COLLATERAL DAMAGE

LEBANON'S FATE IN AMERICA'S FINANCIAL WAR ON HEZBOLLAH
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The good old days

Love him or hate him, Rafik Hariri had a skill set that worked for Lebanon. He was good at amalgamating the competing interests of Lebanon’s various groups and defending this country on the international stage with a unified vision of what Lebanon was and where it was heading. He also had foreign connections he could use to help Lebanon punch above its weight when dealing with powerful players such as the Americans. He considered Lebanon a package, and he included and defended everyone. And the Americans hated him for it. Hariri would have fought an attempt to single out Hezbollah for sanctions that risked destroying our economy. He embraced our divisions and believed that the prosperity a free market economy promised for the entire country would have made them moot.

Today, we not only lack solid diplomatic representation in Washington, but we’re also speaking as a cacophony, without authority and vision. The country’s top political bosses have their own teams in DC who compete and undermine each other with no regard for the fact that they’re embarrassing this country in the process. Worse, we still haven’t figured out how to work with the American system. When Lebanese politicians go to Washington, they are far better at convincing their hotel manager to let them smoke a cigar in their room than they are at convincing American officials of anything that would benefit this country.

Our internal divisions make it easier for us to be pushed around and punished. It’s an embarrassment for which I see no easy fix. We do, however, have an opportunity to fill an empty seat in Baabda that has been vacant too long. We need someone strong who can once again speak in a united voice for Lebanon. I see no viable candidate at the moment. But nonetheless, I sincerely hope that this time next year, our economy will have survived the American onslaught and we will once again find a strong leader who has our back.

Yasser Akkaoui
Editor-in-chief
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Putin announces withdrawal of Russian troops from Syria

Russian President Vladimir Putin shocked the international community on March 15 by announcing the withdrawal of “the main part” of Russia’s armed forces in Syria. Russian troops had intervened directly on the side of the Syrian government in September 2015, after Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made a formal request for direct Russian airstrikes. Although the stated goal of the Russian military intervention was to combat international terrorism, the majority of Russian airstrikes targeted groups belonging to Syria’s more moderate armed opposition, not militants from ISIS or Al Nusra Front. Backed by the Russian airstrikes, Syrian government forces and its allies on the ground made huge advances, seizing a reported 10,000 sq km of territory and nearly encircling rebel forces in the northern city of Aleppo, Syria’s largest city, which has been divided since the start of the armed conflict. Some Western diplomats speculated the Russian announcement may be a move to pressure the Syrian government to be more willing to compromise during on-going UN-sponsored peace talks in Geneva.

Naameh landfill re-opens for business

On March 19 the first garbage trucks entered the infamous Naameh landfill since it was closed in July 2015, prompting popular anti-government protests that lasted several months. The trucks were accompanied by a heavy military presence to ensure local activists and residents would not prevent the trucks from entering the site. Within 24 hours, the trucks had already collected more than 8,000 tons of garbage that had accumulated on streets and in informal dumping grounds around Beirut and Mount Lebanon, according to Environment Minister Mohammad Machnouk. The temporary re-opening of the Naameh landfill is part of the government’s plan to solve the country’s 8-month waste management crisis, which involves collecting garbage informally strewn across the country and dumping it in three landfills in Naameh, Burj Hammoud and Costa Brava. While the Naameh landfill is set to re-close after two months, the one in Burj Hammoud is expected to function for four years and collect 1,200 tons of garbage per day. In Costa Brava, work is underway to reclaim land from the sea and build a sea wall. The plan has been criticized for violating the Barcelona convention which prohibits landfills on coastal areas. Residents of Naameh were not happy with the re-opening of the Naameh landfill but were unable to protest in the face of such a heavy military presence.

Ban Ki-moon visits Lebanon to tour refugee camps

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon arrived in Lebanon on March 24 for a two-day tour of the country’s most impoverished areas and of
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Syrian refugee camps in the Bekaa. During the trip, Ban also met with senior Lebanese officials for talks focused on addressing the refugee crisis. In a press conference held the following day, Ban called for “stability and security in Lebanon” and insisted that the international community would help Lebanon’s Syrian refugees by offering temporary relief until Syria is safe enough to return to. After touring a Syrian refugee camp, the secretary general also pledged that the World Bank would allocate $100 million to Lebanon’s education sector. The aid package would target children ages five to 17 to ensure that Syrian refugee children in Lebanon would have access to education.

UN withholds pledged funds as Lebanon’s political stalemate continues

The World Bank warned Lebanon on March 24 that if the two year long political stalemate to find a president is not ended, then they will continue to withhold millions of dollars of developmental aid money. World Bank President Jim Yong Kim made the announcement while on a two day visit to the country along with U.N Secretary Ban Ki-moon and Islamic Development Bank Group President Ahmad Mohamed Ali Al Madani. Most of the money pledged is being held up as lawmakers struggle to agree on a president for the country. Yong Kim said that “there are real costs to the dysfunction of these governmental institutions in Lebanon and the cost is in money not moving directly to communities.” Once the funds are released the World Bank want to see the money used for development projects, such as education and providing employment opportunities, which will in turn foster economic growth.

Tripoli militia leader released from prison

Saad al-Masri, a notorious militia commander in the northern city of Tripoli, was released on March 26 after a two year stint in Qobbeh Prison. The militant, who was wanted on charges related to his role in the armed clashes between the Tripoli neighborhoods of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen, surrendered himself to Lebanese authorities in April 2014. Masri’s arrest coincided with the commencement of a government-sponsored security plan to restore calm to the restive northern city. Tripoli had witnessed several rounds of heavy fighting between the majority-Sunni neighborhood of Bab al-Tabbaneh and the Alawite-dominated Jabal Mohsen. The clashes, in which hundreds were killed over many rounds of fighting, greatly intensified after the outbreak of armed conflict in neighboring Syria. After his release, Masri received a hero’s welcome, with thousands of supporters gathering in Tripoli’s Abu Ali roundabout to celebrate the militia leader’s return.

Lebanese nationals risk deportation from Kuwait

Kuwait canceled the residency permits of 60 Lebanese nationals on March 28, according to an official at the Kuwaiti Interior Ministry, citing alleged ties to Hezbollah as the reason behind the decision. Earlier this month, the Gulf Cooperation Council designated Hezbollah a “terror organization” and proceeded to issue deportation orders for individuals suspected of having connections to the group. An estimated 350,000 Lebanese citizens work and reside in the Gulf region, with 41,000 alone living in Kuwait. Earlier in March, a report in the Kuwaiti daily Al-Qabas said that Kuwait is planning to deport around 1,100 Lebanese and Syrian nationals over alleged connections to Hezbollah. The clampdown follows an ongoing diplomatic spat between Lebanon and the Gulf countries which began when Saudi Arabia halted a $4 billion aid package to the Lebanese army and police force in February.
Business Expenses Made Easier

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Lebanon is in a sticky situation. The Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act (HIFPA), a United States law targeting Hezbollah, places Lebanon between Hezbollah and a loaded gun. It is the latest fire encroaching on the Lebanese economic house and comes on top of domestic catastrophes, such as the garbage and political crises, as well as the turmoil rolling throughout the region. All of these are troubles that are, in theory, throwing our national economy back to the stone age that Israel wanted to send us to nearly ten years ago. The worst thing about HIFPA is that Lebanese leaders could have done much to protect the house from the political firestarters across the Atlantic.

In a roundabout way Lebanon has almost done so. The banking sector has complied with central bank regulations for anti money laundering and counter terrorism financing, and the government has adopted laws to satisfy international standards (see SIC Q&A page 20). But that won't be enough to completely shield the country’s financial system. The Americans look to label Hezbollah a criminal organization because of its alleged key role in international drug trafficking and money laundering networks, using local and foreign banks to move its money. American pressure aimed at Hezbollah is a warning to financial institutions not to deal with Hezbollah lest they become the focus of American investigations.

This is a problem that Lebanon should have begun dealing with when draft versions of HIFPA first surfaced in 2014. Instead, recently Lebanese government and banking officials have been rushing to the US to assess the level of damage heading its way. If Lebanon had an effective diplomatic presence in Washington then this problem could have been dealt with sooner. Lebanese officials tell Executive that the country has negligible bilateral relations with the United States and that the embassy has had virtually no role in communicating Lebanon’s concerns to the Americans regarding HIFPA (see story page 14). Yet scaling up our diplomatic presence in DC would only be treating the symptom rather than addressing the root cause of the problem.

The main reason why Lebanon has virtually no voice in Washington is because there is no common foreign policy strategy. For the last quarter century, but specifically in the period since the assassination of Rafic Hariri, there has been no common denominator strong enough to rally everyone behind a decision on what Lebanon’s foreign policy vision should be. Lebanon has not done a very good job at presenting foreign policy positions to bilateral and multilateral counterparts. In Washington, specifically, deficiencies in diplomatic representation have resulted in reactionary responses instead of strategies to proactively influence policy there.

The dilemma regarding HIFPA is the inverse of what we saw last month when Gebran Bassil, Lebanon’s minister of foreign affairs, refused to sign Gulf Cooperation Council and Arab League anti-Hezbollah statements. Bassil took a specific approach to those statements that differed from the state’s. In that instance, Lebanon was caught between the opposing interests of Hezbollah and Gulf countries, specifically Saudi Arabia. Lebanon can begin to address its diplomatic deficiencies in the US by nominating an ambassador for cabinet approval. More effective representation in Washington means having a stronger voice to explain what is happening and will also help safeguard Lebanon’s national interest, but doesn’t necessarily mean it will be able to push those interests onto a US agenda.

Lebanon lacks basic representation in DC because we don’t know what those interests are and because we don’t have a diplomatic identity. Taking anti-Hezbollah legislation up with US lawmakers is a particularly difficult quagmire because representing the interest of the Lebanese government – in which Hezbollah is a stakeholder – is not in the interest of the Lebanese government.

That is due to Hezbollah’s role as the Resistance – many Lebanese outside its core constituency credit Hezbollah for rooting the Israelis out of south Lebanon – and the fact that Hezbollah has been assuming quasi state functions in parts of Lebanese territory. So the idea of America treating Hezbollah as a criminal organization doesn’t sit well for Lebanon. In that context, the label of criminal organization is a matter of definition and Hezbollah, from the Lebanese perspective, cannot be declared an enemy of the state. That in turn means Lebanon has to make a choice on what is in the best interest of the Lebanese. On the one hand it is of vital Lebanese interest to have America as a friend for business and trade relations, not to mention being cut off from the international financial system led by the United States would effectively kill our economy. But on the other hand we cannot ignore Hezbollah and the Shiite constituency it in large part represents – nor can we declare them to be enemies of the state or secessionists.

While we’re capable of adapting to the challenges we face, it’s impossible to satisfy opposing interests at the same time. But we need to take care of our national interests, however difficult that may be.
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LEADERS

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Education is key
Creating safe spaces for women in the workplace and on the streets

No woman should have to take it. Sexual harassment is one of the many prevalent issues Lebanon has yet to solve. Not only is it not reprimanded by the Penal Code, but sexual harassment is the product of socially reproduced gender discrimination indoctrinated through education or lack thereof, so much so that it has become an inevitable reality of what a woman will go through in our country. While government officials are neglecting the need to eradicate sexual harassment, it is time we become our own leaders and put an end to it.

With MP Ghassan Moukheiber’s draft law criminalizing sexual harassment still pending in Parliament (see story page 28), Executive urges economic, religious and social influencers to push for the law’s enactment and to create a well-rounded campaign that highlights the inequitable repercussions sexual harassment has on a woman. The campaign will include clauses from each think tank upholding the need to favor the law by confirming the sociological and mental effects sexual harassment can impose on a woman, which inhibit the latter from climbing the social and professional ladder.

Parliament is not our only target; we must forward the campaign to stakeholders who represent mainstream economic entities in Lebanon and invite them to join the campaign. This will help enforce sexual harassment prohibition into the code of conduct of Lebanese companies and offices to protect employees subjected to sexual harassment and discrimination in the private sector. Devising a plan to assess companies on gender-sensitive codes of conduct will also help make the workplace a safer environment. Once the assessment list is finalized, it must be publicized to inform people which companies did not instill a nondiscriminatory code of conduct and boycott it if they wish. This approach would encourage companies who do not have an inclusive approach to implement it, or least do so out of fear of reputational damages.

In 2013, a photograph portraying a woman with a bag over her head being pulled back with a belt attached to her neck was released to celebrate the collaboration of luxury handbag designer Johnny Farah and photographer Joe Kesrouani. The photograph immediately sparked outcry and women’s rights activists called for a boycott of Farah’s products. Although the designer issued a statement explaining the reason behind the photo, he ultimately changed it due to consumer pressure.

Of course, campaigning for better protection and safety of women goes beyond the law. We must not forget that real change can only come with proper awareness. First and foremost, it is crucial to introduce gender-sensitive education in schools where activities and exercises can challenge students’ reasoning and expose them to different situations regarding issues of gender. Teaching gender equality in schools provides a base for students’ understanding which they will then carry into their lives beyond the educational system. In addition, students should be taught about the prevalence of sexual harassment against women in society, different ways to prevent it and the cruciality of consent. Secondly, Executive urges educational institutions to partner with NGOs to arrange seminars to shed light on sexual harassment from local experts’ points of view armed with real-life experiences and developed knowledge on the subject. Third, the media should grant NGOs airtime by inviting them onto primetime shows or by teaming up with ad agencies to create fairly-priced awareness ads in order to maximize their visibility and influence. We know that social efforts should not be limited to organizations because change starts with each individual. Harassers should be punished and exposed at every level; be it through public shaming, scolding or sharing experiences on social media platforms, the word on sexual harassment should always be out in order to familiarize people with its prevalence and allow it to become a common cause. One way we can raise awareness is by creating support programs through which anyone who is harassed can share their stories as well as give and receive advice. Earlier this year a website called HarassTracker was developed to help people identify where sexual harassment occurs and to collect the received data for upcoming campaigns fighting sexual harassment. Ultimately, however, the

Students should be taught about the prevalence of sexual harassment against women in society, different ways to prevent it and the cruciality of consent.

Change in social behavior cannot happen overnight, especially not in a society that puts women in secondary societal and economic positions and portrays them as the weaker sex. Equality is at the heart of national progression, and as long as we are dealing with prejudice, women will not find their deserved place in society. Sexual harassment in Lebanon must become a thing of the past.
New legislation in the United States targeting Hezbollah has Lebanese government and banking officials shuttling between Beirut and Washington, not to rush to its defense but to assess the level of damage heading this way. Remembering the forced closure of the Lebanese Canadian Bank in 2011, local officials are more than a little concerned at the prospect of not just one bank as a victim but the entire sector.

Ratified into US law in December, the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act (HIFPA) is a continuation of the United States’ war on terrorism, an American policy that dates back to the Bush Administration. It is also a consequence of the P5+1 nuclear agreement with Iran (the Iran deal) and the lifting of that country’s sanctions. Those opposing the Iran deal – Republicans and American allies in the Gulf and Israel – have focused their residual fury at Hezbollah. They fear that the lifting of sanctions against Iran will allow it to float more money and aid to Hezbollah and other proxies in the region.

A PAWN IN US DOMESTIC POLITICS

The Americans allege Hezbollah is a key player in global narcotics trafficking and money laundering networks, using front companies to access local and international banking services to finance its military operations – charges vehemently denied in December’s “show me the evidence” speech by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

Cabinet officials in the Obama Administration and Congress – the Senate plus House of Representatives – both agree on the need to curtail Hezbollah’s access to Lebanese and international financial systems. But the message that the Administration has portrayed – in statements and through meetings with Lebanese government and banking officials of shielding Lebanon’s banking sector and economy does not exactly jive with that of the Congress.

There is not a discrepancy between the White House and Capitol Hill on the question of targeting Hezbollah, says Alain Aoun, a Member of Parliament representing Hezbollah’s ally, the Free Patriotic Movement. He told EXECUTIVE following February meetings with representatives from both that it’s not clear how aggressive the implementation rules will be for the HIFPA. “It’s a question of [implementation] so as not to provoke any collateral damage – this was the message we [emphasized],” Aoun said.

Shielding Lebanon’s financial institutions, banking sector and economy has been the key point reiterated by Lebanese government and banking officials in trips to Washington. Amal Movement MP Youssef Haidar, another Hezbollah ally, told EXECUTIVE in early March that the Americans were puzzled by all the meetings Lebanese officials were taking in DC. “Their reaction was to ask why [is Lebanon] panick-
ing? We told them, well, the perception in Lebanon is that it’s going to be crazy,” Jaber said. Lebanese concern regarding HIFPA implementation is that the law will disrupt the country’s banking sector, blowing up the Lebanese economy in the process, with individuals and businesses that come into contact with Hezbollah, even if not facilitating financial transactions or involved in alleged illicit activities, as collateral casualties.

The Obama Administration has been quick to point out that it is only Hezbollah that the Americans are interested in. Following meetings with US officials, Jaber told EXECUTIVE that “[The Americans] have no intention of neither hurting the Lebanese economy nor the Lebanese banking sector, nor of targeting any community or religious group. This is about [specific] individuals, entities and companies.” Following his mid-March visit to Washington, Minister of Finance Ali Hassan Khalil stated that Assistant Secretary for Terrorism Financing at the Treasury Department, Daniel Glaser, clearly confirmed “that the regulations will not target the Shiite community or any groups in general.”

The Obama Administration does not want to push Lebanon further toward chaos says Ibrahim Warde, an expert on terrorism financing at Tufts University. According to his reading of the situation, at least some departments in the Administration do not want to instigate a breakdown of Lebanon’s banking sector. “Certainly someone like John Kerry and the State Department institutionally, don’t want to see the collapse of the Lebanese banking sector because they are well aware of the fact that it is one of the few things left standing in Lebanon,” Warde told EXECUTIVE.

Preserving the integrity of the banking sector is a point underlined by Obama’s nominee for ambassador to Lebanon, Elizabeth Richard. Richard testified to Congress in her nomination hearing in mid-March that shielding Lebanon’s banking sector and economy from Hezbollah infiltration is a top priority for the Administration. “Our goal,” she said, “is to dismantle Hezbollah’s international financial network while supporting Lebanese institutions and the Lebanese people. The success of the Lebanese banking sector, a backbone of the country’s economy, relies on upholding an already excellent reputation. Both Lebanon and the United States have an interest in ensuring Hezbollah cannot penetrate the Lebanese financial sector.”

But Congress is taking a much more hardline approach in the lead up to writing the law’s implementation rules. The case being made to Congress by partisan academic experts is that, since the signing of the Iran deal, Hezbollah’s financial latitude to purchase weapons and military technology has expanded. That is, according to testimony in front of the House of Representatives’ Foreign Affairs Middle East and North Africa subcommittee in late March by Matthew Levitt of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, because the lifting of Iranian sanctions has “Increased Iranian spending... likely to benefit Hezbollah’s regional and international operations.”

Critics of the Iran deal have labored over the question of whether the removal of sanctions would provide more money for terrorist funding – Exhibit A being Hezbollah, Warde told EXECUTIVE. From his perspective, “The way in which the Obama Administration has tried to deflect that kind of criticism was to go along with [HIFPA] in December… the [Iran deal] had been under very strong attack by the Republicans, Gulf countries and Israel.”

The advice presented to Congress during that subcommittee hearing was to go hard at Hezbollah, whatever the cost.

