

Local



Local Spotlight

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The 39th GCC summit

The 39th Gulf Cooperation Council summit, which was held in Saudi Arabia this week, made headlines. I believe holding the summit under the difficult circumstances the GCC countries are going through is an indicator of the improvement of the future situation and the desire to maintain the cohesion of Gulf states. The summit, which was held in Riyadh, called for strengthening joint GCC work in order to overcome the challenges facing GCC countries.

I think the most prominent decisions of the meeting was the declaration to welcome the establishment of a joint military force and appoint a commander to lead the joint defense system, as well as the establishment of an academy for strategic studies. In a joint press conference with GCC Secretary General Abdullatif Al-Zayani, the Saudi foreign minister said: "We are waiting for Qatar to adopt the policies that are required for them to deal with." That comment I think means the door is still open for Qatar regardless of the complication of the crisis.

HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah led Kuwait's delegation to the Gulf summit. He said "the continuation of the Gulf dispute presents a serious threat to unity". He called to stop malicious media campaigns, pointing out that this will "create the atmosphere to resolve the dispute between us". Personally as a Kuwaiti citizen, I believe that this is right, because the dispute with Qatar needs to end soon.

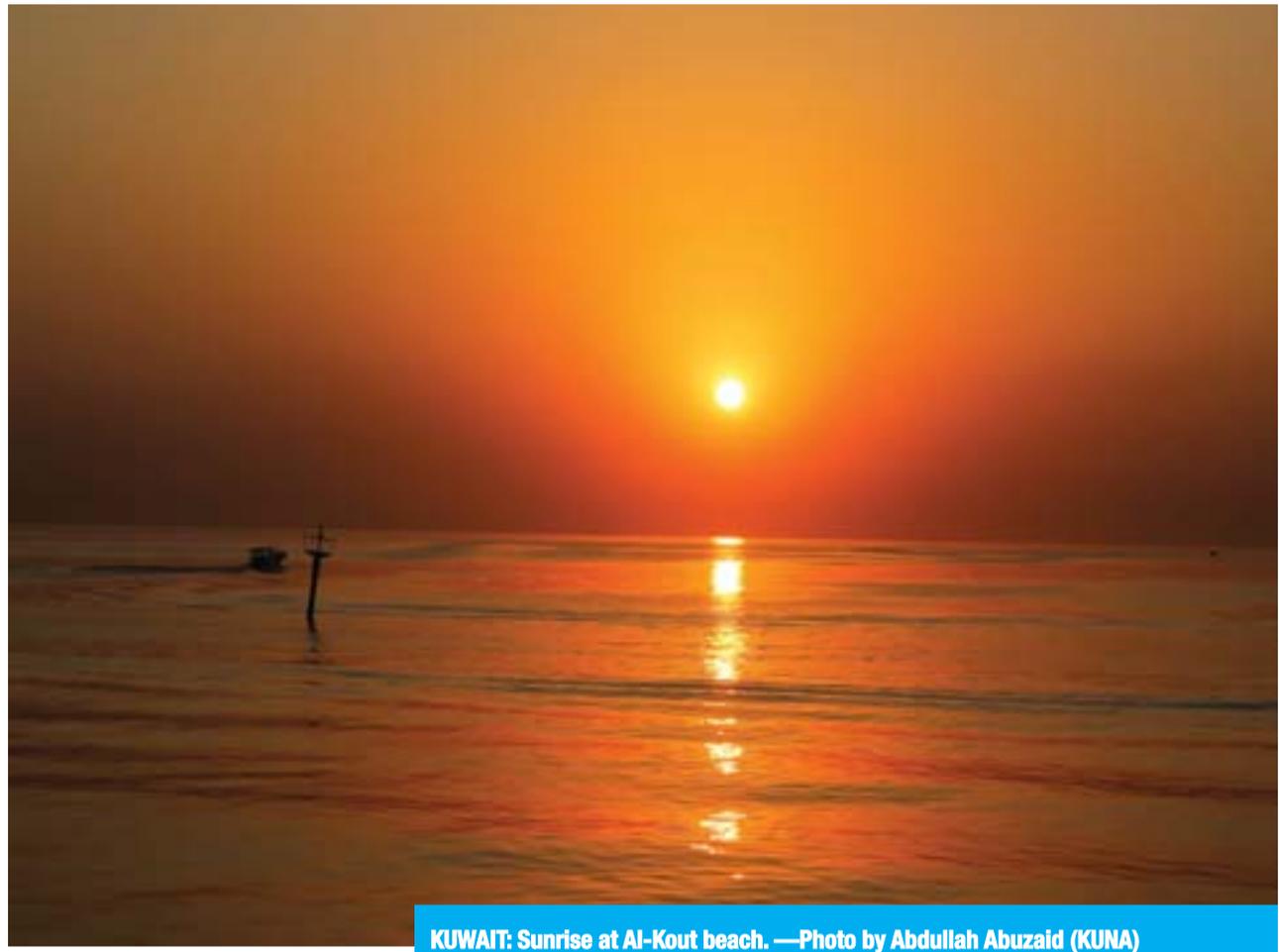
On the Yemeni crisis, the Amir said that the conflict in Yemen "poses a direct threat to all of us". He stressed that "our relations with Iran must be set on the principles adopted by the United Nations, of which the most important is non-interference in our affairs".

