

Palestinian women struggle to improve social position

Mon, 2022-03-07 22:23

RAMALLAH: Palestinian women in the West Bank and citizens of Israel have achieved tangible and remarkable success in recent years – it is easy to see them assuming positions such as deputy foreign minister, governor of a large city, minister, ambassador, judge, company director, or high-ranking officer in the security services.

However, these achievements do not necessarily reflect society's conviction over women's roles, efficiency, status, or equality with men.

Activist Rula Salameh, for one, is dissatisfied with the situation of Palestinian women.

She told Arab News that Palestinian women have not obtained their rights despite engagement in the struggle alongside men against the Israeli occupation, and that their lot does not reflect the fact they make up half of society.

"Women reach high positions in two ways; if the political party to which she belongs is strong and connects her, or if she has highly influential relatives, they may make her occupy a senior position," Salameh, from East Jerusalem, said. "However, if she does not belong to a strong political faction and does not have influential relatives, she will not get high positions."

Statistics indicate that the percentage of educated women exceeds the percentage of educated men among Palestinians, yet men continue to hold critical senior positions.

Salameh is also angry at female leaders within the community, as she says many refuse to leave positions of power when they attain them for younger female leaders when the time is right, while several occupy multiple senior positions concurrently, which does not allow for others to progress.

Palestinian women's organizations also struggle with all manner of gender-based issues in society, not least efforts to enact deterrent laws against so-called honor killings. The disruption of the Palestinian Legislative Council means that no real progress is being made on this issue.

Ghassan Khattib, vice president of Birzeit University, believes that the situation of Palestinian women is worse than those of their counterparts in other Arab countries, and says the main approach to strengthening their position is economic independence and increased participation in the labor market, which enhances their position within their family and society.

Currently, Palestinian women involved in the labor market number around just 19 percent of their total.

"Without women being economically independent, it is difficult for them to have a role, status and weight in decision-making and contribute to public life," said Khattib. "How many women directors of companies (are there) and how many university presidents? Society marginalizes women for cultural reasons because it is a patriarchal society.

"The best way to enhance women's status in Palestinian society is an increase in education and greater involvement in the labor market," he said.

Safa Hassaneh, an activist, told Arab News that Palestinian women whose husbands are arrested or killed found themselves forced to bear great family responsibility.

Hassaneh agrees with Salameh that laws do not do justice to women, and women must struggle to improve their social position and obtain representation.

Alia Sobh, another activist from Bethlehem, believes that despite the involvement of Palestinian women in many aspects of society, their position is still weak, referring to the first round of municipal elections that were held in the West Bank last December, when some female candidates for municipal council seats were unable to place their pictures on the electoral campaign posters, and instead had pictures of a rose because their husband forbade them from sharing their images.

In some families and regions, women's names are indicated on wedding invitation cards without mentioning their full name.

Sobh says that political parties' control over women's unions is an obstacle to enacting laws that do justice to women and advance them in society.

Meanwhile, the situation of Palestinian women living in Israel seems a little different from that in the West Bank, as activist Samah Diab from Tamra in Galilee told Arab News that women's associations raise their voices against the Israeli government.

"Women can change better than men because we do not deal with figures, but rather overcome the human side so that we can bring real and actual change; the Arab woman in Israel has made progress, but she aspires to achieve more," Diab said.

Maqbola Nassar from Arrabeh in Galilee told Arab News that the adoption of the doctrine of survival by Arab women inside Israel has led to their achievement of multiple successes, noting that 60 percent of Arab university students are women, as Arab women consider education a vital strategy to reach their goals, and that women have succeeded in reducing the phenomenon of early marriage and polygamy.



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[UAE, Qatar to become members of Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean](#)

Author:

Mon, 2022-03-07 19:56

ROME: The parliaments of the UAE and Qatar will become full members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, an international forum comprising representatives of the national parliaments of the Euro-

Mediterranean region.

