



KUWAIT: Walid Al-Khabizi, the Assistant Foreign Minister for Europe Affairs (right) and Bulgarian Ambassador to Kuwait Boris Borissov cut the ceremony's cake. —Photos by Joseph Shagra



Diplomats and other dignitaries attended the event.

ELECTRONIC PASSPORT HELPS KUWAIT'S SCHENGEN VISA WAIVER BID: OFFICIAL



KUWAIT: Kuwait's adoption of the e-passport system will hopefully help prepare the ground for exempting Kuwaiti nationals from visa requirements in the Schengen Area, a Kuwaiti official said. The e-passport system is one of the EU technical requirements for a Schengen visa waiver, not all requirements, said Walid Al-Khabizi, the Assistant Foreign Minister for Europe Affairs. The Kuwaiti move could facilitate the negotiations in this regard, he added.

Khabizi made the comments during a reception, hosted Thursday by Bulgaria Embassy here to celebrate the country's national day. He said that the Kuwaiti-Bulgarian relations have been growing steadily since 1962. The signing of 26 agreements on cooperation between the two countries helped augment the relations in various fields and brought their views on various international issues close to each other, he said.

The number of Kuwaiti tourists, visiting Bulgaria rose to nearly 3,000 last year, he said, noting that the number of Kuwaiti students, studying at Bulgarian colleges also went up steadily over the last years. On investment cooperation, he said Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) is mulling a plan for long-term investments in, and tapping into the potentials of trade exchanges with, Bulgaria which is an active member of the European Union and the NATO alliance. —KUNA

WOMEN'S FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT FORUM ORGANIZED IN BEIRUT

BEIRUT: A forum on women's empowerment in the financial sector kicked off in Beirut yesterday, focusing on women's role in Arab social development. In a keynote speech, Lebanese Minister of State for Women's Affairs Jean Ogasapian called for involving women in social improvement and prosperity. He said Arab official institutions and bodies should seek to invest women's capabilities to achieve social growth.

The forum was co-organized by the World Union of Arab Bankers (WUAB) and the Arab League's Arab Women Organization. WUAB President Joseph Torbey said that comprehensive and sustainable development is a core social goal that can be notched up with the help of women who make up one half of society.

He added that for a society to be developed, women should be involved, noting that human development should be based on women's empowerment. He regretted that although women make more than half of the world's population, they own only one per-

cent of the world's wealth, obtain just 10 percent of its income, and hold merely 14 percent of leading world posts in both public and private sectors.

On the forum, the WUAB president said it mainly aims at stressing women's involvement in economic sectors for stronger economies and more stable societies. Director-General of the Arab Women Organization Mervat Telawi said the companies where three women hold leading positions are more productive than others, citing relevant UN statistics.

She boasted Arab women have made recent reasonable successes in Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and even Iraq, but there are still major challenges women are facing due to existing wars and conflicts.

Telawi emphasized that Arab banks should provide necessary facilities for women's empowerment in the economic and financial domain. Regrettably, 1.33 billion women across the world have no bank accounts, she lamented. —KUNA



BEIRUT: A scene from the forum on women's empowerment in the financial sector. —KUNA