

In my view

## PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT



By Labeed Abdal

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The Kuwait Institution for Scientific Research (KISR) reassured recently that pollution in Kuwaiti waters is at normal levels, and that high concentrations of pollutants are only found near sewage drainages that are typically located away from fishing areas. The assurances which came to guarantee the safety of consuming local fish are important to reassure consumers who grow concerned by any rumors regarding the safety of local food production.

The KISR works through agreements with international organizations on protecting the Kuwaiti environment. This is important for maintaining the environment's productivity in light of the increasing needs of the growing population.

KISR's Director Dr Naji Al-Mutairi made these assurances during a press conference to announce signing an agreement with an international organization specialized in environment rehabilitation. The agreement allows the organization to engage in KISR's activities in rehabilitating Kuwait's environment, while it allows KISR's researchers to communicate with experts in arid land research. I hope that the exchange of expertise in this regard will have positive effects, especially when it comes to the level of consumers.

The activities of Kuwaiti environmental organizations, combined with an active monitoring role against pollution, are effective to support calls for achieving a clean environment in Kuwait. KISR deserves credit for following up with the red tide phenomenon, and for the efforts of its specialists who assured that the current problem is not as serious compared to the one detected in 2006.

In my view

## IN CHARGE FOR ONE DAY



By Talal Al Ghannam

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Dear readers,

I know that I am writing things that make you rethink if you are really in Kuwait or somewhere else in the globe. I know for sure that writing in an English newspaper will only attract expatriates and Kuwaiti officials will only look in the Arabic ones (if they really care for complaints in the Arabic newspapers, that is).

In this article, I will pinpoint on issues that could be settled and addressed if there is a strict decision. I will make myself an official for at least one day and try to resolve such hectic problems.

1. If I were in charge of the zoo and see the kinds of dangerous animals in the possession of people such as lions, tigers, hyenas and so on, I would confiscate them and take them to the zoo, where they are supposed to be, along with their owners. This will show how ordinary people are scared and puzzled by what they see while the owners would be showing off on the Gulf Road.

2. If I were in charge of the traffic department and see those reckless drivers zigzagging between lanes and driving on the shoulder of the road, I would stop them and have their cars crushed and scrapped in front of their eyes. This way they will respect other drivers' lives and properties.

3. If I were in charge of the gardens and see some nationals and expatriates leave the park filthy, I would close the park on them and have them clean their mess. Or before that, I would take refundable fees in order for them to keep the park clean as it was.

4. If I were in charge of the companies or offices acting as third-party agents, I would have them set the salary of the haris or Janitor at KD 100, force him not to take additional money from tenants, and place a sign-board on the entrance of the building asking tenants not to pay the haris any money as he is getting his salary, which is enough.

