

## Local

## LOCAL VIEWPOINT

## The Niqab: A Kuwaiti Conversation Sparked

By Nadia Ahmad

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Recently, Kuwait witnessed the spark of a very heated conversation that began as a strategic cyber strike from the political Islamist right on local/regional non-profit youth organization LOYAC and its Chairwoman Fareah Al-Saqqaf. Fareah posed a question in a Dutch documentary about Kuwait a year ago that was taken out of context and made viral last week in order to facilitate the attack on LOYAC.

I do not want to jump to the defense of LOYAC as I believe its 17-year history in youth empowerment and regional community development speaks for itself. I also do not want to jump to the defense of Fareah Al-Saqqaf as she happens to be my mother and I her only daughter, thus my objectivity might be seen as injured in this case. Here I speak as an independent Kuwaiti journalist.

What I do want to defend, among the very many of our freedoms that have been encroached upon, is the right of our young community to debate issues freely. Fareah Al-Saqqaf unknowingly sparked what can be turned into a very productive, local and even regional debate. Is a full-face veil (niqab) and its increased presence in our community a cause for alarm?

The problem is, the political Islamist right have a useful tool they continue to use to sway public opinion - accusing any such discussion as treasonous against Islam, and on an international level, a violation of human rights. However, discussing the niqab and its relevance in our community is not a sacred or religious issue or taboo. The vast majority agree that the niqab is not Islamic. Let me remind you, that the mothers of the local feminist movement publicly burned their traditional abayas over half a century ago.

I'll avoid offering a history lesson as to how and why the niqab became suddenly more prominent in our communities over the last two decades after it had, in effect, disappeared between 1950 to 1970. You can Google that. If you did search this issue, you'll have found that the burqa is traditional but the niqab ideological.

Let's assume for argument's sake that the niqab is traditional wear - shouldn't it be reserved for the places and backdrops it belongs to? A picture of a niqabi woman set to the backdrop of old Kuwaiti mud house villages or nomadic Bedouin tents in the desert makes sense and is quite beautiful and poignant and nostalgic. However a picture of a niqabi woman set to the backdrop of a modern, Westernized city does not make sense and does, in this day in age, cause alarm. After all, it is traditional for some indigenous women of the Amazon to go bare-chested? Would we allow that in a modern community?

According to the Islamic scholar Mohammad Shahrour, in any community, if a woman is allowed to walk the streets completely bare-skinned, then she should be allowed to cover her face and body completely, but if she is not allowed to walk completely bare-skinned, then she should not be allowed to cover her face and body completely. I find justice in this logic.

When the argument of human rights is brought up in defense of the niqab, I beg to ask the questions: What about the human rights of non-niqabis in knowing who shares public spaces with them? In these modern times, shouldn't there be a minimal degree of transparency in public dealings to secure everyone's human right to safety? What about the marginalization of non-hijabi Muslim citizens when the government publicly supports hijab campaigns among 10-year-old girls? Is it not a human right for women to be acknowledged as individuals rather than one in an indistinguishable flock of black drapes? Isn't it an intrinsically oppressive garment if it automatically excludes you from assuming most jobs that contribute to today's economy?

Covering the body and hair is every Muslim's right; I don't dare to contest that, but does covering the face and body completely in public areas serve anyone? It is currently a serious security issue internationally. We cannot ignore the statistics of men with terrorist intentions wearing niqab to conceal their weapons or to be granted entry into certain locations. In the UK, a great point was made that CCTV (security cameras) are completely ineffective if they cannot see people's faces. We also cannot ignore that the niqab is a known part of an extremist indoctrination process that isn't exactly famous for its female empowerment policies. In fact, the niqab, in and of itself, quite literally deletes a woman's identity.

Simply put, when there is an increase in mass gun violence, there needs to be a ban on automatic guns. I applaud New Zealand on its recent ban on automatic weapons and sincerely hope the US makes a similar stance. Therefore, when there is a clear correlation between using traditional uber-conservative dress to conceal weapons and explosives that result in mass murders, there needs to be a ban on that specific traditional dress.

The reason why Europe is having a difficult time settling into a ban is because it has not made a clear argument against the findings of the UN that a niqabi ban is in violation of human rights. Over the last few years, we have seen Western women dress in the niqab in solidarity and protest of a ban. This is precisely why this conversation must be had here in the Arab world first. So first and foremost, let's stand up and protect our freedom of thought and speech and the right to debate such issues without our conviction in our religion being viciously attacked.

