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## MPs request to meet Amir over tough jail sentences

Opposition lawmakers seek pardon • Speaker says no action until final verdict

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition lawmakers yesterday decided to request a meeting with HH the Amir to discuss the shocking jail terms passed against 67 opposition figures and appeal to him to issue a general pardon for all the convicts. The decision came following an urgent meeting attended by 16 MPs, as Assembly speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said that no action will be taken against the three convicted lawmakers until a final ruling by the court of cassation.

The harsh sentences by the appeals court on Monday sent shockwaves in political and legal circles amid calls for a comprehensive solution to the lingering political crisis in the country. The court overturned acquittals by the criminal court and passed jail terms on 67 people, including three current lawmakers, several ex-MPs and many activists for storming the National Assembly building in Nov 2011 during protests against the former prime minister.

Former MP and prominent opposition leader Musallam Al-Barrak, who left jail in April following a two-year imprisonment, was handed a fresh nine-year term. Two MPs, Waleed Al-Tabtabaei and Jamaan Al-Harbash, were handed seven years each and MP Mohammad Al-Mutair got one year.

Defense lawyers yesterday filed petitions challenging the rulings, while the public prosecution also demanded stiffer penalties

for some defendants. The opposition lawmakers have decided to hold another meeting next week. MP Mohammad Al-Dallal, who hosted yesterday's meeting, said the jail terms against leading opposition figures constituted a shock, adding that lawmakers in the meeting expressed their respect for the verdicts but stressed they were harsh. He said the lawmakers formed two teams - first to study options how to deal with the issue, and the second to follow up with the convicts and their families.

MP Mohammad Hayef said the verdicts were shocking and are likely to return the political crisis to square one, adding that those who supported the rulings represent only themselves and do not want the wheel of development to progress. He said the ruling takes the country back to the period before the opposition ended its boycott of elections, "as if we are at the beginning of the political crisis".

Hayef called on the judiciary to keep itself away from political disputes and not to issue verdicts in political issues. He said that the judiciary should not enter this dark tunnel, stressing that entering the Assembly building is not a criminal offense. He said that the entire issue is a political one and the issue should have been resolved politically. Hayef criticized the interior minister for immediately forming a 40-member team from the ministry to arrest those convicted, saying he "remained asleep" after the verdicts against



KUWAIT: MP Mohammad Al-Dallal (left) hosts a meeting of 16 opposition lawmakers yesterday. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

a pro-Iran cell.

Meanwhile, under 30 of those convicted have been arrested or gave themselves up to the police. They could be freed when the court of cassation starts looking into the case. Ghanem said that the Assembly will

take no action against the three MPs until after the final verdict, adding that the lawmakers enjoy parliamentary immunity before the verdict but lose it after jail terms are passed. He said that no Assembly sessions will be held before the formation of the new

government, adding that on some previous occasions, the formation of the Cabinet took longer. Opposition MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari said yesterday that if the process of forming the new Cabinet will take longer, he will file to grill the prime minister.

### News in brief

#### Senior Saudi prince Miteb freed

DUBAI: Senior Saudi Prince Miteb bin Abdullah, a former National Guard head once seen as a contender to the throne, has been freed after more than three weeks in detention, according to Twitter messages by royal family members yesterday. "Almighty, thanks be to you..." wrote Abeer bint Khaled bin Abdullah in a posting on her Twitter account. Posting an apparent file photo of Prince Miteb, she added: "May God give you long life, long life full of health, and keep you for us." Writing on his Twitter account, Moaid Mahjoob, who identifies himself as director of external relations for Princess Jawahar Al-Saud, said Prince Miteb "had been released and that he was at his home in Riyadh". Another royal family member, Princess Nouf bint Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Saud, also posted a similar message on Twitter, writing over a photo of Prince Miteb: "May you be safe for us, Abu Abdullah."

#### UAE: Qatar behind complaint

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates yesterday accused Gulf rival Qatar of being behind a call for the International Criminal Court to investigate allegations of war crimes by the UAE in Yemen. A group calling itself the Arab Organization for Human Rights in the UK said on Monday it was taking the UAE to the ICC over "indiscriminate attacks on civilians" in Yemen. UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash accused Qatar of being responsible. "The Arab Organization for Human Rights with its address in Qatar has filed a media complaint against the UAE to the International Criminal Court," Gargash wrote on his Twitter account. "People with knowledge are aware that this move aims to create noise, which is Qatar's favorite game," he said.

#### Egypt police kill 11 'terrorists'

CAIRO: Egyptian security forces killed 11 suspected "terrorist elements" during a raid on a hideout for militants in Ismailiya province providing support for militants in the northern Sinai, the interior ministry said yesterday. Police were pursuing leaders of "terrorist groups in North Sinai that aimed to carry out a series of hostile operations targeting important and vital buildings and Christian churches," a ministry statement said. Security forces were able to identify "a group of these elements and the hideouts they were using to hide, train, and store means of logistic support ahead of smuggling them to terrorist groups in North Sinai".

