



# MP demands scrapping maid company due to high prices

Bedoons under rights panel • Speaker slams footage 'leakers'

## MoI mulls fee hikes to plug budget deficit

**KUWAIT:** Director General of Residency Affairs Maj Gen Talal Maarafi said the most important reasons that made the interior ministry submit a proposal to increase fees is the deficit in the state's general budget, besides the real cost of services presented by the department, which are not in harmony with the current fees. He said the current fees have been in effect for 40 years without a change and most of them are selective, such as for visit and temporary residency permits.

"We are not against expats as they are our brothers. They live in Kuwait and earn their living here, and have a major role in building old and modern Kuwait as far as education, health and



Talal Maarafi

infrastructure are concerned, but the fee increase includes both expats and citizens," he told Al-Qabas daily.

Maarafi spoke about a new system to renew expats' residency permits online, adding several offers from companies are being studied to select the best.

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By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** MP Safa Al-Hashem yesterday demanded in a draft law the scrapping of the newly-established company for the recruitment of maids from abroad because of its high prices. Hashem said in her proposal that the company was established in accordance with a law passed in 2015 by the National Assembly with the main objective of bringing down the highly inflated prices charged by private recruitment offices.

But the company, which began operations recently, is charging almost similar fees, which means it has failed to achieve the goals of its establishment and should be scrapped, she said. Under the said law, only one company has been established, Al-Durrah Company, which recently advertised recruitment of domestic helpers from Sri Lanka, demanding a price of around KD 1,000, which is almost the same as charged by private offices.

Meanwhile, reports said the Kuwaiti Embassy in Manila recently sent a report to the foreign ministry in which it explained that the cost for the recruitment of a domestic helper from the Philippines is only KD 370, including the airfare. Recruitment offices have been charging well over KD 1,000, which prompted MPs to pass the law to set up pub-



Safa Al-Hashem

lic shareholding companies for the recruitment of helpers with the aim to reduce prices.

Meanwhile, the Assembly's human rights defense committee yesterday decided to include the issue of stateless people or bedoons under its mandate in a bid to help resolve their decades-old problem. Head of the committee MP Adel Al-Damkhi said the committee decided to invite State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh for a meet-

ing to debate the establishment of the national human rights commission. He said the committee will pay an inspection visit to the central jail on Thursday and also decided to visit any facility where human rights abuses take place.

MP Mohammad Al-Dallal said yesterday that he will grill the new finance minister if he does not send the financial and economic reforms document to the Assembly before Feb 20 for a debate. Dallal asked the minister about the motives and the reasons behind the finance ministry's plans to impose taxes on individuals and companies, especially since taxation has a unique system under capitalism and does not apply to the Kuwaiti constitutional system. The Assembly will hold its regular session tomorrow amid demands to debate the hike in petrol prices, amendments to the health insurance on expatriates and others.

Separately, Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem vowed yesterday that those who leaked footage deemed offensive to the political leadership will be exposed and penalized. Ghanem linked between these people and those who helped impose a ban on Kuwaiti sports, which was lifted by FIFA a few days ago and which allowed the country to host the Gulf football championship.

## News in brief

### Saudis deny Israelis visas

**ATHENS:** Israeli players have been denied visas to participate in a speed chess championship hosted by Saudi Arabia this week, a vice president of the World Chess Federation (FIDE) said yesterday. Seven Israeli players had requested visas for the tournament on Dec 26-30. It would have marked the first time Saudi Arabia had publicly hosted Israelis as the Gulf state does not recognize Israel and there are no formal ties between them. Israel Gelfer, vice president of FIDE, whose Secretariat is based in Athens, told Reuters in an email that visas for the Israeli players "have not been issued and will not be issued". He said the tournament would go ahead as planned. It was not immediately clear if other delegations had been excluded but players from Qatar had suggested they may have been rejected.

### Tunisia outraged over UAE curbs

**ABU DHABI:** The United Arab Emirates said yesterday that "security information" had caused the delays on Tunisian women on boarding flights to the Gulf state that caused an outcry in their home country. "We contacted our Tunisian brothers about security information that necessitated taking specific procedures," UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash said on his Twitter account. A number of Tunisian women said in recent days that their travel to the Gulf state on UAE airlines had been delayed and some had to undergo additional examination of their visas. That triggered angry reactions on social media and local Tunisian media. The Tunisian government said Friday it had asked the UAE ambassador for clarification, adding that the envoy said the decision was for only a short period and the restrictions had been lifted.