With that, I would like to congratulate Morocco on its ban of the burqa/niqab back in 2017 when they cited two major reasons: Serious security concerns and to nip the expansion of extremist ideologies in the bud. I also hope the Islamist right does not succeed in scaring us back into silence and that we continue to cultivate debates that can take our country forward. After all, a healthy debate is key to any globally-aware, cultured community governed by justice and a constitution.

Nadia Ahmad is a Kuwaiti journalist, TV presenter, film producer and cofounder of LOYAC.

# No decision yet to allow govt contract workers to transfer to private sector

## 211 expired contracts with 5,792 workers registered on them

By A Saleh and Meshaal Al-Enezi

**KUWAIT:** Official sources at the Public Authority for Manpower said the authority allows, through its committee handling disputes, the transfer of workers registered on government contracts to work for another government contract in exchange for certain fees. The authority denied issuance of transfer decisions in exchange of fees from a government contract to the private sector - rather the rules are limited to transferring to the main file that belongs to the same sponsor, with the possibility of having the worker leave the main file to work for a government contract only.

Meanwhile, the authority's Deputy Director General for Labor Affairs Hassan Al-Khader said that the authority wrote to labor departments to hold the files of companies that have expired contracts with the government until they complete processing the workers with them. Khader said this measure comes with the authority's periodical review of government contracts and projects, adding that this revealed the existence of several contracts that expired on Sept 31, 2018. The number of these

contracts is 211 with a total of 5,792 workers.

### Firemen's rewards

Sources said the Finance Ministry approved the Kuwait Fire Service Directorate's (KFSD) request to increase rewards of firemen to reach KD 2.7 million for the previous fiscal year for their efforts during the extraordinary circumstances the country went through. The sources said the KFSD rewards were initially KD 1.2 million, then after keeping all workers on duty during the rains, the request was made to increase the rewards by an additional KD 1.5 million. He said there are 4,805 special jobs for firemen, in addition to 584 general jobs.

### Road billboards

Kuwait Municipality's deputy director general for Capital and Jahra affairs and head of the advertisements committee Faisal Al-Jumaa said the municipality is keen to open qualification opportunities every year for all advertisement agencies bidding to win contracts for road billboards. He said the committee sets conditions and rules for all companies that are unchanged for many

## Bus driver arrested for committing 'grave' traffic violation

By Hanan Al-Saadoun and Agencies

**KUWAIT:** The Relations and Security Information Department commented on a video clip that appeared on social media showing a bus driver violating traffic laws and overtaking vehicles near a traffic light. The statement said traffic policemen dealt with the driver and sent him to the traffic detention cell for committing a grave violation. The bus was impounded.

### Resisting arrest

A police patrol in Kaifan suspected a man, so they

stopped him. He was found wanted by the felonies sentences implementation department. When he was placed in the patrol car, several men enabled him to escape and prevented police from doing their job. They were brought under control and were sent to concerned authorities, charged with resisting arrest and insulting a public employee.

### Mosque damage

A bedoon man was sent to state security for destroying contents of a Jahra mosque, Al-Rai reported. The man entered the mosque and destroyed everything he could reach. Police went to the mosque and arrested the suspect, as investigations are ongoing.

### Blackmail

The cassation court sentenced a Saudi man to three years in jail for blackmailing a Kuwaiti national. The victim complained to the electronic crimes department and told them an unidentified person fabricated inde-

cent pictures, then called him and asked for money in order not to send the pictures to his family. Detectives asked the young man to make the blackmailer believe he agreed to pay, and when he arrived, he was arrested.

### High school exams

The Education Ministry is ready for high school exams that will begin on May 7 for 10th and 11th grades, and May 19 for 12th grade, as it estimates the number of students who will enter exam classes at 120,000. Meanwhile, source said Education Ministry Undersecretary Dr Saud Al-Harbi will provide Kuwait University and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training with the number of expected graduates from the 12th grade, categorized according to gender and type of qualification. He said that the ministry carries out this measure every year since the crisis of university admittance during the academic year 2012/2013 in order to provide enough seats for general secondary graduates in all colleges.

### Police chase

A juvenile was detained following indecent acts against policemen, who chased him until he ran out of fuel. Patrolmen were surprised by an ATV rider who provoked them indecent acts before escaping. He then returned and repeated his act before disappearing. He was sent to concerned authorities.

