

## Analysis

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Founder and Publisher  
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief  
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
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FAX : 24835620/1  
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163  
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125  
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.

Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

## Kenya issues smart ID cards to protect fishing and forests

Fishing communities on Kenya's north coast will be the first to benefit from "smart" identity cards aimed at distinguishing genuine fishermen and loggers from poachers who raid waters and cut down mangroves vital to ease climate change threats. Each government-issued Mvuvu card - the word means "fisher" in Swahili - features a photo and fingerprint taken from its registered owner. Authorities will be able to read the cards using smartphones loaded with communications software that allows short-range wireless data transfers.

Officials hope the cards, being used first in Lamu County, home to what the government says are about 60 percent of Kenya's protected mangrove forests, will boost security and curb illegal fishing and logging. "There are people who pretend to be fishermen going out to sea but they are doing illegal logging of the mangroves," Samson Macharia, commissioner of Lamu County, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a telephone interview. "Over-harvesting of mangroves will affect (impacts from) climate change and ecosystems all along the shores of the coast and the islands," he added. Environmental scientists have long stressed the important role mangrove forests play in reducing global warming threats. Mangroves are far more effective at absorbing and storing carbon dioxide - one of the major drivers of climate change - than trees on land, they say. The trees' roots also trap and hold sediment, providing a coastal buffer against storms and protection from floods, as well as creating an important fish breeding ground.

More than 35 percent of the world's mangroves are already gone and they are disappearing three to five times faster than other forests, according to international conservation group WWF. Figures published by Kenya's Ministry of Environment and Forestry show that the country lost about 20 percent of its mangroves between 1985 and 2009. Of the mangroves that remain, an estimated 40 percent are degraded. "In the mangroves, we have witnessed 'die-back', which is mangroves just drying up," said John Bett, who works on sustainable forestry for WWF-Kenya. Bett said he has seen the effects of climate change in Lamu County gather pace in the last 10 to 15 years and that the rate of mangrove regeneration, which can occur naturally as seeds fall from trees onto the mud, has "slowed down dramatically". Only loggers registered with Kenya's Forestry Service are allowed to cut mangroves in Lamu County and only within certain quotas and areas, he explained. But without knowing who exactly is on the water, cracking down on those fishing or logging mangroves illegally has been a challenge, he stressed.

### Saltier land, emptier seas

Coastal communities in Kenya are already struggling with the effects of climate change. Globally, scientists have warned that water temperatures are increasing far faster than expected due to carbon emissions. As oceans warm, they expand, driving rising sea levels which, along with more erratic weather, make farmland increasingly vulnerable to flooding and failed harvests. Hotter seas also fuel more powerful cyclones and other storms, which can drive saltwater onto land. With fewer mangrove forests to buffer coastal land, soil is becoming salty - which kills crops - and or is being washed away by heavy rains, scientists say. Warming oceans also threaten fish, especially in areas such as Kenya that have experienced coral bleaching. "Fishermen report that some of the species are disappearing because of the increase of temperatures and the damaged corals and increasing bleaching, so you find breeding areas have reduced drastically," said Bett of the WWF.

Bett has seen local fishermen become poorer and more desperate, with some taking bigger risks to net increasingly smaller catches. Others have given up fishing entirely, he said. "We have witnessed decreased stocks, so fishermen are now going further, beyond the reefs they are used to, whereas 10 to 15 years ago they would just fish near the reefs," he said. Bett also noted that local fishermen using traditional methods and small wooden boats struggle to compete with foreign vessels that fish using more modern gear.

Funded by the European Union and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Mvuvu card project originally launched in 2018, with a pilot phase that handed out 250 cards to fishermen on Kiwayu Island in Lamu County. Those cards were eventually canceled due to the discovery of security gaps in the system, explained Mathenge Ndungu, program manager of the Kiunga Youth Bunge Initiative (KYBI). The local civil society group is in charge of finding and registering fishermen for the card. The group is now working with the government to strengthening the security of participants' personal information and is in discussions over allocating space on the government's servers to store that database, Ndungu said. — Reuters

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Iraqi medical students take part in an anti-government demonstration in the Shiite shrine city of Karbala yesterday. — AFP

## Iraq's 'PUBG generation' schools politicians

It was a sea of white: Students in school uniforms and lab coats demanding change in Iraq, where youth make up most of the population but benefit from few of the government's policies. They stole the spotlight yesterday by joining a wave of anti-government protests in Iraq's capital and south, ignoring threats of arrest and parents worried by violence that has so far left more than 200 dead. Samara, who studies engineering at Baghdad's Dijlah University, said she was rallying without her family's knowledge.

"They called us the PUBG generation," she said, referring to a combat video game that is so popular among Iraqi youth that parents often scold them for playing it too much. "Look what the PUBG generation can do," she said. Young Iraqis claim a generational gulf between them and the country's politicians - chief among them 77-year-old premier Adel Abdel Mahdi. "Adel, chief of thieves!" they chanted.

