

# [Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan views come closer on giant Nile dam: Sudanese irrigation minister](#)

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Sun, 2019-12-22 17:53

KHARTOUM: Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan have come closer to aligning their views on filling the reservoir of and operating the giant hydroelectric dam that Ethiopia is building on the Blue Nile, the Sudanese irrigation minister said on Sunday.

Egypt is worried the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), under construction near Ethiopia's border with Sudan, will restrict supplies of already scarce Nile waters on which it is almost entirely dependent.

"Proposals were submitted by the three countries regarding filling the reservoir and operating the dam and a convergence (of views) occurred," Sudanese Irrigation and Water Resources Minister Yasser Abbas told reporters after he met with his Egyptian and Ethiopian counterparts in Khartoum.

"It was agreed to take the new positions separately to be discussed at the meetings in Addis Ababa," he said. The three sides will meet in the Ethiopian capital on Jan. 9-10.

They also agreed to define droughts and the operating conditions during droughts, Abbas said.

"There is a convergence (of views) in general, and there are differences of views in some circumstances. Sudan proposed a specified time for filling the reservoir and added definitions for drought and continuous drought," Abbas said.



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[Nile Dam](#)

Sudan opens Darfur crimes probe against Bashir regime figures  
Sudan government off of US religious freedom blacklist

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## Baghdad's 'Tahrir Beach' where the revolution takes a break

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Sun, 2019-12-22 13:02

BAGHDAD: Close to Baghdad's protest hotspot of Tahrir Square, a sandy Tigris River bank offers some relief from the revolution: youths kick around footballs and smoke shisha pipes to booming hiphop music.

It is on this half-kilometre (500-yard) stretch where the post-Saddam generation celebrates its uprising on the beach, escaping the teargas and bullets for a fun and festive atmosphere.

"Our leaders have deprived us of everything – our rights, our money, our dignity," says Ammar Saleh, 20. "Here we simply discover the taste of freedom."

Unemployed and penniless, another man here, Ali, is intoxicated by the wind of revolt that has swept through Iraq since early October in the biggest wave of street rallies since the 2003 US-led invasion.

"We have nothing left to lose, we will not move as long as the thieves in power don't leave office!" he says with fervour, then returns to his football game.

"Tahrir Beach", as its occupants call it, has maintained the carnival-like atmosphere of the protests before they were marred by bloodshed and fear.

"This is where you find the magic of the early days of the movement," says journalist Ali, a regular visitor.

In the almost three months since the rallies started, about 460 people have been killed and 25,000 wounded. The initially self-managed camps at Tahrir Square have become more strictly organised and the carefree spirit has gone.

"There is less mobilisation, leaders have changed, militiamen and spies have infiltrated the demonstrators," said Ali, who pointed also to the growing influence of supporters of Shiite populist leader Moqtada Sadr.

Tahrir Beach lies on the east bank of the Tigris, between the Al-Sinek and al-Jumhuryiah bridges, where security forces guard access routes into the locked-down "Green Zone" government and embassies district.

Along Rashid Street, centuries-old brick houses with elaborate wooden

balconies, now mostly dilapidated, tell the story of the capital city's past glory.

Bland modern buildings now mar the cityscape as do the concrete blast walls, covered with protest graffiti.

Red and yellow tuk-tuks – the three-wheeled taxis that have become a revolutionary emblem – pour their smiling passengers onto the stretch of river-front, to be greeted by rows of shisha water pipes.

Everywhere there are reminders of the “martyrs” who fell on the barricades: improvised mausoleums adorned with now wilted flowers, a construction helmet, a bloodied t-shirt.

Black, red and white Iraqi flags flutter in the breeze, alongside the inevitable FC Barcelona logo.

“Dumping garbage is forbidden,” reads a sign suggesting the civic-minded spirit of the “new Iraq”, even if litter on the ground suggests not everyone is on board yet.

Under Saddam Hussein and the civil war that followed it was unthinkable to wander around here, so close to the dictator's palaces and then the headquarters of the US occupation.

“It was too dangerous! There were no people, just dogs at night,” recalls Ayman, a former resident of the area.

