

Gaza man masters rare skill of balancing art

Author:

Wed, 2019-11-27 01:06

GAZA STRIP: Whenever Mohammed Al-Shenbari sees a new object, he quickly tries to find its “balancing point” and make it stand in a way that appears to defy the law of gravity.

The 24-year-old self-taught Palestinian artist says he can balance almost any object, using what he calls a mix of mind and body.

This has made him a popular entertainer and frequent participant in psychological support sessions that are common in conflict-ridden, poverty-stricken Gaza.

In the yard of his home in northern Gaza, Al-Shenbari stood a chair on one leg, propped two gas canisters on a slanted pipe wrench and balanced an upside-down TV screen on the rim of a Coke bottle.

“You just need to know the fulcrum of the object and you get it,” he said.

A fitness and bodybuilding coach, Al-Shenbari says his healthy lifestyle helped him slowly develop “the great focus” required to balance the objects.

“When I do this, I feel something indescribable – like a magnet drawing out energy from me toward the objects,” he said after he stacked four oddly angled cans of beans on a wood frame hanging off a tree.

A year ago, Al-Shenbari came across a YouTube video by a Korean balance artist, Nam Seok Byun, and was fascinated by the way the artist arranged layers of rocks delicately supported by round pebbles.

Trying to emulate his hero, Al-Shenbari said he would spend days working on what now seem like basic sculptures. Now, it takes him just a few minutes and several attempts to figure things out.

Gaza is sandwiched between Israel and Egypt, which have kept it under a blockade for 12 years since the Hamas militant group took power. After years of living under the blockade and three devastating wars between Israel and Hamas, Al-Shenbari, like many young Gazans, wants to leave the territory in search of better opportunities.

His dream is to compete on reality TV shows and travel to Asia, where he says the art of balancing is practiced, to improve his skills.

“I want to balance larger objects like a washing machine or a fridge,” he said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Gaza](#)

Amid tension in southern Gaza, a newlywed couple's future is thrown to the wind
Truce ends deadly clashes across Gaza border

[UN investigators eye 160 Daesh militants over Yazidi massacres](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1574799912696584300

Tue, 2019-11-26 20:10

UNITED NATIONS: United Nations investigators have so far identified 160 Daesh militants accused of massacres of Yazidis in northern Iraq in 2014 and are building legal cases against them, the head of the team told the UN Security Council on Tuesday.

The UN investigative team, created by the UN Security Council, started work a year ago to collect and preserve evidence for future prosecution of acts by Daesh in Iraq that may be war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide. "In relation to the Yazidi community alone, the crimes that targeted them, we have identified over 160 perpetrators of massacres against the Yazidis ... and

we're focusing our work to build solid cases hopefully in relation to each of those that may be presented to domestic courts," said Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, head of the UN team.

UN experts warned in June 2016 that Daesh was committing genocide against the Yazidis in Syria and Iraq to destroy the minority religious community through killings, sexual slavery and other crimes.

Daesh militants consider the Yazidis to be devil-worshippers. The Yazidi faith has elements of Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islam.

Nadia Murad, who won the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, and human rights lawyer Amal Clooney played a key role in pushing for the UN investigative team. Murad is a Yazidi woman who was enslaved and raped by Daesh fighters in 2014.

Daesh overran the Yazidi faith's heartland of Sinjar in northern Iraq in 2014, forcing young women into servitude as "wives" for its fighters and massacring men and older women.

Yazidi survivor Kachi, whose full name was withheld to protect him, addressed the UN Security Council on Tuesday.

"After shooting at us, Daesh members left to another place. I found myself under a pile of dead bodies," he told the council. "When I opened my eyes I saw three of my brothers. They were next to me. They were dead. So were my nephews and my cousins."

He said his wife and daughters were kidnapped and sold as slaves and that he had lost some 75 members of his family.

"Five years have passed and I can still hear my wife and my daughters screaming when the members of ISIL (Daesh) kidnapped them. I can also hear the voice of my daughter Lara, who was three months old when she passed away in captivity because of thirst and hunger," Kachi said.

He said the Yazidis now want justice.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[UN](#)

[Daesh](#)

[Yazidi](#)

[massacres](#)

[Six dead in blasts in Iraqi capital amid deadly protests](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1574793823776083100

Tue, 2019-11-26 18:19

BAGHDAD: Six people were killed in near-simultaneous blasts across Iraq's capital late Tuesday, medics and a security source said, amid deadly anti-government protests that have rocked Baghdad and the Shiite-majority south for weeks.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the three explosions, which were the first such violence in the capital after months of relative calm.

The blasts were caused by two explosives-laden motorcycles and a roadside bomb and hit three Shiite neighborhoods of Baghdad, according to medical and security sources.