About 60 percent of Iraq's 40-million-strong population is under the age of 25. But youth unemployment stands at 25 percent and one in five people live below the poverty line, despite the vast oil wealth of OPEC's second-largest crude producer. Corruption is widespread, with a parliamentary probe this year finding \$450 billion in public funds have been stolen since the 2003 US-led invasion that ended Saddam Hussein's rule.

Many youths blame an entrenched system of clientelism that they say provides jobs based on personal connections

or bribes rather than university degrees or experience. "They steal billions and billions of dollars while the people don't see any of the country's resources," said Tareq, a third-year dentistry student in Baghdad.

### 'Take care of our country'

Their ire has engulfed more than just the premier. "We had one Saddam before. Now we have a parliament full of Saddams," said Rafal, a young business administration student protesting in Baghdad. "Young graduates are working as taxi drivers," she lamented. "We have to reopen the factories that have been closed for years and find jobs for young laborers," Rafal told AFP.

Students have chanted classic protest slogans, including, "We sacrifice our souls and blood for you Iraq!" But they have also come up with their own, including "No country? No class!" And in Najaf, striking medical students held up a banner reading: "Don't just teach us to take care of the sick - teach us to take care of our country."

In nearby Basra, an oil-rich city where public services remain shockingly poor, students filled the streets. "We're out here to ask for our rights - our right to education, our right to life, and when we graduate, to get appointed to a job," said one student, Ali. Ahead of yesterday's protests, higher education minister Qusay Al-Suhail said academics should "stay away" from protests, and a spokesman for Abdel Mahdi threatened "severe punishment" for any further disruptions. Students went out anyway, and have cir-

cumvented blocks on social media by downloading virtual private network (VPN) apps. On Facebook and messaging application WhatsApp, they shared news on protests, coordinated movements and meetings, and offered tips on avoiding closed roads to reach rallies. "We said to ourselves, we need to back these protests in our own way," said Alaa, a high school student demonstrating in Baghdad.

### Democracy, open-mindedness

Professors, too, are taking part. The Iraqi Syndicate of Teachers announced a four-day strike across the country, except in the autonomous north. Raghda, a university professor, said her students inspired her and she was taking to the streets "to support them". "The authorities shouldn't cross this generation, because they were raised on democracy and open-mindedness," she said proudly.

Since protests erupted on Oct 1, almost 240 people have died across the country from live rounds, heavy tear gas use and in fires set to political offices. Yesterday, security forces fired tear gas at young protesters gathering on the edge of Tahrir Square, near a bridge leading to the high-security Green Zone which hosts government offices and foreign embassies. Those gathered said they knew the rallies could turn violent but were hoping their presence could prevent that. "This movement must stay peaceful, because the blood of our young people is precious," said Raghda. "And the people of the Green Zone aren't worth dying for." — AFP

## With Baghdadi gone, who is heir to the 'caliph'?

The US declaration of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi's death opens the question of his succession at the helm of the Islamic State organization and analysts say the list looks short. It was limited further on Sunday night after Kurdish fighters in Syria said they had killed IS spokesman Abu Hassan Al-Muhajir - another prominent figure - in a joint operation with US forces. IS social media channels have not confirmed President Donald Trump's announcement on Sunday that Baghdadi had been killed in a US raid in Syria, nor alluded to potential successors.

But Hisham Al-Hashemi, an Iraqi expert on IS, said two potential candidates stand out: Abu Othman Al-Tunsi and Abu Saleh Al-Juzrawi, who is also known as Hajj Abdullah. The first - a Tunisian national - heads IS' Shura Council, a legislative and consultative body, Hashemi said. The second - a Saudi - runs the group's so-called Delegated Committee, an executive body, he added. These "possible options" would nonetheless be controversial, according to the IS expert, because neither is a Syrian or Iraqi national, who make up the bulk of IS' guerrilla force. "This could lead to defections," he said.

Aymenn Jawad Tamimi, an academic and expert on jihadists, also identified the elusive Hajj Abdullah as a

potential successor. "He turns up in leaked IS documents as a deputy of Baghdadi and to my knowledge, he is not dead," Tamimi said. "Apart from some texts that mention Hajj Abdullah, not much is known about him except that he was the amir of the Delegated Committee which is the general governing body of IS."

