

# Abu Dhabi crown prince voices hope for Mideast stability in talks with Israel PM

Author:

Tue, 2021-12-14 00:08

ABU DHABI: Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan hosted Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Monday in the first ever public meeting between the UAE's de facto ruler and an Israeli leader.

Israel's ambassador to Abu Dhabi said the issue of Iran was on the agenda for their talks, which follow the formalization of Israel-UAE relations last year under a US-led regional initiative.

While shared concern about Iranian activity was among reasons for the diplomatic moves, the UAE has also been trying to improve relations with Tehran. Releasing photographs of Bennett and Sheikh Mohammed smiling and shaking hands, the Israeli leader's office described the meeting as "historic."

A statement on state news agency WAM said Sheikh Mohammed voiced hope for "stability in the Middle East" and that Bennet's visit would "advance the relationship of cooperation toward more positive steps in the interests of the people of the two nations and of the region."

The Palestinians, whose diplomacy with Israel has been stalled since 2014, have deplored the Israeli-UAE rapprochement.

Israeli Ambassador Amir Hayek declined to elaborate on any discussion of Iran but he told Israel's Army Radio: "The prime minister did not only come here solely to address the Iranian issue."

With world powers now trying to renew the Iran nuclear deal, Abu Dhabi last week sent an envoy to Tehran.

A US delegation is due in the UAE this week to warn Emirati banks against noncompliance with sanctions on Iran.

Iran has not been mentioned publicly by Bennett since he set off on Sunday to the UAE with pledges to promote bilateral commerce and other forms of civilian cooperation.

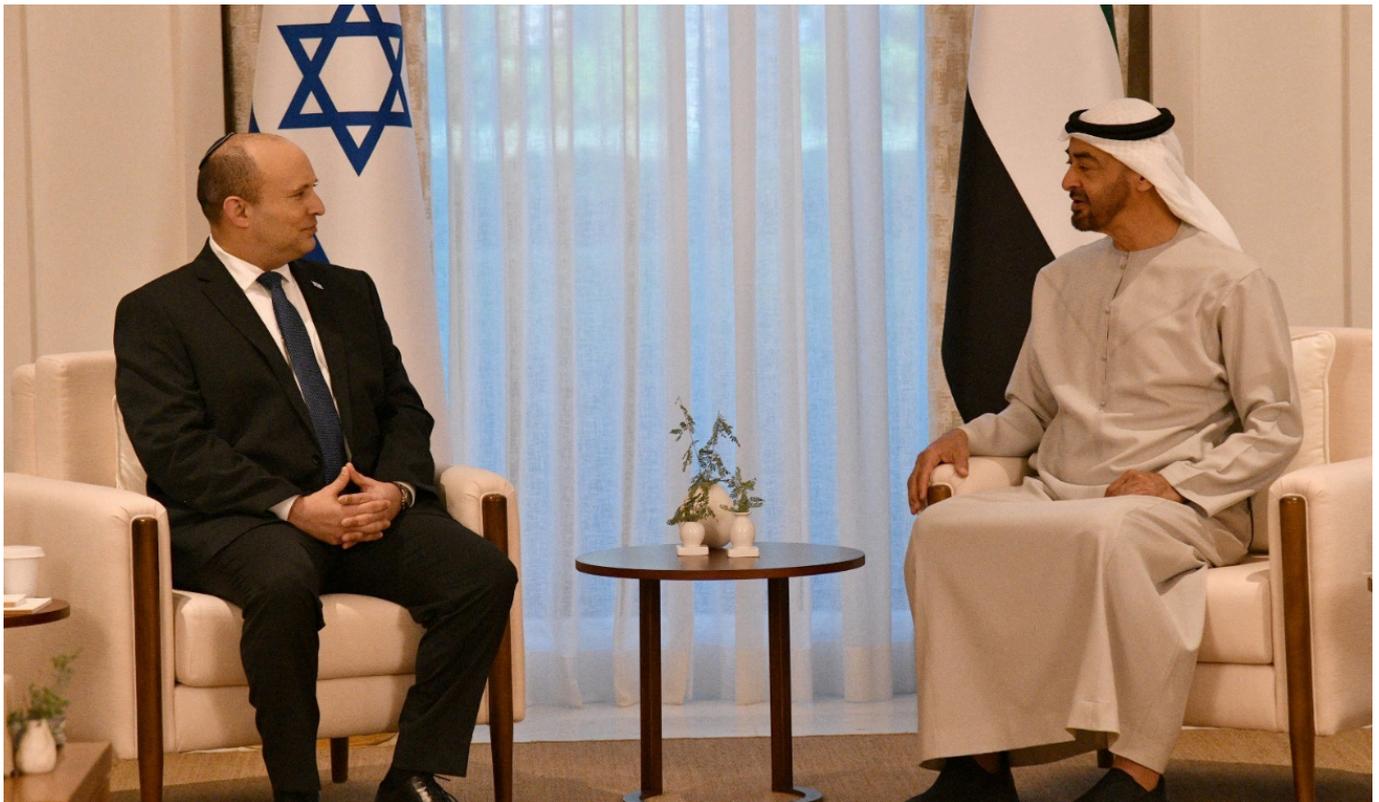
The Israel Hayom newspaper, quoting unnamed officials, said Bennett was expected to brief Sheikh Mohammed on intelligence regarding Iranian-supplied militias and drones in the region.