The advice presented to Congress during that subcommittee hearing was to go hard at Hezbollah, whatever the cost.
receiving this financial windfall of over $100 billion it is not only reasonable to expect that Iran will increase its support of its proxy, but it is as near of a guarantee as one can have,” Ros-Lehtinen said.

REPUBLICANS, GULF COUNTRIES AND ISRAEL

Republican leaders, like Ros-Lehtinen, are pushing to target Hezbollah because the measures will serve as a counterweight to the Iran deal. Republicans as well, especially on the far right, have for a long time questioned Obama’s commitment to Israel. To many voters in the Republican primaries, Obama is considered a Muslim, and his fumbling of the America-Israel alliance, in their view, is part of an Islamic conspiracy to push Israel into the sea. The president has at times publicly feuded with his Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu, but Obama has not veered far from US policy norms concerning issues like the Israel-Palestine peace process. Ros-Lehtinen subscribes to this critique of Obama and the narrative has played well among 2016’s Republican presidential candidates.

That HIFPA is politically driven legislation is underscored in small part by the 2016 presidential election cycle in the US. Then Republican presidential candidate Marco Rubio, a key sponsor of the bill in the Senate and one-time protégé of Ros-Lehtinen, had leveraged other important issues, such as immigration, as a way to spring up the political rungs of his career ladder. Rubio’s tendency, as a recent article pointed out in Rolling Stone, an American magazine covering music, pop culture and politics, has been to pursue issues and political alliances that best benefit his quest for power until they don’t.

America’s Arab allies fear that an Iran flush with cash will pursue regional goals more aggressively, leading one Saudi Arabian diplomat to describe the deal as “extremely dangerous,” The Washington Post reported in July 2015. Several sources tell Executive that Saudi Arabia’s decision to pull its $3 billion aid package to Lebanon’s army, the designations of Hezbollah as a terrorist group by the Gulf Cooperation Council and Arab League, as well as recent measures taken by several GCC countries to deport Lebanese nationals because of alleged ties to Hezbollah are designed to show anger over, or to blunt the impact of, sanction lifting. Criticism by Arab governments that view Iran as competition agree that the Iran deal will enable it to give more aid to its proxies, particularly Hezbollah. More money for Hezbollah, they say, will allow it to increase military capabilities on multiple fronts in the region, strengthen Hezbollah’s alleged terrorism, narcotics and money laundering networks across the globe, and restore and expand social services to its constituency in Lebanon, allowing it to further entrench itself in domestic politics. The position Israel has taken on the Iran deal has been clear for some time: Iran represents an existential threat to the Jewish state with Hezbollah in the position to execute this threat both directly and covertly.

PARTISAN POLICY ADVICE

The arena of power battles includes the use, by all combatants, of not only politics but also partisan think tanks. Gulf countries have bought political influence by funding think tanks in Washington. A 2014 investigation by The New York Times found that “More than a dozen prominent Washington research groups have received tens of millions of dollars from foreign governments in recent years while pushing United States government officials to adopt policies that often reflect the donors’ priorities.” The investigation linked Arab funding to several well known think tanks including the Brookings Institution, the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Atlantic Council.

Israeli interests influence think tanks in DC too, Warde says, like the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) and the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD). “This constituency...
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has always been quite powerful. It is especially clear whenever you have the experts testifying, it’s always the same names and affiliations – WINEP, FDD – these kinds of groups always send their ‘experts or pseudo-experts’ to just say all sorts of bad things about Hezbollah,” he tells Executive.

FDD is a think tank that describes itself as a non-partisan foreign policy and national security institute, but it does not publish its financials or donor lists. In 2011 ThinkProgress, a left-leaning policy advocacy organization, published FDD’s Form 990s, a tax document required of nonprofits by the United States Internal Revenue Service, accounting for nearly all of the organization’s funding from 2001 to 2004. ThinkProgress concluded that: “Most of the major donors are active philanthropists to ‘pro-Israel’ causes both in the US and internationally. With the disclosure of its donor rolls, it becomes increasingly apparent that FDD’s advocacy of US military intervention in the Middle East, its hawkish stance against Iran and its defense of right-wing Israeli policy is consistent with its donors’ interests in ‘pro-Israel’ advocacy.”

WINEP is the alleged policy think tank of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), its critics say. In a 2010 blogpost for Foreign Policy, Stephen Walt, a professor of international affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, suggested that foreign policy officials in the White House at that time held convictions closer in line to Israeli policy than to America’s, prompting an indignant rebuttal by WINEP director Robert Satloff labeling Walt a McCarthyite, one who makes accusations of treason without evidence – an underhand way of calling Walt an anti-semitre.

Israel has the added weight of supposedly non-partial academic policy organizations with that of pro-Israeli lobby groups. According to opensecrets.org, a website compiling records from the US Senate Office of Public Records, AIPAC was one of the pro-Israel organizations that paid for lobbying in 2014 and 2015 against loosely wording the text of HIFPA. Lebanon had one organization, the Association of Banks in Lebanon, that lobbied on its behalf both years. (The association declined to comment for this article). Organizations like AIPAC hold a lot of weight in Washington, and American leaders often speak in front of it to push their policy agenda or to gain support for political appointees.

In March, for example, Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken addressed AIPAC to garner congressional votes in favor of Obama’s nominee as the next undersecretary of the Treasury Department for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, Adam Szubin. Blinken told AIPAC that Szubin is the right person for the job because in his sleep he dreams “about how to maintain and sustain the pressure we need on Iran” and that “every senator who has called for more sanctions should be pushing for, not delaying, his confirmation.”

Likewise, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton also addressed AIPAC in March. She told the pro-Israeli lobby group that the US “must work closely with Israel and other partners to cut off the flow of money and arms from Iran to Hezbollah.”

When compared with Arab countries and Israel, Lebanon commands exceedingly insignificant influence in Washington

UNDERREPRESENTED IN WASHINGTON

When compared with Arab countries and Israel, Lebanon commands exceedingly insignificant influence in Washington. Diplomatic presence – the ambassador retired in December – was described to Executive as “pretty weak” and “not sufficient to do what is required.” MP Alain Aoun said that “the embassy is understaffed for such an important country like the United States. Where many decisions concerning the whole world are taken, we are so underrepresented that we are almost completely absent. One congressman is probably staffed better than our embassy.”

Compared to that of America’s Middle East allies – countries of the Gulf plus Israel – MP Yassine Jaber told Executive, “We have really been sitting on our buttocks – if you compare two countries in the region, Lebanon and Jordan, we have more burden fighting terrorism, and vis-à-vis the refugees. But Jordan has a lot more attention, a lot more money, a lot more support because they’re [actively present in Washington],” adding that Lebanon has virtually “no bilateral engagement” with the United States.

The conundrum for Lebanon in all this is its perception in Washington as a problem country because of Hezbollah, an image it has little latitude to alter. Lebanon is underrepresented diplomatically and is outspent in its lobbying efforts. Ultimately, Lebanon has little ability to articulate its position, drowned out by America’s Arab allies plus Israel, on American policy in the Middle East, leaving its national concerns to go virtually unheard.
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LEAD THE WAY
Up to standard

Lebanese banks now comply with international anti-money laundering standards

With the mid-April implementation of the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act (HIFPA), signed into United States law in December 2015, Executive inquires whether Lebanese financial institutions face an increased level of American scrutiny. The new law places liability on any financial institution, not just Lebanese banks, if they were to knowingly facilitate financial transactions connected to Hezbollah. In the lead up to HIFPA's ratification and immediately after, Lebanese banks took notice. De-risking ensued, accounts were closed and, according to local media reports, the opening of new accounts were denied for some politically exposed persons.

In the month preceding the law's ratification, in mid-November, Lebanon was in danger of being cut off from the international financial system due to out of date anti-money laundering rules. After many months of complacency, and despite urging from Banque du Liban (BDL), Lebanon's central bank, Lebanese politicians rushed to Parliament to pass anti-money laundering (AML) and counter terrorism financing (CTF) legislation to comply with international standards.

Within this context, Executive was in search of answers as to the impact of HIFPA, though the Americans have yet to write its implementation rules, and as to how Lebanon is complying with AML/CTF standards. Executive posed these questions to Abdul Hafez Mansour, head of the central bank's Special Investigation Commission – the responsible authority for investigating suspicious financial transactions. To the latter the response is one of confidence – Lebanon has put in place the necessary compliance measures to shield its financial system. But to the former, in the face of American pressure, uncertainty persists as to the consequences for local banks should the Americans accuse them of servicing accounts linked to Hezbollah – the outcome of which will be answerable only through testing actual conflict scenarios, as Executive has previously reported.

Since the closure of the Lebanese Canadian Bank (LCB) in 2011, the United States Treasury has only targeted Lebanese nationals, not institutions, with financial sanctions. But, last year, the Treasury sanctioned two individuals for their connections to local banks. Is there again a growing concern of alleged money laundering through Lebanese financial institutions?

No, we don't have this feeling. After the LCB case, banks heightened their awareness to the risks – whether they are local or international [banks], it is now much clearer. When I compare what [Lebanon's] banks are doing, I think we're doing well by regional and international standards. Our set of laws and regulations are pretty much complete now. The new laws and regulations passed last November complete our legislative [framework], and on the regulatory front the central bank has issued the necessary regulations. So what we need from the regulatory and legislative perspectives we [have], it's quite complete and is one of the best set of [rules] in the region. I would say the situation is quite acceptable – is it perfect? No, we're never perfect.

In early November, before the AML laws were passed, you said that the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) – the body coordinating standards on anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing – would not hesitate to blacklist Lebanon if its legal framework were not amended.

Yes, there was a list of 23 countries already shortlisted – they were about to go out with a report and a shortlist of the countries that are not compliant or have fundamental problems with their regulations.

So with those laws passed and with the rules from the central bank regulating cash transfers and requiring banks to have compliance officers, Lebanon has addressed its weaknesses and alleviated the concerns of FATF?

Essentially yes. FATF was doing a fact finding initiative on countries' compliance with the regulations that are needed to fight terrorism. Many countries in the world, including countries in the region, did not have the chance to elaborate on existing legislations and we argued that FATF...
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should not apply double standards – [Lebanon was one] of the countries that made the point that other countries had the chance to explain their situation, which really helped them to not be on the shortlist. So on that basis countries were given until February to have a look at the report’s findings and to come forward with comments, which [Lebanon] did. In the timeframe running from October to November we managed to have the legislation passed – [the laws] were already ready but the legislative process is quite slow in this country.

**E** Were the laws ratified because of lobbying by the central bank?

Absolutely – it was public lobbying. We were out in front of the media – the governor of the central bank, myself, the bankers’ association – we were all working to raise the awareness of the possible risks of Lebanon being blacklisted and the need to comply with international standards. That helped to a good extent in putting the necessary momentum for these laws to be issued.

**E** How did it go at FATF’s February plenary meeting?

It went pretty well. The new laws were reviewed and Lebanon was found to be in compliance and that there was no further action to be taken in this regard.

**E** That is essentially what BDL governor Riad Salameh announced after the meeting; that the FATF asserted Lebanon was in full compliance with international standards to curb money laundering and terrorism financing, and that no further follow-up was necessary. But a FATF spokesperson told Executive following the February meeting that the FATF’s official stance was that Lebanon was not discussed and therefore the FATF could not say what Lebanon’s status is in terms of compliance. Can you clarify?

Possibly because you did not ask the right question. I said there was a special initiative that all the countries were subject to, which is on the terrorist financing legislation – it’s not a comprehensive set of reviews. This is too technical, in a short amount of time I cannot explain, but countries are subject to what they call mutual evaluation reviews – a mutual evaluation is a kind of exercise carried out periodically every four to five years.

**E** Can you explain how the FATF writes the standards for anti money laundering (AML) and counter terrorism financing (CTF)?

The standards that FATF issues on AML and CTF are labeled as recommendations for countries to comply with. Countries that do not comply could be subject to public listing. This short listing is a very influential tool. A public listing of a weak system on AML would probably lead to the cutting off of [the country’s] financial system from the rest of the world. This is how it works – there are standards that are issued by the FATF, who also reviews the extent of compliance with these standards, and countries that are not compliant – there are varying degrees of compliance – could reach the status of being publicly listed as a non-compliant country or a country with substantial weaknesses in its regulations. And the international financial community would take that into consideration when dealing with a country – they could opt to not deal with the banking sector of the specific country that was labeled a weak country when it comes to the AML / CFT regulations.

**E** Just to be clear, what FATF is doing in setting the standards for compliance is completely different than what the Americans are doing with their financial sanctions.

Absolutely, the FATF is a different setup. We have to distinguish between the FATF’s work and the United States’ work. The United States passes designations and enforces its own laws and regulations on US soil but sometimes these laws have long arms and are far-reaching.

**E** Many officials in Lebanon seem to be very concerned by the coming implementation of the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act signed into US law in December 2015. Why are government and banking officials so worried?

This is a US law that might affect nationals in this country and now we are in a position to see what measures will be taken as a result of this law. It’s a matter of concern to them because if Lebanese banks and the banking sector want to remain part of the international financial system they need to play by the rules of the game. So if a law is passed in the United States that would prohibit US banks from dealing directly or indirectly in certain types of transactions, or with certain individuals, then Lebanese banks cannot deal with such individuals – otherwise they will expose their correspondents, themselves and the sector to the measures that may be taken. This is pretty clear. Banks have to KYC – know your client. So the correspondent banks in the United States, which deal with a large number of banks all over the world, have to know exactly how their clients, i.e. banks, in Lebanon and elsewhere operate – and what degree of compliance is observed, what is the professionalism of their compliance officers – in order to feel comfortable dealing with them. This is a connected kind of system and in this respect you have to understand this kind of relationship in order to stay in business and stay connected: first as a bank to your correspondent and second as a country to the community worldwide. A Lebanese bank should not operate as a front. When they deal recklessly with clients not observing international regulations then this is, in a way, almost fronting. And they’re saying ‘no we’re dealing with normal clients’, when in fact they’re not – this is the general case all over the world. Lebanese banks or banks anywhere in the world could be, if they don’t apply the appropriate compliance measures, in effect, covering for illegitimate clients.
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Merhi Abou Merhi, a Lebanese business tycoon and former board member of IBL Bank, has not been acquitted by federal prosecutors, sources at the United States Department of Justice and the Department of Treasury told *Executive* on March 8. A report carried by Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency (NNA) on March 7 claimed that Abou Merhi, his family members and their companies had been acquitted of charges of facilitating a narcotics and money laundering ring overseen by the Joumaa Criminal Organization.

American officials deny Merhi Abou Merhi acquittal

The Treasury Department says that the report is false and that sanctions are still in place on the Abou Merhis and their 11 companies. “They all remain designated. Claims that Mr. Merhi has been ‘found innocent of the claims by OFAC’ are inaccurate and there has been no action regarding Mr. Merhi that would change his status as a Specially Designated National and Blocked Person,” says Betsy Bourassa, spokeswoman for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence at the Treasury.

**UNDESIRABLE LINKS**

The Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) had sanctioned Abou Merhi, along with three family members that held management positions in 11 designated companies, in October 2015 for alleged business dealings with members of the Joumaa network that had previously been sanctioned by OFAC. Acting Director of OFAC John Smith said in a statement announcing the sanctions that “Merhi Ali Abou Merhi operates an extensive maritime shipping business that enables the Joumaa network’s illicit money laundering activity and widespread narcotics trafficking. The Joumaa criminal network is a multi-national money laundering ring whose money laundering activities have benefited Hizballah.”

The Treasury Department sanctioned Abou Merhi pursuant to the
Kingpin Act and added him and his family members to the OFAC’s Special Designated Nationals (SDN) list. A listing on the SDN freezes the financial assets of the Abou Merhis and 11 companies held in banks under US jurisdiction and blocks them from accessing the international financial system. Getting off the OFAC list is an arduous process requiring those listed to sever business and personal relationships and provide financial records. Gary Hufbauer, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics and former deputy assistant secretary at the Treasury Department, has previously told Executive that it is an expensive and time-consuming process that places the burden of proof on the designated entities. Designation under the Kingpin Act also carries possible fines of up to $5 million and criminal penalties of up to 30 years in prison for each listed individual.

When the NNA broke the news that a US court had acquitted the Abou Merhis of any alleged wrongdoing, Executive was skeptical. The timing of the report was peculiar in that only six months had passed since the sanctions were announced, a very short period of time considering the allegations they face.

According to the NNA, the US Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Virginia (EDVA) dropped the case against Abou Merhi, his family and companies. But Joshua Stueve, a Justice Department spokesman for the EDVA, told Executive that “the reports are false.” Stueve did not elaborate and did not respond to follow up questions sent via email.

The NNA says the statement was issued by the EDVA and reported by its correspondent in the US. Executive reached the NNAs director, Laure Saab, by telephone and was told that all pertinent information regarding the source of the statement and any other details could be found in the Arabic version of its article published on March 7. But the article neither indicates whether the NNA correspondent actually spoke with the prosecutor’s office or with the Abou Merhis’ legal counsel.

**READING BETWEEN THE LINES**

According to the NNAs ghost statement, “the US has conducted a lengthy and broad investigation into the allegations against Merhi Abou Merhi, his family and companies. It turned out that the allegations made void of any party, but the prosecutor’s office in the US has taken the decision to close this case and has informed OFAC of the innocence of Abou Merhi, his family and companies, and there is no need to carry the investigation any further.” The NNA stands by its report that the statement acquitting the Abou Merhis came from the EDVA.

The fact that the NNA does not clearly identify and attribute sources, even anonymous ones, is an alert to the need for higher reporting standards when tackling such issues that have implications for the Lebanese–American relationship, Lebanon’s financial system and the business community at large. These stakeholders need to have reliable information because any type of business relationship with a sanctioned entity can raise red flags with Treasury.

**GETTING OFF THE OFAC LIST**

Getting off the OFAC list is an arduous process requiring those listed to sever business and personal relationships and provide financial records.

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What lies beneath

Lebanon must act to keep its seat at the oil and gas table

Lebanon has missed several opportunities to grow its nascent oil and gas industry at an ideal pace, but now regional developments threaten not just further delays, but also permanent losses unless the country acts to protect its national interests.

The new urgency stems primarily from two principal events. The first was last summer’s discovery of the giant Zohr gas field off Egypt’s northern coast by Italy’s ENI, a find estimated by some to have doubled the North African country’s natural gas reserves overnight. It also significantly increased the likelihood of commercially viable deposits in nearby offshore acreage belonging to Cyprus, Lebanon and Israel. This has sparked renewed interest in this section of the Eastern Mediterranean basin from major international oil companies.

The second event – in part at least a consequence of the first – was the Cypriot government’s approval in late February of a two-year extension for an ENI-led consortium to conduct exploration and production in Blocks 2, 3 and 9 of Cyprus’ exclusive economic zone (EEZ), the first and third of which are adjacent to Lebanon’s EEZ. Apart from general location, these blocks also share similar geology with Zohr and other Egyptian and Israeli fields, and undersea hydrocarbon deposits obviously pay no heed to political or other borders, so it’s possible that Cyprus’ Blocks 2 and 9 have reservoirs that extend into Lebanon’s maritime area.

This prospect should be good news for all Lebanese because it offers a chance to share in any revenues derived from any reservoir that may be discovered, even if this country’s energy sector has yet to undertake any production operations of its own. It would also offer an opportunity for Lebanese individuals, companies and government departments to gain experience by cooperating with Cyprus and ENI, helping to prepare our public and private sectors alike for the day when this country starts actively exploring for its own resources.

