

Kuwait's ambassador to Saudi Arabia highlights importance of upcoming GCC summit

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1609621347828767500

Sun, 2021-01-03 00:02

LONDON: Kuwait's ambassador to Saudi Arabia stressed the importance of the upcoming 41st Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit in light of developments in the region.

There is a "fraternal and positive atmosphere" among GCC leaders "which reflects the spirit of responsibility and sincere belief in the importance of strengthening Gulf solidarity in facing common challenges and establishing peace and stability for the benefit" of the council, Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Sabah said.

Sheikh Ali added that "the Gulf faces major economic, development and political issues and challenges," and that GCC leaders will discuss all of these issues and challenges with one vision that stems from their belief in a common destiny and their keenness to preserve the interests of the region's countries and their peoples.



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Saudi Arabia's King Salman welcomes participation of Gulf leaders in GCC summit
King Salman invites Emir of Qatar to GCC Summit

[UN eyes bigger role for creative economy in promoting sustainable development](#)

Sat, 2021-01-02 23:35

NEW YORK CITY: COVID-19 has plunged theaters into darkness, thrown down the shutters on art galleries, and canceled innumerable concerts, exhibitions and book signings. According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the cancelation of public performances alone has cost authors roughly 30 percent of their royalties worldwide, while the global film industry has reported a revenue loss of \$7 billion.

By disrupting cultural life, the coronavirus pandemic has brought to light the chronic volatility of the creative industries. Many artists were already struggling to make ends meet, often working part-time under precarious contracts. For some, lockdown measures introduced to contain the outbreak were the final straw.

And yet, at the same time, COVID-19 has revealed the industries' immense potential. Beside their therapeutic effects, arts and culture are also drivers of social cohesion, inclusion, innovation and growth, not only for small businesses but for the broader economy. This potential, to a great extent, remains untapped.



Beside their therapeutic effects, arts and culture are also drivers of social cohesion, inclusion, innovation and growth, not only for small businesses but for the broader economy. (AFP/File Photo)

Marisa Henderson, UNCTAD's Geneva-based head of the Creative Economy Program, says she sees this potential everywhere she turns, from the Arabic calligraphy she has seen in Dubai, to the jewellery designers she has met in Doha, and the women she has seen telling children's stories in Gulf libraries.

"Women have been the engine of the creative economy, doing it without even noticing: Sewing, for example, or designing a piece of clothing, or embroidering and telling stories," Henderson told Arab News.

It is with this in mind that the UN placed women and girls at the heart of its resolution to make 2021 an International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development, recognizing the need to promote inclusive economic growth, foster innovation and provide opportunities and empowerment for all.

Indonesia was the main sponsor of the proposal, which was presented by a global grouping of more than 80 countries.



With so many urgent global challenges to contend with, the arts have often found themselves pushed down the pecking order. (AFP/File Photo)

Marking a watershed for the creative industries, resolution 74/198 singled out the creative economy as an important tool on the path to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals – a comprehensive set of universal targets to eradicate poverty in all its forms, protect the planet and improve lives. The 17 goals were adopted by all UN member states in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda.

With so many urgent global challenges to contend with, the arts have often found themselves pushed down the pecking order. This is changing, however, in part thanks to technological advances, which have upended old categories and definitions, giving rise to new, hitherto undefined artforms, making the creative industries more accessible to audiences and consumers, and more profitable for investors.

“We have goods that we’ve never heard of before,” said Henderson. “3D music: How do you classify that in the creative services? How do you count and sell it?”

“Technology is affecting the way artists sell jewelry, toys, arts and crafts, paintings, and musical instruments. Visual arts are creative goods, too. But now they’re being sold online, so there’s a service component involved.”

INNUMBERS

Creative industry

* 30m – People employed worldwide in cultural and creative sectors.

* 10% – The sectors' projected contribution to global GDP.

Redefining creative industries and improving the way data is collected is a top priority for UNCTAD, as the agency gears up for a busy year. “We need to know so we understand what we’re talking about,” said Henderson.