Israel last month broached setting up joint defenses against Iran with Gulf states.

Hayek said military sales to UAE are in the works, though Israeli industry sources say advanced Israeli air defense systems have yet to be offered.

“Israel is in cooperation with a new friend, with a partner for the long-term, and the considerations will be both considerations of defense and also considerations of how you work with a country which is very, very, very friendly to Israel,” Hayek said.

Israel-UAE bilateral trade in goods alone reached nearly \$500 million so far in 2021 – up from \$125 million in 2020 – and is expected to continue growing rapidly.



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Abu Dhabi crown prince, Israel leader discuss ties, regional issues  
Israel extends travel restrictions for a further 10 days

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[\*\*PM Mustafa Al-Kadhimi's plea for\*\*](#)

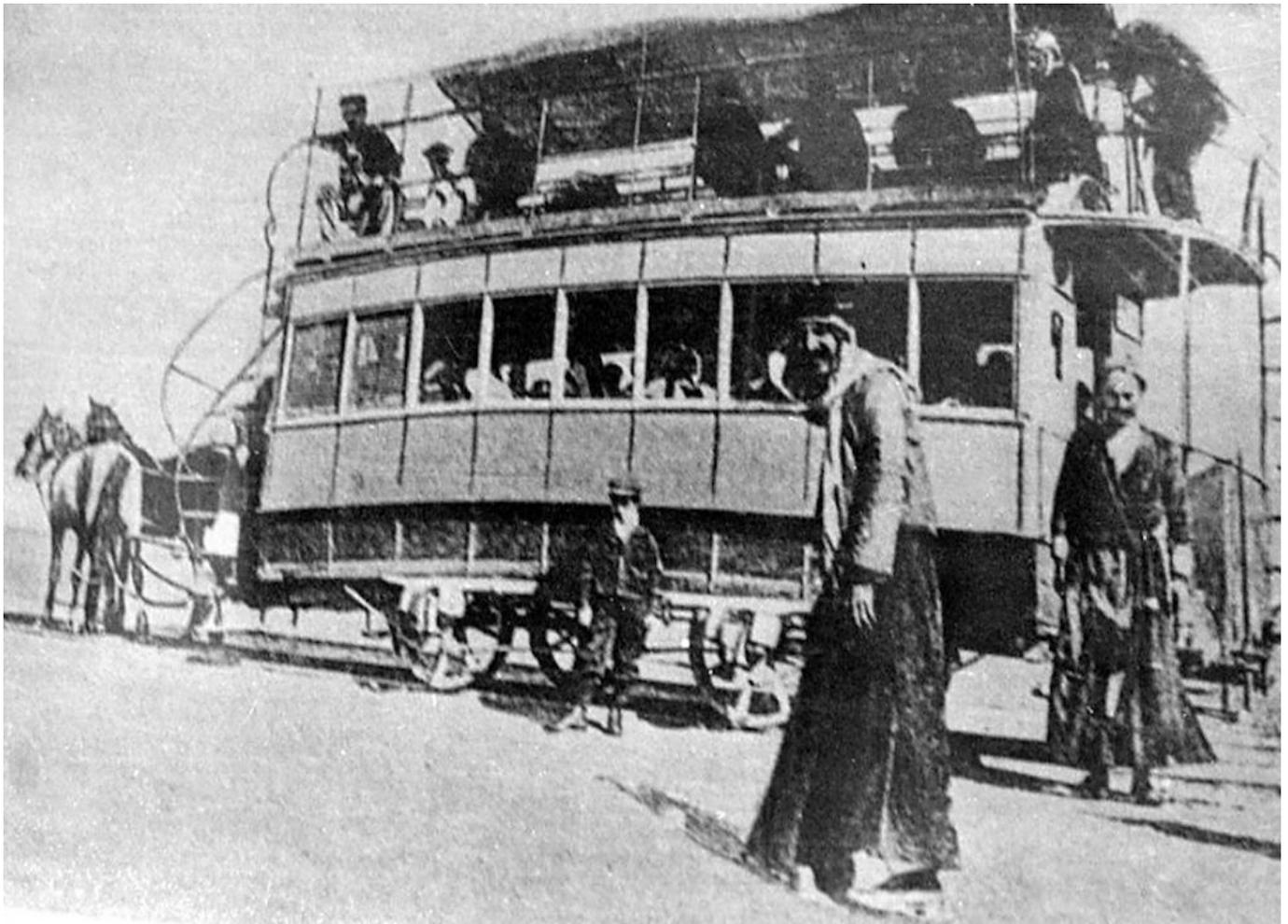
# national unity strikes a chord on Iraqi nation state's centenary

Mon, 2021-12-13 23:20

DUBAI: Iraq was a cradle of civilization long before it was established as a modern nation state exactly 100 years ago, the country's prime minister, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, said during a speech on Saturday marking the country's centenary.

Addressing the Iraqi public in a televised message, he said the special occasion was an ideal opportunity to look at the country objectively, take pride in its achievements and admit where it had made mistakes.

Although the Iraqi state as we know it today was formally established by the British at the Cairo Conference in 1921, "it does not mean that Iraq was not a country a hundred years ago," Al-Kadhimi said.



A horse-drawn tram makes its way through a Baghdad street in this picture dated 1925. (AFP)

"The ground upon which Iraqis are standing firmly was the first country known to humanity, the first law to organize human life, the first policeman whose job was to protect people, and the first military soldier to defend the

borders and sacrifice himself.

“Here, on the land guarded by the souls of your parents and ancestors, was the first economic organization to preserve rights, property, sale and purchase, and the first punishments for human rights violators.

“It was the first of poetry, art and culture, the first base of mathematics, and the first moment of revelation and prophecy.”



The young King Faisal II of Iraq takes the oath at the age of 18, in front of the Parliament May 5, 1953 in Baghdad. (Intercontinentale/AFP)

Indeed, humanity owes many of its earliest achievements in a number of fields, including agriculture and astronomy, to the civilizations that flourished in ancient Mesopotamia, the land between two rivers, more than five millennia ago.

From the Akkadians and the Assyrians to early Islamic civilization, the peoples who inhabited this region created many of the world's first known institutions of government, systems of writing and numeracy, and epic works of literature.

In his centenary speech, Al-Kadhimi said it was the responsibility of all Iraqis, no matter their political alignment, to recognize this heritage, pass it on to future generations, and protect it from those who seek to manipulate it for their own ends.