FRIENDS WITHOUT BENEFITS

All it takes to start reaping the early rewards of these happy circumstances is for the Lebanese government to exercise a modicum of self-preservation through a little initiative. The only things missing are a maritime border deal with Cyprus to define the line between the two countries’ EEZs and a Framework Unitization Agreement (FUA) that would establish terms for joint development and exploitation, including the formula(s) for any revenue sharing.

Herein lies the problem; Lebanon and Cyprus enjoy friendly relations, neither has staked out an extreme position in this process, talks on an FUA have made progress and a delineation map was agreed upon way back in 2007. However, the unitization talks have been stalled since 2013, and the map has yet to be ratified. Absent of such agreements, the scope for legal disputes over potential resources will be considerable, exposing the interests of both sides to unnecessary delays, but hurting Lebanon more because it would prevent this country from assisting and learning in the process – and rob its people of revenues to which they are entitled.

No such questions hang over Egypt’s Zohr field, which lies adjacent to Cyprus’ EEZ, because the modalities of any shared reservoirs have already been set by Cairo and Nicosia. Time is running out for Beirut to protect its long-term interests with a similar agreement that would, inter alia, insulate it against any kind of “rule of capture” claim if and when Cyprus starts recovering oil and gas from areas adjacent to Lebanon’s EEZ.

The solution is clear: Lebanon needs to re-engage with Cyprus as soon as possible and, when it does, to remain focused and keep its priorities in order. If recent history is any guide, there will continue to be distractions that limit the pace of oil and gas development, including the ongoing stalemate in Lebanon’s political class and various obstacles attached to (and compounded by) the state of war that still exists between this country and Israel. To further complicate the situation, the latter is one of three regional states, along with Syria and Turkey, that have neither signed nor ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), usually the most reliable mechanism for resolving offshore resource disputes.

No matter. None of this prevents Lebanon’s diplomats and energy officials from getting on with the business of finalizing the necessary arrangements with Cyprus. The politicians may not get around to activating Lebanon’s energy industry as a whole any time soon, but this aspect is a no-brainer: in order to ensure Lebanon receives any revenues to which it is entitled from shared reservoirs, all it has to do is reach an agreement with a
friendly country. And although there is no agreement on the tripoint where the EEZs of Lebanon and Cyprus meet, the overlap between Israeli and Lebanese claims — this has no bearing on the rest of the bilateral line between Lebanon and Cyprus, or, for good measure, on the 90 percent or more of Lebanon’s EEZ that is not in dispute with anyone.

**SHARING THE SPOILS**

Lebanon and Cyprus can accelerate this process by jointly enlisting the support of the United States to help define the aforementioned southern tripoint. The Israeli failure to commit to UNCLOS is a significant obstacle, as is the absence of Lebanese-Israeli relations. At present the only country with the diplomatic heft to ford this impasse is the US, which, through separate discussions with Lebanon and Israel, has already made progress in narrowing the gap between the two sides’ respective maritime claims.

Timely cooperation with Cyprus will also preserve Lebanon’s interests by garnering fuller recognition of our EEZ. The same partnership may allow Lebanon to start collecting revenues from shared oil and gas fields even before its own production begins. Further down the road, if and when Lebanon is producing enough natural gas for export, Cyprus can be an important outlet to crucial markets in Europe and elsewhere.

Of course, it would be nice if more politicians would provide these and other negotiations with all the support and cover they deserve. Most of Lebanon’s political institutions have been hamstrung by partisan wrangling, but parliament still has considerable resources. Having the legislative branch resume its role could be pivotal on this score.

Lebanon is not the first country to face the unique challenges of developing an oil and gas industry during a prolonged period of turmoil, and luckily one of the best examples is Cyprus itself. A third of that country has been occupied by Turkey since 1974 and its political landscape is a raucous one, populated by outsized personalities with sharply different views, and with an economy that is still struggling to regain the ground it lost since the global financial crisis of 2008-2009.

Despite these handicaps, and some decidedly unsuble Turkish threats, successive Cypriot presidents and their ministers have kept their eyes on the prize, methodically laying the groundwork for its future as a modern oil and gas producer and, quite possibly, as the region’s premier energy hub. Successes at home have been matched by effective diplomacy abroad, integrating the tiny country into an interlocking web of bi- and multilateral partnerships that give it a voice on the regional stage. In addition, far from acquiescing to the continuing division of the island nation as an insurmountable obstacle to this process, Cyprus has turned the tables by holding out future energy revenues as an incentive for reunification.

These attitudes have allowed for meaningful progress across the legislative and regulatory spectrum, encouraging investments and partnerships that even now are fleshing out the infrastructure and support systems for a thriving oil and gas sector. Even more importantly, they have demonstrated the effectiveness of dialogue and cooperation, showing a way to break the cycle of conflict and instability that has gripped much of the region for so long.

That may sound like a lot of ground for Lebanon to cover if its energy sector is ever to catch up with those of Cyprus and other neighboring countries, but the facts are not quite so bleak.

Before the current political stalemate spread into virtually every nook and cranny of the Lebanese public sector, parliament and cabinet designed and even began to install many of the necessary administrative and legal structures, including a suitably empowered Lebanese Petroleum Administration to oversee the sector. While not quite “plug and play,” most of these can start functioning as soon as the right levers are pulled and crucial pieces of enabling legislation are passed. Therefore, while it is probably too much to hope that Lebanon’s deeply divided politicians will act with unity of purpose any time soon, if and when sufficient numbers of them get serious about serving the people they are supposed to represent, the right tools for the job will be close at hand.

Finally, Lebanon should also strongly consider joining the emerging club composed of Cyprus, Egypt, Greece and Jordan. Apart from the technical and economic advantages to be gained, the various cooperation agreements linked to this grouping give each member greater influence over how the Eastern Mediterranean’s energy resources will be developed. Signing on would radically enhance Lebanon’s standing, and while the immediate goals of such membership would be economic, the resulting relationships would do much to promote regional stability. That, at least, would offer some hope that all of the peoples in the Eastern Mediterranean might one day know both peace and prosperity.

Roudi Baroudi is CEO of Energy and Environment Holding, an independent consultancy based in Doha, Qatar.
PROSECUTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN LEBANON: in limbo
Making a safer society for women

The above is just one case among enumerable accounts from victims of sexual harassment in Lebanon, where statistics on assaults are not registered in legal records because as of yet, there are no measures taken against this form of abuse. According to Human Rights Watch, Lebanon has proven to be anything but progressive when it comes to protecting women’s most basic human rights, such as the right to be protected from sexual assault. Its definition might slightly vary from country to country, but sexual harassment is globally construed as any physical, verbal or nonverbal act of a sexual nature that violates a person’s integrity or privacy resulting in said person feeling bothered, threatened, disrespected or harmed. Sexual harassment is not exclusive to Lebanon, yet the Lebanese Penal Code does not punish it. This effectively makes sexual harassment a social norm that women in Lebanon simply have to deal with. “We are brought up and socialized in a way that constantly reminds us that men are more dominant than women,” explains American University of Beirut sociologist Karma Bibi. “Women have fewer rights and are seen as weaker, and this is socially reproduced all the time;” she adds. Two major factors contribute to the prevalence of sexual harassment in Lebanon: the lack of legal initiatives and the socialization of Lebanese citizens. Women are still not guaranteed protection from sexual harassment in public, which is all the more reason why the private sector in Lebanon should enforce values and regulations that would protect employees from this form of abuse, setting an example to the rest of society.

Yet Lebanese officials do not seem to be concerned by this, nor do they seem to even be aware of the abuse taking place under their noses. The need for government action became particularly clear after news broke in early 2014 of the resignation of Nasif Qaloush, Governor of Beirut and the North, following the release of a YouTube video showing him attempting to sexually assault a female employee in exchange for a contract renewal.

Yet Ghassan Moukheiber, Member of Parliament for the Change and Reform Bloc, is looking to change this alarming status quo. In May 2014, after consulting with legal experts, Moukheiber drafted a law to criminalize sexual harassment. The proposed law dictates the appropriate measures to be taken in cases of sexual harassment and racial discrimination in Lebanon. It is comprised of clear sections on criminal provisions, victim protection, disciplinary measures, prevention and employee regulations. Moukheiber believes that: “Victims do not have a real basis to prosecute [harassers],” and in his proposition to Parliament, he explained that...
taking advantage of the absence of a law becomes worse when the victim experiences social or professional subordination. However, the bill has not yet been voted on in Parliament. Earlier in 2014, Parliament did pass a law criminalizing domestic violence that had been pending since 2010. A Lebanese judicial source told EXECUTIVE that the government at the time wanted to tame public outcry over the stalled bill, and, in turn, approved it. However, the legislation sparked backlash from activists who decried the removal of a clause condemning marital rape after some politicians and religious figures had criticized it.

**LEGISLATION: TOOTHLESS OR ABSENT**

In Lebanon over the past five years, drug-related crimes have increased by 200 percent, the murder rate has doubled and cases of reported theft have risen 18 times; despite the extremely high incidence of sexual harassment, most officials feel they have their hands full. Although Colonel Johnny Haddad of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) claims that 99 percent of sexual harassment cases are “solved”, Moukheiber states that to this day, “no reliable data [on the subject] exists.” He believes that Lebanese authorities possess neither the proper legal tools to resolve sexual harassment nor the political will to fight it. According to Haddad, sexual harassment cases are prosecutable under articles of the Penal Code relating to indecent actions. However, such articles can be misleading; for example, Article 507, which imposes a penalty of imprisonment with hard labor for a minimum of four years for anyone who coerces another person to commit or endure an obscene act, can be interpreted in different ways and does not dictate the criminalization of sexual harassment specifically. However, Haddad insists that not one report of sexual assault goes uninvestigated: “The [harasser] will get arrested and will be transported to the prosecutor’s office who will press charges. He or she will later be charged and sentenced by a judge for the crime,” he says. Despite this claim that sexual harassment cases are always dealt with, one cannot deny that there are loopholes. ISF records reveal that only six cases of sexual harassment have been reported as of March 2016, most of which, Haddad says, are related to incest specifically and not sexual aggression against another person in general. A 2015 study by the World Bank shows that only one in five MENA countries have a law criminalizing sexual harassment in public and in the workplace.

The prevalence of sexual harassment in Lebanon is not only a direct consequence of the lack of political will to criminalize it, but also a result of certain long-established social norms that promote all forms of sexism. The pre-assigned gender roles for men and women in Lebanon play a part in shaping perceptions in society and in the professional world. AUB’s Bibi told EXECUTIVE that the roles men and women are expected to play in our society are reinforced through education: “Don’t we always tell women to look good and presentable?” she asks. “Don’t we always tell men they’re allowed to look at pretty women but are not allowed to touch them?” She elaborates on the fact that the more our society puts barriers and limitations on one’s actions, the more one will be intrigued to explore what he or she isn’t allowed to do. “If a man knows he cannot reach a certain woman, one way to release that frustration is by sexually harassing her.”

Some NGOs are contributing to raising awareness on the issue of sexual harassment in the hopes of reforming societal norms. ABAAD, an NGO advocating for gender equality, launched a ‘Men’s Center’ where men who are prone to violence against women are able to seek treatment from
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The presence of socially-reproduced gender stereotypes in Lebanon adds an extra barrier for women who wish to find their place in society and climb the professional ladder free from sexual harassment. The presence of socially-reproduced gender stereotypes in Lebanon also adds an extra barrier for women who wish to find their place in society and climb the professional ladder free from sexual harassment. The absence of legal initiatives and social pressure, few Lebanese companies in the private sector resort to taking matters into their own hands by implementing ethical guidelines they feel would protect their employees. The Lebanese offices of L’Oréal, a leading company in beauty and cosmetics, do have a code of conduct that presents a set of guidelines dictating how employees are expected to interact with each other and the community at large. L’Oréal’s Human Resources Director and Ethics Correspondent in Lebanon Tony Hayek speaks of the importance of ethical practices in the workplace: “To make sure employees understand our code of ethics, we hold a yearly interactive training round through which employees are exposed to different situations and are required to know the right thing to do in each case,” explains Hayek. In addition to L’Oréal’s attention to ethical issues, diversity and equal pay, the majority of the top managers at the company are female, creating a healthy work environment based on meritocracy.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), such initiatives are mostly developed in large companies that have global policies encouraging diversity and equality. However, L’Oréal’s policies are not the norm and many large local corporations do not have clear rules in place to reprimand employees who engage in sexual harassment. “We do not have a specific policy against sexual harassment in the workplace,” says Rania Jamal, the Head of Planning, Staffing & Employee Relations at Fransabank Group. Although the bank advises employees to report any breach of conduct, Jamal explains that most of the employees at Fransabank would hesitate to speak up in the fear of harming their reputation or jeopardizing their job. “Of course I know it could happen,” says Jamal when asked if she’s aware of the possibility of sexual harassment taking place at the bank. Jamal recalls her own experience with sexual harassment when she was employed at another well-known Lebanese company. The director who assaulted her has never been punished. She says, “I still hear stories about him flirting with women.” According to research conducted by the ILO on the recruitment processes in Lebanon, smaller companies are generally less progressive when it comes to the protection and advancement of women in the workplace. A survey conducted in 2015 shows that the majority of employers did not have a “well-developed gender sensitive human resources program.” Although some companies are institutionalizing measures to support women’s rights and careers, not enough data is available to make a determination on how effectively the private sector is currently adopting measures to protect its female employees from sexual harassment.

A 2013 survey by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, which examined 22 Arab countries for violence against women, women’s place in society and attitudes toward a woman’s role in the economy, revealed that Lebanon was ranked the 16th worst country for women because of discriminatory employment laws and the absence of laws criminalizing sexual harassment in the workplace. The idea of social, political and professional reform may seem far-fetched, but with Moukheiber’s draft law awaiting a vote in parliament and the rise of civil society groups championing the issue, the debate around sexual harassment is coming more to the fore in Lebanon. However, the big question regarding sexual harassment remains how to address the apathy on the issue permeating from Lebanese society’s most influential decision makers.
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Money talk
An overview of current financial markets

Financial markets have rallied significantly from mid-February to mid-March, supported by several events including, but not limited to, the G20 summit, the Chinese National People’s Congress meeting, the expansion of the European Central Bank’s (ECB) quantitative easing and the Federal Open Market Committee’s March session being more dovish than expected. So what’s next for global financial markets?

Short-to-medium term, it now seems that we are due a slowdown in the markets, given that they have already rallied from the year’s lows.

“In a context where it is difficult to imagine that there is much left in central banks’ tool box, especially the ECB, that now pushes for fiscal measures, we believe that a correction is likely as investors will focus on fundamentals,” explains Christophe Barraud, chief economist and strategist at Market Securities, who, according to Bloomberg, ranks as top forecaster of the United States and Eurozone economy in 2015.

HIGHS AND LOWS

It is indeed difficult to imagine what more the ECB could do, given that Germany will likely be opposed to further easing and, as suggested by the ECB statement on March 10, it is now time for governments to implement structural reforms.

In the US, overwhelming economic pessimism is dominating the 2016 presidential campaign, whether from an economic or geopolitical standpoint, which should lead markets to come down from current highs.

Furthermore, Marc Malek, founder and portfolio manager at Conquest Capital Group, highlighted that we are now witnessing a bubble in government bonds which is “why you are seeing these desperate actions.” So it is hard to see equity markets rally sustainably, with all else remaining constant, without first seeing a market correction.

The consequences for the world economy if China starts to falter and the Chinese central bank fails to successfully intervene will cause further turmoil to the global markets, as it has in the last year.
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Whether a global market slowdown or a bigger correction is imminent, it is essential to differentiate the impacts on financial markets between regions.

In fact, unlike the Eurostoxx 50 index, the Dow Jones Industrial Average finally turned positive on the year (+0.4 percent year to date, as of March 29). We’ve also seen the Standard & Poor’s index outperform in the US over its European counterparts YTD (the S&P has outperformed the Eurostoxx by 7.7 percent YTD as of March 29, with S&P -0.5 percent YTD, and Eurostoxx -8.2 percent YTD), which has been the trend in recent years. This gap might widen even further this year, given that, as Barraud maintains, “political uncertainties surrounding Spain, Ireland, Greece and Brexit will be a drag.” This is in addition to a stronger euro which will be weighing on European equities, the ECB running out of tools, and a Europe that is facing the largest migration crisis on the continent since World War II. This trend is also reflected in Bloomberg’s company earnings expectations for 2016, with S&P forecasted to outperform Stocks Europe 600 by 4.4 percent.

Meanwhile, in the US, the correction might be less pronounced. It’s an election year and if Hillary Clinton becomes president, as is widely predicted, this alone should help US equities. This is because Hillary is a well-known figure worldwide with a somewhat predictable policy portfolio (despite being market negative for sectors such as healthcare and banking). Donald Trump, on the other hand, is a much more unpredictable figure who will not bode well for the markets, unless he presents a very precise and efficient economic program.

Furthermore, the Federal Reserve is turning more dovish, with only two rate hikes expected, rather than the predicted four, which should also help US equities rally.

INVESTMENT ADVICE

So where should one invest their money today, given the pessimism in which we started the year and given that equities have already rallied from year lows? It depends on duration. Short to medium-term it seems that US equities are a safer bet than Europe for a long position, while Europe is probably a good short, or hedge to a long, as it is a good time to “sell the news.”

Going back to fundamentals, and picking cheap stocks who are disconnected from their fair value, whether buying undervalued defensive sector names (healthcare, staples) for the more conservative ones among us, or even buying the dip in cyclical names such as European banks, could make much more sense for a longer-term horizon investment. Personally, I wouldn’t buy European luxury names yet, given the sector’s exposure to and correlation with China, but note that most European luxury names have low earnings expectations for Q1 already. Nonetheless, whichever the index or sector, investors should not wait for the absolute bottom, as many have unsuccessfully been trying to do for the last three years, given that, despite the market volatility, the trend has been upwards. Moreover, momentum trading (buying when markets rally and selling when markets are going lower) has probably hurt more than it has profited investors, due to the extent of the moves and the fear to re-initiate a position too early, while the long volatility trade is most likely also over.

The best way to look at the markets and invest today is on a relative-value basis, the old adage: studying the fundamentals and buying undervalued assets and equity. In fact, Domenico de Sole, the chairman of auction house Sotheby’s, emphasized that there was a notable “slowdown in the art market today”. From speaking to art collectors, it does seem like US and European buyers are somewhat waiting for prices to stabilize, galleries to give decent discounts, and some top-level buyers are even expecting a correction in the New York May auctions. There is no better opportunity to invest than when the market slows down and asset prices have dislocated from their fair value.
Launching of the Young Lions Print Competition 2016

Executive Magazine, the country representative of the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, in cooperation with the International Advertising Association Lebanese chapter and the Advertising Association is pleased to announce the launch of the 2016 Young Lions Print competition that will take place on April 15 at the American University of Beirut. Following the great success of last year’s competition, the nation-wide competition will select the best talent to represent Lebanon at the Young Lions Competition at the 2016 Cannes Lions International Festival.

With the support and effort of the Lebanese advertising industry, Choueiry Group, Fortune Promoseven, Grey Worldwide, Impact BBDO, Intermarkets, J. Walter Thompson, Leo Burnett, Lowe Pimo, Memac Ogilvy, Publicis, Rizk Group, Spirit, Young & Rubicam, the American University of Beirut and Air France, winners will have the opportunity to win a fully paid trip to the Cannes Lions International Festival.

