

Kurdistan Chronicle

NIGHT OF HORROR

THE IRANIAN
ATTACK ON THE
KURDISTAN
REGION





Telling the Story of Kurdistan in Washington How We Can Strengthen the U.S.-Kurdistan Relationship?

This edition of *Kurdistan Chronicle* marks a historic moment as it is the first Kurdish publication to be distributed simultaneously in both the United States and Erbil. It signifies a major milestone in the effort to bridge cultural and informational divides between Kurdistan and the United States, fostering greater understanding and cooperation.

This development is a significant step forward in amplifying the voices and perspectives of the Kurdish community on an international scale, promoting cross-cultural dialogue, and enhancing global awareness of Kurdish culture, politics, and achievements.

Discussions of the U.S.-Kurdistan bilateral relationship often center around strategic defense, counterterrorism, and geopolitical positioning. Just a decade ago, Kurdish *peshmerga* fighters fought alongside U.S. troops to defeat ISIS and restore peace and stability to the Middle East. As regional tensions mount, Kurdistan is again playing a critical role in protecting freedom and deterring unwarranted aggression.

However, the story of Kurdistan goes far beyond security. As the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Representative to the United States, it is my honor and privilege to tell our story in Washington, D.C. and work to foster greater cooperation between our two nations.

Beyond defense, there are many opportunities for the Kurdish and American people to build deeper bonds and work together to build a better world.

For starters, Kurdistan is ready and willing to join the United States in the fight against climate change. Given our geographic location, we understand the damaging impacts of a warming planet and the need to be better stewards of our environment. Issues like drought, famine, and deadly heatwaves threaten our very way of life, which is why the KRG is doing everything it can to stem the tide of climate change. As *Kurdistan Chronicle* detailed in its November 2023 issue, environmental organizations in Kurdistan are working tirelessly to restore our region's oak forests, which is crucial to mitigating the impacts of climate change. With greater international partnership, we can make great strides toward protecting the planet we call home.

Additionally, the Kurdistan Region is a beacon of human rights in the Middle East, and we are eager to partner with the United States and other allied nations to protect the rights of the diverse communities in the region. Kurdistan is a tapestry of religious and ethnic groups coexisting in peace, and we are a people who empower women and girls to seek education, build careers, and succeed in their own endeavors. By working together to protect and promote human rights, the United States and Kurdistan can make a powerful impact on the lives of so many people in need.

Kurdistan can also become a powerful economic partner to the United States. In recent years, the KRG has prioritized developing its economic infrastructure by boosting the agriculture sector, increasing internet access, combatting poverty, and fostering a spirit of entrepreneurialism that is rapidly transforming our region into an economic engine. With greater trade and mutual investment with our friends in the United States, both nations can enter a new era of prosperity.

Ultimately, though, the greatest bonds we can build lie in the connection between our two peoples. Like the American people, the Kurdish people value freedom, prosperity, and the rights of individuals. As we continue to work together with the United States to restore peace in our region, we must strive for deeper people-to-people connections that make all of us stronger. ●



Treefa Aziz

KRG Representative to the United States

TIMELINE

JANUARY 2024

January 1 • The Peshmerga Ministry urged Baghdad and Coalition partners to assist in halting repeated drone attacks on the Kurdistan Region.

January 2 • An intercepted drone attack targeted the US-led Coalition base in Erbil.

January 3 • Kurdistan Region leaders condemned deadly attacks in Kerman, Iran. • A high-level delegation of Iraqi Sunni leaders visited Erbil to discuss the political and security situation in Iraq.

January 4 • The Iraqi army raided a Kurdish-populated neighborhood in Kirkuk, arresting several people.

January 5 • A drone attack targeted Hariiri Base in the Kurdistan Region, causing no serious impact.

January 7 • A senior delegation from the Kurdistan Region visited Baghdad to discuss unresolved budgetary disputes.

January 8 • Austrian Ambassador to Iraq Andrea Nasi visited Erbil, meeting with PM Masrour Barzani to discuss bilateral ties. • French Ambassador to Iraq, Éric Chevalier, visited Erbil to bid farewell to Kurdish leaders after concluding his tenure in Iraq.

January 9 • France opened a visa application center in Erbil. • Commander of the Coalition Forces in Iraq and Syria, Major General Joel B. Vowell, visited Erbil to discuss security collaboration with Peshmerga.

January 10 • A drone attack targeted the Coalition base in Erbil.

January 11 • US Consul General, Mark Stroh, promised ongoing support for the reform process at the Ministry of Peshmerga. • The Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Children and Armed Conflict (UNCAAC), Virginia Gamba, visited Erbil. • Another intercepted drone attack targeted the Coalition base in Erbil.

January 14 • PM Masrour Barzani welcomed newly appointed South Korean Ambassador Sengchol Lim in Erbil. • Finnish Ambassador Anu Saarela visited Erbil to meet with Kurdish leaders and discuss bilateral ties. • Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani visited Baghdad to discuss Erbil-Baghdad relations with Iraqi leaders.

January 15 • A ballistic missile attack by Iran's IRGC killed and injured several innocent civilians in Erbil. • PM Masrour Barzani arrived in Davos to join world leaders for the 54th round of the World Economic Forum (WEF).

January 16 • The international community condemned the fatal ballistic missile attack by Iran's IRGC on the Kurdistan Region. • Three explosive-laden drones were intercepted over the Coalition base in Erbil. • The Iraqi federal government's delegation arrived in Erbil to investigate the Iranian attack, announcing that the targeted site was only a civilian property.

January 17 • US and UK ambassadors arrived in Erbil to meet with Kurdish leaders and reaffirm their countries' support for Kurdistan in the face of the Iranian attack.

January 18 • Tens of thousands took to the streets in Duhok to denounce the deadly missile attack by Iran.

January 19 • The Kurdistan Counter-Terrorism Unit announced that an explosive-laden drone was intercepted over the Coalition base in Erbil.

January 20 • The Erbil Chamber of Commerce called on businesses to boycott Iranian products in the wake of the IRGC missile attack on Erbil.

January 21 • Tens of thousands of people poured into the streets to protest the repeated missile attacks by Iran targeting civilians in the Kurdistan Region. • A delegation from the Iraqi Parliament arrived in Erbil to probe the IRGC missile attack on a civilian house in Erbil. • PM Masrour Barzani paid a visit to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

January 22 • The Tehran Chamber of Commerce called on the Kurdistan Region to end the boycott on Iranian products.

January 24 • UK Ambassador Stephen Hitchen visited Erbil for the second time in a week to express solidarity with the Kurdistan Region after the Iranian missile attack on Erbil. • China officially inaugurated its visa center in Erbil.

January 26 • A Katyusha rocket attack on Kor Mor caused a suspension of gas supplies to power plants, greatly affecting public electricity provision. • PM Masrour Barzani condemned the attack on Kor Mor Gas Field, stating that the assault aims to dismantle Kurdistan's infrastructure.

January 27 • The US State Department denounced the rocket attack on Kurdistan's Kor Mor Gas Field.

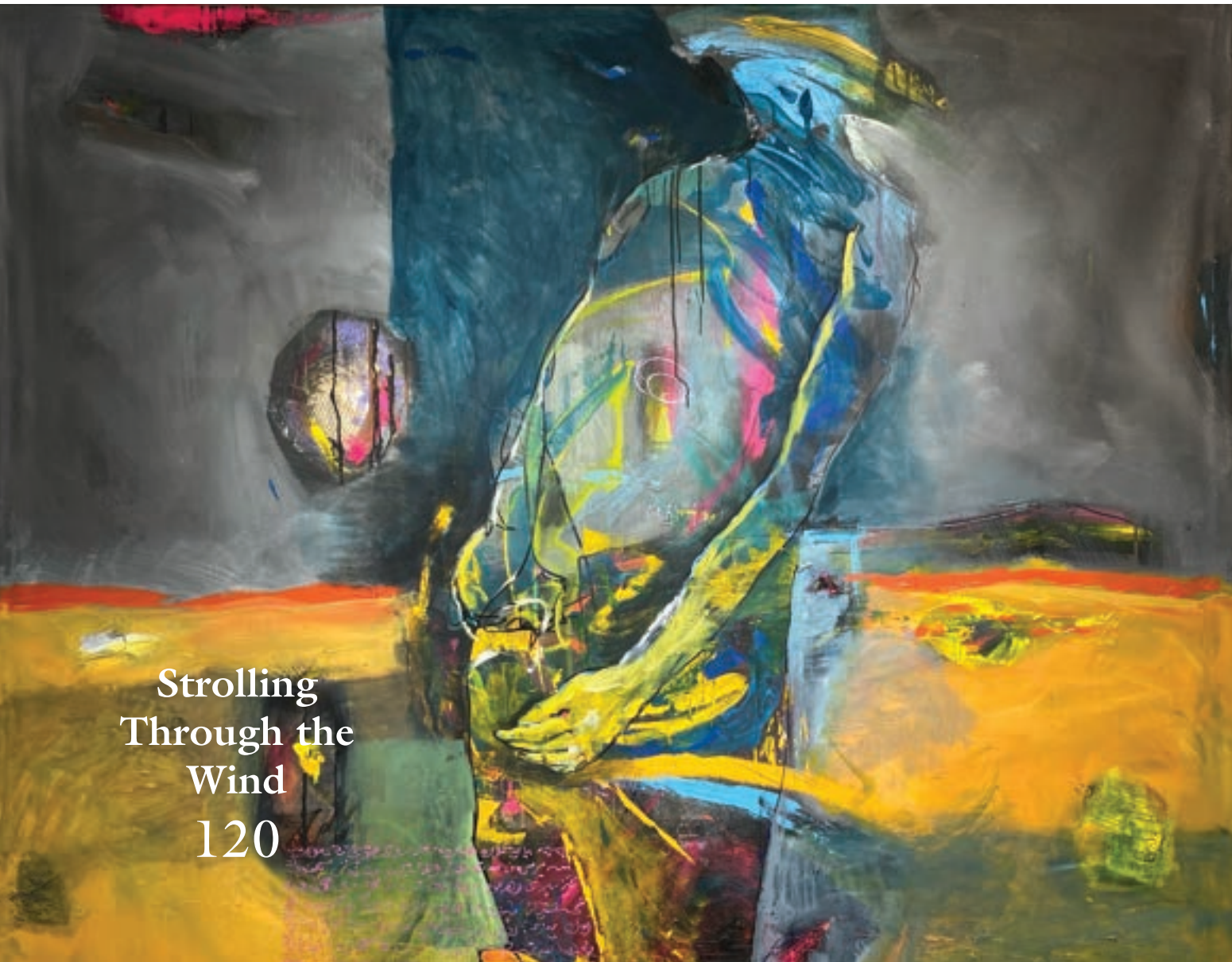
January 28 • The Department of Foreign Relations of the KRG held the third Kurdistan Representations Conference in Erbil. • Ibrahim Kaln, the head of the Turkish Intelligence Agency (MIT), visited Erbil.

January 29 • The Kurdistan Region joined the international community in condemning a deadly attack on a US base in Jordan.

January 31 • Ambassador of Norway to Iraq and Jordan, Espen Lindbaeck, visited Erbil.

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Photo: Peshraw Mahdi

Night of Horror

**THE IRANIAN ATTACK ON
THE KURDISTAN REGION**



A somber statue veiled in black stands at the entrance of the Empire World residential complex in Erbil, serving as a poignant tribute to Peshraw Dizayee.

Iran's Ballistic Missile Attack on the Kurdistan Region

Kurdistan Chronicle

On January 15, 2024, at 11:30 pm, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched a ballistic missile attack on Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, targeting the residence of prominent Kurdish businessman Peshraw Dizayee. The attack resulted in at least four casualties, including Dizayee and his 11-month-old daughter Zhina. Dizayee's wife and two sons sustained serious injuries, prompting condemnation from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the international community.

KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani strongly condemned the "cowardly attack" and called on Baghdad to take a stance against the violation of Iraq's sovereignty. Western nations, including the United States, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy, joined in condemning the missile strike, emphasizing their opposition to actions undermining Iraq's stability.

Iran's claims regarding the attack's target raised eyebrows, alleging Dizayee's involvement in an "espionage center of the Israeli spy agency Mossad" and accusing him of illicit oil exports to Israel. Evidence

supporting these claims, including manipulated photos and false connections, was quickly revealed to be baseless.

The attack follows a pattern of IRGC assassinations in the Kurdistan Region since 2018, targeting civilians and exacerbating tensions in the region. Iraq responded robustly by recalling its ambassador from Iran, lodging an official complaint at the UN Security Council, and canceling scheduled meetings with Iran's Foreign Minister.

Amid heightened regional tensions – including the killing of a senior Iranian commander in an Israeli airstrike and a terrorist attack in Iran claimed by ISIS – the missile strike on Erbil adds another layer of complex geopolitical dynamics. The incident underscores Iran's attempts to destabilize the Kurdish economy and create fear, possibly in response to the Kurds' friendly relations with the West.

As the international community reacts to this alarming event, attention is drawn to the broader implications for regional stability and the ongoing struggle of the Kurdish people in the face of external threats. ●



Children participate in a celebration marking Zhina Dizayee's first birthday amidst the remnants of her home following the Iranian attack.



Rescuers labor at the site of the Iranian ballistic missile assault, where a picture of Zhina Dizayee is displayed on the crumbled walls of her residence.



Burial of Pesraw and Zhina Dizayee in Erbil.





President Masoud Barzani joining the Dizayee family at the burial of Pesraw and Zhina.



SPECIAL DOSSIER

Investigation and Condemnation Iran's Ballistic Missile Strike on the Kurdistan Region



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*is a seasoned reporter and
analyst who specializes
in Kurdish affairs, and
holds a Master's degree
in Kurdish studies from
Exeter University, UK.*



Activists and family members gathering in a symbolic event to celebrate the first birthday of Zhina after she perished in the Iranian ballistic missile attack.

On January 15, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps carried out a ballistic missile attack on Erbil, capital of the Kurdistan Region, targeting the home of Peshraw Dizayee, a prominent Kurdish businessman and real estate developer. At least four missiles hit his home in the targeted attack.

"I condemn this cowardly attack on the people of the Kurdistan Region in the strongest terms," Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani said in a statement after the attack, urging Baghdad to take a stance "against the flagrant violation of the sovereignty of Iraq and the KRI."

The attack killed at least four people, including Dizayee and his 11-month-old daughter Zhina, and badly injured his wife and two of his sons, who were transported to the UAE for treatment. Six more civilians were injured.

Several Western countries, including Italy, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and the United States also condemned the attack. "We oppose Iran's reckless missile strikes, which undermine Iraq's stability," U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller stated.

After his visit to Lalish and an IDP camp, Mark Stroh, the U.S. Consul General in the Kurdistan Region, addressed

the public in a press conference with the Shekhan mayor. During the announcement of USG-sponsored English language training for the disadvantaged communities in Shekhan, Stroh expressed profound concerns. He conveyed "We pray for Mr. Peshraw Dizayee and his infant daughter, as well as Mr. Karam Mikhail Saridar, and the other civilians killed, and for a speedy and complete recovery for the injured. We condemn in the strongest terms Iran's reckless, indiscriminate attack, a flagrant violation of Iraqi sovereignty. We are in touch with both the KRG and the Government of Iraq on how best to respond to this flagrant and unjustified attack."

The Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot strongly condemned the attack on January 19, following the revelation that Zhina held Dutch nationality. She talked to her Iranian counterpart and summoned Iran's ambassador to the Netherlands.

Iran claimed that there was no proof that Zhina had been killed, despite evidence to the contrary.

In a report on the attack, Human Rights Watch said "these killings follow a long history of Revolutionary Guard assassinations in residential areas of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq that have targeted civilians."

Since 2018, Iran and Iranian-backed groups have carried out



Children taking part in celebration on the first birthday of Zhina Dizayee at the ruins of her home after the Iranian attack.

several attacks on U.S. bases, oil and gas infrastructure, and Iranian-Kurdish opposition groups. A September 2022 attack on Iranian-Kurdish opposition parties resulted in the deaths of 16 people.

Furthermore, after the eruption of the 2023 Israel-Hamas war in October, Iranian-backed groups have carried out over 140 attacks on U.S. bases in Iraq and Syria, including the Kurdistan Region, aiming to expel the United States from the region.

Baghdad has since recalled its ambassador from Iran and lodged an official complaint at the UN Security Council. At the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani and KRG Prime Minister Barzani also canceled a scheduled meeting with Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

The wife of Peshraw Dizayee, Hana Jutyar Dizayee, provided an eye-witness account of the attack to an Iraqi delega-

tion led by Iraqi National Security Advisor Qasim Al-Araji. She said she was watching television with her children while her husband hosted Iraqi Christian businessman Karam Mikhail, who was also killed in the attack.

"My husband had guests and was downstairs. There were no signs of anything wrong. This is our house in Erbil, where we live permanently. We had recently returned from a holiday in Dubai during the school break," she said. "Suddenly, I witnessed the ceiling collapsing. Amid this chaos, I heard verses from the Quran in my head..."

Baseless claims and false evidence

Peshraw Dizayee, the main target, was the owner of Falcon Group, established in Baghdad in 2004, and the creator of Empire World, a 750,000-square-meter complex of high-rise apartments and villas in the center of Erbil, termed the "second Dubai."

However, Iranian state media claimed they were targeting an "espionage center of the Israeli spy agency Mossad." Moreover, they claimed Dizayee was linked to Mossad and was an oil tycoon that had made a fortune through oil exports to Israel.

Iran state-owned network Press TV published a picture of fighters of the Iranian-Kurdish Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK), a group that played a major role in fighting ISIS, with Peshraw Dizayee and the alleged "Mossad spy" Elan Nissim, the chairman of U.S.-based company Tasa Elite, visiting the *peshmerga* frontlines with ISIS, alleging that Dizayee was working with PAK and Mossad against Iran.

"Mr. Peshraw was not at that meeting; it was an edited photo. Secondly, the other individuals were journalists," PAK spokesperson Khalil Nadry told *Kurdistan Chronicle*, when asked about the picture. On Nissim's Facebook page, the original picture does not show Dizayee, proving that it was

altered by Press TV. “The PAK never had a relationship or affiliation with him, never,” Nadry added.

Another picture published by the Iranian state-owned Tasnim Agency showing Peshraw Dizayee with a rabbi based in Russia also proved to be fake. Tasa Elite later reposted the original picture with the caption “whatever.”

A relative who wanted to remain anonymous also told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that Dizayee was “strictly working for Kurdistan Democratic Party after 1991. I doubt that he worked with the PAK or other factions.”

Moreover, Iraqi National Security Advisor Qasim Al-Araj, on X after inspecting the site of the attack with an investigation committee “that the claims that speak of the targeting of a Mossad base have no truth to them.”

Sherwan Dizayee, a relative of Peshraw Dizayee, told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that “his main business was construction and security. He was providing security to companies and individuals in the whole of Iraq during the difficult times of the 2000s.

“Claims that he was exporting oil to certain places are absolutely baseless. This unacceptable excuse was used to cover up for the failure to tackle the real problem they have. It’s a misleading theory by the military and the intelligence agency that resulted in the murder of innocent civilians,” he added.

Another relative told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that he was invited to Peshraw Dizayee’s house. “One of the things we discussed was oil opportunities. He clearly told me that he was not involved in oil supply but in providing logistics, procurements, and construction services for oil companies.”

Falcon Group runs oil field services. “Falcon Group Iraq is a conglomerate that includes an oil field services company. They provide local site services, and do not have the skills, contracts, or jurisdiction to buy, sell, trade, or produce oil,” Shwan Dizayee, a relative of Peshraw Dizayee, also added.

Moreover, a source within an international oil company operating in the Kurdistan Region told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that he has “no knowledge of any role that he [Dizayee] played in oil exports”

“He had no oil trading interests at all, though he did once harbor an interest in entering the sector,” said another anonymous source who worked with Dizayee for several years. “There were already many people doing this, and I think he decided against entering the field.”

“

Several Western countries, including Italy, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and the United States also condemned the attack

”

in the (so-called) Green Zone,” the source added.

“He was close to the Americans because many of his offices were rented out to U.S. companies. This was his main income stream at one point. He also used to employ ex-U.S. soldiers as directors of his security company in Erbil.”

“I think the main reason was to target a high-profile business leader close to the Kurdish leadership to send a message to them that they could be next.”

“The greater purpose I think is to destabilize the Kurdish economy and create fear,” the source added. “The Iranians want to punish the Kurds for having friendly relations with the West.”

“Cowardly attacks”

The ballistic missile attack in Erbil came after Iran lost a senior commander in an Israeli attack in Syria, and a terrorist attack claimed by ISIS that killed over 90 people in Kerman, Iran on January 4.

The Iranian Foreign Minister officially claimed the ISIS attack was planned from Erbil, although ISIS itself attacked the Kurdistan Region in 2014, and the Kurdistan Region’s *peshmerga* forces fought against the terrorist group for years, losing more than 1,800 men with over 10,000 wounded.

Mohammed Salih, a senior fellow at the U.S.-based Foreign Policy Research Institute told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that the “Iran regime links every attack or sabotage act inside Iran to Israel almost immediately, before any serious investigation of evidence has been conducted.”

KRG Coordinator for International Advocacy Dindar Zebari told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that the *peshmerga* defended “a front line spanning nearly 650 miles. *Peshmerga* forces exhibited unparalleled courage and resilience in the face of ISIS.

“The *peshmerga*’s unwavering commitment to protecting their homeland and standing against terrorism demonstrates

Also in March 2022, Iran targeted the home of Sheikh Baz Karim Barzinji, CEO of the Iraqi Kurdish oil company KAR Group, also under the false pretext of “selling oil to Israel.”

“I think there are a number of reasons why the Iranians picked him (Dizayee),” the source added.

“He started out by providing security services in Baghdad. This included providing protection to U.S. soldiers

the epitome of bravery and dedication, earning them the respect and admiration of people worldwide,” Zebari said.

Mohammed Shareef, a foreign policy specialist at the University of Kurdistan Hewler (UKH), told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that “such a claim is pure nonsense, as ISIS is no friend of the Kurdistan Region, nor does ISIS lack a base from which to plan such an operation.”

“Furthermore, neither the Kurdis-

near Makhmur to provide daily catering to 2,800 *peshmerga* fighters on the front line against ISIS.

“The Iranians did a huge injustice by targeting Dizayee, as he did a lot to support the *peshmerga* as they played a big part in fighting ISIS,” a source who worked for Dizayee said.

“He provided free meals for 5,000 *peshmerga* at Gwer for quite a lengthy time. It cost him well over a million dollars.

Republic of Iran in this difficult time. “Such propaganda forces [Iran] to frame its response in the name of countering Israel,” foreign policy expert Mohammed Salih added. “Given Iran’s propaganda about Israel, the Kurds are low-hanging fruit for the regime because it knows the Kurds do not have the military means to respond.”

He added that Iran also has a long-standing ambition to subdue the Kurdistan Region and paralyze its economy



Children showing posters with the photograph of Zhina Dizayee, and written message reading: “There is no excuse for killing Zhina.”

tan Region nor its leadership is in any shape or form willing, capable or foolish enough to take such a massive risk with a powerful and influential neighbor like Iran.”

Shareef added that the attack was “a publicity stunt for domestic consumption; basically it was to say to Iranians that the country is taking action against Israel in light of the situation in Gaza.” In August 2014, Dizayee set up a camp

“He dedicated large sums of his fortune to those who needed help, both individuals and organizations. He fed thousands of *peshmerga* fighters during the war against ISIS,” Sherwan Dizayee added.

KRG Prime Minister Barzani also strongly condemned “cowardly attacks” in the Iranian city of Kerman, and expressed his condolences “to the people and government of the Islamic

and business sector “by targeting its most prominent heads.”

