



iimonthly

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The Meltdown: **135,000** Lebanese Youths Towards Emigration!



Page 4
Nasrallah and Aoun at the Top but with Fewer Supporters
Geagea Moving Ahead among the Maronites
30.9% are willing to emigrate while 8% have applied for emigration

Page 15
2006 Budget:
Attempts to Pass Partial Reforms that might not be Achieved

Page 17
Will Civil War ravage the Country Again?
The Signal Today is Yellow

Page 18
Legal Quorum for Presidential Elections
Two-thirds of Deputies since Independence

Page 19
Legislative Decrees:
Many in the presidencies of Chehab, Sarkis and Gemayel and none after the Taif Accord

Page 22
A Comparison between Parliaments in Six Arab Countries

Page 24
Government Sells its "Remnants"

Page 27
LOTO competing with YANASIB
Is someone lurking in the Shadow?

Page 28
Shia'a Religious Authorities
Traditions and Al-Faqih Authority

Page 29
The Greek Orthodox Confession
77,000 in 1932, 280,000 residents today and 11 civil servants in first-grade positions

Page 32-33 Discover Lebanon
Beshwat - Sarda Wa Aumra

Page 34-35 Historical Documents
The Events of 1840 that Led to the Massacre of 1860

Page 36-37 Case Study
American University of Beirut
Characteristics and Students' Opinions

Page 38-39 Industry & Crafts
For whom the Bells of Beif Chabab Toll

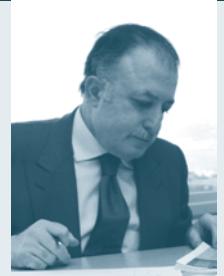
Page 40 Interview
liMonthly Meets Barbara Shahin Batlouni

Page 41 Arab Countries
Syria Health Sector:
A Success in the Pharmaceutical Industry;
a Failure in Managing Services

Page 42 Arab Countries
Health Sector in Egypt
Population Growth Overcoming Health Services

AWORD

A Railway between Sunni and Shia'a so we don't miss the Train



Having received some comments from a descendent of Al-Saifa of A'akkar (accused in school history books of being traitors) on the previous editorial in issue no. 57 "Saints, Traitors, Villains, and Fools with Two Airports", a further examination is required.

In January 2007, we had a leader that Lebanon may soon have two presidents, two parliaments and two prime ministers, so why not two airports? Having seen that "Hariri International Airport" can be easily closed, (like what happened on January 23, 2007), a good 'planner' will make sure that an alternative is available.

"René Mouawad International Airport", is almost ready and the planes can be easily diverted. In the future, as cantonization becomes more probable and alliances shift, a third airport might be called for.

What does this have to do with current fights and debates about democracy, peace, "Shia'a" and "Sunni"?

As always, ideologies are a cover up, a decoy and a cause that people live and die by and for. Before and after World War I, Pan-Arabism and independence were convenient banners to fight the Ottomans and insure that minorities run to the "West" for protection. The "ideological wars" went on. In order to fight communism, we sometimes resorted to the "Arab Nation" and at other times to "Islam".

Today, our leaders are hiding behind banners of "Freedom, Sovereignty and Independence" on one side and "Arabism, Dignity and Accountability" on the other side.

Friends, enemies, crises and wars were and still are made under those banners.

During World War I, T.E. Lawrence befriended King Faisal I to oust the Ottomans, blew up the Hijaz railway and participated in paving the way for British and French dominance in the region. Consequently, coups d'états were launched in the region starting with Husni Al-Zaim, Jamal Abdel Nasser to Abdel Karim Qasim and the Ba'ath Party in Syria and Iraq to Libya and Sudan. The leaders of the Arab Revolt and their descendents were butchered mercilessly.

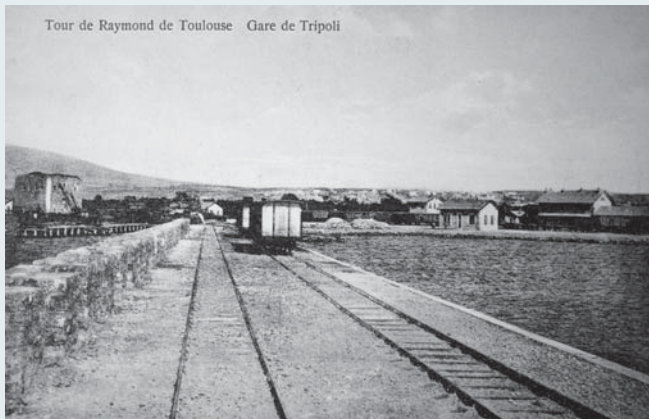
In the meantime, Sykes-Picot Agreement (with modification) and Balfour Declaration were implemented and are perhaps yet to achieve their full potential, while 'we the people' of the region, were fighting each other and our leaders were studiously abiding by the instructions of external forces.

Even when T.E. Lawrence had something to say on Iraq against his government, his allies in the region were praising Great Britain.