Founded in 1954, the Cannes Lions International Festival is the most prestigious advertising and communication awards event in the advertising industry and gathers the best and brightest communication professionals around the world during the third week of June each year in Cannes, France. The National Young Lions Print Competition aims to give young professionals aged 30 and under the space to unleash their creativity and test their skills among their peers. Teams of two will be given a brief by an NGO on the day of the competition and will have 7 hours to produce a print ad. The identity of the NGO will be kept secret until the competition’s day. The work will be judged by a jury of head creative directors of advertising agencies, and the winning team will be sponsored to compete internationally at the Cannes Lions International Festival. The deadline for registration is April 8, 2016. The winners will be announced on April 21, 2016.

Mr. Yasser Akkaoui, editor-in-chief of Executive Magazine, says: “This initiative brings together the Lebanese advertising industry and its supporters to give Lebanese talent the recognition it deserves. It is this talent that is the best suited to represent our nation worldwide. We owe it to them and to the future of our country.”

Executive is eager to continue being the facilitator of this great journey and be able to bring new opportunities to pioneers in the field of advertising. Executive believes in the true power of Lebanese young professionals and this competition is a great way to open up new paths for Lebanon and Lebanese talent.
The Uni-leader

When Lebanon-based Fattal Holding, agents and distributors for numerous global brands in six countries of the Middle East and North Africa region, celebrated the 80th anniversary of their partnership with consumer goods multinational Unilever, the occasion was auspicious enough to bring Unilever Chief Executive Officer Paul Polman to Beirut. Executive used the rare opportunity to squeeze an interview into Polman’s hyper-busy schedule.

I would like to start with a macroeconomic question. Multinational producers of fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) are affected by global economic challenges more and earlier than other types of multinationals. How is Unilever dealing with macroeconomic challenges across the globe?

At this point in history, whether we like it or not, we have to deal with an economic system that produces slow growth and many companies are challenged by that. In Europe there is deflation and a geopolitical environment which is seeing more conflicts than we have in a long time; the [Middle East] is unfortunately one example, but there are many others too.

Then we have the effects of climate change which are coming through at an increased rate. All of that causes a social dissatisfaction that we also have to deal with, and all these forces don’t make it easy.

If you think of that at a high level, of what you can do if you are in my position, the first thing is to be sure that your organization is driven by a strong purpose because the stronger your purpose is, and the more people are aligned with it, the more it will permeate these short term volatilities.

The second thing you need to do is be sure that your organization has a certain level of agility. It is now much more difficult to anticipate all these changes that are going to happen. With a company like Unilever, it means creating four different business units; we are more decentralized, driving decision making down, delayering organizations.

The third thing to do [in tandem with creating] agility, which is the ability to react quickly, is to build up resilience. Agility and resilience have to go hand in hand if you want to be a top performing company. So as a company we spend a lot of time building that resilience and one of the ways in which we do that is to look at our leadership development and what type of leaders we need.

Changing the culture is the most difficult thing for a financial market to understand and it’s also the most difficult thing to do. In many companies, the top level implements something and thinks the rest of the company will behave which is not true; it takes a long time. For every layer in the company, you will need a year to change the culture. And culture is also influenced by many other things. What is happening is that people are looking for a deeper level of job satisfaction. They are discovering that happiness comes from positively influencing others and leaving the world a better place.

When we moved to the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan [ed.: a transformation project aiming to double the business while improving environmental and social impacts], I took a year to first be sure that our internal organization was aware of what we are doing, because they had to be comfortable with the idea. We don’t incentivize people too much which is interesting, it is not in our bonuses or something like that. We just expect people to join us and the more people join us and are there for that reason, the quicker we can advance our cultural journey.

Lately we’ve witnessed a shrinking emerging market which contributed to 57 percent of your revenues a few years back. As an executive committee, when you submit your strategy for the next year to the board, to what extent is the board reasonable or unreasonable in terms of market expectations?

In their governance, companies today are looking more and more at bottom-up approaches, embarking on inclusive visions and missions, as compared to a top-down approach. How successful were you in migrating Unilever to this culture?
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part of the change process that you are applying in the company. As CEO I am part of the board myself. Board members come from a broad variety of backgrounds, from their knowledge base or region of origin, and they only meet six times a year. Because this world is changing so fast and there are many issues, such as cyber security, digitization of society [and] changing emerging markets, you have to spend a lot of time educating and updating the board [on issues such as] why we have the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan, and why this is our business model. The board, on its end, has to be very confident in the CEO and his management team; after all, the main responsibilities of the board are succession plans, governance and protection of the culture. A lot of the other things are actually delegated to management but the way we work is to engage them as if they are part of the company; I believe this is the best way.

**E** To what extent do you think shareholders have taken note of the environmental, social and governance (ESG) concerns as factors in evaluating their investments and do they assess you on your ESG?

The answer is, not enough, but the positive thing is, increasingly so. For example, there is an enormous divestment movement worldwide in the financial markets on carbon. So if you take this specific topic, carbon and climate change, the financial committee has been majorly aware. The reason is that if you want to stay within the two degrees [of global temperature increase] which was a clear signal in Paris, this basically means we have to leave in the ground about two thirds of the carbon stock that has been discovered. These are now called “stranded assets”, so all of a sudden the financial markets are interested.

The other reason, on the business side, is that people are starting to discover that the cost of not acting is becoming higher than the cost of acting. A good example is the insurance companies. Over the last ten years [insurers] paid $2.7 trillion more in response to natural disasters than the normal average; 14 of the last 15 years in history have been the hottest years on record, [and] the sea level has risen. Some people are starting to see this as enormous risk that needs to be dealt with. [Also,] the costs of mitigating [climate change risk] are coming down rapidly because of technology; solar is a good example. You have forty countries in the world where green energy is already cheaper than fossil energy.

So we need to change some things like market mechanisms. We need to price in carbon, we need governments to start developing rules and regulations, we need subsidies in many parts of the world to accelerate this process and the financial markets are taking notice of all this.

The other reason why ESG investment is going well is because 75 percent of the money that is invested by these institutional investors is your or my pension money; it’s the money of us all and society is starting to wake up to the need for change. So the ESG investment itself is the fastest growing. People are subscribing to the UN Global Compact and Principles of Responsible Investing (PRI). We are definitely on the right curve and for good reasons; my main concern is how fast we are [acting]. [To achieve] what we signed in the sustainable development goals and [at the COP21 conference] in Paris, we have to accelerate.

**E** To which extent can a company like Unilever be an agent in reinforcing this commitment to the ESG?

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A stroll through the ecosystem
Evolution is on the move in Lebanon’s startup space

The most common ecosystem disturbances are fast and furious. Earthquakes. Floods. Fires. Not so Circular 331. The initiative by Banque du Liban (BDL), Lebanon’s central bank, provided a long-awaited capital injection into the country’s entrepreneurship ecosystem. But it’s a disturbance more akin to climate change than a meteor strike. Organisms long part of the ecosystem are adapting to the new disturbance, and it’s acted as a draw to bring new biomass into what is still a relatively small space for the startup-minded.

In late March, central bank Governor Riad Salameh indicated Lebanese banks had committed $243 million to the ecosystem, around half of what 331 makes available (i.e., 3 percent of commercial and investment banks’ Tier 1 capital, an amount that grows year-on-year as bank profits increase). To date, only around $50 million has been deployed.

While EXECUTIVE heard no shortage of complaints (some of them contradictory), no one the magazine spoke with for this article feared the money would go uninvested. The newness of the idea and associated processes as well as the ecosystem’s relative immaturity, several interviewees say, are among the factors hindering a more speedy deployment. After all, according to EXECUTIVE’s research on the topic and an engagement with the country’s new Startup Ecosystem Think Tank, Lebanon is the only example of a central bank orchestrating and executing a policy to nurture an entrepreneurship ecosystem (as opposed to a country’s executive or legislative branches of government taking such a policy initiative).

CLEARING THE BACKLOG
Prior to 2010, venture capital (VC) and private equity (PE) funds were not doing much in Lebanon. Between launching in 2006 and losing two of its key investors four years later, entrepreneurship organization Bader’s Building Block Fund (BBF) invested in — and quickly exited — exactly one company. And it wasn’t even Lebanese. A local bank’s attempt at a VC fund in the same time period folded before deploying a dime. The only success story during these years was the 2008 launch of Berytech Fund I. For two years, Berytech basically owned VC and PE space in Lebanon. A competitor emerged in 2010 with the birth of Middle East Venture Partners (MEVP), which launched its own MENA-focused fund that same year and took over management of the BBF, currently known as the BBEE.

Combined, these three funds totaled around $23 million. Post-331, both Berytech and MEVP raised new funds focused mainly on Series A investments with a combined total value of $120 million ($50 million for Berytech and $70 million for MEVP). Berytech has deployed around $20 million (announced in one batch in December 2015) and MEVP $29 million, representatives of each tell EXECUTIVE. Both Berytech Fund II Manager Paul Chucrallah and MEVP Managing Partner Walid Hanna say that these deployments are largely backlog investments, meaning the deals are not exactly new, but neither had the cash available before 331 to make them. Aside from that commonality, the two men have divergent views on the months and years ahead.

Chucrallah says he’s comfortable doing one or two investments over the next few years and is not overly concerned about deal-flow in the ecosystem. Hanna, on the other hand, focuses almost exclusively on pending pipeline problems in a 30-minute conversation with EXECUTIVE. “The problem is Lebanon is very small and [existing and new] VC funds are competing for pipeline that doesn’t exist,” he says.

Concerning fund efforts to fill the pipeline in the future, both point to Speed@BDD, to date the country’s only startup accelerator (see story page 46) — an ecosystem component meant to help early-stage companies mature at a rapid pace. Berytech Fund II and MEVP’s
BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES
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The Biggest and Most Celebrated Construction Show in the Levant Region

Following more than two decades of unrivaled success, Project Lebanon evolved into one of the most specialized trade shows in its field and the main business gateway for local and international firms to access the region's construction market. This year, the 21st International Trade Exhibition for Construction Materials and Equipment for Lebanon and the Middle East, will be held in BIEL – Beirut from May 31 to June 3, concurrently with Energy Lebanon 2016, the 6th International Trade Exhibition for Power, Electrical Engineering, Alternative Energy, Lighting, HVAC, Water & Environmental Technologies.

Establishing itself as the focal point of growth for the construction business in Lebanon and the region, Project Lebanon welcomes nearly 500 global firms from over 20 countries, in addition to more than 20,000 visitors. The participation of national pavilions as well as the attendance of international public figures, diplomats, and high-ranking government officials merely affirms the success and effectiveness of the exhibition.

This year, and after its immense success in 2015, the Live Demonstration Theater will be a major highlight for Project Lebanon 2016. Optimizing the trade show experience, the Live Theater is the perfect platform for exhibitors to showcase or launch their products and services to an eager and interested audience.

Another major highlight will be the specialized conference-style presentation dedicated to waste management and renewable energy. The discussion, open to all Project Lebanon's attendees and private invitations, will particularly focus on four topics: recycling, waste incineration, waste-to-energy, and composting. Professional speakers including ministers, mayors, CEOs, and EU representatives will present their ideas, solutions, and services concerning the waste management crisis in Lebanon.
they tell EXECUTIVE.

By the end of April, they say, they plan to formally launch a seed-stage focused fund, dubbed B & Y Venture Partners, making use of around $40 million in 331 money. As the Yafis spoke to EXECUTIVE in late March, they explained the exact fund size was still being finalized as the fund’s 20-plus investors were busy putting final signatures on the fund’s legal documents. When it launches, it will have a temporary advantage of being the sole seed-only fund catering to the Lebanese market. Moreover, the Yafis describe it as a “hybrid” fund, meaning between $10 and $15 million comes from private investors and will not have the same limitations as the $40 million in 331 money local banks have contributed.

“We understand private investors today will not invest in a fund where only the banks are subsidized,” Abdallah explains. So, he says, they adjusted the risk-reward profile to draw in non-bank money. The fund is charging a 25 percent carry instead of the more common 20 percent. “But we’ll only take 20 for ourselves and 5 percent will be channeled to our private investors,” he says. Based on simulations the fund managers have run, this can translate into better returns for investors on fund liquidation. For example, if the fund achieves a return of 20 percent, the reward incentive structure gives private investors “a bump from 20 percent to around 32 or 33 percent,” or a 50 percent increase, Abdallah says. The banks accepted this structure because the private money will be invested strictly outside of Lebanon and “at a slightly later stage” than the 331 money.

B & Y may not for long be the sole seed-only fund in the market. Other new players are looking at early-stage opportunities including Cedar Mundi Capital. The fund has an appetite for seed investments, according to Bassel Attieh, co-principal at Cedar Mundi and executive VP at Kuwait’s International Financial Advisors KPSC. Attieh speaks to EXECUTIVE in a short email exchange, and explains that Cedar Mundi is a joint venture between International Financial Advisors and Spain’s Alma Mundi Ventures. The fund, Attieh explains, received central bank approval in October 2015 and hopes to raise between $50 million and $70 million. He adds that “at least nine banks and one financial institution have firmly committed so far.”

Like B & Y, it will have a hybrid structure, with around 10 percent of the fund’s capital raised “committed by the founders of the fund” and not restricted by 331. “The fund will be investing between $500,000 and $1 million in Seed Stage opportunities and between $1 million and $5 million in Series A&B opportunities,” Attieh says, without specifying how much equity the fund will be asking for.

Cedar Mundi announced its first ticket of $1.5 million in December, investing in ChefXChange, an online portal for finding private chefs. While it will help close the seed funding gap, Cedar Mundi is arguably also the kind of adaptation BDL was hoping for when drafting 331. The managers are foreigners whose expertise will theoretically benefit the entire ecosystem, and their first investment – which has a Lebanese expatriate co-founder – is only now moving its headquarters to Beirut in order to receive an investment under 331. Cedar Mundi has “nine other active deals in the pipeline.”

When EXECUTIVE last spoke to BDL’s Hoayek in October, she said there would soon be two or three seed-focused funds on the market. Reporting for this

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See funding for startups – a need angel investors meet in many other markets – was largely lacking in the first two years since 331 was published.
INVESTING IN HUMAN CAPITAL

Although Circular 331 does not actually include the word “technology”, it mandates that banks (and the funds managing their 331 money) invest only in startups that rely “on knowledge economy and support of creative intellectual skills (Intellectual Capital).” In the field, it is being interpreted as a mechanic for the startups (and taking them to London for international exposure), Director Nadim Zaazaa tells Executive that future acceleration cycles will focus on more established startups looking to scale their operations. Part of the reason, he says, was a feeling at the Tech Hub that Speed and Bootcamp are helping the early stage companies well enough. The initiative, brokered by the UK and Lebanese governments, has a two-year lifespan. Asked if that’s also something that might mutate soon, Zaazaa smiles and says “April”, in reference to an event the Tech Hub was planning at the time of the interview in March.

NEW MARKET, NEW MODEL

Flat6Labs, an accelerator founded in Cairo in 2011, will be launching in Beirut this summer, CEO Ramez Mohamed tells Executive. This news comes on the heels of back-to-back announcements in 2015 and 2016 at Arabnet, a regional technology conference hosted in Beirut, that the company would be coming to Lebanon soon. Mohamed says Flat6Labs has been in contact with Arabnet, its local partner, and the central VC funds, of course, are not the only funding source for Lebanese entrepreneurs. As noted above, angel investors play a prominent role in seeding startups in other markets. However, as Theo Khoury of AltCity’s Bootcamp explains, “There isn’t an angel culture in Lebanon.” Bootcamp has not seen much interest from angels in the startups it’s incubating. That is not to say there are absolutely none in the country. Sami Abou Saab, Speed’s CEO, says the accelerator has piqued the interest of at least four high net worth individuals, three of whom offered investments which respective startups have yet to accept.

ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

One factor neither the ecosystem nor the central bank can control, however, is the regulatory framework in which the system is operating. Lebanon’s capital markets are laughable, says Henri Assiely of Leap Ventures, which is managing a $71 million Series B fund, and the legal procedures for setting up a fund and making investments are cumbersome and time consuming, he adds. Since Lebanon actually lacks a law governing venture capital and private equity funds, all funds in this country are legally registered as holding companies. Assiely adds that the risk aversion of pre-331 investors into startups produced complicated term sheets that also make it difficult for Leap to make follow-on investments into existing startups. He says Leap is eyeing two big investments that, if they go through, would mean the fund is more than 50 percent deployed. And aside from the legal troubles, Assiely is worried there is not enough series B money in the system. “We have to go bigger,” he says.
Tech entrepreneurs update

By Thomas Schellen

When hiking through an aging natural forest, did you ever accidentally burst your foot through an old log and see the wood fibers crumble while bugs and worms scuttle away into the moss or wiggle around your hiking boot? That is a moment to not only gaze at the young shoots, but also appreciate the secrets of an ecosystem’s functionality. Effective decomposition is vital, contradictory as this may sound, to every functioning ecosystem. It liberates resources for re-composition into new uses and, eventually, new structures.

Another characteristic of a successful ecosystem is its ability to respond to disruptions and function with resilience. All ecosystems, science says, are exposed to disturbances. They can range from your boot interrupting the decomposition of that rotten tree to a volcanic eruption that spews an ocean of hot ash for miles around. Either event will disrupt the ecosystem and change it but even a mass destruction event might not eradicate it; when Mount St. Helens blew in 1980 in one of modern history’s most devastating volcanic outbreaks, no one was more surprised than the scientists observing the area after that violent event to see how quickly new plants broke through the cover of ash and how tenaciously life grew back in the surrounding mountains in the United States’ Pacific Northwest.

Natural environments will not deliver this resilience if they are put together by a landscape designer. Both the sheer number of constituents and complexities that are encapsulated in an ecosystem, and the unpredictability and specificities of external variables that are testing its resilience, make it a thankless task and fool’s errand to try and construct a perfect biological ecosystem; and quite probably this is equally true for business environments.

Resilience will only be proven after they have withstood the impacts of external disruptors and risks from new tech to politics, geo-economic forces and climate change factors.

JUDGING ACCELERATION

Because digital ecosystems are human-driven and thus exposed to Murphy’s Law even more than they follow Moore’s law, it stands to reason that their resilience will only be proven after they have withstood the impacts of external disruptors and risks from new tech to politics, geo-economic forces and climate change factors. Developing and proving this resilience, however, is not a short-term task.

In the days of the New Economy, when the media buzzwords were incubator and cluster (instead of accelerator and tech hub), every aspiring economy, including the Lebanese, was talking about emulating the US information technology revolution by having their version of a Silicon Valley. Shortly thereafter, however, the burst of the New Economy bubble eliminated countless dot.com ventures (London-based fashion site boo.com, which failed in 2000, was one of the bubble’s top destroyers of Lebanese investor money). The massive disturbance, in ecosystem terms, taught investors and entrepreneurs important and hard lessons of decomposition and set the digital economy back to square one of the long journey to real profitability.

In the current iteration of the innovation ecosystem concept, the digital economy has shown that the lessons of the dot.com crash did have positive impacts. But this neither means that the current system is per-
HAPPY TUNEFUL EASTER
fect in any way nor that it has already reached full maturity or resilience.