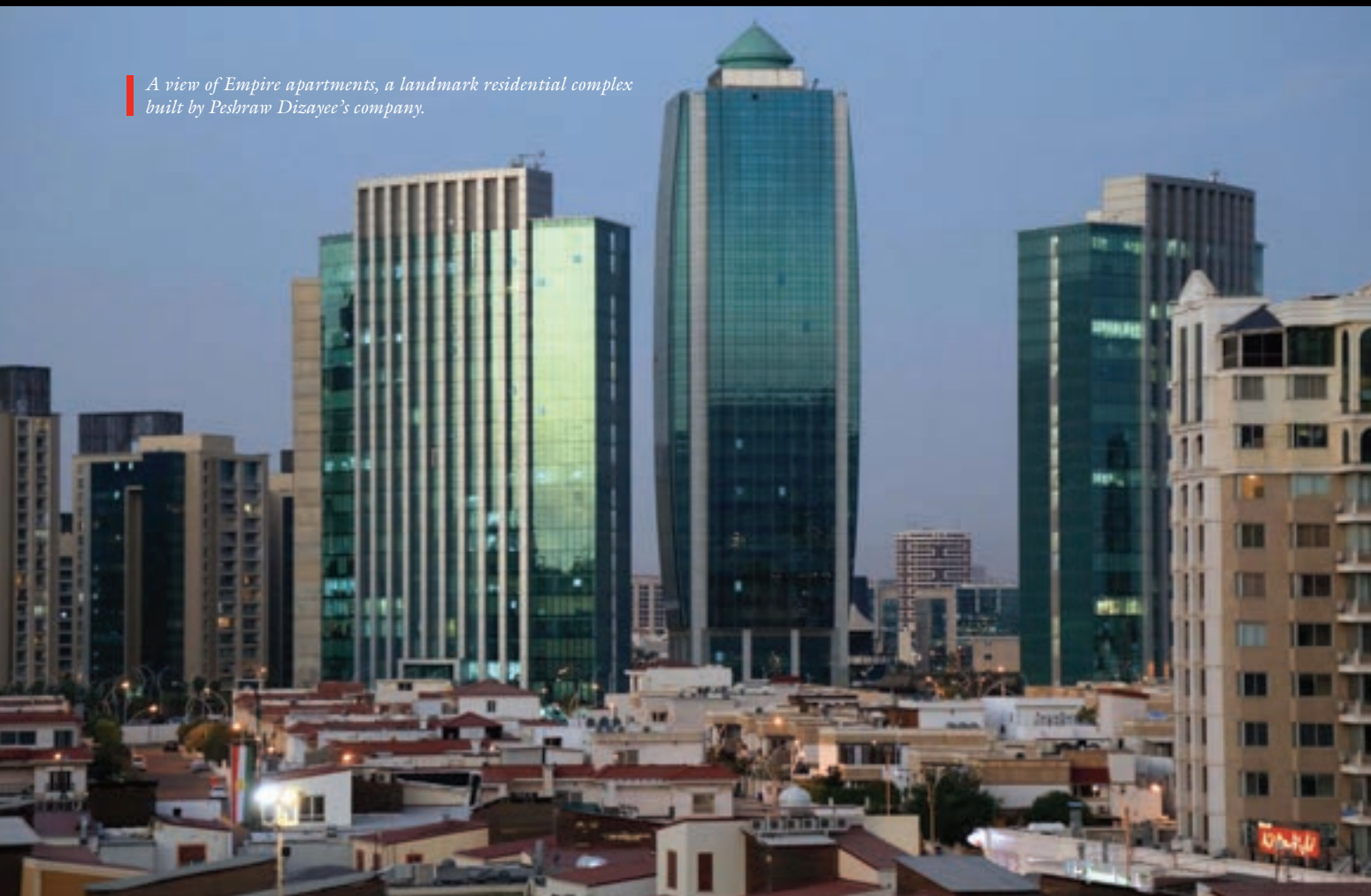
“One key sign of the baselessness of Iranian claims is that if Iran actually wanted to retaliate against Israel, it would have directly targeted actual Israeli targets, perhaps inside Israel itself. After all, Israel directly targets Iranian commanders in Syria and is known to have targeted military and nuclear sites inside Iran.” ●

In Memory of Peshraw Dizayee

(1966-2024)

- Born in 1966
- Moved to Sweden in the 1990s
- Returned to Iraq after the liberation of Iraq in 2003
- Established the Falcon Security Group in Baghdad in 2004
- Founded the \$2.3-billion real estate project Empire World in 2007
- Provided food to thousands of peshmerga and donated \$1 million to the families of peshmerga martyrs after the ISIS attacks in 2014.
- Donated money to the health sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A view of Empire apartments, a landmark residential complex built by Peshraw Dizayee's company.



Peshraw Dizayee, who was killed on January 15 in a missile attack launched by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, leaves behind an impressive legacy. He was the visionary behind the \$2.3-billion Empire World real estate project in Erbil. Established in 2007, it is one of the largest projects in Iraq, covering an area spanning 750,000 square meters and including 88 towers and 300 villas. "A continuous pursuit for expansion and growth has propelled Empire World to success through developing diverse projects ranging from multi-functional commercial offices, hotels, leisure and entertainment facilities to residential projects," the website of Empire World reads.

Dizayee was born in Erbil in 1966. A member of the affluent Dizayee family, he moved to Sweden after the Kurdish uprising in the 1990s, but returned to the Kurdistan Region after the liberation of Iraq in 2003. He established the Falcon

Group in 2004. Initially a security company called Falcon Security, the firm provided services to the U.S. army. "He was working with the U.S. army as a security service contractor, just like many other entrepreneurs," a relative said.

"His main business was construction and security. He provided security to companies and individuals in the whole of Iraq during the difficult 2000s," his relative, Sherwan Dizayee, added. "Not many people were prepared to risk their lives to be engaged in business in those dangerous areas."

In 2005, Falcon Security registered as an authorized security provider with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Ministry of Interior. Now the Falcon Group has seven companies under its wing, and has undertaken projects in security, construction, agriculture, general trading, oil and gas services, technology, and beauty services, and has clients such as the UN, Hunt Oil, PwC, the KRG, the Iraqi federal govern-

ment, the U.S. army, and Marathon Oil. Despite false reports published by Iranian government-linked media, his company was not involved in oil exports. However, it has provided piping stores, warehouses, and services to several foreign oil companies based in the Kurdistan Region. In 2007, he started the Empire World project, modeled after the success of real estate development in Dubai.

He was also a major supporter of the peshmerga. After ISIS attacked the Kurdistan Region in August 2014, he established a new corporate social responsibility program to feed peshmerga fighters on the Makhmur front line.

"He donated \$1 million to the families of the peshmerga killed in the fight against ISIS. He provided lunch and dinner for thousands of peshmerga for many months during the fight against ISIS," Sherwan Dizayee told Kurdistan 24.

He later built his own villa near the Pirmam-Erbil road. "I have been to his villa. He had spent a lot of money to ensure the comfort of his family," Sherwan Dizayee said. "He always invited his relatives and friends."

He added that Peshraw mainly stayed in Dubai but stayed in the villa when visiting Erbil.

"He was a very honest, serious, hard-working person. Peshraw will be greatly missed," Sherwan Dizayee said. "His murder is a violation of the sovereignty of the whole country. No claim or excuse will justify the murder of Peshraw and his beautiful baby."

"Peshraw was determined to serve Kurdistan through his business activities. He was an optimist and believed in himself and his capabilities. Obviously he was making money from his businesses, but that was not his primary objective. He believed that Kurdistan and the Kurds deserved to be equal to other nations," Sherwan Dizayee concluded. ●



A view of Empire apartments, a landmark residential complex built by Peshraw Dizayee's company.

Empire World

This piece was originally penned by the late Peshraw for the fourth issue of the Kurdistan Chronicle supplement, dated May 2023. Today, as we solemnly remember the tragic demise of the author at the hands of an Iranian assault on the Kurdistan Region, we feel compelled to bring attention to his poignant article once more. His untimely death was unjustifiable, sparking a surge of condemnations directed at the Iranians and their assault on the Kurdistan Region. The echoes of his words continue to resonate, underscoring the senselessness of the violence that claimed his life.



Chairman's Message

With great belief and trust in the capabilities and opportunities in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, it is with honor and pride that I introduce you to Empire World. This exciting development is inspired by the potential the future holds and is second to none in the world of real estate development.

Empire World is a highly dynamic, structured organization that ensures consistency and quality in all aspects of its business. Our people, both local and international, are our key to achieving excellence. We offer a pioneering spirit complemented by integrity and honesty and value the contributions of our highly motivated individuals working in harmony as a team. The Empire World team strives for one unified goal: excellence without compromise.

Empire World plays a significant role in the growth of the Kurdistan Region. We stimulate the private sector and create employment opportunities while supporting sustainable development. Our strategy is straightforward: remain fully engaged in the region through investing in its future while continuing to cultivate value for Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.

Our product is unique in all of Iraq. Our master planned community offers a lifestyle destination for live, work and play. We provide a comfort and quality level unrecognizable in other developments in the area. Our clients are discerning, and we exceed those expectations.

I look forward to the opportunity to see you at Empire World. I am confident that you will feel like you have arrived at home.

Peshraw Majid Agha

Believing in a prosperous future for Erbil in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Empire World emerged in 2007 as a private real estate development company. A continuous pursuit for expansion and growth has propelled Empire World to success through developing diverse projects ranging from multi-functional commercial offices, hotels, leisure and entertainment facilities to residential projects.

A pioneer in real estate development, Empire World embodies its mission of contributing to the economic re-emergence of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region on the strong foundation of a free market economy. Empire World is a comprehensive company catering to different needs and markets with total dedication to excellence without compromise.

A clearly defined vision and mission underscore Empire World's dedication to building a new entity in Iraq, specifically the Kurdistan Region. It delivers world-class products and services that extend beyond property development to a wide range of business activities.

Empire World is proud to demonstrate the company's principles through providing the very best in quality combined with professionalism and expertise. Employing both local and foreign nationalities,

Empire World also enhances its talent base with experienced locals and international professionals positioned in management roles.

Since its establishment in 2007, Empire World has become a leader in the real estate sector due to its high standards and values. It is honored and proud to continue contributing to the growth and development of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. ●

EMPIRE WORLD PROJECTS

RESIDENTIAL

Empire Square

Empire Square Project is in the north-west of the Empire project and has 720 apartments spread over four buildings. The total project area of 168,497 square meters includes residential and commercial buildings.

Residential Wings

Residential Wings luxury apart-

ments are in the west and east of the Empire Project. They include up to 3,856 apartment units within 30 buildings and host nine amenities facilities.

Diamond Towers

Empire Residential Diamond Towers are in the west and east of the Empire Project. They include three high-rise buildings that accommodate 1,288 apartment units.

COMMERCIAL

Business Towers

The Empire Business Towers comprise five towers in the center of the Empire Project. Together with seven amenities facilities, its total area covers 108,000 square meters.

Business Complex

Empire Business Complex is located on both sides of the main gate at the north entrance of the Empire Project. Its six buildings cover 30,600 m².



A perspective of the Empire apartments, an iconic residential development crafted by Peshraw Dizayee's enterprise.

PM Barzani Advocates Economic Growth and International Collaboration



Robin Bell

is a specialist in marketing, logistics and supply chains with experience in over 35 countries – mainly developing markets. CEO of consultancy Graydon Lloyd, he is an Advisor to Valuechain, UK (Cloud based Network & Supply Chain Portals) and Kadme (Big Data & AI specialists), Norway.

Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Masrour Barzani concluded his participation in the 53rd World Economic Forum, held from January 16-20 in Davos, Switzerland. The international forum, themed “Cooperation in a fragmented world,” served as a platform for global leaders to engage in discussions on pressing issues and explore avenues for collaboration.

In a video message shared on X, Prime Minister Barzani expressed his satisfaction with the forum. “There were many topics we discussed that are important for Kurdistan as well as how Kurdistan can play a positive role in this,” he stated. Emphasizing the importance of the discussions, he highlighted a range of reforms being pursued by the Kurdistan Region, including initiatives in agricultural exports and banking.

The primary focus of Prime Minister Barzani’s visit was to boost exports, expand trade relations, and diversify the Kurdistan Region’s economy, which has been traditionally reliant on oil. In a proactive approach to economic development, Prime Minister Barzani underscored the significance of reforms aimed at increasing agricultural exports and modernizing the banking sector. Optimistic about the future, he expressed hope for positive outcomes in the near term.

During his visit, Prime Minister Barzani engaged in several meetings with officials from Europe, the United States, and Arab nations, representing both the public and

private sectors. A major topic of discussion was the export of local Kurdish produce to European and Gulf markets, reflecting the region’s commitment to economic growth and global market integration.

Responding to questions from Kurdish media, Prime Minister Barzani revealed that his discussions in Davos extended beyond economic matters to encompass issues of climate change, food security, renewable energy, and security. These broader considerations underscored the Kurdistan Re-



gion’s commitment to addressing global challenges and contributing to international efforts.

Highlighting the Kurdistan Region’s role in combating terrorism and fostering regional stability, Barzani showcased the region’s effectiveness in these critical areas. He took the opportunity to invite international partners to invest in the Kurdistan Region, emphasizing ongoing banking reforms as a key facet of the government’s commitment to creating an economic environment conducive for entrepreneurial ventures and commercial initiatives. ●

PM Masrour Barzani engages with French President Emmanuel Macron at the World Economic Forum in Davos (January 17, 2024).





PM Masrour Barzani interacts with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the WEF (January 17, 2024), along with Saudi Investment Minister Khalid al-Falih (January 16, 2024).



PM Masrour Barzani meets with Vice President of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council Aidarus al-Zubaidi (January 18, 2024) and Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan (January 18, 2024) at the WEF.



Photos: Farhad Ahmad



PM Masrour Barzani engages in discussions with Lebanese PM Najib Mikati (January 18, 2024) and Czech Republic's Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský (January 17, 2024) at the WEF.

PM Masrour Barzani and David Cameron, UK's Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Jordanian PM Bisler Al-Khasawneh, Hungarian President Katalin Novák, Dutch PM Mark Rutte, and White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan at the WEF (January 2024).

Photos: Farhad Ahmad

Welcoming the Displaced U.S. Consul General Praises Kurdistan Region

Kurdistan Chronicle

U.S. Consul General (USCG) Mark Stroh on Jan. 28 visited the Sheikhan camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Nineveh Governorate and met Yezidi leaders at the Lalish Temple, which has been being restored with over \$2 million in funding from the United States since 2019.

“Since 2014, the U.S. government has contributed more than \$3.5 billion in humanitarian assistance to Iraq. We value our government, the UN, and local partners working to preserve dignity and create durable solutions to displacement,” the U.S. Consulate General in Erbil posted on X on Jan. 29

Moreover, in another post on X the U.S. Consulate General Erbil underlined its commitment to supporting the Yezidi community, as well as other religious and ethnic minorities in the Kurdistan Region and in Iraq.

In a joint press conference on Jan. 28 with the mayor of Sheikhan District Sardar Sheikh Yahya, Stroh said that the United States strongly welcomed the policy of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of hosting over one million IDPs and refugees and for not forcing them to return.

A home for the displaced

According to the latest information from the KRG’s Ministry of the Interior Joint Crisis Coordination Center (JCC), there are currently 900,467 registered IDPs and refugees in the Kurdistan Region, comprising 760,189 IDPs, 251,475 refugees from Syria, 7,796 from Turkey, 8,357 from Iran, 652 from Pales-

tine, and 1,013 from other countries.

USCG Stroh added that in many places around the world local communities have not welcomed IDPs and refugees, unlike the Kurdistan Region. “That is a testament to the warmth of hospitality and the resilience of the residents of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.”

“Education and skill development is critical for the next generation in the Yezidi community. We will never be able to recover and build a better future unless our people have a chance at skilled jobs and move beyond subsistence farming,” Stroh added.

“The KRG’s policy towards IDPs is voluntary and no one will be forcibly returned,” Srwa Rasul, Director General of the JCC, told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

“After the arrival of the terrorist organization ISIS in 2014, the Kurdistan Region hosted 2 million IDPs and refugees who were not accepted by other Iraqi governorates, but on the recommendation of President [Masoud] Barzani, the doors of the Kurdistan Region were opened to the displaced people.”

“We would like to thank the United States for closely monitoring the situation of IDPs and refugees and visiting our camps and centers several times in recent days to investigate this issue and expressed their support,” Rasul said. “(We) appreciate the words of the U.S. Consul General in Erbil [in this regard].”

The U.S. Consulate General also announced an additional \$150,000 contribution to the Free Yezidi Foundation to provide two years of after-school and



US Consul General Mark Stroh addresses journalists during a press conference in Erbil.



On January 29, 2024, US Consul General Mark Stroh visited the BCF office at the Shekhan IDP camp in Dubok, Kurdistan Region.



Stroh is shaking hands with Yezidi leaders during his visit to Lalish Temple in Dubok on the same day.



US Consul General Mark Stroh pays a visit to the sacred Yezidi temple of Lalish in Dubok on January 29, 2024.

weekend English classes to more than 140 high school students in Sheikhan District, including “some of those who reside in IDP camps to help them better prepare for their life and careers after school.”

Pari Ibrahim, the founder and Executive Director of the Free Yezidi Foundation (FYF), told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that “we would like to see people return home, but it can’t be forced. We thus oppose any premature closure of the IDP camps until our people no longer choose to live there and can return feeling safe and secure for a better future.”

USCG Stroh also visited the JCCC as well as the Barzani Charity Foundation

(BCF) in Sheikhan. The JCCC shared that it was grateful for the ongoing humanitarian support from the U.S. government.

The BCF in a post on X said that “the purpose of the visit was to closely observe the situation of the refugees in Sinjar and find out the reasons why they have not returned to their homeland.”

Meanwhile, USCG Stroh underlined that the U.S. Government fully supports the implementation of the UN-backed Sinjar agreement that was signed between the Iraqi federal government and the KRG in October 2020, with the goal of establishing a new administration, removing militias, and facilitating

the return of Yezidi IDPs living there.

Nearly 200,000 Yezidis from Sinjar remain displaced and live in camps in the Kurdistan Region. However, Stroh underscored that while the United States backs the Sinjar agreement, which “will ease and support the return of IDPs to their home communities, we recognize that some families will choose to make new lives here in the Sheikhan area.”

Stroh concluded by thanking Mayor Yahya and his team for “for welcoming so many members of vulnerable communities here to Sheikhan and for seeing the positive in their presence here among you. We are proud to partner with you in this noble effort.” ●



Lavin J. Putrus
is a civil activist who holds master degree in Plastic and Reconstructive surgery.



Diana A. Kako
is an assistant lecturer at University of Dubok, College of Nursing.



Babar Aljammoor
is the director at Counterpart international/ USAID program.



Raneen Taber Alkjmimi
is working with the UN organisations and pursuing MA in Genocide at Stockton University.

Climate Action in Iraq & Kurdistan

The first annual forum of International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) Alumni held on September 17, 2023, in Erbil, Kurdistan Region, convened experts from Iraq's Ministry of Environment, representatives from civil society, and academics to address pressing climate adaptation issues in Iraq. The panel discussed government strategies, civil society missions, scientific foundations, and collaboration in the context of climate change.

The forum's primary objective was to address the challenge of climate adaptation within Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, underscoring the pressing requirement for comprehensive strategies to tackle the various complex problems brought about by climate change. Panelists accordingly discussed government approaches, the roles of civil societies, and the scientific basis for these initiatives, while also stressing the importance of working together.

The discussion highlighted the urgent need to secure access to clean drinking water for the next generation within the coming decade. Panelists meticulously examined past initiatives, differentiating between those deemed successful and those with counterproductive effects. They correspondingly delved into the scientific basis supporting these initiatives and assessed the availability of scientific resources.

The collaboration between ministries and the allocation of budgets for climate research also faced intense scrutiny. Key solutions were proposed, encompassing water conservation, urban planning, active trans-

portation, and energy-efficient practices. Above all, the discussion underscored the significance of collective responsibility, the necessity for reinforced environmental regulations, and the imperative of international collaboration.

Context and challenges

Iraq is the fifth-most impacted country by climate change, according to the UN Environment Program. The challenges posed by climate change are diverse and include severe water scarcity; extended drought; ineffective water utilization in agriculture, industries, and households; and pollution of water sources. In addition to inconsistent urban planning, insufficient green spaces, lack of sustainable transportation, and an excessive reliance on fossil fuels, greenhouse gas emissions have increased, which has further exacerbated climate challenges. The panel of experts, consisting of Moderator Dr. Karwan Amen, Abdulrahman Siddiq, Dr. Shireen Younus Ismael, and Saadia Fleih Hassoun, brought diverse perspectives to address these challenges.

Siddiq highlighted the role of governments, particularly in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, in addressing climate change.

"In 2020, Iraq joined the Paris Convention," he stated. "In line with this, the Kurdistan Region and Iraq are trying to reduce emissions by 15% and build a clean energy system with international support."

"What we demand from the international community is that they provide us with new

technologies and uphold our national stability," he added, underscoring the need for international support.

"We must recognize that when a significant amount of rain – the amount that would normally fall over three months – comes down in just one day, it has a different impact. Currently, we are grappling with issues such as water scarcity and rising temperatures."

Dr. Ismael focused on climate adaptation measures in Iraq, highlighting the

"In our cities, it's essential to ensure a minimum of 20% green spaces," she stated. "We must prioritize efficient infrastructure that minimizes emissions, as our overreliance on cars, even for short journeys, is contributing to the problem."

Dr. Ismael suggested strategies such as creating green areas, promoting sustainable transportation, and adopting green practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. She also drew attention to the lack of focus on national stud-

Iraq's specific environmental challenges.

"Climate change is not just an Iraqi issue but a global one," she explained. "Now we are in an emergency situation regarding climate change." She highlighted numerous negative practices, such as inefficient water usage, pollution, and complex water-sharing agreements with neighboring countries.

During the panel discussion, the experts presented a range of solutions



The inaugural annual gathering of International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) alumni takes place in Erbil on September 17, 2023.

challenges posed by low readiness and high vulnerabilities in the country. She emphasized the importance of urban planning, specifically as relates to electricity and transportation.

ies and adaptation strategies in climate change research, which is a crucial gap that needs addressing.

Meanwhile, Hassoun presented climate change as a global issue and discussed

to address the challenges posed by climate change in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. These solutions included effectively combating climate change by promoting responsible water usage, prioritizing green spaces in urban plan-



Photo: Peshraw Mahdi



ning, encouraging active transportation methods, promoting energy-efficient building practices, conducting studies on tree planting, launching public awareness campaigns, strengthening environmental regulations, supporting civil society organizations, engaging with international organizations and donors, promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration, investing in research, and advocating at international forums.

The overall message emphasized the importance of collective action and comprehensive strategies to effectively combat climate change in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.

Result and recommendations

The panel discussion on climate adaptation in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region revealed several key findings. It highlighted the proactive role of both the government and civil society in addressing climate change through international agreements and local adaptation plans. The ongoing global climate change crisis was firmly placed on the shoulders of major polluters, such as the G20 countries. “Approximately 80% of emissions can be attributed to the G20 countries. We have only contributed a small part to the changes that we are experiencing,” said Siddiq.

At the same time, Iraq and the Kurdistan Region are facing considerable challenges in adapting to the consequences of this environmental crisis. The conversation stressed the importance of recognizing how climate change is significantly altering the availability of water resources, resulting in issues such as water scarcity, extended periods of drought, and rising temperatures, all of which, in turn, have a direct impact on agriculture. Dr. Ismael highlighted the adverse effects of planting trees in inappropriate locations.

“Planting trees in the wrong locations can lead to temperature increases,” she noted. “It is recommended to conduct a comprehensive study on the characteristics of both the trees and the soil

to maximize the potential benefits of reforestation.”

Furthermore, the discussion emphasized the critical role of urban planning because cities are major contributors to the harmful emissions of greenhouse gases. Hassoun stressed the role of the community in combatting climate change.

“We need everyone to work together on this issue; spreading awareness on social media and other kinds of media can have an effect,” she said.

“We wasted a lot of water without planning for the future,” Hassoun added, calling for stricter environmental laws to address these issues and stressing the importance of raising awareness among the general population.

To effectively address these challenges, the panelists had several recommendations. First, there is a need for greater international solidarity and support for Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, recognizing their vulnerability and limited contributions to global climate change. Developing a comprehensive national climate strategy that combines mitigation and adaptation measures is imperative.

Additionally, investing in education and awareness campaigns to inform the public about climate change and its implications can be a powerful tool for change. Collaborating with international partners for technology transfer, focusing on green infrastructure in urban planning, enforcing stricter environmental regulations, engaging local communities, and conducting research to understand local climate challenges are all essential steps.

Finally, continued advocacy at international forums is crucial to raise awareness of the unique climate challenges faced by Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. These recommendations collectively aim to foster resilience, reduce emissions, and secure a sustainable future for the region.

Conclusion

The conversation about climate change, water shortages, and environmental problems in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region drives home the fact that people must act together with a comprehensive strategy to tackle these pressing concerns. Iraq’s ranking as the fifth-most impacted country by climate change and the fact that water scarcity is a major factor in displacing people within the country shows how serious these challenges are.

Solutions span from water conservation and efficient urban planning to public awareness campaigns and stricter environmental regulations. The forum also highlighted how vital it is for countries to work together, rely on research driven by data, and involve various stakeholders in their efforts to effectively tackle climate change.

In the end, the conversation underscored that Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, even though they are particularly at risk from the effects of climate change, are not the main culprits behind the global emissions problem. This places a moral and practical obligation on the international community, particularly those countries emitting the most greenhouse gases, to provide support for their endeavors.

Addressing climate change in these regions requires immediate and sustained action. What is needed here is for someone to step up and take charge, for all parties to work together, and to make a firm promise to construct a future that can withstand the test of time. By putting the suggested solutions into action and working alongside other countries on the global stage, Iraq and the Kurdistan Region can genuinely make progress in lessening the effects of climate change and securing a source of clean water for the generations to come. ●

Kurdistan's Pioneer Beekeeper



Peshraw Mahdi

is a freelance journalist and photographer with substantial experience in the field, having worked for numerous media agencies over several years. He has won multiple awards in photojournalism.



Rojin Khasraw embodies the multi-faceted mosaic within the Kurdistan Region, building success as a young woman in a niche industry that delights the breakfast tables of her fellow citizens and, increasingly, those around the world. Rojin, who is 30 years old, has devoted more than three years of her life to beekeeping, transforming it into a sustainable livelihood. Her journey mirrors the broader triumphs within the KRI's internationally renowned honey industry.

The Kurdistan Region's honey industry currently boasts around 700,000 beehives managed by 16,000 beekeepers and spans diverse terrains, from Sakran's peaks to Nineveh's plains and the mountains of Hawraman. The production of honey has long been pivotal in shaping the region's economic prosperity.

Khasraw, known as the pioneering female beekeeper of Halabja, has not only expanded her hive count from 30 to over 70, but has also earned her place in the tight-knit beekeeping community. Living in the heart of the Kurdistan Region's famed pomegranate region, which is abundant in fruits, walnuts, and fine oils, she strategically cares for her bees so that they thrive amid the natural bounty of their surroundings.

Her meticulous approach involves placing hives across varied landscapes, from the mountainous areas of Sharbazher to Hawar and Hawraman, ensuring the ex-

“
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traction of pure, natural honey. “This year’s harvest promises abundance, compensating for the previous year,” Rojin confidently states, alluding to the challenges that any young entrepreneur faces.

“Although it was challenging at the outset – from bee stings due to my lack of expertise to the skepticism of those around me that thought I was undertaking an insurmountable task, I persisted. I faced obstacles within my community, with people asserting that beekeeping was too arduous and essen-

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Recognized around the world for its superior quality, Kurdistan’s honey has recently witnessed soaring demand
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tially impossible. However, I refused to give up,” she recalls.

“Thanks to personal conviction and the unwavering support of my family, I persevered through it all. Now, I stand with my own project, aspiring to expand it in the future,” Rojin adds.

