

News

Trump appeals for unity, talks tough...

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to serve," he said. "Tonight, I want to talk about what kind of future we are going to have, and what kind of nation we are going to be. All of us, together, as one team, one people, and one American family."

Trump's opening tone was uncharacteristically conciliatory, although it bridged no compromise on his drive to reduce immigration - which he painted as responsible for a plethora of social ills. He touched on a range of foreign policy issues - including, in an emotive moment, offering the spotlight to crippled North Korean amputee defector Ji Seong-ho, who waved his crutches in the air as he received a prolonged standing ovation. Trump warned that Pyongyang's "reckless" nuclear drive could "very soon" threaten the US homeland, while also eyeing the geopolitical challenge posed by adversaries China and Russia.

But Trump's State of the Union, the third longest on record at one hour 20 minutes, was overwhelmingly focused on domestic concerns. Among those looking on were dozens of cross-armed Democratic lawmakers, some decked in black to honor the victims of sexual harassment and still others wearing butterfly stickers in support of immigrants - two social issues that more than any others have roiled America in the age of Trump.

Also in the audience were members of Trump's own family including the first lady, Melania, who recently cancelled a joint trip to Davos, Switzerland and has not been seen with her husband in public since reports alleged he paid porn actress Stormy Daniels hush money over an affair, which the White House denies. Breaking with tradition, the first couple arrived separately to the Capitol, because, according to the first lady's spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham, she was accompanying guests.

Over the years the State of the Union address, a set piece of the American political calendar, has lost some of its impact and pizzazz. But the primetime address, watched by as many as 40 million Americans, was still a once-in-a-year opportunity for Trump to speak to the nation and mend his

sunken approval ratings, languishing around 40 percent. A CNN poll released afterward suggested people who watched the address were underwhelmed by it.

Seeking to enliven his own base, Trump spoke at length on the need for immigration reform, drawing hisses from the opposition as he equated immigrants with criminality and economic tension and spoke of "chain migration". For decades, he lamented, "open borders" had allowed "drugs and gangs to pour into" the United States. He again called for the construction of a border wall that remains unfunded in Congress. "They have allowed millions of low-wage workers to compete for jobs and wages against the poorest Americans. Most tragically, they have caused the loss of many innocent lives."

Two couples whose daughters were murdered by MS-13, a Salvadoran gang, were among those joining the first lady to watch the address. "The United States is a compassionate nation" he said, "but as president of the United States, my highest loyalty, my greatest compassion, and my constant concern is for America's children, America's struggling workers, and America's forgotten communities."

The 71-year-old real estate mogul and reality TV star touted a long bull run on Wall Street and improving growth rates, something the White House has dubbed a "Trump bump". "The stock market has smashed one record after another, gaining \$8 trillion in value," he said, even though that narrative suffered a setback Tuesday when stocks posted their biggest drop in eight months amid fears of a bubble.

Trump also lifted his economic gaze beyond the United States, calling for "fair" trade and declaring that "the era of economic surrender is over". "America has also finally turned the page on decades of unfair trade deals that sacrificed our prosperity and shipped away our companies, our jobs, and our wealth - our nation has lost its wealth but we're getting it back so fast."

And there was a partisan-tinged focus on terror, which had been a central message of his campaign. Trump vowed to keep the Guantanamo Bay prison open - anathema to Democrats and many Republicans. The CNN poll of people who watched the speech found 48 percent said they had a "very positive" impression of it. That compared to 57 percent after Barack Obama's first State of the Union address, the network said. Trump's number was the lowest since CNN first started conducting the poll in 1998, it added. — AFP

154,000 illegals in Kuwait; amnesty...

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He asked sponsors to hand over violators' passports so they can leave and take advantage of the amnesty, unless they are wanted in other cases.

He said the following categories of violators are allowed to leave during the grace period:

- Those whose regular or temporary residencies expired before Jan 24, 2018.
- Those who entered the country on a visit, residency, tourism or transit visa whose stay period expired before Jan 24, 2018.
- Those whose passports expired before Jan 24, 2018 but have valid residency permits, and wish to

leave the country.

• Newborns that are given residency permits sponsored by their family should refer to the residency affairs department to correct the newborn's status during the amnesty period.

• Those reported to have absconded before Jan 24, 2018 regardless of the type of residency they have.

• Those who absconded after Jan 4, 2016, whether working in the private or domestic sectors.

Hajeri said item 2 of the law says that those wishing to remain in the country must pay fines without being referred for questioning, then settle their status if they meet the conditions. He added item 4 of the ministerial decision says expats in violation of residency law who have administrative or judicial obstacles that keep them from leaving must go to the residency affairs department to discuss the conditions of getting a residency permit according to the legal rules set during the grace period.

Court delays expat health charges...

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He told the appeals court that the lower court overlooked his arguments and called for a correction to the judgement. The Assembly in 1995 issued a decision stating that the government cannot raise charges on public services without a law by the Assembly. That law did not make exceptions based on nationality.

Meanwhile, Minister of Social Affairs and Labour Hind Al-Sabeeh yesterday comfortably defeated a no-confidence motion by a big margin, with 29 MPs voting in her favor and only 13 lawmakers against. Only elected MPs are allowed to vote on no-confidence motions and Cabinet ministers are barred. The vote came in a special session following a brief debate in which two MPs spoke in her defense, while two others opposed her.

