

Professor takes the plunge to protect Kuwait's coral reefs

Fri, 2020-03-13 02:06

KUWAIT: Dr. Dari Alhuwail is a true modern-day hero. When he is not working as an assistant professor at Kuwait University's Department of Information Science, he is with the Kuwait Dive Team, plunging deep into the sea to protect the country's marine environment.

"I am saying this in all honesty and without the tiniest bit of cheesiness or corniness: we are 'Team Mission Impossible'," he said with the unmistakable pride of someone who has been associated with the volunteer diving team for close to 13 years now.

The Kuwait Dive Team is a group of diving professionals committed to protecting the marine ecosystem through salvage operations.

Officially, Alhuwail handles international relations, communicating with associations such as Project AWARE and Ocean Conservancy, but he also takes regular trips to monitor the corals and clear sea debris.

Alhuwail's relationship with the team goes back to his high-school days, when he saw press releases of the Dive Team's initiatives for picking up marine debris, sunken boats and beach trash.

"For me, their efforts symbolized something greater," he said.



Dr. Dari Alhuwail, an assistant professor at Kuwait University's Department of Information Science, has been a part of the Kuwait Dive Team since his high school days. (Supplied)

"All of the work that we undertake essentially involves protecting Kuwait's coral reefs because the reefs are one of the most important elements in the marine world." Alhuwail said.

"For example, on a regular day, we lift sunken boats and vessels, move debris and ghost nets from the waters and moor buoys to safeguard the reefs so that the boats don't anchor there."

In 2010, Kuwait experienced its worst coral bleaching season, with almost 80 percent of its reefs affected. Alhuwail says they are now recovering, but more effort is needed to reclaim what is lost.

"We have a coral transplantation project in place where we try and build new homes for the reefs, and we have artificial reef installations around Kuwait."

Alhuwail cites amateur diving and spearfishing around the reefs as some of the human activities that can damage these areas.

"Amateur divers have lesser control over their buoyancy, and sometimes when

you swim too close your fin breaks off a coral – it might have taken 10 or 20 years for that bit to grow.”

“No, we are not your regular 911,” said Alhuwail trying to explain the range of work he undertakes as part of the Dive Team.

However, the members do respond to some calls, for example about sunken boats that pose a threat to passing vessels. Even then, many factors need to be considered before the team sets out.

“The sea has certain rules that need to be observed – high tide, low tide, wind speed and direction, wave height, and add to that the things we need to do our homework on – location of the operation, threat to life, additional resources requirement and so on.”

• 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 and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation 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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Northern Red Sea coral reefs may survive a hot, grim future
Tunisian seeks to bring mobility to MENA's differently abled

Tunisian seeks to bring mobility to MENA's differently abled

Fri, 2020-03-13 02:00

DUBAI: In the Middle East, those who are differently abled or have some impairment are referred to as "people of determination" because of the tremendous effort required to live a life that others consider normal.

For Khadija Jallouli, that effort involves building the HawKar.

"The idea is an electric vehicle for people with reduced mobility. It's a one-seat city car that is directly accessible in a wheelchair. As a person with reduced mobility, I've had difficulties traveling long distances since university," says the Tunisian national, who gets around in a wheelchair.

HawKar is her way of expanding her world and living an independent life – a smart and sustainable electric vehicle wheelchair users can use to drive to their destination.

"It's more secure than an electric scooter and is adapted to different physical disabilities," she said.

HawKar has a low speed of 45 kilometers per hour (km/h), and can be charged directly at home with a standard plug-in.

Jallouli, who has a degree in food technology, has been working on the concept since 2016 together with her friend and co-founder Seifeddine Aissa, a mechatronics engineer with a passion for cars.

"This vehicle will allow people with physical disabilities to move long distances every day and to be autonomous and free to go to study, work, shop or simply go out (to) meet friends without thinking of how or looking for help," Jallouli said.

Cars for wheelchair users already exist in other countries. The Canta has been motoring differently abled users down bicycle paths in the Netherlands at speeds of 45 km/h since 2006, while the Chairiot solo was introduced in California in 2014.

Similar products are in development in the Czech Republic and the UK. By and large, however, these vehicles remain confined to their home markets, and the majority of units available in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are

conversions, typically altered to accommodate wheelchair users as passengers, not as drivers.

Testimonials on the brand's website talk of the need for such a concept, especially in MENA, HawKar's target market.

Jallouli said: "The infrastructure and public transport are not suitable for people with disabilities in the MENA region, and we need to improve their lives and include them in society – especially when you look at the statistics and see that they represent about 10 percent of the population in the MENA region!"

The World Health Organization estimates that about a billion people worldwide – or 15 percent of the population – live with some kind of disability.