International demand

Kurdistan’s honey recently clinched the title of the best honey in Asia at the 16th Conference of the Asian Apiculture Association held in Saudi Arabia in



■ *Rojin Khasraw poses for the camera amidst her apiary.*



■ *Rojin Khasraw tends to her beehives at her apiary.*

August 2023. This accolade followed the success in 2009, when a honey from the KRI secured the top spot in an international competition in Paris.

In line with the Kurdistan Regional Government’s (KRG) vision to diversify the economy, support farmers, and empower the private sector, two tons of Kurdistan’s premium honey were delivered to Qatar by air in November 2023. An additional ton has been sold to local and national retailers in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, further supporting Kurdistan’s hardworking beekeepers. This shipment is set to appear on shelves next month.

This initiative, backed by the KRG Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, the KRG Prime Minister’s Office, and the private sector, involved over 200 beekeepers, generating nearly 100 jobs and forging new relationships with retailers in Qatar and the Gulf. Harvested from beehives across the KRI, this effort is poised to lay the groundwork for increased exports and foster new bilateral trade opportunities between the KRI and its international commercial partners.

Recognized around the world for its superior quality, Kurdistan’s honey has recently witnessed soaring demand. With a production of approximately

550 tons in 2023, the region aims to meet burgeoning international interest, signaling the potential for additional production growth in the future.

Kurdistan boasts three distinct honey types, including 100% natural honey that is derived from mountainous flora and those sourced from semi-artificial farms that still maintain high purity levels. The third type, which contains sugar, caters to specific preferences but differs in its composition.

Determining the best honey involves evaluating various criteria, encompassing quality, taste, color, and several other factors that define its excellence. ●

Advocating for Kurdish Rights and Culture

Kurdistan Chronicle

The Washington Kurdish Institute (WKI), a non-profit organization founded by Dr. Najmaldin Karim headquartered in Washington, D.C., operates with a steadfast mission to raise public awareness about Kurdish issues and safeguard human, cultural, and political rights across Kurdistan. This educational institution actively contributes to the development of Kurdistan's civil society, enhances access to Kurdish cultural and educational resources, and advocates for effective solutions to Kurdish-related concerns.

Mission and activities

WKI employs diverse strategies to fulfill its mission, ranging from conducting in-depth research on Kurdish issues to organizing conferences and events. The institute is a prolific publisher of reports and articles, providing valuable insights into the complexities of Kurdish culture, history, and contemporary challenges. Additionally, WKI plays a pivotal role in advocating for Kurdish rights on both the domestic and international fronts, engaging with the U.S. government and various international entities.

Key initiatives

WKI has emerged as a leading voice in the global Kurdish community, serving as a valuable resource for information on various Kurdish issues. Some of its key initiatives include:

- **Educational outreach:** The institute educates the public on Kurdish culture, history, and news through initiatives such as Kurdish language classes, the production of Kurdish-related news, and dissemination of other relevant information.

- **Humanitarian activities:** WKI actively engages in humanitarian efforts, providing crucial support through medical treatment, research, and training to address the needs of the Kurdish population.

- **Campaign against chemical weapons:** The institute campaigns against the possession, proliferation, and use of chemical weapons, working towards a safer and more secure environment for the people of Kurdistan.

- **Environmental advocacy:** WKI is committed to monitoring and improving Kurdistan's environmental health,



recognizing the importance of sustainable practices for the well-being of the region.

- **Capacity building:** The institute focuses on building and improving the capacity of non-governmental organizations, civic organizations, and community groups in Kurdistan, fostering a stronger and more resilient civil society.

Origins

The idea for establishing WKI sprang from Dr. Karim's extensive experience leading the Kurdish National Congress of North America. Driven by a passion



Various delegations from Kurdish political parties engaging in discussions with Kurdish and American scholars, alongside American intellectuals, at the Washington Kurdish Institute.



for the Kurdish cause, he founded the WKI to create a platform that could effectively address the multifaceted challenges faced by the Kurdish community.

The distinctive aspect of WKI lies in its non-partisan approach to the Kurdish issue, encompassing all four regions of

Kurdistan. The institute places a central focus on the security and existence of Kurdistan, emphasizing a comprehensive perspective. Notably, WKI has welcomed numerous Kurdish leaders from different parts of Kurdistan.

Dr. Karim, in his role as the head of WKI, played a pivotal



role in facilitating the peace accords between the Kurdistan Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in 1999. Before this significant achievement, Dr. Karim's work at WKI served as a foundational element in establishing the Voice of America-Kurdish service.

tial conference on Capitol Hill in 2019, where three U.S. senators were hosted.

In March 2021, the board members unanimously elected Sierwan Najmaldin Karim as the new president of WKI, ensuring the continuation of his father's legacy and work. Since assuming this role, Sierwan has been instrumental in

non-partisan approach. We take pride in raising awareness for a stateless nation enduring a century of attacks. Serving as a vital hub, WKI provides updates, news, and reports on Kurdistan, reaching thousands worldwide. Building on Dr. Najmaldin's legacy, we continue to thrive, hosting leaders from all parts of Kurdistan in recent years. I frequently



Furthermore, Dr. Karim orchestrated a series of conferences and meetings at WKI, where distinguished guests, including U.S. diplomats, congress members, Kurdish leaders, and media outlets, convened. These events effectively echoed the enduring struggle of the Kurdish nation, showcasing the institute's commitment to fostering dialogue and understanding on a global scale.

Until his passing, Dr. Karim dedicated himself tirelessly to overseeing WKI's operations. His commitment was evident, notably in organizing a substan-

hosting numerous events, welcoming Kurdish representatives, and uniting the Kurdish voice in Washington. Currently, he is at the forefront of leading WKI's team towards new initiatives, including the production of weekly visual reports on Kurdistan and topics related to the disputed territories.

Speaking with Kurdistan Chronicle, he shared the following: "Since its founding in 1996 by my late father, Dr. Najmaldin Karim, the WKI has been a steadfast advocate for Kurds across Kurdistan, championing their cultural, political, and human rights with a

visit Kurdistan to connect with leaders and citizens, gaining insights into their challenges."

As a beacon of advocacy and education, the Washington Kurdish Institute stands as a dedicated entity working tirelessly to amplify the Kurdish voice. Through its research, publications, events, and advocacy efforts, WKI continues to play a crucial role in shaping global perspectives on Kurdish issues and contributing to the betterment of Kurdistan's society. ●

A Digital Path to Political and Economic Autonomy



Robert D. Manning, currently a Professor of Management, Finance, and Public Policy at the University of Kurdistan-Hewler in Erbil, has made significant contributions to international academic journals with his scholarly articles. He is also the recipient of multiple awards in the United States.

The continuing struggle for political autonomy defines the Kurdish experience in Iraq. Today, equally important is the struggle for autonomous economic development. This is underscored by the ongoing disagreement over the equitable distribution of revenue from the Iraqi energy sector. The political factors responsible for the (in)ability of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to pay employee salaries and necessary expenses for improving quality of life in the Kurdistan Region are well understood. What is less clear, and is obscured by a complex web of dependent relationships with the Central Bank of Iraq, are the obstacles to developing a modern financial system. This includes currency-exchange volatility that exists outside of the control of the Kurdistan Region banking system.

Chicken or egg: When is finance the key to economic development?

Each day, the modernization of the Kurdistan Region financial system increases in importance, with more students graduating into the Iraqi labor market, even as oil revenues are projected to decline over the next decade. Indeed, a steadily increasing share of job growth and higher standard of living in the Kurdistan Region will be generated by a more dynamic and better-capitalized financial sector.

A robust and highly profitable banking system offers convenient digital services; lower cost loans to consumers and businesses; automated credit scoring systems; a wider range of financial products and services, including consumer investment and insurance products; sophisticated risk-management

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The political factors responsible for the (in)ability of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to pay employee salaries and necessary expenses for improving quality of life in the Kurdistan Region are well understood
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policies; highly skilled and efficient employees who are better compensated; improved bank capital structures; greater social trust that encourages patriotic consumer deposits; targeted financial education and literacy programs; new consumer legal protections; and, eventually, investment banking capabilities for integration into global capital markets. Together, they will contribute to the economic diversification of Kurdistan with more highly paid and dynamic jobs.

Does all that sound naively optimistic? Does it not seem feasible with the current resource constraints? Let's examine the puzzle.

A five-step plan for modernizing the Kurdistan Region financial system

The key to successfully modernizing the

Kurdistan Region's financial system is to design and implement its development as a series of interlocking pieces that constitute a three-dimensional puzzle. The digital foundation has been laid by KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani with the creation of bank accounts for all KRG government employees. This not only offers more financial services to city residents, but also bridges the urban-rural gap in accessing modern banking services.

is essential for progressing to the next phases – that is, the direct deposit of government employee salaries in trustworthy banks with unique UPI account numbers. This is the culmination of a complex technological integration between employers, banks, and digital payment platforms. Cash can be withdrawn with bank-issued payment cards at ATMs, while KRG government services can be conveniently paid through this digital payment system. Signifi-

cant profits – by using payment cards. This new source of bank revenue will help to pay for the costs of expanding the merchant acceptance and processing network.

The marketing campaign will begin by enlisting major grocery store chains, food service and utility companies, and petrol stations that accept electronic payment cards in other countries. During this early phase, the analysis of



An overhead perspective captures Erbil, the vibrant capital of Kurdistan Region.

My recommendation is five interrelated steps that build on the institutional development of each preceding phase. With the progression to each new step, a pilot project with a select group of regional banks and their customers will test each new “piece” or component of the modernizing Kurdistan Region financial system.

Step One: First and most importantly, Prime Minister Barzani has successfully established the digital foundation that

currently, this is the beginning of a cultural transformation, as Kurdistan Region residents transition from face-to-face bank relationships to the convenience of impersonal digital financial services.

Step Two: Kurdistan Region's banks must expand their retail networks for accepting digital payment cards. This entails cultivating merchants' willingness to pay small transaction fees to member banks since consumers will increase their purchases – and thus mer-

aggregated payment data will become the basis for compiling consumer and household spending profiles for creating credit-scoring systems. At the same time, member banks must establish sophisticated risk management departments with specially trained staff. This includes assessing the impact of interest rate risk on portfolio management policies as well as household consumer credit capacity for extending future loans and corporate lines of credit.

Step Three: For many reasons, the lack of trust in the Kurdistan Region's depository institutions has led to the undercapitalization of the financial system. This severely limits banks' ability to increase consumer and commercial lending with lower cost loans. In order to increase bank liquidity, major savings campaigns will be required to encourage the growth of household bank deposits. Achieving this goal requires a combination of promoting patriotic savings accounts, household financial incentives, and greater institutional oversight.

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The Kurdistan Region's depository institutions has led to the undercapitalization of the financial system
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First, the Kurdistan Region business community will benefit and seek to invest in the highly profitable “member” banks of the modernizing financial system. This is due to greater lending capability arising from increased household bank deposits, which will underwrite an internationally managed deposit insurance program. The membership costs for these selected banks will include initial fees to join and quarterly insurance premiums based on the size of bank deposits. This expense will be paid from increasing bank revenue that is generated from a much higher loan volume. Second, consumer incentives must be enhanced with share-based financial returns for rewarding deposit retention as well as eligibility for new financial products such as high-status ATM payment cards or credit cards. Third, greater consumer confidence in depository financial institutions must be reinforced by social or political marketing campaigns. They must urge patriotic support for a healthy Kurdistan Region financial system by increasing household deposits.

Lastly, with increasing bank loan portfolios based on more sophisticated risk management systems, third-party prudential supervision audits must be sensitive to risk-adjusted capital reserve ratios and interest rate risk. Greater household confidence in the modern banking system will generate sustained job growth independent of volatile oil revenues, a greater variety of financial services, lower cost financial products, and sharply increased bank profits.

Step Four: The next phase requires the development of enhanced institutional capacity, as well as consumer and investor confidence among participating depository institutions. To improve bank efficiency and profitability requires the ongoing development of: (1) a household credit reporting system for improved underwriting of consumer and business loans; (2) a debt collection system with bureaus in Baghdad for coordinated asset retrieval and liquidation; and (3) wealth management services, including international investment and insurance products. These three components will attract foreign investment and new technology that will smoothly integrate into the Kurdistan Region financial system.

Meanwhile, improving consumer trust will require the establishment of: (4) an administrative agency for issuing regulatory policies and enforcing contractual consumer rights and protections arising from new financial services and products; and (5) financial literacy programs in coordination with public schools and private financial institutions to identify best practices in household budgeting and the use of new financial services and products.

Step Five: The final piece of the puzzle is the development of investment banking capabilities for integration with global capital markets. This phase increases the liquidity of the Kurdistan Region financial system by packaging “bundles” of consumer and commercial loans from member banks to create asset-backed securities (ABS). With sophisticated credit scoring and debt collection policies, the performance of these securities will be accurately estimated according to international valuation standards.

The sale of ABS products to international investors will sharply increase bank profitability, greatly enhance bank liquidity, and increase loans to borrowers at lower costs. This is a “win-win” for the healthy growth of the banking sector, domestic investors, consumer borrowers, and Kurdistan Region businesses in need of capital and credit facilities. The first series of ABS sales could be negotiated with Middle East sovereign wealth funds to establish baseline valuations.

Conclusion

Future economic expansion, sectoral diversification, and robust job growth in the Kurdistan Region depend on the ongoing transformation of the financial system. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Barzani, the critical first step has been achieved, with the creation and integration of new pieces of the financial services puzzle currently in development by the KRG. Greater household convenience and lower cost products and services will generate increased consumer confidence as reflected in increased bank deposits. Together, these results will generate greater bank profitability, consumer and commercial loans, domestic job growth, and foreign investment in the financial sector.

Soon, the modern financial technology will be at your fingertips. Your ATM bank card will become a SMART card with payment and credit functionalities that will be accepted throughout the Kurdistan Region and eventually around the world. Remember, Rome was not built in a day. A modern financial system will not be, either. But, the future is much closer than you think! ●



Explore the Kurdistan in America Podcast!

The official podcast of the Kurdistan Regional Government representation in the United States presented by Delovan Barwari



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Listen to stories shaping our global future through the Kurdish perspective.

In this episode, Dr. Yerevan Saeed shares his academic journey, including his impressive accomplishment of earning a PhD in Peace and Conflict Resolution from George Mason University. We'll also explore his role as the Mustafa Barzani Scholar in Residence.

Profile:

Dr. Yerevan Saeed is the Mustafa Barzani Scholar in Residence at American University and a Non-Resident Fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute. He obtained a PhD in Peace and Conflict Resolution from George Mason University.



Michigan's Thriving Chaldean Community



Shamal Abdulla

is a journalist with 18 years of experience in the field. He has held a number of prestigious positions, including news director at Kurdistan 24 and the editor-in-chief of BasNews.

Michigan, renowned for its cultural diversity, boasts a vibrant tapestry woven with various ethnic communities, among which the Chaldean community stands as one of the most dynamic. Sprawled across various cities across

The Chaldea, hailing from the historical region of the Middle East that spans Iraq, Syria, and parts of Iran and Turkey, have sought refuge abroad due to the enduring political and social unrest that has destabilized their home region. Thanks to



the state, the Chaldean community has seamlessly integrated into Michigan's cultural fabric, bringing with it a rich blend of traditions, history, and resilience.

Michigan's welcoming environment and economic prospects, the state has become a pivotal hub for Chaldean immigrants in the United States, with the Detroit metropolitan area serving as its epicenter. Cities



The Kurdistan Chronicle team paid a visit to the Chaldean Community Foundation on January 25, 2024.

like Sterling Heights, West Bloomfield, and Warren have experienced a notable influx of Chaldean families, contributing significantly to the cultural diversity and commercial dynamism of these communities.

The Chaldean Community Foundation A distinctive feature of the Chaldean community's presence in Michigan is its entrepreneurial spirit. Many Chaldea have successfully established businesses, ranging from small family-owned shops to larger enterprises. The Chaldean Chamber of Commerce, headquartered in Farmington Hills, plays a crucial role in supporting and promoting Chaldean businesses, fostering economic growth and prosperity within the community.

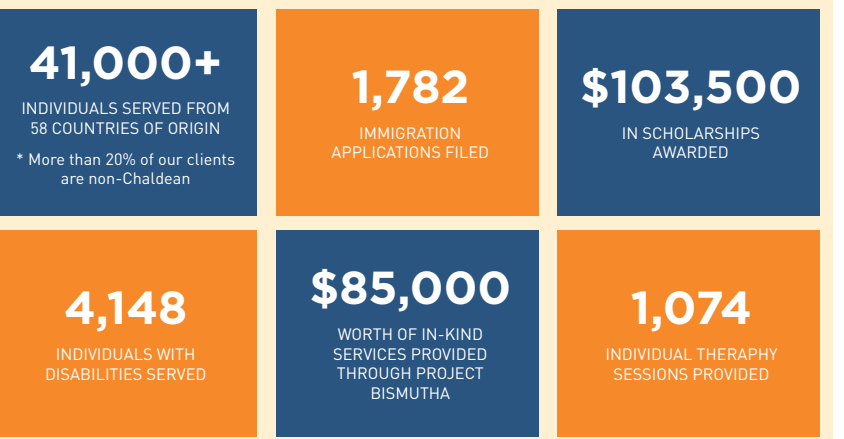
The Chaldean Community Foundation (CCF), a nonprofit organization, has undergone a transformative journey since 2011, evolving into a full-service human and social service agency to cater to the needs of the Chaldean

community in the United States and Michigan. Originally aiming to serve 400 people per year, the CCF surpassed expectations, providing services to 4,000 individuals within the first year. Moreover, its 1,500 square-foot facility serves as a haven, offering human, health, social, and community

services to new refugee arrivals, ethnic immigrant communities, and low-income and disadvantaged populations. By 2014, the number of people served by the CCF surged to an impressive 16,000. Today, the foundation serves more than 41,000 individuals annually, from 58 different countries of origin.

EVERY DONATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Generous donations helped us to reach numerous milestones in 2023





Contributing to Michigan’s cultural landscape, the Chaldean community actively enriches the state’s diverse tapestry. From religious festivals to traditional music and dance, Chaldeans preserve and share their vibrant traditions. The fusion of Middle Eastern and Assyrian flavors in Chaldean cuisine has also garnered popularity among the state’s residents, with Chaldean-owned restaurants offering authentic dishes that captivate the taste buds.

Martin Manna, President of the CCF, emphasizes the pivotal role of the foundation as a hub for the community in the United States. “We offer various services including language courses aimed at connecting the next generation of immigrants with their roots,” Manna explains. In addition, the CCF provides legal advisory assistance to the Chaldean community as well as to Kurdish and Iraqi individuals.

President Masoud Barzani’s emphasis on standing together to protect peaceful coexistence in Kurdistan resonates deeply with the Chaldean community. Manna acknowledges the importance of diversity in Kurdistan and the collective responsibility to safeguard this haven while promoting peaceful coexistence.

The Chaldean diaspora community



“
Manna acknowledges the importance of diversity in Kurdistan and the collective responsibility to safeguard this haven while promoting peaceful coexistence
”

Religion holds a significant place in Chaldean culture, with many practicing Chaldean Catholicism. Churches and religious institutions serve not only as places of worship but also as community centers where cultural events and gatherings take place.

The foundation’s cultural programs encompass courses in music and arts, culminating in annual exhibitions on special occasions. Manna underscores the shared destiny and values between the Chaldean community and the Kurds, expressing gratitude to the Kurdistan Regional Government for their unwavering support.

in the United States stands out for its remarkable achievements in both business and culture. Numerous success stories across the country make it a source of pride, embodying resilience, cultural preservation, and a commitment to diversity. ●

Youth Participation in Politics



Hajar Sadoon

is a lecturer at College of Political Sciences at the University of Duhok in the Kurdistan Region.



Mohammed Tatarkhan

is a lecturer at College of Political Sciences at the University of Duhok in the Kurdistan Region.

The participation of all social sectors and classes in public life is vital for the establishment of a healthy and vibrant democratic system and for political systems to be representative. Young people comprise a large share of societies around the globe, and when they are excluded, disfranchised, or disengaged from political processes, they become voiceless and unable to shape the decision-making that affects their lives. A robust political culture thus hinges on the political inclusion of the youth, their relationship with politics and political processes, and the level of their political awareness.

There is growing concern in many countries, particularly in Western democracies, that youth participation in formal political processes is declining, despite the fact that young people are participating in politics in other ways, including campaigning on behalf of humanitarian or environmental issues. Engagement in formal political processes is not, after all, restricted to voting in elections; it also includes participation in political parties and in institutional political processes and policy-making bodies, such as parliaments, public administration, and government more broadly.

However, a closer look reveals that the opposite is happening in the Kurdistan Region, which has seen a steady rise in young people holding positions in public institutions, including in its legislative body, the Kurdistan Region Parliament, since the early 1990s.

Growing participation

Since its establishment, the nascent political system in the Kurdistan Region has empha-

sized youth involvement in formal political processes and decision-making bodies, paving the way for their full and active participation. The reasons for this can be traced to the unique nature of the Kurdish national liberation movement. First of all, young individuals carried the burden of the movement and comprised most of the *peshmerga* forces. Additionally, many in the highest echelons of the current political leadership of the Kurdistan Regional Government joined politics at a young age, alternating between political activities and fighting for the cause of national liberation.

“Youth involvement in the Kurdistan Region’s public institutions has grown over time”

Youth involvement in the Kurdistan Region’s public institutions has grown over time. The number of young members of the Parliament (MPs) has increased gradually since the first Parliament in 1992, which had 12 young MPs. While the second Parliament in 2005 saw a slight decrease to 10 young MPs, the third Parliament in 2009 more than doubled that number to 22. The trend continued with the fourth Parliament in 2013, which saw an increase to 27. A major increase occurred with the fifth Parliament in 2018, which brought the number of young MPs to 37. This trend may reflect a greater willingness by the youth to

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE KURDISTAN PARLIAMENT



FIRST TERM 1992-2005

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Number of Parliamentarians..... | 105 |
| Members under the age of 35..... | 12 |
| Number of Permanent Committees..... | 14 |
| Head of Permanent Committees under the age of 35..... | 0 |
| Number of Political Party Factions..... | 3 |
| Head of Party Factions under the age of 35..... | 0 |

SECOND TERM 2005-2009

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Number of Parliamentarians..... | 111 |
| Members under the age of 35..... | 10 |
| Number of Permanent Committees..... | 14 |
| Head of Permanent Committees under the age of 35..... | 1 |
| Number of Political Party Factions..... | 6 |
| Head of Party Factions under the age of 35..... | 0 |

THIRD TERM 2009-2013

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Number of Parliamentarians..... | 111 |
| Members under the age of 35..... | 22 |
| Number of Permanent Committees..... | 18 |
| Head of Permanent Committees under the age of 35..... | 1 |
| Number of Political Party Factions..... | 16 |
| Head of Party Factions under the age of 35..... | 1 |

FOURTH TERM 2013-2017

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Number of Parliamentarians..... | 111 |
| Members under the age of 35..... | 27 |
| Number of Permanent Committees..... | 22 |
| Head of Permanent Committees under the age of 35..... | 5 |
| Number of Political Party Factions..... | 16 |
| Head of Party Factions under the age of 35..... | 1 |

FIFTH TERM 2018-2022

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Number of Parliamentarians..... | 111 |
| Members under the age of 35..... | 37 |
| Number of Permanent Committees..... | 19 |
| Head of Permanent Committees under the age of 35..... | 6 |
| Number of Political Party Factions..... | 15 |
| Head of Party Factions under the age of 35..... | 0 |

Number of Young Members of Parliament



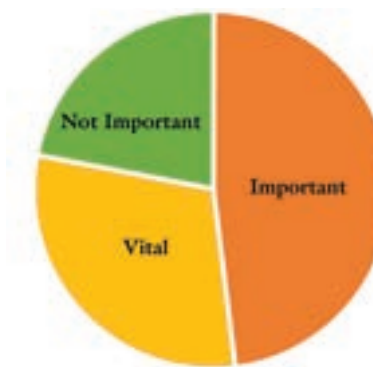
| Term | Position and age when taking office | Average age |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| First Term | Speaker of Parliament | 46 Years |
| | Deputy Speaker of Parliament | 39 Years |
| | Parliament Secretary | 46 Years |
| Second Term | Speaker of Parliament | 56 Years |
| | Deputy Speaker of Parliament | 51 Years |
| | Parliament Secretary | 59 Years |
| Third Term | Speaker of Parliament | 55 Years |
| | Deputy Speaker of Parliament | 59 Years |
| | Parliament Secretary | 63 Years |
| Fourth Term | Speaker of Parliament | 35 Years |
| | Deputy Speaker of Parliament | 59 Years |
| | Parliament Secretary | 42 Years |
| | Parliament Secretary | 35 Years |
| Fifth Term | Speaker of Parliament | 41 Years |
| | Deputy Speaker of Parliament | 42 Years |
| | Parliament Secretary | 40 Years |

Age of the Presidium of Parliament

engage actively in political processes and from the electorate to vote for them.

The same trend can also be seen in the allocation of decision-making posts in the Parliament, where a growing number of young MPs are taking up positions in the presidium, committees, and decision-making bodies. In the first Parliament in 1992, no permanent committee was headed by a young MP, but in the second and third Parliaments, a young MP headed one committee. This number leaped to five and six in the fourth and fifth terms, respectively. A similar trend can be seen when considering who heads the parliamentary factions. It is clear that the youth can gain the trust of society and the region's political parties to be elected as representatives.

In a survey conducted by both the authors in Duhok Governorate in April 2023, which saw the participation of 1,823 young people from the age of 18 to 23, the following question was posed: are politics and state affairs important to you? The result was as overwhelming, with 30% saying they were vital, 48% important, and 22% not important.



Additionally, the authors asked whether they believed that their participation in formal political processes as a young citizen was important. In similar results, 37% of respondents said it was vital, 43% important, and 20% not important.