### Fog disrupts UAE flights

**DUBAI:** Thick fog yesterday disrupted flights at major airports in the United Arab Emirates as thousands of foreign residents rushed to travel home for Christmas and the New Year. Dozens of flights were cancelled, diverted or delayed at the three main airports in the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. At Dubai airport, one of the busiest in the world, at least 17 flights were cancelled, as visibility dropped to just 100 m in some areas of the emirate. At least another 100 incoming flights were either diverted to nearby airports or delayed, according to the flight schedule at the airport. Emirates Airlines, which has a fleet of over 250 large planes, said it has cancelled 10 flight departures. Police warned motorists to be extremely cautious when driving in the fog.

## Dozens dead in Philippine mall inferno

**DAVAO, Philippines:** At least 37 people, including call center staff from an American firm, are believed to have perished in a fire that tore through a shopping mall in the southern Philippine city of Davao, local authorities said yesterday. President Rodrigo Duterte, himself a Davao native, visited distraught relatives outside the burning building overnight but told them there was "zero" chance their loved ones had survived, witnesses told AFP.

Firemen found one body as the blaze was finally extinguished yesterday, Davao Mayor Sara Duterte - the president's daughter - told reporters. Firemen have concluded that all those trapped in the building are dead, she said, adding: "They assessed that no one would survive in that heat and with that thick, black smoke." The deadly fire adds fresh misery for the mainly Catholic Philippines at Christmas as the death toll from a tropical storm that hit the

south of the country Friday crossed 200 and with tens of thousands displaced by severe flooding and landslides.

The blaze started at the four-storey NCCC Mall Saturday morning, sending thick plumes of black smoke billowing into the sky over Davao. With low wages but strong English language skills, the Philippines is a popular destination for international companies to set up customer call centers. The building's top floor housed a 24-hour call centre for the US-based market research company SSI.

Jimmy Quimsing, a retired seaman, was one of the relatives desperately waiting for news. His 25-year-old son Jim Benedict worked at the call centre and had not been in contact since the fire broke out. Quimsing said he spoke to President Duterte and had been told to prepare for the worst. "He told us ... no one would survive under these circumstances," he told AFP. Duterte's special assistant Christopher Go confirmed the bulk of the president's comments to AFP. Paolo Duterte, the president's son and the vice mayor of Davao, also wrote on Facebook that fire officials had told him there was "zero" chance of anyone trapped surviving the blaze.

In a statement on its local Facebook

## Ad firms using tools to help them read your mind

**NEW YORK:** Why did you splurge on that new pair of shoes? Or that pricey smartphone? More and more advertisers are trying to tap into the unconscious to divine the invisible forces that drive those spending decisions. Using gadgets to track eye movements, computer maps of faces to capture a momentary grin (approval) or squinting (anger), and sensors to measure perspiration or monitor brain activity, companies are mining consumers' raw emotions for information. Traditionally, ad firms have measured the success of their campaigns through consumer surveys, but that technique has its limits.

"It's not that people won't tell you, they actually can't tell you why they're making the decision they're making," said Jessica Azoulay, vice president of the market intelligence practice at Isobar, a digital marketing agency. The new techniques recognize that our purchase decisions are driven by both rational and emotional factors, and

reflect research showing the brain takes in information on different levels.

They "enable us to capture many different types of emotions and to be able to profile the emotions that are happening very granularly on a second by second basis," said Elissa Moses, chief executive of the neuro and behavioral science business at Ipsos, a consultancy and market research firm. "People won't be able to tell you that something irritated them in scene three or thrilled them in scene seven, but we'll know from looking at the facial coding," Moses said.

The technologies can help track if brands are maintaining their edge over competitors, and make ads more effective by determining what to highlight, for example whether to emphasize the distress of allergy symptoms or the relief of treatment when pitching medications. And the techniques are being applied to other industries, such as retail, which is experimenting on ways to attract customers in the Amazon era. "Ultimately there is a dance between the conscious and unconscious," Moses said, noting that "in order to actually buy a product, you have to make a conscious decision."

Some of the techniques were first employed in the 1970s, but now are being more widely adopted as equip-



DAVAO: Firefighters extinguish a fire at a shopping mall on Saturday. — AFP

ment has improved. An eye tracking test uses technology-enhanced glasses with a camera to record what a person is seeing on a television or in a store and read how long the eye settles on a particular cue. That can be combined with other methods, such as galvanic skin responses with sensors applied to a person's hand to read perspiration, and electroencephalography (EEG) which reads brain activity through sensors on a per-

son's head. The data is used to produce a "heat map" with yellow, orange or red "hotspots" that show where the person's eye fixated.

Techniques measuring arousal can signal whether an ad stands out amid today's media avalanche. Other tests that are becoming more popular seek to shed light on unconscious associations with products or shopping needs.

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NORWALK, Connecticut: Emily Safian-Demers of the French advertising company Ipsos uses eye-tracking for neuromarketing techniques on Dec 5, 2017. — AFP

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