“This is important for policymakers and governments who are trying, for example, to regulate downloads. How much money does the platform get versus what the creative gets? This is usually done through Google and Spotify, but the government has a role of facilitating it.

“Generally, we don’t have that kind of information in developing countries.”

UNCTAD’s Creative Economy Program helps developing countries maximize their gains from these industries to generate employment and reduce poverty.

The agency’s help is demand-driven. While countries mobilize their own funds, they come to UNCTAD with their own particular set of problems, seeking the UN agency’s data-driven insight to help carve out a space for their creative industries.



Dancers of the Palestinian Jafra Dabke Team perform a traditional dabke dance while wearing latex gloves and surgical masks for people confined due to a

COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic lockdown in the village of Tarqumia northwest of Hebron in the occupied West Bank, on April 15, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

Henderson offers the example of Omani music, which she recently discovered. "It was very traditional, but it also had very modern elements to it that are different from what you conceive of as Arabic music. I thought, 'this music is a creative industry.' In Oman, they have so much potential, it's incredible."

UNCTAD helps countries identify their so-called "leakages," where their specific needs lie, but also their trade potential: How can they attract investments? What are the legal instruments that need to be in place for implementation? Then a national conversation follows, involving artists and all other stakeholders.

UNCTAD helps draft a plan of action, the execution of which relies on cooperation between different ministries and agencies. "We make sure that the infrastructure is not imposed. It has to be one that is created for their benefit," Henderson said.

While the main problem in developing countries remains the lack of infrastructure, countries who do have a strategy, such as Malaysia, have a difficult time implementing it.

"And I understand why it's hard. This is not an industry that can be managed by a single ministry. For the creative industries, you have to bring together the ministries of culture, trade, technology, intellectual property, and foreign affairs," Henderson said.

"UNCTAD perceives creative economy as a circle. It is not just art. You need to make use of these industries to capture investment, have a production cycle, create employment, and hopefully be able to export. It's a creative circle."



Sherazade Mami, a 28-year-old Tunisian professional dancer and performer at the Caracalla dance theatre and a teacher at the Caracalla dance school, practices while wearing a surgical mask on the roof of her apartment building in the suburb of Dekwaneh on the eastern outskirts of Lebanon's capital Beirut on April 4, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

At the first World Conference on Creative Economy in Bali in 2018, an informal group of governments, private stakeholders and NGOs came together under the moniker "Friends of creative economy," injecting momentum into a nascent movement that believes in sharing experiences as part of the engine of creative economy.

The UAE took the floor in Bali and offered to host the next round, which will take place in December.

"Arab states in general are really pushing this," said Henderson. "The Emiratis realize there are a lot of things, like gaming and apps, that are not necessarily related to culture as we think about it but are in fact industries. And the driver, the petrol, the main commodity behind these industries is creativity.

"The Emiratis realize that the creative economy is beyond making money, even beyond culture. It is about social change. They know that by encouraging creativity, they will bring about change for so many in society, including young people and women."

She added: "They know they can buy very precious art and put it in a museum.

But they want something different: They are looking to inspire people. They want to integrate creativity into their culture and bring it to a new level.



A painting by a Palestinian artist is seen during an exhibition entitled "Corona and the art" organized by the Arts & Crafts Village, a centre that helps promote artists and their work in an attempt to maintain and preserve the Palestinian heritage, in Gaza City on November 12, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

"But they are also very wise economically. They see the importance of creative economy in terms of economic growth."

The program of activities to implement the International Year of Creative Economy kicks off on Jan. 25. The event includes the launch of a new book, co-prefaced by Henderson.

"What could be more fitting entering a new era than a dedicated focus on creativity and the role it can play in helping us achieve the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030?" she said.

"More than ever we need creative thinking, innovation and problem-solving to imagine ourselves out of the furrow we have been in. The creative industries, which are the lifeblood of the creative economy, are well placed to help."

