

Four countries discuss 'tolerance in multiculturalism' at UAE summit

Thu, 2019-11-14 18:13

DUBAI: With over 200 nationalities currently residing in the GCC, countries across the region are continuing to promote the values of tolerance and coexistence through various initiatives.

The UAE first introduced the post of minister of tolerance with the appointment of Sheikha Lubna Al-Qasimi in 2016, reinforcing its commitment to eradicate ideological, cultural and religious bigotry in society.

The second edition of the World Tolerance Summit, held in Dubai on November 13 and 14, saw a bigger number of countries participating, including Saudi Arabia.

Dr Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Fawzan, vice-chairman and secretary general of the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue, reviewed the Kingdom's tolerance initiatives, and described the summit as "an opportunity to bring about positive change."

The summit's second day included a session titled "Tolerance in Multiculturalism: Achieving the Social, Economic and Humane Benefits of a Tolerant World," in which speakers from Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Tatarstan, and Columbia discussed ways in which their respective countries are attempting to instill social and economic tolerance.

Princess Lamia bint Majed Saud Al-Saud, secretary general and board member of Alwaleed Philanthropies in Saudi Arabia, touched on the importance of tolerance in humanitarian work.

"It is extremely important to be a tolerant and accepting person in order to be able to help others. Our organization works in 180 countries – and we do not have any discrimination when it comes to language, religion or color," said Al-Saud.

She said the region's diversity of nationalities is at the essence of the Arab society: "I think that tolerance is in our DNA. It is something we can trace back through our history and previous civilizations."

Alwaleed Philanthropies promotes cultural understanding through various centers across the world. Some of the most active are those located in Harvard University and Edinburgh.

"Prince (Al-)Waleed realized there was a serious problem in the way people viewed Islam and Arab culture after 9/11 and decided to take a proactive approach to fix this through the centers, which work on restoring the image of Muslims," said Al-Saud.

She added: "Tolerance starts with one's self. You have two ears, so listen to

others before you talk and keep an open mind.”

Also speaking at the summit, President Rustam Nurgaliyevich Minnikhanov of Tatarstan discussed the progress of tolerance in the republic’s various cities, which have a population of 4 million people from 173 nationalities.

The two main religions in Tatarstan are Islam and Orthodox Christianity, and the sovereign state went through a long period of conflict before religious groups found common ground.

“We have gone from 20 mosques in (Tatarstan) to more than 1,500, with some just 200 meters away from a church,” said Minnikhanov. “Today, we have stability in our cities, and we have created a council to adopt a system through which we can strengthen the values of tolerance and maintain the peaceful coexistence of religious parties.”

More than 20 million Muslims currently reside in Tatarstan, where new policies in healthcare, education and tourism are catering to the “halal lifestyle,” he added.

Similarly, Muferihat Kamil, Minister of Peace in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia said her country aims to move forward from a past based on prejudiced conflict.

“The reason behind building a ministry of peace in Ethiopia is the aspirations we have for our people in the existing situation in the country,” she said. “We aim to empower our people and build peace that will resonate with the rest of the region.”

Lucy Jeannette Bermudez Bermudez, president of the State Council of Colombia, discussed her country’s current transition between its government, residents and armed groups. “In order to promote tolerance and respect in the country, our concentration has been on the group known as FARC – the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia, which has now evolved into a political party,” said Bermudez.

The conflict between government and paramilitary groups, crime syndicates and FARC in Colombia began in the mid-1960s, and she stressed the need for the coexistence of different views, religions and race.

“We have different characteristics that we have to live with and even celebrate,” she added. “The advances we see in the UAE are something we look forward to establishing in my country. This model of government is one we should all follow.”



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UAE launches global tolerance initiative for youth
King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue takes part in tolerance summit in Dubai

[Major roads reopened in Lebanon after 2-day closure](#)

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Thu, 2019-11-14 13:21

BEIRUT: Lebanese troops reopened major roads around Lebanon Thursday after a two-day closure triggered by a TV interview with President Michel Aoun in which he called on protesters to go home.

