

Cairo turns to Tokyo for a lesson on education

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-22 23:48

CAIRO: Egypt is seeking Japan's help to improve its education system, which has fallen to 130th place in international rankings.

The Japanese education system is recognized as one of the top five worldwide, and Cairo is hoping to apply key aspects of Japan's approach to the Egyptian curriculum.

Education has played a major role in transforming Japan from a feudal state receiving aid following World War II to a modern economic powerhouse.

During a visit to Japan in 2016, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi discussed political and economic development with Japanese officials, and was also briefed on the Japanese education system.

The Egyptian leader visited Japanese schools and called on Japan to help Egypt introduce a similar system in its schools.

As part of Egyptian-Japanese cooperation, Japan's embassy established cultural cooperation as well as technical and professional education links between the two countries. Collaboration has been strengthened from kindergarten to post-university, with Japanese experts contributing in various education fields.

Japanese experts have held seminars in schools across the country, focusing on basic education.

During one seminar, Japan highlighted the importance of enhancing education by playing games during kindergarten and primary school, encouraging children's ability and desire to explore.

Education expert Ola El-Hazeq told Arab News that the Japanese system focuses on developing students' sense of collective worth and responsibility toward society. This starts with their surrounding environment by taking care of school buildings, educational equipment and school furniture, for example.

"Japanese schools are known for being clean," El-Hazeq said. "The first thing that surprises a school visitor is finding sneakers placed neatly in a locker or on wooden shelves at the school entrance. Each sneaker has its owner's name on it. This is a habit picked up at most primary and intermediate schools as well as in many high schools."

Japanese students also clean their classrooms, collect leaves that have fallen in the playground and take out the garbage. In many cases, teachers join students to clean up schools and also public gardens and beaches during the summer holidays.

El-Hazeq added that neither the teachers nor the students find it beneath their dignity to carry out such chores.

The academic year in Japan continues for almost 11 months, different from most other countries, with the Japanese academic year starting on April 1 and ending on March 31 the following year.

Japan's school days and hours are relatively longer in comparison with other countries. Usually the school day is from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Teachers normally work until 5 p.m. but sometimes up to 7 p.m. Holidays are shorter than in other countries. Spring and winter holidays are no longer than 10 days, and the summer holiday ranges from 40 to 45 days.



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Egypt's iconic Tahrir Square to be renovated

Assad forces threaten Turkish observation posts in Idlib

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-22 23:26

ANKARA: Syrian regime forces opened fire on a Turkish observation post No. 8 eight – in Sirman, Maarat Al-Numan in southeastern Idlib – on Thursday morning. Observation post No. 9, in the town of Morek, is reportedly surrounded as well.

The observation post in Sirman is of strategic importance due to its location in the north of Khan Sheikhoun – an area which regime forces, supported by Iranian-backed foreign militia and Russian forces, have targeted in recent days.

Khan Sheikhoun is the fourth-largest town in Idlib and has been under the control of opposition forces for five years. It is situated on the M5 highway, which connects Aleppo to Damascus and is an important supply route for the rebels.

Although all Turkey's observation posts in Syria are manned, experts have warned of a looming security threat as Syrian regime forces have intensified their military operations in the area despite the presence of the posts.

FASTFACT

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani are expected to discuss Idlib at next month's meeting in Ankara.

Two Turkish soldiers have been killed by mortar strikes on observation posts in recent months, with 12 military staff wounded. On Monday, an airstrike on a Turkish military convoy killed three civilians who were heading toward observation post number eight.

The Russian Foreign Ministry's most-recent statement on the matter – saying that Turkey has to honor the Idlib agreement – could be seen as another faultline opening up between the two partners on their Syria policy. Ankara and Moscow agreed last September to create a de-escalation zone in Idlib to prohibit acts of aggression.

Navvar Saban, a military analyst at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies in Istanbul, told Arab News that Turkey should not retreat from the Morek observation post, adding that there is no obvious escape route from the area.

