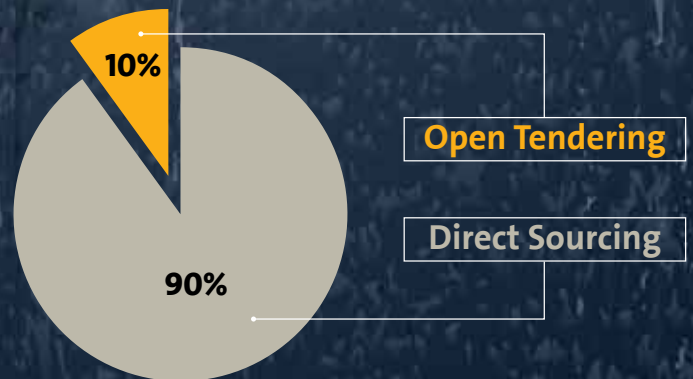




LEBANON STATE WORKS AND PROJECTS

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Is there a better solution?

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with no progress

Index

173 | October 2018

Leader

- 5** **Lebanon State Works and Projects**
Direct sourcing is the rule and open tendering is the exception

Public Sector

- 30** **Télé Liban**
A model of failure for the Lebanese state
- 36** **A Breakdown of State Election Funds**
- 38** **The Lebanese State Pays Annual Rental Fees of LBP 200 billion**
Is there a better solution?
- 40** **Discretionary Acquisition and Compensation**
The story of acquiring a property for LBP 5.2 billion
- 42** **12 Electricity Ministers with no Progress**
- 44** **1,000 Cars for Arab and Foreign Embassies in Lebanon**
- 46** **The Red Spell: By Dr. Hanna Saadah**
- 50** **Discover Lebanon**
Wata Al-Jaouz: Destroyed by sanders
- 51** **Lebanon Families**
The Naassan Families: "Sunni" in Trablous, "Catholic" in Saida, and "Orthodox" in Marjeyoun



5



30



42

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A Ramadan “dialogue” in the Cedars’ Forest

By Jawad N. Adra

This article was first written and published in September 2011 (*The Monthly*, issue No. 110) and we are republishing today as it applies to the current situation of political rivalries and wrangling, although it is not Ramadan now.

“They” decided to meet in what is left of the Cedars’ Forest to discuss what is left of Lebanon. The dialogue started with interventions from representatives of Kataeb Party and the Lebanese Forces stating that the oldest cedar tree today in “Arz Al Rab” is 1,000 years old according to a carbon testing report and that the oldest tree in Lebanon is the endangered Lizab (Juniper), especially following the construction of the Dinnieh-Hermel road and the Brissa dam. It was opposed by Hezbollah representatives who called for the validation of laboratory tests. As a result, the attendees decided not to discuss this issue but to only tackle daily life matters. Therefore, there shall neither be talk about the international tribunal nor the weapons. There shall be no talk regarding “international legitimacy”, “alliances with Saudi Arabia or Iran” or even debates about the age of the Lizab and the cedars, thus avoiding any escalation.

The discussions focused on the following:

Electricity: They agreed on the necessity to immediately grant a USD 2 billion treasury loan to Electricité du Liban to enable it to construct new gas powered stations in Deir Ammar, Al-Zahrani and other areas, and rehabilitate the electricity networks. They also agreed on closing down the polluting Zouq station, which is harmful to Lebanon, Kessrouan, the Maronite patriarchy, the beauty of the shore and of course people’s health. Their aim was to provide 24-hour power so the generators will no longer be a rule.

Full medical insurance: They agreed that the death of poor patients at the hospital entrances and the inability of most people to have access to adequate healthcare is humiliating. As such, around USD 500 million should be secured for healthcare. Since real estate profits have multiplied tenfold in the past few years, it is time then to introduce a real estate profit tax by 20% after calculating inflation. This would secure the required amount and provide health coverage for two and a half million Lebanese who are currently uninsured.

The Lebanese University and public education: They agreed that the amounts spent on public education should ensure a good level of education but this is not the case. The percentage of students in pre-university public education has decreased from 33.1% in 2007-2008 to 30.6% in 2017-2018, and the recently licensed private universities are not better than Lebanese University except in foreign languages. Supporting private education through religious institutions or providing school fees subsidies to the children of public sector employees, namely teachers, must be ceased and priority should be granted to the Lebanese University and public education.

Cheap labor and emigration: They agreed that money transfers from abroad, along with the emigration of youth and the import of cheap labor, are issues that should be of the utmost priority. Thus, measures will be put in place to increase the cost of hiring foreign labor so that it does not become a form of slavery, while ensuring better opportunities for nationals. Organizing money transfers from abroad so that they do not cause an imbalance in the economy is also something to consider.

Road accidents and public transportation: They agreed that the death of two Lebanese daily due to road accidents is unacceptable and therefore speed violations should be stricter, roads should be improved and the use of public transportation should be generalized (buses, trams and maritime transport) as is the case in all other countries of the world.

Environment and construction: They agreed that environment and construction are intertwined issues and that Lebanon, from its shores and beaches to its mountains, should be treated like a vast, beautiful garden. There should be no polluting factories, quarries, or garbage thrown in its valleys. The Lebanese shore should be restored and opened to all people and there should be more green spaces in cities.

Conclusion: The Zua’ama, our princes and kings and “tarabeesh” on our heads, pledged that they would immediately implement the matters on which they reached an agreement. One of the attendees tried to discuss sectarianism and the independence of judiciary but he was told that these topics would be discussed in the next meeting. Another put forward the issue of the international tribunal and the weapons, and the answer was that these two important matters would be discussed when what was agreed upon has been implemented. The last question raised was: “Which of the two comes first, the Cedar tree or the Lizab?” Hezbollah insisted that the cedar tree is the eternal slogan of Lebanon, and this is imperative. All attendees agreed and left the meeting smiling.

Now came the time for iftar and Samir Geagea insisted on inviting everyone to his modest residence in Bsharri, remembering the quartet agreement and looking for a quintet agreement. Everyone agreed though most of them were non-fasting. They decided to have the iftar without media coverage. Moreover, they agreed that the phenomenon of iftar banquets is a flaw that needs to be addressed, citing the noble Hadith: “There are people who fast and get nothing from their fast except hunger and thirst.” Pretending to fast is not a sort of faith and fasting from food and drink is of no value.

Suddenly a scary sound was heard. It was Humbaba, the guardian of the Cedars’ Forest, screaming, “The hero has died ... he has fallen and he will no longer rise. Like a fish in a net and a gazelle in a trap, the hero has died, perhaps the nation has died.” The dream is short and the nightmare is long-standing.

* The added phrases are underlined.