A case in point for yet-to-be-proven value propositions are the accelerator programs. According to the 2016 report by the Seed Accelerator Ranking Project (SARP), a research initiative by US-based scholars Yael Hochberg and Susan Cohen, proliferation of accelerator programs in the US in the past few years has resulted in the emergence of hundreds of programs that do not meet the criteria for calling themselves accelerators. “Even within the group of programs that meet the criterion of an accelerator – a fixed term, cohort-based program that includes educational and mentorship components and culminates in a public pitch event or ‘demo day’ – there are differences on many critical dimensions, including program structure, management, goals and, most importantly, efficacy. For an entrepreneur considering an accelerator program, finding reliable data regarding the performance of programs is difficult, and there is much confusion and debate regarding how ‘performance’ should be measured for an accelerator,” Hochberg and Cohen write in their report, which was published last month.

Entrepreneurs need more transparency on the performance of accelerators because the exercise is prone to incur a high cost in form of equity. “Equity is an entrepreneur’s most valuable currency, so the non-monetary benefits such as mentorship, network and exposure to future investors are an important part of the decision to attend a program,” they note.

Another scholar, visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution Ian Hathaway, concludes from his research that startups which graduated from “top programs” achieved milestones in fundraising and gaining customer traction. “However, these positive effects dissipate when looking at a broader sample of accelerators: many programs do not seem to accelerate startup development, and in some cases may even slow them down,” Hathaway cautions in a contribution to Harvard Business Review.

While these scholarly findings derive from research into US-based accelerators – whose numbers according to Hathaway have skyrocketed from 16 in 2008 to 170 by 2014 with a flattening of the curve since then – the positive implications and the cautions very likely apply to international programs, with the extra remarks that international programs are still younger and much less researched than their US peers. From the Middle East, at time of writing, only two accelerators in Arab cities met the criteria for inclusion in the Global Accelerator Network (GAN) list of members; one in Cairo and one in Jeddah.

**GROWING WITH DIVERSITY**

According to Hathaway’s paper, Accelerating growth: Start-up accelerator programs in the United States, there are indications that accelerators bring benefits to participating companies and broader startup communities despite little systematic research having been done because of the newness of the accelerator programs. “Regional development leaders need to recognize that ideas, talent, capital and a culture of openness and collaboration are all vital to regional startup communities, which are best thought of as innovation ecosystems involving complex interaction among entrepreneurs, investors, suppliers, universities, large existing businesses and a host of supporting actors and organizations,” he advises.

The recommendation resonates with what Executive has experienced as stakeholder in complex interactions that are shaping and are expected to sustain an innovation ecosystem in Lebanon. Situated outside of the narrow network of organizations and actors with vested interests in running the system, the magazine has for years been committed to analyzing entrepreneurial companies and the system itself, as evidenced by the magazine’s role in the Global Entrepreneurship Week and our annual selection and recognition of the top 20 entrepreneurs starting in 2012.

Thus when examining the current state of development in the Lebanese innovation ecosystem we opted to review perspectives from both stakeholders and companies. We moreover looked at both intrinsic factors such as the latest new investment funds that have entered the supply chain of funding companies in the stage of formation, and at extrinsic and intangible factors that play a role in Lebanon – mindful of the insights regarding complexity that real-life ecosystems afford us.

The first thing that emerges from the Top 20 selections since 2012 is a strong correlation between the Executive list of top entrepreneurial ventures and the company names which one encounters as winners in competi-
companies from the Top 20 Entrepreneurs in Science and Technology, which EXECUTIVE had recognized in November 2014. We selected companies working on three hot topics, namely cyber security, economic data and renewable energy.

One of the companies – cyber identity protection vendor myki (see interview page 54) – has participated in several startup competitions and acceleration exercises abroad; the two others – Economena Analytics and Sharp Minds (interviews pages 50 and 52) – have pursued their growth without the use of acceleration programs. Their choices have also differed in financing: Sharp Minds and myki have negotiated fundraising rounds in 2015; Economena has chosen to seek no funding in 2015.

When it comes to their view of the financing environment, the verdict is two-and-a-half-thumbs up between the three companies. The experiences of all three validate the progress that has been made possible by Circular 331 and the gradual diversification of the funding landscape through the formation of additional providers (see story page 42). The comparatively minor hiccups that still mar the funding side are a certain lack of transparency - as Economena’s Tamim Akiki points out, no such thing as an annual report on Circular 331 has been produced - and cumbersome bureaucratic requirements, which both applicants and fund managers confirm to EXECUTIVE on or off the record.

Three thumbs are also pointing skywards in terms of access to talent. All three companies speak highly of their human capital; Antoine Saab and Nadia Moussouni at Sharp Minds tell EXECUTIVE that they found top-notch talents among fresh graduates at local universities and among people in the labor market. “We have been very lucky to find true talent among people who came back from abroad but then found themselves in the crisis in Lebanon,” Moussouni says.

For myki, being located in Lebanon at their present stage of development was an advantage that was too good to give up even in exchange for an investment when this would have come with a requirement to relocate to another country. According to myki’s co-founder Priscilla Elora Sharuk, the benefits of having a strong local network and market knowledge were non-negotiable.

While all three firms confirmed the value of their involvement in the growing Lebanese innovation ecosystem, there were also thumbs-down verdicts in important areas. The insufficient size of the local market made all three firms scoff at the possibility of focusing their growth strategies here. Moreover, using Lebanon as sole operational base is not a proposition from the perspective of a self-respecting tech startup.

As other young entrepreneurs like the google-with-heartbeat-monitor producer Instabeat (Top 20, 2012) and automatic-guitar-tuner maker Band Industries (Top 20, 2014) have also found out, Lebanon is not a place for prototyping a hardware device and the industrial logistics are at best cumbersome. This important deficiency seems to have informed decisions of aspiring companies such as myki and Sharp Minds to the point that the latter established a subsidiary to set up what Saab describes as testing & certification and quality control center, plus logistics hub in the city of Burgas on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast.

With respect to the values and lessons of organic development, the entrepreneurship environment is clearly benefiting from the diversity and engagement of its people. Taken all together as a batch of corroboration, the experiences of the entrepreneurial teams both validate and challenge the Lebanese innovation ecosystem.
Economena Analytics

By Thomas Schellen

There is a tremendous link between what Lebanon needs in terms of information, transparency and planning, and what improved data can help deliver. This is a first in Lebanon and it is completely dynamic.

E Was the development of data and tools your main focus in 2015?
TA: We also launched the Lebanese Economic Outlook survey. We published three editions of the survey where we poll our clients and other economists in the local market about the outlook for the economy to try to separate the good sectors from the bad sectors.

E Did you take steps in relation to overall business development?
TA: We have invested a lot in our outreach and in the optimization of our platform, some of this based on client feedback. We also grew our revenues in 2015 by around 35 percent. In organizational terms we established two new businesses, an offshore enterprise which helps our foreign clients, who represent two thirds of our revenues, and a joint stock company. For the coming year we are looking to sell more subscriptions to the United States, breaking into the academia sector.

E What happened on the team development side? How much did you grow?
AK: We did not grow much, in Lebanon that is, but we have focused on developing our team. We added a team in Nepal that helps with data extraction and we now have one team member in Egypt as well.

TA: The reason we invested in the Nepalese and Egyptian teams is because we are focusing on developing our coverage this year. We are going to add a lot more countries with extensive coverage to help existing clients in Lebanon save costs in their expansions and coverage. Thus the banks that are investing in Egypt as a growth market will now have access to a full Egyptian database at Economena. We also did a lot of stuff internally [to upgrade our team’s capabilities] and Amani is now managing the business altogether.

E How did that feel, to move into this responsibility?
AK: The nice thing about working here is that it is not a one-person responsibility. It is a shared responsibility. So [being deputy CEO] is just having a fancier title.

E How large is the Economena team now?
TA: We are 12 full-timers here, five in Nepal, one in Egypt and one sales and marketing in the United States.

E Did you do any fundraising in 2015, and specifically did you approach any venture capital funds for Circular 331 money?
TA: We did not but we are currently in negotiations with two different parties to raise money or finance part of our expansion into the Gulf Cooperation Council and the US. This would mean either specific financing for our sales and marketing expansion into the US and the GCC or an investment into the core business, which would possibly be through Circular 331. We expect to obtain funding in 2016.

E Was there a reason why you did not seek to obtain equity finance from local VCs in 2015?
TA: We wanted to wait and see. Circular 331 was issued in August 2013 and has not been in effect for a very long time, so we wanted to see how the relationships between the
“Giving me a job that has never felt like work.”

FRANK, VP/GLOBAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

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VCs and the startups develop. Our business is more of a long-term value proposition and we want to be very careful about who we are working with.

**E** When someone asks you if you are a startup or an entrepreneurial company, how do you describe yourselves?

AK: As an entrepreneurial company, not as a startup.

TA: One of our key advantages is that a lot of our business is based on contracts that are ongoing and will be ongoing for several years into the future. At the same time, our core product, the Economena User Station, is still very early in its life cycle, so it is a startup project by itself.

**E** How large do you see your growth potential in the next three to five years?

TA: Our five-year business plan through 2020 foresees annual revenues of $3 million to $5 million from subscriptions and the Economena User Station. A large part of that revenue will come from North America and effectively international markets, excluding the Middle East. The Middle East will contribute approximately one third of our revenues.

**Can you tell us in closing how much in terms of investment amounts you will be shooting for in your fundraising in 2016?**

TA: We are looking for anything between $500,000 and $1 million in 2016.

**E** Solar energy as the way forward

Antoine Saab and Nadia Moussouni are the entrepreneurs behind Energy24, a power storage solution which they claim is suited to solving the most challenging electricity supply problems. Since being recognized as a Top 20 entrepreneurial company by Executive in 2014, their company Sharp Minds has added a solar energy component to its electricity storage product.

**E** How far has the solar component developed in 2015?

AS: Our portfolio is now almost 50-50 between solar and storage. Half of our customers have storage units only, the other half have batteries plus solar. Since we offer hybrid solar, the half of our customer base that has hybrid solar is injecting enough power into the grid to compensate for what the other half is using. If you want, our customer base is grid-neutral in this way.

**E** How much has your customer base expanded?

AS: We had a growth rate of about 300 percent year over year between the end of 2014 and the end of 2015, and we think that we might reach about 400 percent this year.

NM: We currently don’t have any salespeople and are only selling thanks to our reputation.

**E** But you told me that this is going to change soon.

AS: We are now building our sales force. We have rented a 700sqm office in Sin el-Fil where we will soon be moving. Besides the 15 people that make up our current team, we have just hired five to six people who will join us to build our sales force, starting April 1. Today I signed a lease for our first outlet in Sidon which will be operational on June 1. By the end of 2016 we expect to have two outlets toward the south, in Khalde and Sidon, and one in the Bekaa, plus our outlet in Sin el-Fil. In 2017, we will hopefully tackle Keserwan and North Lebanon.
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What was your experience in raising funds?

AS: I first have to say that I think that Banque Du Liban (BDL), Lebanon’s central bank, has done a great job. I have looked at how many countries handle startups and I think [BDL Governor] Riad Salameh has really done amazing business. [Circular 331] is a bold move and an approach that many other countries should follow.

NM: In administrative terms, the system in Lebanon is a bit tedious and quite complicated. It took us a year to finish the paperwork. But overall we are very happy with the deal we have made. It gives us a completely new perspective and opens up prospects for reaching much larger numbers much faster. We think we will be able to develop products and are already developing products that can go global. This would have been just an impossible dream without the investment into our equity.

This was the investment by Lebanese venture capital firm Leap Ventures?

AS: Yes. It is a relatively small investment but as you know, as a startup you should neither over-raise nor under-raise funds. We got offered lower funding, which we didn't accept and got offered higher investments, which we did not take; we took exactly the funding that we viewed as adequate. We expect to be able to develop products and are already developing products that can go global. This would have been just an impossible dream without the investment into our equity.

Are you already strategizing for the medium-term future?

AS: Absolutely. From the growth that we are seeing and the way we are looking at the market and how it is developing, we think that this company has a good chance of becoming a very large business. By the seventh year we will probably have had a couple of fundraising rounds, perhaps three. Pessimistically speaking, we believe that the company will be a $300 million business [at year seven]. At that level we don’t see a problem replacing the funding (guaranteed under Circular 331). It is one thing to gain credibility here and an entirely different thing to get it abroad, especially when it comes to a field like identity protection. Seeing the concept given credibility by people who have worked in this space internationally and hear them say ‘you are onto something big’ gave me the guts to come back and say that this deserves to be done all-out. From that point I went full-time myki, which is how we renamed ourselves from Ki for legal incorporation reasons and also to make it more personal. The biggest thing that happened since was a massive pivot from hardware to software.

In what way?

Ki was a hardware device, a token where I would swipe my fingerprint and select the service from a screen [for storing passwords]. Prototyping and editing the tokens here [in Lebanon] would take time and we found that it was very difficult [for logistics reasons]. In addition, our market research showed that people understood the value of the product but said they didn’t want to carry an extra token in their wallet. So we thought, why not take the same technology and incorporate it into the one item that you always have with you – your mobile phone.
How did the change to a software solution impact your business proposition and costs?

We are now totally focused on enterprise software as a service – SAS. This represents different challenges from hardware solutions but it is definitely easier to manage the challenges on the software side rather than dealing with the manufacturing which is a very difficult thing to do, especially when you do not have enough talent around you meaning that you have to outsource [manufacturing]. Not having to produce hardware devices means that I am free.

Production of the tokens in Lebanon was never on the table?

It was never an option.

What were the main challenges that the shift has brought?

One of the biggest challenges that we noticed in the region is education. Once people see the product they ask, ‘when can I have it?’ But can I say that people understand the value and the risk of a cyber breach in MENA as much as they do in Europe and the United States? No.

Do you see limits of growth and is it your strategy to serve mainly the MENA market or do you want to go global?

No, we are not focused only on MENA and of course we want to go global. We would like to be the leading identity management platform on the market.

You have succeeded in gaining equity participations, one of which was announced last month. Can you tell us who the partners are and how much capital they are injecting?

The investment is for $600,000 and comes from B&Y Ventures here [in Lebanon] and BECO Capital in Dubai.

The participation is equal between the two?

Yes. We initially wanted to go with one investor but because Dubai is an important market for us, it was strategic for us to have an investment from Dubai and say this is an entry into a new market and access to a new network and more support for the team. Until last year, we were two [people], Antoine and myself. We have since grown to seven. So it is moving at a pretty rapid pace and when we talk about moving global, we are starting here as a test market and then into Dubai and then Europe, the United States and the rest of the world.

Was the equity deal driven by Circular 331 or outside of the framework?

The B&Y part of the participation is part of the 331 framework; the BECO portion is not, because it is money coming in from Dubai.

Do you already anticipate undertaking later funding rounds?

When doing that round we were looking at an 18-month runway but we already have two VCs who are saying, ‘When you raise again, we would like to be a part of it’. One of them is a Lebanese VC and the other is a Silicon Valley-based VC.

Where do you see myki’s future?

A multi-billion dollar company.

You want to be a multi-billion dollar company?

We will be a multi-billion dollar company.

Moving along that road, where and at what valuation do you expect to be in five years?

That is a very big question. If you ask me where I will be in five years and ask me about a value, that is a question I cannot answer but I know that it is going to be massive. That is what I work for.
Sushi Nation

Slicing up one of the most popular cuisines in Lebanon

Back in 2003, T-shirts with the slogan: “Sushi: Traditional Lebanese Dish” were spotted being worn by young fashionistas across Beirut, illustrating the glowing success of this staple Japanese dish in Lebanon.

Thirteen years later and the Lebanese passion for sushi does not seem to be ebbing away. On the contrary, the estimated number of restaurants serving sushi in Lebanon has to date reached close to a hundred individual outlets.

THE EARLY YEARS

Japanese cuisine has been present in Lebanon, to some extent, since the 1980s. First through the restaurants Tokyo in Manara, which was operated by a Japanese woman, and Nippon Mare in Jounieh, according to Nicolas Rebeiz, partner and managing director of the seafood and sushi restaurant and supplier Oceanus, who adds that these restaurants were not focused on sushi.

Aref Saade, owner of Tropical Bamboo, a company which offers supplies, consultation, menu development and recruitment for Asian cuisine restaurants in Africa and the MENA region, recalls that when he returned to Lebanon from Saudi Arabia in 1992, sushi was not common in Lebanon, despite it being a global trend. At the time, Chinese cuisine was more in demand.

Slowly, says Saade, young expats returning to Lebanon from Canada and America who had tried sushi abroad began asking around for it, prompting restaurateurs to open their eyes to this opportunity. In 1995, Boubess Group decided to open a Benihana restaurant in their Commodore Hotel and utilized Tropical Bamboo’s services, serving sushi as well as the teppanyaki that Benihanas are globally known for.

THE TAKEOFF

But it was with the opening of Le Sushi Bar in Ashrafieh that the sushi craze took flight.

Mario Junior Haddad, who hails from the cinema business, decided to open Le Sushi Bar in 1998 out “of a passion for food” and because there were no restaurants at the time “that focused solely on sushi even though it was an international trend.” He explains that his concept was a bar where people would sit around the chefs and be served sushi that had been prepared in front of their eyes.

Haddad recalls that restaurant openings were not as common as they are today, so people flocked to Le Sushi Bar to discover the new outlet as well as the new concept, generating quite a buzz. “It hit a chord as well because the place was unusual and worth discovering,” says Haddad.

Five years later, in 2001, Yabani opened on Monot Street, then an area booming with clubs and bars. This stylish underground outlet, designed
by the renowned architect Bernard Khoury, cemented sushi’s appeal as a trendy cuisine, explains Ramzi Adada, Yabani’s general manager.

FOR THE LOVE OF RICE AND RAW FISH

Indeed, these days sushi in Lebanon can be found on many a menu, including international cuisine restaurants or coffee shops, and can even be consumed alongside your argeeleh in a Lebanese café or bought pre-packaged at some local supermarkets.

Rita Ekmekjian, co-owner of the sushi restaurant Tsunami which has four outlets across Lebanon, says that when they first opened Tsunami in Kfardebian, Faraya, in 2003 (the outlet was closed two years later when they moved to the busier area of Ashrafieh) there were only nine sushi restaurants in Lebanon. Today, she estimates the number has grown to 75 pure sushi outlets in Lebanon. If you include the cafes and catering companies which serve sushi, as well as the individual branches of chain sushi outlets, Adada places this number at 150.

These sushi outlets are mainly concentrated in Greater Beirut and Mount Lebanon with only a few outlets in the North and South of the country, says Alain Haddad, sales manager at Royal Gourmet, a wholesale supplier of fish used in sushi (mainly salmon), adding that his company only supplies two sushi outlets in Sidon, for example.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

In parallel with the increase in outlets serving sushi is the increase in suppliers of dry goods and raw fish used for sushi. “At first there was only us supplying the ingredients, the consultation, menu development and chefs for Japanese restaurants from 1992 to 1998 when we stopped our supplying activities in Lebanon to open Shogun,” says Saade who currently owns two Shoguns in Lebanon and a few others in the region while running Tropical Bamboo in the countries where Shogun is not in operation.

Le Sushi Bar’s Haddad estimates there are 10 to 15 suppliers of sushi related items today, refuting the popular notion that only one or two companies supply all sushi restaurants in Lebanon. Saade adds that existing food product suppliers also began importing sushi related products when they saw the increased demand for them.

Adada explains that, just as with any other cuisine, choice of supplier would depend on the ingredient, adding that at Yabani they sometimes work with different suppliers for the same ingredient so as to ensure a continuous supply and also to maintain good relations with all suppliers.

