

News

Iraqis fill Mosul airwaves after IS radio silence

MOSUL: During the Islamic State group's rule in Mosul, radio stations were banned and replaced with broadcasts of jihadist propaganda. Today, young Iraqis are filling the city's airwaves. One budding presenter is Nour Tai, who at 16 years old faces the microphone with a confident tone and a professional style. She hosts a weekly program on One FM, a Mosul station launched in February that broadcasts a mix of music, entertainment and current affairs debates.

Her career began a year ago thanks to a talent show organized by Al-Ghad, a station in the Kurdish city of Arbil which hosted many of those displaced from Iraq's second city. She told AFP at the time that she was passionate about radio because "it touches everyone". "I want to be part of it," she said. She now sits in the One FM studio, accompanied by her father, as a degenerative illness left her blind three years ago. She says her aim is to "give people hope, especially those who suffer from a handicap." "I want to tell everyone that we can all contribute something and that we can realize our dreams," she says from the cramped studio.

Erasing 'terrorist ideology'

The launch of One FM came six months after Iraqi forces declared victory over IS following three years of brutal jihadist rule in Iraq's second city. IS had shut down independent radio stations and anyone caught tuning in could expect severe physical punishment. The emergence of stations such as One FM is a step in the

city's transformation since IS was ousted following a vast, months-long operation. Young presenters are busy 24 hours a day, producing and broadcasting shows which are also filmed for broadcast on the radio's website and social media accounts. The channel is run by volunteers who bought the necessary equipment by pooling their savings, some selling their own belongings to fund the station.

Yassir Al-Qaissi, One FM's head of communications, says their aim is to "denounce violence and extremism, and broaden people's minds." There is a need to "erase the terrorist ideology and end the sickness of our society, such as sectarianism and racism," the 28-year-old says. Ahmad al-Jaffal, 30, says the jihadist occupation "created a vacuum of thought". "With my program, I try to promote ideas of coexistence, of mutual understanding, and of acceptance of the other," says Jaffal, who worked as a journalist prior to the IS takeover in 2014.

Volume up

One FM is not the only ambitious new station on the local airwaves. Mosul residents who took refuge in Arbil after the IS takeover of their city launched two stations: Al-Ghad and Start FM. After Iraqi forces drove the jihadists from Mosul, One FM was launched and Mosul FM started broadcasting from the nearby region of Dohuk.

That means it has more radio stations than the two state-run channels it had under former dictator Saddam Hussein. All currently broadcast analogue signals and can only reach Mosul and its surroundings. The US invasion in 2003 brought a multitude of new options for listeners, although these were co-opted by American occupying forces or political parties. The period before the IS offensive was risky for journalists and presenters in Mosul, who were regularly targeted by Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups.



MOSUL: Radio presenter Nour Tai broadcasts her weekly program on One FM, a radio station in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. A degenerative illness left the 16 years old Nour blind three years ago. During the Islamic State group's rule in Mosul, radio stations were banned and replaced with broadcasts of jihadist propaganda. —AFP

Mohammad Salem, a sociologist, says the new stations will need government supervision to ensure that this time they are not misused for political or religious purposes—"especially as some of their funding sources are unknown". On the streets of Mosul, the radio shows bring a distraction from the struggles of life in

the war-scarred city. Taxi driver Mohammad Qassem, 27, says the music and entertainment shows are a welcome addition to his long days. "We can finally listen to all the songs that IS deprived us of for three years," he says happily, before pushing the volume up to maximum on his car radio — AFP

Despite summit, N Korea 'still a nuclear threat'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump yesterday cited "an unusual and extraordinary threat" from North Korea's nuclear arsenal to extend sanctions on Kim Jong Un's regime, despite touting the success of a historic summit earlier this month. After flying back to Washington last week, boasting of success, the US leader tweeted: "There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea." "Sleep well tonight!" he added on June 13, a day after the Singapore meeting.

But a presidential declaration sent to Congress on Friday struck a different note as it explained why the administration would keep in place tough economic restrictions first imposed by former president George W. Bush. "The existence and risk of proliferation of weapons-usable fissile material on the Korean Peninsula and the actions and policies of the Government of North Korea continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States," it said.

"I am continuing for one year the national emergency with respect to North Korea," added the statement. Though the notice is considered pro forma, the disparity in tone reflects the work that US officials concede remains to be done as negotiators thrash out the details of Pyongyang's disarmament.

At their summit, Kim and Trump signed a pledge "to work towards complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," a stock phrase favored by Pyongyang that stopped short of longstanding US demands for North Korea to give up its

atomic arsenal in a "verifiable" and "irreversible" way. Critics have pointed to the vague wording of the non-binding summit document and raised fears that the summit could weaken the international coalition against the North's nuclear program.

Also Friday, the US and South Korea agreed to indefinitely suspend two exchange program training exercises, to support diplomatic negotiations with North Korea, the Pentagon said. The move came after the two countries had previously announced the shelving of the large-scale Ulchi Freedom Guardian exercises slated for August, making good on a pledge by Trump during his summit.