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Lebanese creative fashions traditional tableware from Beirut blast's broken glass
Major boost for Saudi creative industries at Misk Global Forum

[Sudan says Nile dam talks to resume Sunday](#)

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Sat, 2021-01-02 18:57

KHARTOUM: Sudan is to join a new round of talks with Egypt and Ethiopia Sunday in a bid to resolve a long-running dispute over a huge Ethiopian dam on the Blue Nile, state media reported.

The three countries have held multiple rounds of talks since Ethiopia broke ground on the project in 2011 but they have so far failed to produce an agreement on the filling and operation of the vast reservoir behind the 145-meter (475-foot) tall dam.

The last, held by video-conference in early November, broke up without making any headway.

Late last month, Egypt called in Ethiopia's charge d'affaires after its foreign ministry spokesman claimed the dam dispute had become a welcome distraction from domestic problems for the Cairo government.

Sudan's state news agency SUNA said that officials from current African Union chair South Africa would be involved in the new round of talks.

Citing an unnamed official, SUNA said Sudan would propose granting African Union experts a "bigger role" in the negotiations for a binding agreement on the dam's filling and operation.

Cairo has expressed fears that the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will severely reduce the Nile's flow, with devastating effects for the more than 97 million Egyptians dependent on it.

Ethiopia says the hydroelectric power produced at the dam is vital to meet the power needs of its even larger population.

It insists downstream countries' water supplies will not be affected.

Sudan, which suffered deadly floods last summer when the Blue Nile reached its highest level since records began more than a century ago, hopes that the new dam will help regulate the river's flow.

The Blue Nile, which meets the White Nile in the Sudanese capital Khartoum, provides the great majority of the combined Nile's flow through northern Sudan and Egypt to the Mediterranean.



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Egyptian officials: Roadside bombing in Sinai kills 2 police 'Our children die in our hands': Floods ravage South Sudan

[Palestinian election hopes rise after rivals agree on poll plan](#)

Sat, 2021-01-02 21:03

AMMAN: Hopes that the first Palestinian polls in almost 15 years will be held soon have received a major boost with rival factions Hamas and Fatah exchanging written approval of a democratic election process.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported that President Mahmoud Abbas received a written letter from Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas political bureau, conveyed to him by Jibril Rajoub, secretary of Fatah Central Committee.

Abbas welcomed the letter's contents "regarding ending the division, building partnership and achieving national unity through democratic elections, with full proportional representation – legislative and presidential elections, and the National Council – to be held simultaneously," Wafa said.

The Palestinian president asked Hanna Nassir, chairman of the Central Elections Commission, to meet with him to discuss the procedures that should be followed to issue the election decrees, the news agency said.

The exchange of letters between the rival factions is a major step forward for internal Palestinian reconciliation efforts.

Abbas thanked Egypt, which sponsors the intra-Palestinian reconciliation talks, as well as Qatar, Turkey, Russia and Jordan, for their goodwill efforts in reaching the agreement.

Speaking during Fatah's 56th anniversary, Rajoub told Al-Awdah TV that contacts have taken place with Egypt, Qatar and Turkey.

FASTFACT

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for internal Palestinian reconciliation efforts.

“We told them to keep us out of their internal problems and agendas. For the first time, Egypt says Fatah is not responsible for the continuation of the reconciliation. We have taken a number of steps to overcome the obstacles. Israel has been the head of the external factors that have wished for the reconciliation not to take place.”

One issue that appears to have been resolved is Hamas’ agreement to support the candidacy of Abbas for president, Rajoub said.

Nabil Shaath, a senior adviser to Abbas, told Arab News that Egypt has been playing a positive role in bringing the sides together.

“Egypt has a national interest in Palestinian unity which will be helpful in ensuring security.”

Hamadeh Faraneh, a member of the Palestine National Council, said: “A presidential decree confirming the date for elections would be welcome so long as it comes as a result of a political will.”

Hamadeh Kamal, who runs a training program for released prisoners, said that he hopes that Haniyeh’s letter will reverse the repeated sense of disappointment and defeat among Gazans.

“Gazans don’t see any value in meetings and letters while they are hungry and in need. They are sick and tired of the status quo and the repeated failures to accomplish a breakthrough.”

