

Kuwaiti artist celebrates 50 years of diplomatic relations with Albania



On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between the state of Kuwait and the Republic of Albania, the Kuwait photographic pictures exhibition was opened earlier in the Albanian Capital Tirana, reflecting the beauty of the smiles and generous hospitality of the Albanian people by Kuwaiti artist Ibtisam Nasser Al-Houti, wife of Kuwaiti Ambassador to Albania Favez Mushari Al-Jasim.

The exhibition was held at the Albanian National Historic Museum under the slogan "Albanian Hospitality's Bright Smile". The opening ceremony was attended by government representatives and heads of diplomatic missions and a large number of artists. Artist Ibtisam Al-Houti lauded the Albanian peaceful people who preserve family ties and co-live with all groups of

the society in a natural harmony with love and respect for others.

She said "I wanted to express the feelings of love and gratitude to this loving society that loves its guests, which made my stay with them among the best days that carry unforgettable memories. Albania, despite its small area, is rich with historic landmarks of successive civilizations, which reflects the heritage and importance of this place".

The exhibition included 42 photographs taken by Artist Al-Houti with her camera in six Albanian cities, showing the hospitality of the people, customs and traditions, as well as showing popular costumes and food that is unique to each area.



Baristas behind bars: UK prisoners swap crime for coffee

Every morning, the whirr of an industrial-scale coffee roaster and the sharp hiss of a milk frother can be heard as customers queue to get their caffeine fix at a most unusual spot: inside one of Britain's toughest young offenders prisons. Staffed by prisoners aged 18 to 21, the Redemption Roasters cafe inside Aylesbury prison, about 50 miles (80 km) northwest of London, trains inmates with specialty coffee skills in a bid to help them to find jobs upon release.

The small-scale coffee company is part of a growing number of businesses globally that aim to have a positive social impact while turning a profit. For 20-year-old Vince, whose real name could not be identified, being productive and learning new skills instead of sitting idly in a cell means his years in jail have not been squandered. "It's quite useful for my mentality knowing that two years hasn't just been wasted and that I can actually improve myself whilst being in here," said Vince, who is due for release next January.

"Everyone (working in the cafe) has the same goals. They do want to go out and live a crime-free life. Being around people like that is much better for your mental health," he added. With about 4,000 men aged 18-20 in prison in the U.K. last year, according to official statistics, helping them find meaningful and stable work when they leave custody is a key priority, the justice ministry says. About one in three adult prisoners commit a crime within a year of their release, government data shows, costing the country roughly 15 billion pounds (\$19 billion) annually.

Reoffending

Laura Sapwell, governor of Aylesbury prison, said the institution has more than



A 20-year-old male prisoner makes coffee inside Aylesbury prison where specialty coffee company Redemption Roasters is training him with industry-level skills so they can work in the coffee sector upon release, Aylesbury, United Kingdom. — Reuters

400 young men. Almost 70 are serving life sentences. "A large proportion of our men arrive at Aylesbury without having had a job in the past," Sapwell told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Our aim here is to give those men who are going to be released from Aylesbury the best possible opportunity to get work and accommodation and all the other things that we know reduce their risk of re-offending in the future," she said.

Yet across Britain's prison system the record is poor. Sixty percent of prisoners fail to get inmates into education or training placements, even when there were spaces available, according to a 2018 report by the prison watchdog. The Inspectorate of Prisons, which scrutinizes the condition of prisons across England and Wales, reported that many inmates felt frustrated for not

being able to leave their cells to do purposeful activities in the day, which led to violence.

Sitting around

It is a problem that Redemption Roasters, one of the most popular work placements at Aylesbury, aims to tackle. "If they don't have a workshop placement in a prison, they just sit around, they're just locked up," said co-founder Max Dubiel, whose team also runs shorter courses at other prisons. "And that's not a great place to be psychologically, but also not great to prepare you for life on the outside," he said.

Redemption Roasters - which invests profits from its London cafes and beans back into the prison scheme - trains 10 Aylesbury inmates at a time with barista,

coffee roasting, customer service and food hygiene skills for up to a year. Its coffee roaster, the first of its kind inside a British prison, is used to produce a special 'Aylesbury' blend of beans that is sold across the country. "The more coffee we sell, the more trainees we train about coffee, the more training academies we can open and the more skills we can bring across," said Dubiel.

Back on track

Redemption Roasters wants more businesses to consider hiring ex-offenders, and has since employed three former inmates, including 23-year-old Mohammed, who left prison last October and now works full-time in one of its London cafes. Mohammed, who declined to reveal his real name, said unrealistic expectations of what life would be on the outside, or the enticements of a life of crime, such as money, could lead people back to jail. "You're in such a negative place and then you're looking forward to coming out (of prison) and if you can't get into employment and you're not earning money, it could be a lot for you to handle," he said.

Mohammed said he was grateful to be given a second chance but said there were many others like him who wanted to move on from their past and start afresh. "If you can give someone an opportunity to get into employment ... then you definitely should because you'll be changing their life," he said. "I'm not saying that everyone's a good person but there's definitely people out there that want to get their life back on track and be normal civilians," he added. — Reuters

The Prodigy singer Keith Flint dead at 49



In this file photo taken Keith Flint of The Prodigy, performs at the 10th annual Incheon Pentaport Rock Festival in Incheon, west of Seoul on August 9, 2015. — AFP

Keith Flint, the singer and iconic frontman of British rave scene band The Prodigy, has died at the age of 49, the electronic pop group said. Police said they were not treating the death as suspicious after finding his body yesterday in Essex, northeast of London. "We attended and, sadly, a 49-year-old man was pronounced dead at the scene. His next of kin have been informed," Essex Police told AFP. "The death is not being treated as suspicious and a file will be prepared for the coroner." The Prodigy issued a statement calling Flint a "true pioneer, innovator and legend", Britain's domestic Press Association news agency reported.

