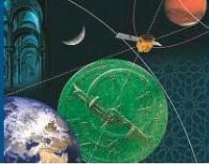


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'HOPE' COULD BE THE GAMECHANGER FOR ARABS

UAE's space mission on course to restore pride of place once enjoyed by Arab civilisation

BY MOHAMMED ALMEZEL | Editor-at-Large

The Arab nation for long had been a wounded nation, a defeated nation. Physically defeated and on the brink of a psychological defeat, perhaps for more than 500 years. The retreat of this once thriving and advanced nation began with the Arab defeat in Andalusia with the fall of the last Arab Emirates, the city Grenada (Charnata in Arabic) and its famous palace Al Hambra, on January 2 in 1492, at the hands of the Catholic monarchs, Queen Isabella I of Castile and King Ferdinand II of Aragon.

Andalusia was the height of the Arab renaissance. The advances in science, philosophy, arts and culture achieved by the Arabs are considered the basis for the Western renaissance and later the Industrial Revolution.

Two decades after the fall of Grenada, and around 1517, and while the Arabs were being expelled from Andalusia or forced to convert to Christianity, the Ottomans took over Arab lands in the Middle East. The Ottoman's cruel rule in the Arab region, which lasted until the end of World War I in 1918, was one of the darkest eras in our history. The Ottomans made sure that the region remained benighted, uncultivated, and underdeveloped. The region represented from them just another source of revenue and a torrent of forced conscripts to fight their endless wars in Europe. Not a single school or hospital, or a factory for that matter, was built in the Arab region by the Ottomans.

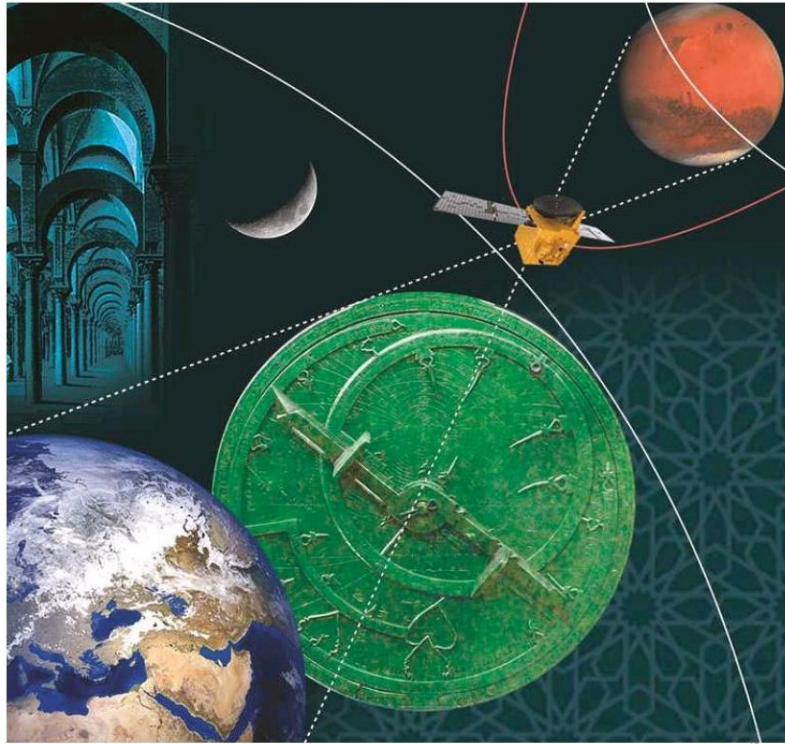
Failure of civilian governments

The modern Arab states inherited a vastly illiterate people, who mostly worked as farmers or sailors. However, the situation didn't get any better as those states were to remain under British and French occupation at least for the next two decades. As the wave of independence began in the early 1940s, another player came on stage – the military rule. Syria saw the first ever military coup in the Arab world in 1949, as a result of the utter failure of civilian governments of the time in the Palestine war in 1948. Most Arab states, except for the Gulf states, were now run by soldiers who were rarely interested in human development.

In his timeless manuscript, 'Al Muqaddimah', or The Introduction, the great Arab medieval intellectual Ibn Khaldun, says in one of his most quoted remarks: "Throughout history many nations have suffered a physical defeat, but that has never marked the end of a nation. But when a nation has become the victim of a psychological defeat, then that marks the end of a nation."