### Ivanka, feted in India, calls for closing gender gap in business

HYDERABAD, India: Ivanka Trump urged India yesterday to close its yawning gender gap in the job market, telling a business summit in her biggest foreign mission yet that this would bring huge economic benefits. US President Donald Trump's eldest daughter urged India to seize the untapped potential in women in a speech before Prime Minister Narendra

Modi and business leaders in Hyderabad. India is one of the world's fastest growing major economies but also has one of the lowest rates of female employment, a trend that has worsened over the last decade.

The World Bank has warned that the country must reverse a trend of falling women's participation in jobs if it is to achieve its ambition of double-digit growth. "Just consider, if India closes the labour force gender gap by half, your economy could grow by over \$150 billion dollars in the next three years," Trump told the Global Entrepreneurship Summit. "I encourage everyone here today to come together, to learn from each other, and to find new ways to lift the barriers in our societies so that women are free to innovate."

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HYDERABAD: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and advisor to the US president Ivanka Trump inaugurate the Global Entrepreneurship Summit yesterday. — AFP

### Israeli chess players could make history at Saudi tournament

JERUSALEM: Israeli chess players could make history by participating in a tournament in Saudi Arabia after the international chess governing body yesterday said it was pushing to allow it to happen. A spokesman for the Israel Chess Federation told AFP seven players had filed requests for visas to participate in the games to be held in Riyadh on Dec 26-30 as part of the world rapid and

blitz chess championships. Israel and Saudi Arabia have no official relations. The presence of Israelis there would be highly unusual, and comes as officials from the Jewish state increasingly hint at covert ties with the Sunni-ruled kingdom. Israel and Saudi Arabia share a common fear of Iran's attempts to increase its influence in the region.

Georgios Makropoulos, deputy president of the World Chess Federation (FIDE), said that the papers of the seven Israeli chess players - five men and two women - had been handed to the Saudi organizers "and the visa status is currently pending". "We are making a huge effort to assure that all players get their visas," Makropoulos said in a statement. The Israeli chess federation said it "supports FIDE's policy to hold the tournament in Saudi alongside FIDE's commitment to ensure the participation of Israelis would not be subject to limitations,"

spokesman Lior Aizenberg told AFP. "We expect the Saudis, aided by FIDE, to approve our requests for visas to play," he said.

Aizenberg noted the Israeli chess federation chairman Zvika Barkai had discussed the issue of the Saudi visas with Makropoulos as well as with FIDE President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, who recently visited Israel. A spokesman for the Israeli foreign ministry said he didn't believe there would be a problem for the Israelis to participate in the Riyadh games if the visas were granted. Israeli athletes often face difficulties when competing around the Middle East due to hostility toward their country. In a recent incident, an Iranian wrestler was lauded by his government after he intentionally lost an international bout at a tournament in Poland over the weekend to avoid having to face an Israeli opponent. — AFP

### Saudi 'Matchstick' TV host takes over state broadcaster

RIYADH: With a furrowed brow and wagging finger, Dawood Shirian for years skewered top officials on Saudi television, but now the firebrand host is taking over the country's state broadcaster. Deploying a pull-no-punches style rarely tolerated in Saudi Arabia's tightly controlled media landscape, Shirian spent nearly six years as the host of "Al-Thamina" (Eight O'Clock) on satellite broadcaster MBC.

Shirian - nicknamed "matchstick" for his combustible personality - was allowed to champion issues that are a potential lightning rod for public discontent, from joblessness to extremism. His career took on a new trajectory on Monday with his appointment as the head of the Saudi Broadcasting Corporation, as his legions of admir-

ers called for his return to Al-Thamina. His intentions as the new chief are unclear. But if his past is any indication, Shirian may be about to shake up the country's traditionally sedate state television and radio channels.

The primetime show garnered an avid following with its host's hard-hitting style of demanding accountability from officials, often berating them and sometimes chivvying them into action. In a recent episode, Shirian, 63, fumed over rising unemployment among Saudi engineers, airing testimonies from some with the highest grades forced to work as waiters, car washers and fish sellers. "Does the job market have no place for Saudi engineers?" Shirian asked angrily, waving print-outs from a government jobs website. "Where are the authorities?" he demanded.

Within minutes, the hashtag "Saudi engineers treated unfairly" started gaining traction on social media. Behind the scenes, the show's producers were inundated with hundreds of WhatsApp messages pouring in from people venting fury. A labor ministry official, caught like a deer in the headlights, sought to explain on the show that policy reforms were in the works to



RIYADH: A picture taken on Oct 24, 2017 shows MBC TV personality Dawood Shirian during an interview at MBC headquarters. — AFP

create jobs. "When?" Shirian interjected with a scowl. "The people are getting angry." MBC said Al-Thamina, which enjoys a mass following in Saudi Arabia - consistently registering top ratings typically seen by lifestyle

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