### On the run

The case of a Kuwaiti man who attacked an Egyptian national in Maidan Hawally revealed that the attacker was on the run to avoid serving a five-year jail sentence. Police noticed a man beating another following a traffic dispute, so the citizen was arrested and taken to concerned authorities.



**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff Mohammad Al-Khedhr held talks yesterday with the deputy head of the Italian army's foreign relations department Brigadier General Massimo Blagini. The talks, attended by a number of Kuwaiti and Italian military officers, revolved around matters of mutual concern, read a statement by the Kuwaiti defense ministry. — KUNA

## Red tide spotted off Kuwait's coasts

**KUWAIT:** The Environment Public Authority (EPA) has detected the spread of red tide over large swathes off Kuwaiti coasts along the Green Island and the Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Al-Sabah causeway. In a press statement, the EPA stated Monday that its teams had surveyed the affected areas and took samples for laboratory analyses. The EPA urged the public to refrain from reporting or circulating rumors about any kind of pollution before the official confirmation. It warned that legal action would be taken against violators as per article No. 126 of the environment protection law.

Last week, the EPA announced that it had detected fish mortalities off Suliabikhat coast and red tide spots in Gulf waters off Shuwaikha coast. It cautioned that some other phenomena such as jellyfish, algae, and fish death boom may occur in the southern areas and Kuwait Bay due to the season change and high temperature. Red tide is a common name for algal blooms,



**KUWAIT:** Environment Public Authority workers inspect an area where the spread of red tide was spotted off Kuwait's coasts. — KUNA

which are large concentrations of aquatic microorganisms, such as protozoans and unicellular algae. Harmful algal blooms can occur worldwide, and natural cycles can vary regionally. The most conspicuous effects of red tides are the associated wildlife mortalities and harmful human exposure. — KUNA

## KRCS delegation inspects Iranian areas affected by floods

**TEHRAN:** A delegation of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) on Monday toured areas affected by floods in Khuzestan province, Iran. KRCS Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi said that during the tour the delegation was briefed about the extent of the damage done to those areas. "We have seen the magnitude of the disaster and the needs and we will help as needed and as soon as possible," Hasawi added.

Hasawi announced the readiness of the association to contribute to alleviating the effects of the damage on the people of Ahvaz and the Iranian people through the distribution of tents and blankets. Khuzestan suffered severe damage as a result of the recent rains in the province, displacing thousands of people and demolishing houses due to floods. Kuwait was one of the first Arab countries to respond to the humanitarian appeal of the Iranian people upon the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA



## Ministry asks for monthly pricelist of 114 basic items

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Commerce and Industry asked the Kuwait Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies to provide it with the prices of 114 basic items by the 7th of each month at the latest in order to compare prices, Al-Qabas reported. Sources said that the price list from cooperatives will help ministry inspectors enforce the law of monitoring trade in commodities, services and work through inspection campaigns to guarantee commitment to the declared prices. The sources said the ministry completed the plan of supervising markets to be aware of any artificial increase in food prices in co-ops, supermarkets and commercial outlets. Plans are made to carry out daily inspections round the clock.

### Smart city

In other news, Al-Qabas reported that the South Saad Al-Abdullah City project may not materialize, and the dream of the smart residential city has started to fade, amid moves by officials and leaders in the government to shift it to Khairan.

### Power consumption

Separately, Al-Qabas reported that power consumption growth in Kuwait has registered a drop last year due to what officials said was the increase in tariffs that came in effect on Aug 22, 2017. Rates of power and water consumption in 2018 recorded a notable drop, as the increase in power consumption was 1.43 percent compared with 4.77 percent in 2017. Government statistics sent to the National Assembly revealed that water consumption dropped by 0.22 percent in 2018, after recording a 1.61 percent rise in 2017 and a 5 percent increase in 2016.

In the meantime, the Ministry of Electricity and Water announced yesterday that consumers can now gain access to a wide variety of on-line services, citing an awareness campaign it launched earlier this year. The initiative is part of efforts to familiarize consumers with online services they have at their disposal, the ministry's assistant undersecretary for planning Ahmad Al-Rashidi said in a statement. The ministry is in the process of setting up booths at public places to acquaint consumers with such services, the official said. Among the services offered is a quick e-payment system where consumers can pay their bills, he pointed out, adding that the ministry will continue to provide quality services as part of Kuwait's 2035 development plan.