[pic.twitter.com/m0u3IeYrKt](https://pic.twitter.com/m0u3IeYrKt)

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“It is time to look at our country objectively and be proud of its achievements and admit its mistakes,” he added. “And we move forward armed with our inheritance and the abilities of our people to stand together with all successful countries.”

Arab leaders sent messages of congratulations to the people of Iraq on the anniversary, including Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who spoke with Al-Kadhimi by telephone on Sunday, according to the Iraqi PM’s media office.

In his own message of support, Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi described the centenary as an important moment in the shared history of the Arab world.



A picture dated 1957 shows King Faisal II (C) with Lebanese President Camille Chamoun (R) and King Faisal's uncle Abdel Illah during the King's visit to Lebanon. Abdel Ilah became a regent to the throne after King Faisal's father King Ghazi died April 6, 1938. (AFP)

"One hundred years have passed since the Cairo Conference in 1921, which launched the establishment of the Iraqi state as an extension of an ancient civilization rooted in the depths of history," he said.

"One hundred years have witnessed many milestones in the path of Iraq, the Arab nation, and indeed the whole world. On my own behalf, and on behalf of the Egyptian people, we congratulate brotherly Iraq on this precious occasion, wishing its great and honorable people peace, security and stability, and hoping that Iraq would always remain an asset for the Arab nation."

After gaining its independence from the British Mandate established after the First World War, the kingdom of Iraq was founded in 1932 under Faisal I, a member of the Hashemite dynasty who was born in Saudi Arabia.

[pic.twitter.com/D3IAyz8zia](https://pic.twitter.com/D3IAyz8zia)

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He ruled for 12 years, under a constitutional monarchy imposed by the British, until his death from a heart attack at the age of 48. Faisal's son, King Ghazi, took the throne but died six years later in a car accident in Baghdad. The title of king fell to Faisal II, who was just 3 years old, and so his reign began under the regency of his uncle, Crown Prince Abdallah.

Highly intelligent, and leading a country blessed with a wealth of natural resources, Faisal seemed destined to build on the foundations established by his father and grandfather when he took the throne, at the age of 18, in 1953. Iraq at the time was prospering; oil revenues were flowing in and the country was undergoing rapid industrialization.

But the tide would soon start to turn against the kingdom. Iraq's close relationship with the British – a policy Faisal II continued – became the source of increasing hostility, which was exacerbated by the Suez crisis in 1956.

