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Amir pardons several Kuwaitis convicted of various charges

Cabinet approves amnesty decrees • Speaker thanks Amir



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

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Cabinet yesterday approved draft Amir decrees which will pardon dozens of former MPs and political activists who had been convicted and sentenced to various jail terms, an official statement said. The statement was issued following an extraordinary meeting of the Cabinet chaired by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah.

The move came after several sessions of national dialogue called by HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in which the government, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and three opposition MPs took part. HH the Amir then invoked article 75 of the constitution, which authorizes him to pardon prisoners or reduce their sentences, and decided to pardon a number of Kuwaiti citizens convicted and sentenced to jail terms.

HH the Amir had assigned the Assembly speaker, prime minister and head of the judicial council Ahmad Al-Ajeel to set out conditions for the planned amnesty. The three submitted their first report on the issue to HH the Amir late last week. "The Council of Ministers approved the necessary draft decrees which will be referred to the Amir," the Cabinet statement said yesterday.

Under Kuwaiti law, the Cabinet approves decrees and HH the Amir officially issues them. No details were published on the content of the decrees or the names of people who will be pardoned. But local media cited unnamed senior government sources as saying that around 70 people will be pardoned, topped by a dozen opposition former lawmakers and activists who have been living

in exile in Turkey since the summer of 2018 to escape verdicts of jail terms passed against them for storming the National Assembly building following an anti-corruption protest in 2011.

They include former prominent opposition MPs Musallam Al-Barrak, Faisal Al-Mislem, Jamaan Al-Harbash and others. The list is expected to include some convicts in Kuwait. More people will be pardoned later as the three-man high-level panel is still considering more cases, according to Ghanem, who thanked HH the Amir profusely.

The Cabinet also expressed its thanks and appreciation to HH the Amir for his gesture. It also thanked the Assembly speaker, head of the judiciary and members of the Assembly for their efforts. "The Council of Ministers is confident that this move will pave the way for fruitful cooperation between the legislative and executive authorities in accordance with the principles of the constitution," said the Cabinet statement.

Last Thursday, the speaker told reporters that the panel had submitted its first report and recommendations they had reached unanimously. "Things are now in the hands of the Amir," he said. He added there will be more reports as more cases of convicts will be discussed. "I was honored today, along with the heads of the judicial and executive authorities, with a meeting with His Highness the Amir to present the report, including the recommendations, to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf," Ghanem said. He indicated other reports concerning "crucial and complex" issues would be delivered to HH the Amir after "studying them", indicating that these matters could not be examined in a short period of time.

Iraqi PM urges restraint after home attacked

BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi escaped unhurt from an "assassination attempt" in which an explosives-packed drone hit his Baghdad residence early yesterday, a new escalation in the country's post-election turmoil. US President Joe Biden condemned the "terrorist attack" and said he was "relieved" Kadhemi was not injured, while Iraqi President Barham Saleh called the attack, which was not immediately claimed by any group, an attempted "coup against the

constitutional system".

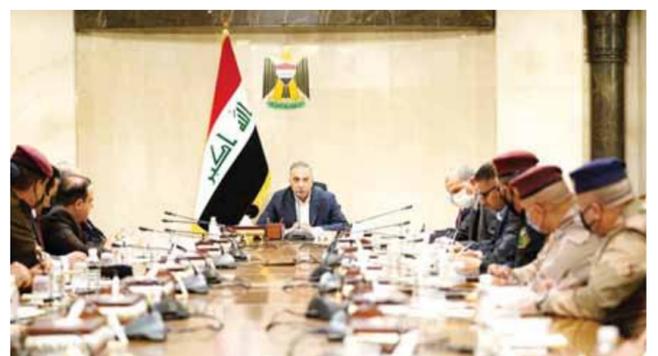
Kadhemi, aged 54 and in power since May 2020, appealed for "calm and restraint" before chairing a meeting at his office in the high-security Baghdad Green Zone, where the overnight attack took place. Three drones were launched from near a Tigris River bridge but two were intercepted, according to security sources, who said two bodyguards were wounded.