For centuries, we have been a physically defeated nation. But not entirely defeated psychologically. The past four decades saw many efforts to bring back the nation from the brink of its seemingly infinite decline. Some of these projects faltered at later stages and some of them are still in progress.

And then came the great 'Hope'. The UAE's Mars probe, which successfully entered the red planet's orbit on Tuesday, could thus become a gamechanger in the civilisation-



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al struggle of the Arab nation. The UAE as a project, since its inception in 1972, is built on the principle of innovation. It is the first successful Arab unification in centuries. Its system of federalism is unique in the Arab world. Its focus on human development, tolerance, multiculturalism and economic and social empowerment has made it a destination for not only foreign economic investment but also for skills and talents from around the world.

The success of the project is highlighted by the building of the first Arab nuclear plant for peaceful energy, Al Baraka, the almost-total automation of services, the strength of its private sector, the rapidly decreasing dependence on oil revenues and last week's successful Mars mission, the Hope Probe. The Mars mission however could very well propel a new line of thinking in the Arab world that we are capable of such things that were until last week assumed to be the acreage of developed nations such as the US and European countries. What is amazing about the UAE space project is the fact that the team that made it possible is a 100 per cent Emirati – scientists, engineers, designers, technicians, and supervisors. Therefore, the country has the right to be proud of its brilliant minds who achieved what many countries would not dare even think of doing. They have worked hard since the project was an idea announced by His Highness Shaikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al

Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, in 2015. "Arab civilisation once played a great role in contributing to human knowledge and will play that role again," Shaikh Mohammad noted at the time.

Regaining past glory

He was referring to a long line of Arab scientists who were behind the Arab golden age before we became a defeated nation. A thousand years ago, Arab and Muslim scientists were world leaders in astronomy. Among them was Abdul Rahman Al Sufi (died 986) whose pioneering book described the 48 universal constellations, formed by what were then called the 'fixed stars' – the celestial objects that did not seem to move in relation to the other stars. He was followed in the science of stars by such leading astronomers as Al Biruni (died 1048), Ibn Al Haytham (died 1039) and many others. Following centuries of a civilisational slump and physical defeat, the Arabs finally stand a chance today to regain some of their past glory.

Back to Ibn Khaldun. He says: "He who finds a new path is a pathfinder, even if the trail has to be found again by others; and he who walks far ahead of his contemporaries is a leader."

Today, the UAE is a pathfinder. A pioneer in a region struggling to find its proper place in the world.

Off the Cuff

ANNIE MATHEW
Special to Gulf New

Many shades of love

Red is all over the place, in fact this hue has been in the air for more than a month now and will continue to beseech us to profess true love through exotic flowers, expensive gifts, candlelight dinners et al till the D-Day!

Being a bit old school in this regard, I believe there are subtler and truer ways of showing genuine love and care, which may not be instagrammable though.

I remember a friend telling me once that she was peeved that one year, her husband had completely overlooked the existence of this day of love. She reached her workplace all upset, being under the weather as well. She reached for her bag and found a flask of warm water in it. Her husband had heard her coughing all night and had put it in there for her. At that moment she realised that the humble flask held much more value to her than a thousand red roses!

Love does manifest itself in our lives not always with flamboyant romance, background music and flowing robes a la Bollywood but in quieter ways. I believe we don't need special days to celebrate and feel loved unless we would like to contribute to the economy!

It's heart-warming love when loved ones squeeze our hand and wordlessly let us know that they are there for us in our difficult times. When someone gives us their undivided attention and time it makes us feel loved and valued.

Many years ago me and my friends got terribly late at work and were so busy that we hadn't eaten anything, the whole day. My better half offered to pick us up and drop off my friends too. When he arrived he bought a whole box of sandwiches and juice, which was nothing short of a life saver for us. We devoured it like Rip Van Winkle would have done after his twenty year nap!

Suddenly one sensible soul among us asked how had he known that we were famished. That's when we too realised that nobody had mentioned that. He said he just had an intuition and that's it. I like to believe that what happened that day was born out of love and concern. Sometimes simple acts of love speak volumes louder than the best photoshopped picture.

Unforgettable moments

Ages ago, I had got married and moved out of my parent's home. After a few days I suddenly had this urge to see my mom in the middle of the night. I had dreamt about her. My perplexed husband promised to take me to her in the morning and I went off to sleep fitfully. I was awakened by the incessant ringing of the doorbell the next morning and right as rain there stood my mom saying that she had this intense desire to see me!