While surveys are not perfect, the responses reveal a clear reality: 78% of young respondents consider politics and state affairs to be important matters that require their attention and 80% consider youth participation in formal political processes important.

The global context

The Kurdish experience of increasing youth attention to formal political processes and participation in legislative bodies is not representative of many other countries, in which youth have grown increasingly passive, as reflected in their decreasing involvement in formal political processes. The rate of parliamentarians under the age of 35 in the fifth term of the Kurdistan Region Parliament was 33.3% and the rate under the age of 40 was 49.5%.

“
The rate of parliamentarians under the age of 35 in the fifth term of the Kurdistan Region Parliament was 33.3% and the rate under the age of 40 was 49.5%
”

Indeed, this is a remarkable achievement when compared with many other democracies. For instance, the rate of parliamentarians under the age of 40 is 27.4% in the National Assembly of France, 21.7% in the UK House of Commons, and 15.4% in the Spanish Congress of Deputies. The same can be applied to many Asian and Middle Eastern countries as well. The rate of parliamentarians under the age of 40 is 10.7% in India, 10.7% in Turkey, and 11.8% in Algeria. This is illustrative of the fact that, although the youth comprise a large proportion of the population in many of these countries, youth participation in official decision-making bodies is low when compared to the Kurdistan Region. ●

A Pioneering Effort in Environmental Conservation



Dr. Mahmood Mahmood

is an Economist and holds a PhD from the University of Erlangen, Germany. He has worked as researcher at the center for Iraq Studies in Erlangen – Germany.

Despite a challenging history of war and upheaval, the Barzan area is home to the Kurdistan Region's first de facto national park. Founded by Sheikh Abdulsalam Barzani and further developed and expanded under the guidance of Sheikh Ahmad Barzani, the park reflects the local culture's commitment to environmental protection, as hunting is prohibited and fishing and lumber activities are strictly regulated. The Barzani's commitment to nature preservation during difficult times has transformed the area into a natural gem, standing as a testament

to environmental conservation in the Kurdistan Region.

The global significance of such efforts is palpable, both considering the need for a continued commitment to environmental protection and the potential economic benefits tied to tourism and development. The existence of this protected area highlights the value of implementing strategies for expanding forested areas, drafting modern environmental laws, and seeking international collaboration for further advancement in environmental standards.

Ultimately, the Barzan area provides an ecological haven for flora and fauna and symbolizes the vital connection between humans and nature, while playing an important role in the history of Kurdistan's revolutions.

Cultivating Barzan

The United States established its first national park in 1872, driven by a collective vision to protect plants, animals, and their habitats from human degradation. The primary goal was to preserve the ecological system, safeguard

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The Barzan area is home to the Kurdistan Region's first *de facto* national park

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To this day, this area remains a protected haven, teeming with diverse wildlife, including rare species like tigers and bears

”



“
 Beyond its ecological importance, this protected area could serve as a dynamic instrument for the economic development of the region
 ”

■ Dore Canyon in the Barzan area of Kurdistan Region.

endangered animal and plant species, and maintain the delicate balance of life within these areas.

The cultivation of the Barzan area is an exceptional testament to untouched nature that has persevered despite the challenges presented by human conflict. Amid daily bombardments and attacks, Barzan became a symbol of resilience, in addition to embodying the principles of a national park. This historic initiative reflected the core values of the local culture: prohibiting the killing or hunting of wild animals, regulating fishing seasons, and imposing restrictions on tree felling in the forest. To this day, this area remains a protected haven, teeming with diverse wildlife, including rare species like tigers and bears.

During harsh winters, the people of Barzan refrained from felling trees for heating, and even during periods of food scarcity, the hunting of wild animals was strictly regulated. The environmental protection measures taken by the Barzanis, despite their high cost, have transformed the area into a natural gem. Notably, it stands as one of the oldest *de facto* national parks in the Middle East.

Global ecological significance

Globally, the significance of such areas is increasingly recognized, as environmental protection evolves into a complex global issue. The environmental sacrifices made by the people in Barzan over the last century should be upheld by subsequent generations, fostering an enduring culture of environmental protection. Establishing an educational framework that promotes environmental consciousness is also pivotal for achieving and maintaining high-quality standards, reflecting the distinctive culture of the Barzan area. This framework should guide future efforts, including the development of facilities and the provision of environmental education for the wider public. The region’s forward-thinking stance has the potential to enable the introduction of new standards in environmental protection, such as waste separation and management.

Beyond its ecological importance, this protected area could serve as a dynamic instrument for the economic development of the region. Economic progress will heighten awareness among residents, making them active stewards of the protected area. Similar protected areas worldwide play a crucial role in environmental conservation.

Moreover, this unique example of untouched nature should be showcased to both local and foreign tourists. The area can benefit from innovative techniques to attract tourism, including expanding the forested areas by planting millions of native trees. Meanwhile, enforcing modern environmental laws to address new challenges and seeking membership in international environmental protection organizations, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature, can facilitate knowledge sharing and field studies to categorize and elevate environmental standards. ●

Unveiling the Ancient Civilizations of the Kurdistan Region



Goran Shakhawan

is a Kurdish-American journalist and author based in the United States. He has covered news for several Kurdish news outlets and was a former senior correspondent for Kurdistan24 in Erbil and Washington D.C. He has published several books in Kurdish.

Let's embark on an extraordinary journey through the archaeological wonders of Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). In this comprehensive trip, I will explore the majestic and captivating Erbil Citadel, the mesmerizing Shanidar Cave, the prehistoric sites of Jarmo and Bestansur, and the archaeological wonders of Qalat Said Ahmadian. These sites offer a window into the cultural heritage of the Kurdistan Region, which boasts a rich history spanning thousands of years, allowing us to connect with our ancestors. I will guide you to unravel the mysteries and marvel at the remarkable achievements of these historical landmarks.

A citadel standing proudly in the heart of Erbil

The Erbil Citadel is an ancient city center and a symbol of pride for the Kurdish people. With a history dating back over 6,000 years, it is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and stands as a testament to human resilience and endurance. It has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2014.

Throughout its history, Erbil Citadel has been a significant center for various civilizations, including the Assyrian Empire, and has witnessed the rise and fall of empires, the spread of Christianity, and the Muslim conquest of 642. The citadel's towering mud-brick walls, narrow alleys, and historic buildings – including palaces, mosques, and schools – offer a glimpse into the city's past.

The citadel's strategic location has also made it a hub for trade and cultural exchange throughout history. Over the years, it has suffered damage and neglect but ongoing restoration efforts that have been undertaken since 2007 by the High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalization are ensuring its preservation for generations to come.

Erbil Citadel is not only important to the local community but also holds outstanding universal value for all of humanity. It serves as a reminder of the city's rich history, resilience, and continuity. Today, it attracts thousands of

visitors daily, allowing them to experience the heritage and cultural significance of the site.

A subterranean wonder hidden beneath the rugged mountains

With a history stretching tens of thousands of years, the mesmerizing Shanidar Cave is a natural marvel that showcases the awe-inspiring beauty of

nature. With its vast chambers, stalactites, and stalagmites, the cave offers a captivating experience for adventurers and nature enthusiasts alike. Exploring the depths of Shanidar Cave is like stepping into a hidden world, where time stands still, and the wonders of the underground realm unfold.

The cave was once a refuge for ancient peoples, serving as a shelter from harsh weather conditions and poten-

tial threats. In 1960, the archaeologist Ralph Solecki from the United States unearthed a burial site within Shanidar Cave, revealing the remains of 35 individuals interred over 10,000 years ago. This cemetery was found at the end of four seasons of excavation, during which time Solecki discovered something even more extraordinary: the partial remains of ten Neanderthal men, women, and children. Using mid-20th century techniques, the archaeologi-



A bird-eye view showcases the ancient citadel of Erbil, an architectural marvel in the Kurdistan Region.



Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

cal team could only date them to over 45,000 years ago.

Shanidar Cave also houses over 30 “proto-Neolithic” skeletons dating back to approximately 10,000 BC. One of these skeletons is displayed at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., having traveled over 6,000 miles from the KRI.

The cave’s intricate formations and

ethereal atmosphere evoke a sense of mystery and wonder. Guided tours take visitors through its chambers, highlighting the geological formations and sharing fascinating stories and myths associated with the cave.

The cradle of agriculture

Jarmo and Bestansur, two ancient archaeological sites located in the Sulay-

maniyah Governorate, hold the key to unraveling the beginnings of human civilization. Dating back thousands of years, these Neolithic settlements offer valuable insights into the human transition from hunter-gatherer societies to sedentary agricultural communities. Jarmo, also known as Qalat Jarmo, is an archaeological site that showcases the earliest signs of settled agricultural life.

Excavations led by University of Chi-

cago archaeologist Robert Braidwood uncovered circular mud-brick houses, communal buildings, and evidence of early domesticated crops at Jarmo. These findings paint a vivid picture of the daily lives of the ancient inhabitants and provide invaluable knowledge about the birth of farming practices.

Bestansur, on the other hand, stands as a remarkable example of an elaborate architectural ensemble from a crucial period in human history. The site, protected by law, boasts intact archaeological layers dating back to between 7,700 and 7,100 BC. It is the only archaeological site in the KRI that provides evidence for that period, making it globally significant in terms of its cultural and historical importance.

Both Jarmo and Bestansur offer a glimpse into the early stages of settled agricultural life and serve as important sites for understanding the Neolithic period. Beyond their historical significance, they also represent the birth of human ingenuity and the development of the social hierarchies that shape our modern societies. The inclusion of Bestansur on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List has helped to further ensure its protection and con-

servation. As an exceptional prehistoric site, it stands out among the most important historic sites in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq.

The two villages are, moreover, not just archaeological sites; they are windows into the past, offering a bridge between our hunter-gatherer ancestors and the agricultural revolution that transformed the world. Through continued research and preservation efforts, we can continue to uncover the secrets hidden within these ancient settlements and gain a greater appreciation for the remarkable journey of human civilization.

Qalat Said Ahmadan: A fortified hilltop settlement

Qalat Said Ahmadan is an important archaeological site located in the Peshdar Plain, north of Qaladiza, that stands as a reminder of the strategic importance of fortified settlements in ancient times.

This hilltop stronghold, believed to date back to the second millennium BC, provides a glimpse into the architectural and military advancements of the period. The remains of its defensive walls, towers, and gateways reveal the

site’s significance as a hub for regional trade and as a defensive bastion. Excavations have unearthed artifacts that shed light on the daily lives, trade networks, and interconnectedness of ancient civilizations.

Qalat Said Ahmadan’s location provided a vantage point for the ancient inhabitants to monitor surrounding areas and defend against potential threats. Moreover, the site’s remains offer insight into the urban planning, fortification techniques, and economic activities of the time. Discoveries such as pottery, jewelry, and tools showcase the cultural richness and trade connections that flourished in this region. This remarkable site provides tangible evidence of the rich history and cultural significance of Kurdistan.

As we explore the Erbil Citadel, Shanidar Cave, Jarmo, Bestansur and Qalat Said Ahmadan, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of preserving these archaeological wonders. Local authorities, along with international organizations, are dedicated to protecting and conserving these sites for future generations. By safeguarding our heritage, we ensure that the stories of our ancestors continue to be shared and appreciated. ●

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In 1960, archaeologist Ralph Solecki from the United States unearthed a burial site within Shanidar Cave, revealing the remains of 35 individuals interred over 10,000 years ago
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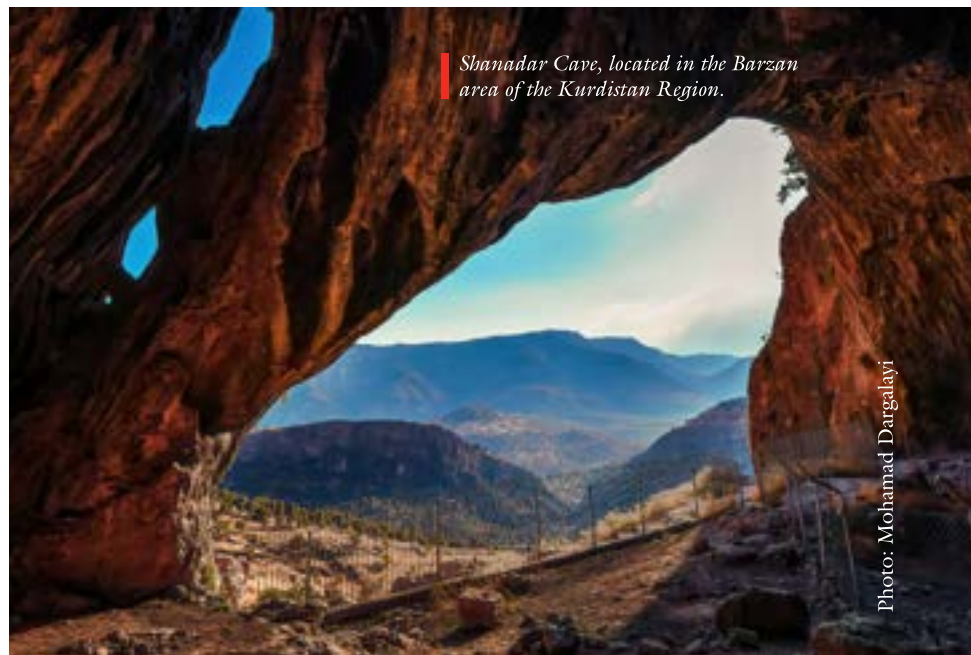


Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

Celîlê Celîl

The Protector of Kurdish Folklore



Jan Dost

is a prolific Kurdish poet, writer and translator. He has published several novels and translated a number of Kurdish literary masterpieces.

December 23, 2023, was a frigid morning. Flurries of snow fell gently, dispelling the gloominess that hovered over Vienna. The thick, joyous blanket of snow extended along Lassallestraße where we were staying, hovering over the pristine landscape of the Danube River.

We started our morning with a precautionary Covid-19 test as we would meet with the Kurdish scholar Celîlê Celîl. Born in 1936 in Yerevan, Celîl has spent his life collecting Kurdish folklore, transcribing love songs and folk proverbs from the mouths of storytellers and singers, and studying the history of the 19th century Kurdish uprisings.

With our test results negative, we set off to Celîl's home in the town of Eichgraben, approximately 30 kilometers west of Vienna. My wife and I were accompanied by my friend Suleiman Mahmoud, director of the Kurdish Cultural Institute of Vienna.

Recording the traditions of the past

Celîl and his sister Zine, who works as a translator, greet us with a hearty welcome, as is customary among Armenian Kurds. Zine leads us into a large hall with shelves of books ornamenting the walls. Celîl and I begin our conversation, and I dive right in with my first question:

"Who did you inherit your passion for books from?" I ask.

"My father, Casime Celîl, was very interested in books," he says. "Sometimes

he would bring home ten copies of each book. I would ask him, 'Why all these copies?', to which he would reply that Kurdistan would need them in the future."

"Where did your father inherit his love of books? From someone in his family?" I inquire.

"No. My father grew up in an orphanage in Armenia, and then studied electricity and worked at power stations in Yerevan. From 1928 to 1931, he worked and studied at the request of the Komsomol, a Soviet communist organization for youths aged 16 and older. Eventually he began collecting books and newspapers that talked about the Kurds. While in Yerevan, he heard about Isaak Maragulof, who was from the Syriac community and had apparently invented a Kurdish alphabet. He wrote to him, introducing himself and stating his wish to learn the Kurdish alphabet and to acquire books, to which Maragulof responded: 'If there are Kurds around you, we will send you a large number of books.' The Ministry of Culture had printed many propaganda brochures in Kurdish, and there were schools in Kurdish. When Kars was still under the Russians, Maragulof opened a Kurdish school in one of the villages where Assyrians and Kurds lived together. When power passed to the Soviets, he continued to teach Kurdish in Kurdish schools.

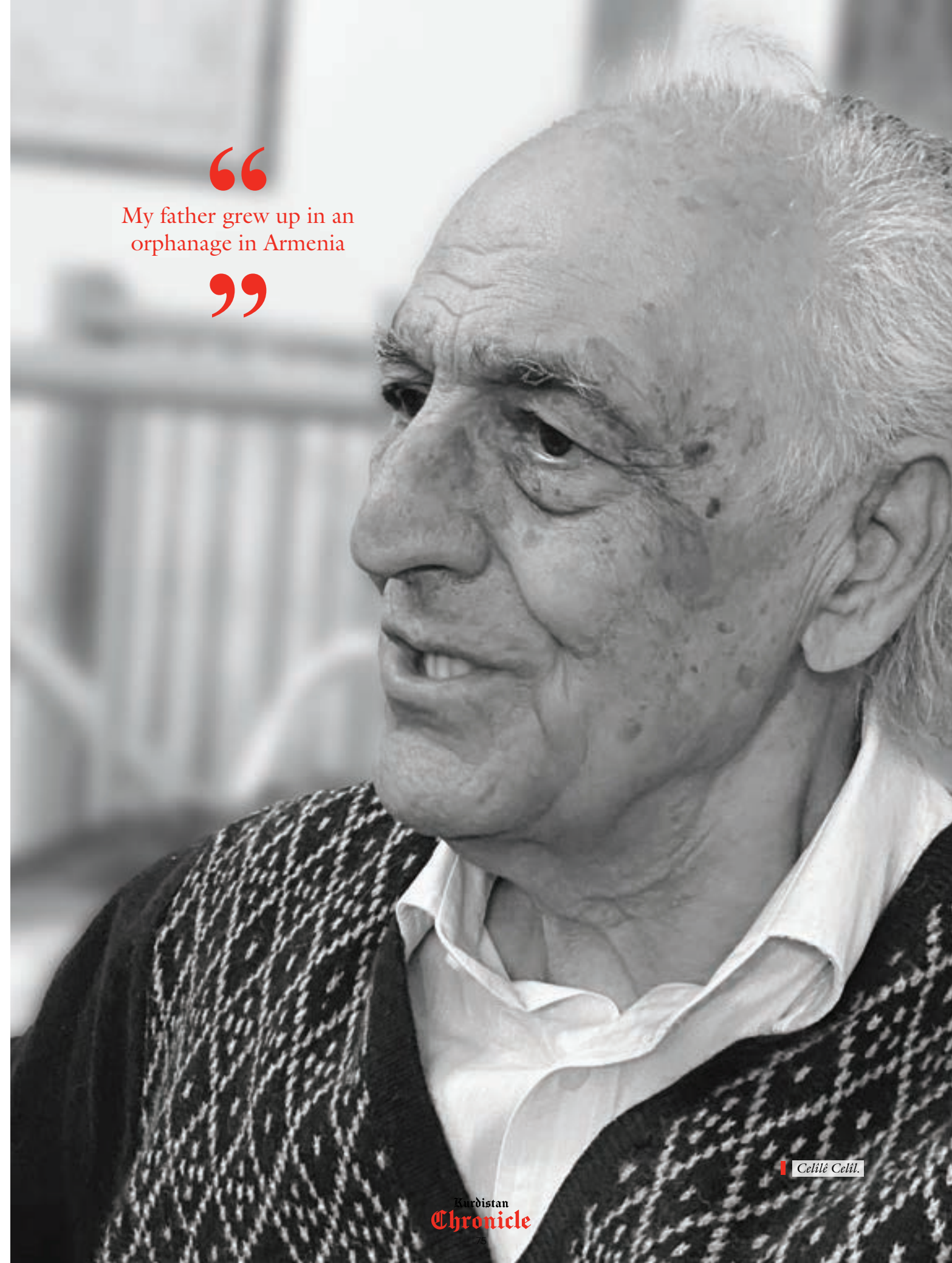
"Maragulof sent the books as promised, and now our house is filled with them.

"While working at Yerevan Polytechnic Institute, my father became responsible

“

My father grew up in an orphanage in Armenia

”



Celîlê Celîl.



Celil Celil holds the Kurdistan Chronicle Magazine in his hand, reflecting on current events.

for the Kurdish printing press, which printed political propaganda, books on medicine, and school curricula, and it was my father's habit to keep several copies of each. I brought three tons of books with me to Vienna, all in thirty or forty bags I bought from the market," he explains.

"Are there any books left there?" I wonder.

"No. Who would I leave them to?" he replies. "At one point, Shifa Barzani, an official responsible for the Kurdistan community in Europe and the United States, visited me, and I shared with him

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When Kars was still
under the Russians,
Maragulof opened a
Kurdish school in one
of the villages where
Assyrians and Kurds
lived together
”

that my father's will had stipulated that I give a copy of each book to Kurdish institutions. I am now fulfilling his will."

We begin to shift topics. "I transcribed many folk epics in Syria," Celil says. "In Kobani, I reproduced a famous, heartfelt song from the mouth of the folk singer, Baqi Xido, called 'Dilo'. Another called 'Hami Muse', which I transcribed in 1982 from the Qamishli singer Silo Koro, relates the uprising of some brave men from the Brazan Region of Kurdistan against forced conscription under the Ottomans. A second version came from an Armenian named Iskander who was singing in Kurdish in Shikhlar vil-

lage in Armenia. Iskandar was quite knowledgeable about *maqam* singing yet his voice was not that sweet. The same song was also sung by Cimoye Tozo."

"Sargis Haykouni also published it!" I exclaim.

"Yes, but I was unaware of his version,"

Celil explains. "He didn't sing it. I only document singers because my job is to collect folklore. Haykouni had witnessed some traumatic events and felt deep pain because of it, which is why he demanded that they be collected. He argued that Armenians who knew Kurdish songs should document them because they'd also serve their cause."

"What is the difference between Haykouni's version and yours?" I ask.

"My copy is distinguished by the fact that I was the one who collected it, deciphering it soon after my brother Ordixan died seventeen years ago," he says.

Celil pauses for a moment to read from *Sexishtik* poems composed by Kurds from Khorasan. *Sexishtik* is a short Kurdish poetry form consisting of three lines with one rhyme. It resembles the Japanese haiku and is characteristic of the Khorasan Kurds.

"Which Kurdish region is richest in folklore?" I inquire.

"Every place in Kurdistan has preserved the ancient traditions," he says. "Every Kurdish individual has a connection to folk heritage. I once traveled to Qamishli, where a Communist Party official received me and invited me to a public gathering. I told him that I would attend on the condition that folklore be the focus of our conversation. We then sat on chairs in a circle in a beautiful garden. I asked the people sitting to each recite something from folklore. Some at first protested and said, 'How on earth are we supposed to know about folklore?' to which I re-



Celil Celil is captured alongside Jan Dost in his personal library, sharing moments of intellectual exchange.

plied: 'Let the first of you say an old saying, then the next one follow, and continue in this way.' This worked, and beautiful Kurdish proverbs and sayings started to pour out."

"Our family, my sister Cemila, Ordixan and I, received an invitation from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Minister of Culture, Falak al-Din Kakai," Celil relates. "I didn't want to go at first. I was pessimistic that we, the three siblings, would travel and something terrible happen while we were on the same airplane. I sent my sister and brother. The KRG took a great care of them. They also received special care from the Barzanis, and Cemila and Ordixan returned very impressed by the care and hospitality they received."

The professor continues to talk excitedly, but I take advantage of a moment of silence to present him the latest copy

of *Kurdistan Chronicle*. He has already received the previous ten issues.

"This magazine is really necessary," he says. "It represents us in the best way possible. Other cultures must get to know more about our culture, realities, societies, and customs. They only know that we are freedom fighters. We are the kind of people who hardly ever agree among ourselves. But there are other beautiful things they should know about us."

When I asked him about his brother Ordixan, the researcher, Celil asks his nephew to bring his brother's book of Kurdish historical songs, along with their Russian translations.

As he peruses the pages, he says: "Many of the songs that my brother documented were performed by Armenian folk singers. Songs about the Sheikh



■ Casimé Celil (right) and his brother (left), embodying family ties and heritage.

Said rebellion, the Ararat uprising, and many others had not reached us. He told me to take these songs to several places to compare them. Once, he journeyed to an Armenian village to visit the house of a singer, Ise Varte – his name is Israel and Vart is his mother’s. Knowing that Ise’s mother had passed away one week earlier, he apologized but nevertheless inquired into whether he would sing. Ise replied: ‘Son! You went through all the trouble traveling from Leningrad to Yerevan and you came all this way and now you are my guest. How can you go back empty-handed?’

“He then proceeded to sing many sad, melodious epics that lauded the exploits of the brave. So we have benefited greatly from the Armenians, some of whom have served our culture and preserved a great deal of our folk heritage.”

Encountering Barzani

Shifting gears, we inquire about Celil’s encounters with Mulla Mustafa Barzani, with whom Celil met during the Kurdish leader’s long stay in the Soviet Union.

“Yes. I met him twice. Once he came to Yerevan, which was famous among the Kurds thanks to the Kurdish radio. Moscow and the Soviet government cared greatly about the Kurds of Armenia. Barzani arrived there for a brief visit just after the overthrow of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Said. He was an official guest of the state, and it was not easy to meet him. He was accompanied by Nado Mahmudov, a government official of Kurdish origin, as well as Siyaband Siyabandov, a hero of the Soviet Union who held a high position in the Communist Party of Armenia.

Barzani’s freedom to meet with people was limited, but he wanted to visit a village. The local authorities had no choice but to rush to install some nice furniture in a few homes. Barzani, aware of these political games, suggested that he visit a house randomly, where he discovered the true poverty of the people.

“My father met Barzani at the radio, and I was keen to meet him as well. At the time, I was in my last year of university. My father suggested I call my ‘Uncle’ Nado – not my real uncle, but the moniker is a sign of respect – and convey my interest. Uncle Nado loved me and, though there was very little time, he told me to come to the airport early the next morning. I did just that and found Barzani there with a small entourage. Excitedly, I told him,

“We, the young people here, are ready to join the revolution and fight. He replied: Son! We need you dearly. But not for fighting. I have many fighters. We will need you after we liberate our homeland. You will come to us then.”

“What about the second time you saw him?” I ask.

