

Six women are all that remain of a once-thriving Jewish community in Cairo

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CAIRO: In 1971, Egyptian daily newspaper Akhbar Al-Youm published a story by journalist Abdel Wahab Mursi about Cairo's "Jewish Alley," and how it had changed during successive migrations by Jews from Egypt.

Mursi pointed out that the name is misleading and that this "alley" was in fact an entire neighborhood which, at the time of his report, was home to about 25,000 people. However, only 18 of them were Jewish, all of them elderly or widows. The rest were Muslims and Copts.

"The Jews who did not sell their property during the time of immigration never allowed others to live in the houses they left," wrote Mursi. He also writes about a number of synagogues, including one called Rab Ishmael at 13th Al-Sakkia Street. Another, called Moses Ben Maymon and also known as Hermban, at 15th Dar Mahmoud had collapsed suddenly on the first day of Ramadan in 1970. Other temples mentioned in his story include Al-Torkeya, Al-Istaz, Rab HayiinQabous, Ram Zamra and Al-Yahoud Al-Feda'eya.

Almost 50 years after the story was published, much has changed in Jewish Alley. Most notably, the entire Jewish community in Egypt, led by Magda Shehata Harun, now numbers six women, according to a statement they issued in 2016 following the death of one of their number, Lucy Sawel. As for the synagogues, all but one – the Adli Temple in Downtown Cairo – have vanished or become derelict ruins.

"Both the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the outbreak of war between Jews and Arabs had a distinctive impact on the role of the Jewish community in Egypt," said Egyptian historian and writer Mohammed Abul Ghar. Most of the Jews liquidated their businesses and property and migrated to Europe, America or Israel."

Egypt was once host to the largest Jewish community in the Arab world. It was influential and involved in various aspects of Egyptian society. Although there are no accurate census figures, the Jewish population of the country was estimated to be between 75,000 and 80,000 in 1922, but had fallen to fewer than 100 by 2004.

At its peak, it included Arabic-speaking, Rabbinic and Karaite Jews, along with Sephardic Jews who had come to Egypt after they were expelled from Spain. In addition, trade flourished after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, attracting Ashkenazi Jews fleeing massacres in Europe. As a result, Egypt became a safe haven for Jews, who congregated in Jewish Alley and established a commercial and cultural elite. It would not last, however.

BACKGROUND

After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Egypt became a safe haven for Jews, who congregated in Jewish Alley and established a commercial and cultural elite.

"During the era of Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt's president from 1954 until 1970), the conflict between Egypt and Israel increased dramatically," said Abul Ghar. "From the moment the State of Israel was established and invited Jews from all over the world to immigrate to it, Muslims started burning well-known shops owned by Jews, such as Chicoril and Ads.

"Several Israeli espionage networks, the members of which were Egyptian Jews, were discovered. In the 1980s, after Egypt's victory in the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, some attempts to emigrate to Egypt by a few families were made. However, according to the Egyptian constitution, after someone acquires Israeli nationality he is stripped of Egyptian citizenship and so faces rejection of all applications for emigration."

In the days when the Jewish community was thriving in Egypt, Abul Ghar said that wealthy Jews monopolized certain fields of commerce, including "Mosa Dubik," "Marco E'nteibe" and "Jalabaj." They traded in scrap and toys, while "Mizrahi" and "Mozaki" organized textile auctions in Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra city.

Jewish Alley, meanwhile, was not very hospitable to non-Jews. Hajji Abdul Latif Fawzi, an 82-year-old former assistant secretary at a medical center, said that when he went there one day at the age of 10 he was hit in the eye with a stone that had been thrown at him. The Jewish residents prevented any outsider from entering their neighborhood except for the few Egyptians who worked with them in workshops and textile shops.

Fawzi said when he entered the alley, he heard someone saying "Joey ... Joey." This was a word used to describe "someone who is not Jewish" though he did not know this at the time. Then a group of young men rushed toward him and attacked.

"In the 1950s things began to change gradually in the neighborhood, as Jews started emigrating to Israel," he added.



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House arrest for Jewish minors held over killing of Palestinian
Israel arrests Jewish students over Palestinian woman's death

An NGO strives to stem brain drain of talent from Lebanon

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LONDON: Lebanese professor Mustapha Jazar has made it his life's work to help connect students to the jobs they deserve.

While Lebanon has long produced highly educated students, this promising pipeline is badly affected by a lack of matching job opportunities.

Jazar set up the Lebanese Association for Scientific Research (LASeR) 10 years ago to "try to help the students through their journey from school to the job market."

"The government itself isn't doing anything about it," Jazar said.

LASeR is a research-driven nongovernmental organization (NGO) that focuses on selecting candidates to pursue work-orientated research programs.