“Turkey committed in the last few days to hold its observation post. If they retreat from the area, they will break their commitments and it will make them look very bad in front of the international community and even the opposition they support,” he said. “Northern Hama is empty now, in terms of civilians. Turkey is conducting negotiations to control this area.”



Civilians flee a conflict zone in Syria’s northwestern region of Idlib, where regime attacks have killed hundreds since late April. (AFP)

Saban said Turkey “will not withdraw from its observation posts before the next Astana meeting with Russia and Iran in September.”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is set to host Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani for a summit in Ankara on Sept. 16.

They will discuss Idlib as well as the establishment of a constitution commission and how the political process should continue, said Erdogan’s spokesman Ibrahim Kalin.

Ammar Hamou, a Jordan-based Syrian journalist, said that all indications suggest the regime has no intention of halting its military action, and that its intention is to seize control of the M5 highway.

Hamou said that there is a feeling among Syrians that Turkey is the “silent guarantor,” because it did not react strongly to the regime’s violations on the borders of the de-escalation zone four months ago.

He said he did not expect that Turkey would move its observation posts unless

the regime exceeds the limits of the Turkish-Russian agreement. “The silence of Russia on the regime’s excesses in terms of the Astana agreement is not strange.”

Hamou told Arab News: “The Turkish-Russian-Iranian agreement (based on) the Astana talks provides for the protection of safe areas like Eastern Ghouta, southern Syria, Homs, and Idlib. Today, three of them are, with Russian support, under the regime’s control.”

Hamou believes that Ankara is extremely dissatisfied by Russia’s silence on the Syrian regime’s violations of the agreement, but that the Turkish government is unwilling to risk the deterioration of its relationship with Moscow.

Under the de-escalation zone deal of last year, Turkey was required to ensure the withdrawal of extremist groups and heavy weaponry from that zone.

With Syrian militants withdrawing from several positions in the region, Ankara is also concerned that the fighting may cause a further influx of displaced people into Turkey, which already hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees.

The Syrian regime has opened a corridor in the village of Soran, on the southern part of the opposition-held area, to allow civilians to escape.



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Damascus to let civilians flee rebel-held Idlib Assad regime warplanes strike Turkish armored convoy in Idlib

[Tel Aviv beaches fall foul in Israel's passion for plastic](#)

Thu, 2019-08-22 22:10

TEL AVIV: In the early morning, when the only sound on Tel Aviv beach is the waves, Yosef Salman and his team pick up plastic debris left by bathers or cast up by the sea.

Working in heat and humidity with large rakes, they scoop plastic cups, cigarette ends, empty sunscreen tubes and soiled babies' nappies.

Also present, but impossible to separate from the sand, are microplastics, tiny particles of plastic debris that have been broken down by sun and salt. "When it rains... you can see tons of plastic in the sand," says Ariel Shay, of the Plastic Free Israel movement, which organizes volunteer beach cleanups. Despite the activities of environmental groups, Israel remains hooked on plastic.

A June report by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) ranked Tel Aviv's coastline as the third most polluted by plastic waste in the Mediterranean, behind Barcelona and southern Turkey.

Valencia, Alexandria, Algiers and Marseille were listed in fourth to seventh places.

With around four million inhabitants, Tel Aviv is Israel's most populous metropolitan area.

"Every time I go to the beach now, I spend my time cleaning – it's horrible!" complains Shani Zylbersztejn, with an eye on her nine-month-old daughter, who plays with a plastic fork freshly dug from the sand.

In the upper-crust town of Herzliya, just north of Tel Aviv, Limor Gorelik, of the environmental protection NGO Zalul, patrols the sands, offering beachgoers bamboo cups and reusable bags in a bid to wean them from single-use plastics.

Gorelik blames Israel's passion for plastic on a lack of education and on deeply ingrained habits, such as using disposable tableware for family picnics.

Observant Jews who want a beachfront lunch on Saturdays are forbidden from washing the dishes afterwards, because their faith bans them from working on the Sabbath.

"They're not permitted to wash dishes so they use disposable plastic," Gorelik says.