“The second time I saw him, in Tashkent, he had the same charisma. Professor Qanate Kurdo was in the Uzbek capital as a delegate of the University in Leningrad and head of the Department of Kurdish Studies and through him I met Barzani again. During their conversation, the epic of Dimdim Castle was discussed, and Kurdo mentioned that my brother Ordixan was working on this epic. Barzani said that among his fighters were those who knew and sang this epic.

“When Kurdo returned to Leningrad, he told Ordixan the story about what happened between him and Barzani. Ordixan asked how to reach these singers among his fighters, and Kurdo gave him his phone number in Moscow. In the summer of 1958, I was in Leningrad with Ordixan to learn about Soviet historical landmarks. Meanwhile, my mother rendezvoused with us in Moscow. The three of us called Barzani from a phone booth, told him the purpose of our visit, and related my mother’s wish to meet him. He accepted.

“Unfortunately, the international female students at our accommodation had seen our mother alone and taken her out to explore with them. So, we went to meet Barzani without her. The leader gave us a map of Kurdistan that was hanging on the wall in his room.”



■ Celil Celil recounts the story behind the map of Kurdistan gifted to him by the late Mustafa Barzani in 1958 during a visit to Moscow.

Sheikh Ubeydullah Al-Nahri’s revolution and Jilal’s doctoral dissertation

As noted earlier, Celil Celil had an interest in the Kurdish uprisings in the 19th century. His studies are significant in their own right; he has extensive knowledge of the primary sources that explain the disappearance of the local Kurdish emirates during this period. Celil’s academic devotion manifested in his doctoral dissertation on the revolution of Sheikh Ubeydullah Al-Nahri, which is considered the first uprising after the collapse of the Kurdish emirates, the result of the power vacuum that Kurdish regions witnessed after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878.

I ask Celil more about his academic research for the dissertation.

“I collected literary materials in several languages related to that period,” he says. “But I needed to read the archival record in Moscow of Russian

consulates and embassies. There, I found the documents and correspondence of those diplomatic bodies from Khoy, Salmas, Erzurum, and Istanbul, as well as the consular correspondence between them about events along the common border. These records enabled me to write about the uprising of Sheikh Ubeydullah Al-Nahri.”

“You published a book entitled *Why is the Camel Angry?*, which I read an Arabic translation of. What is the book about?” I ask.

“This book contains thirteen texts on folklore, including a letter to my father, a letter from August Jaba, a mid-19th century Russian consul in Erzurum, and other documents. My sister Zine translated this book into Russian,” he says.

A painting representing Mustafa Barzani catches my eye, so I ask him about it.

“It was drawn by a colleague of mine at

the university in 1957. He had copied it from a magazine. At that time, the Soviet press was publishing many reports and articles about Barzani. This is a map of Kurdistan from the American archives [looking at two maps on the wall]. This other map is from the Russian archive and shows the geographical distribution of the Kurdish population.”

As the conversation winds down after three hours, which included the shooting of videos, the taking of photos, and the drinking of tea, we move to leave, but Celil asks us to stay. “By doing so, you are adding a lifetime to my life,” he smiles.

As we bid farewell at the door, we know that we had spent time with someone who was a witness to a volatile and rich period of history, a faithful guardian of Kurdish folklore. He waves until our car, driven by his nephew, disappears into the darkness of the street. ●

Perspectives on Kurdistan in German Politics

Kurdistan Chronicle

In this interview, Jian Omar, a member of the Berlin parliament and representative of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, shares insights from his 2021 visit to Kurdistan, emphasizing the need for international support in rebuilding post-ISIS. He envisions deepening German-Kurdish relations and offers recommendations for the Kurdistan Regional Government's environmental focus. Omar discusses his integration into German politics as a Kurd, emphasizing the enrichment of diverse identities. Regarding the Kurdish community in Germany, he encourages active participation in German politics and the preservation of cultural identity within the broader societal context.

To begin, please tell us about your last visit to Kurdistan. Was it an official visit or for tourism and educational purposes?

The last time I was in Kurdistan was in 2021, two months after I had been newly elected to the Berlin parliament. At that time, I was officially invited as a parliamentary observer to the elections of the representatives of the Kurdish diaspora in Erbil. I also used the trip to exchange perspectives with some of the political groups in the parliament in the Kurdistan Region and had a very positive meeting with Mayor Omed Khoshnaw. We talked about the potential of Erbil, networking with cities in Europe, and how the administration in Erbil could be developed further. I offered him my support, both in my role as spokesperson for city partnerships and as a member of the Kurdish community.

What is your vision for Kurdistan and the development of German-Kurdish relations?

In my eyes, the Kurdish community deserves more support, which is why it was

important for me to send a signal of support through my trip and help set up a longer-term network. The Kurdistan Region has achieved great things in the fight against ISIS, yet international support for the region has dwindled. The region urgently needs help in rebuilding the areas destroyed by ISIS, especially in the Yezidi region of Sinjar.

In the meantime, the region has largely recovered from the war, and people are actively working on further development. The current task is to persist and exploit the existing potential, especially in the areas of road transport, administration, tourism, science, and industry. Kurdistan, having demonstrated its ability in the fight against ISIS to network with other countries, should leverage this for further development. Many concepts have already been tried and tested in other countries, such as in the areas of administration and urban development, that can be easily adapted to fit here. In this way, Kurdistan can benefit from the experience and expertise of other countries and does not have to reinvent the wheel.

My vision is to strengthen and deepen

cooperation between Kurdistan, Germany, and other European countries. I would like to work towards this.

In the Ninth Cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) under the leadership of Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, environmental issues have become a key focus. Since your organization is recognized at a global level for its interest in the environment and efforts to protect it, do you have any particular recommendations for the KRG?

I see a need for improvement, particularly in addressing the ongoing power cuts, in solar energy and renewable energies in general, and in environmental protection, which is why I am glad that these issues are now a high priority for Prime Minister Barzani's cabinet. I also think that these are issues that are worth working on for the future, both through networking with other countries and cities and attracting the necessary investment. In the long term, this will not only lay the foundations for better living conditions for the Kurdish

population and contribute to global climate policy, but also enhance the international reputation of the region.

Currently, the region's climatic advantages are not being sufficiently utilized. Abundant wind and solar resources need to be utilized for the expansion of renewable energies. In this context, established concepts from other nations and lessons learned from errors elsewhere can be applied. It is now up to the KRG to network between Kurdish and Western cities, gather knowledge,



MP Jian Omar

apply it to regional needs and conditions, subsequently, utilize it as a foundation for formulating strategies to integrate energy and climate protection. My party, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Alliance 90/The Greens), alongside other European Green parties, is eager to lend support to these efforts.

In concrete terms, I see several key ways with which the KRG can counteract environmental pollution in the region: waste disposal and separation, the protection of ground water from pollution, and the expansion of public transport. There are already effective approaches for protecting groundwater from pollution, as well as for dealing with waste. For example, more waste is recycled in Germany than in any other



■ Jian Omar actively participates in the proceedings of the Berlin Parliament, advocating for constituents' interests.

country. This results in both financial profit and an enormous contribution to environmental protection efforts.

There are also numerous studies and practical experiences in the field of mobility that prove that not using a car can reduce CO₂ emissions and make a major contribution to improving the quality of life in cities. To achieve this, local public transport must be expanded and made more attractive so that people switch from cars to buses and trains. Apart from the aforementioned aspects, agriculture should be conducted and promoted in a more environmentally friendly manner, aiming for the ^ to become self-sufficient in terms of food, presenting a significant advantage. However, it is essential to protect the quality of the soil and promote regional agriculture so that good and sustainable harvests remain possible using modern technologies.

The question of identity is of central importance in Germany, with integration a priority goal of the government. As an integrated Kurd, how would you explain the story of your integration to the point of entering politics? Can an immigrant's identity become an obstacle for them to realize their ambitions in the country to which they emigrate?

I immigrated to Germany for my studies because, as a member of the Kurdish minority in Syria, I didn't see any future prospects for myself in Syria. I have always been very political, partly because as a person with a Kurdish identity you are confronted with political issues and sensitive topics early

on. I quickly realized that I could not develop and evolve under Assad's totalitarian regime and decided to emigrate to Germany in 2005.

However, it was not an easy path. At the age of 19, I went without my family to a country whose language I didn't speak and whose political system and culture were foreign to me. At the same time, I had significantly more freedom and opportunities in Germany than in Syria; I was able to develop myself politically, network with other politically active people at university, and get involved in politics in the way I chose. I quickly realized that it is essential to have a very good command of the language in order to settle in here properly. To achieve this, I meticulously attended German courses immediately after my arrival, met people who didn't speak my mother tongue, took part in activities, and volunteered in my neighborhood. By volunteering for a while to accompany

people from Kurdistan and the Middle East in general on visits to the German authorities, I also gained an insight into the basic values of communication and interaction in Germany. All of this helped me to learn the language well, find my way around, and ultimately feel like I belonged.

I joined Bündnis 90/Die Grünen in 2014 for two main reasons. First, the issues of environmental protection and sustainability had been a key focus for me while I was studying political science. Second, I was looking for a party that supported human rights-based asylum policies, women's rights, values-based international policies, and the protection of minority rights. This is the case with Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, and so for a long time I was involved in the issues of migration and asylum as part of my voluntary work with the party. After studying political science, I then decided to pursue a political career. I stood as a direct candidate for the party in Berlin Mitte in the 2021 parliamentary elections and was directly elected to parliament.

I firmly believe that my multiple identities were not an obstacle but an enrichment. Diversity within society is a positive quality, as Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and large parts of society in Berlin see it. The election results showed that, as I was able to win a majority of votes in my district, by a large margin. The participation of people with an immigrant background must be promoted in a country like Germany, and I am actively committed to this in my political work.

In our democracy, it must be a matter of course that people with an immigrant background are also elected as representatives of the people and take their place in active politics and all oth-

er areas. I see myself as a bridge builder within our pluralistic society in Berlin, which benefits from different experiences, perspectives, and knowledge. All in all, it is important that we treat each other with respect and stay in contact with each other instead of isolating ourselves.



There is a large, heterogeneous Kurdish community here in Germany coming from several Middle Eastern countries. Based on your experience, do you see any hope that the Kurds will have electoral weight in Germany in the future? How can the members of this community maintain a balance between their original national identity and culture and their acquired German identity and culture? What are the obstacles to achieving this balance?

I believe that the Kurdish diaspora should become more involved in democratic German parties in order to represent their interests comprehensively

and incorporate their perspectives on a national scale. They should also actively participate in elections when they can by voting for parties that stand for an open society and promote and protect diversity in society.

Today, I see many Kurds getting involved in Kurdish parties based abroad rather than in Germany. It will not be possible to solve Kurdish national problems from Germany alone, but involvement in German politics can represent the interests of the Kurdish community here in Germany. This includes promotion of the Kurdish language, culture, and identity and, in connection with this, the establishment of bilingual German-Kurdish day-care centers and schools so that children born and raised in Germany can learn both languages and thus preserve their mother tongue. The course has been set for influencing these issues, so now it is up to the Kurdish community to lobby, formulate demands to politicians, establish non-governmental organizations, and thus further promote Kurdish culture and rights in Germany.

Kurdish life is part of German society and has been for decades. It is necessary for Kurds to understand themselves in this way and not limit themselves to only their Kurdish identity. These two identities do not contradict each other. Around one-fourth of Germans today have an immigrant background, and that number is rising. German society is diverse, and the Kurds are a part of it. People with an immigrant background should take their place in our democracy, participate, and stand up for our values together. ●

Taban Sami Shoresch Genocide Survivor Receives Top British Honor

Kurdistan Chronicle

Taban Shoresch, born in Erbil and founder and CEO of non-profit organization The Lotus Flower, was awarded the Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by King Charles III before the New Year in recognition of her work supporting refugees and displaced conflict survivors in the Kurdistan Region. The OBE is one of the highest forms of recognition in the UK.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak stated that the New Year's Honors List acknowledges the outstanding accomplishments of UK citizens who have demonstrated the utmost dedication to altruism and compassion.

"To all honorees, you are the pride of this country and an inspiration to us all," he said

The UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office said in a separate statement that they recognized Shoresch "for an exceptional and sustained contribution to supporting refugees and displaced conflict survivors in the Kurdistan Region."

"Being honored with an OBE is a great recognition of all the hard work that we do," Shoresch said.

Shoresch added that she does not know exactly how she was picked. "But obviously, being Kurdish, British, and a genocide survivor, my lived experience has allowed me to take pain and trauma and turn it into something positive to impact the community in a positive way."

The Lotus Flower

Taban Shoresch was imprisoned when she was just four years old and narrowly escaped being buried alive during the genocidal Anfal Campaign. Her family moved to the UK in the 1980s after her father, Sami Shoresch, a poet and *peshmerga* fighter, fled abroad with the help of Amnesty International.

"I'm a genocide survivor and was imprisoned when I was a child. I escaped with my family and have seen what it's like to be a refugee. As refugees we see things in childhood that we shouldn't really see. We spent months, years even, fleeing."

Shoresch said this experience convinced her to work with refugees and displaced people in the Kurdistan Region. In the UK, she worked with several charities, before she set up The Lotus Flower. "That experience gave me valuable insight into the charity world and how charities function."

In 2014, she returned to the Kurdistan Region. That same year ISIS attacked the Kurdistan Region, carrying out a genocide against the non-Muslim Yezidi minority, with thousands killed or enslaved.

"I worked closely with the women survivors of the genocide and when I came back to the UK in 2015 I could not go back to a normal job; I had to do something. I had all of that lived experience and there was no way that I could go back to a normal nine-to-five job."

“Taban Shoresch was imprisoned when she was just four years old and narrowly escaped being buried alive during the genocidal Anfal Campaign. Her family moved to the UK in the 1980s after her father, Sami Shoresch, a poet and peshmerga fighter, fled abroad with the help of Amnesty International

As a result she set up The Lotus Flower in 2016 her own living room, with no connections. "I slowly built it up, which led to recognition in the EU. I built an organization from zero income, and now we have 200 staff, impacting 60,000 people in the Kurdish community."

"We are UNHCR Child Protection partners, which is really important for me, as Child Protection is something very close to my heart," she added.

Shoresch added that she set up The Lotus Flower while grappling with illness as a single mother. Her sickness was so severe that it brought her close to death.

"The odds were against me, and I still managed to do it. It's my hard work and my team's hard work that brought us to where we are."

"I think that's why our work was recognized for its exceptional impact on the community. It started from really humble be-

ginnings and grew through sheer hard work. It's an example for anyone who wants to make a difference – you don't need to be rich or have connections."

"There are ways of making an impact on the world. I figured out how to do it in my own way and I have been recognized for that," she concluded.

Expanded reach

The Lotus Flower operates both within and outside of camps in the Kurdistan Region. The autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq, despite its budget being cut by the federal government in Baghdad, currently accommodates over one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Moreover, Baghdad closed its IDP camps and is trying to force Erbil to shut down their camps as well.

"We focus on women and girls, but we do work with men and boys as well. We've had many men and

boys projects and I'm a big believer that it takes a community to support women and girls," Shoresch said.

"So we work in accordance with four pillars that are aligned to the UN sustainable development goals of education and livelihoods, peacebuilding and human rights, health and safety. We've added climate change recently as well."

"Under each pillar we have projects. Under education, we have adult literacy, computer literacy, any kind of educational programs. Adult literacy is very popular among women that have never gone to school, because it gives them the opportunity to read or write."

"We help run a women's business incubator, in which we train women to set up their own



Taban Sami Shoresch.



businesses and help them register the business with the government. We give them a small grant, as well as training and equipment.”

Moreover, The Lotus Flower focuses on health and safety, gender work, child protection, and health support. “We’ve run men’s trauma projects and youth suicide prevention projects, and we offer mental health support for all women at the centers we operate.”

The Lotus Flower is also planning to set up a Women Peace Institute with support of the Kurdistan Regional Government’s High Council of Women’s Affairs. “Women’s peace and security is a big priority. It’s a way to enable more research, discussions, and training at the center. That’s a really exciting development for this year.”

Moreover, The Lotus Flower now focuses on climate change, since Iraq is ranked 61st out of 163 countries on UNICEF’s Children’s Climate Risk Index, and the UN Global Environment Outlook 6 ranks it the fifth-most vulnerable country to water and food shortages and extreme temperatures. The Kurdistan Regional Government has focused on water conservation, having completed four dams as of the end of 2023 and working on 13 additional ones.

The Lotus Flower has also worked on projects focused on food security, and climate change for schools.

“We’ve built school gardens to try and encourage our students to think about the future and start looking after these gardens. They’ve cultivated an understanding of agriculture,



food security, and climate change. We have another program called Earth Sisters, where we basically do capacity building around climate change.”

Shoresh noted that women and girls are highly impacted by climate change, be

it through displacement, or violence. “We’re starting a project called Swimming Sisters. When there are floods, not just in the Kurdistan Region, but many places around the world, women and girls are more likely to drown because they don’t know how to swim.”

“In the cultures that we work in, it is not a priority for women and girls to know how to swim, but it’s a life-saving skill. That’s a great example of how climate change impacts women.” ●

Refugee Resilience Kurdish Youths Shine in Finland



Riband Kurd

is a professional photographer and journalist. Recognized as a member of the Union of Journalists in Finland, he currently contributes to MTV.

The remarkable dedication and contributions of two Kurdish individuals, Berivan Suleiman and Kawa Simo, have been recognized recently in Finland, demonstrating the positive impact of refugees in the Nordic country. Their extraordinary life stories were honored at the presidential palace by Finnish President Sauli Niinistö.

Berivan Suleiman, born in 1995 in the city of Qamishlo, Western Kurdistan (northern Syria), fled the country in 2011, seeking refuge in Turkey. After four challenging years, she arrived in Finland with her three-year-old daughter, Pelin. Overcoming doubts about their maternal relationship due to Berivan's young age and the lack of proper Syrian identification cards and documentation – a reality for most Kurds living in Syria who face discrimination – Berivan underwent DNA tests to prove that Pelin was her daughter. This marked the beginning of Berivan's integration into Finnish society through education, culminating in her pursuit of a career in the field of security.

Despite initial skepticism from acquaintances, Berivan broke barriers as a female security guard, driven by the conviction that refugee women can excel in non-traditional roles. Her determination led to her recognition as the Finnish Refugee Council's Refugee of the Year in 2023, acknowledging her expertise and achievement.

However, her journey was marked by adversity when she faced a battle with cancer after her marriage to Kawa Simo and the loss of their newborn child. Berivan's resilience and triumph over both illness and tragedy further exemplify her strength and determination.

Simo, born in 1997 and residing in Finland for over six years, actively participates in political activities, particularly within the Center Party of Finland. Engaging in the upcoming presidential campaign scheduled for December 2024, Kawa aims to foster stronger ties between Finnish politicians and the Kurdish community in Finland.



The couple's notable presence at a recent event celebrating Finland's independence garnered attention not only from the president and officials but also from the media. Berivan's fashion choices were lauded by Finnish media, spotlighting her as one of the event's most stylish guests.

As they continue to actively engage in the Finnish political landscape, their prominence has grown, with numerous political candidates seeking their involvement in their campaigns, recognizing their influence among the refugee community.

The journey of Berivan Suleiman and Kawa Simo serves an inspiring example of determination, endurance, and the priceless contributions that refugees can make in their new adopted homelands. ●



“
Berivan broke barriers as a female security guard, driven by the conviction that refugee women can excel in non-traditional roles

”

Berivan is present at the presidential palace, being honored by Finnish President Sauli Niinistö.

HERITAGE

Exploring Kaisary Nakieb's Historic Alleys



Savan Abdulrahman Ahmed

is the editor-in-chief at *DidiMn*, a Kurdish cultural website. Concurrently, she is engaged in a research project on the origins of masculinity in her role as a research assistant at the American University in Iraq, Sulaymaniyah, and also collaborating on this project with the London School of Economics (LSE).

One of the oldest business centers in the Kurdistan Region, Kaisary Nakieb (the Kaisary) stands as a testament to time, preserving its historical significance in the face of modernization. Established in 1900 by Sheikh Mustafa Al Nakieb, this bazaar retains its original character and charm. This article delves into the rich history of the Kaisary, examining its architectural marvels, role as a hub for busi-

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Established in 1900 by Sheikh Mustafa Al Nakieb, this bazaar retains its original character and charm

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ness and culture, and the challenges it faces in the modern era. Join us on a retrospective journey, inviting you to stroll through the enchanting alleys of the Kaisary, immersed in the rich history and timeless charm of this historic bazaar.

Surviving the forces of history

During Sheikh Mustafa's era, the Kaisary was primarily populated by Jews of Kurdistan, rather than Muslims. In early 1950s, when the Jews were repatriated to Palestine, Muslims gradually took their place. The Kaisary survived numerous calamities, evident from the damage observed and recounted by people recalling the area's history. "During the World War II it faced bombardments, was



Photo: Savan Abdulrahman Ahmed

The entrance to the historical Kaisary Nakieb in Sulaymaniyah, beckons visitors to explore its rich cultural heritage.



Photo: Savan Abdulrahman Ahmed

A senior resident of Sulaymaniyah poses for a photograph at the historic Kaisary Nakieb.

ruined, and later rebuilt,” says Omer Muhammed Mustafa, one of the elderly shopkeepers. In 1957, one of the most severe floods in Sulaymaniyah damaged many parts of the Kaisary . At that time, civilians, including many young people, teachers, and public figures, provided financial assistance to those affected. In 1988, during the Ba’ath regime, it was set ablaze and subsequently rebuilt entirely. “The government did not take responsibility; we took charge and revitalized the place,” Mustafa remarks. “We suffered significant losses, starting from scratch after reaching ground zero.”

Architectural style

The construction of the building involved a significant number of workers and architects, the majority of whom hailed from Iran. More precisely, they came from the Kurdish cities of Sna (Sanandaj) and Kermanshah, chosen for their rich architectural heritage. The Kaisary ’s layout mirrors that of the bazaars used in Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran). People used to access the building through five main wooden gates, with a sixth entrance recently added. Despite the modifications, the bazaar has retained its ancient architectural style.

The Kaisary contains a large courtyard, known as the Khan, which is surrounded by numerous shops. Donkeys were historically used to transport products to the Kaisary through the Khan. After the Kaisary was set ablaze in 1988, tractors entered through the Khan to remove the rubble. Today, there is a pool at the center of the Khan, topped by a dome that enhances the Kaisary ’s aesthetic appeal.

The dome underwent reconstruction in 2012 when it was on the verge of collapsing onto the shops. The government contacted German, Turkish, and Iranian companies for the restoration, which insisted on closing the Kaisary during the process, citing the necessity of demolishing and then rebuilding the dome. However, shopkeepers opposed

this, as their livelihoods depended on their businesses.

The College of Business and the House of People

“The College of Business” is the name by which locals refer to the Kaisary, since individuals have long learned the art of business through working there. Products sold at the bazaar have historically originated from Baghdad, Syria, and Iran. In the past, merchants personally traveled to these regions, bringing the latest products to shopkeepers in the Kaisary . After the 1940s, the bazaar became a popular spot for buying herbal medicine, with soap, sugar, tea, fabric and other important products. Decorative items have remained a key commodity. Initially, these products were scarce, but gradually in the 1960s, as people’s awareness expanded globally, the sale of decorative items began, and the bazaar gradually evolved.

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The Kaisary contains a large courtyard, known as the Khan, which is surrounded by numerous shops
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“Kurdistan Tea” was once a successful brand at the bazaar. Hajy Qadir Jabar, one of the oldest shopkeepers in the Kaisary , owned the brand for a period. In 1963, a mob attacked Qadir’s shop and physically harmed him due to his ownership of the brand. Subsequently, the brand disappeared from the market.

Notably, after the revolution of July 14, 1958, when the bazaar started importing women’s goods, women began visiting the bazaar. Haji Salih Qandil and Jabar Fattah were the first two individuals in Sulaymaniyah with a shop dedi-

cated to women’s cosmetics and jewelry items. “They used to call the Kaisary the ‘women’s compass’ because their shopping wouldn’t be considered complete unless they visited the Kaisary,” Haji Qadir explains.

The city’s beating heart

Today, there are four shopkeepers operating shops in Kaisary Nakieb, who also happen to be the oldest: Omer Muhammed Mustafa, Abass Sharafy, Jalal Fatah, and Qala Rash. The tradition of the bazaar has been for shopkeepers to pass down their shops to their sons, ensuring that sons follow in their fathers’ footsteps, thereby preserving the business and cultural roots.

“I have worked at the Kaisary since 1950, when I was around six or seven years old,” Mustafa shares. “I worked with my brothers in their shop during the summer as an apprentice. I’ve had my own shop since 1970. Due to my age, I have retired and handed it over to my son. Those who worked here before have passed away, and their sons and grandsons have taken their place.”

Time has changed the people who make the Kaisary their home and give it vibrancy in other ways. For instance, the porter Darwesh Saeed, known as Uncle Inshallah, was a beloved character always wandering around the Kaisary selling loofah and working for the shopkeepers. He passed away in the 1980s.

Kurdish people are renowned for their hospitality, which is reflected in the social interactions between shopkeepers and customers within the Kaisary . The people in the Kaisary are not just co-workers; they are friends in both deed and need. A sense of compassion and trust has developed among shopkeepers, who spend 10 to 11 hours a day there, and between shopkeepers and customers.

“The shops in the Kaisary don’t have doors,” Mustafa notes. “People use a curtain to cover their goods or place a



Photo: Savan Abdulrahman Ahmed

A store located within the Kaisary Nakieb in Sulaymaniyah, offers its wares to visitors.

chair at the entrance to close the shop when they go to lunch or head home. At the end of the day, only one guard watches over the Kaisary ,” says Mustafa. In addition to working together, shopkeepers used to have picnics together in the springtime.