SUSHI FOR EVERYBODY

Sushi has indeed become one of the most prevalent foods in Lebanon. According to Saade and Haddad, one of the reasons for sushi’s popularity in Lebanon is the fact that sushi is not only a trendy food, but also a food that can be enjoyed by people of all ages and backgrounds. Whether you are a sushi lover or a sushi beginner, there is a sushi restaurant in Lebanon that will suit your taste and budget. From simple rolls to complex nigiri, there is something for everyone. Whether you are looking for a quick lunch or a special occasion meal, sushi is the perfect choice for a delicious and satisfying meal.
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Lebanon is its perception as a healthy cuisine. Ekmekjian explains that sushi remains a global trend and since Lebanese generally follow trends, they continue to enjoy sushi. She adds that since traditional Lebanese cuisine includes raw meat, the idea of eating raw fish was not too much of a transition, culturally speaking.

Adding to sushi's popularity is its availability across all income brackets, with restaurants serving maki as low as a dollar a piece and as high as ten dollars a roll for the rarest items. As Le Sushi Bar’s Haddad puts it: “I think it overflowed the boundaries of the elite; everybody wanted to eat sushi, and this is why a lot of places have mushroomed at all levels and they are all working. It's democratized, just like burgers,” he says in answering the question of why sushi is so popular in Lebanon.

Having sushi for a dollar a piece, especially when raw fish is involved, sounds risky to many. However, as Saade puts it, not everyone can afford the high-end variety while everyone wants to enjoy sushi. “People want to eat sushi and those who can’t afford it will go for the cheap option of a dollar per piece,” he says adding that in all cases, consumers’ main concern should be hygiene and cleanliness when it comes to consuming raw fish.

Restaurant owners Executive spoke to all agreed that hiring a Japanese chef for their sushi restaurant is simply too expensive. “In Lebanon, the salary of a non-Japanese chef is around $1,000. If I hire a Japanese chef, whose salary is much higher, how can I compete with the restaurants around me who don’t have Japanese chefs and pay them much less, given that our other expenses are the same? It’s just not cost effective for us," explains Shogun owner Aref Saade, adding that a Japanese chef would likely find it hard to deal with the way Lebanese eat their sushi all at once mezze style instead of the slow, piece by piece style that Japanese culture is used to.

Moreover, Ramzi Adada, Yabani’s general manager, suggests that Japanese chefs are expensive because the quality of life in their country is so good that they don’t feel pressured to seek employment abroad.

Tsunami co-owner Rita Ekmekjian says that a typical sushi restaurant employs around 10 chefs, so bringing them all from Japan, knowing that the average salary for a Japanese chef is $5,000, is simply not feasible.

Fady Achkar, whose restaurant Mitsu-Ya is one of the only sushi restaurants in Lebanon that employs a Japanese chef, believes it’s an expense worth investing in. “Ok, they are much more expensive, but when people invest $1.5 million to make a sushi restaurant, they should definitely invest in a Japanese chef. At the end of the day, I don’t go to a restaurant to check out the artwork,” he says.

When asked why Lebanese chefs are not employed as head sushi chefs in Lebanon, the answers varied. Some believe that, perception-wise, Lebanese customers are more confident in the chef’s skills when they see an Asian behind the sushi bar rather than a Lebanese, regardless of their rolling skills.

Others insist that Filipinos, for example, understand fish better than the Lebanese since they live on islands and have many Japanese restaurants in their country.

Restaurant owners interviewed say it would be easier for them to get Lebanese chefs for their sushi outlets as they wouldn’t have to do paper work for them in terms of sponsorship, but for the time being, Asian chefs remain in charge of sushi restaurants.
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CUTTING CORNERS

While low cost sushi and maki might not make you ill, there still is often a big difference in the quality and taste between them and the more expensive sushi.

To begin with, restaurants can decrease costs by using lower quality dry ingredients, such as substituting Japanese rice with Egyptian rice, according to Saade, or using Chinese dry goods (such as seaweed or vinegar) which are also cheaper, according to Fady Achkar, co-owner of Mitsu-Ya, a high-end sushi restaurant in Gemmayzeh.

Such lower end restaurants can also use larger quantities of rice, avocado and cucumbers than raw fish, thereby appearing generous but stuffing clients with the cheap items, explains Rebeiz. Another cost cutting technique which some restaurants employ is to use frozen instead of fresh fish, explains Adada.

Achkar, who also supplies major supermarkets in Dubai with packaged sushi, calls sushi made from frozen fish “fast food” and explains that it relies on four main and comparatively cheap fish: “They use crab sticks or imitation crab, mayonnaise, avocado, cucumber, treated tuna which comes in fillets, salmon and frozen shrimp, which people love. But, you have to stick to these four products. There is nothing wrong with it, but it's different quality and not comparable to authentic sushi,” he says.

ALL FISH ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL

Even among those four items, the standards of sushi, and therefore prices, differ according to the quality and cut of the fish. The most important factor when it comes to fish quality is its freshness. Royal Gourmet receives four shipments (by airplane) of salmon per week. The most important factor when it comes to fish quality is its freshness. Royal Gourmet receives four shipments (by airplane) of salmon per week with some restaurants buying from them on a daily basis. Salmon wholesale prices range from $13 to $20 per kilogram for a whole fish, depending on the cut and country of origin, and around $25 per kilogram if cut and cleaned by the supplier into fillet chunks.

While the restaurants Executive spoke to all said they use fresh fish, a lot of the fish used in Lebanon, especially tuna and eel, is frozen for cost efficiency, although the taste is sacrificed. “A kilo of fresh tuna is $30 to $40 while you can get it at $20 frozen. It is more cost effective that way for them because the fresh tuna is three to four kilograms while with frozen tuna, one can buy smaller portions and defrost them, which is good because tuna can quickly darken and go bad,” explains Haddad, adding that Royal Gourmet sells only fresh tuna, mainly to high-end sushi restaurants with a high turnover.

The type and cut of fish also varies with different prices for the belly and under belly of the tuna, which are the more expensive parts of the fish since they are fattier and less chewy, explains Saade. He adds that while the Bluefin tuna is the best type quality wise, it is the yellow fin tuna that is most used in sushi restaurants because it is less pricy.

Whether it’s from the low or high-end variety, or whether packed with rice or made up of only slices of raw fish, it seems the sushi craze is in Lebanon to stay, rivaling hummus and tabbouleh as some of Lebanon’s favorite foods.
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The intricacies of sushi

The art and technique behind the taste

“Tsunami now has a central kitchen where everything is produced in terms of cutting the raw material into semi-finished goods, which are then transported to the outlets for rolling. This is to ensure hygiene and temperature control.” (Rita Emekjian, co-owner of Tsunami)

Le Sushi Bar, Shogun and Mitsu-ya are among the few sushi restaurants in Lebanon that use fresh wasabi, which is a root and has a rough texture. Most use a powder mixed with horseradish, mustard and other spices.

“The easiest way to tell the quality of the sashimi or sushi is to eat it plain, without wasabi or soy [sauce]. If it has a metallic aftertaste, chances are the fish is not fresh.” (Aref Saade, owner of sushi restaurants Tropical Bamboo and Shogun)

“The restaurant Mitsu-ya translates to the house of Mitsu, named after its Japanese chef. It follows the Omakase style of sushi, which is more personal and relies on the chef’s skills, creativity and even his mood.” (Fady Achkar, co-owner of Mitsu-ya)

“Some of the more popular makis were invented by Le Sushi Bar. ‘Crazy’ was called so because of its crazy hair look. ‘Naked’ because there was no nori around it and ‘Volcano’ because it’s spicy. These became staples of Lebanese sushi restaurants.” (Mario Junior Haddad, owner of Sushi Bar)

“Most of the sushi consumed in Lebanon is salmon based, unlike in Japan where 80 percent of the world’s tuna is consumed. Salmon is also a favorite worldwide.” (Mario Junior Haddad)
“Restaurants are experimenting with sushi, introducing new twists to familiar dishes, such as Yabani’s new style sashimi, which includes scallops with truffles.” (Ramzi Adada, general manager of Yabani)

“Bluefin tuna is sold at auctions in Japan. The most expensive Bluefin tuna fish weighed 220 kilograms and was sold for 1,850,000 euros. Bluefin tuna can be found on Lebanon’s shores during May and June.” (Aref Saade)

“Some Japanese like to roll the sashimi in green leaves called shiso, along with some wasabi and pickled ginger, and eat it with their hands for an added, close to minty, flavor.” (Aref Saade)

According to restaurant owners interviewed for the article, Lebanon follows the style of sushi made popular in California, with salmon-based makis being the most popular items on the menu. Meanwhile, authentic Japanese sushi is centered on sushi and sashimi.

“Crab sticks or surimi are made from crab meat and other products. They are sold wholesale from $2 to $7 per kilogram depending on the amount of fresh crab meat used.” (Nicolas Rebeiz, sushi restaurant manager and supplier)

“Sushi restaurants mainly work with Scottish salmon because its meat is firmer if you want to use it in sashimi. They also use farmed salmon as wild salmon, which is only available in May and June, is chewier and less buttery than the farmed variety.” (Aref Saade)
ASSADOUR: AN ARTIST IN MOTION
SURSOCK MUSEUM LAUNCHES NEW ART EXHIBITION

Words by Olga Habre

Looking at the geometric forms in his art, one could never tell Assadour was bad at math as a child. In fact, when he was eight years old, his beautiful math teacher (a former Miss Kesserwan) reprimanded young Assadour for his bad performance, leaving him permanently scarred, which he suspects has something to do with his geometry-inspired style. Born Assadour Bezdikian in 1943 in Beirut, he is an internationally acclaimed artist and key figure in the history of art in Lebanon. Assadour never finished school because he failed math, but he studied art under renowned Lebanese artists Paul Guiragossian, Guvder and Jean Khalife, later completing his studies at the Accademia Belle Arti Perugia “Pietro Vannuci” in Italy and at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France.

Now living mostly in Paris, Assadour returned to Lebanon for his first exhibition in his homeland in 15 years, and his largest ever in Lebanon. “Assadour: Landscape in Motion” at the Sursock Museum showcases more than 130 artworks, about one-third of which are part of the museum’s permanent collection, bequeathed by the artist’s longtime friend Pierre Cardahi in 1996. But this is not his first exhibition at the Sursock Museum; as a budding artist in the 1960s he displayed at Sursock’s popular Salons d’Automne.

Co-curator of the current exhibit and head of programs at Sursock, Nora Razian says the museum owns over 100 works by Assadour, explaining, “Our main impetus to hold this exhibition is we’ve had these works for quite a long time now and they had never been shown.”

Walking through the large open space of the mu-
1. Untitled, Undated
Oil on canvas, 65 × 54 cm
Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Karabakian collection, Beirut, Lebanon

2. Le Songe
[The Dream], 1970
Etching and watercolor on paper, 66.4 × 50.5 cm
Sursock Museum collection – Bequeathed by Pierre Cardahi, 1996

3. Archéologie
[Archeology], 1993/1994
Etching and aquatint on paper, 76 × 56 cm
Sursock Museum collection – Bequeathed by Pierre Cardahi, 1996

4. Lettre à un architecte anonyme
[Letter to an Anonymous Architect], 2012
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 114 × 147 cm
Collection of the artist, Paris, France

5. Le Cube
[The Cube], 1975
Etching and aquatint on paper, 38 × 57 cm
Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Karabakian collection, Beirut, Lebanon

6. Vortex I, 1985
Tempera and watercolor on paper, 76 × 56.5 cm
Private collection, Beirut, Lebanon
seum’s lower level Special Exhibitions Hall, one not only looks at artworks, but also sees the unveiling of Assadour’s story. His body of art – from conceptual early works, to distinctive etchings on paper, a transition to painting and ultimately a blend of previous styles – is definitely abstract but otherwise hard to define. He compares his shifting mediums to food cravings. “Some days you want to eat olives and bread, and sometimes you want to eat refined cuisine that takes many hours of preparation,” he says, adding that he doesn’t decide what medium to use: “You don’t decide. It’s like you are attracted by something and it’s better not to know why.”

In his art Assadour explores the modern condition, alienation and un-rootedness, questioning identity, fate, time and history. His art depicts the human form, landscapes, architectural and cosmological objects and technology. Assadour doesn’t fit into any traditional artistic movement but has, over the years, been inspired by different cultures and influences. “It’s a personal style; it doesn’t belong to a school. He’s an outsider, his own man and he has his own art,” says co-curator, art critic and writer Joseph Tarrab, a friend of the artist.

Assadour says art makes him feel younger and adds that he is never satisfied with his work and the only thing that stops him working on a painting is a deadline. “There are even paintings in this exhibition that I am tempted to continue; it’s my obsession. They are always unfinished and I’m always unsatisfied,” he says.

Staying faithful to the themes of identity and un-rootedness in his art, the artist, now 73, lives quite a nomadic lifestyle. Based in Paris (a city he doesn’t particularly like), he spends hot summers in the south of Italy and travels every winter to the Far East, where his work is featured in galleries. His art indeed fits in with the Asian tradition. Razian says, “He’s had a career in Asia, Korea, Japan and Italy, and other places where ‘works on paper’ are important in terms of art practices and art history. He’s one of the only Lebanese artists who’s worked with engraving and etching. But he’s not just a Lebanese artist because he hasn’t been living here in a long time and he has an international career.”

Assadour’s wanderlust began at a young age. He left Lebanon for the first time at age 17, going back and forth to Europe for a few years. “At that time I was not happy at all in Lebanon because of family and everyday life; I wanted to travel,” he says. He returned again in 1974 as an adult, this time falling in love with his homeland. “I was so happy to re-discover Lebanon, another Lebanon. I was very happy but a week after the opening of my exhibition in 1975 it was the start of the civil war in Lebanon,” he recounts.

Asked if he thinks he would have stayed in Lebanon had the Civil War not started, Assadour responds, unsurprisingly: “The Lebanese mentality is that they can never stay somewhere indefinitely; they have always been travelers. They are here, they’re in America and in Europe, but in their minds they are Lebanese. We Lebanese, we are here and there, and never definitively. I don’t know if I would have stayed.”

“Assadour: Landscape in Motion” is open at the Sursock Museum until May 30, 2016.
AROUND THE WORLD IN A HEARTBEAT

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ARTIST MARWAN CHAMAA MAKES MUSIC FOR THE EYES
POP ART EXHIBITION AT THE OPERA GALLERY DUBAI

Words by Olga Habre

Love. It transcends human differences and brings people together in ecstasy and in agony. It’s the reason for wars and surrenders, the subject of poems, books, songs, plays, films and of course, art.

In his latest series of pop-art paintings, “Chagrin d’amour – The Musical”, Marwan Chamaa depicts moments in the timeline of a love affair, illustrating ups and downs with mostly primary colors, defining pleasures and pains with a vintage comic-book aesthetic. The six large, vibrant works weave together a harmonious melange of renowned paintings – mostly those of pop-artist Roy Lichtenstein and comic magazine illustrations – with the heartfelt love song lyrics of Arabic tarab music of the 1940s - 60s. It’s no wonder the impressive artworks caught the eye of organizers at the prestigious Opera Gallery in Dubai, where he has an exhibition in April.

Love stories never get old because everyone can relate and they’re fantastically melodramatic explains Chamaa. In these artworks the dialogue is distilled from songs by Um Kulthum, Asmahan, Abdel Halim Hafez and Farid el-Atrash, “stressing on the beauty of the poetry of Arabic songs,” he says, from the infatuated lyrics of “I Love You” (Ahwak); the begging in “One Thousand and One Nights” for the sun not to rise for a year; or the intense demand for freedom of “The Ruins.” Looking closely at details, discerning viewers will also notice the famous Velvet Underground banana by Andy Warhol on a tissue packet and Keith Herring’s “Barking Dog” in the background.

With every painting, looks of love and amorous verses reveal passion and heartache that transcend
“Quand?”

“I wish I could forget you”
language and land, but should not be reduced to a simplistic East meets West analysis. Chamaa is quick to dismiss labels in general, like his art being “pop” or his nationality “Lebanese”. The artist, whose career has spanned over 30 years, was born in Beirut but largely grew up in Germany and spent some time in the United States before returning to Lebanon.

His paintings tell stories, says Chamaa, who prefers to create thematic series rather than individual pieces. His previous “La Dolce Vita” series, shown in 2013 at Lebanon’s Galerie Tanit and at the Bel Air Fine Art Gallery in Geneva, paints a melodramatic consumerist love triangle between beautiful Yasmine, her sleazy but rich new boyfriend and her lovelorn neighbor. The 12 canvases are a continuum spanning 22 meters and conclude with a follow-up painting entitled “Caramel, Superheroes, Fried Eggs et Chocolats.” But his art doesn’t always evoke drama; a more recent work titled “Mashrou’ Lulu” – a play on Lebanese band Mashrou’ Leila – is a light and fun triptych of comic book character Little Lulu, who features a lot in his projects, cooking a giant plate of spaghetti.

Chamaa’s signature style often intertwines Arabic script with more traditional pop art and regularly includes collage-style images of famous products, logos, characters and symbols. It’s not surprising then, that the artist has a background in graphic and advertising design – even setting up his own boutique design company fresh out of college in the 1980s. Before 2010 his painting style was actually very different but the shift was natural. “Pop art glorifies commercial products so while my jump from advertising to pop art took time, it makes perfect sense,” he says.

In between stories, Chamaa tells jokes and makes sarcastic comments, recalling how he grew up surrounded by culture in a family of creatives and was first encouraged to pursue art by a primary school teacher in Germany. Chamaa also studied fine art and, although he had a long-term day job, he always kept an easel at the office. He never thought he’d earn a living through art, but since he entered early retirement in 2006 to become a stay-at-home-dad, he began to have more time for his passion. When his daughter went to school and he began to experiment with pop-art, a friend pushed him to “come out of the closet” as an artist.

But dealing with logistics is far from enjoyable for Chamaa, which is why he now has an agent. “The business side of art is like any other business,” he says. “It’s boring and you cannot really do both. If you really want to take it seriously you have to focus on your art; you can’t think about how to transport paintings,” he explains. His exhibition at the Opera Gallery is ideal for regional exposure, which he says is essential for his career. First founded in Paris in 1994, the leading contemporary art gallery operates out of 11 major cities, also opening in Downtown Beirut last year. Chamaa welcomes publicity but also criticism. “I want people to criticize me, to say ‘who does he think he is?’ and ‘my kids can draw better!’ I want to hear these things,” he says.

“Chagrin d’amour – The Musical” premieres at the Opera Gallery in Dubai’s DIFC area on April 1st and runs for two weeks.
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TECHS AND THE CITY
THE QUICKLY CHANGING LIFESTYLE OF THE FOMO GENERATION

Words by Olga Habre

It feels like more and more of us are coming down with FOMO. Short for “fear of missing out”, it’s defined as the “anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on social media.” The technology-driven epidemic is a side-effect of our mobile phones becoming our bae, but it’s no surprise we want to be part of it all, since we see it all, all the time. Whether it’s mobiles in our faces, smartwatches on our wrists or internet appliances in our homes, technology is constantly bombarding our senses with information. While tech certainly makes our lives easier, offering lifestyle solutions and facilitating the balancing acts of these FOMO-induced modern lifestyles, it has also added layers of complication we never anticipated.

Some argue we’re collectively devolving into lazy, impatient, antisocial button-pressers and screen-touchers, dependant victims of the digital revolution itching for notifications and instant gratification. We wake up to mobile phone alarms and spend mornings scrolling down social media feeds as if they were newspapers – while actual newspapers are sadly shutting down. Snap-happy over-sharers document the banal on Snapchat until their batteries run dry. We watch concerts on the screens of viewers in front of us. Over meals, neo-photographers are busy art directing food and we often eat together in silence, tired eyeballs and fast fingers flicking over screens. Those without mobiles are weirdos, outliers, even “psychopaths” according to one viral meme.

