MEDIATING MEDIA

Tawasul to host a two-day bilingual forum on media and elections

M Mustafa Khan
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Tawasul will host a forum to train and network local media, civil society, the government sector and prospective Majlis a'Shura candidates on September 25 and 26. Titled 'Media and Elections', it is the first of its kind aimed at bringing together the private and the public sector in the election process to learn about responsible and ethical media coverage of elections.

"In October 2011, the sultanate is going to witness the seventh Shura (Lower House) elections and we think it is time for us to mature and develop the idea of effective election media coverage that adheres to internationally recognised standards," said Nasra Abdulrahman al Adawi, chief operating officer at Tawasul. This forum follows a recent awards ceremony organised with the Omani Journalists Association to recognise and honour pioneering contributions by women in the electronic and print media.

"Following that event, we have reached the conclusion that more capacity building efforts are needed for media professionals as they are instrumental in keeping the public informed, and media is an important arm of the civil society. This part of the programme (in September) caters to both candidates and journalists' capacity building, with emphasis on women empowerment," she said.

The programme is designed to provide inter-disciplinary learning, where journalists learn the best practices in election coverage, while prospective Majlis a'Shura candidates will learn how the media works and use it as a canvassing and awareness tool. "Some earlier reports raised issues about election procedures in media. Many journalists and officials confuse terms like 'eligible voters' and 'registered voters'. These might appear insignificant but these facts, their sources and their verification mean a lot for research and mapping progress," said Khalid al Huraibi, managing director of Tawasul.



▶ Nasra Abdulrahman al Adawi

"Simple things like the terminology used or the tone of the article are crucial; these reports should be unbiased," he said. For this purpose, a panel of experts from Oman and abroad has been put together to teach participants how to address key issues in the elections. The sessions will be presided over by H E Dr Rasheed al Safi al Huraibi, serving member of the Majlis a'Shura and Secretary General of National Human Rights Commission, Oman.

Mohammad al Hadi al Hanashi, a journalist and a producer with Al Arabiya, who won the Arab Journalism Award 2002 (Political) and has covered elections in Afghanistan, Tunisia, the UAE and Sudan, will be part of the panel providing regional grounding. To maintain international standards, Tawasul has roped in Sara Staino, global programmes officer at International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in Sweden, who has authored many articles and training manuals for electoral process.

"This is the first time IDEA is partnering with anyone in the Gulf, and we found them ideal because they respect a country's existing setup and seek to share expertise suitable to the sultanate. They engage as friends rather than dictate solutions that may not work and the same applies to the Hague-based, Bridging the Gulf Foundation, which will also be participating," Although this programme is the last leg of an 18 month training programme to empower prospective women candidates, Nasra said that male candidates have also been included in this forum. "We believe that more media awareness is important for everyone as campaigns will shortly be launched."



Tawasul recognises the need to educate media as a reliable observer
Khalid al Huraibi

CIVIL SOCIETY AWARDS 2010

Tawasul is accepting nominations for the Civil Society Awards 2010. These are the second annual CSA, which seek to empower civil society organisation. Adjudged under four categories of Civil Society Leaders (male and female), Civil society organisation and Best Social Investment Programme of the year, these awards recognise and honour exceptional efforts by private and public organisations for civil benefit.

Media forum to boost women's role in elections

Media and Elections Campaign Forum will **discuss the role of media** in elections

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Tawasul is organising its first media forum, 'Media & Election Campaigns' which will host a number of regional and international election coverage and also assist journalists and consultants, as well as Omani media experts.

The forum is a continuation of the series of initiatives lead by several public and private institutions during the Omani Journalists Association's 'Omani Women Media Forum' held in May this year. This forum is based on an 18-month candidates training programme which aims to prepare prospective women candidates for Majlis Al Shura elections to be held in October, 2011.

Media and Elections Campaign Forum will take place on September 25-26 (from 9am to 3pm) at the Crowne Plaza Muscat Hotel Sindbad Ballroom and will discuss the role of media professionals in covering elections, best practices in elections coverage, media and development.

In addition to media experts from the Sultanate, regional and international experts will share their experiences with 150 participants in the forum. Guest speakers include Mohammed Al Hadi Al Hanashi, journalist and producer in Al Arabiya news channel and Sara Staino, an electoral process global programmes officer in the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).

Al Hanashi was awarded Arab Journalism Award in 2002 (Political), and has covered elections in Afghanistan, Yemen, UAE, Mauritania, Tunisia, and Sudan.

Sara Staino is a political science lecturer in Orbero University in Sweden, and has co-authored several books and articles on electoral process. Sara has also served as an election observer on several international missions.

Tawasul to organise first 'Media and Election Campaign' forum

Muscat - Tawasul is all set to organise first 'Media and Election Campaign' forum on September 25-26 at Crowne Plaza Muscat Hotel's Sindbad ballroom.

The forum will discuss the role of media professionals in covering elections, best practices in elections coverage, media and development, said a press release.

It is based on a 18-month candidates' training programme, which aims to prepare prospective women candidates for Majlis A'Shura elections to be held in October next year.

The forum aims to bring together media representatives and women who will cover and contest Shura elections respectively. It will see participation of a number of regional and international journalists, consultants as well as Omani media experts.

The forum is a continuation of the series of initiatives led by different public and private institutions during the Omani Journalists Association event, 'Omani women Media Forum' which was held in May this year.

In addition to media experts from the sultanate, regional and international experts will share their relevant experiences with about 150 participants in the forum.

Guest speakers include Mohamed al Hadi al Hanashi, journalist and producer with Al Arabiya news channel and Sara Staino, an electoral process global programmes officer in the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm, Sweden.