Through the undertaking of specific research initiatives, the students are trained in areas that will have a positive impact on Lebanon's socio-economic condition, and can acquire skills that will improve their employability.

Jazar says: "I'm a true believer in research. Throughout my life I have been a researcher and I've tried to find funds to do research; for myself, for my students and my colleagues. Then one day I had the idea to create an NGO to mobilize the benefits of research in a more systematic way."

For the first five years, LASeR was focused on university professors but the NGO has since shifted its focus to undergraduates. The program now takes in about 150 students annually.

Jazar says: "LASeR's programs include a mix of capacity-building, soft skills and advanced technical skills according to their major. The aim is that students will be better equipped for the job market at the end of three years of university."

The framework is called "E2C: Education To Community." It has three modules: Media to Community, Health to Community and the soon-to-be launched Engineering to Community.

"The idea is to take a bunch of students nearing graduation in their third year of study, call them to apply, and then enroll them in a competition-based experience for three to four months where we deliver training. At the end, they have to deliver a product," Jazar said.

He said that previous projects have included society-wide health-awareness campaigns and public-technology solutions.

At the end of the training period, a jury assesses the outcome of each group and gives a grade, along with the public's assessment.

Jazar said: "In this way, they will learn the basics of how to deliver an awareness campaign and how to run a budget. If they need specific training, we will find a senior or alumni to deliver the training. Every team has a

mentor. In the media group, most of the students have already found jobs.” Jazar said LAsER was funded by donations and corporate sponsorship. The NGO relies heavily on volunteer expertise from corporates and within the university.

Local enrollment at Lebanese universities is exceptionally high – at about 50 percent – but the country’s small size and job pipeline inefficiencies mean career opportunities are limited.

“Lebanon is educating many highly skilled people but they are going abroad to work in the Gulf, Canada, Europe or the US,” Jazar said.

“We are facing a real problem, especially in research. Jobs are becoming competitive. Right now, we are nearing saturation. We will be observing brain drain soon.”

In 2018, 4,000 students graduated in engineering, which is a huge number for a country that has a population of four million, he says.

“We do believe that there will be a scarcity of job offers, but what is also lacking in Lebanon is self-employment, start-ups and initiatives led by young people, especially in coding,” Jazar said.

Through LAsER, Jazar aims to create a framework that cherry-picks the best talents from society and focuses these talents on addressing Lebanon’s biggest issues and opportunities.

“We believe there’s a huge amount of social problems that need to be addressed. We aim to raise awareness about our society and the environment with our students.

“We are training our students to look for problems and come up with solutions that will make money for their livelihoods – and for the betterment of Lebanon.”



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Indebted Lebanon may struggle to refinance as austerity budget stalls
US Embassy in Lebanon advises citizens to keep low profile

[US bolsters Middle East force with 1,500 troops as Pentagon blames Iran for tanker attacks](#)

Fri, 2019-05-24 18:50

WASHINGTON: The US will strengthen its force in the Middle East with 1,500 extra troops, Donald Trump said Friday as the Pentagon blamed Iran for an attack on oil tankers off the coast of the UAE.

“We want to have protection in the Middle East,” Trump said as he left the White House for a trip to Japan. “We’re going to be sending a relatively small number of troops, mostly protective.

“Some very talented people are going to the Middle East right now. And we’ll see what happens.”

Shortly after his comments, the Pentagon accused Iran’s Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) of being directly responsible for attacks on tankers off the UAE earlier this month, describing it as part of a “campaign” by Tehran driving new US deployments.

“The attack against the shipping in Fujairah we attribute it to the IRGC,” said Rear Admiral Michael Gilday, the director of the Joint Staff, adding the Pentagon attributed limpet mines used in the attack to the IRGC. He declined to describe “the means of delivery” of the mines.

The 1,500 extra troops will be made up of a deployment of 900 more forces, including engineers, and the extension of a tour by some 600 personnel manning Patriot missiles.

Officials said earlier that members of Congress were notified following a White House meeting Thursday to discuss Pentagon proposals to bolster the force in the region.

Earlier this week, officials said that Pentagon planners had outlined plans that could have sent up to 10,000 military reinforcements to the region.

Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan later said planners had not settled on a figure.

The US began reinforcing its presence in the Arabian Gulf region this month in response to what it said was a threat from Iran.

*With AP and Reuters



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Pentagon plans to send more troops to Middle East amid Iran threat
Pentagon mulling request for 5,000 more US troops to Middle East -Reuters

[Lebanese cabinet approves draft state budget](#)

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Fri, 2019-05-24 14:21

BEIRUT: The heavily indebted Lebanese government approved a draft budget to cut its large deficit on Friday, aiming to ward off a financial crisis which top leaders have warned is bearing down on the country unless it carries out reforms.