Even plastic waste dumped in the bins that dot the beaches can end up in the

sea, carried by the wind or by birds which rip open garbage bags in search of food.

Independent researcher Galia Pasternak has analyzed coastal plastic pollution in Israel.

According to her data, 60 percent of the waste on the beach comes from the bathers themselves.

Some is also borne by currents from Gaza and Egypt in the south or from Lebanon further north.

In 2005, Israel's environmental protection ministry launched a program offering local councils incentives for proven results in cleaning their beaches.

Subject to regular inspection, councils that meet requirements get funding, while failing authorities face cuts or even court, says Ran Amir, head of the environment ministry's marine division.

Amir cites the case of the popular Palmahim beach, south of Tel Aviv. Palmahim municipal council was taken to court and fined over the state of the beach – which has since become “one of the cleanest beaches in Israel today,” he says.

The ministry's strategy in recent years has also included public service messages on radio and online, along with fines, recycling facilities and education, according to Amir.

“It think it has partially worked,” says Pasternak, who helped set up some of those programs.

Zalul's Gorelik, however, says Israel is still trailing behind other countries.

She says charges introduced in supermarkets in 2017 for plastic bags – previously given away free – are too low, at just 0.10 Israeli shekels (0.02 euros/ \$0.03) each.

“It's not enough,” Gorelik says, adding that even this modest measure does not apply to small grocery stores.

She points to new European Union restrictions on single-use plastics. “Europeans are the leaders on the subject,” she says.

“Here, we are very far away.”



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Two Israeli Arabs charged over alleged Daesh support
Feminist icon blasts Israel PM over travel ban

[Somalia's Jubbaland president wins new term amid rift with central government](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-22 22:01

GAROWE, Somalia: The president of Jubbaland, a Somali region critical to East Africa's fight against Al-Shabab militants, won a new term on Thursday, amid a growing rift between the federal government and its semi-autonomous states. The contest has stoked tensions between Kenya and Ethiopia, longtime allies who both have large contingents of peacekeepers in the country and see Jubbaland as a buffer zone against Islamist attacks in their own countries. Kenya supports the victor, Ahmed Mohamed Madobe, while Ethiopia has grown increasingly close to the federal government in Mogadishu. Madobe won 56 of the 74 votes cast in the regional parliament, parliamentary

speaker Cabdi Maxamed Abdirahmaan said.

"I am ready to sit and speak with all people, including the opposition. I will speak and work with anyone who has a complaint," Madobe told parliament after the vote.

There was no immediate reaction from the central government.

Mogadishu said on Saturday it would not recognize the result, saying the candidate selection process had been unconstitutional.

It has accused Madobe of interfering in the process and has backed opposition candidates, who were rejected by the electoral commission when they attempted to register.

Jubbaland is seen as the breadbasket of Somalia and the capital Kismayo is a strategically important port. Its shoreline delineates a hotly contested maritime zone claimed by both Somalia and Kenya with potential oil and gas deposits.

Madobe ousted Shabab from Kismayo in 2012 with the help of Kenyan forces, took power and was first elected in 2015.

Hundreds of people gathered in the streets of the capital Kismayo after the result was announced, chanting "long live Ahmed Madobe" and waving his picture.

The barred opposition candidates said they held their own vote in Kismayo on Thursday, electing Abdirashid Mohamed Hidig.

The impact of the parallel vote was not clear.

Jubbaland is the third of the country's seven semi-autonomous regions to hold presidential elections before next year's national vote.

And while analysts say that President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo must exert greater control over Jubbaland and the other regions ahead of a next year's national vote, they also expect the federal government to grudgingly accept Thursday's result, despite earlier fears that the contest could spark violence.

"They will have to live with (Madobe)," said Hussein Sheikh-Ali, a former national security adviser and founder of the Mogadishu-based think tank Hiraal Institute.

Shabab controls swathes of territory and towns in Jubbaland and analysts say it may exploit the spat over the election.