Living an expat life, we do not always get enough time to spend with the extended family. One year after staying with my niece for some time, I was preparing to leave when the little one, with a grave expression, gave me a crumpled paper. Through my tears I could see that she had drawn a broken heart on that paper! I held on to that paper for many years.

I remember seeing a small child getting his mom's picture to school and sneaking a look at it once in a while and feeling comforted. Life is made up of such poignant beautiful moments and it becomes a bit of a charade when we assign a particular day for loving, friendships and so on. But again, most of us lead busy lives and might get lost in the rigmarole of life keeping deadlines, achieving targets.... that we might need reminders to keep aside a day solely to spend with loved ones.

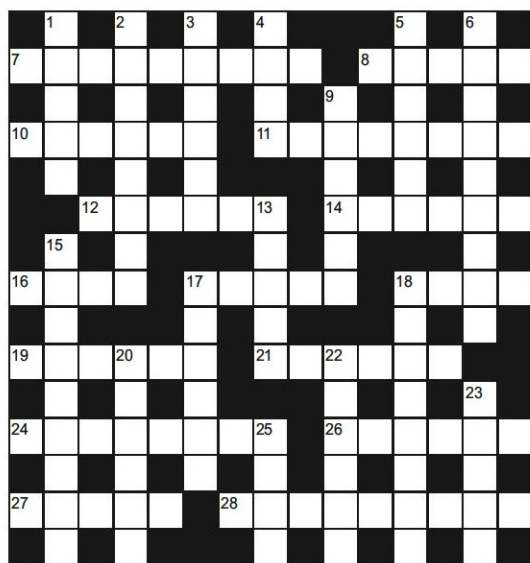
So does it matter if one isn't given flowers, chocolates or gifts on this special day? It's never the gifts but the thoughts which count. Better still, love yourself and buy yourself a gift. It's fine to be your own Valentine too!

As for me, I would prefer a cup of hot black coffee on a cold morning, Valentine's day or any other day!

■ Annie Mathew is an educator and writer based in Dubai.

Crossword

MORE CROSSWORDS IN TABLOID

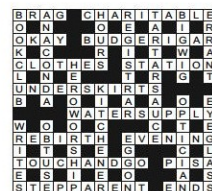


ACROSS

- 7 Handle in one's hand? (9)
- 8 Extensive spread in France and the Orient (5)
- 10 Means business! (6)
- 11 People grasping Old Testament symbols (8)
- 12 Painter consumes gallon in attractive bar (6)
- 14 Crafty Kate Minola departs (6)
- 16 Joke ultimately unsavoury and feeble (4)
- 17 Doom and gloom for Birmingham City? (5)
- 18 Not allowed to enter pub, called out for Celtic poet (4)
- 19 Everyone outside potty over handsome youth (6)
- 21 Small boat shown in loosely drawn image (6)
- 24 New yarns composed: pens productive here? (8)
- 26 Coat to take to the cleaners (6)
- 27 Parry, holding short

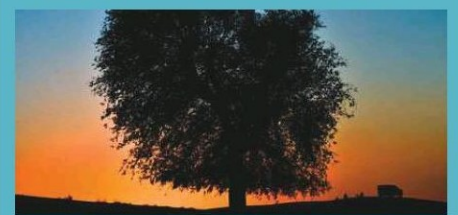
- 28 At sixes and sevens, turn to her for direction (4,5)
- ### DOWN
- 1 Breather, then energy needed in fencing move (5)
 - 2 Tied beside a railway line (8)
 - 3 Cheat catching fish for children's writer? (6)
 - 4 Wrong to harness power for short trip (4)
 - 5 Gambler now attending Gamblers Anonymous? (6)
 - 6 See our way to change military command (2,3,4)
 - 9 Secret police given seconds to make arrest (6)
 - 13 Support band not totally sincere – songs lacking content (5)
 - 15 Plot that failed? Good: prisoner taken in below (9)
 - 17 Phone left in shady spot (6)
 - 18 Composer with part

- that's upset Mister Solo? (8)
- 20 Large home with study and tree (6)
- 22 File assembled about iron tower's designer (6)
- 23 Author in second chapter exaggerated (5)
- 25 See attempt to get out at the Oval? (4)



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