

TRIP TO IRAQ

---

**International Affairs Department**

International Affairs Office of Japan Sewage Works Agency (JS) has started contract research activities for Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) this year. JICA supports the sewage works project in Erbil, Iraq, and Kyiv, Ukraine. In September, Mr. Nomura, JS executive director, and I visited Erbil of Iraqi Kurdistan. I will report on our research tour.

Iraqi Kurdistan, which is northern Iraq and on the border with Turkey, is the Kurdish region. Erbil is the capital city of Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraq must remind you of Islamic State, IS. When we visited Erbil, the Kurdish self-defense military had successfully defended the area against the IS invasion, and Erbil especially looked very safe. However, JICA put a security guard on our car, and we were not allowed to be alone outside the car. Going out was prohibited in principle, and we were only allowed to be out without a security guard within the area of 50 square meters around our hotel.

It was boiling in Erbil. We had a maximum temperature of 42°C in the middle of September. Then, what about humidity? It must have been less than 10%, I guess. It was pretty dry. We get dehydrated as soon as we walk outside. But we do not recognize it because we do not sweat (sweat evaporates in a blink). I felt like a dry squid. JICA staff said that it was more relaxed than midsummer because there were times when they had more than 50°C. While I had several occasions to visit Asian countries, the weather in the Middle East was entirely different. No wonder adobes are made in this region, and

people hang around out of the sun during the day in town. We can't work hard in such hot weather. Relaxing and avoiding getting tired look best for survival. By the way, hot sweet tea is indispensable for the scenery of Erbil. When I had a cup of highly sweetened tea in a restaurant with no air conditioner, I felt like being relaxed.

I saw people pumping up groundwater to sprinkle street trees. Trees kept green with scarce water. The area without watering was a dusty expanse of dry land with dry grass. They have just a little bit of rain only in winter. Rivers accept gray water, and pits save sewerage. When driving to a planned construction site of the new WWTP, we saw scattering green farms in the brown barren expanse of land. People cultivated leaf vegetables with pumped river water. When taking a closer look, we found they used blackish water for watering. While I had heard people irrigated with untreated wastewater in desert regions, it was my first time seeing it. I cannot say it is clean, can I? After that, we had lunch with a green salad. I wanted to believe the green salad was not "the" vegetables we saw.

Erbil's center area has a historic walled town, "Citadel," inscribed on the World Heritage List. Ancient people landed up to a height of 10 meters and were surrounded by a wall to make Citadel 6,000 years ago (it is 50 % older than China of 4,000 year's history). Currently, renovation works are going on while all residents temporarily move. We had a chance to "peek" inside the Citadel, and workers were rebuilding adobe buildings "slowly".

Erbil had been called "Another Dubai" a few years ago. Oil money makes schools and hospitals accessible. The city is full of cars, and there are luxury shopping malls. However, Erbil has had an economic slowdown recently because of falling oil

prices. I saw many tall buildings under construction downtown. However, when I looked closer, I found construction works were temporarily stopped, and cranes were abandoned.

In Erbil, a power outage occurs frequently. Though it was restored shortly, I had many blackouts during the night. The hotel we stayed in has a standby generator running at total capacity. In residential areas, wealthy families own in-house power generators.

In many aspects, the improvement of public infrastructure is just the beginning. The sewerage system is undeveloped, and the project design is going on with JICA's assistance. JS will support providing quality sewerage service for people in Erbil. I am looking forward to the start of the WWTP operation in peace.



Photo 1: Downtown of Erbil



Photo 2: Citadel constructed 6,000 years ago



Photo 3: Home standby generator



Photo 4: Modern shopping mall



Photo 5: Traditional market with rich variety of items



Photo 6: Still-under-construction tower building



Photo 7: Kebab lunch