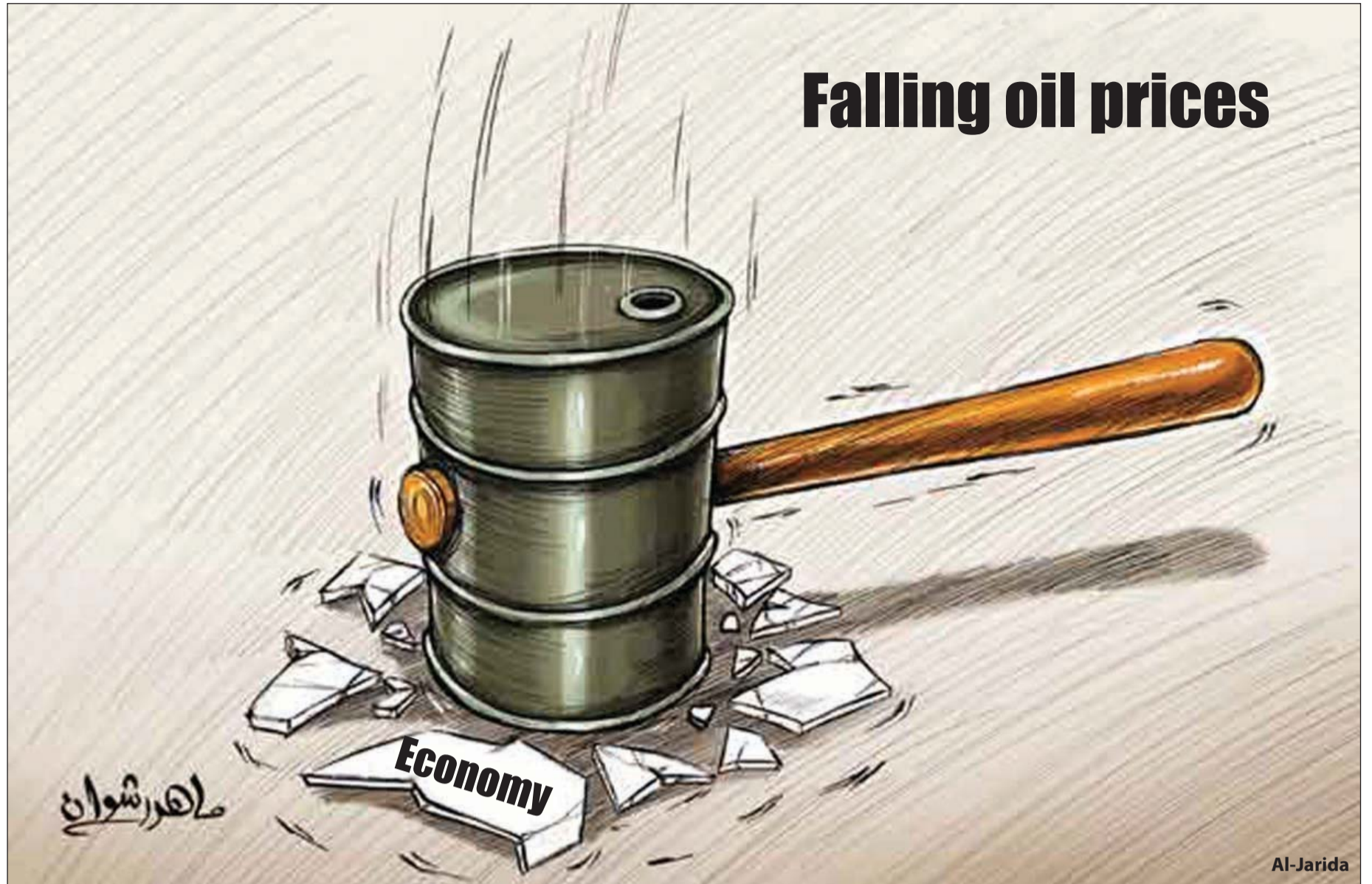
5. If I were in charge of the Interior Ministry and see those young kids doing graffiti on the schools walls and elsewhere, I would take the paint from them and paint their faces so that they can be good examples for public property violators.

6. If I were in charge of the Ministry of Youth and Sport, I would establish an open day for Kuwaitis and expatriates where everyone could interact with the other and to break the ice between these segments of the society.

7. If I were in charge of the domestic helpers offices, I would impose stricter regulations on some of the offices which insult or beat the domestic workers. I would cancel the office's license in that case, in order to show respect for those who come from all over the world seeking a decent living for their kids.

Until the next article Insha Allah

## Falling oil prices



Al-Jarida

washington watch

## ARAB AMERICANS GETTING READY FOR 2016

By Dr James J Zogby

This week, Arab American leaders and activists from a dozen key electoral states will convene in Washington to map out a political strategy for 2016. Despite the very real challenges facing the leaders who will gather, this generation of Arab Americans can approach the future with some confidence given the progress that has been made the last three decades. Thirty years ago, the obstacles confronting the community were quite different. Back then, Arab Americans, as an organized constituency, were excluded from the mainstream of American political life. Candidates rejected our endorsements and support; political parties ignored or excluded us; and, for many, simply being of Arab descent was seen as a liability in politics. Just a generation ago, young Arab Americans felt the need to hide their ethnicity to run for office or to secure an appointment to a federal post. In Washington, only a handful of Arab Americans worked in government or in organizations and think-tanks that focused on issues of concern to the community. As wrong as it would be to ignore the reality of the problems remain, it would be equally wrong to ignore how much has changed.