Popular memory

“I was a child when my mother used to bring me here to buy things like beads and bracelets – those tiny beads that delight kids,” recalls Munira Mohammed, a tailor who regularly visits the Kaisary. “It’s the oldest bazaar, and there are beautiful things in it. We’ll go now and buy you a bracelet, a necklace,’ my mother used to tell me. It’s one of my oldest memories.”

The Kaisary has preserved itself in the minds and hearts of the people. They learn about it from their parents, who take them there, and now they, in turn, take their own children.

“As a tailor, when I need sewing materials, I come here,” says Munira. “There are times when I visit twice a week, and sometimes only once a week. But it is definite that I visit at least once a week. To me, this place has a timeless feeling that never goes away.

“When I enter the Kaisary, it is the smell of the past that attracts me – the smell of cloves and herbal medicine. It reminds me of my childhood. This place never changes. It’s true that new products are coming in, new things and products according to modern demand, but the market never loses its historic feel.”

Kadija Khan, an elderly woman in her seventies wearing an abaya, browses the shops. “Kaisary Nakieb has existed for a long time. I was a child when I first came here. By God, I remember visiting this place when the Jews still worked her,” she says with an expression of delight.

“Sheikh Jalal was a tailor; he used to sew *kawa*, a kind of traditional Kurd-

ish women’s dress, for me. That was his shop right there. But there are no tailors here anymore.”

Anyone you talk to nowadays about their relationship with the Kaisary will explain their connection to the bazaar with a deep sigh from the soul.

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A shop situated in
the Kaisary Nakieb in
Sulaymaniyah presents
its merchandise to
visitors

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“I used to work at the smugglers bazaar – that’s what they used to call the bazaar neighboring the Kaisary back then,” explains Dana Ismaeel, a regular customer. “Our house was in Chwar Bakh. When I walked past the Kaisary on my way to my workplace, tiny beads caught my eyes. In the evenings, when returning home early, I used to go through there just a quick visit. I like it. It is an old place. It contains stuff that I like because I love practicing hand-works with beads, such as bracelets,” .

Modernization

Through changing times, the Kaisary has endured. However, the big malls and companies are taking business from the bazaar. Nowadays there are numerous options available, and people can easily buy their necessities at the newer mini bazaars and malls closest to them. As a result, the old bazaar’s customer base is shrinking.

The Kaisary is making efforts to align itself with the demands of the modern world to survive, which includes importing modern products. “I think that, in earlier times, more people used to come, and now not many people

care to visit because people can buy their products elsewhere,” says Munira.

However, prices are much cheaper at the bazaar than anywhere else, which is why some customers always prefer to shop there.

“Things are cheap here,” says Haseeba Saeed, a regular customer. “They are sold at wholesale prices. For example, if you go to Daboka bazaar, the same item that you buy for 1,000 Iraqi dinars here is more likely to cost you 3,000 dinars there. For someone who is not very rich, this place is better than anywhere; I buy my perfumes here.”

However, it is clear that the younger generations are not visiting the bazaar. This raise concerns that business might cease at the Kaisary soon, as the youth are finding newer and faster ways of shopping that suit their tastes and desires. But for the previous generation, visiting the place holds much more significance.

“I still go there. Its oldness takes me back,” says Ismaeel.

Haji Ibrahim, who established his shop in the Kaisary in 1972, laments, “The Kaisary once catered to wholesale transactions with shops in Darbandikhan and beyond. However, business has dwindled by 50% due to the proliferation of supermarkets and companies offering delivery services, diverting customers away from traditional storefronts.” Products go to the people; the people don’t come to the product anymore. They rely on new companies and markets more than the Kaisary .”

Despite these challenges, many loyal visitors like Ismaeel and Haji Ibrahim still frequent the Kaisary , valuing its enduring charm and historical ambiance. ●

Why Are Kurds Facing Persecution and Genocide?



Dr. Yasin Hamad
is as an Embryologist and lecturer at the College of Medicine at Hawler Medical University.

Before delving into scientific research on the use of chemical weapons in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), it is essential to understand genocide as a crime that can occur during both wartime and peacetime. The 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as the intentional destruction of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, either in whole or in part. Notably, this definition excludes political groups and "cultural genocide."

This discussion also aims to document and elucidate the involvement of international media in the use of chemical weapons against the *peshmerga* forces, Kurds, and other Iraqi populations across various regions of the KRI during the ISIS conflict in Iraq. The objective is to analyze global media research confirming the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds and *peshmerga*, while also identifying the types of chemical materials, including mustard gas and chlorine.

Pentagon sources reported on August 14, 2015, that credible information indicated ISIS had used mustard gas against Kurdish fighters in Iraq. Confirmation of such reports could be a significant turning point, compelling the United States to address this reality. The broader concern lay in ISIS's continued expansion and adaptation in highly perilous ways.

A statement from the German Defense

Ministry on August 14, 2015, revealed that around 60 Kurdish fighters experienced breathing difficulties due to an attack southwest of Erbil. The attack did not harm German soldiers training the Kurds. Subsequent reports indicated ISIS's production and use of mustard gas and other chemical agents against the *peshmerga*, employing various delivery methods.

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On August 14, 2015,
that credible information
indicated ISIS had used
mustard gas against
Kurdish

Further incidents included a reported launch of approximately 45 shells, potentially containing mustard gas, near Sultan Abdullah in the Nineveh Governorate. In response to injuries sustained by Kurdish soldiers in August 2015, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), directed by the Iraqi government, conducted an investigation that confirmed the use of mustard gas through positive samples in February 2016.

In 2016, news surfaced about the use of



Credible information, revealed on August 14, 2015, indicated ISIS used mustard gas against Kurdish fighters.

chemical weapons in the Makhmur area, leading to 63 *peshmerga* being injured. As a researcher in medicine and science, I initiated scientific research on the attack, resulting in an article published in the October-December 2021 issue of the scientific journal Scoops. Below is a summary of the research and its findings.

Research summary

The categorization of chemical weapons as “weapons of mass destruction” underscores their potential harm to civilian health. This study specifically focused on reproductive toxicity and its impact on sperm, leading to infertility in individuals exposed to chemical weapons during the war against ISIS.

A prospective cohort study compared 58 individuals exposed in three chemical attacks with an equal number of non-exposed individuals. Semen analysis, conducted on all participants with a one-year follow-up, revealed disturbances in volume and sperm count. Elevated levels of malondialdehyde (MDA) and superoxide dismutase (SOD) were observed, alongside significant quantitative disturbances in sperm.

The study found that hypospermia developed in 18% of the exposed group and in 20% of all participants, oligospermia in 20% of all participants (with only 3% in the non-exposed group), and decreased motility in 19% of all participants. While sperm morphology did not change significantly, there was a notable increase in abnormal sperm counts in those exposed to chemical weapons.

The findings underscore the significant impact of chemical weapons on semen analysis, suggesting potential genetic ramifications on subsequent generations. Further research and testing are imperative to comprehensively understand the long-term consequences of exposure to chemical weapons. ●

FEATURE

Kurdistan's Dom Community

Kurdistan Chronicle



Photos: Safin Hamid



Kurdistan
Chronicle



Kurdistan
Chronicle



In October 2023, the Dom people, also known as the Romani of Kurdistan, organized their first-ever conference in the Middle East. Sponsored by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), this event aimed to showcase their rich culture, art, music, and handcrafts.

The Dom community settled in Kurdistan approximately 700 years ago and has since become renowned for their musical talents and craftsmanship. Masters in playing instruments like the *dhol* (a hand drum) and *zurna*, they also showcase their skills in woodwork through crafting unique baby cribs called

community include Hassan Ali Khanjar, Jaffar Dom, and Jalal Saeed.

Since settling in Kurdistan, the Doms have adopted both Kurdish languages and religions. Kurdish Doms speak both the Kurdish Sorani and Kurmanji dialects, and most have adopted Islam.

Originally, the Doms came from India as descendants of the Dom caste, according to Donald Kenrik (1929-2015), a prominent researcher studying the Romani people. They



Photos: Safin Hamid

lank. Additionally, they are skilled at making Kurdish hand-made shoes known as *klash* and flour and wheat sieves, as well as performing blacksmith work.

The Doms of Kurdistan believe that they introduced the Kurdish people to *lank* and have played an important role in preserving Kurdish folklore songs and music. Some well-known Dom singers in the Kurdish

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The Dom community settled in Kurdistan approximately 700 years ago and has since become renowned for their musical talents and craftsmanship
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originally migrated from India to Persia following Shah Ardashir’s conquest of parts of India (modern-day Pakistan) in 227 AD, due to a demand for laborers. From Persia, they dispersed across the Middle East before ultimately reaching Europe, where they now prefer being identified as Roma, rather than the term “gypsies.”

Fighting for equal rights

Yunes Zahir Piro is a representative of the Doms in the Kurdistan Region and has extensively researched his people’s history. He believes that it was oppression within India that forced them to leave.

Yunes, the conference’s organizer, told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that he hopes to hold an annual Dom festival in the future and invite Doms from other parts of Kurdistan, including Syria, Turkey, and Iran.

“Doms share a strong bond among themselves and have integrated well into Kurdish society,” said Yunes.

He emphasized that the Doms have long identified themselves as Kurds and actively participated in Kurdish revolutions for self-determination and equal rights.

Yunes proudly shared an example of their resilience, mentioning how Saddam Hussein’s regime issued a decree in 1984 during Iraq-Iran war that enabled Iraqi Doms to enlist in the army. However, young Doms from the Kurdistan region chose to join the *peshmerga* – Kurdish Freedom Fighters – instead of joining the Iraqi army.

When in high school, Yunes himself was detained for three years at Saddam Hussein’s notorious Abu Ghraib prison for his involvement in distributing leaflets and writing graffiti in support of Kurdish freedom and rights.

He also recalled the brutal acts committed against Doms by extremist groups. Between 2003-2004, Al-Qaeda targeted 48 Doms in Mosul simply because they spoke Kurdish and wore traditional Kurdish clothing. Among those killed were several women.

“We have faith in Kurdistan”

According to a 2012 survey conducted by Yunes, the number of Doms in the Kurdistan Region, as well as in Kirkuk

and Nineveh, was 25,000. It is believed that this number has doubled since then.

In 1978, the Doms of Iraq were granted exceptional citizenship. However, in 2014, the Iraqi government removed the term “exceptional” as a step towards equality for all Iraqi citizens.

Today, the Doms of the Kurdistan



due to its demeaning nature.

Furthermore, they expressed their demand for representation in the KRG Parliament through a designated member of Parliament who can voice their concerns.

“We have faith in the Kurdistan authorities to grant us representation in Parliament,” said Yunes confidently.

In Rizgari village, located north of Duhok, where approximately 500 Dom families reside, Jaafar Mustafa sat beside a wood stove at his home making flour and wheat sieves. He planned to sell them in other villages and at the Duhok bazaar. Jaafar has been involved in this craft since childhood, when he learned it from his father, who had inherited it

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Today, the Doms of the Kurdistan Region identify themselves as a tribe consisting of 20 families
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from his own father before him. Jaafar’s two sons have also followed suit by learning this craft from their father with intentions to pass it down to future generations.

Alongside practicing his craft diligently, Jaafar also emphasized the importance of having an elected representative within the KRG Parliament for advocating on behalf of their community’s demands and rights.

“Having a representative in Parliament is essential to ensure that our concerns are addressed,” said Jaafar determinedly. ●

Region identify themselves as a tribe consisting of 20 families. Each family is known for a specific skill such as music, carpeting, blacksmithing, and shoemaking.

During the conference, most participants agreed that they should be referred to as Doms instead of *wasta* or *usta*, which means craftsman, or *qaraj*, which means gypsy in Kurdish. They particularly rejected being called *qaraj*

Kelidar

A Tale of Kurdish Adaptation and Heroism



Tala Rostami
is a researcher and has an MA in sociology.

Throughout history, Kurds have faced suppression and forced displacement from their homeland. The deportation of Kurds in Eastern Kurdistan, in what is now Iran, dates to the Safavid dynasty (1501-1736), during which numerous Kurdish tribes were relocated to Khorasan and Gilan Provinces. The primary motivation for sending Kurds to Khorasan was to defend the empire’s borders against Turkmen and Uzbek nomads from Central Asia. Despite the forceful separation from the rest of the Kurdish community, their descendants have integrated into Khorasan, and their stories have been chronicled in works of literature and history books. Among the most well-loved fictional characters in Persian literature is Gol-Mohammad, a legendary nomadic Khorasan Kurd.

Gol-Mohammad takes center stage in Mahmoud Dowlatabadi’s epic novel, *Kelidar*, a work that took 15 years to craft and was published in 1984. Spanning 10 volumes and 2,836 pages, *Kelidar* stands as the longest Persian novel ever written. Set against the political and social backdrop of Iran immediately after World War II (1946-1949), the narrative unfolds in Sabzevar, portraying the life of the nomadic Kurdish Kalmisi family. Gol-Mohammad, the family’s second son, undergoes significant character development, grappling with desires, engaging in criminal activities, and ultimately becoming a symbol of justice.

The novel explores Gol-Mohammad’s transformation from a person with extramarital desires to a fugitive who forms an armed group to combat tyrannical lords and aid peasants, a modern-day Robin Hood. While some view him as a legendary

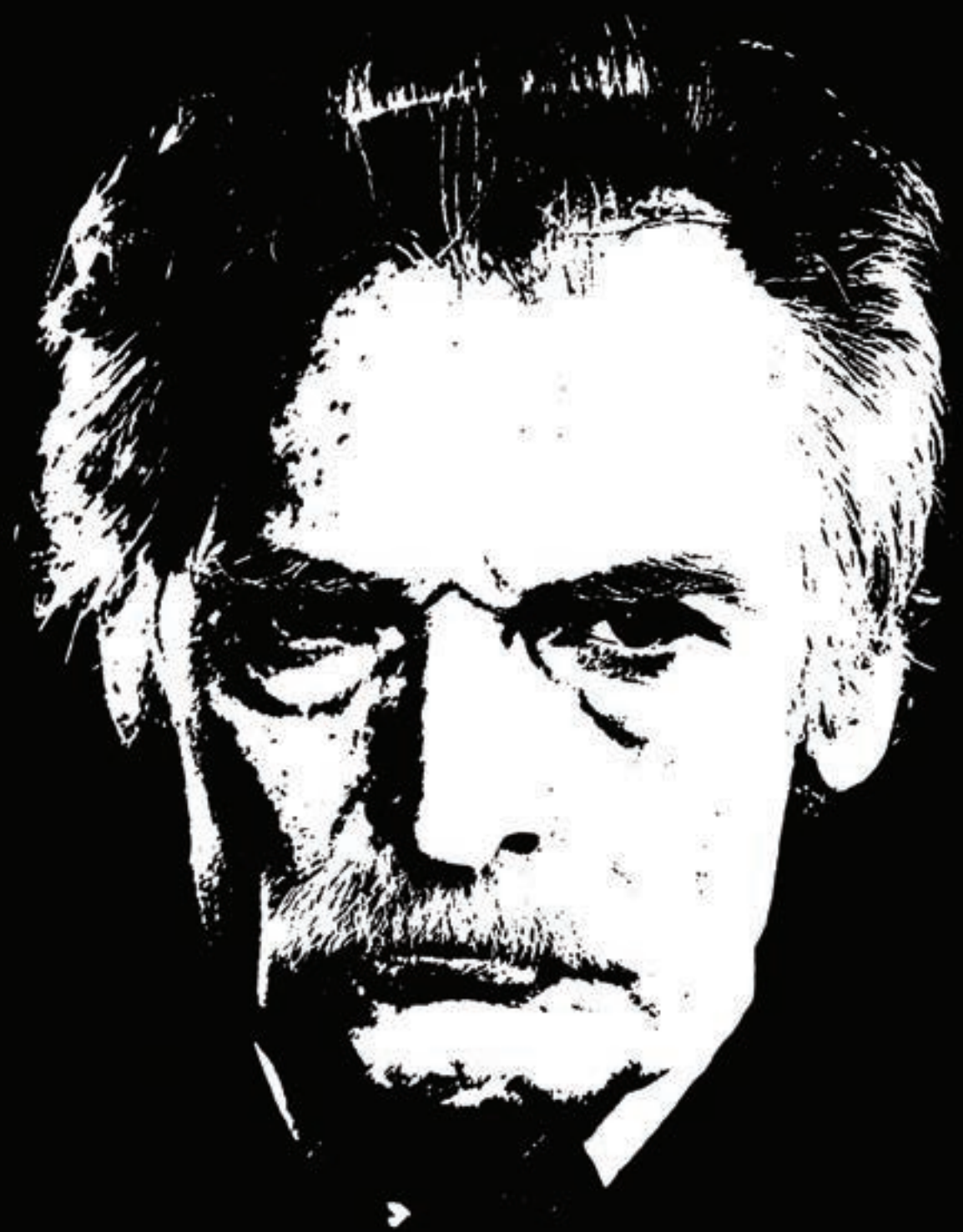
hero, authorities label him a villain deserving punishment for his actions. Gol-Mohammad’s final battle is a poignant scene of glory, sacrifice, and true love, as he deliberately chooses death, believing it symbolizes true “living.” His journey is one from obscurity to fame, from being a shepherd to evolving into a hero.

Social realism

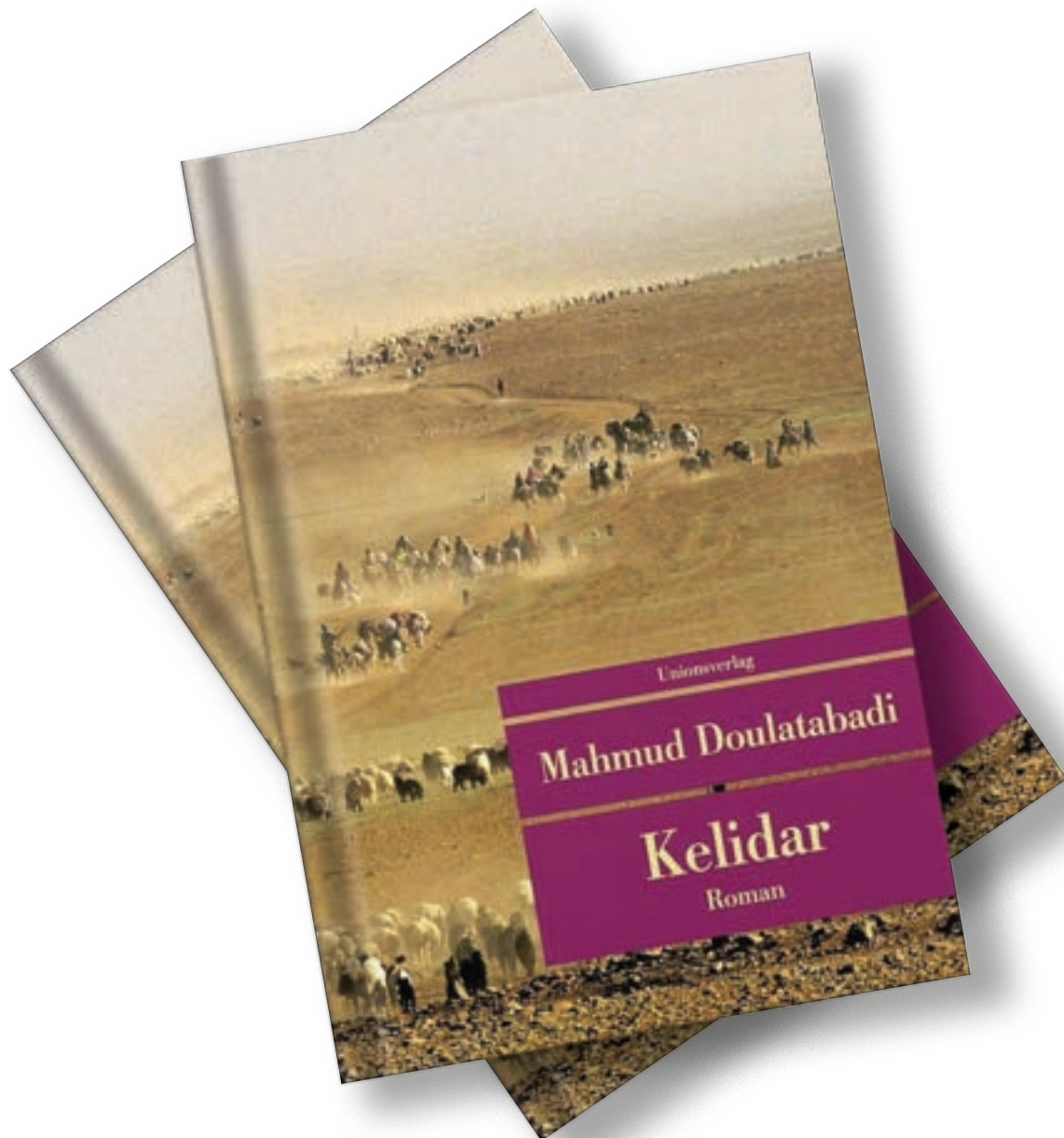
Kelidar brought fame not only to Dowlatabadi but also to Gol-Mohammad, making him one of the most renowned characters in contemporary Persian fiction. The timing of the novel’s publication, amid the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, likely contributed to its widespread popularity. Despite receiving both praise and criticism, the book has been published 37 times.

“Spanning 10 volumes and 2,836 pages, *Kelidar* stands as the longest Persian novel ever written”

While inspired by true events, *Kelidar* leans towards social realism rather than presenting a straightforward biography, as it does not aim to provide an accurate portrayal of real people and events. Oral accounts from locals suggest that Gol-Mohammad,



Mahmoud Dowlatabadi.



This is the cover of Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novel "Kelidar."

belonging to a Kurdish nomadic family (a subgroup of the Milan tribe), fought against Aldaghi.

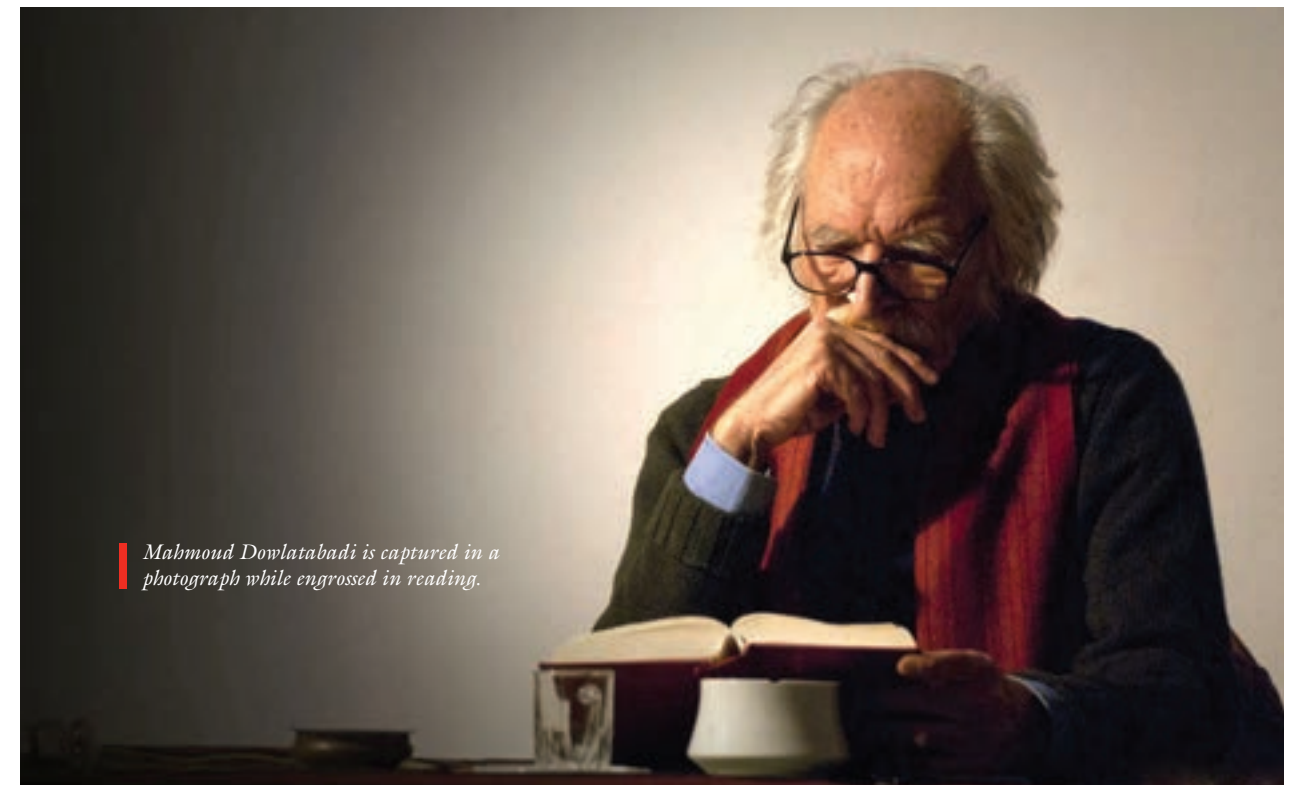
Discrepancies exist between the timing of Gol-Mohammad's rise and death in the book and historical reality. Characters like Maral, Gol-Mohammad's second wife and lover, and Belqays, his mother, are fictionalized. Dowlatabadi, having heard childhood songs about a local hero named Gol-Mohammad, deliberately altered the timing and de-

tails of the character's life, even though he had collected basic information through discussions with Gol-Mohammad's descendants.

In addition to showcasing the author's exceptional skills, there is another noteworthy aspect of the novel that merits attention, particularly concerning Kurds. Although the Kalmisi family is identified as Kurdish, the writer neglects to provide distinctive descriptions or symbols of Kurdish culture,

language, and tradition. They are merely labeled as Kurds, and their identity as "Kurds" remains superficial.

There is also a lack of differentiation even among the more educated characters. Balochs, Turks, Persians, and this particular Kurdish family all speak the same language. Consequently, as a reader, it becomes challenging to discern any meaningful distinctions between Kurds and other ethnic groups, as if there were an absence of diversity.