The roads linking Beirut with the country's south and north were opened

shortly before noon Thursday, as well as others around the country. Protesters have been holding demonstrations since Oct. 17 demanding an end to widespread corruption and mismanagement by the political class that has ruled the country for three decades.

Aoun said Thursday that the demands of protesters are being followed adding that "they will be among the top priorities of the government that we are working on forming in the near future."

Aoun expressed hopes in comments released by his office that a new Cabinet "will be formed in the coming days" after removing obstacles that have been delaying the formation.

Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned his government on Oct. 29, meeting a key demand of the protesters. Since then there have been disagreements over the new Cabinet as Hariri insists it should be made up of technocrats who will concentrate on solving Lebanon's worst economic and financial crisis in decades while other politicians, including Aoun, want it to be a mixture of technocrats and politicians.

"Dealing with the developments should be based on national interests that need cooperation from all sides to achieve pursued goals," Aoun said.

Caretaker Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil tweeted that the priority is to form a "salvation government" and prevent anyone from taking the country into a confrontation. Bassil is Aoun's son-in-law and close aide.

The opening of the roads came a day after protesters started building a wall inside a tunnel on the highway linking Beirut with north Lebanon leading to an outcry by the public who saw it as a reminder of the 1975-90 civil war.

In the town of Jal Al-Dib, just north of Beirut, troops pushed away protesters from the highway and removed barriers that had been blocking the road since Tuesday night.

In the town of Choueifat south of Beirut, thousands of people attended the funeral of a 38-year-old father who was shot dead by a soldier at a protest Tuesday night. Alaa Abou Fakher's death marked the first such fatality since the economically driven demonstrations against the government engulfed the country last month.

That protest was ignited by comments made by Aoun in a televised interview, in which he said there could be further delays before a new government is formed.

Abou Fakher's coffin was carried through the streets of Choueifat as women dressed in black threw rice on it from balconies in a traditional Lebanese gesture.

Bank employees announced they will continue with their strike on Friday for the fourth day amid concerns for their safety as some of them have been subjected to insults by bank clients who were not allowed to withdraw as much as they wanted from their accounts. The country's lenders are imposing varying capital controls that differ from bank to bank, fueling the turmoil.





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[Egypt oil pipeline fire kills six](#)

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Wed, 2019-11-13 20:43

CAIRO: Six people were killed and 15 injured when a leaking oil pipeline caught fire in Egypt's northern province of Bahira on Wednesday, officials said.

The head of Egypt's oil pipelines authority, Abdelmoneim Hafez, said the leak was the work of "thieves" syphoning off oil.

The fire broke out on the pipeline near Itay Al-Baroud, a village half-way between Cairo and Alexandria, health ministry spokesman Khaled Mugahed said in a statement.

The wounded were taken to a nearby hospital, while the blaze was put out and

the leak fixed.



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Egypt working to calm Israel-Gaza fighting
Egypt's sovereign wealth fund to raise authorized capital five-fold up to \$62.15 billion

[Emirati soldier in Arab coalition fighting in Yemen killed in Najran](#)

Wed, 2019-11-13 23:09

RIYADH: An Emirati soldier was killed in Saudi Arabia near the border with Yemen on Wednesday.

Corporal Tariq Hussein Hassan Al-Baloushi was serving with UAE forces as part of the coalition supporting the Yemeni government against Houthi militants. The UAE General Command of the Armed Forces said the soldier died "performing his national duty in Najran as part of our forces' participation in "Operation Decisive Storm" and "Operation Restoring Hope," state news agency WAM reported.

No further details about his death were provided.

The general command extended its condolences and sympathy to the families of

the soldier.

The Arab coalition, which includes Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain intervened in the war in Yemen to restore the internationally-recognized government after it was ousted by the Iran-backed Houthi militia in 2015. Saudi Arabia's border areas near Houthi held territory have faced constant attacks from rockets and missiles fired from inside Yemen.