Gunfire rang out and smoke rose from the Green Zone after the strike, which the premier's office labelled a "failed assassination attempt". Photos issued by Kadhemi's office showed debris strewn on the ground below a damaged exterior stairway and a door that had been dislodged. Kadhemi said in a short video that "my residence has been the target of a cowardly assault. Praise God, I am fine."

The attack came two days after security forces clashed with supporters of Iran-backed parties that lost support in the October 10 parliament election and who have charged they were the victims of vote irregularities. The Conquest (Fatah) Alliance, the political arm of the pro-Iran Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary network, suffered a substantial decline in seats, leading it to denounce the outcome as "fraud". After the drone attack, Qais Al-Khazali, the head of Assaib Ahl al-Haq, one of the main pro-Iran groups of the Hashed, called for the perpetrators to be "brought to justice".

The United States, which has around 2,500 troops in the country, said it was "relieved to learn the Prime Minister was unharmed".

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BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi heads a meeting yesterday, hours after his residence was targeted by a drone attack. — AFP

US reopening borders after 20 months

WASHINGTON: The United States reopens its land and air borders today to foreign visitors fully vaccinated against COVID-19, ending 20 months of restrictions on travel from around the globe that separated families, hobbled tourism and strained diplomatic ties. The ban, imposed by former president Donald Trump in early 2020 and upheld by his successor Joe Biden, has been widely criticized and become emblematic of the upheavals caused by the pandemic. The restrictions were particularly unpopular in Europe and US neighbors Canada and Mexico.

In an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus, US borders were closed after March 2020 to travelers from large parts of the world, including the European Union, Britain and China, India and Brazil. Overland visitors from Mexico and Canada were also banned. The months of restrictions affecting hundreds of millions of people helped fuel both personal and economic suffering brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's been so hard," Alison Henry, 63, told AFP. "I just want to see my son." The British woman plans to fly Monday to see her son in New York, after 20 months of separation. Families on both sides of the Atlantic are eager to finally reunite with their loved ones. Although travel from the United States to Europe has been possible since the summer, foreign US residents holding certain visas have had no guarantee of being able to reenter the country.

To cope with surging demand, airlines have increased the number of transatlantic flights. They also plan to use larger planes, as the easing of restrictions represents a major boost for a sector plunged into crisis by the pandemic. Along the border with Mexico, many cities in the big US states of Texas and California have seen significant economic struggles due to anti-COVID trade restrictions. Local economies are also impatiently waiting for a return to normalcy. Meanwhile, Canadian seniors will be able to resume their annual car trips to Florida in order to escape the bitter northern winters.

Lifting the travel ban will affect more than 30 countries. But entry to the United States will not be totally unregulated: US authorities plan to closely monitor travelers' vaccination status and will still

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Iran launches military drills near oil lanes

TEHRAN: The Iranian army began yesterday drills in the southwest of the country, near the strategic Strait of Hormuz, where it said a stand-off with the US recently took place. "The exercise of the army of the Islamic Republic of Iran on an area of more than one million square kilometers east of the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman and north of the Indian Ocean has begun," state television said.

It broadcast images of the military exercises which involved helicopters, tanks, drones, ships and speedboats. "This exercise is a serious warning to our enemies and those who have ill intentions towards Iran," the spokesman for the drills, Admiral Mahmoud Moussavi, was quoted as saying by Irib News Agency.

The elite Revolutionary Guard Corps announced on Wednesday it had thwarted an attempt by the US Navy to seize a vessel carrying its oil in the Sea of Oman the previous week. But US defense officials



Iranian soldiers participate in a military exercise on the shore of the Sea of Oman in the coastal region of Baluchistan. — AFP

offered a contrasting version of events, saying the Iranians had seized the tanker, while US forces "monitored" the incident without engaging.

The Strait of Hormuz is a chokepoint for global oil shipments, where US and Iranian naval vessels have faced off in the past. The latest tanker incident took place amid protracted efforts to revive a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers that the US unilaterally pulled out of in 2018

under then-President Donald Trump. The deal would offer Iran vital relief from debilitating sanctions in return for severe limits in its nuclear activities.

In 2019, a series of attacks on tankers in the Gulf threatened to further drive US-Iran tensions. Nuclear talks are expected to resume on November 29 in Vienna, after they had been suspended since June after the election of Iran's hardline President Ebrahim Raisi. — AFP