



6 No joke: Indian comedian Das under nationalist fire



12 E-buggies replace horse carts at Jordan's Petra



16 Lakers' Staples Center to be renamed in \$700m deal



Barrak returns to Kuwait, thanks Amir for pardon

Ex-MP Tahous also returns • Only ex-MP Mislem remains in Turkey

By B Izzak



KUWAIT: Former opposition MPs Musallam Al-Barrak (left) and Khaled Al-Tahous are welcomed by supporters as they arrived in Kuwait yesterday after being pardoned by the Amir. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Fouad Al-Shaikh



KUWAIT: Prominent opposition leader and former MP Musallam Al-Barrak yesterday returned to Kuwait after three and a half years in exile following an Amiri pardon, as hundreds of his supporters gave him a hero's welcome. Barrak was accompanied on the same flight from Istanbul by former MP Khaled Al-Tahous and three activists who were also given Amiri pardons as part of a national dialogue to resolve political problems.

Barrak, Tahous and the activists thanked HH the Amir for pardoning them, and Barrak in particular wished the Amir good health. Dressed in a grey suit without a tie and with a Kuwaiti flag draped over his shoulders, Barrak and his companions kneeled and kissed the soil of Kuwait immediately after disembarking the Kuwait Airways aircraft. Hundreds of supporters had waited for the returnees at T4 terminal at Kuwait Airport, but they had to move quickly to nearby Sheikh Saad Airport, where Barrak and the activists were taken.

Continued on Page 2

Robots, big data as Gulf bets on AI



DUBAI: In this photo taken on Oct 2, 2021, visitors walk past a robot outside the Dutch pavilion at the Dubai Expo 2020. — AFP

DUBAI: Robots puttering around Dubai's hi-tech Expo site could be a sign of things to come for the Gulf, where new cities are being built from scratch with artificial intelligence at their core. The 5G-enabled Expo, covering an area twice the size of Monaco, will remain as a "city of the future" and tech industry hub, Expo's chief told AFP before its grand opening last month.

But the \$7 billion project, featuring robots that greet visitors and can be used to order food, is not alone in the wealthy Gulf, where petrodollars are being invested heavily in a post-oil future. Neighboring Saudi Arabia is lavishing \$500 billion on NEOM, a brand new, next-generation Red Sea tech center that will offer ultra-connectivity to its planned population of one million-plus, and is trialing airborne taxis.

AI is also at the heart of other Saudi developments including the Red Sea Project, a new tourist area that will use smart systems to monitor environmental impacts and visitor movements. Analysts say the Gulf monarchies are willing to bet big on AI, knowing they must move away from their reliance on fossil fuel industries and become more active in tech, tourism and other areas.

"You've got very forward (-looking), somewhat risk-loving leadership that sees the need to transform," said Kaveh Vessali, a partner at consultancy firm PwC Middle East. "I think that's just completely the opposite of what I see in the rest of the world." Artificial intelligence courses in Bahrain primary schools, the UAE's plans for

Continued on Page 2

Free KPTC bus service to, from Mubarakiya

KUWAIT: Free transportation by bus will be offered to and from Mubarakiya from four stops in the capital district, Kuwait Public Transport Company (KPTC) said yesterday. CEO of KPTC Mansour Al-Saad told KUNA during the launch ceremony of the service, attended by governor of the Capital district Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-

Sabah, that the service will operate from 10:00 am to 10:00 pm with trips available every 30 minutes.

The four stations are located in the parking lot of Souq Sharq, the yard near Jahra roundabout and Sheraton hotel, Sanabel Complex, and the ministries complex in Mirqab, he revealed. Saad added that the service will run until March 2022, and will be renewed if there is considerable demand. Hopefully, the service will lessen traffic jams in Mubarakiya, indicated the KPTC CEO, pointing out that the buses included in this service are unique in shape, color and passenger capacity. — KUNA



KUWAIT: A free bus service to Mubarakiya is launched during a ceremony yesterday. — KUNA

UAE seeks to bolster arms industry

DUBAI: Drones, guided missiles, simulators: the United Arab Emirates is on the offensive to develop its defense industry in a bid to wean itself off dependence on imports. Khalid Al-Breiki heads one of five clusters of the Emirati defense consortium EDGE, formed two years ago and bringing together 25 Emirati arms firms in a bid to develop "national capacities".

According to him, the Abu Dhabi-based defense consortium is an indicator of the "maturity of our industry in the UAE".

EDGE became the first Middle Eastern company to rank among the top 25 military firms in the world last year, with gross sales of over \$5 billion, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. "We realized that we needed to bring our capabilities under one roof to focus on what we want to manufacture and service in the country, and now we can go global with that," Breiki told AFP. "We have a start-up mentality, but with an economy of scale."

Continued on Page 2



DUBAI: This picture taken on Nov 14, 2021 shows a view of the Desert Sting DS-16 precision-guided glide weapon by Halcon, a part of the EDGE advanced technology group, at the 2021 Dubai Airshow. — AFP

Schools shut as Delhi, Lahore choke in smog

NEW DELHI: India's capital has shut schools and coal plants as it battles dangerous levels of air pollution in the region that yesterday also left Lahore in neighboring Pakistan choking on acrid smog. Air quality has worsened across northern India and adjacent parts of Pakistan in recent years, as industrial pollutants, smoke from seasonal crop burn-off, and colder winter

temperatures coalesce into toxic smog.

Delhi is consistently ranked the world's worst capital for air quality, with levels of pollutants last week reaching more than 30 times the maximum limit recommended by the World Health Organization. The city on Tuesday ordered the closure until the end of the month of six of 11 coal-fired power plants surrounding the metropolis in a bid to tackle the filthy air.

The move comes after India led the charge at the weekend to weaken anti-coal pledges at the UN COP26 climate summit, with critics saying it prioritized economic growth over the planet's future.

Continued on Page 2



LAHORE: Vehicles make their way over a bridge amid heavy smog yesterday. — AFP