Around a dozen people were wounded and taken to Baghdad hospitals already treating scores of demonstrators hurt earlier in the day in protests. Rallies demanding deep-rooted regime change erupted in early October across Baghdad and southern Iraq, leaving more than 350 people dead and around 15,000 wounded.

In the Shiite holy city of Karbala on Tuesday, one person was killed as protests escalated into chaotic "clashes" with security forces, a medical source told AFP.

There were no immediate details about the victim's identity or cause of death, but the medic said the toll was likely to rise further.

AFP's correspondent saw riot police fire live rounds both into the air and directly at crowds of teenage protesters with at least one demonstrator suffering a bullet wound to the head.

In one face-off under a bridge, teenagers threw rocks at riot police trucks, bursting into song when the vehicles screeched away.

Clashes also erupted in Baghdad, where security forces fired rubber bullets and tear gas to keep demonstrators away from Al-Ahrar bridge, which leads to government buildings on the west bank of the river Tigris.

One protester died after being shot by a rubber bullet and 18 were wounded, a medical source said.

A body bearing a rubber bullet wound was also found underneath Al-Ahrar on Tuesday, but it was unclear when the person had died, the medic said.

The historic districts near Al-Ahrar have morphed into arenas for daily street battles.

Demonstrators – mostly teenagers who have been there for days or weeks – throw rocks from behind makeshift barricades at security forces firing tear gas, rubber bullets, live rounds and even machine gun fire.

"We won't leave unless it's in coffins," one protester told AFP.

"Either way, I've got no job, no money, so whether I stay here or go home, it's all the same," said another.

An Iraqi tricolor tied around his shoulders, he went on bitterly: "I'll never be able to get married without work or a salary, so I've got no family and no home anyway."

Smoke bombs exploded all around the protesters, filling the colonnaded streets with puffs of orange, green and purple.

In the south, protesters burned tires along highways outside the city of Diwaniyah, blockading bridges and one of the province's three power stations.

In the city itself, massive crowds marched through the streets, tearing down posters of politicians and beating them with shoes to insult them.

"It's been two months, we're sick of your promises," they chanted.

Schools and public buildings have been shut in Diwaniyah for the past month by strikes and road closures, but skirmishes with riot police have been rare. In nearby Hillah, usually peaceful sit-ins took a violent turn overnight when security forces fired tear gas grenades at protesters, wounding around 60, medics said.

Demonstrators and security forces in Karbala lobbed Molotov cocktails at each another.

Night-time skirmishes have become routine in the city.

In Dhi Qar, arterial routes linking key cities and the three oilfields of Garraf, Nasiriyah and Subba were shut.

Clashes with police guarding the fields wounded 13 officers.

Together, the three oilfields produce around 200,000 of Iraq's roughly 3.6 million barrels a day.

Iraq is ranked OPEC's second-biggest crude producer and, according to Transparency International, the world's 12th most corrupt country.

The turmoil since the start of October has not significantly impacted oil production or exports, which fund virtually the entire state budget.

Iraq's cabinet is currently discussing the 2020 budget before it is submitted to parliament, and government sources say it is expected to be one of the largest yet.

That is mostly because of the enormous public sector, which has ballooned in recent years as the government has hired tens of thousands of new graduates in a country with a severely under-developed private sector.

But experts say that model is unsustainable for a country of nearly 40 million people, set to grow by another 10 million in the next decade.

Public anger over a lack of jobs fueled the latest grassroots protests, Iraq's most widespread and deadly in decades.

One in five people lives below the poverty line and youth unemployment hovers at a staggering 25 percent, the World Bank says.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iraq](#)

[blasts](#)

[Baghdad](#)

Iraq to close nine TV stations for 'inciting violence' Security forces kill nine in Iraq protests

Protesters injured during rioting at Beirut's Ring Bridge

Author:

Tue, 2019-11-26 00:47

BEIRUT: The Ring Bridge, which links east and west Beirut, was a battleground for more than five hours between peaceful protesters and Hezbollah and Amal supporters. According to the General Directorate of the Lebanese Civil Defense, 10 people were taken to hospital.

Young supporters of Amal and Hezbollah arrived on motorcycles at the Ring Bridge after 10 p.m. on Sunday chanting the name of Hezbollah's secretary general. Their demonstration turned into a riot in residential streets parallel to the Ring Bridge, which are predominantly Christian areas, as journalists and peaceful protesters were surrounded and assaulted. Tear gas was used to disperse the rioters.

Former Deputy Speaker of Parliament Farid Makari tweeted: "The people want the Ring to be a bridge that brings the Lebanese together, while others want to turn it into a boxing, intimidation and repression arena."

While no rioters were arrested in Beirut, many peaceful protesters in other areas were arrested for blocking roads on Sunday night to pressure the government to comply with their demands. The detainees were released on Monday morning.

However, there were two casualties at the blockades when stones were thrown at a car on the Jiyeh highway, on the Beirut-South road. The car crashed into a concrete barrier and two occupants were killed.