### Rumors

Speculation has abounded around a senior IS figure known as Abdullah Qardash - a former Iraqi military officer jailed with Baghdadi in the US-run Iraqi prison of Camp Bucca. A months-old statement attributed to IS propaganda arm Amaq but never officially adopted by the group said he was selected to replace Baghdadi even before Trump declared the self-proclaimed "caliph" dead. But Tamimi and Hashemi both said the statement was fake. Fake statements in the name of Amaq routinely circulate on social media networks. "It was not put out on the official IS channels, it was not disseminated there... it was definitely fake," said Tamimi, who archives and analyses the group's publications. Citing Iraqi intelligence sources, Hashemi said Qardash had died two years ago. "Qardash's daughter is currently held by Iraqi intelligence," he said. "Both her and other relatives have confirmed that he died in 2017." Hashemi also said Qardash - a Turkmen from Iraq's Tal Afar region - would not qualify as "caliph" because he is not from the Quraysh tribe - the same tribe as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He said belonging to the Quraysh tribe is seen as a prerequisite for becoming the leader of IS.

### Tricky succession

Whoever gets the job will inherit the difficult task of

leading a frayed organization that has been reduced to scattered sleeper cells after continuous offensives stripped it of its territory in Iraq and Syria. Divisions have widened within IS ranks in recent months, with some supporters blaming Baghdadi for the demise of the "caliphate" in March. With Baghdadi gone, "IS affiliates have a chance to switch allegiances or simply not repledge their allegiance to Baghdadi's successor," said Nate Rosenblatt, a researcher and jihad expert. This may give a boost to rival jihadist groups in Syria such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, headed by Al-Qaeda's former Syria affiliate, and the Al-Qaeda-linked Hurras al-Deen group, he said.

### 'It doesn't matter'

But day-to-day IS operations are not likely to be impacted by the leadership void, according to Max Abrahms, professor of political science at Northeastern University in the United States. "It doesn't matter who will succeed Baghdadi," who largely disappeared after he announced his "caliphate" across swaths of territory in Syria and Iraq in 2014, he said. "When it comes to decision making and operations and recruitment, IS was much more decentralized than even Al-Qaeda," whose founder Osama bin Laden was also killed in a US raid in 2011, he added. "When bin Laden was killed, the question of who would replace him was more relevant, because bin Laden exercised more control over Al-Qaeda than Baghdadi did over IS."

IS has invested in an elaborate bureaucratic structure that could compensate for the loss of its leader, according to Charlie Winter, a researcher at King's College London. — AFP

## Tiger emerges from 'most challenging' career phase with win

Tiger Woods said yesterday his latest injury comeback to win the Zozo Championship and tie the US PGA Tour's win record had ended the "most challenging" phase of his storied career. Woods held off Hideki Matsuyama at Accordia Golf Narashino Country Club to equal Sam Snead's record of 82 wins and move to number six in the world rankings from 10th. It was his first tournament since arthroscopic left knee surgery in August and came after he started the tournament on Thursday with three straight bogeys.

Four back surgeries, countless knee operations, marital strife and run-ins with the law meant Woods had not won a major since 2008 and no tournaments since 2013 when he teed up at the Players Championship at East Lake, Atlanta, just over a year ago. He had endured two years out of the game and hobbled out of the February 2018 Dubai Desert Classic with back spasms on his long-awaited return.

His ranking plummeted to 656 at the end of 2017, and

with form and fitness deserting him many observers felt he might never get the three further tour wins he needed to tie Snead, let alone another major. Not only did he win the Tour Championship for his first victory in five years, but Woods went on to secure a fifth Green Jacket and 15th major at Augusta earlier this year to stand just three behind Jack Nicklaus's record 18.

And now he stands unsurpassed as the most successful PGA Tour golfer of all time after victory at the weather-delayed inaugural tournament in Japan. "Well, it's satisfying to dig my way out of it and figure out a way," said Woods, who finished three shots clear on 19-under par. "As far as playing, I didn't really know that I would come back and play at this level. "But I've come back with different games over the years, moving patterns, and this one's been obviously the most challenging," he said, after four stunning rounds of 64, 64, 66 and 67 for a three-stroke win.

### Olympic ambition

"Then having another procedure a couple months ago and again coming back and winning an event, not easy to do, but I trust my

hands and today was no different." Woods recalled as a five-year-old in 1981 getting to play with Snead for the only time. "I played with Sam at, I think, it was Calabasas Country Club," said Woods. "He was doing an outing there and I had come out to play the 17th and 18th holes with him. I remember hitting the ball into a little creek and playing it out of the water and making bogey. I bogeyed the last and he went par-par."

"It was the only time I ever got a chance to play with Sam Snead - I was two-down through two," he smiled. While Snead registered his 82nd win at the age of 52, Woods is nine years younger. "As far as playing until 52, I hope that's the case," said Woods. "If you would have asked me a few years ago, I would have given you a different answer, but certainly the future looks brighter than it has." And that includes coming back to Japan for the Tokyo Olympics next year before defending his Zozo Championship.

"I hope to qualify for the team and represent my country," he said. "I know some of my friends have made Olympic teams before in the past and they said it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I'll be 44 and I don't know if I have many more chances after that." — AFP