The inclusion of the UAE's Federal National Council and Qatar's Shoura Council will be formalized at PAM's 16th plenary session on March 9-10.

It will be held in Dubai under the presidency of Italian MP Gennaro Migliore and hosted by the FNC.

PAM supports the work of other international bodies entrusted with fostering security, stability and peace in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

It will be the first time that PAM will meet in the Arabian Peninsula since the organization, which has observer status at the UN General Assembly, was established in 2005.

"Our vision is that peace, dialogue and cooperation in our Mediterranean region isn't divisible, and the Gulf region isn't far away from us," Migliore told Arab News before traveling from Rome to Dubai.

In the past few years, both the FNC and the Shoura Council "have been very active in all the activities of the assembly, especially regarding initiatives on counterterrorism and de-radicalization, as well as women's empowerment and energy transition," he added.

Developments in the Middle East and North Africa – including Libya, Syria, Lebanon and Western Sahara – as well as those in Europe – such as Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina – will be on the session's agenda, as will water scarcity, said Migliore.

"PAM has always been convinced that international parliamentary cooperation is the key to encourage national and international policymakers to harmonize legislative frameworks," he added.

"This assembly is a unique platform for parliamentary diplomacy, promotes constructive dialogue and support initiatives."

The role of parliaments, he added, "is every day more crucial for Mediterranean stability and cooperation because they can help to overcome issues and points of friction paralyzing governments in conflict or limiting their scope of action."



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[Russia-Ukraine conflict could prompt Mideast food riots: Analysts](#)

Author:

Mon, 2022-03-07 15:24

The Russia-Ukraine conflict could have a knock-on effect in the Middle East due to the rapidly increasing prices of wheat and disrupted supply of other goods, the Daily Telegraph reported on Monday.

Analysts warn that violence could break out amid a 25 percent spike in the price of wheat, with Russia and Ukraine representing 14 percent of the global export market for the grain, and a similar percentage of the world's corn

market.

Wheat prices are up 37 percent since the start of the year, to levels not seen since 2008 and the last great global financial crisis.

BCA Research said the supply line from the Black Sea to the Middle East has become strained.

Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are also among the world's leading fertilizer exporters. With sowing normally beginning in late February, harvests in Ukraine could be severely disrupted.

BCA said state reserves abroad could quickly become depleted, and developments "could lead to civil unrest similar to the food riots that occurred during the Arab Spring in 2011."

Lebanon imports 40 percent of its wheat from the region, and is currently in the grip of an unprecedented series of economic, social and political crises.

Risk advisors Dragonfly warned that the country has just one month of wheat reserves, and "hardship-related protest and unrest are likely."

War-torn Syria and Yemen are also likely to feel the knock-on effects of increasing prices and reduced supply.

Ukrainian authorities have talked up the prospect of using the country's still largely functioning railway network to transport vital goods to other European ports for export.



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[UAE's daily Covid-19 cases drop below 400](#)

Author:

Mon, 2022-03-07 15:07

DUBAI: The UAE recorded 386 new Covid-19 cases on Monday, the lowest daily tally reported in weeks.

The new cases bring the total number of recorded cases in the UAE to 883,270.

One person also died due to COVID-19 complications, the report added, bringing the total number of deaths in the country to 2,302.

It also noted that an additional 1,203 individuals had fully recovered from COVID-19, bringing the overall number of recoveries to 844,308.



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[Gas queues in Lebanon as fears mount over food security](#)

Author:

Sun, 2022-03-06 22:36

BEIRUT: Hour-long queues outside gas stations have returned to Lebanon, as supplies of cooking oil and flour in shops dwindle amid mounting fears of a food security crisis.

Citizens told Arab News: "We saw on social media that a new crisis is underway. We arrived at the supermarket to find people fighting over cooking oil and flour."

"We do not trust the promises made by the ruling authority and we have previously run out of basic foodstuffs and medicines," they said.

"We fear this could happen again, especially since Ramadan is approaching," they added.

