



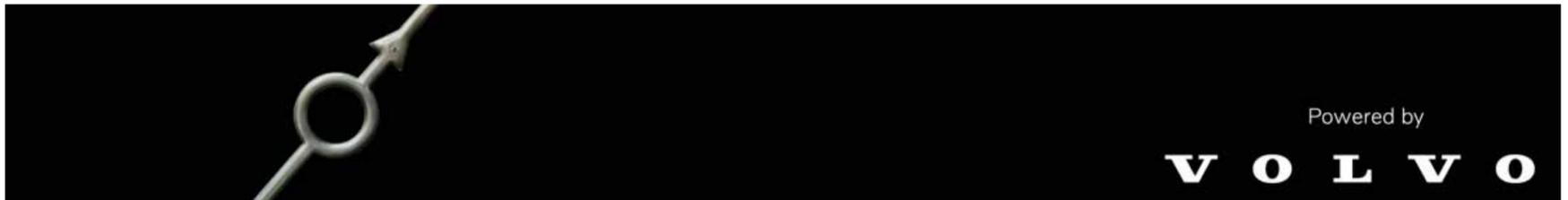
2 Kuwaiti artists remember late Amir with paintings



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Amir calls for dialogue to resolve all problems

National reconciliation talks aim to strengthen democracy

Health curbs, distancing to continue

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The health ministry yesterday urged the public to continue to observe health measures, including physical distancing at mosques, even as the coronavirus situation in the country has substantially improved. The call by the ministry came a day after Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said life in the country has returned to normal after months of closures because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ministry called on the public in a statement to continue following health and other precautionary measures currently for all activities, especially in closed places "including places of worship", and denied that such restrictions have been dropped. The statement said social distancing, covering the mouth and nose with a mask and sanitizing and cleaning hands do not obstruct people from carrying out their daily tasks and play a key role in returning to normal life. It said technical teams at the ministry will continue to assess the pandemic situation in the country.

KUWAIT has reported less than 100 new coronavirus cases for 25 days in a row and fewer than 50 daily cases in the past nine days. The number of patients in hospitals has dropped to only 39, including nine in intensive care units.

The fatwa - religious edict - department at the ministry of Islamic affairs issued a ruling yesterday saying that worshippers must continue to maintain distancing at mosques, which are attended by both vaccinated and unvaccinated worshippers, in order to safeguard public health against the coronavirus pandemic.

The fatwa said health authorities have insisted that physical distancing by worshippers will protect them against the disease, especially with the presence of a large number of elderly people in mosques who are at high risk of contracting the disease. The fatwa came after calls by MPs and religious scholars intensified to end distancing at mosques.

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday issued directives to start a national dialogue between the government and the National Assembly with the aim to resolve all problems. Amiri Diwan Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah said in a statement that the dialogue aims to unify efforts, strengthen cooperation and direct all capabilities to "serve the country, discard differences and resolve all problems".

He said HH the Amir expressed hope that the dialogue will pave the way to strengthening democracy in Kuwait. A number of opposition MPs had already expressed support for the dialogue and national reconciliation, but linked it to pardoning a number of former opposition MPs and activists who

have been living in exile in Turkey for over three years.

Sheikh Mohammad said HH the Amir urged both sides to pool their efforts and resources towards putting aside their differences and resolving all problems in serving the interests of citizens and the dear homeland. He added HH the Amir looks forward to the dialogue realizing its aspired objectives in pushing forward the march of democratic action, which is a source of pride for everybody, within the framework of the constitution and national principles.

Sheikh Mohammad prayed to Almighty Allah to protect the generous people of Kuwait and maintain the security, prosperity and welfare of the country under the wise leadership of HH the Amir and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-



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

Jaber Al-Sabah. The Amiri Diwan statement did not provide further details on who will participate in the dialogue and when it will be held.

News in brief

Driving license ban mullied

KUWAIT: Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah yesterday called for a study to stop issuing driving licenses to foreign residents of Kuwait in a bid to limit traffic jams. Sheikh Faisal made the statement during a tour of Ahmadi traffic department to review preparations for the new academic year. — MOI

No speeding on green

KUWAIT: The interior ministry yesterday warned drivers must follow the road speed limit even while crossing the green traffic light at intersections. For instance, if the speed limit of the road is 45km/h, then the driver must not exceed that speed limit while crossing the green signal. Traffic cameras will take photos of speeding cars crossing the green signal as well as cars running the red light. — MOI

Ban on fans in stadiums

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Sports announced yesterday that a ban on fans attending football matches in stadiums has been reinstated until authorities come up with a comprehensive plan that guarantees their safety as per health protocols. The decision came following events witnessed during the Amir Cup semifinal match between Qadisiya and Arabi on Monday, during which fans failed to observe social distancing, the authority explained.