Heavily tattooed and topped with a bleached mohawk, Flint helped turn The Prodigy into one of the most influential groups to emerge from the underground rave scene. Their biggest hits included "Firestarter" and "Smack My B**h Up", which merged intense dance beats with punk elements. "There was a real determination for it to have zero compromise," Flint told AFP in 2015. "There really needed to be an antidote to the DJ scene, which made it quite brutal." — AFP

British royals appeal for online kindness after trolling of Kate and Meghan

Britain's royals unveiled a new protocol yesterday for users of their social media channels, asking for kindness and warning of possible police action following a rise in abusive comments, often aimed at Prince Harry's pregnant wife Meghan. Abusive and even threatening remarks have become commonplace on the comment sections and Twitter feeds of the royal family, with Kate and Meghan, the wives of Queen Elizabeth's grandsons Prince William and Harry, particular targets.



File photo shows Prince Harry and his wife Meghan, Duke & Duchess of Sussex, visit the Kasbah of the Udayas near the Moroccan capital Rabat. — AFP

Unveiling their "Social Media Community Guidelines", Buckingham Palace, Clarence House and Kensington Palace - the offices for the queen, her son and heir Prince Charles, and William and Harry - outlined what behavior they expected from users of their channels. "We ask that anyone engaging with our social media channels shows courtesy, kindness and respect for all other members of our social media communities," the guidelines said.

They stated that comments must not be defamatory, obscene, threatening, or abusive; be discriminatory in any way; be "off-topic, irrelevant or unintelligible" or contain advertising. The protocol said royal officials would determine whether the guidelines

had been breached and anyone who did so would be blocked or have their comments hidden or deleted. "We also reserve the right to send any comments we deem appropriate to law enforcement authorities for investigation as we feel necessary or is required by law," it said. Some 3.87 million accounts follow the Royal Family's Twitter feed and another 1.69 follow that of Kensington Palace as the House of Windsor seeks to reach out directly to royal fans and showcase its work, with the overwhelming number of messages supportive.

However, while the palaces gave no explanation as to why they had issued the guidance now, there has been rising abuse of Kate, the Duchess of Cambridge, and Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, since the former U.S. actress married Harry last May.

A source from Kensington Palace told Hello! magazine, which launched a campaign in January to end the online abuse, that officials were spending hours each week addressing sexist and racist comments aimed at the duchesses. These included a number of violent threats while there have also been vicious online rows between rival supporters of the two royals, and even those who report on their activities.

"It is not just the royal princesses who are being trolled, every royal journalist, every royal correspondent is being trolled as well," royal biographer Claudia Joseph told Reuters. "People see their opinions as valid and I don't think they totally understand journalists do research, that the royals have a job to do." Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York and ex-wife of the queen's second son Prince Andrew, called on social media firms to do more following the Hello! Campaign, saying it was not a matter of free speech. "Much of social media has become a sewer," she said on Twitter last month. "Tech firms need to do much more to take a stand against online abuse, rather than shrugging their shoulders." — Reuters

Samba schools ready to roll for giant Rio Carnival

Thousands of dancers from Rio de Janeiro's elite samba schools were set Sunday to roll out their traditional parades of feathers and sequins-combined with a large dose of social and political commentary-as the main business of the giant annual Carnival gets under way. It's the first Carnival since the election of President Jair Bolsonaro, the far-right leader who rode a wave of support from conservatives and evangelical religious groups-who hold a dim view of the Carnival's excesses-into office last year.

In total, 14 samba schools from the elite so-called "special group" will parade at the packed purpose-built stadium known as the Sambodrome, to compete for the prestigious Carnival title. Each school, featuring up to 4,000 shimmering dancers, elaborate giant floats and deafening percussion, will take 75 minutes to parade down the 700 meters (yards) Sambodrome track. The Carnival formally kicked off Friday with the traditional symbolic passing of a key to the city to the festival-leading "King Momo" character-unleashing giant street parties known as "blocos" in Rio, Sao Paulo and across Brazil.

One of Sunday's most anticipated groups is current champions Beija-Flor, which triumphed last year with spectacular, hard-hitting floats depicting violence and corruption in Brazil.



This year, the school will tell the story of its 70 years in existence under the theme "The Fables of Beija-Flor". The parades begin at 9:15 pm (0015 GMT) and last well into the early hours of the next morning. The two biggest schools, Portela and Mangueira, are among those participated yesterday.

Portela's parade will pay tribute to Brazilian singer Clara Nunes, an icon of the 1970s and the first artist of her time to publicly defend Afro-Brazilian religions. A section of their parade will feature dancers in costumes designed by French designer Jean-Paul Gaultier. The other major school, Mangueira, will perform what its artistic director Leandro



Viera calls the "B-side" of Brazilian history, with a parade extolling the heroes and heroines of the country's long-sided black, indigenous and poor populations.

The troupe will also honor black city councilor Marielle Franco, a respected and outspoken defender of human rights in the slums of Rio, who was shot dead in March of last year. Authorities expect seven million people-including one and a half million Brazilian and foreign tourists-to participate in this gigantic outdoor party. — AFP



Members of the Beija-Flor samba school perform during the first night of Rio's Carnival at the Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil yesterday. — AFP photos