Mohamed al Hadi al Hanashi was awarded the Arab Journalism Award in 2002 and has covered elections in Afghanistan, Yemen, the UAE, Mauritania, Tunisia, and Sudan. He has also conducted special interviews for Al Arabia news channel with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Ethiopian President Meles Zinawi, Eritrean President Isaias Afworki, Mauritanian President General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz and former Mauritanian presidents Muhamad al Taie and Muhamad Fal.

Sara Staino is a political science lecturer in Orbero University in Sweden, and has co-authored several books and articles on electoral process. Staino has also served as an election observer in several missions.

To apply, download the application at Tawasul's website (www.tawasul.co.om).

OMAN
OMAN DAILY Observer
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2010



Tawasul invites participation at media and election forum

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — Tawasul has invited media representatives and candidates for Majlis Ash'shura to participate in its first media forum on 'Media and Elections'.

The forum is to be held under the auspices of Dr Rasheed al Haribi, the Majlis representative of the Wilayat of Salalah.

To be held on September 25 and 26, the forum is being organised in co-operation with Oman Journalist Association. The forum will host groups of guest speakers and media representatives from the Sultanate and abroad, and aims to address the role of the media in covering elections campaign in Oman, as well as law regulations, parliamentary media and election's impact.

On the first day Haider Abdul Ridha, member of Oman Journalist Association and Mohammad al Hadi al Hannashi will participate in the forum. While Haider works as prolific researcher, writer and a journalist, Mohammad is a well-known reporter with the Al Arabiya channel. He is specialised in covering elections. His travels took him to several Arab, Asian and African countries such as Mauritania and Afghanistan.

Dr Amal Van Hees, Director of Bridging the Gulf Foundation will also participate on the first day. She served in several international organisations such as Amnesty International and participated as speaker in the previous three Women in Elections Workshops that included: Campaign Design and Management; Media Relations and "It is Campaign Time".

Sara Staino of International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance will also participate in the forum. Staino has a wide experience with elections and conflict, election administration, effective electoral assistance and capacity development. She is also chairman of a Polling Station Commission in Sweden, co-author and editorial anchor of the International IDEA handbook on Electoral management design' and fully accredited Bridge trainer.

On the second day there will be participation of Awadh Ba Quwair, a board member of the Oman Journalist Association. He is a well-known journalist and currently serving as the Director of Media at Majlis Ash'shura. Prior to his current position he worked at the Ministry of Information. He has a column in the daily press.

Jihan al Lamki will participate in the event on the second day. Al Lamki is a famous TV presenter and active media professional. She is a member of the Oman Journalist Association. She led and participated in several national debates pertaining to the media and its role in social development. The forum will be moderated by Iman Alsafi al Huraibi, Tawasul's Media Consultant and Nasra Abdul Rahman al Adawi, Tawasul's Project Manger.

Nasra had stated earlier that the forum is a platform for presentation and discussion moderated by media leaders and experts. It is an embodiment of media outreach, which is one of Tawasul's core activities.

The forum will also cover topics like 'Media as a development tool in Oman'; 'Media and elections: intersections'; 'Media law and regulations: how to understand them and work with them'; 'Parliamentary media: meaning, role and impact'; and 'Al Arabiya experience in covering elections'.

Media representatives and candidates for Majlis Ash'shura are invited to participate through application available at: www.tawasul.co.om.

Tawasul forum to pitch for greater role of media in election reporting

The forum will host a group of national and international speakers. **The forum aims to discuss the role of media in reporting election campaign in the Sultanate** and parliamentary media issues other than a wide range of media-related topics. **Initiated in 2009, the programme is aimed at preparing women for the 2011 Majlis Al Shura Elections**



Dr Rasheed Al Haribi

OMAN
TIMES OF OMAN
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2010 | B3

MUSCAT: Tawasul, the first national independent and professional not-for-profit think-tank in Oman, will hold a media forum on 'Media and Elections' under the auspices of Dr Rasheed Al Haribi, Member of the Al Shura Council Representative of the wilayat of Salalah, in cooperation with Oman Journalist Association (OJA) on September 25 and 26 for media representatives and Shura Council candidates.

The forum will host a group of national and international speakers. The forum aims to discuss the role of media in reporting elections campaign in the Sultanate and parliamentary media issues other than a wide range of media-related topics.

On the first day

On the first day, Haider Abdul Ridha, member of OJA, and Mohammed Al Hadi Al Hannashi, who is specialised in reporting elections, will be the key speakers in the forum. Haider Abdul Ridha works as prolific researcher, writer and journalist and Al Hadi Al Hannashi works with the Al Arabiya Channel.

Amal Van Hees, director of Bridging the Gulf Foundation, will also be a key speaker in the forum. Amal Van Hees has served in Amnesty International and has delivered speeches in the previous three Women in Elections Workshops.

Sara Staino from Sweden will also speak in the forum. Sara Staino works with International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Sara Staino is an expert on issues like elections and conflicts, election administration, effective electoral assistance and capacity development.

She is the chairman of a Polling Station Commission in Sweden, co-author of Electoral Management Design and a fully-accredited BRIDGE trainer.

On the second day

On the second day, Awadh Ba Quwair, a board member of the OJA, will deliver his speech in the forum. Awadh Ba Quwair, a well-known journalist, is the director of media at Majlis Al Shura. Earlier, Awadh Ba Quwair worked at the Ministry of Information.

Jihan Al Lamki, a famous TV presenter and active media professional, will also attend the forum. Jihan Al Lamki is a member of the OJA. She had led and participated in several national debates pertaining to the media and its role in social development.

The forum will be moderated by Iman Alsafi Al Huraibi, Tawasul's media consultant, and Nasra Abdul Rahman Al Adawi, Tawasul's project manager.