The GCC issued a final statement which highlights key points of agreement, starting with a mutual commitment to economic integration among GCC states and the comprehensive application of the provisions of the economic agreement with a view to achieve economic unity in 2025, along with combating terrorist organizations through security integration and countering extremist ideologies.

In an impressive gesture, HH the Amir drew media attention during the official photo with the leaders of the delegations to the summit. As the leaders lined up to take the photo, the Amir went to the Qatari flag and held it to check whether it was visible in the picture.

The boycotting of Qatar since June 5, 2017 undoubtedly has had a clear impact on the image of Gulf cohesion, and the Kuwaiti mediation has not succeeded so far in bringing together the parties. But I think this summit may be a prelude to the return of the brothers to one table. Saudi King Salman concluded the summit and the leaders went back to their countries, leaving behind hope and a heavy agenda to work on.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



KUWAIT: Sunrise at Al-Kout beach. —Photo by Abdullah Abuzaid (KUNA)

The fight against public smoking: Universities

By Faten Omar

Smoking was once a public activity that could be seen all over Kuwait - in the airport and hospitals, at the mall and restaurants and in universities and coffeeshops. Over the last few years, however, more and more regulations are being put in place to restrict smoking in public and limit the harmful effects of smoking on public health. Smoking has been banned completely from hospitals and smokers are now confined to small, special glassed in rooms at the airport.

In another step towards limiting smoking in public places, the Deputy Director General for Technical Affairs at the Environment Public Authority (EPA) Mohammad Al-Enezi said the authority will now be checking universities and colleges to implement the executive regulations of the environment protection law that bans smoking inside educational institutions. These include universities, colleges and applied education institutes. Anyone caught smoking on campus or in building annexes will have to pay a fine of KD 50, while the institution will have to pay KD 1,000 for its failure to protect its premises from smokers.

Kuwait Times spoke with students at some universities for their reactions. "The university needs this law, as some students smoke in the classrooms before the start of lectures as well as in the corridors, squares and cafeteria. Such behavior harms both the smokers and the students around them. Many students who do not smoke are bothered by this," Mohammed Al-Assi said. He added that if the new law is applied, it will make smokers smoke less and protect students from passive smoking. "Some of us suffer from allergies and asthma and smoking in the campus causes us harm. The law will protect the health and safety of other students."

Awni Harb, a smoker, said smoking is a personal choice, adding, "I always smoke in open-air places and not inside the building. I make sure that my habit does not hurt any people around me." Harb suggested that smoking rooms should be provided in universities, colleges and other institutions, and

students who smoke outside these rooms should be penalized.

Samar Saleh said female smokers are much worse, as they mostly hide and smoke inside bathrooms and classrooms. "Many female smokers do not want to be judged, so they will smoke inside the women's washroom or an empty classroom. "The cafeteria is the worst - when I go there to spend my spare time, I find students smoking so much that it seems like a coffee shop and not a university," she said.

Salah believes that such laws will not be applied. "There are 'no smoking' signs all over the university, but students smoke anyway. The law will only be ink on paper and there will be no application of the decision. I wonder how the university issues a decision banning smoking and hangs signs in the corridors, but is not committed to it. If this happens within the university, which should teach students a culture of respect for laws and to abide by them, what about other institutions and facilities? I see a lot of students smoking on the campus as well as professors and administrators - this is a wrong behavior that must be stopped," she told Kuwait Times.

In August 2018, prices of tobacco products rose by 13.5 percent compared to the same month last year, according to the Central Statistical Bureau. Meanwhile, 70 percent of students in Kuwait are smokers, according to the most recent health ministry statistics. The figures also show that the smoking rate among the population's males reached 24.5 percent, while it is 1 percent among females. As for shisha (hookah) smoking, its spread is estimated at 2.2 percent among men and 0.2 percent among women.

Kuwait has a high rate of population growth with a young population (55 percent of Kuwaitis are 20 years old or younger). The majority of smokers (68 percent) started smoking regularly when younger than 20 - significantly more men (70 percent) than women (33 percent) began to smoke regularly before they reached the age of 20. The duration of smoking is 15 years for men and 12 years for women.

The World Health Organization estimates that smoking kills seven million smokers every year. The prevention and treatment of tobacco addiction have been targeted by WHO as priorities for intervention in developing countries. It has been estimated that unless immediate steps are taken to reduce smoking rates, the number of deaths due to tobacco use will rise to 10 million per year over the next 30 to 40 years, and 70 percent of these deaths will occur in developing countries. Several reasons have been suggested for this recent and continuing smoking epidemic in the developing countries of Asia and the Middle East.