The decision followed a meeting between Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joe Dunford, and National Security Advisor John Bolton. "To support implementing the outcomes of the Singapore Summit, and in coordination with our Republic of Korea ally, Secretary Mattis has indefinitely suspended select exercises," Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White said in a statement.

Two Korean Marine Exchange Program training exercises scheduled to occur in the next three months have now been shelved. US and South Korean forces have been training together for years, and routinely rehearse everything from beach landings to an invasion from the North, or even "decapitation" strikes targeting the North Korean regime. Pyongyang typically reacts furiously. — AFP

Sex, gender, social change: Cambodia blogger tackles taboos

PHNOM PENH: Sex toys and infidelity are generally hush topics in conservative Cambodia, but not on a taboo-busting video blog called "A Dose of Cath" that unabashedly wrestles with the risqué, drawing both applause and abuse in the patriarchal country. Hosted on Facebook, the show by a 23-year-old Cambodian woman tackles the finer points of sex education, women's health and gender imbalances in a country where the #MeToo movement has barely registered.

A recent episode on a well-known 19th-century Cambodian poem that used to be taught in schools and advises women not to laugh too loudly gained nearly 350,000 views. The videos feature Catherine Harry, the pen name of the self-described feminist who featured in Forbes' 2018 "30 under 30" list of outstanding leaders and entrepreneurs in Asia. Having ditched her birth name more than 10 years ago, Cath is following in the footsteps of other Cambodian writers and media personalities turning to blogs and social media to make a name for themselves.

But few have waded so deeply into the sensitive social issues that Cath confronts in short no-frills monologues filmed in her Phnom Penh apartment. "What I expect to get from what I'm doing, from my videos, is to start a conversation, because the topics that I talk about, people don't really talk about," she said. Those include premarital sex, whether to watch porn in a relationship, cervical cancer and sexual assault. Statistics point to an urgent need for such conversations in a kingdom where one in five Cambodian men surveyed as part of a 2014 UN study admitted to having committed rape.

Cath has shared her own #MeToo experiences to help spur debate, but said those who



PHNOM PENH: 23-year-old Cambodian blogger using the pen name Catherine Harry, edits a video for her blog in her Phnom Penh studio. — AFP

speak out in Cambodia face victim-blaming or even violence. "If a woman talks about her experiences of sexual assault or sexual harassment, she will be rejected by society, by her family, her friends," she said. And while 65 per cent of all businesses in Cambodia are run by women, the country's major political and financial institutions are still male-dominated.

Hun Sen, the long-serving prime minister who has been in power for over three decades, has tried to court the youth through his own Facebook page and graduation speeches. He also dispenses advice to women on how to live, telling female garment workers on May 23 that it was better to have only one partner so "there is no worry about AIDS". "This is a message to youth to do good things," he said in his remarks, which were broadcast live on his Facebook page. The premier is set for a landslide victory in general elections next month after backing a crackdown on the opposition.

Cath, who studies mass media at Pannasastra

University in Phnom Penh, started the "vlog" in early 2016 and it is now a full-time job, monetized through product placements for skin care companies and a brand of condoms. "I don't want everyone to agree with me but I want people to start questioning society," she explained. Raymond Leos, one of her professors, brings up Cath when discussing a wider trend of students moving beyond traditional career paths and family expectations. "They're very technologically savvy, they're very sophisticated, and they're very independent in their thinking," he said.

"A Dose of Cath" has found a ready audience in a country where one third of the 15 million population is under 30 and smartphone usage has more than doubled over the past five years, helping her amass more than 200,000 followers on Facebook. One video posted last year dealt with female virginity, an issue in a country where many women are expected to wait to wed before having sex. — AFP

Ethiopian leader escapes grenade...

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Abiy took office after his predecessor, Hailemariam Desalegn, resigned in February following protests in which hundreds of people were killed between 2015 and 2017. Emergency law was temporarily imposed to quell the unrest and was lifted this month. Despite boasting one of Africa's fastest growing economies, opponents say the benefits have not been shared fairly between ethnic groups and regions in the country, which has been run by the same ruling coalition for more than quarter of a century.

Abiy has travelled around the nation, promising to address grievances and address political and civil rights. After yesterday's blast, the prime minister's chief of staff wrote on Twitter: "Some whose heart is filled with hate attempted a grenade attack." "All the casualties are martyrs of love & peace. HE PM sends his condolences to the victims. The perpetrators will be brought to justice," Fitsum Arega wrote. The US embassy in Addis Ababa said: "Violence has no place as Ethiopia pursues meaningful political and economic reforms."

Peace initiative

Rally organizer Seyoum Teshome told Reuters he saw five people injured in the blast. "It was a grenade.

Someone tried to hurl it to the stage where the prime minister was," Seyoum said. As well as promising economic reforms, Abiy stunned Ethiopians this month by saying he was ready to fully implement a peace deal with Eritrea that was signed in 2000 after a two-year war. For years, Ethiopia refused to implement the deal, saying it wanted more talks. The stalemate led to a military build up and sporadic clashes on the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which seceded from Ethiopia in 1991 after a long war of independence.