"The forum is a platform for presentation and discussion moderated by national and international media experts. It is an embodiment of media outreach, which is one of Tawasul's core activities," Nasra Al Adawi said.

Initiated in 2009, the programme is aimed at preparing women for the 2011 Majlis Al Shura Elections. The programme comprises four phases, each one with a series of two or three day workshops to train women on how to design and manage election campaigns; how to interact with the media; how to speak in the public; and how to prepare budgets for election campaigns.

Objectives

Al Adawi said that the programme's main objective is to support and encourage the participation of Omani Women to enter Majlis Al Shura elections.

Al Adawi said that the media forum was announced and endorsed by the OJA in its previous initiative on Dialogue on Women in Media.

Media representatives and Shura Council candidates are invited to participate through application for available at: www.tawasul.co.om. For enquiries, contact: 24614418.



Ahmed Al Mukhaini



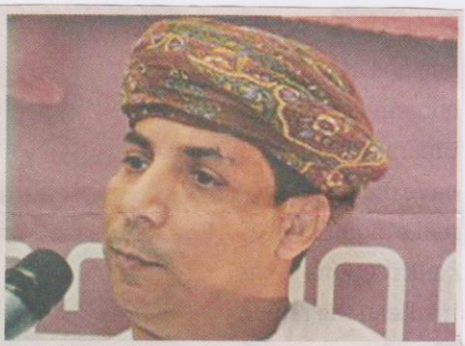
Mohammed Al Hadi Al Hannashi



Nasra Abdul Rahman Al Adawi



Haider Abdul Ridha



Awadh Ba Quwair



Jihan Al Lamki



Sara Staino



Amal Van Hees



Iman Alsafi Al Huraibi

TIMES OF OMAN

Tawasul's media forum concludes, calls for reforms and growth

The first Tawasul media forum **focussed on discussing parliamentary media vis-a-vis members of parliament and the populace**

RAHIMA AL BALUSHI
rahima@timesofoman

MUSCAT: On the final day of the two-day Tawasul media forum yesterday, delegates highlighted the role of media in covering elections in the Sultanate and called for widespread reforms that would set in motion the fast progress of the (media) field.

On the first day of the forum, Jihan Al Lamki, the well-known TV presenter, Ahmed Al Mukhaini, independent researcher and Tawasul's strategic studies consultant and Nasra Al Adawi, Tawasul's project manager discussed the role of media law and regulations in the Sultanate.

Al Mukhaini stressed that media exposure has both advantages and disadvantages in relation to the coverage of Shura Council activities. "Media is a source of providing information but the media in Oman only looks for sensationalism in its reports. Moreover, the journalists do not cover news and activities related to Shura sufficiently."

Nasra, on the other hand, said that the lack of awareness about Shura Council is the reason why there is lack of coverage of Shura activities.

Jihan told *Times of Oman* that it is extremely important for the media, Shura candidates and voters to be acquainted with the changing scenario. Jihan is a member of the Oman Journalist Association (OJA). She has led and participated in several national debates on social-related issues.

The forum participants got an opportunity to look at the media laws and regulations in a practitioner's perspective. Yesterday, the forum focussed on discussing parliamentary media vis-a-vis members of parliament and its populace.

Awadh Ba Quwair, a board member of the OJA, led the discussions. Awadh is a well-known journalist and currently serves as the director of media at Majlis A'Shura. Prior to his current position he worked at the Ministry of Information. He is a known columnist also.



MAKING A POINT: Al Mukhaini, Jihan and Nasra at the forum. - AJ Rajkumar/TIMES OF OMAN

On first day of the forum, Muna bint Mahfoudh Al Mantheri, the member of the State Council, recalled media memories back to 1974.

"In 1974, the media in Oman had a real challenge in creating awareness among the people on the importance of educating women. Before, we used to cover news from every nook and cranny of the Sultanate although we had only a limited number of employees."

"We were in a need for a cultural and social awareness at that time. For this reason, the role of the media is very influential in society."

Muna also stressed that it is time that the policy of the government television should change.

"Nothing should be hidden from society," she said.

When Muna was only 12 years old, she initiated the entry of Omani women into the media in the early 1970s.

In 1971, she was the first Omani woman to conduct a radio programme for Oman Radio.

During her career as a TV host, Muna hosted various programmes for Oman Channel.

She excelled in presenting news-related programmes, socially relevant programmes and a number of special programmes for children.

Muna commented that a media-person has to be given an opportunity to prove his mettle.

"There is a difference between a journalist and a performer. In other countries, a media representative gets exceptional features, which are not found in this country," she said.

"Media has to change in order to develop. The new generation now has to work hard to go ahead in this field. A true mediaperson is the one who practices journalism as a development tool," she added.

Muna also stressed on the importance for women to be present in Shura Council.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2010

Tawasul media forum concludes

A Staff Reporter
OMAN TRIBUNE

MUSCAT Non-government sector should take the initiative to develop their own means of communication, instead of waiting for the government to provide the facilities, said Mohammad Hannashi, journalist with UAE based Al Arabiya channel on Sunday. Speaking at the concluding session of Tawasul's First Media Forum in Muscat, Hannashi said that the forum was the beginning of a future debate.

He said that the forum was an indication of the freedom people enjoy in the Sultanate. "We have big dreams. We have to start step by step," said Hannashi.

Jihan Al Lamki, member of the Oman Journalists Association, said that women need to be part of the society. Referring to candidature of women for the next Shura Council elections and the role of media, Lamki said the women should be represented in all sections of the society. Civil society can push their cause. This will help them to break the traditions, she said.



Last session of the forum in progress.

Participants also discussed media law and regulations and parliamentary media issues. The forum which began on Saturday, discussed subjects like media as a development tool in Oman, media and elections and Al Arabiya experience in covering elections.