Grilling delay 'dangerous'

KUWAIT: Opposition MP Hasan Jowhar yesterday said the decision by the National Assembly to delay grillings against the prime minister until the end of 2022 represents "the most dangerous political crime in Kuwait's history". Speaking at a conference organized by the "Bloc of Six MPs", Jowhar said it is not possible to accept shielding the premier against political questioning, adding such a measure is even worse than the suspension of the Assembly in 1976 and 1986 in violation of the constitution.

Bouden named Tunisia's first female PM

TUNIS: Tunisia's president yesterday named geologist Najla Bouden as the country's first ever female prime minister-designate, to form a government with limited executive clout after the president seized wide-ranging powers two months ago. Bouden, a university lecturer and political unknown, will take office after President Kais Saied on July 25 sacked the government of Hichem Mechichi, suspended parliament, lifted MPs' immunity and took over the judiciary.

His moves followed months of political deadlock in the face of a pressing economic crisis and mounting coronavirus deaths. While some Tunisians have supported his decisions against a reviled political class, he has faced repeated calls to name a government. Yesterday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke to Saied, where she stressed that "a return to parliamentary democracy in dialogue with all political actors is essential", her office said in a statement.

Last week, Saied extended the suspension of parliament and moved to rule by decree, suspending parts of the country's post-revolution constitution. Saied's office yesterday published a video of him meeting Bouden, and charging her with presenting a cabinet "in the coming hours or days". The president, who will head the

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TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied meets newly-appointed Prime Minister Najla Bouden yesterday. — AFP

Iran, Saudi Arabia hold new round of talks in Iraq

BAGHDAD: Regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran have met again in Iraq, several local sources said yesterday, as talks aiming to ease tensions have continued under Iran's ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi. Iran and Saudi Arabia, on opposing sides in multiple Middle East conflicts, have been engaged in talks since April at the highest level since

cutting ties in 2016.

The discussions, hosted by Iraq as it seeks to act as a regional mediator, were launched under Iran's former, moderate president Hassan Rouhani, who was replaced in August by Raisi. The talks have led to "serious progress" regarding Gulf security, Tehran's foreign ministry spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Sept 23.

The latest round of talks was confirmed by three Iraqi sources, all speaking on condition they not be named. "An Iranian official met with a Saudi official in Baghdad, following previous meetings between the two countries," one source told AFP, confirming the talks took place in recent days. A government official and a source close to the government confirmed the

meeting, without providing more details. US ally Saudi Arabia and Washington's arch-foe Iran are at odds over many regional issues, including the wars in Yemen and Syria.

Riyadh also has concerns about Iran's nuclear program, despite the Islamic republic's insistence it is pursuing only "peaceful" nuclear technology. Saudi King Salman said in his recent speech by video conference to the UN General Assembly that "we hope that our talks will lead to tangible results that would build trust" and revive bilateral "cooperation". He again called on Tehran to "cease all forms of support" for armed groups in the region and reaffirmed the kingdom's support for "international efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons". — AFP

Smuggler hides 1 kg gold paste inside body

NEW DELHI: A smuggler who stashed nearly one kilo of gold paste in his rectum to get the precious metal past Indian customs has been arrested, officials said yesterday. India is the world's second-largest gold consumer and experts say smuggling has increased in recent years, including by converting

the precious metal into paste form. The mule was detained on Monday after a security official noticed the "presence of metal in a body cavity" at Imphal airport in the northeastern state of Manipur.

The man, who was bound for New Delhi, was taken for questioning but "could not reply satisfactorily", the Central Industrial Security Force said in a news release. Officials then took him to the medical examination room where an X-ray of his lower body revealed four capsules filled with gold paste weighing over 900 gm. The value of the haul is around 4.2 million rupees (around \$57,000), the statement added.

Demand for gold peaks in the final months of the year in India as the wedding season gets going and preparations are made for the major Hindu festivals of Diwali and Dussehra. Manipur borders Bangladesh, which experts say has emerged as a major route for smuggled bullion into India. Smugglers have become more creative of late, with authorities discovering gold bars sewn in clothes or hidden in oral cavities, and some using wheelchairs to conceal their illicit cargo. In August, the Indian Gold Policy Centre said 300 tons of gold is estimated to be smuggled every year into the country, leading to huge revenue losses for the government. — AFP



The recovered gold paste packs.