

University and press officials gather to celebrate achievements

Jovial atmosphere prevails during luncheon

By **Mayssam Zaaroura**
Daily Star staff

A jovial and informal atmosphere prevailed on the 18th floor of the Safir Helipolitan Hotel on Wednesday, as a group of about 20 people, mostly men, gathered for a celebratory lunch.

The president of the Lebanese American University, Riad Nassar, was hosting a lunch to honor the country's press for their support of Lebanese universities and for their efforts in fighting for freedom and truth.

"Education and the media are intertwined as they both preach freedom and democracy, and although we sometimes disagree

Education and the media are intertwined as they both (promote) freedom'

... that is a part of freedom," said the university's president, who will be retiring this summer.

"Lebanese universities prosper and succeed more than any universities in the region because of the freedom that prevails in this country."

Although someone new will be taking the helm at the university – Joseph Jabaa, a political science professor – Nassar appears to have left an indelible mark on his colleagues and the press alike.

As the president of the Press Federation, Mohammed Baalbaki, rose to give a speech, he stressed that the press could not exist without education and vice versa.

"The Koran says: 'God, increase my knowledge,'" said Baalbaki, adding that monetary power cannot "compete with the power of knowledge."

"Nassar's name will remain with LAU despite his retirement, and we as the media hold very dear our duty to support and encourage educational institutions. They are the

well of good journalists."

The camaraderie and the friendship between the men present was obvious, as ribald, sexist remarks, digs at one other and private jokes flew across the listeners' heads.

This familiarity was particularly touching between Nassar and the president of the Journalists Union, Melhem Karam. After his speech, in which he said that "Nassar was a man with a heart as pure as the marble in holy places of worship," Karam embraced Nassar and received a kiss on the cheek for his efforts.

So what has the press done to support Lebanese universities?

According to Nassar, the press has helped by investigating the truth and trying to ensure freedom and hence enabling universities to do research and teach in a free and democratic fashion.

"Lebanon will always be a country of immigration," added Nassar. "It is the universities' duty to create future ambassadors for Lebanon and the press has been crucial in providing aid and support."

And are more students opting to follow that field of study?

In LAU, there is a Communication Arts program that is split into three majors: Journalism, Television and Radio, and Performing Arts.

Magda Abu-Fadil, the current director of the Institute for Professional Journalists and a previous teacher of journalism at LAU, said when she was teaching she proposed setting the students in a mock "newsroom" to prepare them for the working world.

"Journalism is not something stagnant," she added. "One has to constantly learn new things and new technologies that are cropping up in the world of communication."

"But at LAU, the students are more attracted to the Television and Radio major," she joked. "Here everyone wants to be famous."



Christian Ousi, Khalil Khouri and Hassan Sabra



Mohammed Baalbaki, Riad Nassar and Melhem Karam share a deep respect for one another



Elias Baz, Salah Slam and Arafat Hijazi



President of the Lebanese Press Club Youssef Howayek and Antoine Mrada



Mira Geha



Rashed Fayed and Walid Chouqair



Ramzi Hafez and Najib Saab

Photo by Mahmoud Khier