In the MENA region, the projection runs to about 30 million people, many of whom experience discrimination and social exclusion. Figures for wheelchair users alone are not available. Reliable data is hard to find because there is no standardized way of collecting this information – when it is gathered at all.

HawKar has already been recognized internationally. Last year, the founding duo presented their idea alongside speakers from NASA at a forum on urban livability during the Global Entrepreneurship Summit in The Hague.

The two also toured Silicon Valley in the US to understand the startup ecosystem and connect with industry experts.

"We had a chance to visit the Tesla factory, and one of our supporters is a former vice-president of plant manufacturing at Tesla," Jallouli said.

They have won awards in Morocco and Tunisia, and HawKar was a finalist at the MIT Arab Start-Up Competition 2019.

So far, HawKar has been funded by electronics manufacturer Actia Engineering Services, where the startup is incubated, and has been able to garner technical support and advice from experts when required.

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Professor takes the plunge to protect Kuwait's coral reefs
PWD-friendly infrastructure rebuilds completed in Two Holy Cities, Saudi Arabia tells UN

79-year-old man becomes third victim in Lebanon; 15 nurses quarantined

Author:

Fri, 2020-03-13 01:32

BEIRUT: Lebanon has reported its third death from the coronavirus. A 79-year-old man with cancer died on Wednesday while being treated in a hospital in Jbeil.

He was sharing the room with a man, whose infection was not yet been confirmed.

Doctors' syndicate chief Sharaf Abu Sharaf said: "There are 15 nurses and two doctors being quarantined at home who have not showed any symptoms."

The streets have been almost empty as all entertainment and recreational facilities in the country have shut. The Lebanese Cabinet has doubled internet speed and capacity for Ogero users until the end of April, to encourage them to work and study at home.

Mohammed, a taxi driver in Beirut, told Arab News: "People have stopped going to malls and Beirut souks are empty. They are even refusing to take a cab and are walking instead."

Salam, a saleswoman in Sodeco, said: "Buying clothes is no longer a priority as people are afraid of the coronavirus. We are making sure to disinfect and sterilize the shop everyday but it seems like we will be closing soon."

The Lebanese General Directorate of General Security has begun implementing the decision of the Ministerial Committee for Combating Coronavirus to close all border crossing points with Syria, preventing entry without residence permits.

The directorate has also banned the Lebanese from entering Syria, where all border crossing points are expected to close four days after the issuance of the decision.

On Wednesday, the Lebanese prime minister stopped all flights between Italy, South Korea, Iran and China for a week.

Lebanon has also banned the entry of passengers from France, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Germany, Spain and the UK.

Diplomats, NGO workers, UNIFIL members, Lebanese citizens and members of Lebanese families who have not yet obtained their nationality or residence permits were granted a deadline of four days, until March 16, to return to Lebanon.

The arrival of the last flight from Iran on Wednesday at Rafic Hariri International Airport, carrying 105 passengers, provoked wide criticism on

social media, where people blamed Hezbollah and the authorities for allowing the entry of people from an affected country.

The first coronavirus case in Lebanon was a woman who arrived from the Iranian city of Qom on Feb. 20.

The airport's general security bureau ascertained that "passengers were tested" and denied that "people from a certain party entered the airport to receive the passengers and get them out without being tested."

Regarding pictures that have been circulating on social media, the bureau said: "The pictures are fabricated and can harm the Lebanese interests and the reputation of the airport."

The Banque du Liban said: "Banknotes, according to the World Health Organization, are like anything else we touch during the day and thus people should wash their hands after handling money."

According to the German Central Bank, the risk of handling banknotes is no greater than touching other things, such as a doorknob or light switches and that Banque Du Liban is taking all precautionous measures regarding the banknotes deposited to prevent the spread of the virus.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has announced a new plan to halt the spread of the virus in the camps of Syrian refugees, following a meeting attended by international organizations. The meeting decided "to organize awareness-raising campaigns and provide supplies to clean and sterilize refugee camps in cooperation with the UN."

Bassel Al-Hujairi, mayor of the border town of Ersal, which is home to over 60,000 Syrian refugees, said: "No coronavirus cases have been reported in Ersal so far. The major challenge we are facing is to limit gatherings in camps. We have closed the public park and canceled all gatherings."

Al-Hujairi added: "The Lebanese Army has set up a perimeter along the borders in the eastern mountain range near Ersal. But the danger comes from border crossing points outside the Ersal borders, which made us stop refugees from going to Syria, to protect them and the people of Ersal."