Now a new generation is reappropriating the river bank, as expressed in a slogan daubed on a wall: “We have cried so much, now we want joy.”

Indeed, even though it's a short walk to Tahrir Square, the violence seems far away.

Three teenagers try to free a scooter stuck in the beach, the rear wheel spraying up sand. Youths with pulled-up pants play volleyball.

A temperamental sound system spits out Iraqi techno and the rap hit “I Got Love”, while a piece of linoleum serves as the stage for a hip-hop dance contest.

Bandanas wrapped around their heads, two guys pumped up with testosterone twirl and spin to the crowd's applause.

The day before, a yoga class here produced photos of bulked-up and bearded men performing the one-legged downward-facing dog pose, sparking delight on social media.

The crowd remains predominantly young and male – and poor.

One young man, 26-year-old Sofiane, his arm deformed by polio, says he has “never received the slightest allowance” but expresses hope the demonstrations will “change everything”.

A group of girls stroll past, their long black hair blowing in the wind. They receive discreet glances but no one bothers them.

The young ladies sip soft-drinks while squinting at guys with slicked-up hairstyles who are shaking their hips to the rhythm of a song that decries the “rotten politicians”.

As teenagers splash in the brackish river water and toddlers build sand castles, some incredulously film the relaxed scene with their smartphones.

“These scenes were unimaginable just a few months ago,” Ali marvels. His voice darkening slightly, he adds that he is “not sure it will last”.







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Iraq protests take toll on economy, vulnerable suffer most  
Iraq's top cleric calls for quick formation of government

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## [Sudan opens Darfur crimes probe against Bashir regime figures](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2019-12-22 16:08

KHARTOUM: Sudan said Sunday it had opened an investigation into crimes committed in the Darfur region by members of the regime of ousted president Omar Al-Bashir.

Prosecutor general Tagelsir Al-Heber said “we started an investigation about the crimes that have been committed in Darfur from 2003”, speaking on his arrival in Khartoum from a visit to the United Arab Emirates.

The investigation – the first launched since Bashir was ousted by the army in April amid mass protests after 30 years in power – focuses on “cases against former regime leaders”, Heber said without giving names.

Bashir himself, who is behind bars for corruption and awaiting trial on other charges, is wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague for his role in the bloody conflict.

The ICC issued warrants for Bashir’s arrest in 2009 and 2010 on charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the conflict that left around 300,000 people dead and 2.5 million displaced, according to the United Nations.

The Darfur fighting broke out in 2003 when ethnic minority rebels took up arms against Bashir’s Arab-dominated government, which they accused of marginalising the region.

Human rights groups say Khartoum targeted suspected pro-rebel ethnic groups with a scorched earth policy, raping, killing, looting and burning villages. Despite numerous calls for his extradition, the ex-dictator has not been sent to The Hague, the seat of the ICC.

Brought to power by a 1989 coup, Bashir was deposed on April 11 by the army, after months of a mass protest movement against his regime that left dozens dead.

Following a deal reached in August between the military and protesters, Sudan is now led by a transitional government tasked with paving the way for civilian rule.

The investigation was announced on Sunday as the new government has vowed to establish peace in the country’s conflict-hit regions, including Darfur.

On December 14, Bashir was sentenced by a court in Khartoum to two years’ detention in a correctional centre for corruption in the first of several cases against him.

Bashir is also being investigated for his role in the 1989 coup that brought him to power.

On Sunday, Heber also said that proceedings had been launched against Salah Gosh, former intelligence chief under Bashir.

“There four cases against Salah Gosh and we started a procedure to bring him (back to Sudan) by Interpol.”

Gosh, head of the feared National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), resigned in April two days after the ouster of Bashir, and is now outside of Sudan.





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Sudan PM talks of peace on maiden trip to Darfur  
Sudan government off of US religious freedom blacklist

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## [The building blocks of a tolerant Middle East](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-12-21 02:49

DUBAI: Higher education will play a major role in fostering tolerance throughout the world, Arab intellectuals and academics have predicted.

Experts believe the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which in recent years has been wracked by religious radicalism, violent extremism and sectarian strife, will be one of the major beneficiaries.

