

## Thinking green

Rehan Ahmed



### END OF CAMPING SEASON

Bahrain's camping season which started last year will soon be coming to an end. The government institutions organized this season meticulously and planned activities to make it convenient to all visitors who came to the Sakhir and other adjoining areas located some 30 kilometers south of the capital Manama for recreation and relaxation.

Camping is considered as one of the most entertaining activity enjoyed by citizens and residents in cooler weather across the Kingdom. As the temperature dropped and the educational institutions were closed for the holidays, families in Bahrain flocked to the Sakhir area for the annual camping season. During the five month camping period, the area became home to thousands of families who escaped the busy urban and routine life and took refuge in outdoor camps for relaxation and fun.

It is estimated that around 100,000 people visited Sakhir campsites every weekend. There are around 1,500 registered campsites, which increase with time and day of the week. Around 20,000 cars entered the camping zone each day during weekends. More inspection and site visits by officials were performed during this season, which witnessed less violations as compared to the last year due to better monitoring, awareness and information.

The organizers have taken several measures alongside public and private companies to ensure that all campers have a great time and enjoy a deep-rooted tradition. Several companies put up tents or rent tents to promote greater interactivity among their staff. The desert camping is an opportunity to remain connected with our traditions and customs. The desert camping area's atmosphere is very quiet, serene and mostly away from the urban noise which is in our daily lives living and working in the congested urban areas. Moving away from the usual residential surrounding and confined high-rise buildings gives a wonderful feeling of freedom and calm.

The Supreme Camping Season Committee is always urging all campers to follow the security and safety requirements set by the committee for camping. As per the camping rules implemented, Campers have to remove tents, accessories and rubbish before the camping season finish otherwise it will be removed by the competent authorities, and their owners will then have to pay all expenses incurred on camps decommissioning and cleaning. A special committee consisting of many organizations oversees compliance with rules and regulations to ensure the camping area is kept free of trash.

While extra ordinary care, monitoring and awareness campaigns have been initiated and campers were told to follow the environmental, safety and security norms, but in spite of that many campers still pollute and leave the area without clearing their mess. Last year huge quantities of garbage were removed from camping areas by the cleaners and cleaning companies. The items removed included carpets, TVs, broken sofas, torn and old tents, old tires, bricks, discarded utensils and cots.

Last year people were caught setting fire to couches, carpets and even whole tents at the end of the season rather than disposing them at Bahrain's landfill site in Askar. This year, Campers who will burn any unwanted equipment and furniture in the camping area were being threatened with legal action to avoid any form of pollution.

The authorities have urged the public to maintain cleanliness during and after the end of the camping season and also organized awareness campaigns to combat littering as well as imposing fines on violators.

While you will be planning to decommission your camp or moving out, it is important that you look around and clear any mess which should not affect the pristine Sakhir environment. Let us follow some basic rules for our safety, health and environmental conservation.

- Remove any camp entrance barrier which you may have created at the entrance and in camp periphery.
- Remove stoves, iron, combustible materials, fire extinguisher and first aid facilities.
- Remove all illumination, electronic gadgets and water containers.
- Remove all garbage, litter and bins from the camping site. Do not leave behind any waste which may decompose, ignite or generate odours.
- Don't throw any food or decomposable food in open. It will attract vermin, birds, insects and rodents.
- Don't throw away used/unused plastic bags.
- Keep all recyclable and disposable waste in separate bags.
- Do not burn any garbage irrespective of its composition and weight.

Remember the principle of green camping: "If you brought it in....you need to take it out and leave the area just as you found it."

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*(The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of this newspaper.)*

# Freed Filipino priest says airstrikes routed IS extremists

Roman Catholic priest Teresito Soganub

#### Manila

A Filipino Roman Catholic priest taken hostage last year by Islamic State group-linked militants recounted Friday how military airstrikes helped crush an extremist siege, but said a Muslim autonomy deal is crucial in preventing new bloodshed.

The Rev. Teresito Soganub recalled his 116-day captivity in a rare appearance at a Manila news conference, where he described how he and other hostages constantly feared for their survival amid the airstrikes and gunbattles in southern Marawi city.

The 57-year-old priest said he and other hostages were forced by their captors to collect explosive powder from firecrackers and unexploded military ordnance, which the militants used to make improvised bombs.

Gunfire and explosions repeatedly shook the ground and shattered buildings and mosques, where the militants ordered them to lie low during intense fighting, said

Soganub, who couldn't recall how many near-death moments he experienced.

"Every moment, day and night, we were facing death," he said. "We didn't know if we'll still be alive in the next hour or next minute."

Troops rescued Soganub in September before crushing the Marawi siege, which left more than 1,100 combatants and civilians dead and forced hundreds of thousands of residents to abandon the mosque-studded city and outlying towns and flee to emergency shelters.

About 600 militants waving Islamic State-style black flags seized commercial buildings, mosque and houses in Marawi's central business district on May 23 after an army-led assault failed to locate a top Asian terror suspect, Isnilon Hapilon, and other militant leaders in a safe house in the lakeside city.

About 120 armed militants barged into a church compound, where Soganub said he was seized with five church workers and others. Later, in the mosques and buildings where

they were hidden, Soganub counted about 120 hostages with him at one time.

During the intense urban fighting, the militants took cover in concrete buildings and houses, which they used as combat bases and sniper posts for months. But military strikes and artillery fire gradually caused that combat advantage to crumble and allowed troops to advance, Soganub said.

"The airstrikes were terrible, you could fill each crater they dug with two cars, and we could get killed if they hit our building dead center or on the sides," he said, adding that two of the kidnapped church staffers were killed in airstrikes and artillery bombardments.

Soganub said Malaysian and Indonesian gunmen were involved in the fighting but that local militants, including Hapilon, led the uprising. Hapilon, who was killed in the final battles in Marawi, visited their hideout occasionally to lead a prayer and check on the hostages, he said. (AP)

## UN see a lonelier planet with fewer plants, animals

#### Washington

Earth is losing plants, animals and clean water at a dramatic rate, according to four new United Nations scientific reports on biodiversity.

Scientists meeting in Colombia issued four regional reports Friday on how well animal and plants are doing in the Americas; Europe and Central Asia; Africa; and the Asia-Pacific area.

Their conclusion after three years of study: Nowhere is doing well.

The work was about more than just critters, said study team chairman Robert Watson. It is about keeping Earth livable for humans, because we rely on biodiversity for food, clean water and public health, the prominent British and U.S. scientist said.

"This is undermining well-being across the planet, threatening us long-term on food and water," Watson said in an interview.

The reports project that, if current

trends continue:

— By the year 2050 the Americas will have 15 percent fewer plants and animals than now.

— In Asia, there will be no fish stocks for commercial fishing by 2048.

— More than a quarter of the species that live only in Europe are threatened now.

— Africa could lose half of some bird and mammal species by 2100.