, wounded thousands and ravaged half the capital.



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Lebanon has scant chance of getting IMF aid, Geagea says

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## [Woman dies in crash, run over repeatedly on pitch-black Lebanese highway](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-10-21 20:34

BEIRUT: Lebanon on Thursday woke to news of one of the bleakest moments brought on by the country's energy crisis, after the smashed-up body of a female Ethiopian worker was found on Al-Zahrani Highway, which links Beirut

to the south.

According to a security source, she was killed in a crash during the night but was run over again and again as drivers could not see her body in the dark.

People took to the streets for the second day in a row to protest their ever-worsening conditions, especially the uncontrolled rise in fuel prices and its repercussions on everyday life.

On Thursday, Banque du Liban said a meeting was held with the executive director at the International Monetary Fund during which the government's priorities were discussed, especially with regard to a "comprehensive economic project."

The IMF's Mahmoud Mohieldin described his visit to Lebanon and his meetings with officials as "successful, with a positive outcome, compared to previous visits."

He said: "I saw a better consensus over priorities and a common discourse between the parties regarding the economic crisis and its social effects. The meetings reflect the four priorities that constitute the pillars of future dealings with the IMF, and a framework for the negotiations that the government will carry out with the BDL in the coming weeks. It is important to consider a timeframe."

Mohieldin stressed the importance of unifying the exchange rate which was, he added, usually a product of comprehensive economic reforms that were being initiated.

"A law to control remittances from inside and outside the country needs to be adopted, along with structural reforms and emphasis on the issue of governance, transparency and sector-related priorities, determined by the state.

"If we succeed in developing a good framework to present to the IMF in the coming weeks, it can then be presented to the IMF's board of directors, and the form of the program and the financing framework associated with it will thus be determined, in a way that will reinstate confidence in the Lebanese economy and restore financial flows," he said.

But the Cabinet has yet to convene as the ministers of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement are refusing to attend a session until Judge Tarek Bitar, who is leading the investigation into last year's Beirut Port blast, is dismissed and until the deadly street violence from earlier this month is investigated.

The government is also supposed to decide on the ration card for the country's poorest and most vulnerable, coinciding with the lifting of fuel subsidies.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati on Thursday contacted several officials following statements from the Culture Minister Mohammad Mortada, who is affiliated with the Shiite parties Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, about Shiite ministers

resigning from the government.

Mikati also met President Michel Aoun.

According to a ministerial source, their meeting revolved around “finding a formula” that would lead to the resumption of government work “under the pressure of stressful living conditions.”

“All parties realize that the uncontrolled rise in prices will implode in the street, and the government bears the responsibility to implement rescue measures and secure the required international assistance,” the source added.

Mikati chaired a committee meeting to address the repercussions of the financial crisis on public utilities.

The committee discussed existing obligations and an agreement to provide a financial, contractual and legal equation that allowed securing public utility services and the continuation or termination of business in a balanced and fair manner that took into account urgent factors.

The majority of contractors that signed with the Lebanese state have stopped their work, including waste removal companies, because the cost was calculated on the official exchange rate of LBP1,507 to the US dollar. But the Lebanese national currency trades at around LBP20,000 to the dollar on the black market.

During the meeting, it was decided that the first Cabinet session would announce measures that would respond to the living crisis, specifically raising the daily transport allowance, and approving a monthly advance as social assistance for workers in public institutions, government hospitals and schools, within an integrated project.



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IMF official hopes Lebanon program talks can start before new year  
Lebanon elite united against Beirut port blast probe seen as survival threat

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## [Tunisia president promises 'dialogue' over political system](#)

Thu, 2021-10-21 20:08

TUNIS: Tunisia's president said on Tuesday he would launch a "national dialogue" on changing electoral law and the political system, but gave no detail on how he would allay international concerns about his seizure of near total power.

President Kais Saied assumed executive authority in July then last month brushed aside most of the constitution. Critics called the moves a coup and the European Union this week joined other donors in calling for a restoration of democratic order.

In a speech streamed on the presidential Facebook page, Saied said the

dialogue would include the country's young people, but kept up a defiant tone.

He said the discussions would not include "those who stole the people's money and traitors". He also criticised what he called foreign interference, telling world powers to "return smuggled Tunisian money to European and international banks".

Critics say his moves have cast doubt over the democratic gains of Tunisia's 2011 revolution. But his supporters have hailed the changes, saying they have reclaimed the revolution from an entrenched, corrupt elite.

Saied announced a new government this month but gave no indication he was ready to relinquish control. Under rules announced in September, the new cabinet ultimately answers to him rather than the new prime minister, Najla Bouden.



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