Tolerance as a state policy received a big boost in 2019 after the UAE proclaimed it the Year of Tolerance in the country.

The initiative has seen a number of events promoting the UAE as “a global capital for tolerance,” with the emphasis on “legislation and policies aimed at entrenching the values of tolerance, dialogue, coexistence and openness to different cultures, especially among youth, which will reflect positively on society as a whole.”

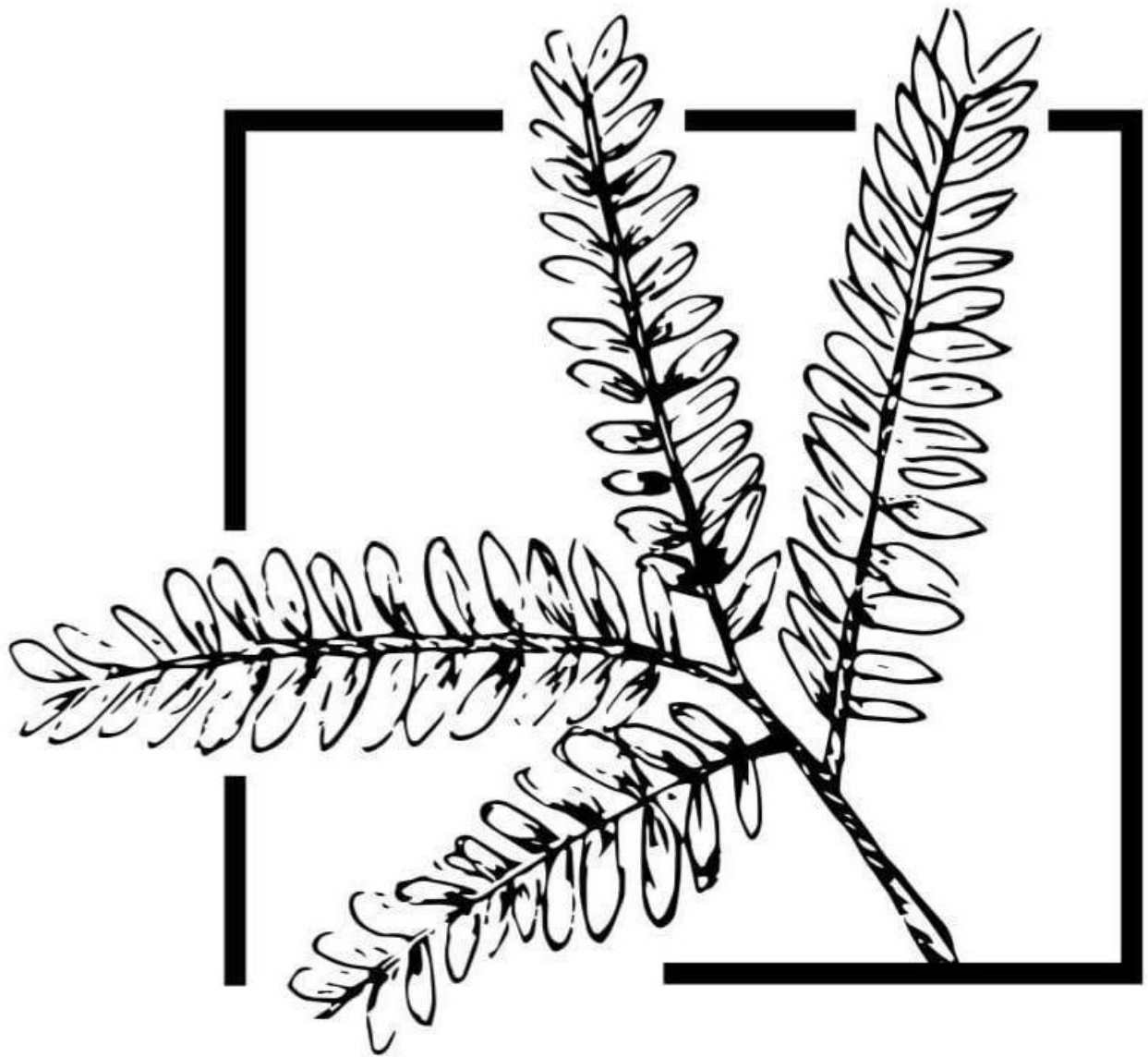
Prof. Einas Sulaiman Al-Eisa, rector at the Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University (PNU) in Riyadh, said higher education had a crucial role to play, as it was in a good position to promote tolerant societies.