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IMF urges Lebanon to 'quickly' implement economic reforms
Coronavirus claims two with nearly 70 cases confirmed in Lebanon

[Yemeni government quits Hodeida redeployment committee](#)

Thu, 2020-03-12 23:54

AL-MUKALLA: The internationally recognized government of Yemen has suspended participation in the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) in the western province of Hodeida after a Houthi sniper gunned down a government soldier, the government said in a statement carried on the official Saba news agency on Wednesday.

The government said it had decided to boycott the committee's meetings in protest against an escalation in Houthi attacks against government observers, the Houthis' exploitation of the truce in Hodeida to mobilize forces on other battlefields, and restriction of the movements of the UN monitoring team.

The RCC was established under the Stockholm Agreement and assigned to monitor

the redeployment of forces in Hodeida and to supervise the clearance of land mines from Hodeida's seaports.

On Wednesday, a Houthi gunman shot a member of the government team that monitors the truce, despite having been notified about his movement.

"The Houthi militia gunned down a soldier at the fifth observation post in spite of having information that the soldier was moving to the post," Baha Khalefa, one of 10 government soldiers deployed at the joint observation posts, told Arab News.

Khalefa said that he and his fellow soldiers had pulled out of the posts to the last government-controlled areas in Hodeida. Government forces were subsequently placed on high alert in anticipation of an escalation of attacks by the Houthis in Hodeida.

BACKGROUND

The Redeployment Coordination Committee was established under the Stockholm Agreement.

"We will respond appropriately to any attack by the militia," Khalefa said.

Under the Stockholm Agreement, the Iran-backed Houthis are obliged to defuse land mines and to withdraw from Hodeida's seaports and open roads from and to the city in exchange for the Yemeni government halting a major military offensive that had reached Hodeida city.

Local rights groups say that more than 500 civilians have been killed in Hodeida by Houthi fire since December 2018.

On Wednesday, Brig. Gen. Mohammed Musleh Aydha, the head of the government's RCC team, said that the death of the Yemeni soldier threatens to end the Stockholm Agreement and see Hodeida descend into further violence.

State media outlets quoted Gen. Aydha as saying that government observers have been repeatedly targeted by Houthi fire for months and threatening a military response to Houthi attacks.

Yemen's Minister of Information Moammer Al-Eryani urged the UN to reassess its mission in Hodeida as the mission as the Houthis have failed to put into place the security arrangements laid out in the Stockholm Agreement.

"The UN mission has failed to force the Houthis to implement its obligations (under the Stockholm Agreement) – withdrawal from Hodeida ports and city and stop cease-fire breaches," the minister wrote on Twitter on Tuesday.

Elsewhere in Yemen, fighting continued on Thursday in the northern province of Jawf, Marib's Serwah and near Sana'a. In Jawf, Yemen's army pushed deeper into Khab and Sha'af, the largest district in the province, after expelling

Houthis from areas near the Saudi border, and reopened a strategic road between Jawf and Marib.

Government officials say that the Houthis, who seized control of Jawf's capital last week, have continued looting government offices in Hazem city and humanitarian aid, including generators, from the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center.



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Government forces foil two Houthi attacks in Hodeida232 civilians killed in Hodeida since Stockholm Agreement

[More than 500 medical sites struck in Syria since 2016](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-03-12 01:07

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday that it has documented more than 500 military attacks on medical facilities in Syria since it began counting them in 2016, with nearly as many deaths among staff

and patients.

About two-thirds of those struck were in Syria's northwest where fighting has intensified in recent months as Damascus, backed by Russia, has sought to capture the last slice of the country beyond its control.

A cease-fire between Russia and Turkey, which back opposing sides in the conflict, was agreed to last week and only minor violations have occurred.

The data documented 494 attacks on health facilities between 2016-2019, the report showed in what the WHO says is the first comprehensive time it has released of data on medical strikes.

Since the start of this year, it has confirmed nine further attacks, all in northwest Syria, that resulted in 10 deaths, without saying who was responsible.

The total death toll of medical workers and patients was 480 from January 2016 to present, it said.

"What is troubling, is that we've come to a point where attacks on health – something the international community shouldn't tolerate – are now taken for granted; something we have become accustomed to," said Richard Brennan, WHO's regional emergency director in the Eastern Mediterranean.

He added that only half of facilities in northwest Syria, where about 1 million people displaced by recent violence are based, remain operational.

The WHO, a Geneva-based UN agency, is mandated to keep track of attacks on health facilities and began doing so in 2016. The system has since then been formalized under its Surveillance System for Attacks.

Such data could help the UN Board of Inquiry which last year began investigating a series of incidents in northwest Syria, including attacks on health facilities.

UN officials have previously denounced "deliberate" attacks by the Syrian regime and its allies on protected civilian sites, including hospitals and schools. If proven, these would amount to war crimes.



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Road crash kills tens of people in Syria