The draft 2019 budget, which will cut the deficit to 7.5% of GDP from 11.5% in 2018, is seen as a critical test of the government's will to launch reforms that have been put off for years by a state riddled with corruption and waste.

Lebanon's bloated public sector is its biggest expense, followed by the cost of servicing a public debt equal to some 150% of GDP, one of the world's heaviest debt burdens.

The budget could help unlock some \$11 billion in financing pledged at a Paris donors' conference last year for infrastructure investment, if it wins the approval of donor countries and institutions.

"Now, praise God, we are done. The budget is complete," Information Minister Jamal Jarrah said after a cabinet session.

One more meeting to seal the process will be held at the presidential palace before the draft is referred to parliament for approval. Ministers did not say when the next session would take place.

Fears the budget would lead to cuts to state salaries, pensions or benefits triggered weeks of strikes and protests by public sector workers and military veterans.

Measures to rein in the public sector wage bill include a three-year freeze in all types of state hiring and a cap on extra-salary bonuses. State pension will also be taxed.

However a temporary public sector salary cut mooted by some early in the process was not included.

A big chunk of the deficit cut stems from tax increases including a 2% import tax and a hike in tax on interest payments. The government also plans to cut some \$660 million from the debt servicing bill by issuing treasury bonds at

1% interest rate to the Lebanese banking sector.

The final cabinet approval had been obstructed by a dispute over whether more needed to be done to bring the deficit lower.

But Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil, speaking to local media, said "all the clauses and articles" had been agreed. Nobody had raised any objections when Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri said "we are done" at the end of the session, he added.

There was no immediate comment from Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, who had been demanding further debate.

Deputy Prime Minister Ghassan Hasbani, speaking to Reuters on Thursday, said the draft budget would stabilise the financial situation and avoid "catastrophe" but it fell short of the major structural reforms Lebanon needs.

Economists in Lebanon say it will give a "positive shock" to market confidence against a backdrop of years of low economic growth, concern over a slowdown in the growth of bank deposits and falling central bank net foreign assets.

Aberdeen Standard Investments emerging markets fund manager Kevin Daly said: "We are still sceptical because they still have very little room in the budget." Wages and subsidies made up a large proportion of the deficit, he noted.

"I think the market will come back after the weekend and take a closer look ... the jury is still out on these guys".

Nassib Ghobril, chief economist at Lebanon's Byblos Bank, said the draft budget had stopped increases in government spending but had not reduced them. "They might reduce the deficit to an acceptable level. But it is not a reform budget or an austerity budget, it is a budget based heavily on taxes," he said.

"This is the easy way out for the government to reduce the deficit. If we believe the figure, it is a significant reduction in the deficit, but it is not the way to do it in a stagnating economy, in an economy in need of liquidity."

Jason Tuvey, senior emerging markets economist at Capital Economics, said: "Markets might react positively initially in as far as they've actually managed to agree on a budget after several weeks of deliberations.

"But over longer horizon, we still think that markets in Lebanon will come under pressure again."



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Lebanese budget protesters clash with security in Beirut
No need for more talks over draft budget: Lebanon finance minister

[Lebanon deports 16 Syrians](#)

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BEIRUT: Lebanon has “summarily deported” at least 16 Syrians, some of them registered refugees, by forcing them to sign “voluntary repatriation forms,” human rights groups said on Friday.

Lebanon hosts nearly one million Syrian refugees – a significant burden for a country of four million people – and there has been mounting pressure for them to go home even though the UN says many areas remain unsafe to return to.

The 16 were all removed to Syria on April 26 after they arrived at Beirut

airport, Human Rights Watch and four other groups said in a joint report. Most of them were sent back to Lebanon after they were barred from entering Cyprus via Turkey, quashing their plans to seek asylum, it said. At least five were registered with the United Nations refugee agency, it added.

“Lebanese authorities shouldn’t deport anyone to Syria without first allowing them a fair opportunity to argue their case for protection,” said HRW’s acting Middle East director, Lama Fakih.

The report said around 30 Syrians have been deported from Beirut airport this year by Lebanon’s General Security agency.

The latest deportees said they were “pressured” by General Security officers at the airport into signing documents stating that they were “voluntarily” returning to Syria.

“My biggest fears returning to Syria are that I would be conscripted and have to fight, or that I would be arrested because the regime has me on a wanted list or because of a case of mistaken identity,” the report quoted one of the deportees as saying.

“If I wasn’t scared of arrest, I wouldn’t have left Syria in the first place.”

General Security estimates that over 170,000 Syrian refugees returned home from Lebanon between December 2017 and March 2019.



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Indebted Lebanon may struggle to refinance as austerity budget stalls