Tawasul media forum begins

A Staff Reporter
OMAN TRIBUNE

MUSCAT Media has crucial role to play in society and its development, therefore there are expectations that it would do hard work and play more responsible role in creating awareness, according to Muna Bint Mahfoudh Al Mantheri, Member of State Council of the Sultanate.

Speaking at the First Tawasul Media Forum on Women in Elections Empowerment Project, Manthari talked about the development of media over the last few decades as well as its evolving role in the society.

The two-day First Tawasul Media Forum which began on Saturday is being attended by media representatives and candidates for Shura Council.

On the first day of the forum, the role of media in the development of Oman as well as its being a democratic tool was discussed by the speakers as well as participants.

Haider Abdul Ridha, a member of the Omani Journalists Association, highlighted the evolution of media during last few decades and the role it has played in Oman, particularly during the last 30 years. Giving details of a major expansion in the media sector in the Sultanate, he said now the professionals must be geared up to play the role of being a bridge between the common people and the source of information to provide them credible news about what is happening around them.

As for the Media Forum, Nasra Al Adawi, project manager of Tawasul, said that this forum was a leap forward in the efforts to evolve the role of media in the elections as it would help orientation of mediapersons. She said that the forum, in which Omani as well as foreign journalists and media personalities are participating, was an important platform to share experiences.

She said that the role of the local and international media in elections has become increasingly important over the years. This has stem from the role played by the media in the pace of development in Oman as well as the evolution of independent media and Internet use in the Sultanate, she said.

Sara Stanio, from International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance of Sweden, gave her presentation on the role of media in democracy. She said that all the regions have their own culture and traditions which is taken into consideration while deciding the role of media in elections.

Amal Van Hees of Bridging the Gulf Foundation of Netherlands as well as Mohammad Hannashi of Al Arabiya Elections Reporter also made their presentations on the first day of the forum which was followed by interactive sessions.

The second day, the forum will focus on media law and regulations, how to understand them and work with them and parliamentary media; its meaning, role and impact.



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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2010



Media as platform for debate

From page 1

Dr Amal Van Hees, Director of Bridging the Gulf Foundation was among the participants. She served in several international organisations such as Amnesty International and participated as speaker in the previous three 'Women in Elections' workshops.

Among the participants is Sara Staino from International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). She has a wide experience in areas like elections and conflict, election administration, effective electoral assistance and capacity development.

She is also chairman of a polling station commission in Sweden and co-author and editorial anchor of the International IDEA handbook on *Electoral Management Design* and fully accredited Bridge trainer.

Participating in the Forum, Muna sought to give more access to information to media representatives.

She said they should be provided with right information to avoid any misinformation on their part. She also called for proper training for media people to understand regional sensitivities and other such issues.

Commenting on the importance of media, Muna said: "The media is known as Fourth Authority in every society now. It is not possible to hide news. If anyone tries to block one channel, other channels are open. Hence it is advisable to provide the media the right information to avoid any confusion," she said.

Expressing similar view Haider threw light on the 'role of media in raising awareness'. He also said that there is no limit to contribution of media in creating awareness in a society.

He laid stress on the fact that it is important to note that who is responsible for evaluating the role of media.

Commenting on elections and role of median Sara said: "The history of involvement of media in election is a new phenomenon. Active participation of media in election campaigns started some 30 years ago. And now it is one of the most important influences on elections."

"The media gives an idea that how elections are being run and how they are received. Media conveys the message and emerges as a platform for democratic debate. Hence involvement of media in election campaigns is very important," she said.

Earlier, Nasra outlined the Tawasul's initiative as a move to prepare women candidates to run for the 2011 Shura elections. "Additionally, it aims to target those who wish to have leadership and management skills as potential campaign managers.

The programme is entirely the first of its kind locally and regionally," she said.

The move is to provide participants with an overview of the political landscape in Oman; a discussion on the Shura institution and internal procedures, candidacy and election procedures.

It is also aimed at acquainting participants with best practices and previous experiences (from Oman and abroad) regarding campaign management, focusing on transparency and to empower participants with basic analytical, planning and budgeting skills.

Today's session will have participants like Awadh ba Quwair and Jihan al Lamki. While Awadh is a board member of the Oman Journalist Association, Al Lamki is a famous TV presenter and active media professional. She is a member of the Oman Journalist Association.

She led and participated in several national debates pertaining to the media and its role in social development. The Forum will be moderated by Iman Alsafi al Huraibi, Tawasul's Media Consultant and Nasra.

NATION
02 | MUSCAT DAILY | SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2010

First Tawasul media forum gets underway



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The first Tawasul media forum, entitled 'Media and Elections,' started on Saturday. The forum is part of an 18 month project on 'Women in Elections Empowerment.'

The forum aims to empower Majlis A'Shura candidates, especially women, to better handle and access the media, to inform society about the media's role in ensuring a fair and free election and to engage the media in playing a more influential, participative and active role in reinforcing fair and free elections.

The event was held under the auspices of H E Dr Rashid al Sasi al Huraibi, the Salalah representative in the Majlis A'Shura and secretary general, National Human Rights Committee, and H E Khalid bin Salim al Saidi, secretary general, State Council.

Saturday's speakers were Mohamed al Hadi al Hanashi, journalist and a producer with Al Arabiya news channel, and Sara Staino, electoral process global programmes officer in the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).

Other participants included members of the Majlis A'Shura, women who are planning to run in the 2011 Majlis A'Shura elections, journalism students at Bayan College, and Tawasul representatives including Nasra al Adawi and Ahmed al Mukheini.

The role of the media in the sultanate's development and modernisation process, as well as the national media policy and philosophy, will be discussed on the second day of the programme.