Hani Almasri a Ramallah-based analyst and head of the Masar think tank, said that many obstacles have yet to be overcome. “This is a positive move, but many difficulties remain.”

Wael Manameh, a political analyst from Gaza, said that he hopes Haniyeh’s letter to Abbas shows that Hamas is totally committed to ending the split and holding elections.

“We need to take this opportunity to end the division. Our people have no more patience with the division that has hurt our cause and left the occupied areas in a deteriorating economic situation made worse by the pandemic.”



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Top diplomats from Jordan and Israel hold rare meeting on Palestine issue
Jordan urges Israel to stop undermining peace opportunities with Palestine

Turkey's academic freedom under spotlight with new appointment

Author:

Sat, 2021-01-02 21:02

ANKARA: Academic freedom in Turkey was dealt a huge blow with a politically motivated appointment to one of the country's handful of independent universities, Bogazici University, which is more than 150 years old.

By presidential decree the current rector of the university was replaced on the first night of the year with a political figure who was a candidate standing for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) during the previous general and local elections.

The new rector, Melih Bulu, was a founding member of a district branch of the AKP. Over the past year, 27 rectors have been appointed by the president.

Bogazici University, overlooking the Bosphorus, was founded in 1863, the first American higher education institution to be established outside the US. It has more than 15,000 students and six campuses on the European side of Istanbul.

This latest appointment symbolizes the increased politicization of Turkish universities, along with an alarming trend of keeping the critical voices in media, civil society and academia under the control.

"President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has tightened his control over the higher education system in Turkey," Berk Esen, a political scientist at Sabanci University in Istanbul, told Arab News.

As Erdogan has repeatedly stated that his party has not yet gained hegemony over education and culture, Esen thinks that such moves can be seen as deliberate attempts to change this situation.

He said Erdogan's decision to appoint Melih Bulu as rector is especially worrisome for several reasons.

"Bogazici is one of the best universities in the country and employs some of Turkey's most respected academics in various fields. In the past, President Erdogan refrained from appointing outsiders as rectors to prominent universities in the country," he said.

"Our country needs free academia, free scientists and productive students. This freedom and productivity cannot be achieved by appointing trustees. We want a free academia," tweeted Ali Babacan, the leader of breakaway DEVA party.

Students of the university, who are known for their high political awareness, protested under the Twitter hashtag #KayyumRektorIstemiyoruz (We don't want a trustee rector).

In 2018, several anti-war students were arrested after a police raid in their houses and dormitories after they staged a peaceful demonstration in the university campus against Turkey's military campaigns in Syria. They were criticized by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as being "communist, terrorist youth" in a public speech.

"It is impossible to have competitive universities on a global level and students who express themselves freely if you bring rectors to the universities in a top-down fashion. You cannot get success with such a mentality," said Burak Dalgin, a founding member of DEVA who is also a graduate of Bogazici University.

Dalgin studied at Bogazici University in the mechanical engineering department between 1995 and 1999 before starting to work in the investment sector.

"Despite the shortcomings of Turkish democracy in the past, the school was still a safe haven for personal liberty," he said.

Traditionally the candidate with the highest share of votes in the university elections became the rector of Bogazici University.

As the outgoing Bogazici rector is a professor at the university and briefly worked as vice-rector before taking on the top job, Esen said this recent move breaks with such precedent.

"Melih Bulu comes from outside the ranks of the Bogazici University and many have questioned whether he even has the academic credentials to work at Bogazici, let alone become rector. Also, his close connections to the AKP Istanbul branch will call into question his impartiality towards critics of the government among the academic staff and the student body," he said.

According to Esen, this latest decision to appoint a political crony will further contribute to the culture of fear that has permeated the higher education system in Turkey and significantly harm academic freedoms.

"There is now widespread fear that universities will turn into sites for Erdogan to reward his party stalwarts," he said.

Another presidential decree last year led to the closure of Sehir University, a private university in Istanbul linked to former prime minister and political rival Ahmet Davutoglu, making jobless all its academic staff, many of whom had taken a critical political stance over recent years.



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