Under the 2000 peace deal, Ethiopia is required to cede the border town of Badme to Eritrea. But war veterans in Badme and ethnic Tigrayans along the border oppose the peace initiative, with some town residents saying they will not leave the town. Eritrea's ambassador to Japan, Estifanos Afeworki, wrote on Twitter that his nation "strongly condemns the attempt to incite violence" in Addis Ababa, calling the rally a "demonstration for peace". Ethiopia's ruling EPRDF is made up of parties representing the country's four major ethnic groups. Abiy hails from the Oromo ethnic group, making up roughly a third of the population.

Oromos, along with the Amhara ethnic group, led street demonstrations against the government since 2015 that began as protests against a development plan around the capital and which opponents said the state was using to grab land. Protests broadened to cover other political and economic demands. In another of Abiy's major policy shifts, the prime minister has said Ethiopia would open its state-run telecoms monopoly and state-owned Ethiopian Airlines to private domestic and foreign investment, both moves would loosen the state's grip. — Reuters

unexpected outages in Venezuela, Libya and Angola have effectively brought supply cuts to around 2.8 million bpd in recent months.

Falih has warned the world could face a supply deficit of up to 1.8 million bpd in the second half of 2018. "Both Saudi and Iran can show that they won," an OPEC delegate said. "Zanganeh can go back to his country and say 'I won', because we are keeping the original agreement unchanged. Falih can go back and say 'we will be able to raise production to meet market needs.'" The United States, which rivals Russia and Saudi Arabia for the position of world No.1 oil producer, is not participating in the supply pact. — Reuters

Thousands call for 2nd...

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she added, European flag in hand. Freelance journalist William Diaz, 52, said Brexit was "creating tensions" and a "much more polarized society." "It is not something you can decide on a yes no vote," he added. Almost two-thirds of Britons believe they should have a final say on the Brexit deal, according to a poll published this week, although it is still unclear what would happen the government's deal were rejected.

Britain's Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, who campaigned to leave the European Union, warned May against a Brexit that was "soft, yielding and seemingly infinitely long" like toilet roll. Writing in The Sun, Johnson urged against a "bog-roll Brexit", British slang for toilet paper, and called on his boss to "fulfill the mandate of the people and deliver a full British Brexit". May's team is about to enter into the next round of negotiations with EU counterparts, but is still to define exactly what it wants from Britain's future relationship with the continent, particularly in the area of customs regulation.

Saudi women hit the road as...

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economy, with industries from car sales to insurance to reap returns. It should also encourage more women into the workforce and raise productivity, if only modestly at first. Auto companies have seized the moment with theatrical ads marking the end of the ban, and private parking garages designated "ladies" areas with pink signage.

Social media is also celebrating with tweets like #You_Will_Drive_and_the_People_Are_With_You. Some reactions have been more derisive or expressed concern about social impacts. Much of the kingdom's overwhelmingly young population supports Prince

Trade minister Liam Fox, an arch eurosceptic, insisted that the prime minister was still prepared to walk away from the talks if no satisfactory deal was reached. "The prime minister has always said no deal is better than a bad deal," Fox told the BBC in an interview aired yesterday. "It is essential as we enter the next phase of the negotiations that the EU understands that and believes it... I think our negotiating partners would not be wise if they thought our PM was bluffing."

Johnson, who was the most prominent face in the campaign to leave the EU, wrote that the British people "just want us to get on with it". "They don't want a half-hearted Brexit," he wrote. "They don't want some sort of hopeless compromise, some perpetual push me-pull you arrangement in which we stay half-in and half-out in a political no man's land."

"Two years ago the people of this country recorded a verdict about themselves that they had the guts to believe in Britain. They were right and will be proved right in the decades ahead," he added. However, aviation giant Airbus warned on Friday it could pull out of Britain if it leaves the EU without a deal, while carmaker BMW also warned that uncertainty was affecting the investment climate. The march against Brexit is part of a "summer of action" planned by campaign groups to put pressure on political leaders to hold a vote on the final deal. — AFP

Mohammed's reforms, but many Saudis fear their speed could provoke a backlash from religious conservatives once seen as dominant. Activists and diplomats have speculated that the arrests of more than a dozen women's rights advocates over the past month were aimed at appeasing conservative elements or at sending a message to activists not to push demands too far.

The Crown Prince's modernization efforts have won praise at home and abroad, but he has also provoked unease with an anti-corruption purge last year, when scores of royals and top businessmen were detained at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Riyadh. Most were freed after reaching settlements with the government. Activists have already begun campaigning to end the guardianship system, which has been chipped away at slowly over the years. Prince Mohammed declared in an interview earlier this year that he believes men and women are equal. — Reuters

Saudi pledges 'measurable' oil...

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ecause of sanctions on Iran, OPEC and its allies have since last year been participating in a pact to cut output by 1.8 million bpd. The measure had helped rebalance the market in the past 18 months and lifted oil to around \$75 per barrel from as low as \$27 in 2016. But