The forum will also highlight essential aspects of the electoral process when dealing with the media, most notably transparency. Another objective is to identify tools used by the media to promote elections and encourage public participation in them.

There will also be discussions on media laws and regulations. The aim is not to change the laws and regulations as much as to understand them.

Tawasul forum highlights the issue of vote buying

Ahwa al Said
Muscat

Participants at Tawasul's 'Media and Elections' forum, aimed at empowering women candidates for the 2011 elections, discussed the practice of vote buying by some candidates in the previous Majlis A'Shura elections. The two-day event was held at Crowne Plaza Hotel Muscat.

Noora Abdul Rahman al Zadjali who was participating in the forum because she plans to run in the 2011 elections said that in the last elections in 2007, she witnessed vote buying first hand. "When I asked people why they voted for this candidate the direct answer was they offered us money, food and a bus ride." Noora is Director of Information at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Thuwaiba Mohamed A'Shahi, one of the women candidates who has decided to run in the 2011 elections in Bukha in Musandam, said, "I am not worried about vote buying. From the beginning I will say that I am not going to pay for votes. I am confident my message and personality will get me elected. I want voters to be convinced I can do what I promise I will do for them."



Participants at Tawasul's Media and Elections forum discussed a number of issues related to the 2011 elections

Fatma Jan Mohammed al Zadjali is another female candidates who will run in Muscat in 2011. She is not as confident as Thuwaiba about not being affected by vote buying.

Fatma does a lot of volunteer work, mainly helping the youth, including raising funds for drug rehabilitation outside Oman for those who need it. She said, "I am worried about vote buying. The candidates who do this will target the poor. The poor won't think about the work I've done to help in the past four years, instead they will think about the RO20 they are being offered for their vote."

"The issue of money and buying of votes is difficult to control. No government can control such an issue. Our aim is to establish good campaigns, a good electoral process and to elect the best men and women. The main purpose of the council is to serve the country, it is not important to search for the mechanisms," Awadh Ba Quwair, Director of Media, Majlis A'Shura, said. He was part of an eight-member panel that was taking questions from the forum's participants.

"There are no clear rules that criminalise buying votes by candidates. If as a citizen you detect the practice,report this to the authorities," Ahmed al Mukheini, Strategic Studies Consultant at Tawasul, told the participants.

Sara Santaino, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), said, "Vote buying is there in many parts of the world. It is difficult to tackle. If you find out how, let us know. It is a big issue with campaign regulations in many countries. In Mexico for example, there is a lot of illicit drug money and it is difficult to address. The money is used to support candidates in elections. Mexico has tried to stop it in two ways - by setting limits on how much can be raised and spent in elections, and having candidates disclose where their money came from. These methods may work in some countries and not in others." Santaino was invited by Tawasul to participate in the forum.



Media laws and parliamentary aspects on Ash'shura elections addressed

By Maryam Khalfan

MUSCAT — As part of Tawasul's 18-month project on empowering women in the forthcoming Majlis Ash'shura election process, the 2nd day of discussions on Media and Elections Campaign addressed the media laws and regulations as well as parliamentary media related aspects.

The event is predominantly aimed at empowering prospective women candidates for Majlis Ash'shura elections to better handle and access the media and to enlighten the society about the role of media in ensuring fair and free elections. The forum is also designed at engaging the media to have a more influential and active role in enforcing fair and free elections.

The event, which concluded yesterday at Crown Plaza Hotel hosted senior media journalists in political and parliamentary reporting such as Awadh Ba Quwair, Director of Media, Majlis Ash'shura and Jihan bint Abdullah al Lamkiya, Chairperson of Women's section, Oman Journalists Association (OJA).

In her presentation Al Lamkiya highlighted specific media laws and regulations of the Ministry of Interior that governs the Majilis Ash'shura campaigns and the procedures of the electoral process in the Sultanate.

She also shed light on the media related campaign in raising and enhancing awareness using diverse means of promotion and advertisement using the print and the electronic media such as the television and radio on billboards as some of the effective means of communication. She also urged women to utilise an exclusive opportunity of campaigning through the Omani Women's Associations (OWA) and to effectively maximise the campaign phase by networking.

In a discussion addressed by Awadh, the subject focusing on parliamentary media, addressed the meaning, role and impact of parliamentary reporting. Media is one of the most significant tools of linking the parliament and the public in diverse political, social and economic issues, remarked Ba Quwair.

All over the world, the parliamentarians play a major role to enlighten the public on political aspect in close co-operation with the media in the most effective way and the assistance of experts in political and parliamentary reporting.

The members of Ash'shura council are transparent and do not have restrictions to expressing their views. We are transparent in providing information and we are witnessing a lot of changes that are subject to further improvement noted the official.

Any candidate has the right to know the requirements and procedures of the Ash'shura elections prior to contesting into the election process.

Nonetheless, in spite of the fact that contesting in the Ash'shura elections is open to all citizens, it is significantly important for a candidate to be well versed with the social, economic and political aspects of the country. The candidate should also have knowledge of the activities and responsibilities of the members of parliament before contesting to this challenging and yet interesting area of task. It is equally important that prospective candidates know how to deal with the media.

An occasion like this is also an opportunity to acquaint media persons specialising in different forms of tasks with parliamentary media coverage and an opportunity of further enlightening the public on the tasks of activities of the parliamentary media. The media also boosts of an extensive website that provides information on diverse aspects of the council. The website also gives an insight of the political, educational, social and economic aspects of the economy among other relevant information, he remarked.

T OMAN

WOMEN IN ELECTIONS

Tawasul's media forum's spotlight on women

RAHIMA AL BALUSHI
rahima@timesofoman

MUSCAT: In an attempt to highlight the role of Oman's media in elections, the first Tawasul Media Forum kicked off yesterday at Crowne Plaza Muscat Hotel under the auspices of Rasheed Al Haribi, member of A'Shura Council, representative of the wilayat of Salalah.