But tech also gives us fantastical new abilities, improves quality of life and efficiency and brings us closer to faraway people and places. In a world where it’s more lucrative to work in the Gulf and fly to your Beirut-based family on weekends than hold a local job, smartphones and social media platforms have made it possible for us to stay closely connected with loved ones far away, so we don’t fear missing out. Families separated by seas wait for Life360 check-ins and long-distance couples enjoy 24-hour Facetime dates. Courtships begin on Tinder – so much so that an April 2015 glitch in the app caused a global meltdown – and singles swap likes and texts before investing in “real life” dates (that very same social media activity is later the basis for modern-day squabbles). We panic when there’s no reception, refresh our feeds religiously and fall asleep staring at screens (the latest iPhone update offers a night mode that makes this easier on the eyes).

Ask millennials about life before mobiles and you may get a moment of nostalgia; they’re the last generation to experience both “real” and digital lifestyles, growing up in that transition. But today’s youth can tech before they can talk. I’ve seen a one-year-old slide to unlock her mom’s iPhone and find “Peppa Pig” on YouTube – and she knew how to slide up incoming texts to get rid of the pesky interruptions.

Smartphones are becoming our BFFs, and rivalry between makers runs deep. The Samsung Galaxy Note5 targets multitaskers – helping users stay on top of their personal and professional lives simultane-
1. Blu-ray Home Theatre System by Sony
2. The newest iPhone SE
3. LG’s Hom-Bot vacuum cleaner
4. Beautifully designed BeoLab 90 speakers
5. BeoSound Moment features a colorful mood-wheel

In the early days of wearable tech, we thought listening to music on the go on a bulky Sony Walkman was advanced. Today wearable tech looks like trendy watches, led by Apple Watch, Samsung’s Gear S, Sony SmartWatch and newcomer Huawei Watch, which track health, facilitate calls and utilize apps. Further wearables have given us the power of virtual vision; Google Glass and its competitors, like Atheer AIR by Lebanese entrepreneur Sulaiman Itany, are fascinating for everyone but especially useful for professionals by freeing hands and revolutionizing industries like medicine and engineering.

At work, fewer consumers use desktops, and most professionals opt for convenient laptops that transition easily from work to personal use. This has led a new breed of coffee shops to spring up, accommodating rows of laptop users with shared tables and free WiFi. Whereas we used to read newspapers and magazines to show off our intellect in public, today laptops make

oursly on one little screen. Some of LG’s phones even offer a double life, with two passcodes to separate personal and professional identities. Phones are becoming more durable: Samsung’s new Galaxy S7 Edge is advertised as water resistant for 30 minutes (plenty of time to save it from spillage accidents), while its Galaxy Round along with LG’s G Flex series are setting the trend for curved phones. For those with expensive taste, Vertu offers not only stunning design and top performance, but also luxury innovations like a concierge service and access to exclusive venues and events (a very FOMO-inducing feature!) Also stepping into the game is China’s Huawei and their range of competitive Android-run devices. While smartphones give us the illusion of freedom to live more spontaneously by making it easy to run a business on the run, it’s also enslaving to be constantly so connected. Of course exceptions and rebels are rampant but they’re dying out.
“The best way to predict the future is to invent it.” Alan Kay

us look intelligent even if we’re Googling nonsense.

Our PCs are so small thanks to new forms of information storage. We’re changing how we communicate and collaborate, using email and online drives. Individuals as well as businesses are moving into the cloud, saving space and money. Popular sharing service Dropbox soared from 25 million users in 2011 to 400 million in 2015. Microsoft’s Azure, one of the major public Cloud Storage Providers along with Google Cloud and Amazon Web Services, was storing 10 trillion objects in 2015.

And while we slave away at work our smart appliances are beginning to do housework for us. LG’s Hom-Bot and Samsung’s POWERbot are some of the already available robotic vacuum cleaners that find their own way around a room, avoiding objects in their path. The two brands are also pioneering prototypes for fridges of the future, which include cameras and sensors so you know what’s inside without opening it – and can even view it remotely from your mobile.

Our homes accommodate us musically too. Music players like the BeoSound Moment understand our musical preferences, integrating music with streaming services to create a perfect acoustic atmosphere. Meanwhile the brand’s BeoLink Multiroom follows you around the house with utmost crisp quality sound and customized music. We don’t even need to go to a concert hall when you have live-music quality with BeoLab 90 loudspeaker. Closing your eyes while the music is playing, you can actually hear where each instrument in an ensemble is located. The 360-degree speakers measure surroundings to direct the perfect sound waves for any listening position, whether you’re watching a movie or having a party.

This goes beyond music too. “Netflix and chill” is the new “dinner and a movie” because home entertainment is on par with theatres. Why go to the cinema when you can have a high-powered home entertainment system like the Sony’s range of Blu-ray Home theatre systems, or one of the many other options on the market for every taste and budget? Today’s cinemas are forced to indulge spoiled consumers with VIP treatment and gourmet food options to make up for the fact that they can get virtually the same visual and sound quality in the comfort of their own homes. By revolutionizing television resolution to LG’s OLED display and Samsung’s 4K SUHD TV, sound quality and bringing 3D home, leading companies have not only changed our lives as consumers, but forced changes on rivaling entertainment venues, prompting new experiences altogether. Every day we test the limits of tech, expecting solutions, demanding evolutions and improving lives for future generations.

Technology is dashing forward so fast and in so many directions that it’s hard to keep track of what’s new and what’s what. In business, the speed at which tech is evolving is creating never-before-seen industries, sectors, businesses and movements. Banque du Liban, Lebanon’s central bank, is pushing local talent to expand in this direction by injecting more than $400 million into the sector with Circular 331. The domino effect of the Arab Spring was assisted by the use of smartphones and social media. Tech affects everything we do, how we think and communicate and who we are, throwing us into a digital age we could only have imagined a few short years ago. Sure, we’re becoming a little more neurotic, but what beats waking up to the sound of your child’s voice when they’re half a world away? That’s something we’re glad we’re not missing out on anymore.
Despite being a self-confessed “big time” techie, Patrick Gharios also has a penchant for adventure and music. He was a software engineer at Eriksson until 2014, when he launched Hipernation – an online streaming platform for live events which so far include Arabnet, TEDxBeirut and conferences for Human Rights Watch and Carnegie Middle East Center.

Are you going for a Mark Zuckerberg look – T-shirt and hoodie?
He has so many decisions to make every day, other than his clothes. I don’t have as many decisions as Mark Zuckerberg! But it’s really about investing your time to create products instead of thinking about clothes. I’d rather be remembered for the work I do.

Wristband, Fitbit Flex
This tracks my activity. I’m into all kinds of sports: biking, running, hiking, skiing, watersports, tennis, basketball… also chess, does that count? I used to play chess during breaks at university. I’ve always been a geek.

Shoes, Converse
I think laces complicate things and when you’re playing music it’s easier to kick the drum. The first time I bought a pair of Converse without laces was ten years ago. I had a wedding and a gig afterwards at the AUB Outdoors festival so I bought a pair and it became my favorite kind of shoe ever since. I have them in every color.

Why did you choose to go into tech?
It allows for expression, creativity and innovation. You come up with solutions for people to live better. It’s like art for me; code is poetry, it’s a language. I launched Hipernation because there was a need. It’s a non-traditional, alternative solution for people to get live coverage. Now I’m working on a new project to integrate my passion for music into Hipernation, streaming live music events.
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Company Bulletin

- After the results of an extensive audit conducted by two international auditing firms reaffirmed the leadership status of Ipsos and Nielsen's joint venture in Lebanon, the companies officially released their annual television audience results for 2015.

- ABC Ashrafieh announced that its photovoltaic power plant succeeded in 2015 in generating 31 percent of the mall's needed electricity, and ABC also recycled more than 100,000 kg of recyclable materials in the last six months of 2015.

- 2016 sees the BMW Group celebrate its centenary under the motto “The Next 100 Years”; the BMW Group’s centenary celebrations are set to focus primarily on what lies ahead and explore how individual mobility might develop over the coming decades.

- King Food sal, the Burger King® brand franchisee in Lebanon, inaugurated its new branch at The Spot mall in Nabatieh in February 2016.

- Banque Libano-Française hosted, in partnership with the Economic and Capital Markets Research Center of the University of Balamand, a conference on “The World Economic situation in the United States, the Eurozone, the United Kingdom, Japan and the Emerging Markets” on Thursday, February 25, 2016.

- The Bacardi Legacy cocktail competition final took place on Saturday February 27 at The Grand Factory, crowning Ayman Zayour from Vivid with La Palma as the national champion. Ayman will be representing Lebanon in the global competition taking place in San Francisco, USA.

- Sympaticus, a psychotherapy and wellbeing platform for women in MENA, ranked second at the ArabNet Beirut 2016 startup demo competition on March 3.

- According to a study on the economic costs of climate change to Lebanon published on March 8 by the Ministry of Environment and the United Nations Development Programme, Lebanon's economy will save $50 billion by 2040 if global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are implemented.

- On Friday, February 19, Brandcell held its first edition of Brandcell Conversations. Participants from several industries were gathered to discuss the theme of Innovation in Business.

- Roadster diner launched a food safety awareness program in March in collaboration with the Department of Nutrition and Food Sciences at the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at American University of Beirut.

- MasterCard Start Path recruited a new class of startups across the globe in March 2016 to embark on the six-month virtual program.

- On March 1, Diageo and Public Interest Design – Levant (PID), in collaboration with industry stakeholders and NGOs, launched the next phase of their “In Good Spirit” campaign with public furniture to be deployed in key nightlife locations, promoting responsible alcohol consumption and raising awareness on the risks of its abuse.

- Saxo Bank, the online trading and investment specialist, and CME Group, the world’s leading and most diverse derivatives marketplace, on March 3 signed a content-sharing agreement rendering CME Group’s educational materials available to Saxo Bank’s global client base.

- Cultural Village Foundation-Katara launched on Sunday, March 6, the first ever auction house in Qatar, “Al Badih”. On March 7 adidas introduced its new pureBOOSTX shoes at Genesis Health Club – Verdun in the presence of celebrity guest Carla Haddad.

- Ericsson showcased its latest media solutions, paying special attention to the evolution of the cloud and the use of multi-screens in the Middle East region at CABSAT 2016, from March 8-10, at the Dubai World Trade Centre.

- On March 9, Visa Inc. released the results of a new 2016 study conducted by Moody’s Analytics, which revealed that the increased use of electronic payment products added nearly $300 billion to GDP across 70 countries between 2011 and 2015.

- On March 9, the Movement of French Enterprises and Economic Representations (MEREF) and Business France in Lebanon signed a partnership agreement that aims to strengthen economic ties between France and Lebanon at the Résidences des Pins, in the presence of French Ambassador Emmanuel Bonne.

- On March 9, Swiss watchmaker Baume & Mercier hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony marking the opening of the brand’s new boutique at Beirut Souks in Lebanon.

- On Saturday, March 12, a Youth-Speak forum, organized by AIESEC in Lebanon, gathered 200 students from different universities in Lebanon to take action on what they want to change in their environment.

- ANB Motorcycles, the official distributor of Piaggio Group and KTM motorcycles in Lebanon, brought together riders and their families for a fun-filled Family Ride on Sunday, March 13, as one of their annual activities for the motorcycle club’s
A.N.Boukather, the Official Distributor of Mazda cars in Lebanon, arranged a driving experience - #Fun2Drive - on Sunday, March 13 at the Pit Stop Circuit in Zouk Mosbeh.

On March 14 an event at the J.W. Marriott Marquis Hotel in Dubai, hosted by co-guardians of the Mouawad diamond house Fred, Alain and Pascal Mouawad, showcased the brand’s new collections of luxurious Swiss-made watches and stunning high jewelry.

On March 14, Air Arabia shareholders approved the distribution of a 9 percent cash dividend for the 2015 financial year at the company’s Annual General Meeting in Sharjah.

Product of the Year Lebanon, a leading innovation incubator in the Fast Moving Consumer Goods sector, revealed the names of its winners on March 15; winning products were selected by consumers through an independent consumer survey conducted by Ipsos.

On March 15, Center for Corporate Services Group (CCS) announced the full acquisition of Move Forward International (MFI), a move that will further strengthen CCS’s position not only in Lebanon but also in the Middle East region as a major player in providing consulting and training services.

The UN Information Centre in Beirut (UNIC-Beirut) launched a one-year partnership with the Junior Chamber International Lebanon in its three chapters: Beirut, Sidon and the American University of Beirut on March 15.

In collaboration with ABC, Gata Events & Promotions organized a Lebanese designers’ exhibition entitled “Bloom” that celebrated spring, Mother’s Day and Easter, held on March 17-21 at ABC Dbayeh.

On March 17, Adidas held the public opening of its new branch at ABC Achrafieh, making this their eighth store in Lebanon.

Touch hosted its annual mother’s day lunch under the auspices of Mrs. Marlene Boutros Harb at the Regency Palace Hotel in Adma on March 17.

Staffan de Mistura, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, spoke on humanitarian aid at a press conference after a meeting with the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) in Geneva, on March 17.

On March 17 and 18, Lebanon hosted its first Marketing Kingdom forum, with international marketing experts from Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo, Visa, Coca Cola and Hug Digital, among others, to tackle the latest in marketing trends and challenges.

On the occasion of Mother’s Day, Scuderia Lebanon srl, the official Ferrari importer in Lebanon, celebrated with an exclusive Mother’s Day brunch at its Ferrari Boutique showroom on March 17.

Rasamny-Younis Motor Company srl, the exclusive distributor of Nissan in Lebanon, unveiled the locally tuned 1,000 horsepower Nissan GT-R during an event that took place on March 19 at the RPM track in Mtein.

Economena Analytics, a specialized economic data provider, released its Lebanese Economic Outlook for the first half of 2016. Key forecast findings are based on the views of 18 leading Lebanese economists, and show growth in 2016 is expected to grow to 0.72 percent.

Rasamny Younis Motor Company, official dealer of Nissan and Infiniti, will continue its strategic partnership with agency TBWA/RAAD in managing its advertising and marketing campaign across all platforms.

On the occasion of Mother’s Day, LG Electronics organized a high-profile brunch hosted at Al-Mandaloun Café, Achrafieh, and invited mothers in the media sector to enjoy the special day.

BASSMA graduated the first of five groups from an intensive training program of twelve sessions held at the Primary Healthcare Center in Chiyah that aimed to enable women to join the workforce fully equipped.

Total Syndication has signed a contract with web design company iBarood in exchanging media products and works of art.

Samsung Electronics Middle East and North Africa (MENA) unveiled innovation that is making a meaningful difference in people’s lives during the Samsung MENA Forum 2016 in Lisbon, Portugal.

Rotana Hotels Beirut appointed Ms. Raymonde Nawar as the new cluster revenue manager.

Two startups from the first batch of Speed@BDD’s acceleration program, Next Automated Robots (N.A.R.) and RationalPixels, have graduated from the two-week “LebNet Ignite Powered by Blackbox Connect” program in Silicon Valley.

A Bank of Beirut delegation visited the Ghanaian capital to oversee the operations of the bank’s newly-opened representative office in Accra and to sponsor the Lebanese American University gala dinner for the Ghana Alumni chapter.

The Maserati Levante, the luxury SUV that premiered at the 2016 Geneva Motor Show, has now arrived in Lebanon.

ELIE SAAB is proud to announce the opening of its second boutique in Dubai, at the Mall of the Emirates.

Byblos Bank held a lunch in honor of the newly elected president of the Lebanese Contractors’ Syndicate of Public Works & Buildings Maroun El Majzoub.

Majzoub & Partners, CPAs celebrates the launches of the new brand identity which coincide with the 25th anniversary of Nexia International, a worldwide network of independent auditing and accounting firms, of which is a member.

Alfa, managed by Orascom Telecom, honored mothers in the media sector on the occasion of Mother’s Day at the Aïshti Foundation, in recog-
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BUSINESS ESSENTIALS

Company Bulletin

In recognition of their dedication and support for Alfa and the telecom sector, Ericsson was awarded the highest category award, “IT Partner of The Year”, for the second consecutive year, Etisalat Misr I-Awards 2015 in Egypt.

For the third year in a row, Yaduna Foundation organized a gala dinner to raise funds in support of the Women Heart Health Center to improve women’s cardiovascular health and reduce the burden of disease through prevention, screening, primary treatment and advocacy.

Ford Motor Company has announced the creation of Ford Smart Mobility LLC, a new subsidiary formed to design, build, grow and invest in emerging mobility services.

Panasonic's all-in-one audio system SC-CMAX5, with its ability to deliver ultra-powerful sound both indoors and outdoors, can be used as a guitar amp and speaker for dynamic musical performances or home jamming sessions.

According to a local analysis released by Saxo Bank, Lebanon’s economic slowdown is mostly due to the lack of foreign investments in private sectors, energy infrastructure and real estate, along with the failure to elect a president.

Samsung Electronics Co. Ltd announced the newest additions to the Galaxy family of products, Samsung Galaxy S7 and Galaxy S7 edge.

Samsung Electronics Co. Ltd announced a strategic alliance with NCR Corporation, whereby NCR will support Samsung's strategy to accelerate growth in its printing business by delivering a comprehensive set of managed print services to customers worldwide.

Dubai-based flydubai announced receiving its membership certificate from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), becoming the latest airline to join from the Middle East and North Africa.

According to a recent Middle East and North Africa Consumer Confidence Index survey conducted by Bayt.com and YouGov, a quarter of respondents (25 percent) are largely optimistic about the future, expecting business conditions in Lebanon to ‘get better’ in a year’s time.

H3 Secure announced it has signed an exclusive distribution agreement with Bianco Technology Group to sell its data erasure and mobile diagnostics solutions to enterprise organizations in the Middle East and North Africa.

Asmak, the UAE-based provider of fresh and frozen seafood in the Middle East, held a personalized cooking and tasting session with Chef Rayya Abou Ezzeddine at KitchenLab to celebrate entering the Lebanese market.

In celebration of the 11th World Kidney Day, the Ministry of Public Health and the Lebanese Society of Nephrology and Hypertension launched the “Act early to prevent it!” national awareness campaign to fight the increase of preventable kidney diseases.

LG Electronics has announced the launch of two of its K Series models, the K10 and K4, in key global markets including the Middle East, Asia and Latin America.

The Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA), the largest PR association in Europe representing and regulating over 18,000 PR individuals, has announced the launch of PRCA MENA.

The interior of the new Lincoln MKX features soft, supple leather developed by Scottish brand Bridge of Weir specifically for Lincoln.

Alfa, managed by Orascom Telecom, signed 4.5G LTE Advanced network deployment contracts with Ericsson and Nokia and two MoUs on 5G technology within the 2020 plan announced by the Ministry of Telecommunications.

Banque du Liban (BDL), Lebanon’s central bank, Governor Riad Salameh, met in London his British counterpart, Governor Mark Carney, to tackle key issues concerning the Lebanese banking sector.

Trend Micro, a global leader in security software solutions, has appointed Redington Gulf as the first authorized training center to conduct certified training courses here in the region.

Bassoul Heneine sal, exclusive importer of Renault to Lebanon, launched the Renault Duster 4x4, with an exclusive system that allows the driver to choose between 4x2 or 4x4 drives.