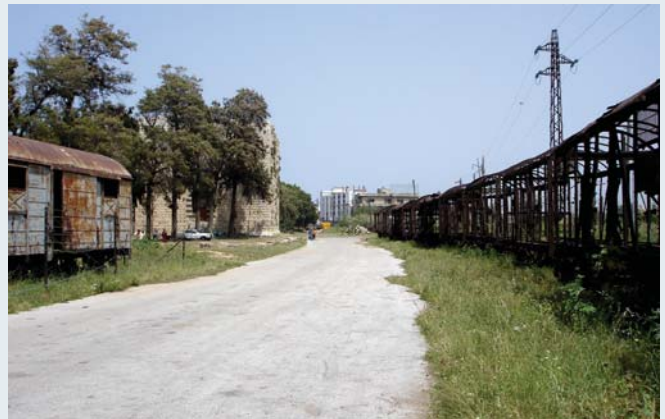
"The people of England have been led in Mesopotamia into a trap from which it will be hard to escape with dignity and honour. They have been tricked into it by a steady withholding of information. The Bagdad communiqués are belated, insincere, and incomplete. A recent proclamation about autonomy circulated with unction from Bagdad.

We say we are in Mesopotamia to develop it for the benefit of the world. How far will the killing of ten thousand villagers and townspeople this summer hinder the production of wheat, cotton, and oil? How long will we permit millions of pounds, thousands of Imperial troops, and tens of thousands of Arabs to be sacrificed on behalf of a form of colonial administration, which can benefit no body but its administrators?"

Even when T.E. Lawrence expressed his doubts about Sykes-Picot geographical rationales, his allies were singing praise and queuing for positions in the newly founded states.



Railway in Tripoli - Before
Badr El-Hage Collection c.1920



Railway in Tripoli - After
Waddah Joma'a - 2006

"Actually it not only seriously compromises the political future of the Arab Provinces, but also seriously jeopardizes the peace of the Near and Middle East and will result in serious local disorder which all agree, will spread to Kurdistan, Mesopotamia and Palestine, and perhaps to the entire Moslem world".

What does all of this have to do with airports, trains, "Sunni" and "Shia'a"?

All the governments since T.E. Lawrence have abided by his legacy; they did neither restore the Hijaz railway nor attempted to undo his work. We can lecture as much as we like about the "Arab Nation" but never attempt to have a simple railway working again. Now we will claim success that "René Mouawad Airport" will be operational soon, but no railway, not even between Tripoli and Beirut.

Just in case a railway is built, T.E. Lawrence has written a manual about how to demolish it from Ras Ba'albeck to the Arabian Desert.

"I therefore went west to Ras Baalbek on June 10th and dynamited a small plate girder there.

The effect on the traffic was of course very slight but the Metowila [Shia'a] of Baalbek were most excited and it was to arouse them that I did it. The noise of dynamite explosions we find everywhere the most effective propagandist measure possible.

It was still necessary for us to cut the railway between Deraa and Amman.

After long experiment, we found this the cheapest and most destructive demolition for a line with steel sleepers [Tulip System]".

Why all those wars and why the "Sunni"- "Shia'a" schism now? Apparently, T.E. Lawrence had his eyes on the "Shia'a" [Metowila] long before Mr. Bush invaded Iraq. The "Shia'a" of Ras Ba'albeck were happy that an "Inglizi" was liberating them from the tyranny of Turkey.

T.E. Lawrence of Scotland, of England, of North Wales of Westmeath of Arabia of Dorset later apologized for many promises he made. Apparently, he was duped by his government.

"Lawrence had written that he had been led to believe that the British

Government meant to live up to its promises to the Arabs, and that it was because of this belief he had encouraged the Arabs. He wished to inform the Arabs and the British public that he regretted what he had done because the government evidently had no intention of living up to the promise it had authorized him to make to the Arabs".

Promises are easily made and broken. Men of substance will learn from history but what can hollow men do, except repeat with T.S. Elliot:

We are Hollow men
We are stuffed men
Leaning together
Head piece filled with straw. Alas!
Between the idea
And the reality
Between the nations
And the act
Falls the Shadow

King Faisal I, descendent of the Prophet, the leader of the Arab Revolt and the signatory on an agreement with Chaim Weizmann for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, was left wandering in a hotel in Paris on 18 January 1919 at 2 a.m. T.E. Lawrence pleaded Faisal's case to Balfour, who said that he "simply forgot" to invite him to the meeting. The Paris Peace Conference gathered victorious nations but not pity zu'ama. The vacuum created by inapt Arab regimes depending on the West to survive is now being filled by Turkey, Israel and Iran.

A government, unwilling or unable to connect the "Sunni" of A'akkar with the "Shia'a" of Sour by a railway, what use would it have for two airports? Faisal, Jamal Pasha, Saddam Hussein, Bush and Ahmadinajad have the answer, while both our "pro-government and opposition leaders" are yet to learn from history. Soon the country will be in worse turmoil and they will all be left in the lobby of a hotel or at a train station where there is no train.

*Citations in Italic from
The Letters of T.E. Lawrence of Arabia
David Garnett (ed.) 1938*

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