The two-day event is taking place in partnership with Oman Journalist Association. Attending the first day of the media forum were media representatives and members of the Shura Council.

This two-day forum is part of the 18-month-long 'Women in Elections Empowerment Project'. The event endeavours to empower parliamentary (Shura) candidates, especially women, to better handle and access the media. It also attempts to inform society about the role of media in ensuring fair and free elections as well as engage the media to have a more influential, participative and active role in reinforcing fair and free elections.

Three themes were presented yesterday at the forum. The first theme highlighted media as a development tool in Oman. This theme was discussed by Muna bint Mahfoudh Al Mantheri, the Member of the State Council, Haidar Abdul Ridha, director of research at the Central Bank of Oman and member of Oman Journalist Association, Nasra Al Adawi, project manager of Tawasul, and Ahmed Al Mukhaini, independent researcher and Tawasul's strategic studies consultant.

The mediaperson has a mission of raising generations and educate them, stressed Mona Al Mantheri. "Being involved in media field is sensitive. Media has a vital role in providing what is suitable for the society," Mona pointed out.

The forum will be moderated by Iman Al Huraibi, Tawasul's media consultant and Nasra Abdul Rahman Al Adawi, the project manager.

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Women get tips

For her wilayat (Masirah), Amira said, "Masirah needs amusement parks. Plus, the medical services in Masirah should be taken care of. We should provide an ambulance helicopter ready at any time to help those who need to be transferred immediately to Muscat".

For Al Abda Al Junaibi, a candidate from the wilayat of Ibri in Al Dakhiliyah Region, Tawasul's programmes have shown the way for them to win a seat in the next elections. "I was a candidate in a previous election as well," said Al Abda, adding, "however, we did not have sufficient information on Shura Council as we do right now. Tawasul has eased the way for us."

Al Abda said: "Media in Oman did not cover Shura Council sufficiently before. For the previous elections, media started to cover Shura elections only two weeks before the elections started. The Omani society is still unaware of the importance of Shura Council and its responsibilities."

Shura Council aims at serving Oman and a Shura candidate is the pulse of Oman, noted Al Abda. "If I win a seat in the council, I will be working on the issues of women welfare in Oman. In fact, the society still needs awareness that women also have got a role in the society," she added.



> The society still believes that women cannot play a significant role in the society. Even educated people share this belief. These people let us down. They believe that since men in Shura did not create any change in the society, the women too cannot do much.
>
> **Mariam Al Balushi**
> Candidate from Musana'a

Customs and traditions

It is because of the social customs and traditions that no woman has won a seat in Shura Councils in the last elections? noted Mariam Al Balushi, a candidate from the wilayat of Musana'a. "I was a candidate in the last elections as well," informed Mariam. "However, the society still believes that women cannot play a significant role in the society. Even educated people share this belief. These people let us down. They believe that since men in Shura did not create any change in the society, the women too cannot do much. This is wrong. They should believe in us," Mariam pointed out.

"It is a fact that women represent half the society, but I disagree. Women represent the entire society because men were educated and raised by us," she noted.

Mariam said that Ahmed Al Mukhaini was the one who has encouraged them to discuss issues that are not being discussed. "There are many issues related to women that are not talked about, like spinsterhood, for example," she said.

For Amna Al Obaidani, awareness of Shura Council is still negligible. "People in Oman do not have awareness of Shura and the elections. As a citizen living in Muscat, I did not have any information on how elections are conducted.

Pride of Oman

"It is a matter of great pride that we have our own Shura Council, and it is even greater to know that women can be candidates fighting for a seat in the Council. We are the first country among the GCC countries to enjoy this right. People in the Western world believe that Arab women have no voice in their societies," Amna pointed out.

Amna said that Shura candidates must stress on issues that are not being highlighted in Oman. "The candidates should focus on children's issues and on social security," she added.

Oman was the first GCC state to make special efforts to get women elected to the Council.

TIMES OMAN

Women get set for Shura polls

During elections in 2007, women could not make headway in the Shura elections as all 84 seats were won by men candidates. However, **women in Oman are confident to make inroads this time**. Tawasul recently held a forum for women candidates to get acquainted with the election process

Majlis A'Shura takes rapid strides since its inception

The Consultation/Shura Council (Majlis A'Shura) was established in 1991 and evolved from the State Consultative Council, which had been in operation for a decade from 1981 to 1991.

While members of the State Consultative Council had been appointed by Sultan Qaboos, the members of today's Consultation Council are representatives of the Sultanate's districts, elected by Omani citizens in general elections where women vote and stand for office on an equal footing with men. There have been women members of the Consultation Council since 1994; Omanis women were the first in the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (AGCC) states to enjoy this right. Two women were elected to the Council's fifth term (2004-2007) in the October 2003 general elections. Oman's Consultation Council is a financially and administratively independent legal entity based in the Governorate of Muscat. Its role and functions have been reinforced over the years to keep pace with the needs of Oman's rapidly changing society. A wilayat with a population of 30,000 or above is represented by two members, while a wilayat with fewer than 30,000 inhabitants is represented by just one member. The winning candidate is the one who obtains the greatest number of votes according to the official election results.

During its fifth term (2004-2007) the Consultation/Shura Council had 83 members, including two women. Omani citizens are eligible to stand as candidates for the Consultation Council provided that they are Omani nationals, as defined by the law, not less than 30 years old and of good social standing and reputation in their wilayats. A candidate must not have been convicted of a crime, indecency or dishonesty, unless he or she has been completely absolved of such charges. He or she must have a reasonable standard of education and appropriate practical experience.