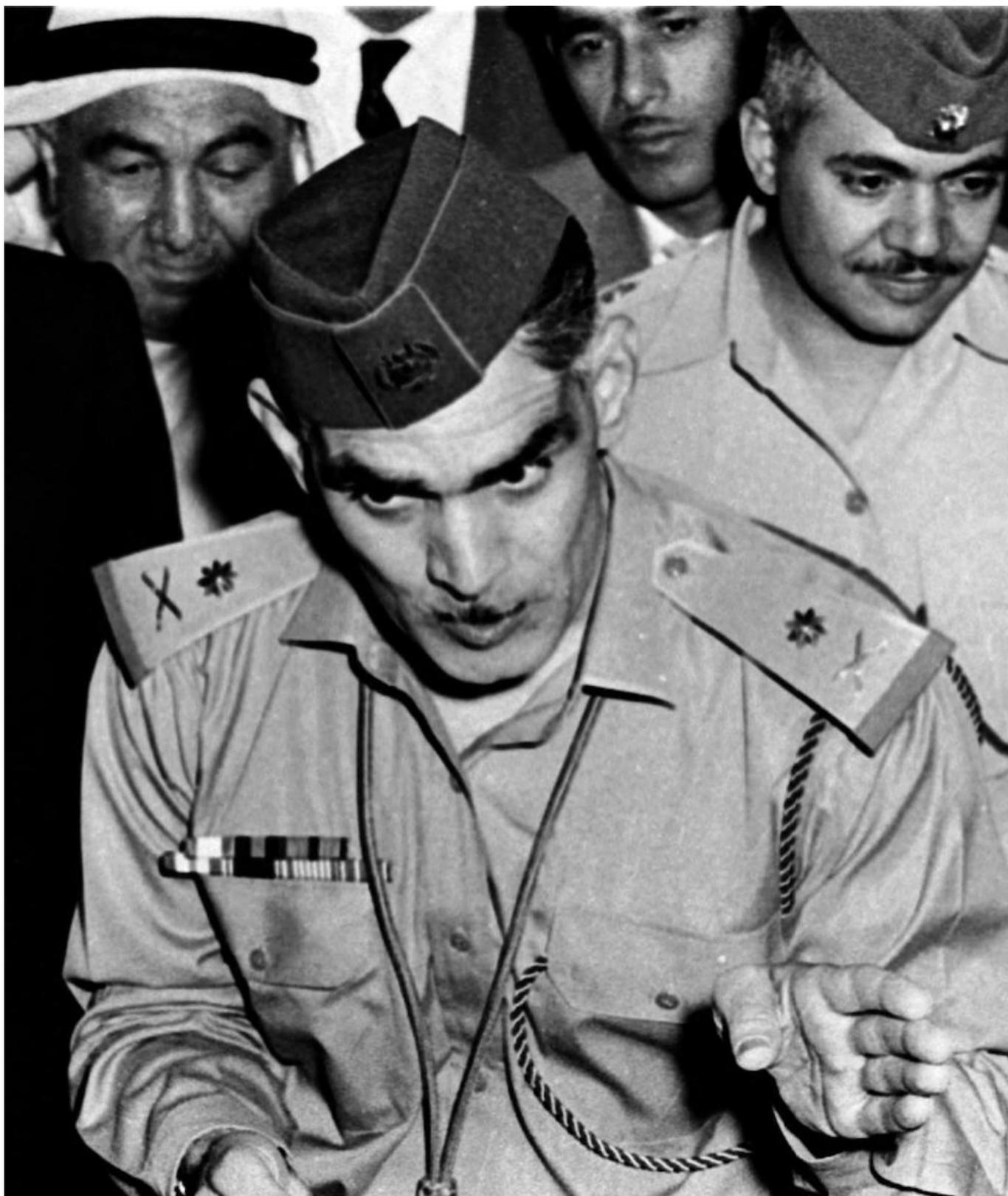


Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein (2L), French Defense Minister Yvon Bourges (3L), Bernadette Chirac (4L) Prime Ministers's wife, and les Baux-de-Provence's Mayor Mr. Tuillier (1L) applaud during a corrida organized by the municipality in honor of the Iraqi leader on September 7, 1975 in Les Baux-de-Provence, southern France. (AFP)

On July 13, 1958, when two army brigades were ordered to go to Jordan to help quell a crisis in Lebanon, Abdul Karim Qassim, a disaffected officer leading one of the units, saw his chance and sent troops to the Qasr Al-Rihab palace in Baghdad. By early the following morning, they had surrounded the royal residence with tanks and opened fire.

Shortly after 8 a.m., King Faisal II, his uncle the crown prince and other members of the royal family and their staff were ordered to leave through a rear entrance and killed.

Many Iraqis still believe this was the start of a catastrophic downhill slide for the nation. While it lasted less than four decades, the constitutional monarchy is viewed by many as a golden period in Iraqi history. The king's execution gave way to a tumultuous republic and, ultimately, the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.



Undated picture of Iraqi president Abdul Karim Qassim, who overthrew King Faisal II in a coup on July 14, 1958. Qassim was himself deposed in a coup on Feb. 8, 1963, and executed the following day. (AFP)

More than 60 years later, Iraq is redefining itself yet again and reasserting its sovereignty. On Thursday, Dec. 9, Iraqi officials announced that the US had officially ended its combat mission in Iraq, reassigning all remaining troops to a training and advisory role. US forces had returned to Iraq at the invitation of the Baghdad government to help combat the Daesh extremist group

that had seized territory in the northwest of the country and in neighboring Syria during the summer of 2014.