Lebanon lost important wheat silos in the Beirut port blast in 2020. The facilities used to store about 120,000 tons of wheat.

Today, the country stores much of its wheat in warehouses in the north, which are stocked after supplies are unloaded in the port of Tripoli.

But Lebanon still lacks sufficient storage space, and is dependent on regular imports to secure its monthly demand for wheat, which is about 50,000 tons.

In 2020, Lebanon imported more than 630,000 tons from Ukraine, which represented 80 percent of its total imports. Russia supplied 15 percent of the remainder, while 5 percent came from other countries.

And in 2021, Lebanon imported 520,000 tons from Ukraine and the rest from Russia.

Lebanon's remaining stockpile is estimated to last a little more than a month, especially if the Central Bank fails to transfer money for wheat shipments that Lebanese mills have ordered.

Economy Minister Amin Salam said the government is seeking to reach agreements with several countries to import wheat at reasonable prices and secure reserves of up to two months.

"But the problem remains in the source and price, in addition to the speed of delivery of supplies before our stock runs out," he added.

As a result of the financial collapse and currency devaluation, Lebanon's purchasing power has significantly declined, meaning its economy is almost entirely dependent on imports.

The prices of commodities, foodstuffs and services are now intertwined with global markets, and any international events, such as the Ukraine conflict, have direct effects on the Lebanese public.

Lebanon's annual imports from Ukraine total about \$500 million.

Head of the Syndicate of Food Importers in Lebanon Hani Bohsali said: "Lebanon imports 100,000 tons of oils per year, 90,000 tons of which are sunflower oils, and 60 percent of sunflower oil comes from Ukraine, 30 percent from Russia, and 10 percent from Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Ukraine is currently no longer exporting, while Russia may encounter problems with the SWIFT system, which will disrupt imports."

While the government seeks alternative countries to supply wheat, Bohsali warned that there were no alternatives to source cooking oils or the raw materials needed to produce them.

On Sunday, members of the State Security Directorate carried out inspections on gas stations that closed on Saturday, claiming that they had run out of supplies. Authorities forced them to reopen if they had remaining stock.

Queues at gas stations returned on Saturday following rumors of a fuel crisis.

The official prices of fuel surged on Thursday, with a 20-liter canister of gasoline costing more than 400,000 Lebanese pounds (\$20). A 20-liter canister of diesel reached 375,000 Lebanese pounds.

However, Energy Minister Walid Fayad denied that there was a crisis on Sunday.

Ships carrying gasoline supplies are at sea and will soon unload their cargo, he added. "It seems that fuel suppliers want to issue a daily price schedule to keep pace with the global markets," Fayad said.

The General Directorate of Petroleum is expected to issue a new table of fuel prices to take into account surging global fuel prices.

Georges Brax, a member of the gas station owners' syndicate, called on citizens to avoid panicking and stockpiling gasoline.

"It is true that the quantities arriving in Lebanon are now less than before due to the global crisis, but what we receive is sufficient for local needs," he said.

Brax called on the Central Bank to speed up the prepayments for ships to unload their cargoes in order to avoid a crisis, especially since the situation could worsen in the future.

Acting Information Minister Abbas Al-Halabi said: "Lebanon is in communication with international companies to address the issue of food security."

Many countries are experiencing difficulties in exports and imports amid concerns over the war in Ukraine, he added.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati's government will soon prevent the export of foodstuffs produced in Lebanon until the crisis caused by the Ukraine crisis subsides, and afterward will limit the export of wheat and flour to maintain domestic bread supplies.

The Economy Ministry will also work to prevent monopolisation and price gouging.

During his Sunday sermon, Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi called for an end to wars that "lure fighters to practice barbarism against one other."

He said: "We pray that the war stops, as a mercy to the innocent. We pray for an end to the destruction, killing and displacement."

"We pray anger and hatred would subside. We pray that the parties to the conflict could sit down and resolve their conflict peacefully. We emphasize the need to adopt a neutrality policy."



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