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# Tabtabaei returns to Kuwait to attend mother's funeral

## Former MP thanks Amir on arrival; will turn himself in and seek pardon

By A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** Fugitive former MP Waleed Al-Tabtabaei attended his mother's funeral yesterday at Sulaibikhat cemetery, which was also attended by a number of current and former lawmakers. Informed sources said Tabtabaei's mother passed away on Thursday in Turkey, where she had been visiting her son. She had been hospitalized in the intensive care unit there, which is the reason why Tabtabaei did not return earlier with fellow former MP Fahd Al-Khannah to turn himself in.

"I thank HH the Amir for allowing me to attend my mother's funeral, which is characteristic of him," Tabtabaei said on arrival at Kuwait airport on Friday. Sources said Tabtabaei will turn himself in to authorities to serve a 42-month prison sentence handed by the court of cassation over charges of breaking into the National Assembly. However, Tabtabaei intends to file a petition to get an Amiri pardon, similar to what Khannah did.

In addition, well-informed sources said more former MPs indicted in the same case will similarly return to Kuwait soon, including former MP Jamaan Al-Harbash. Meanwhile, Kuwaiti citizen Mohammed Nayef Al-Doussary, who was also sentenced to 42 months in prison over charges in the same case, arrived in Kuwait yesterday to turn himself in and file an amnesty petition.



**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem (right) consoles former MP Waleed Al-Tabtabaei during his mother's funeral at Sulaibikhat cemetery yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## KD 130 health insurance fees eyed from 2020

By A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** The health ministry and the Health Assurance Hospitals Company (Dhaman) have started coordinating to prepare a work plan to implement new health insurance fees on expats by the beginning of 2020, said official sources. The sources added that a media campaign will be rolled out to explain the new health insurance mechanism to expats, bearing in mind that the new fee would be KD 130 per expat working in the private sector and the same for each of their dependents.

The sources said the new fee will cover medical and radiology tests and treatment. However, the new law does not specify who will be responsible for providing visitors with healthcare, but explained that paying for healthcare for dependents depends on the company the expat is registered with.

Moreover, the sources noted the health ministry will fully support the insurance hospitals as part of its plan to force expats to receive medical treatment in private hospitals and leave public hospitals only for citizens. "Nonetheless, public hospitals will exceptionally receive expats in emergency cases for certain fees determined in related ministerial decisions," the sources explained, noting that fees paid to private health insurance hospitals will be supervised by the health ministry to prevent "overburdening" expats.

## Pence avoids top Baghdad leaders during Iraq visit

**BAGHDAD:** US Vice President Mike Pence avoided meeting Iraqi federal government leaders during a surprise trip yesterday to the country, where deadly anti-government protests have highlighted Washington's diminished influence. In his first visit as vice president, Pence visited American troops at Ain al-Asad base in western Iraq's Anbar province, but was not expected to travel to the capital. His trip came after weeks of anti-government rallies across Baghdad and the south.

Iraqi officials told AFP that Pence spoke to

Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi by telephone. "There won't be a meeting as they had a phone call. The prime minister isn't going to Anbar" to meet Pence, one source said. President Barham Saleh's office told AFP it was not aware Pence was coming to Iraq and had no meeting planned. The US embassy said it had no details to share.

Pence did meet Iraqi Kurdish President Nechirvan Barzani and his prime minister Masrour Barzani in Arbil, the Kurdish presidency said, publishing pictures of the encounters. Pence tweeted images of himself and his wife speaking to US forces and carrying a roast turkey, traditionally served during the American Thanksgiving holiday celebrated next week. "Happy Thanksgiving from Iraq. @SecndLady and I are so honored to be with our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines here in Iraq!" he tweeted.

The visit echoed President Donald Trump's

own surprise trip to Ain al-Asad a year ago, where he briefly met troops just after Christmas but controversially did not see officials in Baghdad. Trump's visit was veiled in such secrecy that there was speculation most Iraqi authorities had not been told he president was coming. Pence's trip came as the death toll from weeks of anti-government rallies across Iraq's capital and the south rose even further.