A military arrest warrant was issued for the Lebanese army aide Charbel Al-Ojeil for the deliberate murder of civilian activist Alaa Abu Fakher. Abu Fakher was killed on Nov. 12 during the blockade of the southern road into Beirut. Colonel Nidal Daou was also arrested for the murder.

Amid the continuing failure to form a government, the director general for political affairs at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Richard Moore, paid a visit to President Michel Aoun, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Saad Hariri, who recently resigned as prime minister.

In a statement issued by the British Embassy Moore confirmed "his country's commitment to helping Lebanon and to supporting its constitutional legitimacy in the formation of a government. This can then implement economic reforms to

assist the restoration of long-term stability and comprehensive growth in Lebanon, in addition to the implementation of policies that reflect the aspirations of the Lebanese people, without interference in Lebanese internal affairs.

Moore stressed that “the choice of leaders and government is an internal matter for the Lebanese. The people were clear in their demand for better governance, and they should be heard. It is important to continue to respect their right to protest peacefully, and any repression of the protest movement by violence or intimidation by any party is completely unacceptable.”

A general strike has been announced in the private sector on Thursday, Friday and Saturday in light of the “failure to form a new government and the worsening economic conditions reaching unprecedented levels.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Beirut](#)

[Hezbollah](#)

[lebanon protests](#)

Lebanon protesters defiant despite Hezbollah attack Demonstrators target US Embassy near Beirut

Istanbul's secular mayor knocking on European doors for funding

Author:

Tue, 2019-11-26 00:37

ANKARA: The secret behind the latest wave of European visits made by Istanbul's Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu has finally been revealed: To ask for international funding for the urban projects of the metropolitan municipality.

Imamoglu announced on Sunday that Turkey's state-run banks are reluctant to lend routine loans to the municipality – even for paying salaries – and that this has led him to ask European countries for funding.

He added that the municipality is now working on a plan to sell Eurobonds to finance its projects in Istanbul, home to one-fifth of Turkey's 82 million citizens.

“The state banks seem to have shut the doors on us,” he said. “I condemn the officials' attitude.”

However, even if it is endorsed by the city council, he would likely need the approval from the Treasury and Finance Ministry – controlled by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak – to issue Eurobonds worth \$500 million.

During local elections in June, Imamoglu, of the secular main opposition Republican People's Party, took the reins from Erdogan's AKP which, along with its Islamist predecessors, has run the city for the last 25 years.

He also inherited a significant amount of debt and wasteful spending from the previous administration of the city, with a budget of 20 billion lira (\$3.4 billion) and a debt of 26 billion lira, which obliged him to search for resources to pay it.

The municipality rounded up and parked hundreds of cars hired for official use by the previous administration to display the squandering of public money.

Karol Wasilewski, an analyst at the Warsaw-based Polish Institute of International Affairs, said that this is a politically risky strategy since Imamoglu may easily get hit by Erdogan who would criticize him using nationalist discourse.

Erdogan has always taken pride in ending Turkey's dependence on the International Monetary Fund in 2013 after paying its last loan installment.

According to Wasilewski, the Turkish president could capitalize on the nationalistic feelings of the people by saying that Imamoglu would do exactly the opposite after the latter met with various global creditors and bankers

in London.

“However, Imamoglu not only proved that he is a politician willing to accept the risk, but also made his bones as a person fighting the oppression of the government. If he succeeds in bringing further investments to Istanbul and in improving standards of living, his stance in Turkish politics will be even stronger,” he told Arab News.

Although Imamoglu, 49, has dismissed claims that he is interested in a presidential bid, his victories on the local front, his popular appeal and inclusive profile as a practicing Muslim elected from a secularist party have led many to think that he could challenge the president, who also once served as Istanbul mayor.

Imamoglu has paid working visits to Paris, Berlin and London in recent months.

Following these visits, Istanbul has secured €110 million (\$121 million) of financing from Deutsche Bank for an underground transport project on the Asian side of the city. The construction will begin on Nov. 26.

Nezih Onur Kuru, a political analyst and a doctoral researcher on political psychology from Istanbul’s Koc University, thinks the debates on Imamoglu’s meetings with European investors is an indicator of the recent tension between the central and local governments.

“The government has targeted Imamoglu as a potential presidential candidate after his 9-point lead victory in the June 23 elections,” he told Arab News.

Kuru added that seeking investments strengthens Imamoglu’s image as a governor who defies the central government for public interest and consolidates his support base.

During Imamoglu’s European tour, the French Development Agency also signed an €86 million loan agreement with Istanbul for an underground metro line.

So far, the city has secured financing from Societe Generale, Black Sea Trade and Development Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Istanbul](#)

[Ekrem Imamoglu](#)

[Turkey](#)

Istanbul metro project gets \$121m financing from Deutsche Bank
Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu hails victory as step to repair democracy