PNU is the largest university for women in the world, with 59,000 students and more than 2,000 faculty members. Speaking at the recently held World Tolerance Summit in Dubai, Al-Eisa noted that encouraging tolerance, among other values, was deeply rooted in the university.

“Most of our efforts were scattered and fragmented up until the launch of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030, which placed tolerance, among others, at its root,” she said. “We took these values to heart and rose to the challenge of promoting tolerance.”

Through different approaches, the university has been spreading the theme. “If you have an inclusive agenda across all faculties in your admission policies, are merit-based in your recruitment, and hire talent irrespective of their backgrounds, then you are heading in the right direction.

“It’s a journey from admissions to graduation across academia, a prejudice-free curriculum, and programs instilling values and skills,” she added.



# عام التسامح YEAR OF TOLERANCE

Al-Eisa highlighted the role of a global citizen education, in which education empowered learners to become active promoters of sustainable, tolerant, inclusive, safe and secure societies.

By 2020, PNU aims to send every student on campus on one experience abroad, she said.

Recently, a group of students from the university took part in a female scouts program, joining an international community as the first girls from a

Gulf nation. "We can never underestimate the role of sports in promoting tolerance," Al-Eisa added.

"We are now running an ambitious program across the campus using cognitive behavioral theory to promote positive behavior, exhibiting true values. From the beginning, students are tested for certain skills, and there are customized activities for promoting these skills until they graduate."

The rector described Saudi Arabia's leadership as supportive, committed and visionary in spreading the value of tolerance.

The UAE, home to more than 200 nationalities and a multi-religious expatriate community that outnumbers the population of Emirati nationals, is viewed as a beacon of tolerance and peaceful coexistence for millions of people in the Middle East.

The year 2019 saw the UAE create a special Ministry of Tolerance, establish the International Institute for Tolerance, introduce an anti-discrimination and hate act, and set up centers against extremism and terrorism.

Speaking at the World Tolerance Summit, Dr. Abdulatif Mohammed Al-Shamsi, president and CEO of the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) in the UAE, said: "Sheikh Zayed (founding father of the UAE) built the basis of the country on tolerance.

"Back in 1974, he ordered the building of three churches in the UAE, and there are many examples. Being open and welcoming is in the DNA of Emiratis."



The ghaf was chosen as a symbol of the Year of Tolerance by the UAE because of its great significance as an indigenous tree. (SPA)

Al-Shamsi pointed out the need for such sentiments to be carried on through today's youth and delivered via the academic system, particularly in the age of social media and fake news.

"The HCT have 23,000 students and 84 different nationalities who teach our students," he told conference delegates. "We conduct different activities and practices all year round (related to tolerance)."

In recent years, the concept of tolerance has expanded regionally to include women's issues, with many Arab countries working to ensure that women can find representation in leading positions. But more work in this area still needs to be done.

Al-Eisa said Saudi university campuses were mainly populated by young men and women born after 1980 who were diverse, open-minded and community spirited.

"So, the challenges in universities are even greater. It's not just promoting values; it's how you assess the progress of those students with these values so we can design (suitable) policies and activities. Because, without measuring the impact, we cannot move forward."

The PNU aimed to produce critical and independent thinkers, innovators and creators, she added. "Compassion, empathy and gratitude is what we need to focus on.

"Half of our faculty is millennials, which is a strength because they are the most open-minded. But we can't marginalize others; we have to be very conscious of our unconscious biases to eliminate them."

In order to contain radicalism, experts stress the need for a positive vision of commonalities rather than differences, given that the human mindset is instinctively drawn to disparities.

"Don't repeat German history in your country," said Dr. Hubertus Hoffmann, president and founder of the Global Tolerance Institute in Germany, speaking at the World Tolerance Summit.