The ongoing presence of foreign forces in Iraq has long been a source of political disagreement in Baghdad, with many nationalist and pro-Iran factions demanding a full withdrawal.

“After a matter of days, we will witness the withdrawal of all combat forces of the international coalition from Iraq within the scope of the strategic agreement with the American side, and their role will be in the areas of advice, as a sign of the ability of Iraqi forces in all its categories to preserve the security of Iraq, stabilize its people and its continued development,” Al-Kadhimi said.

However, the overarching theme of Al-Kadhimi’s centenary speech was an appeal for all Iraqis to recognize what unites them rather than what divides them, for the common good of the country.

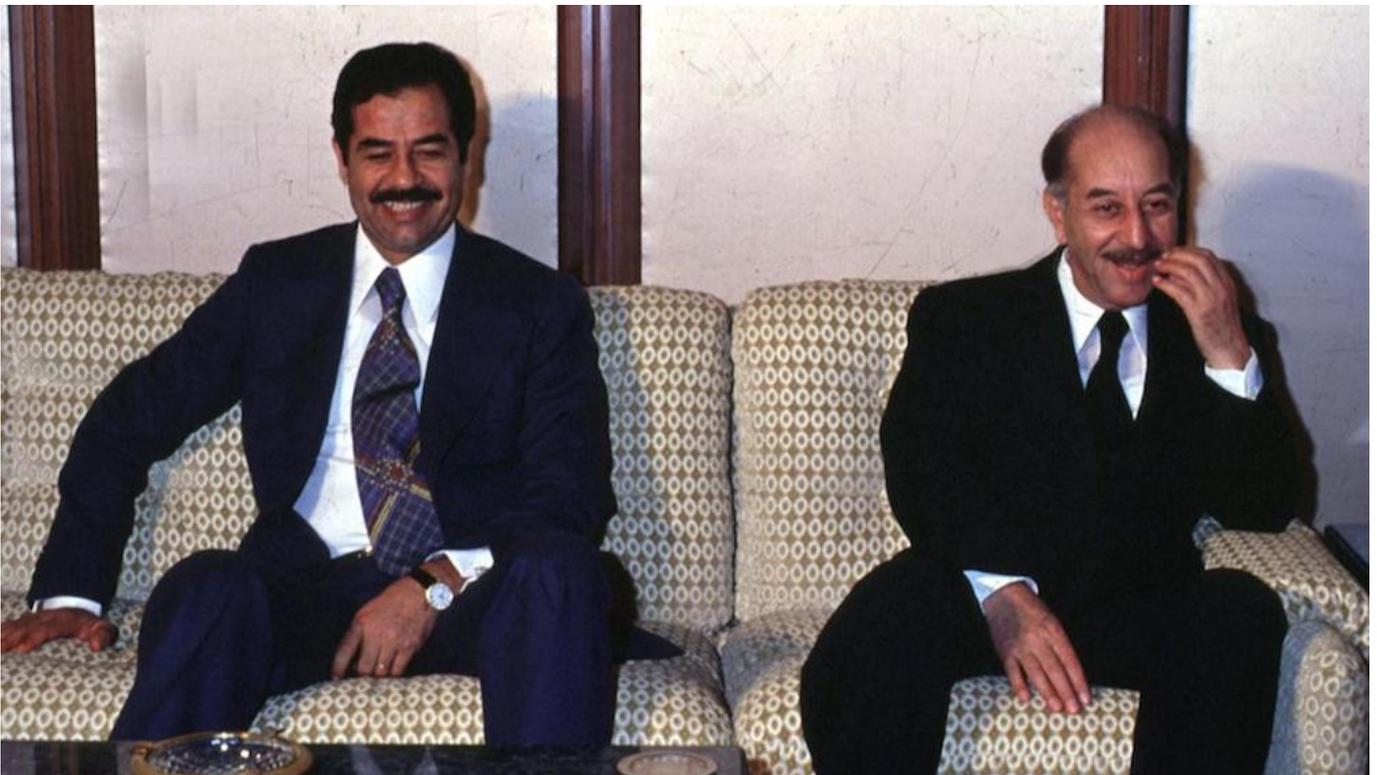


Photo dated 1976 shows former Iraqi President Ahmad Hassan Al-Bakr (R) sitting with then-Vice President Saddam Hussein in Baghdad. Al-Bakr took power in July 1968 following the ouster of Gen. Abdul Rahman Aref and stepped down in July 1979 for health reasons. (AFP)

“Amid the political challenges and efforts that the last election has arranged, everyone should be reassured: We will not allow them to touch your safety and stability,” he said.

“Despite all the differences, the political powers, new currents, independent people and elites are the sons of this country and they are keen on it and its safety.

“The difference in views and directions fades in front of everyone’s belief

that Iraq is our umbrella and our home, and to mess with it and its future is a red line," he added.

"This is Iraq, your Iraq, and the Iraq of all humanity. To preserve it and to inherit it is our duty."







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Why Mustafa Al-Kadhimi is seen as Iraq's safest pair of hands

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## [Palestinian local elections might give a small boost to Fatah](#)

Mon, 2021-12-13 00:12

AMMAN: Saturday's Palestinian local council elections produced a much higher turnout than they did in 2017, according to the head of the Elections Commission Hanna Naser.

Naser told the media on Sunday that 66 percent of eligible voters (405,687) cast their vote in elections for local councils in C areas.

Local elections for the major cities in A and B areas are scheduled to be held on March 26, 2022.

Independent lists (mostly family/tribal oriented) won 71 percent of the vote, while party lists won 29 percent, he said.

In the 2017 elections, only 53 percent of the electorate voted in local council elections.