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Baghdad to 'step up'

Wed, 2019-11-13 20:24

BAGHDAD: Iraqi officials must "step up" to respond to mass demonstrations, the UN representative in Baghdad told AFP on Wednesday as anti-government rallies swelled in Iraq's capital and the country's south.

Protests demanding an overhaul of the political system have rocked Baghdad and the Shiite-majority south for weeks – the crowds unmoved by government pledges of reform and undeterred by the deaths of more than 300 demonstrators.

Washington and the United Nations have called on the government to respond seriously to the protests, with the world body's representative Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert saying the country's authorities must "step up to the plate and make things happen."

"They are elected by the people, they are accountable to them," the head of the UN's Iraq mission (UNAMI) told AFP in an exclusive interview.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, for his part, has said he told Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi that he "deplored the death toll" and to address the popular movement's "legitimate grievances."

The protests had slowed for a few days following a deadly crackdown by security forces in Baghdad and major southern cities but flared again Wednesday with demonstrations by striking students and teachers.

"We're here to back the protesters and their legitimate demands, which include teachers' rights," said Aqeel Atshan, a professor on strike, in Baghdad's Tahrir (Liberation) Square, the epicenter of the protest movement. In the southern port city of Basra, around 800 students returned to camp outside the provincial government headquarters, days after they had been pushed out by riot police.

Schools were also shut in the protest hotspots of Diwaniyah and Nasiriyah. Protesters have felt emboldened since the country's top Shiite religious authority Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani said they "cannot go home without sufficient reforms."

"Students, boys and girls alike, are all here for a sit-in," another demonstrator in Tahrir told AFP.

"If Sistani gave the orders for mass civil disobedience, everything would close – the government, the oil companies, everything. That's how we'll have a solution."

The UN has put forward a phased roadmap, backed by Sistani, calling for an immediate end to violence, electoral reform and anti-graft measures within two weeks.

Hennis-Plasschaert, the UN envoy, discussed the plan with lawmakers during a parliamentary session on Wednesday afternoon.

"Now is the time to act, otherwise any momentum will be lost – lost at a time when many, many Iraqis demand concrete results," she told them on the sidelines of the parliamentary meeting.

At the session's opening, speaker of parliament Mohammed Al-Halbussi pledged to work on laws to respond to protesters' demands including electoral reform. Parliament has received a draft law for electoral reform but has yet to discuss it.

Lawmakers also set dates to interrogate two ministers, which could indicate the first steps of a cabinet reshuffle announced by Abdel Mahdi.

Oil-rich Iraq is ranked the 12th most corrupt country in the world by Transparency International, and youth unemployment stands at 25 percent.

Demonstrations erupted on October 1 in fury over a lack of jobs and corruption, initially fracturing the ruling class.

Populist cleric Moqtada Sadr then called on the government to resign and President Barham Saleh suggested early elections, while other factions stood by Abdel Mahdi.

But after a series of meetings led by Iran's influential Major General Qassem Soleimani, a consensus emerged at the weekend over the government remaining intact and both Saleh and Sadr appear to have changed their tunes.

Sadr, who is reported to be in Iran, took to Twitter on Wednesday to call on parliament to enact reforms and for "a general strike, even for one day," but did not demand the premier step down.

Saleh, too, appears to have dropped the idea of early elections.

The agreement brokered by Soleimani appeared to have paved the way for a crackdown on demonstrations last weekend that sent the death toll amid the unrest to well over 300.

Iraq has faced growing criticism over its response to rallies, with rights defenders accusing authorities of shooting live rounds at protesters and curtailing freedom of expression with an Internet blackout and mass arrests. Also on Wednesday, the president of autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan, Nechirvan Barzani, was in Baghdad to meet with the premier, president and speaker of parliament.

Barzani and Abdel Mahdi are believed to have good personal ties, and the Iraqi Kurdish authorities have backed the current government.

But they have worried that any amendments to Iraq's 2005 constitution as part of a reform process could infringe on Kurdish rights.



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UN: Top Iraqi Shiite cleric backs reforms to resolve unrest