"We have to contain radicalism early. If we let them grow, the major problem is the passive majority. So, we have to stand up for our values."

Education led efforts, but more investment was needed for the promotion of tolerance, he said.

"To have real peace, you need reconciliation and dialogue," Hoffman added. "Without this, there is no peace strategy. You need hard and soft factors and we tend to invest in hard factors.

"However, it's not enough to have peace in this region and elsewhere. If we are passive, we won't succeed. But I am an optimist."

Halfway across the world, in Colombia, a country torn apart by a drug war and conflicts with leftist groups, work is underway through Movilizadorio, a laboratory that aims to build movement, engagement and participation in peacebuilding.

"We saw the need for it because we knew that the youth needed to be actively participating in the process we are going through in our region," said Juliana Uribe Villegas, Movilizadorio's CEO and founder.

"Technology is such an important tool right now, but it doesn't have value. We need to give value to it and bring tolerance and peace-building value to technology and that's what we're doing."

The company works with young people building platforms to promote peaceful dialogue.

"Tolerance and peace need to be intentional at this time across the world, but we're not being invited by social media platforms to learn from others," Villegas said. "Instead, we are being driven to confirm our own biases.

"So intentionally, we need to build a culture and a way of communication which is open to different cultures, dialogue and participation in different things happening in different regions."

Technology was described as a double-edged sword by Al-Shamsi, because of its potential for enabling radical groups to disseminate negative values.

“It’s becoming more demanding for us as educators to pay attention to the youth and remind them of the great passion of our ancestors of how tolerance was a practice. Technology spreads a lot of junk, but we have to promote values,” he said.

By creating new norms and living and exhibiting them through student contributions and science, Al-Eisa spoke of a changing world. “This is where we’re heading. I prioritize the role of universities because they lead change in the community.”

Hoffmann said a structure to prevent hate, of the kind afflicting countries as far apart as Yemen and Colombia, was of the essence.

“It’s unfortunately very easy to incite hate. The cost of recovering from this hatred was enormous. We know it in Europe. So, we have to give young people the oxygen of freedom as well.

“They must have the freedom to express criticism or it doesn’t work. The main tool is dialogue. You must listen. It’s the mother tongue of humanity,” he added.



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[Year of Tolerance](#)

[World Tolerance Summit](#)

Four countries discuss 'tolerance in multiculturalism' at UAE summit  
UAE launches global tolerance initiative for youth  
King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue takes part in tolerance summit in Dubai  
Saudi Arabia urges UN for zero-tolerance justice policy

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## [Russia, backed by China, casts 14th UN veto on Syria](#)

Fri, 2019-12-20 23:57

NEW YORK: Russia, backed by China, on Friday cast its 14th UN Security Council veto since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011 to block cross-border aid deliveries from Turkey and Iraq to millions of Syrian civilians.

The resolution drafted by Belgium, Kuwait and Germany would have allowed cross-border humanitarian deliveries for a further 12 months from two points in Turkey and one in Iraq.

But Syrian ally Russia only wanted to approve the two Turkish crossings for six months and had proposed its own draft text.

Russia and China vetoed the text drafted by Belgium, Kuwait and Germany. The remaining 13 members of the Security Council voted in favor. A resolution needs a minimum nine votes in favor and no vetoes by Russia, China, the US, Britain or France to pass.

US Ambassador Kelly Craft told the council after Russia and China's vetoes that she was in a state of shock as the consequences "will be disastrous." She described Russia and China's opposition as "reckless, irresponsible and cruel."

The council then voted on the rival Russian draft resolution that would have approved the two Turkish crossing points for six months, but it failed with only five votes in favor, six against and four abstentions.

"Who won today? Nobody. Who lost? The Syrian people," Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told the council. He had argued that the humanitarian situation in Syria has improved dramatically and that the council had to recognize that change. "Do not attempt to shift blame for this on us," he



said.

Deputy UN aid chief Ursula Mueller had warned the council on Thursday that without the cross border operations “we would see an immediate end of aid supporting millions of civilians.”

“That would cause a rapid increase in hunger and disease, resulting in death, suffering and further displacement – including across borders – for a vulnerable population who have already suffered unspeakable tragedy as a result of almost nine years of conflict,” Mueller said.