Mahmoud Dowlatabadi is captured in a photograph while engrossed in reading.

What of Kurdish identity?

Surprisingly, the book briefly touches upon the origins of Kurds, when Gol-Mohammad's father attempts to caution him about his behavior and explains how kings have historically manipulated the Kurds. Contrary to the assumption that the author's intent was to exclusively focus on the Kurds, interviews reveal that he utilized Gol-Mohammad's fame to narrate an inclusive story regarding national identity and the official language, rather than delving into Kurdish language and culture. Additionally, the author altered the timeline of Gol-Mohammad's struggles not only to depict the social and political history of Sabzevar but also that of the entire country.

Undoubtedly, the author successfully portrays the political and social milieu of the time, emphasizing the lives of nomads grappling with the aftermath of forced settlement imposed by Reza Shah Pahlavi during the twentieth century. While the essence of Kurdish identity may not be central to the novel, the narrative underscores the challenges

people face when compelled to make choices for survival and ambition. The book also provides vivid descriptions of local culture, such as the family's attitudes and responsibilities towards women escaping with their lovers. Yet, the question arises whether such traditions are exclusive to Kurds or prevalent in the broader region.

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Although the Kalmisi family is identified as Kurdish, the writer neglects to provide distinctive descriptions or symbols of Kurdish culture, language, and tradition
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Despite a century of coexistence with various ethnicities, the Kurds have adapted to new territories, yet their distinct culture and language is often overlooked. Dowlatabadi concludes the book with the song "Nanne Gol-Mamad," sung by Belqays as a lament for her son. This song, initially performed by local Bakhshi singers, has gained popularity, with renowned artists like Sima Bina and Mohsen Namjoo contributing to its widespread appeal, likely fueled by the book. *Kelidar's* significant contribution to the enduring legacy of the Kelmisi family, particularly Gol-Mohammad, is evident in its influence on various artistic endeavors. The book has inspired a documentary by Kalimollah Tavahodi, shed light on Gol-Mohammad's life in Mohammad-Reza Darvishi's musical compositions, and even served as inspiration for Ahmad Shamlou's poetic tribute to Zivar, Gol-Mohammad's first wife in the book. Whether the real Gol-Mohammad was perceived as a criminal or a champion, his fictional character has transcended mortality, fulfilling his desire for immortality through Dowlatabadi's skillful creation. ●

A Story of Survival



Qassim Khidhir

has 15 years of experience in journalism and media development in Iraq. He has contributed to both local and international media outlets.



■ A poster advertises the documentary “The Taste of Water.”

The *Taste of Water* is a compelling new documentary feature film by Ebrahim Saeedi, an Iranian-Kurdish filmmaker. The film revolves around two grape farmers, one of Kurdish descent and the other Turkish, who reside in a village situated on the banks of Urmia Lake between the provinces of East and West Azerbaijan in Iran.

The film sheds light on the severe water scarcity that has plagued these farmers due to the significant shrinking of Urmia Lake over the years. Once a thriving body of water, it has now transformed into a harsh salt flat.

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Ebrahim emphasizes that his documentary focuses not solely on climate change but also on sociology and coexistence
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Born and raised by this lake, both farmers have dedicated their lives to farming – just like their parents before them – as it serves as their sole source of income. However, with climate change intensifying, their livelihoods have become increasingly threatened. Despite exhausting all available resources, including digging wells or purchasing water from trucks, no solution seems capable of alleviating their dilemma.

Both the Kurdish and Turkish farmers strive to support each other and safeguard each other’s farms. Nevertheless, with every passing day, they grow more helpless in combating this relentless environmental crisis.



■ Ebrahim Saeedi is a Kurdish filmmaker from Iran, known for directing “The Taste of Water.”



Ebrahim emphasizes that his documentary focuses not solely on climate change but also on sociology and co-existence. He aims to showcase how Kurds and Turks in West Azerbaijan province unite against the adversities presented by climate change. Through his film's narrative lens, he conveys the message that cooperation and support among Iran's diverse ethnicities offer a far more constructive path than division.

"We must recognize that climate change does not discriminate against Kurds, Turks, or anyone else; it affects everyone equally," said the director.

Formerly the Middle East's largest salt-water lake and sixth-largest globally, Urmia Lake has suffered drastic shrinkage in recent years. This environmental catastrophe carries serious ecological, social, and political implications.

Consecutive droughts, agricultural water usage, and dam construction on rivers feeding the lake have contributed to the decline.

The lake, its islands, and surrounding wetlands also comprise significant habitats and are recognized as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, Ramsar site, and national park. This area serves as breeding grounds for waterfowl such as flamingos, white pelicans, and white-headed ducks. It also acts as an essential stop-over for migratory species. However, with diminishing water levels, the lake has become increasingly salty.

This elevated salinity has given rise to salt storms that spread exposed salt from the lakebed across vast areas. These salt storms pose a potential threat to the fertility of the surrounding land and deal a severe blow to the region's agricultural sector. Additionally, they heighten the risk of respiratory and skin diseases among the local population.

Ebrahim worked on *The Taste of Water* for six years. It effectively depicts how each passing year has seen a decline in water resources for farmers, while

climate patterns become continue to grow more unpredictable and violent, with farmers witnessing unprecedented sandstorms. The documentary also depicts how the village has become deserted, with farmers forced to sell their lands and migrate.

The director was inspired to make this film because of his personal connection to Urmia Lake. "Twenty years ago, I used to swim in these waters alongside ships sailing on its surface; now it pains me deeply to witness this once vibrant lake being reduced to a deserted expanse of salt," he laments.

The director added that water scarcity is currently one of Iran's most pressing challenges. Numerous rivers and streams that have flowed throughout history have now dried up.

A passion for cinema

Ebrahim Saedi, 59, was born in Mahabad, a city in northwestern Iran. He has been involved in the film industry for over 40 years. At the age of 11, he used to visit the Mahabad culture center for kids, where they would screen films. One of the teachers at the center was Ebrahim Khalili, a filmmaker who had his own video camera. When the Iranian Revolution began in 1979 against the Shah of Iran, Khalili would go out to film demonstrations and often asked young Ebrahim to assist him by giving him a recorder and microphone to record sounds. It was during this time that Ebrahim developed a love for documentary films.

"In my opinion, documentaries are more effective than other genres because people tend to listen more carefully when watching them," said Ebrahim.

After completing high school, Ebrahim enrolled at Tehran University to study cinema with a specialization in editing.

Following the fall of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003, he started traveling regularly to the Kurdistan

Region of Iraq (KRI) to make films. Throughout his career, he has directed and edited numerous films such as *Eclipse* (2001), *All My Mothers* (2009), *Tired* (2010), and *Helin* (2015). He also edited *The Exam* (2021) and recently completed *The Taste of Water* (2023).

Ebrahim gained recognition within the KRI after co-directing the documentary feature film *All My Mothers* in collaboration with Zahawi Sanjawi and Abbas Ghazali. In the film they depicted the heartbreaking stories of Kurdish women who had lost their husbands and children during Saddam's genocidal campaign against Kurdish people in the 1980s. The film focused on several villages where these mothers, daughters, wives, and sisters mourned their losses, even decades later.

Speaking about the current state of Iran's film industry, Ebrahim expressed his concerns regarding the impact of sanctions and international disputes on filmmaking.

"Especially for independent filmmakers, it is extremely challenging to find support and sponsorship within Iran," explained Ebrahim. He also noted that seeking funding from outside sources, like Europe, raises suspicion among Iranian authorities. "It is better for us to protect ourselves," he added.

Regarding the film industry in the KRI, Ebrahim believed there was still much room for growth and ambition. He hoped that Kurdish decision-makers and businesspeople would recognize the power of cinema as a medium to share Kurdish stories with the world.

"Cinema offers an unparalleled platform to express our experiences and narratives," concluded Ebrahim. "Kurds have an abundance of stories waiting to be told." ●

Echoes of Love and Loss



Fatima Qasim Habib
is a journalist, artist, poet, and art designer who has organized numerous art exhibitions in both the Kurdistan Region and international locations.

Behind the closed doors of most homes in Kurdistan lies a tragic, heart-wrenching story. As memories resurface, wounds become fresh and painful and eyes shed tears akin to winter rain. These bitter tears are a result of the Anfal Campaign in 1988, which brought suffering and tragedy to the majority of Kurdistan's residents.

The most dramatic element of this massacre is that Anfal occurred when most people were preparing for a wedding. As in any corner of Kurdistan and the world, in the village of Biran nestled on the slopes of Mount Piramagrun, a family's story began with love. A new anthology seeks to capture the loss, solitude, despair and kept promises that pile on top of one of Kurdistan's most famous mountains, heavy as snow.

In 2018, the renowned Kurdish photographer Nasih Ali Xayat was offered the chance to narrate the life of Mullah Qaraman and his wife. He visited Biran and meticulously captured their life story through photography and video, publishing an anthology entitled *The Sole Survivors of Anfal*. Their story is now presented through *Kurdistan Chronicle*, to inform audiences inside and outside of Kurdistan about the horrors of the Anfal Campaign.

As the writer entrusted with crafting this documentary, and drawing from the insights of the renowned photographer Nasih Ali, I sincerely hope that this documentary resonates with

audiences both within and beyond Kurdistan.

Finding love and devotion

Biran was home to approximately 50 mud-built houses, where all residents were friends and relatives. Inside one home, Mullah Qaraman, his wife Aisha, and their only son lived their daily lives in peace, happiness, and harmony, much like the other villagers.

Mullah Qaraman was a dedicated man who was genuinely passionate about education and art. As a child, his father sent him to Biran for religious studies, which served as an alternative to schools for rural people. However, he could only attend the lessons for three days due to the sudden death of his teacher. Despite this, his intelligence led to him to assume the role of prayer leader for the villagers, a position he maintained from his youth until the events that unfolded a decade before Anfal.

At that time, he fell in love with a beautiful girl from Biran named Aisha. After seeking her hand in marriage, she became his wife. Their life brimmed with love and devotion, and after a few years, they were blessed with a son. Their happiness, however, was abruptly shattered by the flames of Anfal, which catalyzed so many other other painful tales. The deeper one delves into this tragedy, the more sorrowful stories emerge, all intertwined with that fateful black day in Kurdish history.



Photo: Nasih Ali Xayat

Mullah Qaraman is a respected figure.

A wound unhealed

The Anfal Campaign transpired across eight phases spanning seven months, starting on April 14, 1988. A devastating toll was exacted, with 182,000 innocent Kurdish people, encompassing women, children, and the disabled, losing their lives. Additionally, it resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of families and individuals to undisclosed locations. Overall, Anfal led to a decline in the Kurdish population in Kurdistan. It left nothing but devastation, profound sadness, and untreated pain for those who survived.

Those born after Anfal constantly hear about the brutal acts committed against their land and people. Every year, on April 14, Kurds in Kurdistan commemorate this tragedy through mourning, wearing black clothes, and concluding the dark day with theatrical performances, poetic readings, and speeches. This demonstrates that this tragedy, like a wound, has never fully healed and has not been forgotten by the families and loved ones of the victims, and the Kurdish people as a whole.

Most Kurdish homes contain cherished photographs, laden with bitter memories that depict fathers, husbands, and children whom they still remember as fleeting summer dreams. These pictures hanging on the walls symbolize fidelity and respect for their lost loved ones. Every phone ring or knock at the door shakes the hearts of most families of Anfal victims, hoping it might bring news about their missing relatives so they can be found and laid to rest in Kurdistan. Visiting their graves may reduce the pain and soothe the hearts of survivors, but they always ask the same question: What was our sin, we innocent Kurds? Why did this happen to us?

Perpetual shock and silence

Anfal left nothing but destruction in its wake, but in Biran, it did produce an incredible love story. Anfal wrecked the lives of Mullah Qaraman and his family. Aisha was a living victim of the trag-



Mullah Qaraman is pictured among his collection of books in his modest home.

Photo: Nasih Ali Xayat

edy, deprived of all of life's joys until her final moments. Her prolonged silence was broken only by constant fear, with her thoughts trapped in a perpetual black circle of reliving those tragic events.

Yet Mullah Qaraman also experienced a moment that he will never forget. The Anfal Campaign started in the village of Piramagrun. Aisha's father's house was raided, and the family was forced to get into a military vehicle. Aisha's younger brother, who was young, tried hard to resist and was shot in the head, dying instantly, an event Aisha witnessed firsthand, leaving her in a state of shock and silence.

Mullah Qaraman took Aisha and their son to the plains of Piramagrun, where they settled in the camp called Zora Malle (meaning "forced group"). There, Aisha began losing her mind and suffering from psychological problems. After three months, her mental state deteriorated completely. Despite Mullah Qaraman's utmost effort to re-

store Aisha's health by caring for her and seeking medical treatment, Aisha relived her brother's murder in her mind, preventing her from healing.

However, Aisha knew her husband well and only felt safe with him. She remained quiet throughout her days, but after long silences, she repeated a few words: "They took them, they killed him, let's leave here."

Becoming a shepherd

After six years, in the 1990s Mullah Qaraman and his family returned to Biran, settling again in their small mud house consisting of a single room. Although some of the couple's relatives – who were not affected by Anfal – lived there, Mullah Qaraman never abandoned his wife. He never remarried and remained loyal to Aisha until her last moments. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, he had promised his father-in-law on the day of Aisha's engagement to protect her forever as he would his own eyes. Secondly, to prevent hurting Ai-

sha's suffering heart and soul, he gave up his personal life. No one was allowed to serve her except him.

He always prayed that Aisha would die before him because he believed that if he died first, Aisha would be lost, and no one would care for her needs like him. For this reason, he never ventured into the city to find work – he was one of the best mechanics of his time – to avoid leaving her and his son alone. Instead, he became a shepherd, taking care of the villagers' sheep and cows, which allowed him to return home multiple times a day to visit Aisha, ensure her well-being and meals, and earn money to meet their needs.

In addition, he never abandoned his artistic endeavors, continuing to pursue his childhood passion for art. This had started when Mullah Qaraman fell in love with art as a child. In the 1970s, he began sculpting, inscribing verses from the Quran and poems of prominent Kurdish poets on the stones of Mount Piramagrun. In 1976, he carved the English alphabet on a stone slab on

the same mountain. After returning to Biran after Anfal, he did not consider his wife's illness as an obstacle to his art. Every day, when he took the sheep and cattle to Mount Piramagrun, he carved some artistic works on the stone slabs. To date, he has sculpted more than 30 artistic works. Moreover, he used his tired hands to remove soil and rocks from Mount Piramagrun to build a road for people and cars. Despite all the difficulties, Mullah Qaraman played a significant role in serving the village of Biran.

Aisha's hero

Mullah Qaraman was about 80 years old when, because of his love for learning, he set up a library in the corner of his small mud house. He owned more than 100 books in Kurdish and Arabic, most of which were historical. When he returned home after work, he spent a few hours reading them each night. To this day, Mullah Qaraman continues his work and serves the village of Biran. In recent years, their son, with his father's support, has married and built a family.



Mullah Qaraman and his wife are seen seated together beside a stove.

Photo: Nasih Ali Xayat

Unfortunately, a few months ago, Aisha passed away, having carried the burden of illness, fear, and unfulfilled dreams throughout her life. Nothing remained of Aisha except her name and painful story. Mullah Qaraman finds it difficult to live without her in their quiet house but is comforted by the memory of the love, loyalty, and care he provided to her. Thus, their story ended with the same love that had always endured between the four walls of their small mud house.

This tragic story will not be forgotten, just like hundreds of other stories in the wake of Anfal. Despite Aisha's absence and the difficulties of loneliness, Mullah Qaraman remains occupied with his daily activities, including his work as a shepherd, his artistic endeavors, and his books. However, he always remembers his wife – the love of his life – and tears fall from his eyes. He never forgets the pain in his heart, which is why he is known as Aisha's loyal hero.

The photographer Nasih Ali Xayat started documenting moments from the lives of Mullah Qaraman and his wife Aisha in 2019. The power of love in triumphing over life's hurdles, amid diligent work and the promotion of art, is captured in over 1,000 photos and an hour-long video that Nasih Ali completed in 2021. Since then, he has sought to provide the couple with a better life by sharing their images on his Facebook and Instagram accounts to attract financial support. With the help of organizations and individuals, the couple managed to build a small, beautiful house for themselves in Biran.

This photographer is seeking sponsorship to produce a documentary film about their lives, entitled *Aisha's Hero*. He also aims to translate it from Kurdish into Arabic and English, intending to showcase the film on screens in Kurdistan and abroad to share this tragic story of Anfal and the persistence of Mullah Qaraman's love and loyalty toward his ailing wife. ●

Sana Barzanji Putting a Face to the Name

Only a few years ago, the velvety voice of a woman suddenly filled every corner of Kurdistan. The artist soon became popularly known by her first name only – and yet no one had ever seen her face. It was at this point that a new star, songwriter, and musician emerged: Sana Barzanji. In an interview with *Kurdistan Chronicle*, Barzanji spoke about her personal and musical journey and the profound messages embedded in her art. With her identity initially shrouded, Barzanji's voice became the focal point for breaking barriers and challenging societal norms in Iran.

The voice before the face

For several years, Barzanji covered Kurdish folk melodies and gained popularity not just among the youth, but also with the older generation, for whom folk music triggered sweet nostalgia.

Barzanji's breakthrough came in 2020 with the release of her album *Raz*, which swiftly soared to the top of musical charts, solidifying her position as a rising star. At that time, she had never shown her face to her tens of thousands of fans. She aimed to forge a connection based on her music rather than relying on flashy appearances. This unconventional approach paid off, as her audience learned to recognize her voice even before seeing her face.

When asked about this choice, she reflected, "I believe that was a great decision, one that perfectly served my art. In the modern world, most singers and musicians try to compensate for the lack of art in their work with exaggerated visuals. I did the opposite."

However, this choice also led to impersonation on social media, with fake pages claiming to be Barzanji. At this stage, sensing a void, she decided it was time to step into the limelight, allowing her audience to see the person behind the mesmerizing voice.

The taboo of a woman's voice

Growing up in the strict confines of Iran as a female artist, Sana faced a unique set of challenges.

"When you live in Iran, and when you are a female artist, you are doomed to silence. Women cannot sing in Iran; they can face severe punishments. I started singing there, in that very strict environment. That's why my ultimate message is freedom, resilience, and peace," she told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

Her journey into the world of art and music began as a little girl with a passion for singing. However, her professional career blossomed many years later. Sana attributes much of her success to her family, particularly her father, who not only believed in her, but



Sardar Sattar

is a translator and journalist based in the Kurdistan Region.

He has an MA in English Studies from the University of Lodz, Poland. He has translated several books and political literature into Kurdish and English. He writes regularly for local and international newspapers

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Photo: Hiwa Slah

Sana Barzanji, a talented Kurdish artist, delivers a captivating performance at a concert in Erbil, the Kurdistan Region.

also introduced her to the rich tapestry of classic Kurdish music, shaping her dedication to preserving and promoting her cultural heritage.

Kurdish music today

Reflecting on the state of music in Kurdistan, Barzanji expressed concern about the influence of Western music as well as that from neighboring countries. She emphasized the importance

of preserving Kurdish language, melodies, traditions, and folklore in the face of this cultural dilution, considering it a crucial part of nation-building.

When asked about the impact of modern technologies on protecting artists' intellectual property, Sana acknowledged the positive role that technology plays.

“Yes, fortunately, that has helped

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Barzanji's breakthrough came in 2020 with the release of her album *Raz*, which swiftly soared to the top of musical charts, solidifying her position as a rising star

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Sana Barzanji enchants the audience with her performance at a concert held in Erbil.

Photos: Hiwa Slah



us a lot. Not only through local laws and regulations, but also with the help of modern technologies, we can protect the intellectual property that belongs to us,” she elaborated.

The responsibilities of the stage

Witnessing the audience sing along to her songs elicits a complex emotion for Barzanji. She described it as a strange feeling – a mix of pride and acknowledgment of the responsibility that comes with being a beloved artist.

“An artist should remember this all the time and work hard to always meet the growing expectations of the audience,” she noted.

Looking ahead, Barzanji shared her aspirations: “I just want to

be myself. I don't want to be an imitation. I want to make music that comes from the heart.”

One of her loftiest goals is to win a Grammy with a Kurdish song, a dream fueled by the desire to make her people proud and fulfill her artistic responsibility.

In the captivating journey of Sana Barzanji, the veil over her identity may have been lifted, but her voice remains a powerful force, carrying messages of freedom, resilience, and peace. As she navigates the complex landscape of Kurdish music, Barzanji continues to earn her rightfully achieved popularity, hoping to represent Kurdistan and its rich culture on international stages. ●

Hayman Homer From Kurdistan to the World



Rabim Rashidi, a Washington DC-based Kurdish journalist, is widely recognized as "Mr. Kurd." He is focused on Kurdish affairs in Kurdistan and abroad.

A visionary American actor of Kurdish descent, Homer Hayman has embarked on a journey that spans continents and cultures. Hayman's trajectory is characterized by versatility and an unwavering pursuit of creative excellence.

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His life serves as a testament to the transformative power of art, identity, and education
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From the picturesque landscapes of Kurdistan to the global stages of the United States and the Middle East, his life serves as a testament to the transformative power of art, identity, and education. This article explores Hayman Homer's career, delving into his theatrical prowess, cinematic accomplishments, and unique skill set that distinguishes him in the realm of performing arts.

Growing up in the heart of Kurdistan

Hayman's roots trace back to the heart of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), the ancient city of Erbil, steeped in urban history and rich Kurdish culture. His formative years were shaped by the tales of his homeland, fostering a profound connection to his family's roots. His father, Homer Eli,

a courageous member of the Kurdish *pesh-merga* forces, sacrificed his life in defense of the Kurdish people when Hayman was just 10 years old.

Hayman's mother, Bediah Azeez, emerged as a beacon of resilience, single-handedly raising Hayman and his seven siblings. Despite adversities imposed by the former Iraqi regime, she not only nurtured her eight children but also established a business to sustain the family. Her unshakeable spirit and resourcefulness illuminated the path forward for her children.

Hayman graduated from Salahaddin University in Erbil with a degree in political science and international relations, an academic foundation that provided him with insight into global affairs and catalyzed his nuanced perspective. Speaking multiple languages and driven to enhance his skills, he has pursued professional training at the Nashville Acting Studio and the 4th Wall Acting Studio.

A global citizen

As the pages of his life turned, Hayman embarked on a journey from the KRI that allowed him to discover the world. Living in England, France, Italy, and Greece for three years, he immersed himself in the cultural tapestry of new lands, absorbing cultural nuances and adding another layer to his evolving identity.

Eventually the United States became his new homeland. Initially settling in Nashville, Tennessee – known as “Little Kurdistan” due to its significant Kurdish population – he later relocated to Los Angeles, California, marking his global break-

Haymen Homer, Kurdish-American actor.





through. The melting pot of cultures and diversity of artistic expression in the United States served as a vessel for his burgeoning passion for storytelling and creative exploration.

“As an artist, I am driven by the endless possibilities that America offers in the world of filmmaking,” Hayman shares, underscoring the profound impact of his time in the United States on his artistic pursuits.

As an actor, Hayman actively seeks opportunities to translate his vision into compelling narratives. Each role he undertakes becomes a canvas upon which he paints the hues of his life, the experiences that set him apart, and the cultural amalgamation that the United States represents.

Hayman’s journey

In the initial stages of his journey in the United States, Hayman encountered formidable obstacles, compelled to undertake work that did not align with his aspirations. Struggling to make headway without a support system, he faced the daunting task of carving a path through his own efforts.

His distinctive appearance, innate talent, and unwavering dedication facilitated his foothold in the film industry. From

featuring in national and global commercials to landing roles in films, Hayman’s acting journey attests to his unwavering commitment to his art.

His venture into film is marked by supporting and leading roles that reflect his range as an actor. From portraying a journalist in the impactful war drama short film *Aman* to embodying Jesus Christ in the upcoming epic film *The Messiah*, Hayman expresses his exhilaration as the first Kurd to portray such a historic and profound character.

“To portray such an iconic figure is not just a role; it’s a journey into the very essence of humanity’s cultural and spiritual heritage,” emphasizes Hayman. “I am incredibly humbled and excited to bring this powerful character to life, contributing my interpretation to the universal narrative of hope and compassion, especially during these times.”

A vision for the future

The inspiration for Hayman’s cinematic journey was ignited by films such as *Goodfellas*, directed by Martin Scorsese, and *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?*, starring Johnny Depp, a poignant exploration of struggles within a family.



One of the films that most impacted his life was *Yol (The Road)*, a 1981 political thriller written and directed by Kurdish filmmaker Yilmaz Gunay. The film’s potent depiction of political and social issues fueled Hayman’s commitment to using acting as a powerful tool for storytelling and social commentary.

The profound impact of such narratives made him realize the immense power of cinema to shed light on the stories of the forgotten and the overlooked. Hayman’s goal is to convey these narratives on an international level, providing a voice to those whose stories may never have been known if not for the canvas of the big screen.

From the KRI to Los Angeles, Hayman Homer’s journey is that of a storyteller with the capacity to breathe life into an extensive range of characters, leaving an indelible mark as a dynamic and immersive force on the cinematic landscape. ●

Strolling Through the Wind

In this article, Bayan Salman's article delves into the captivating world of Hama Hashim's art. Hashim challenges perceptions with abstract forms and a vibrant color palette, conveying emotions beyond words. The artist's unique techniques, including the recurring use of blue, create immersive narratives. Salman explores Hashim's innovative approach to coloring pieces, breaking barriers in contemporary art



Bayan Salman

is a Kurdish literary writer works in Kurdish, Arabic, and French. Her contributions to literature include 10 novels and two poetry collections, highlighting her versatile multilingual storytelling.



Hama Hashim, captured between two of his artworks as he poses for the camera.