Philip F. Boustany has been promoted to deputy general manager at Boustany United Machineries Company, Al, the exclusive distributor of Toyota and Lexus.

ELIE SAAB’s Ready-to-Wear Autumn-Winter 2016/2017 collection has been described as a gypsy-style energy of layered texture with rhapsodic character.

Dinner in the Sky will celebrate its tenth anniversary in Brussels, the town of its birth, by highlighting Michelin-starred Belgian gastronomy, serving 220 guests each day from June 1-5 near the Atomium.

Set to open in August 2016, Mall of Qatar has signed a lease agreement with Azadea Group Holding, a fashion and lifestyle retail company, to feature...
اسمها
"ذكّرة"
ذكّرها

بتسأل عن كل شيء، وعن هوّيتكم ما بتسأل؟

ناسي تقدم بطلب بطاقة هوّيتكم؟ أو طلبتها ونسيت تستلمها؟ أو يمكنّ صار لازم تجدها؟ تقدّم بطلب إصدار أو تجديد بطاقة الهوية لدى أقسام اللجوء أو عند المختار بسرع وقت. ما تتأخر، إجراءات الإصدار سارّة أسهل. بطاقة الهوية هي حقّكم وحقكم، وحقكم، والقانون يلزم كل مواطن بحترامها.

www.dgps.gov.lb
لمتابعة حال طلبكم.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANIZERS</th>
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<th>WEBSITE</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LEBANON</strong></td>
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<td><strong>7-8 Apr</strong></td>
<td>MENA GAMES CONFERENCE</td>
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<td>IFP</td>
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<td>28 Apr - 1 May</td>
<td>THE ARAB BANKING CONFERENCE FOR 2016: ARAB BANKING INTEGRATION</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ubonline.org">www.ubonline.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>11 May</td>
<td>THE NEW ARAB WOMAN FORUM</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Al Iktissad Wal Amal Group</td>
<td>+961 1 377800; <a href="mailto:uab@ubonline.org">uab@ubonline.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>12-13 May</td>
<td>ARAB ECONOMIC FORUM</td>
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<td>Al Iktissad Wal Amal Group</td>
<td>+961 1 377800; <a href="mailto:uab@ubonline.org">uab@ubonline.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>18-19 May</td>
<td>THE SIXTH RISK MANAGEMENT ANNUAL FORUM</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Union of Arab Banks</td>
<td>+961 1 377800; <a href="mailto:uab@ubonline.org">uab@ubonline.org</a></td>
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<td>19-20 May</td>
<td>MIDDLE EAST SOCIAL MEDIA FESTIVAL</td>
<td>+961 5 951343; <a href="mailto:info@mesmf.com">info@mesmf.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>20-29 May</td>
<td>BEIRUT DESIGN WEEK</td>
<td>+961 1 249 082; <a href="mailto:participant@beirutdesignweek.org">participant@beirutdesignweek.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>24-26 May</td>
<td>GENERAL ARAB INSURANCE FEDERATION</td>
<td>+961 5 956957; <a href="mailto:info@gaifbeirut2016.com">info@gaifbeirut2016.com</a></td>
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<td><strong>DUBAI</strong></td>
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<td><strong>6-7 Apr</strong></td>
<td>SIXTH GCC GOVERNMENT FUTURE LEADERS CONFERENCE</td>
<td><a href="http://www.datamatixgroup.com">www.datamatixgroup.com</a></td>
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<td>Datamatix Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>17-20 Apr</td>
<td>THE FAHR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE</td>
<td><a href="http://www.forma-mea.com">www.forma-mea.com</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Informa Middle East</td>
<td>+971 4 336 5161; <a href="mailto:info-mea@informa.com">info-mea@informa.com</a></td>
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<td>20-21 Apr</td>
<td>ISLAMIC BANKING FORUM</td>
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<td>+961 1 377800; <a href="mailto:uab@ubonline.org">uab@ubonline.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>25-28 Apr</td>
<td>ARABIAN TRAVEL MARKET</td>
<td>+971 4 3642813; <a href="mailto:Welliah.Ellis@reedsexpo.com">Welliah.Ellis@reedsexpo.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>26-28 Apr</td>
<td>ARABIAN HOTEL INVESTMENT</td>
<td>+971 4818 0200; <a href="mailto:events@meed.com">events@meed.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>2-3 May</td>
<td>MIDDLE EAST INVESTMENT SUMMIT</td>
<td>+971 1 4440 2500; <a href="mailto:enquiry.me@terrapinn.com">enquiry.me@terrapinn.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>21-25 May</td>
<td>22ND GCC SMART GOVERNMENT AND SMART CITIES CONFERENCE</td>
<td><a href="http://www.datamatixgroup.com">www.datamatixgroup.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Datamatix Group</td>
<td>+971 4 332 6688; <a href="mailto:info@datamatixgroup.com">info@datamatixgroup.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>2-Jun</td>
<td>ECONOMIC AND INVESTMENT EXPERTS SUMMIT</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Datamatix Group</td>
<td>+971 4 332 6688; <a href="mailto:info@datamatixgroup.com">info@datamatixgroup.com</a></td>
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<td><strong>ABU DHABI</strong></td>
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<td>23-24 May</td>
<td>SIXTH ANNUAL BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE FORUM</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fleminggulf.com">www.fleminggulf.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fleming Gulf</td>
<td>+971 4 609 1555; <a href="mailto:info@fleminggulf.com">info@fleminggulf.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>24-25 May</td>
<td>MIDDLE EAST WEATHER TECHNOLOGY SUMMIT</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fleminggulf.com">www.fleminggulf.com</a></td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>QATAR</strong></td>
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<td>18-19 Apr</td>
<td>SMART PARKING QATAR</td>
<td><a href="http://www.acm-events.com">www.acm-events.com</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Advanced Conferences and Meetings</td>
<td>+971 4 361 4001; <a href="mailto:opportunities@acm-events.com">opportunities@acm-events.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>15-18 May</td>
<td>ASSET INTEGRITY AND RELIABILITY SUMMIT</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iqpc.com">www.iqpc.com</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>IQPC</td>
<td>+971 4 364 2975; <a href="mailto:enquiry@iqpc.ae">enquiry@iqpc.ae</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>16-19 May</td>
<td>WORLD STADIUMS CONGRESS 2016</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iqpc.com">www.iqpc.com</a></td>
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<td>23-25 May</td>
<td>FIFTH ANNUAL CORROSION MANAGEMENT SUMMIT</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fleminggulf.com">www.fleminggulf.com</a></td>
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<td>+971 4 609 1555; <a href="mailto:info@fleminggulf.com">info@fleminggulf.com</a></td>
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<td><strong>KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA</strong></td>
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<td>16-11 Apr</td>
<td>ACADEMIA ARABIA</td>
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<td>+971 4 609 1555; <a href="mailto:info@fleminggulf.com">info@fleminggulf.com</a></td>
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<td>26-27 Apr</td>
<td>SECOND ANNUAL KINGDOM WASTE MANAGEMENT FORUM</td>
<td>Fleming Gulf; +971 4 609 1555; <a href="mailto:info@fleminggulf.com">info@fleminggulf.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>3-4 May</td>
<td>FOURTH ANNUAL DIGITAL GRIDS AND SMART CITIES SUMMIT</td>
<td>Fleming Gulf; +971 4 609 1555; <a href="mailto:info@fleminggulf.com">info@fleminggulf.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>9-10 May</td>
<td>SECOND ANNUAL KINGDOM PROCESS SAFETY</td>
<td>Fleming Gulf; +971 4 609 1555; <a href="mailto:info@fleminggulf.com">info@fleminggulf.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>22-23 May</td>
<td>THIRD CYBER SECURITY FORUM</td>
<td>Fleming Gulf; +971 4 609 1555; <a href="mailto:info@fleminggulf.com">info@fleminggulf.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>23-25 May</td>
<td>OMAN ENERGY AND WATER</td>
<td>Oman Expo; +968 2466 0124; <a href="mailto:info@omanexpo.com">info@omanexpo.com</a></td>
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<td>10-11 May</td>
<td>DE-RISKING BANKING FORUM</td>
<td>Union of Arab Banks; +961 1 377800; <a href="mailto:uab@uabonline.org">uab@uabonline.org</a></td>
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<td>5-8 Apr</td>
<td>HORECA</td>
<td>Hospitality Services; +961 1 480081; <a href="mailto:info@hospitalityservices.com.lb">info@hospitalityservices.com.lb</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>16-18 May</td>
<td>BEIRUT INTERNATIONAL PROPERTY FAIR</td>
<td>Promoteam; +961 1 339050; <a href="mailto:sm@promoteam-ltd.com">sm@promoteam-ltd.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>18-19 May</td>
<td>BEIRUT INTERNATIONAL FRANCHISE FORUM AND EXHIBITION</td>
<td>LFA; +961 1 742 134; <a href="mailto:info@lfalebanon.com">info@lfalebanon.com</a></td>
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<td>24-28 May</td>
<td>GARDEN SHOW AND SPRING FESTIVAL</td>
<td>Hospitality Services; +961 1 480081; <a href="mailto:info@hospitalityservices.com.lb">info@hospitalityservices.com.lb</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>31 May - 3 Jun</td>
<td>PROJECT LEBANON</td>
<td>IFP; +961 5 959 111; <a href="mailto:info@ifpexpo.com">info@ifpexpo.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>4-5 Jun</td>
<td>MEN’S WORLD EXHIBITION</td>
<td>FEW; +961 1 207 700; <a href="mailto:info@fewlb.com">info@fewlb.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>13-15 Apr</td>
<td>GULF EDUCATION AND TRAINING EXHIBITION</td>
<td>International Conferences and Exhibitions; +971 4 3355001; <a href="mailto:info@icedxb.com">info@icedxb.com</a></td>
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<td>8-10 May</td>
<td>AUTOMECHANIKA DUBAI</td>
<td>EPOC Messe Frankfurt; +971 4 389 4500; <a href="mailto:info@epocmessefrankfurt.com">info@epocmessefrankfurt.com</a></td>
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<td>31 May - 1 Jun</td>
<td>CARDS AND PAYMENTS MIDDLE EAST</td>
<td>Terrapinn Middle East; +971 14440 2500; <a href="mailto:enquiry.me@terrapinn.com">enquiry.me@terrapinn.com</a></td>
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<td>12-14 Apr</td>
<td>CITYSCAPE ABU DHABI</td>
<td>Informa Middle East; +971 4 336 5161; <a href="mailto:info-mea@informa.com">info-mea@informa.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>3-7 May</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL JEWELRY AND WATCH SHOW</td>
<td>Reed Expo; +971 4 3642813; <a href="mailto:Wellah.Elis@reedexpo.ae">Wellah.Elis@reedexpo.ae</a></td>
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<td>11-14 Apr</td>
<td>SAUDI BUILDING AND INTERIORS EXHIBITION</td>
<td>ACE Expos; +966 12 654 6384; <a href="mailto:ace@acexpos.com">ace@acexpos.com</a></td>
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<td>14-15 Apr</td>
<td>WEPOWER</td>
<td>ITE Group; +44 (0) 203 328 9589; <a href="mailto:stella@bme-global.com">stella@bme-global.com</a></td>
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<td>18-20 Apr</td>
<td>GCC ENVIRONMENT FORUM</td>
<td>BME Global Events; +44 (0) 203 328 9589; <a href="mailto:stella@bme-global.com">stella@bme-global.com</a></td>
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# BUSINESS ESSENTIALS

## Events

### EXHIBITIONS

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<td><strong>SAUDI FOOD, HOTEL AND HOSPITALITY ARABIA</strong>&lt;br&gt;9-12 May&lt;br&gt;ACE Expos</td>
<td>+966 12 654 6384; <a href="mailto:ace@acexpos.com">ace@acexpos.com</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.acexpos.com">www.acexpos.com</a></td>
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<td><strong>SAUDI SAFETY AND SECURITY</strong>&lt;br&gt;16-18 May&lt;br&gt;ITE Group</td>
<td>+44 (0) 203 328 9589; <a href="mailto:stella@bme-global.com">stella@bme-global.com</a></td>
<td>bme-global.com</td>
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</table>

### BAHRAIN

| 9-21 May | **BAHRAIN EXHIBITIONS**<br>Bahrain Exhibition & Convention Authority (BECA) | +973 17558898; Amala@beca.bh | www.bahrainexhibitions.com |
| 26-28 Apr | **GULF INTERIORS EXHIBITION**<br>Bahrain International and Exhibition Center | +973 17299123; info@hilalce.com | www.gulfinteriorsexhibition.com |
| 26-28 Apr | **GULFBID**<br>Hilal Conferences and Exhibitions | +973 17 299123; info@hilalce.com | www.hilalce.com |
| 12-14 May | **THE PROPERTY SHOW**<br>Gallure Ideas & Insight W.L.L | +973 77100097; Gaurav@gallure.com | www.bahrainexhibitions.com |

### EGYPT

| 7-10 Apr | **CITYSCAPE EGYPT**<br>Informa Middle East | +971 4 336 5161; info-mea@informa.com | www.informa-mea.com |

### QATAR

| 9-11 Apr | **EDUtec Qatar**<br>IFP | +961 5 959 111; info@ifpexpo.com | www.ifpexpo.com |
| 18-19 Apr | **SMART PARKING QATAR**<br>IFP | +961 5 959 111; info@ifpexpo.com | www.ifpexpo.com |
| 26-28 Apr | **CITYSCAPE QATAR**<br>Informa Middle East | +971 4 336 5161; info-mea@informa.com | www.informa-mea.com |
| 9-10 May | **LIGHTINGTECH QATAR**<br>Advanced Conferences and Meetings | +971 4 361 4001; opportunities@acm-events.com | www.acm-events.com |
| 9-12 May | **PROJECT QATAR**<br>IFP | +961 5 959 111; info@ifpexpo.com | www.ifpexpo.com |

### IRAQ

| 6-8 Jun | **PROJECT IRAQ**<br>IFP | +961 5 959 111; info@ifpexpo.com | www.ifpexpo.com |

### KUWAIT

| 4-9 May | **BUILDING EXHIBITION**<br>Kuwait International Fair | +965 539 3872; info@kif.net | www.kif.net |

### OMAN

| 12-16 Apr | **COMEX 2016 - IT, TELECOM AND TECHNOLOGY EXHIBITION AND CONFERENCE**<br>Oman International Trade & Exhibitions OITE | +968 9934 1687; tarek@oite.com | www.ghedex.com |
| 19-21 Apr | **GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION EXHIBITION**<br>Oman International Trade & Exhibitions OITE | +968 9934 1687; tarek@oite.com | www.ghedex.com |
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Chairman, The FCCIAL

Mr. Fady GEMAYEL
President, The ALI.

Mr. Ahmad DIAB
General Director

Mr. Farhat FARHAT
CEO of EDUCITY

Ms. Neamat BADREDDINE
Social Activist

SOME OF OUR SEMINARS

Inclusivity-Removing the barriers of bias
by Mrs. Jacqueline MOURHEIBER
HR Director at Fattal Group

The Art Of Networking
by Mr. Andre ABI AWAD
Motivational Trainer

Negotiation Skills
by Mr. Samir ZEHIL
Personal Coach

How to Make a Better Resume
by Mr. Tarek HASSAN
Career Adviser

T.A.L.K.
by Mr. Milad HADCHITI
Motivational Speaker

Food Safety in Working Environment
by Ms. Ghina YASSINE
Food Safety Consultant

From Great to Greatness
by Mr. Naji BEJANI
International Trainer

Business Modeling For Startups
by Mr. David M. Nabti
CEO of ALTICITY

The Killer Social Media Status!
by Mr. Imad Bazzi
Journalist & Social Media Expert

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LAST WORD

By Thomas Schellen

Freedom needs a space and a responsible voice

Tackling the ABCs and 123s of media for the Arab world in the 21st century

Intellectually, what do Aleppo, Beirut, Cairo and Damascus have in common? Historians of Arab thought tell us that these cities were once centers of innovative thinking, national identity quests and movements for political reform in what historian Albert Hourani labeled as the region’s liberal age. They were places where seeds of literature, publishing and journalism were planted in the 19th century and where these seeds produced a movement for, in the words of Princeton scholar Lital Levy, “constructing a public sphere, advocating reform and using the medium of print culture to shape public opinion.”

In this context it was a painful notion last month to hear numerous alarm bells go off across Lebanon’s media landscape. Highly reputed newspapers with publishing histories of over 40, 60 and 80 years were threatened with closure for lack of financial resources, the reports and opinion pieces said.

It was not good tidings but was it news? Hardly. Broadsheets and magazines have lived lives of endangered species in the Lebanese market for years and not only in Lebanon. In general, waves of demise, consolidations and downsizings have accompanied media in global markets for at least 40 years.

Some reasons for the Lebanese print media malaise are as entrenched as they are self-evident. The national market for periodicals is small and growth potentials are extremely limited due to long-term media consumption trends that disfavor mass print organs, especially broadsheets. Advertising as a primary source of newspaper publishers’ incomes has eroded annually in the past three years, putting strains on media organizations.

But to paint this picture wholly and honestly, genuine advertising revenue was already insufficient for running papers – and most television stations – in Lebanon in the 1990s. The pie of ad spending has simply been too small to supply every publisher with an honest slice.

Other reasons for the problem, however, are equally entrenched but not necessarily self-evident. Ownership of media was long regarded as a fine thing for rent-seeking. There were fewer licenses for publishing a political newspaper than interest groups and supply of new licenses was blocked. A newspaper license was regarded as a high-value asset by whoever owned it, even if the paper had not been in print for years.

The constrictive environment of licensing was exacerbated by an ownership culture that was built on the status quo of interests. When I asked the then head of the Lebanese journalists’ association at a conference on media standards in the early 2000s about his views on self-censorship, he affirmed that it was part and parcel of what he considered “correct” journalistic behavior.

Combined with market limitations and the economic dependency on “regie” companies that would essentially dictate advertising sales interests of media organizations, the dominant media culture facilitated centeredness on sponsors – on taking money from interest groups and governments outside of Lebanon, by all evidence without investing any of that into enhancements of journalism or ethics and professional conduct of media organizations.

This brings the story back to the importance of Beirut as the space for the, in regional terms, freest possible discourse on matters of Arab importance. Platforms of such discourse, whether as think tanks or as media enterprises, need to cultivate best practices in their economic behavior, use of technology and also their ethics and authenticity. Phrasing it alternatively, Lebanese media need to make business sense, innovate and must have something worthwhile to say.

I once found myself as a panelist in a Tokyo conference on the future of media where I was seated on a podium between the editor of the Times of India and a former vice-president of the United States of America (hint: it was not Al Gore). My two cents on the viability of journalism then were that only value-added journalism will have an economic future. Today I maintain the same view, with the expansion that the adding of value must be digitally capacitated, as professional digital journalism.

Politics cannot breathe without the freedom of speech and the belief in any cause or thought system is condemned to remain hollow without the freedom of conscience. In parallel, economic prosperity and freedom of information are closer relations than many may think. In this context, it would be disastrous for not only Lebanon but the region if this public media sphere with its culture of discourse would fall into desertification.

However, free media cannot be propped up by the state or foreign governments. The business models of Lebanese media organizations cannot remain fixated on the past. They need to evolve into the digital age and they must build capacities and ethics that can solve problems of stakeholders in the knowledge economy. Remedies for the Lebanese media troubles of today are certainly not simple to find, even if the technical and ethical components are easy to point out.
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