Today, there are hundreds of proud Arab Americans working in the federal government, in Congress, in human and civil rights groups, and in policy-formulating institutions in Washington. It is important to note that many of these public servants got their start as staff or interns working for Arab American organizations. In addition, there is now a network of Arab American elected officials that includes over 400 current and former Members of Congress and state and local officials from across the US.

In the mid-1980's, there was no recognized "Arab American vote." Today, in places like Dearborn, MI, Paterson, NJ, Chicago, IL, and Northern VA, politicians know that Arab Americans are organized and vote. They, therefore, campaign to earn the community's support. And Arab Americans now sit in leadership positions in the political parties on the national, state, and local levels.

I recall back in 1985, the first challenge we faced at the newly formed Arab American Institute was the threat to our community in Dearborn. They had been denounced by the leading candidate for mayor as the city's "Arab problem". After a decade of voter registration efforts and solid grass roots organizing by community organizations, no one who cared for their political future dared to repeat such an insult. Today, four of Dearborn's City Council Members are Arab Americans, as is the Council's President, as well as the head of Dearborn's Democratic Party.

Much the same could be seen in Paterson, NJ, where in 2012 an Arab American backed Congressman beat back challenges by two opponents (one of whom was a Congressman who had lost his district to reapportionment), both of whom had been supported by hard-line pro-Israel groups.

Despite these real electoral gains, many will focus instead at the challenges we continue to face and with a jaundiced eye and make the case that no progress has been made. They are wrong. To be sure, the challenges have grown more daunting, but we are now stronger and better organized and more able to face them down. One of these critics once challenged me saying that I was guilty of saying "the glass was half full, when it was really half empty". I responded by telling him that neither was the case since I could recall a time when we didn't have a glass to fill. And now we do!

We don't need to be reminded of the difficulties that have shaped the current landscape: the terror attacks of 9/11 and the backlash and threat to civil liberties that followed; the devastating impact of the invasion and occupation of Iraq; the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the wars that have taken such a horrific toll; the unraveling of the "Arab Spring" and the nightmare conflict in Syria; and the spread of extremist currents and the danger they pose to the region.

We have been confronted by all of these challenges and more. Instead of cowering, we faced them

head on - and along the way, we've won some little, but important, victories. For example, if we had not been organized and had the allies we had worked hard to develop, we would have been overwhelmed by the 9/11 backlash. Instead of being defeated, we were able to defend our community, educate millions about our history and culture, and win important precedent-setting cases against those who threatened our rights. We were able to secure protection for Syrian immigrants in the US and to expand refugee status for Iraqis fleeing conflict in their country.

At critical junctures, we were able to shape the official response to Israel's brutal assault on Palestinians and Lebanese. We have also been able to challenge the disgraceful manner in which law-enforcement treated our community - which has forced the Department of Justice to rethink their approach to how they deal with us. And just this year, together with allies, we were able to effectively block a Congressional measure that would have mandated that Israel be entered into the US's visa waiver program. In response to our appeals, the State Department made it clear that as long as Israel continued to discriminate against Arab Americans they would not qualify for visa waivers.

So when a new generation of Arab American activists gather in Washington to lay the groundwork for their political work for the next two years, they will have the wind at the backs. The community will want to make sure that candidates who run for office in 2016 understand the realities of the Middle East today and that they are sensitive to the concerns that our community will bring into the national debate.

They will do so with determination and confidence. Determination, because they know that the domestic and foreign policy issues for which they are advocating are important not only to Arab Americans, but to all Americans. And confident, because they have a proud record on which to build.

NOTE: Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute

In my view

## HEZBOLLAH, IRAN GAINING STRENGTH IN LATIN AMERICA

By Samantha Badgen

Mohammad Hamdar, a Lebanese citizen, met his Peruvian wife online and married her within two weeks of his arrival in Lima a year ago. The pair seemed to have strange habits — neither of them worked, Hamdar spent a lot of time at the gym, claiming to be a body builder, and they apparently lived on money they received abroad.