Naser added that all complaints that were filed were investigated and dismissed as they would not have changed the results in any location.

Rima Nazzal, a member of the secretariat of the General Union of Palestinian Women and an elections expert, told Arab News that the elections gave Fatah a boost that will help them.

“Although the separation of election dates is contrary to the law, the poll results most likely will give Fatah a boost that will help it overcome the loss of support that occurred due to the cancellation of the legislative elections last April 30.”

Nazzal said that Fatah, the Palestinian national movement, won 123 out of the 162 uncontested council lists.

In other lists, it is hard to determine politically who won because most rural communities run local candidates that are not necessarily affiliated or loyal to any particular political movement.

Suheir Ismael Farraj, director of the Bethlehem-based Women and Media Development, also known as TAM, told Arab News that the local council elections were largely tribal in nature.

“In most communities, the winners belong to large family tribes rather than political movements.”

Farraj conceded that in many communities the same person who is a tribal leader is also connected to one of the Palestinian factions.

“For example, in my home village of Khader, the head of the winning list is a tribal leader from the Musa family and he is also connected to the left-wing Fida party. Had he run just on the left-wing party, he would have lost,” she said.

While Fatah fielded by far the largest number of lists, the Democratic Front had 25 lists, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine had six lists, the left-wing People’s Party had five lists and the Palestinian Struggle faction fielded a mere two lists.

According to the head of the Elections Commission, the next stage of local elections will begin with voter registration on Jan. 8, 2022. Electoral lists will be accepted starting Feb. 8, and elections for 66 city councils in areas A and B in the West Bank as well as all 25 councils in Gaza will take place on Feb. 26.

It is not clear yet if Hamas, which is in control of the security situation in Gaza, will agree to hold elections.

Nazzal also told Arab News that she does not expect that women will occupy much more than 20 percent of the allotted seats even though women made up 26 percent of the lists that were presented for the elections.

Palestinian law stipulates that at least 20 percent of any council must be made up of women.