The militants, who want to overthrow the Somali government, have killed hundreds of civilians across East Africa and thousands of Somalis in a decade-long insurgency.

Somalia has been trying to claw its way out of the embers of the civil war that engulfed it in 1991, when clan warlords overthrew a dictator and then turned on each other.



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Al-Shabab militants kill 50 soldiers in attack on Somalia military base
Homegrown fashion emerges in troubled Somalia

[Hamdok, UN economist turned Sudanese premier](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-22 21:51

KHARTOUM: Sudan's new prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok, is a seasoned economist who faces the daunting task of rescuing his country's moribund economy. Hamdok built a career in continental and international organizations, most recently as deputy executive secretary of the UN's Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa.

He was welcomed off the plane Wednesday by two civilian members of the new Sovereign Council that was sworn in hours earlier and will oversee his government's work.

The joint civilian-military council replaced the transitional military council that took charge in April when Islamist general Omar Al-Bashir was forced from power by relentless street protests.

The Sudanese people's main expectation of Hamdok will be tangible solutions to the dire economic crisis Bashir's rule and the last few months of political turmoil have caused.

"With the right vision, with the right policies, we will be able to address this economic crisis," he told reporters after taking the oath on Wednesday. He vowed to devise an urgent recovery program addressing the shortages of basic commodities that have plagued Sudan and its 40 million inhabitants recently.

The protests that eventually ended Bashir's 30-year rule were ignited in December last year by the tripling of bread prices.

In the longer term, Hamdok emphasised the need to improve productivity and rebuild a banking sector he said had all but collapsed.

His credentials as an economist seem solid, as was abundantly documented in the official biography distributed to media during his oath-taking ceremony. The text stressed Hamdok is "highly credible among African finance and development institutions, the International Monetary Fund and the Paris Club" of creditor countries.

Hamdok worked for the African Development and Trade Bank and is credited with shaping some of the policies that spurred Ethiopia's rapid economic growth under the late prime minister Meles Zenawi.

Greeted as the savior of Sudan's economy, the greying, moustachioed technocrat was all smiles when he took questions from journalists on his first day on the job.

While he was outside Sudan and not directly involved in the protest movement that terminated Bashir's rule, Hamdok's appointment appeared to be well received by the population.

"He has the skills we need the most at the moment," said Sumaila Ibrahim, a 21-year-old student at Khartoum University.

Hamdok is also an alumnus, having completed a degree in agricultural economics in the capital before moving to Manchester in the United Kingdom for his masters.

Besides his credentials as an economist, Hamdok has carved an image as a champion of transparency and good governance in the course of his rich career in African organizations.

He sat on the board of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, which was founded by the eponymous Sudanese-British billionaire to promote good governance and leadership in Africa.

Last year he turned down an offer by Bashir to become finance minister as part of a government reshuffle.

As the head of Sudan's future government, which according to a roadmap laid out by protest leaders and generals is to be formed by August 28, Hamdok is not only in charge of the economy however.

He will need to draw on his experience in his various African peace-building initiatives to bring an end to deadly conflicts in Sudan's regions of Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile.

This is where the co-existence between generals who all rose to their positions in Bashir's wings and the civilians in the transition's new institutions could be most tested.

Hamdok was born in 1958 in the state of South Kordofan, which found itself on Sudan's southern border when South Sudan became independent in 2011, after decades of war with the north.

His own native village is now in a war zone and Hamdok will be keen to push for a resolution of Sudan's civil conflicts, but he has his work cut out reconciling the military with the rebels.

US Congressman Jim McGovern, a keen observer of Sudanese affairs and vocal critic of Bashir's Islamist regime, highlighted that pitfall in a statement on Wednesday.

"I look forward with hope to a transitional period that places the rights and aspirations of the Sudanese people front and center," the Democrat said.

"I have grave concerns, however, about whether military and political officials associated with the former regime will prove trustworthy partners given their history of violence, repression, corruption and bad faith," he warned.



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Sudan swears in prime minister, civilian-majority ruling council
Sudan forms sovereign council to lead transition