Norms

Membership of the Consultation Council is for a period of four years and is renewable. A member may not combine membership of the Consultation Council with membership of the State Council or public office. The Chairman of the Consultation Council is appointed by Royal Decree.

The Majlis A'Shura enjoys wide-ranging powers under the law. The range of legislative, economic and social powers enjoyed by the Consultation Council enable it to fulfil its role of broadening popular participation in shaping and directing the course of the country's development.

The Consultation Council operates through a system of established channels and procedures, which involve making the maximum use of the expertise of ministers while taking into account the effects on the general public of any decision making resulting from such consultation. The Majlis A'Shura debated the draft of the Seventh Five-year Plan (2006-2010) and the 2006 draft of the General State Budget.

As far as the Council's organisational system is concerned, the chairman has two deputy chairmen who are elected from the Council membership. The Council has several standing Committees: the Legal Committee, the Economic Committee, the Health and Social Affairs Committee, the Education and Culture Committee, and the Services and Local Community Development Committee. Special Committees have also been set up to deal with national manpower employment programmes and the tourism sector. These Special Committees cease to exist when they have fulfilled the functions for which they have been set up. Source: Ministry of Information

RAHIMA AL BALUSHI
rahima@timesofoman

MUSCAT: Despite the fact that no woman was elected in the last Shura elections held in May 2007, Omani women are determined to complete the journey they started long ago.

During elections in 2007, women could be seen waiting in queues to enroll in the elections, but all 84 seats were won by men candidates. However, women in Oman are confident to make inroads in the electoral field and utilise their rights to raise their voice.

HM's vision

In the speech of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said at the opening of the annual session of the Council of Oman (November, 2009), he said: "We have given our full attention, since the beginning of this era, to the participation of Omani women in the march of the Blessed Renaissance, so we have provided them with education, training and employment opportunities and supported their role and status in society. "We have also stressed the need for their contribution in various development spheres. We have facilitated this through regulations and laws that guarantee their rights and explain their duties in order to be able to develop their inner abilities, expertise and skills to build their country and raise its status."

His Majesty added: "We are convinced that the country, in its blessed march, needs both men and women because no doubt it resembles the bird in relying on both of its wings to fly high in the horizons of the sky. How can this bird manage if one of its wings is broken? Will it be able to fly?"

During the recent Media Forum organised by Tawasul, which was driven by its vision "to be the primary and preferred catalyst for an effective and efficient civil society in Oman", *Times of Oman* met several Omani women who are making efforts to win a seat in the upcoming elections of Shura Council. Tawasul has eased the way for the candidates to get acquainted with the election process.



"I was a candidate in a previous election as well, however, we did not have sufficient information on Shura Council as we do right now. The media did not cover Shura Council sufficiently. They started to cover the elections only two weeks before polls

Al Abda Al Junaibi
Candidate from Ibri



"I have been involved in volunteer work in my wilayat for more than 13 years. At Tawasul's forum, we learned that we should devise strategies, plans, messages and a time-line to cover as many people as possible. This is the right strategy for success

Amira Al Farsi
Candidate from Masirah

Strategic support

Amira Al Farsi is keen to represent her wilayat, Masirah in the next elections.

"After attending a lecture delivered by Ahmed Al Mukhaini, who is an independent researcher and Tawasul's strategic studies consultant in the Omani Women Symposium, last year, I decided to file nominations for the elections. I have been involved in volunteer work in my wilayat for more than 13 years," Amira told *Times*.

Amira noted that many candidates in the previous elections used the traditional methods to introduce themselves to the voters by going from door-to-door of people in their wilayats. "At Tawasul's forum, we learned that we should devise strategies, plans, messages and a time-line to cover as many people as possible. This is the right strategy for success. Exchanging experiences with other people is extremely important," she said.

Amira said that Ahmed Al Mukhaini, was the one who gave her a push in her mission. "Ahmed gave me advice that has stuck to my mind. He told me that I should not focus on whether I win a seat or not, but I should work hard in order to believe that I can succeed. The candidates should do everything for the sake of our country and not only to the wilayat that we belong to," she pointed out.

Amira informed that she is going to adopt children's issues. "The children are the future of Oman. In other countries, the children have got special programmes for sports academies, parliament and special programmes for them," she said.

▶B2

High office HOPEFULS

The last Majlis A'Shura elections didn't see any women candidates elected. But, with expert training provided by Tawasul, an NGO, the next elections will see women candidates as a force to reckon with. ***SANDHYA MENON*** *attends a media forum to find out what's expected from the media with regard to election coverage*

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SOME have already stared burning the midnight oil to build up their knowledge of Oman and the world… some are into crash courses to get abreast of politics and its overpowering lure… and some have started brushing up their communication/socialising skills and begun befriending the media in their bid to hop on to the bandwagon of politics!

The prospective candidates for the next Majlis A'Shura elections, who have been receiving extensive training at the behest of Tawasul Global Connections LLC, a budding NGO with a substantial social slant, are sure getting ready for their big day - the elections – with great vigour and greater expectations. But, all would be lost if the candidates did not come face to face with the vehicle of their success - the media - which is the platform that would showcase their abilities and convey their drive to deliver against all odds.

So, for starters, Tawasul organised a media forum, earlier this week, wherein members of the media hopeful of covering the proceedings of the next Shura elections were brought on a common platform with the prospective candidates. The idea was not just to showcase the face of the media to the Shura hopefuls (who would need to constantly interact with different print and electronic media) but also to guide members of the media with regard to the coverage of elections in Oman, how they need to go about presenting issues and events, candidates and profiles, manifestos and ambitions of those in the fray.

The forum was part of the Election Campaign Design and Management for Women Candidates initiative, which was started to prepare women candidates planning to run for the 2011 Shura elections. It aimed to target those who wish to have leadership and management skills as potential campaign managers.