Last month, Peruvian authorities arrested Hamdar after they found explosive material in his garbage on suspicion of being a member of the Lebanon-based terror group Hezbollah.

Sources in Lebanon said that Hamdar had been under surveillance since last August, after Israeli intelligence alerted Peruvian authorities that Hamdar was working for Hezbollah and was in direct contact with operatives abroad, even receiving explosives training in Brazil.

The arrest of a suspected terrorist who was in possession of explosives in an area where local governments are increasingly willing to make political and economic deals with Iran, Hezbollah's primary backer, point to the growing threat in the area.

"Israel and the United States are very aware of this activity, but some of the countries are not so eager to deal with it," Ely Karmon, a terrorism expert at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) in Herzliya, said. "Not just because it's criminal but because they have political interests."

Iranian officials became close with the leaders of Bolivia while former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez was still in office before his death in 2013. He and former Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, developed a close relationship, which helped build an alliance between Iran and several Latin-American countries including Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Argentina.

### Expanding influence

The presence of a Hezbollah member in Peru means that

Iranian influence is expanding even further into Latin America. Sergio Widder, director of The Wiesenthal Center in Latin America, said that the ongoing dealings with Iran have created a doorway through which Hezbollah members can enter the region, and many have been traveling with Venezuelan documents. There are also cases in Argentina of political party leaders who have been known to travel to Lebanon and make contact with Hezbollah members.

"I can't say that there are direct contacts between Hezbollah and the government, but there are political leaders who consider themselves close to the government who have been in contact with them," said Widder.

Argentina has been willing to foster ties with Iran despite the fact that Iran is believed to have been involved in the 1992 and 1994 bombings of the Israeli Embassy and Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA), by its initials in Spanish). More than 114 people were killed in the two bombings, among the worst terrorist attacks in Argentina's history.

"The investigation is still in progress, but it looks like the terrorists were Hezbollah members who came from the triple-border area, and the attacks were carried out in retaliation for the killing of a Hezbollah official in the south of Lebanon," Arie Kacowicz, professor of international relations at Hebrew University, said.

When governments do address Hezbollah's presence in Latin America, they focus on the criminal aspect of the organization instead of addressing the terrorism threat.

### Criminal activity

Hezbollah has been linked to clandestine activity in the region, including drug trafficking and weapons smuggling, Karmon said. But terrorism and criminal activities aren't mutually exclusive, and this convergence of these enterprises points to what Kacowicz called "the dark side of globalization"

Last year, Dino Bouterse, son of the current president of Suriname, was arrested on suspicion of supporting Hezbollah and attempting to establish a base of operations in South America, charges he later confessed to. This and Hamdar's case in Peru are cause for concern among those monitoring this type of activity.

"This case and the investigation by Peruvian authorities into an individual they suspect is a member of Hezbollah... point to an important activity in the area," Widder said. "The information all points in the same direction: there is a presence by Iran and Hezbollah in Latin America, and given Iran's history of sponsoring international terrorism we have to take preventive measures," he said.

Hezbollah's presence in Latin America isn't new; their network grew out of Shiite communities that fled Lebanon during the civil war that began in 1975 and settled in relatively lawless areas, most prominently the triple-border where Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay meet, which became the basis for Hezbollah's infrastructure in South America.

This activity became the basis for Hezbollah's continued presence in the region, where many lucrative and clandestine businesses were set up in order to send money back to the home organization in Lebanon. This developed a network of activity against Jewish and Israeli targets in the region, culminating in the 1992 and 1994 attacks in Buenos Aires.

Hezbollah has been quieter in recent years, a cautionary measure after local governments reluctantly increased pressure following the Sept. 11 attacks in New York. But two years ago authorities foiled a wave of attacks in Asia and Africa that were traced back to Hezbollah. Sources in Lebanon reported that Hezbollah's overseas operation was preparing to target American and Israeli interests if Iran came under attack by Israeli or American military operations. —The Media Line