The no-confidence motion was filed last week by 10 MPs after a marathon grilling in which the minister was accused of committing administrative and financial violations. The minister denied the charges. MPs who supported Sabeeh yesterday said she has performed her duties in a good manner and clamped down on visa traders. Her opponents stressed that she has failed to check the influx of expatriate manpower into the country.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday he will be travelling to Geneva with a number of MPs to meet with officials of the International Parliamentary Union to defend Kuwait against complaints by a current and a former MP and by "Zionists". He was referring to a complaint filed by MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri against the jailing of two lawmakers and another complaint by former Shiite MP Abdulhameed Dashti, who has been living abroad since the past two years. Dashti tweeted yesterday statements against Ghanem and vowed to continue targeting him with more complaints.

Far-right figure embraces Islam over 'moral decline'

BERLIN: A member of Germany's far-right and anti-Muslim Alternative for Germany party (AfD) who recently converted to Islam said he did so in protest at what he sees as the "moral decline" of the Protestant church. Arthur Wagner, 48, until recently a leading party member in the state of Brandenburg, told the Bild newspaper yesterday that his decision was in part sparked by the church's acceptance of same-sex marriage and the presence of priests at gay pride marches.

"One of the reasons (for the conversion) is tied to changes that have taken place in the church, which no longer reflects my values," he told the daily. Explaining his decision, he singled out the church's position "with regard to the AfD, its support for marriage for all and the participation of pastors at Christopher Street Day, where there are children. It's unacceptable!" Christopher Street Day is an annual gathering of the LGBT community in several German and Swiss cities.



Arthur Wagner

Wagner's conversion is perhaps all the more surprising given that he formerly held an official position within the Protestant church. He converted in October but only announced the decision last week,

when he quit his leadership role in the AfD, although he remains a party member. His decision has not gone down well in the party, which is strongly anti-Islam. One of his local party colleagues, Kai Berger, said he was "very disappointed". "Many members are waiting for him to quit the party. Unfortunately our statutes do not allow us to kick him out," he said.

Wagner told Bild he had received several threats since announcing his decision. "Someone told me I should leave Germany before I start making bombs," he said. Wagner later told reporters at an impromptu news conference that he wanted his party colleagues to open up a dialogue with Muslims. "I call on our conservatives and nationalist conservatives: Turn on your brains - we have problems, we need to talk to each other," he said. — AFP

Kuwait to spend \$500bn on oil...

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"KPC is working with fast-changing variables and challenges locally and internationally, and we continue to focus on strategies that will transform Kuwait into a better position to deal with future challenges," he said. The forum brought together an international audience, attracting over 200 delegates from 20 countries including the United Kingdom, Japan and the United States.

Kuwait currently has a crude production capacity of around 3.1 million bpd, excluding some 250,000 bpd from the neutral zone with Saudi Arabia which has remained shut since Oct 2014. It plans to raise its output capacity to four million bpd by 2020. Adsani said the firm also plans to raise free natural gas production to 2.5 billion cubic feet a day by 2040 from just 200 million cubic

feet a day currently. Free gas production will reach half a billion cubic feet in April and one billion cubic feet in 2023, he said.

Kuwait also produces about 1.2 billion cubic feet a day of associated gas, which is produced along with crude oil. The state plans to raise its refining capacity to two million bpd by 2035 from less than 800,000 bpd now. Adsani said. Around 90 percent of Kuwait's state revenues come from oil. Kuwait amassed around \$600 billion in surpluses in the 16 years till 2014, when world prices were high.

For supplier nations, the new energy market poses significant challenges and opportunities, while oil and energy companies continue to consider changes in their business models and strategies for development. One of the key areas of discussion at the event was what to expect from the oil market in 2018. Will production cuts last and if so, will they balance the market; the Russian-Saudi cooperation; what to expect from shale and non-OPEC producers, plus other critical issues for the market. Also discussed was how to finance energy in a shifting market and longer-term investment strategies.

Fiscal strengths mask long-term

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Kuwait export blend has already averaged \$51.7/bbl in the fiscal year to date. Our projected surplus highlights the fact that, at around \$50/bbl, Kuwait has the lowest fiscal break-even Brent price in the GCC. With estimated sovereign net foreign assets at around 500 percent of GDP, it also has the largest fiscal and external buffers.

Our fiscal forecast still implies a financing need of nearly \$19 billion in FY18, as the government cannot spend most of the KIA investment income and is required by law to transfer 10 percent of its revenues (or around 4 percent of GDP) to the KIA's Reserve Fund for Future Generations. If, as we expect, Kuwait's parliament approves the new debt law increasing the sovereign borrowing cap to KD25 billion (\$83 billion), then a significant part of this could be met through more local and international bond issuance," the report said.

"The FY19 budget approved by the Cabinet this week proposes a broadly unchanged total spending allocation of KD20 billion (from KD19.9 billion in FY18), with a rising allocation for investment and energy subsidies but restrained spending elsewhere. However, despite likely

under-execution on capital spending, overspending is a risk as rising oil prices push up subsidy costs further, and limiting public sector hiring and wage growth may be politically difficult.

As Fitch noted when affirming Kuwait's sovereign rating in October, a generous welfare state and the public sector's large economic role present long-term challenges to the public finances. We estimate that the public-sector wage bill alone could grow by 6 percent of GDP over the next five years if the trend of absorbing new labor force entrants into the public sector persists," said Fitch.

"Kuwait's exceptionally strong balance sheet position, which reduces pressure to take action, and parliamentary opposition have led to slower fiscal reform than elsewhere in the GCC. Parliamentary questioning and no-confidence motions against ministers are common and led to the government's resignation in October 2017. We do not think the Cabinet reshuffle that followed will accelerate reform, and do not expect VAT or excise tax to be implemented this year.

The subsidy system remains largely unreformed. Petroleum prices were raised in October 2016 but remain the lowest in the GCC, and the immediate fiscal benefit has been consumed by rising oil prices. Phased utility price hikes came into force in last year, but prices remain low and have not directly affected most Kuwaiti households," the report concluded.

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