One protester was killed and 17 were wounded in clashes with security forces yesterday on the Al-Ahrar bridge in Baghdad, a medical source said. Demonstrators have massed on three main bridges leading from their protest camp in Tahrir (Liberation) Square to the western bank of the river Tigris, where government offices and foreign embassies are based. Since Thursday, nine protesters have been killed in skirmishes with security forces there.

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**ARBIL, Iraq:** US Vice President Mike Pence (left) is greeted by Kurdistan Prime Minister Masrour Barzani as President Nechirvan Barzani looks on yesterday. — AFP

## BJP in surprise comeback in Maharashtra

**MUMBAI:** Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party made an unexpected comeback to power yesterday in wealthy Maharashtra state, home to the country's financial capital, after prolonged backroom negotiations saw presidential rule lifted after days of uncertainty. President Ram Nath Kovind imposed direct rule on India's richest state last week after fiercely fought elections last month led to weeks of haggling between parties over forming a government.

The state was previously ruled by Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and its rightwing regional ally Shiv Sena. But they failed to agree another power-sharing deal despite results showing the coalition had won a comfortable majority for a second consecutive term. Shiv Sena quit the partnership, hoping to convince their ideological rivals, the center-left Indian National Congress, and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) to form a government instead.

In the end though the BJP pulled off a major upset by joining hands with a top NCP leader to form a coalition, announcing the deal yesterday. "This bolsters the BJP and Modi's image in the state and the country," political commentator Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay told AFP. "While there were some questions being raised about their loss of dominance following election results, this verdict will cement Modi and BJP's control in the state", he added.

The coalition still needs to prove its majority in the state legislature in a week's time in order to stay in power. India has been battling an economic slowdown, and the imposition of presidential rule was a setback for Modi and for Mumbai, which is home to business tycoons, the stock market and the glitzy Bollywood film industry. Under India's constitution, New Delhi can take direct control of a state in the absence of a local government and after obtaining consent from the president. — AFP

## First Saudi woman races car in kingdom

**DIRIYAH, Saudi Arabia:** Sliding behind the wheel of a sleek electric SUV, Reema Juffali has blazed a trail in male-dominated motor sports as the first Saudi woman to race in the kingdom. Such adrenalin rushes were unimaginable for women in the ultraconservative Islamic kingdom until June last year, when it overturned the world's only ban on female motorists as part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's wide-ranging liberalization drive.

Juffali, a 27-year-old who made her

motoring debut just months after the decades-old ban ended, competed Friday and yesterday in the Jaguar I-PACE eTROPHY, an all-electric race in Diriyah, close to the capital Riyadh. "The ban was lifted last year and I never expected to race professionally," said Juffali, sitting in her black-and-green Jaguar I-Pace, an electric sports utility vehicle. "The fact that I am doing it... is amazing," Juffali, clad in a racing suit, told AFP in an interview close to the racing circuit in Diriyah.

Juffali, who hails from the western city of Jeddah and was educated in the United States, participated as what organizers call a "VIP" guest driver, becoming the first Saudi woman to race on home soil. Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal, Saudi Arabia's sports authority

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**RIVADH:** Saudi Arabia's first female race driver Reema Juffali poses in front of her car in the Diriyah district of the Saudi capital on Nov 20, 2019. — AFP

## Lion cub mummies feature in huge ancient Egypt find

**SAQQARA, Egypt:** Egypt yesterday unveiled a cache of 75 wooden and bronze statues and five lion cub mummies decorated with hieroglyphics at the Saqqara necropolis near the Giza pyramids in Cairo. Mummified cats, cobras, crocodiles and scarabs were also unearthed among the well-preserved mummies and other objects discovered recently. The antiquities ministry announced the find at the foot of the Bastet Temple, dedicated to the worship of cats among ancient Egyptians, in the vast necropolis.

Antiquities Minister Khaled El-Enany described the discovery as "a (whole) museum by itself". He said initial archaeological studies showed that five of the mummies are lion cubs. Other artifacts uncovered in the dig included statues of an Apis bull, a mongoose, an ibis, a

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**GIZA, Egypt:** Visitors observe mummies of cats and other felines displayed after the announcement of a new discovery at the Saqqara necropolis yesterday. — AFP