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Please rain!



By Badrya Darwish

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Everybody I meet lately is depressed. This is not a once-in-a-blue-moon emotion (like the one we witnessed yesterday). There are no smiles anymore on the faces of people. I go to the co-op and find people are weary and crushed to the maximum of their abilities. I walk in the street and see the same. Drivers are angry - be they Kuwaitis, expats or Japanese tourists. Everyone is in a rush and hurry and everyone looks angry and frustrated. Maybe if you ask someone why are you angry and not paying attention on how you're driving, they won't even know!

I told myself: Let me take a walk in the park - I'll feel better. But the minute I entered the gates, the soil is dry, the trees are drooping, devoid of color and full of dust. The lack of rain has its toll on the city and all of us. We have nice buildings but they don't look fresh. We have beautiful and architecturally-interesting high-rises and lovely villas, but our gardens need rain. Our walls need rain and the streets are filthy and dry. Leave alone that, people are sick and the air is not clean. Flu viruses are spreading like mad. Whoever I see has the flu, cough or fever. I don't want to even go to the clinic to see the queues.

The lack of rain is a metaphor for all that Kuwait is lacking right now. Is it this year only? When you talk to businessmen and shop owners, they ask why is there no business? Why business is not good in Kuwait anymore? The population is at its peak with expats and Kuwaitis and they all need to buy food, furniture, clothes and cars and pay school fees and rents. Some need to buy necessities, and for many others, luxuries too.

So why the dour attitude? Why isn't there more confidence and optimism in the market? Everyone I talk to doesn't have faith in the market. People have lost faith. Why is that? There is no shortage in our oil or in our revenues and income. In fact, Kuwait's oil prices have been steadily climbing, even higher than those projected in our budget. I know we have a deficit, but compared to other countries, it's a trivial amount, and we have plenty of reserves if we have to tap them.

So why all the gloomy faces and attitudes and behaviors? I think people should have more hope and faith. Yes, maybe Kuwait is going through something of a dark and dry spell, but we have always risen before. And we will rise again, insha'Allah. So be a little bit more optimistic guys. Maybe it will rain tomorrow, God willing, and bless us all.
Have a rainy weekend!

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The appeals court yesterday delayed until March 4 a petition filed by a Kuwaiti lawyer calling to overturn a ruling by the lower court that considered as legal a hike in health charges for expatriates. The delay came to allow the government to submit its defense in the case filed after the health ministry significantly raised health charges at public hospitals only for expatriates and excluded citizens. The lower court had rejected the case, saying it was the right of the health ministry to increase charges at its facilities. The new charges took effect in October and saw some charges rise several-fold.

Lawyer Hashem Al-Refai said in his challenge to the lower court ruling that the court had ignored his arguments which said the decision to raise health charges was unconstitutional and violated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which calls for equality among people regardless of nationality or creed. He also insisted that the decision also violated medical practice laws and regulations.

Refai insisted before the appeals court that the decision is also illegal because raising medical charges requires a law and not a ministerial decision, based on a law issued by the National Assembly in 1995.

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KUWAIT: MPs congratulate Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and State Minister for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh after she survived a vote of no-confidence at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Fiscal strengths mask long-term challenges: Fitch

LONDON: Kuwait's recent budget outturns and the government's draft budget proposal point to the country's continuing fiscal and external strengths, which are reflected in its 'AA/Stable' sovereign rating, Fitch Ratings says. Nevertheless, the slow pace of fiscal reform and economic diversification increases long-term risks to Kuwait's public finances.

"We have raised our estimate for Kuwait's fiscal surplus in FY18 (ending March 31, 2018) to 1.9 percent of GDP,

from 0.2 percent previously. Recent data published by the ministry of finance indicates that Kuwait's budget was close to balance in the first nine months of FY18, with revenues at 84 percent of original budget allocations, but spending considerably lower, at 63 percent.

Our forecast incorporates our expectation that spending execution will pick up significantly in the final quarter of the fiscal year, when a lot of spending typically takes place. It also takes into account estimated investment income of the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) amounting to around 13 percent of GDP, which is not included in the 9M data," Fitch said.

"Rising oil prices are a key driver of the outturns. The FY18 budget assumed an oil price of \$45/bbl, but the price of the

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Kuwait to spend \$500bn on oil projects by 2040

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: OPEC member Kuwait plans to spend more than half a trillion dollars by 2040 to boost its oil and gas output and refining capacity, a top executive said yesterday. The announcement of the huge investments comes despite Kuwait projecting a budget deficit in the next fiscal year for the fourth year in a row due to low global oil prices.

The chief executive officer of state-

run Kuwait Petroleum Corp (KPC) Nizar Al-Adsani said the firm plans to carry out a number of major projects to boost oil production to 4.75 million barrels per day by 2040. "To achieve these targets, KPC plans to spend \$114 billion in capital expenditure over the next five years and an additional \$394 billion beyond that to 2040," Adsani told the Energy Strategy Forum in Kuwait City. "KPC has launched the 2040 strategy which focuses on growth in all its activities that require significant funds to finance the mega projects," he said.

Adsani noted that the energy industry faces complex and diverse challenges, but dealing with it professionally focuses on the strategy of investment, innovation and cooperation.

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154,000 illegals in Kuwait; amnesty won't be extended

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Assistant Director General of Residency Affairs Major Gen Abdullah Al-Hajeri said there are strict instructions from the higher leadership to completely end the incidence of residency violators in Kuwait, who number 154,000 people of both genders. Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Sheikh Khalid Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah

issued a decision last month allowing residency violators to leave the country before Feb 22, 2018 without paying fines.

Hajeri said the ministerial decision comes eight years after a similar amnesty given by HH the Amir in Feb 2011. He added the government is serious about implementing the law without exception, and will crack down on violators as the grace period will not be extended.

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Abdullah Al-Hajeri



KUWAIT: Deputy Chairman and CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation Nizar Al-Adsani speaks during the Petroleum Economist Energy Strategy Forum yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Trump appeals for unity, talks tough on immigration, to keep Gitmo open

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump appealed Tuesday for national unity and strong borders in his first State of the Union address, calling for "one American family" after a year marred by acrimony, division and scandal. Delivering his biggest speech of the year, this most polarizing of presidents sought to put the spotlight on a robust economy, while pointedly calling on a packed joint session of Congress to enact tough curbs on immigration.

"Tonight, I call upon all of us to set aside our differences, to seek out common ground, and to summon the unity we need to deliver for the people we were elected

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WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump delivers the State of the Union address as US Vice President Mike Pence (left) and Speaker of the House Paul Ryan look on in the chamber of the US House of Representatives on Tuesday. — AFP



KUWAIT: A super blue blood moon is seen during a partial lunar eclipse behind a minaret yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 32)