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Amir orders paying debts of Kuwaiti, expat inmates

Cassation court frees opposition activists, MPs



KUWAIT: A man walks during a sandstorm yesterday in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 2)

By B Izzak and Agencies

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah ordered the payment of debts of imprisoned citizens and expatriates, the Amiri Diwan said in a statement yesterday. The Amir's generous step came in celebration of Kuwait's 57th National Day and 27th Liberation Day anniversaries, the statement added.

National Assembly Speaker Marzuq Al-Ghanem praised the Amir's initiative. HH the Amir's desire to pay debts of these prisoners from his personal funds and enable them to reunite with their families during the national days is the latest in his record of such good and humanitarian initiatives, the speaker said in a statement.

HH the Amir's humanitarian act presents anew an example of how the ruler is aware of citizens' and residents' hardships and preoccupations. Moreover, he has represented Kuwait as a humanitarian center and a home of social and humanitarian solidarity by relieving the underprivileged. Echoing identical thoughts, Deputy Speaker Essa Al-Kandari said the latest initiative was registered in his record of humanitarian deeds, wishing the Amir lasting wellbeing.



HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Separately, the court of cassation yesterday freed around 67 opposition activists including three MPs and several former lawmakers after three months in jail for storming the National Assembly building over six years ago.

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Netanyahu warns Iran; Zarif mocks 'cartoonish circus'

MUNICH: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Tehran yesterday over aggressions by Iran and its "proxies" in Syria, saying he would not allow them to "put a noose of terror around our neck". Calling it "a message to the tyrants of Tehran", he warned in a speech at the Munich Security Conference: "Do not test Israel's resolve." Iran mocked Netanyahu's tough words, saying Israel's reputation for "invincibility" had crumbled after one of its jets was shot down following a bombing run in Syria.

Netanyahu's fiery comments came as tensions between the archenemies have mounted after clashes involving Syrian forces this month, sparked by Israel's downing of what it called an Iranian drone sent from Syria. With a theatrical flourish, Netanyahu brandished a rectangular piece of dark green metal at the podium. "Here's a piece of that Iranian drone, or what's left of it,



MUNICH: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu holds up what he claims is a piece of an Iranian drone shot down in Israeli airspace as he gives a speech during the Munich Security Conference yesterday. — AFP

after we shot it down," he said. Referring to Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who spoke later in Munich, he said: "No doubt Mr Zarif will brazenly deny Iran's involvement in Syria." "Mr Zarif, do you recognize this? You should, it's yours," Netanyahu said, adding that the Iranian official "lies with eloquence".

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65 'killed' in Iran plane crash; Amir sends condolences

DUBAI: All 65 passengers and crew were feared dead in a plane crash in central Iran yesterday after the domestic flight came down in bad weather in a mountainous region. A spokesman for Iranian carrier Aseman Airlines had told state television everyone was killed, but the airline then issued a statement saying it could not reach the crash site and could not "accurately and definitely confirm" everyone died.

The airline had also initially said 60 passengers and six crew were on board the twin-engined turboprop ATR 72 that was flying to the southwestern city of Yasuj. But it later said there were a total of 65 people on board, as one passenger had missed the flight. The Aseman-operated plane crashed near the town of Semrom after taking off from Tehran's Mehrabad airport, emergency services spokesman Mojtaba Khaledi told ISNA news agency.

HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-



TEHRAN: Relatives of Iranian passengers onboard Aseman Airlines flight EP3704 react as they gather in front of a mosque near Mehrabad airport yesterday. — AFP

Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable of condolences to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani over the victims of the plane crash. In the cable, the Amir prayed to Almighty Allah to have mercy upon the victims and to bestow solace on their families. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

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Many Filipino returnees still eye jobs abroad

MANILA: After the murder of a Philippine maid in Kuwait, domestic helpers are streaming back to Manila with tales of abusive employers - but many are still prepared to take their chances overseas again. For them, the sometimes brutal conditions and the hide-and-seek with Kuwaiti police are outweighed by the need to provide for their families at home.

"The mother of my boss, she would hurt me, she would hit me with a shoe with a thick sole. My body was bruised but I would not (go home)," said Marissa Dalot, 40, who labored for almost five years in the state. "I did not want to go home. I wanted to continue working because my kids were still in school," said Dalot, who finally decided to fly home over the weekend.

In all, some 10 million Filipinos work overseas in a wide variety of jobs and their cash remittances, which the central bank says totaled over \$28 billion last year, are a major contributor to the Philippine economy. But the issue of domestic helpers in Kuwait came into

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MANILA: Filipina workers returning home from Kuwait arrive at Manila International Airport yesterday. — AFP

Saudi women can start own business; cabinet approves bankruptcy law

RIYADH: Women in Saudi Arabia can now open their own businesses without the consent of a husband or male relative, as the kingdom pushes to expand a fast-growing private sector. The policy change, announced by the Saudi government on Thursday, also marks a major step away from the strict guardianship system that has ruled the country for decades. "Women can now launch their own businesses and benefit from (governmental) e-services without having to prove consent from a guardian," the ministry of commerce and investment said on its website.

Under Saudi Arabia's guardianship system, women are required to present proof of permission from a male "guardian" - normally the husband, father or brother - to do any government paperwork, travel or enroll in classes. Long dependent on crude production for economic revenue, Saudi Arabia is pushing to expand the country's private sector, including an expansion of female employment under a reform plan for a post-oil era.

While women still face a host of restrictions in the ultraconservative Muslim kingdom, Saudi Arabia's public prosecutor's office this month said it would begin recruiting women investigators for the first time. The



RIYADH: A Saudi artist paints a mural of King Salman bin Abdulaziz (right) and his son Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on Friday during the 32nd Janadriyah Culture and Heritage Festival held on the outskirts of the capital. — AFP

kingdom has also opened 140 positions for women at airports and border crossings, a historic first that the government said drew 107,000 female applicants. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the powerful heir to the Saudi throne, has been leading the drive to expand the role of women in the workforce in recent months.

His father, King Salman, in September approved the end of a decades-long ban on driving, which goes into effect in June. The 32-year-old prince pledged a "moderate, open" Saudi Arabia in October, breaking with ultraconservative clerics in favor of an image

catering to foreign investors and Saudi youth. Prince Mohammed is widely seen as the chief architect behind Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030" reform program, which seeks to elevate the percentage of women in the workforce from 22 percent to nearly one-third.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's cabinet has approved a bankruptcy law, sources familiar with the matter said yesterday, giving a boost to efforts to make the kingdom more enticing to investors. Modern bankruptcy legislation does not currently exist in Saudi Arabia, creating difficulties for struggling companies

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