Since 2014 the UN and aid groups have crossed into Syria from Turkey, Iraq and Jordan at four places annually authorized by the Security Council. In a bid to compromise with Russia, the Jordanian crossing point was dropped by Belgium, Kuwait and Germany from their draft.

The current authorization for the four border crossings in Turkey, Iraq and Jordan ends on Jan. 10, so the Security Council could still attempt to reach an agreement, though some diplomats acknowledged this could now be difficult.

Russia has vetoed 14 council resolutions on Syria since a crackdown by Syria’s Bashar Assad on pro-democracy protesters in 2011 led to civil war. Daesh militants then used the chaos to seize territory in Syria and Iraq.

Indonesia’s U.N. Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani told the council on Thursday: “The world is watching. The international community is watching. But we are not here to just watch ... we are here to help and take action ... It is not about us. It is all about saving Syrian people on the ground.”

Political blocs are expected to name a new consensus-based candidate for the premiership this week.

Reform measures taken to retire key director-generals over the age of 60 has also caused anxieties for companies who have vested business relationships with bureaucrats. Ironically, the very issues raised by protesters on the street, including corruption, bureaucracy and lack of adequate public services, have long been a factor deterring investment, Sethna said.

Two industry officials who were in the middle of negotiating lucrative energy contracts said they have taken a step back – “until the dust settles,” one said. Both spoke on condition of anonymity to not derail future talks with the government.

Periodic road closures by protesters leading to Iraq’s two main commodities ports in Umm Qasr and Khor Al-Zubair have halted trade activity several times. To compensate, higher volumes of goods were imported through the border cross with Turkey in the north in late November. Hussein Ali, a potato trader, said delays at Umm Qasr cost him up to \$6,000 per container, so he opted for the northern land route. Customs from the ports are an important source of state revenue.

There are no figures to know exact economic losses suffered due to protests, because disruptions, when they occur, are often temporary or reliable data is

hard to come by.

A military spokesperson for the prime minister, Maj. Gen. Abdul Karim Khalaf, said the protests had cost Iraq \$6 billion within the span of a month. This figure is unlikely, since it would require major setbacks in oil earnings, according to calculations by the Associated Press.

The impact has been indelible on Iraq's hobbled private sector.

The World Bank has said developing this sector was key to diversifying the oil-dependent economy and creating much needed jobs. With poor regulations and high start-up costs, however, Iraqis have had little incentive to take the risks associated with entrepreneurship.

As a result, much of the sector remains informal and limited largely to cash-based retailers – who are highly sensitive to any disruptions.

“We have a huge informal sector that has no chance of joining the formal sector – they have no deeds, ownership, just conventions and understandings. If something goes wrong, you are dropped,” said Ahmed Tabaqchali, chief investment officer of AFC Iraq Fund.

At Shorja market, Baghdad's main wholesale market, merchants said they have seen daily earnings drop since protests started in October in part because customers are buying less and in part because of the turmoil at Rasheed Street, where most store their merchandise.

In southern Iraq, a rising number of medium to small businesses owners are defaulting on monthly payments on bank loans, said an official in Iraq's League of Private Banks, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to media.

Iraq's growing ecommerce sector was decimated by widespread Internet cuts imposed by authorities in October and November in a failed attempt to quell the protests, said Mujahid Waisi, an entrepreneur and founder of KAPITA, an incubator space set to launch early next year.

Even with the Internet restored, “because most of those items are not essential, people fear making purchases because of the situation,” said Waisi. “They want to keep money in their hands.” Moreover, ecommerce startups are hesitant to promote their services online, fearing protesters will criticize them as unpatriotic, he added.

Many cash-strapped merchants have let go of workers because of the escalating crisis.

“It has been 25 days that I haven't worked,” said Mohammed Hamid, a worker in Rasheed Street. He said the shopowner he worked for told him not even to come in – “how am I going to pay your ... weekly salary when I am closed?”



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Russia, Syrian regime enter troubled waters of East MedRussia to invest \$500m in Syrian port, build grain hub -Interfax