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Free and fair  
Palestinian elections must include East Jerusalem: UN experts

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## [Turkish lira collapse piles misery on northern Syria](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-12-13 01:28

AL-BAB: Mohammed Al-Debek, a schoolteacher in northern Syria, is on strike: The currency devaluation in neighboring Turkey has slashed the value of his salary by two-thirds.

His town of Al-Bab lies in a northern area of war-torn Syria that in recent years has turned into a de facto Turkish protectorate.

Because the Turkish lira is now the main currency in the area, its recent nose-dive has heaped further pain on the people living there.

"My salary in 2017 was worth \$160, but today it is worth \$50, a fraction of its value," the 33-year-old said outside the washed-out yellow walls of his school.

"It's barely enough to pay the rent."

Ankara does not only have military control of the border region, but most of the products available on the markets and even the mobile phone operator are also Turkish.

Areas of northern Syria run by Turkish-backed opposition groups switched to the lira as the main currency last year, replacing the massively devalued Syrian pound.

The lira has lost 45 percent of its value against the dollar this year alone and Debek's purchasing power has plummeted, as has everybody else's in the region.

"After the collapse of the lira, I was forced to look for a second job after school," he said.

His new afternoon job in a bookshop earns him another \$40 but that still leaves him short of the \$200 he says he needs to make ends meet.

Turkey directly administers several districts of northern Syria and, to seal its presence in the area, has invested heavily in education, health and other sectors.

The region's economic fate is inextricably tied to Turkey's and the lira's sharp fall in recent weeks piled more misery on an enclave whose inhabitants are already scarred by war.

A recent UN report on the humanitarian situation cited estimates that "97 percent of the population, even those that are in employment, are living in extreme poverty."

Inflation is soaring just as fast as it is in neighboring Turkey, with basic food items such as bread selling at record prices and purchasing power at its lowest ever.

And when the price of a bag of flatbread stops rising, locals say, the amount of bread inside goes down.

Ahmed Abu Obeida, an official with the region's chamber of commerce who also owns a company importing food products from Turkey, acknowledged that consumption had slumped.

"The demand for basic materials has decreased, and the citizens in general cannot afford basic things such as their daily needs in food, medicine and heating," he said.

Hanaa Al-Yasbu, a 36-year-old woman who was widowed in an air strike five years ago and has since been living in a camp for war-displaced people, is one of them.

She usually earns around 20 Turkish lira a day by harvesting wheat and potatoes, enough to keep her five children warm and fed.

With her daily income now worth just a dollar and a half, Hanaa has to venture into the countryside to find firewood.

"I dream that I have about 50 lira a day to buy food for my children to feed them, so they do not sleep hungry," she said.



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After lira tumble, Turkey faces threat of inflation and currency crisis  
Turkish lira hits new low after Erdogan says rate cuts needed

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## Four killed in shooting at Palestinian camp in Lebanon, Hamas says

Author:

Mon, 2021-12-13 01:21

GAZA: Four people were killed and others were injured in a shooting on Sunday in the Palestinian camp of Burj Al-Shemali in Lebanon, two officials of the Palestinian group Hamas told Reuters, and they blamed rival movement Fatah for the bloodshed.

The shootings took place during the funeral of a Hamas supporter who was killed in an explosion on Friday night in the camp in the southern Lebanese port city of Tyre.

“Fatah gunmen deliberately opened fire against people taking part in the funeral march,” one Hamas official said, asking not to be named.

There was no immediate response from the office of the Palestinian ambassador in Lebanon to a Reuters request for comment about the Hamas allegation.

Fatah controls the Palestinian Authority that exercises limited self-rule in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Palestinian Authority officials in the West Bank, contacted for comment by Reuters, said they were checking the reports.

Earlier on Sunday, Lebanese state media said two people were killed and seven were injured in a dispute that erupted in the Burj Al-Shemali camp.

Hamas said in a statement on Saturday that the blast on Friday night was caused by an electrical fault.



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