One of the key aspects that were dealt with at the media forum was 'how the media covers elections'. "It is important to concentrate on the candidates – their goals, their personalities and what they have done in the past. This must be delivered neutrally to the public because the country relies on the media to give them a thorough and unbiased picture of the person they are going to vote for," said Mohammed Hannashi, elections correspondent for Al Arabiya news channel, while addressing the gathering.

"Very often, in different parts of the world where there is a boom in the media sector, reporters tend to lose sight of the fact that they are supposed to record events and processes in an unbiased manner. It is crucial to the election process that the reporter and TV channel be a neutral medium between the people and the candidate," he added.



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Jihan Al Lamki
TV journalist

There are some things that a candidate must definitely cultivate. A strong, yet pleasing, personality, emphatic communication skills and a will to cooperate and serve the people. This will definitely be plus points during election time."



In particular, Hannashi spoke of the Iraq election experience where the team trained intensively and spent a year in preparation of covering the election. "In my eyes, the election was a coronation of one year of intense effort by the team. We learnt that in order to put in motion the best election process and, in turn, give the best kind of election coverage, it was important to educate the masses about the candidates as well as the laws that govern the electoral process," he said.

Hannashi further said, "the correspondent is an observer of the process, he or she delivers the objectives of the candidates as well as goes behind the scenes and reports on all that is happening in order for the people to make an informed choice. In other words, the media works as the eye of the election and the voice of the candidate. And, at no point, should a channel fall into the trap of taking one candidate's word against the other."

Adding to the media experience was TV presenter Jihan Al Lamki, a journalist and member of the Oman Journalists Association. Jihan's suggestions for a successful election were many. "It is necessary to develop a dialogue between the people and the electoral management body in order to give important information about elections and the value of a process like that," she said, adding, "Another thing that is necessary to facilitate a democratic electoral process is airing predictions and possible outcomes of the elections in the media. This enables voters and candidates to shift their activities in the required manner."

The biggest challenge facing most candidates in the elections in Oman is the limitation that one cannot indulge in any propaganda during the campaign – no hoardings, pictures, TV commercial spots and the like. "It is only the actions and the deeds of the candidate, the work that he/she has done that should speak. Of course, it is also important to network and spread your word around," she said.

One common trend that Jihan said she has noticed in Oman is the fact that women candidates refuse to cooperate with the media. "If a reporter calls a woman candidate for an interview or a discussion, she puts it off due to her various obligations. It is important to handle your campaign professionally because the media is your strongest voice and to win an election, you need to convey your image and work done through the media," she said.

Suggesting a solution to address the reluc-

Sarah Staino
International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

Omani women are strong, intelligent and determined to prove themselves. The election process here seems very interesting although I haven't had the opportunity to study it in detail. Women's participation in the election will make a huge difference."

Nasra Al Adawi
Project manager, Tawasul

It is important that we establish a two-way communication with the Shura council so that in future women will know what they need to do in order to be apt candidates and perfect elected members to the council."



Mohammed Hannashi
Elections correspondent, Al Arabiya news channel

In different parts of the world where there is a boom in the media sector, reporters tend to lose sight of the fact that they are supposed to record events and processes in an unbiased manner. It is crucial to the election process that the reporter and TV channel be a neutral medium between the people and the candidate."



tance of women candidates in coming forth with their agendas to the media, Dr Amal Van Hees, an electoral process specialist based in the Netherlands and director of Bridging the Gulf Foundation, said "It is a tricky situation, but success lies in working with what we have at hand and not calling for change in laws. While a change in law may be necessary, it would be a long drawn process."

Her suggestion was to make use of the social network that is extremely strong in a country like Oman. "Make use of the resources at hand -- your friends and family will oblige in spreading your message. Also, don't start just a few months before election day. Work from the start of one term and throughout that term, so that by the time the next election comes, your work will be established and people will remember your name," she said, elaborating on the techniques women can employ to make a successful campaign for the Shura elections.

While the larger focus was on women and how they could go about making the most of their candidature, another major issue that kept coming up through the conference was that of opening up the media in Oman. Almost all participants in the media forum were of the opinion that the media needs to be accorded more freedom in the discharge of its duties so that, in election coverage, they can present a true picture to the electorate.

"A freer media will ensure that we have a fair idea of who we are voting for. Around the world, election time is a busy one for the media. But, as propaganda is not allowed in Oman, it is all the more important for us to have a more empowered media," said Ahmed Al Mukhaini, a historian and the driving force behind Tawasul. His advice to the media was to use questionnaires and conduct one-on-one meetings. Blogs and other Internet tools would not be credible sources of information/opinion and members of the media need to rely on more scientific methods in gathering data and reporting.

Candidates from Wilayats such as Masirah, Nizwa and Barka were present at the forum and so were a large number of intellectuals as well as students who keenly participated. It was easy to see that both men and women felt strongly about the issues that were being discussed. Young students felt strongly the need for a more liberal and empowered media, while it was obvious that women candidates were bent on doing something first for their wilayats and then for their country.



Ahmed Al Mukheini
Independent researcher and founder of Tawasul

Filing an application for candidature is a long and tedious process. Therefore, it is important that candidates are truly dedicated to the cause and are determined to serve their state and country, only then can they be successful."









Dr Amal Van Hees
Bridging the Gulf Foundation, The Netherlands

All over the world women are taking charge of situations in their country. Oman too has a history of empowered women which disappeared for a few decades. But, now, the Omani woman has recognized her power and her capability and that will definitely change the course of things.

Awadh Ba Quwair
Director of Media, Majlis a'Shura

There is a need for women to actively participate in the Shura council. We want more women to come forward and tell us what they would like from us to facilitate their participation so that they can be fairly represented."