Photo: Soosen Meliki

When one gazes upon the artworks of Hama Hashim, a profound descent into contemplation ensues. Hashim skillfully amalgamates colors into abstract forms, seemingly immersing himself within his creations. The artist's intention is clear: to challenge our perceptions and cultivate a fresh understanding of his works. Hama Hashim invites his audience to read the language of colors rather than that of words, marking a masterful innovation.

Transcending personal experiences, Hama Hashim communicates his per-

ception through painting, revealing moments of joy and sorrow. Abbas Abdullah Yousif, a renowned Kurdish writer and thinker, reflects on Hama Hashim's art, stating that he leads us into a symphony of colors, revealing himself within us and us within him. Bright, full, and fresh colors convey various emotions, merging hope, sorrow, and life in a vibrant universe. Hama Hashim folds this universe himself, allowing us to enter his world unhindered by frames or canvas material. Even dark colors are presented in a joyous manner, prompting gratitude towards Hashim for imparting happiness

through his creations.

While all colors blend harmoniously, blue emerges as a common hue in many of Hama Hashim's works. *Sun in Yellow* and a depiction of a blue raindrop showcase his diverse artistic expressions. Some paintings feature a simple approach with two forms separated by distinct colors, creating an atmosphere of being in limbo. The artist's manipulation of colors captivates viewers, drawing them into his immersive artistic realm.

Among his works, some exhibit mul-

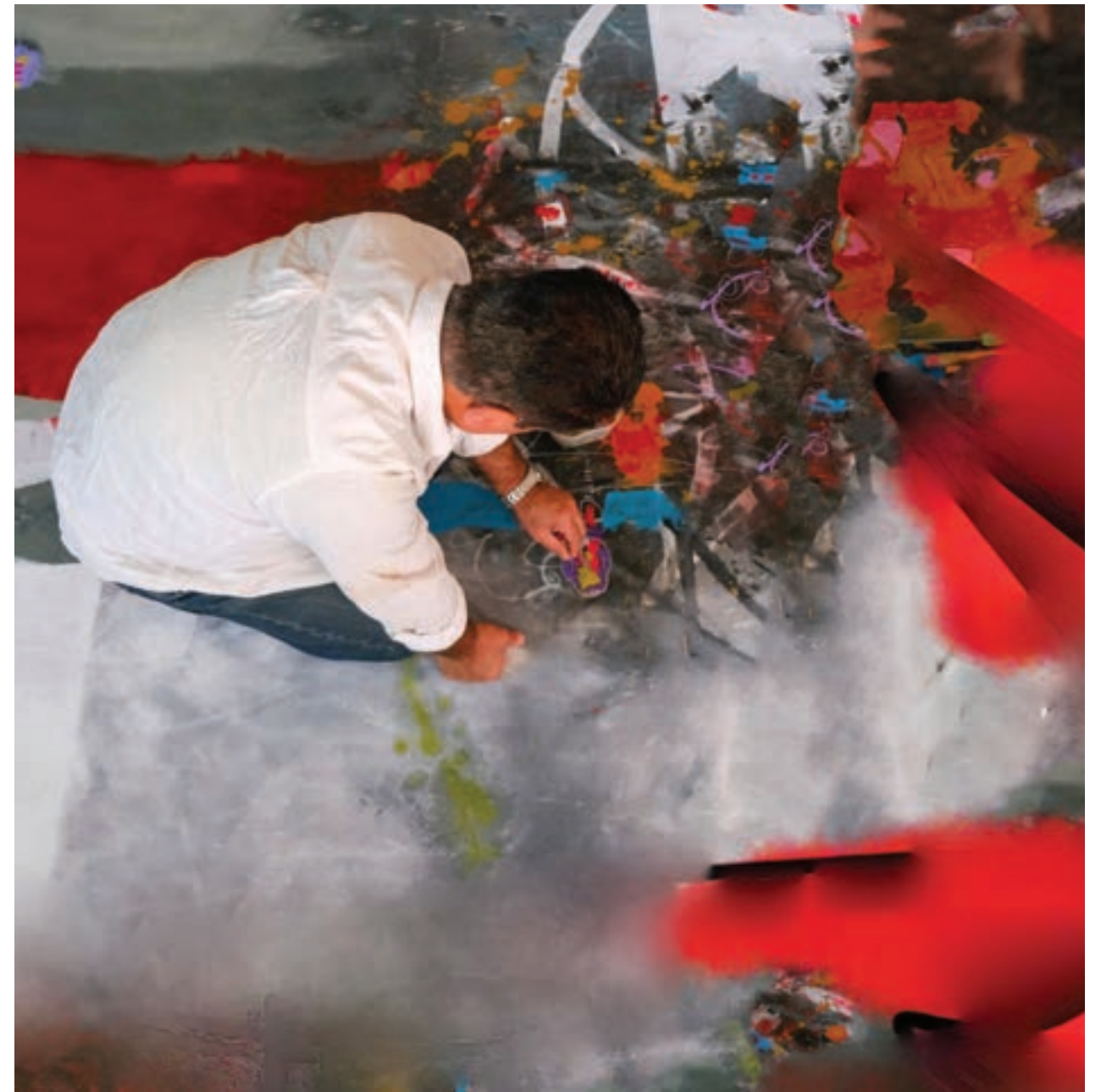


Photo: Soosen Meliki



Photo: Soosen Meliki





Photos: Soosen Meleki

tiple planes, while others focus on a single movement and plane. Paintings with multiple movements evoke a sense of being carried away by a strong wind, uncertain of the landing destination. Human faces, though abstracted, play crucial roles in the chaotic scenes, urging viewers to sit, observe, and comprehend. In pieces where two figures embrace, Hama Hashim delves into the psychology of their interaction, creating a complex narrative akin to the story of Adam and Eve.

A notable piece, *Single*, is enveloped in red, featuring the head of a woman between two white walls, symbolizing the struggles of women in society.

Hama Hashim employs measured techniques and occasional spontaneous brushstrokes to bring scenes to life, emphasizing the significance of colors and lines. By utilizing every tool at his disposal, including unique colors, he seeks to balance ideas and narratives, creating a modern and unique essence to his artworks.

In defining his work as “coloring” pieces, Hama Hashim expresses his ideas through the language of colors, a challenging endeavor in the realm of artistic techniques. Hama Hashim’s intention is clear: to use distinctive colors to convey his understanding while introducing a novel approach to coloring his paintings. Ultimately, Hama Hashim’s works pave the way for new beginnings, breaking barriers, and uncovering a new reality – an intention that resonates throughout his artistic journey. ●

An Artistic Rebirth

Kurdistan Chronicle

Kurdish artist Solin Nirvana, whose first name means “sun” in Swedish, relocated with her family to Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to escape conflict in the Kurdish part of Syria. I wanted to meet with her to learn more about her life and work. When I inquired about the location of her gallery, she responded that she had established her own studio at home.

We arrived there, and after making coffee, we ascended to her compact studio, which serves as both a creative space and gallery. On one of the walls, a beautiful arrangement of paintings greeted our eyes, as well as a number of blank canvases awaiting artistic expression. A small desk with numerous shelves stood against another wall, featuring a cherished gramophone. As Solin placed the needle on a record, classical music filled the air.

“The gramophone was a gift from a dear friend; its impact is incomparable. Playing the same music on a speaker or phone lacks the soulful essence of the gramophone,” she revealed.

The music played as I meandered through the studio, contemplating the limited space where Solin’s talent blossomed. I could not help but ponder the



necessity of a more expansive setting for artistic growth. To delve deeper into her artistic journey and motivations, we asked Solin about the start of her artistic career eight years ago.

“I started painting with colors in 2015 as a way to release heavy emotions. I view my art as therapeutic, a path towards healing and letting go. While everyone possesses artistic qualities, real artists are those who can express and convey messages through various mediums like paint, the written word, or music,” Solin said.

This led to a discussion about the academic study of art, and we asked Solin if talent was enough to make an artist.

“I never studied art or took courses. My artwork serves as a mirror reflecting my emotions at specific times,” she described. “I embrace limitless creativity. As a self-expressing, non-realistic artist, my paintings unfold organically, mirroring my emotions.”

Gazing at the wall adorned with Solin’s paintings, I sensed a prevailing melancholy. Recalling her escape from the horrors of the war in Syria, leaving behind her studies in English literature and a city she cherished, we inquired about the war’s influence on her art.

“**I started painting with colors in 2015 as a way to release heavy emotions**”



Solin Nirvana.



“While war can be a source of inspiration for many artists, I haven’t made it the focus of my work. The endless suffering and torment of wars are similar. However, being a refugee, the war has impacted me indirectly,” she reflected. “It placed me in a position of significant responsibility, exposing me to a broader world beyond the confines of my previous life at school. The war has inspired me in various ways, with its effects manifesting in my paintings and sculptures.”

Separation from reality

One of her paintings caught my eye with its clear symbolism: girls’ braids. The hair of Kurdish women has become a symbol of strength and struggle against ISIS and religious extremism. In trying to understand the story of those braids, we asked about the work’s symbolism and its special atmosphere.

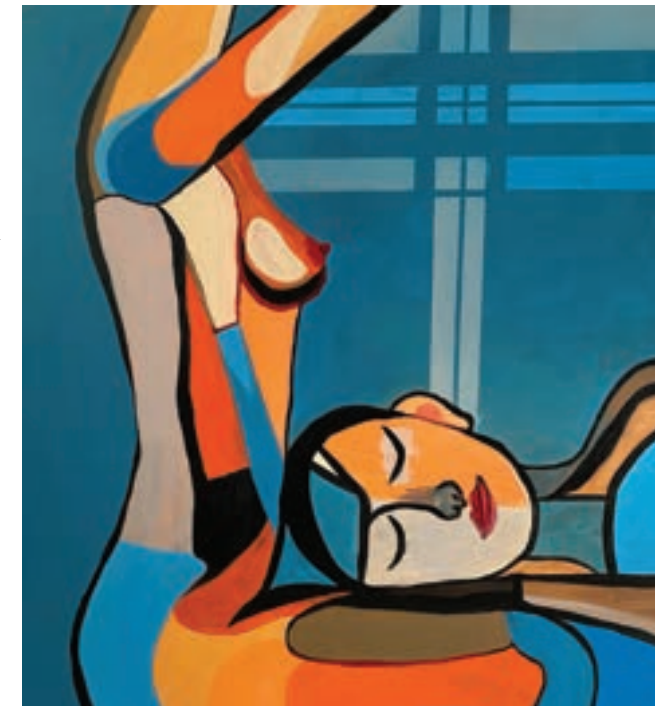
“Most of my paintings relate to women, and many embody my feelings and psychological health at various times. The sculpture *Hair Massacre* is linked to the Kurdish slogan “Jin, Jiyar, Azadi” and connected to Jina Amini (A Kurdish woman from Saqqez, detained in Tehran for her opposition to compulsory hijab, and later losing her life while in police custody, became the catalyst for widespread protests across Iran in September 2022). Even before that time, Kurdish women’s hair served as a symbol of resistance against ISIS. I created the piece using my own hair to represent the incidents when Kurds were hanged, and each braid has a colored ribbon representing the four colors of Kurdistan’s flag, showcasing the execution process,” Solin said.

As I peeked at her signature on one of her paintings, we inquired about the

story behind “nirvana,” a nickname she uses as her last name. She smiled.

“Nirvana means separation from suffering, desire, and the sense of self,” she replied. “It is connected to death and rebirth. I chose this name because every phase of my life felt like a rebirth to something bigger, with more spiritual, mental, and emotional development. As each day passes, I feel more connected to this title. I often joke that my default state is nirvana due to the many moments of feeling separated from reality.”

Happiness is evident on Solin’s face. Despite the suffering she has experienced, she always seemed to be smiling. Despite her elegant black clothes, she



looked very happy. What’s the secret? I wondered. We asked her if she practices yoga.

“Yes, I practice yoga. Additionally, I find Buddhism admirable and peaceful. It played a significant role in helping me navigate through a challenging phase of my life,” she responded.

Classical music from the gramophone

still filled the room. Soft melodies flowed as we walked around the studio, approaching the gramophone. We talked about nostalgia and how people long for things connected to the past. There is a small postcard with a picture of one of her paintings on it. She showed me the card, which had her signature on the back. We asked her about that painting.

“This painting, *Intimacy*, depicts love in all its colors. Some see it as male and female, while others see two women sharing an intimate moment, reflecting how human nature is devoid of ego and filled with honesty, truth, and vulnerability. It portrays the comfort and trusted pose of a partner lying on another’s lap,” she explained.

It was a really beautiful painting. We asked Solin where the original was.

“I sold it to a Swiss lady, and she hung it in her office at Bern University. It was the first painting I sold,” she revealed.

We asked her about the rest of her paintings and if she had been able to sell more. Solin patiently and affectionately answered my many questions. Her eyes sparkled mysteriously. She was silent for a moment.

“I have sold many of my paintings and sculptures in other places around the world. However, here in this country, selling involves

a lot of negotiation about the price,” she said.

The meeting ended with the last sip of the coffee that had accompanied us during the conversation. Joyous music continued in the background. The young artist Solin bid us farewell with a bright smile, and the sun smiled in the blue sky above. ●

Naaz's Musical Triumph

Kurdistan Chronicle

The Dutch-Kurdish singer-songwriter Naaz Mohammed, known by her stage name Naaz, has become famous in the Netherlands and abroad. Having started her songwriting journey in her bedroom at the age of 15, she has since produced three albums and now performs as an opening act for international singers.

Her father, a doctor from Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan Region, and her mother, a Kurd from Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran), were initially hesitant about her aspirations to become a singer. After graduating from high school she focused solely on art, not attempting to continue her studies or get a regular job. "I'm a completely self-taught musician," she said.

Her family fled Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War. "My father is a doctor and helped many Kurds during the war. His life was threatened as the Iraqis thought he was helping their enemy. He had to flee after that," Naaz told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.



However, with time, her parents gradually accepted her dream, allowing her to make studio recordings of her songs with the help of a Dutch-Kurdish producer.

The power of music

"My parents see the impact my lyrics have had on people of all ages and ethnicities. I don't think they realized the power of music until then. They thought of it more as entertainment, but now they see how music can be healing," she said.

"My father is a doctor, so we now joke that I am a healer with my words, too. They love my Kurdish songs the most. My mother says it reminds her of my grandmother singing in Kurdish when doing chores back in Kurdistan. That makes me very proud."

She initially started her career by participating in *Holland's Got Talent* in 2014. Two years later, she released her first single and delivered several sold-out performances in Europe. She was the opening act for the European performances



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They love my
Kurdish songs
the most
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I just want to reach my people, the ones who need me, because I need them, too

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of Melanie Martinez’s *K-12 Tour* in 2019.

In 2020, Naaz took a break from music, later returning with her first album *Never Have I Ever* in 2023.

She has won two Edison awards, two awards at the Music Moves Europe Talent Awards in 2020, and performed last year as the opening act for American artist Lana Del Rey in Amsterdam. Her picture was also shown in 2022 by Spotify on a billboard in New York City’s Times Square in 2022.

“I’ve won several awards, which I’m very grateful for. It’s great to get recognition like that, but the greatest gift to me is when I can see someone truly getting something meaningful out of my music,” she told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

“For me it’s not about the amount of people I reach. I just want to reach my people, the ones who need me, because I need them, too.”

“I’m very proud to be Kurdish, I wear it like a badge of honor!”

Most of Naaz’s music is in English, but her most recent album includes two songs in Kurdish: “Kche Baralla” (Loose Girl) and “Azadi” (Freedom). “Kche Baralla” was also selected for the Grammy Submissions in 2023. “Only five people are nominated so I did not get the actual nomination; nevertheless, I was extremely honored by this recognition – especially for a Kurdish song.”

“My friend Beri Shalmasi taught me about the origins of ‘Jin, Jiyan, Azadi’,” she said, referring to the rallying cry of “women, life, freedom” used by the protest movement in Iran that emerged after the Iranian morality police killed Jina Amini, a Kurdish woman, in 2022. “Before this I had not realized the beautiful equality we have in Kurdish culture. I did not know this as a diaspora child,” she told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

“It made me feel so proud of my ethnicity that I naturally felt more drawn to sing in Kurdish. Azadi is based on the slogan I just mentioned, and ‘Kche Baralla’ is related to how society can often dismiss ambitious women as ‘loose’ and look down on them, when we should be proud when someone is brave enough to enter new worlds.”

In 2024, she plans to write and produce a second album. She hopes to one day perform in her homeland of Kurdistan. “It would be an honor. I get wonderful feedback from Kurdish people, especially women. It always makes me so happy, it feels like meeting my sisters. I’m very proud to be Kurdish, I wear it like a badge of honor!” ●



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“I’m very proud to be Kurdish

”

Shokhan Nooraldin Salihi Kurdish Trailblazer in Saudi Women's Soccer



Soran Luqman
is a professional sports
journalist who has worked
for various local Kurdish
sports media outlets.

In the bustling landscape of Arab women's soccer, a luminous star has emerged, hailing from Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and captivating the Saudi Women's Premier League (SWPL). Born in Kirkuk in 2000, Shokhan

Nooraldin Salihi, or Shokhan, has ascended to the forefront of the SWPL, serving as the prominent forward for the Saudi club Al Hilal.

Her extraordinary prowess has shone



through on the pitches of Saudi Arabia, with Shokhan racking up an impressive tally of 43 goals in 14 matches last season, securing her the title of top scorer in the league. This meteoric rise culminated in a historic feat in November 2022, when Shokhan single-handedly notched 15 goals against Saudi club Sama. Such a stellar performance has rightfully earned her comparisons to Erling Haaland, the celebrated record-breaking Norwegian soccer striker in the English Premier League.

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Throughout her journey from Erbil to Riyadh, Shokhan has excelled on the pitch and enjoyed the privilege of sharing a team with renowned global soccer icons

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These performances led to Shokhan's nomination for the prestigious 2023 Arab Footballer of the Year award. Reflecting on the nomination, Shokhan expressed her profound sentiment, “Being nominated as a Kurdish representative for the Best Arab Player of the Year award is an immense honor. I stand as the inaugural player from Iraq to receive this nomination, a significant milestone for Kurdish women everywhere.”

Born goal-scorer

Throughout her journey from Erbil to Riyadh, Shokhan has excelled



on the pitch and afforded her the privilege of sharing a team with renowned global soccer icons. “Playing alongside talents like Brazilian maestro Neymar is a humbling experience,” the Kurdish player remarked. “The caliber of soccer in Saudi Arabia, with stars like Cristiano Ronaldo and Karim Benzema, rivals the best leagues in Europe. While I harbored hopes of Lionel Messi joining Al Hilal, the presence of numerous other luminaries in our club is testament to its strength.”

Shokhan’s acclaim transcends borders, evident in the tempting offers that she received from five German clubs, including Borussia Dortmund and Leipzig, during the preceding summer transfer window. However, her allegiance remains steadfast as she renewed her contract with Al Hilal for an additional three years. “I am immensely pleased by the respect and trust shown towards me by the club. It’s a privilege to not only represent myself but to also foster a deeper understanding of Kurdish culture among the players and people of Saudi Arabia. I take immense pride in being an ambassador for my people in the realm of Saudi and Arab soccer,” she affirmed.

“
Shokhan’s acclaim transcends borders, evident in the tempting offers that she received from five German clubs
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The genesis of Shokhan’s sporting journey dates to 2017 when she traversed various sports disciplines, including futsal – an indoor, soccer-based game

played on a hardcourt – for the Erbil Women’s Club and handball. Her triumphs include clinching the Kurdistan and Iraqi league titles with Erbil and then *Qala w Mnara* in Jordan and Tunisia. Notably, in 2019, she secured the top scorer and player titles in the Arab Women’s Handball Championship in Jordan, exhibiting her mettle with an astounding tally of 50 goals across five games.

Transition to soccer

Reflecting on her formative years, the Kurdish player reminisced, “My ardor for sports was ignited during my childhood days, when I played volleyball, handball, and futsal in Erbil’s schoolyards. Becoming a professional athlete and representing the women of Kurdistan was a lifelong aspiration.” Her initiation into futsal at Erbil Women’s Club under the tutelage of Captain Mazen Mohammed marked the inception of her remarkable journey.

Mazen Mohammed, recalling Shokhan’s transition from handball to soccer, remarked, “In 2017, witnessing Shokhan’s prowess in handball, I sensed her potential to flourish in soccer. Her remarkable speed, innate talent, and finesse made her a perfect fit for our futsal team.”

This transition saw Shokhan triumph



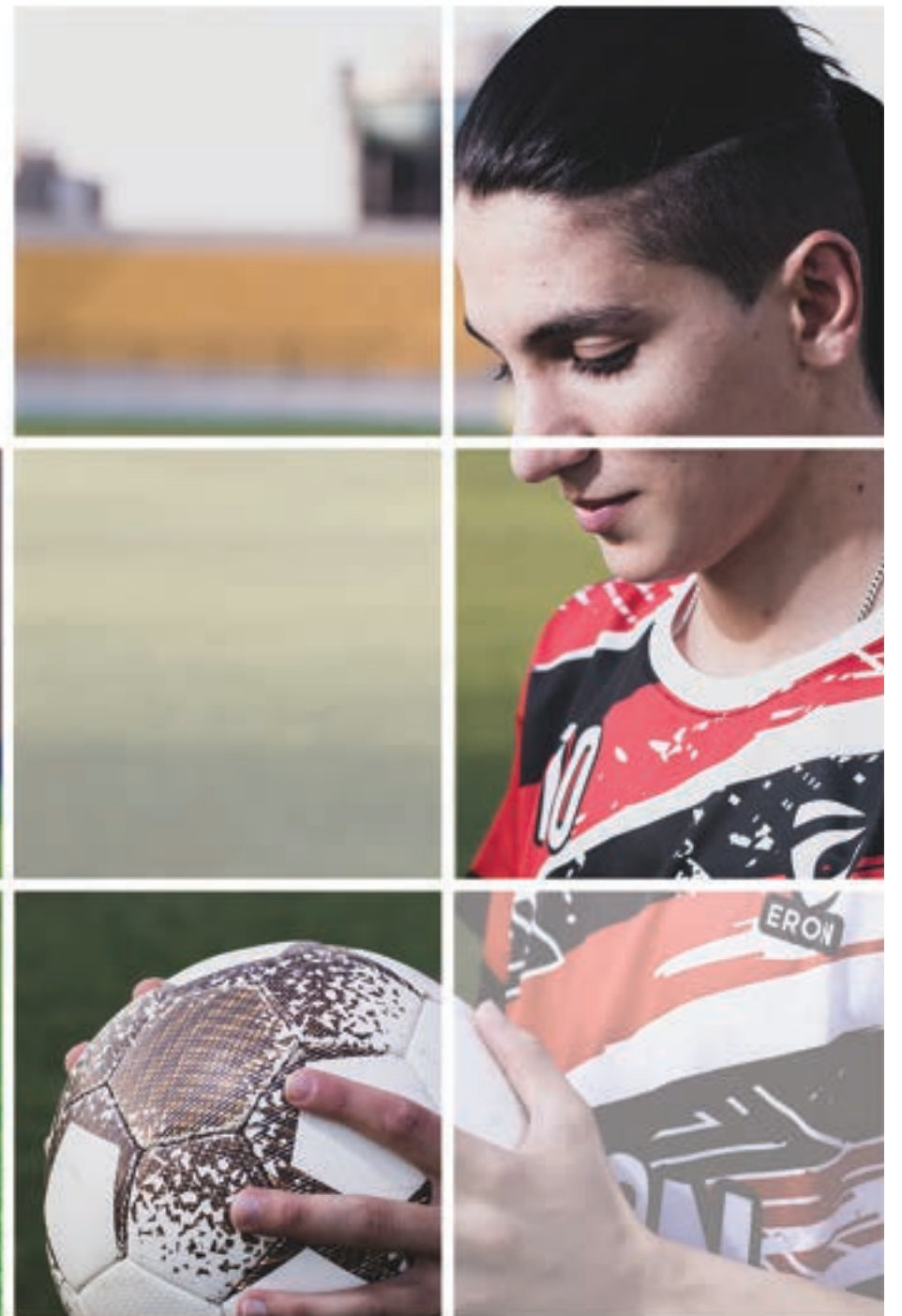
in the Kurdistan Women’s Premier League, clinching the title of top scorer with an impressive tally of 60 goals. Her recent triumph in securing the Iraqi Cup further solidified her standing as a prolific goal scorer in the league.

Her influence, however, extends beyond club accolades, as she plays a pivotal role within the Iraqi national team. Her crowning achievement came at the West Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia two years ago, when she not only lifted the trophy but also claimed the tournament’s title of top scorer, netting an impressive eight goals.

As Shokhan continues to script her growing legacy on the soccer pitch, her journey stands as a testament to perseverance, talent, and the boundless potential that transcends geographical borders, inspiring generations and shattering barriers along the way. ●



“
Her crowning achievement came at the West Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia two years ago, when she not only lifted the trophy but also claimed the tournament’s title of top scorer, netting an impressive eight goals
”





Jalal Malaksha

(1952 - 2020)

Translated by Nahro Zagros

As poetic inspiration comes to light,
The heart contends with its surging might,
Keen to reveal the verses laid bare.
Yet vigilant authorities discern,
Should the scent echo freedom's call,
They swiftly censure its essence,
Eager to stifle its poetic sprawl.

شېعر كه هات
دلېش ئېتر
ئۆقره ناگرې، ئه يدركېنئ
پۆليس بۇنى پيوه ته كا
بۇنى ئازادى ليوه بئ
ههرده ست بهجئ
ته يخنكېنئ!



Paint: Rostam Aghala



Kurdistan's diverse landscape attracts large predatory birds, particularly the Eurasian sparrowhawk known for its notable sexual dimorphism. The female, weighing up to 25% more than the male, preys on woodland and garden birds in urban areas. Adaptable to various habitats, it demonstrates a significant size difference between sexes, with males hunting smaller birds, while females focus on larger prey like thrushes and starlings, occasionally taking down birds over 500 grams

Eurasian sparrowhawk



