

Local

Animal welfare



Local Spotlight
By Muna Al-Fuzai

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The conditions in which livestock are shipped to the Middle East sparked a debate in the Australian parliament after an expose by Australian current affairs program '60 Minutes'. Images of sheep suffering from heat stress and dying of heat stroke caused great distress, and a month after this program was aired, it provoked many animal welfare activists and organizations to call for a ban on livestock exports in summer.

Some Australian legislators also demanded an official ban on exporting sheep to the Middle East. Parliamentarian Susan Lee introduced a legislation titled "Long-term sheep export ban for 2018", and asked for a suspension of export of live sheep over the three months of summer - from July to September. I think the bill will not pass easily because this issue is about those who have been relying on this trade and making profits for many decades. But I guess reconsideration of export conditions will satisfy all parties and preserve the reputation of importing and exporting countries.

It is known that meat is a staple food on the Arab dining table in the Middle East in general, whether in Kuwait

“ Long-term sheep export ban for 2018 ”

or any Arab country. While we enjoy a heavy meal of meat, we often do not think much about which country the meat was imported from or the conditions of the cattle during their transfer, whether humane or not. Animal welfare activists have raised a concern on the conditions of the livestock, as it forms a real wealth of Australia as a major exporter.

I believe that meeting health conditions during the shipping of cattle is the duty of exporting companies. We import sheep and therefore have to impose strict measures to ensure the healthy transfer of these animals and that they are free of defects and in good health until their arrival in the country of import. There has to be mutual understanding and agreement over this.

Kuwait Times published a report that Al-Mawashi company in Kuwait, which is the largest importer of live Australian sheep, is looking to find other sources of livestock as a result of Australia's talk of banning the trade. If so, I think it's the right decision, because focusing on food security is far more important than maximizing profits at the expense of animal welfare.

It is best to wait until the discussions are over and a final decision is made, especially bearing in mind that the trust of local consumers is something I don't think anyone wants to jeopardize. Taking immediate actions to ensure animal welfare is maintained is essential.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Muslims traditionally break their fast with dates and a few sips of water. One of the most nutritious and popular fruits, dates grow wild throughout the Arabian Peninsula and are also cultivated in large date palm farms as well as by individuals. — Photo by Joseph Shagra

Can we 'meat' in the middle?



IN MY VIEW
By Nejud Al-Yagout

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The other day I read an interesting online article about veganism. The author was a vegan for several years and renounced the lifestyle to go back to eating meat. The comments section was inundated with tirades from readers condemning her for her lack of compassion, though she made it clear that she was never a vegan for ethical reasons. This, in turn, sparked a debate between vegans who give up meat because they do not support the mistreatment of animals and those who are vegan because it is trendy or healthy, with the former accusing the latter of shallowness (and the latter accusing the former of moral policing).

The same judgment is present when omnivores belittle vegans or vegetarians and find ways to convince them that giving up meat is unhealthy for human beings. One of the lines commonly used is: You don't know what you are missing! This is untrue. Many vegans and vegetarians do know what they are missing since not all were vegan or vegetarian from birth. They know it is a sacrifice but are still willing to listen to their conscience rather than give in to the demands of their taste buds.

The question is: when did we turn our eating habits into an ideology with its own set of preachers, converts and clergy members? When did it become the norm for us to scorn or sneer at one another for what we eat or do not eat, for that matter? And when did it become commonplace to ridicule those who oscillate from one way of eating to another, struggling to find a balance? It never ceases to amaze me how human beings continue to find ways to polarize one another. It would be comical if it were not so tragic.

In a conversation with Abdul-Aziz Al-Ashban, a young writer, the issue was summed up pretty neatly when he stated that he could no longer keep up with all the ways

people describe themselves in terms of their eating habits: pescetarian, vegan, ovo-lacto vegetarian, flexitarian, omnivore and so on and so forth. And, wisely, he also added that after speaking to a vegan, he understood why it was necessary to define oneself in a restaurant, but why everywhere else? Al-Ashban's points are universal, but as a writer and thinker, he has a way of bringing to surface ideas we keep in our subconscious, trapped in the webs of our psyche.

Nobody who is aware of the cruelty of the food industry can ever view eating animals in the same manner - which is why many people across the globe are embracing veganism. With an awakening on our planet, it will become more mainstream to see people adopt plant-based diets. Even those who adhere to scripture that permits the ingestion of meat know that what we eat today is far from being halal or kosher. In fact, there are online vegan Muslims who remind us that no animal should be slaughtered in front of another one, and these days animals are injected with hormones and antibiotics, and it is hardly spiritual to pollute our bodies. And, interestingly enough, seventy rabbis across the globe have invited Jews to adopt a vegan diet (The Jewish Chronicle, Simon Rocker, September 27, 2017). So just because something is permissible does not mean it is obliged, and we have to use our own discernment, especially since as Bob Dylan would say: The Times They Are A-Changing. For those who are not concerned with the plight of animals, there is also talk of the environmental aspect of consuming animals. But that's a whole other topic.

Ascension has its own pace and can never be induced by fear or guilt (or as in many cases, vanity or selfishness). The time will come when we can no longer bear the exploitation of animals. The time will come when we admit that we can survive as herbivores. The time will surely come when we eat compassionately. And the time will come when we see fellow sentient beings as brothers and sisters in this journey of consciousness. But until then, let's tune into Voltaire and "cultivate our own gardens." There is nothing more difficult to digest (literally) than someone judging us for eating or not eating meat at the dinner table. Can we 'meat' in the middle?