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Assembly to debate grilling of foreign minister

Protesters rally for women's rights, freedoms

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Over 150 people gathered in Irada Square in front of the National Assembly yesterday to protest against the violation of women's rights and freedoms. Participants held placards in English and Arabic with slogans including "Kuwait is a civil country ruled by the constitution", "Personal freedom is secured by article 30 of the constitution" and "No future for a nation without equity", among others.

Ibtihal Al-Khateeb, political activist and teacher at Kuwait University, said the attendees gathered to defend freedoms in general and women's freedoms in particular. "These include simple issues such as practicing sports by women to serious issues like joining the army. We should deliver a message that freedoms of all kinds are among basic human rights, and if we let go of small rights, our bigger rights will be abandoned," she said.

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KUWAIT: Activists rally in support of women's rights outside the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The education ministry yesterday decided to extend the midyear school break by two weeks, with public and private Arabic schools to reopen on March 6. The postponement came partly as part of efforts to combat the spread of the coronavirus. This will allow students and the teaching staff to enjoy the national holidays and the Israa and Meraj religious holiday before going back to school. The decision came despite a sharp drop in the number of coronavirus cases, which declined from a peak of over 6,900 cases on January 28 to just over 4,200 cases on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly holds a regular session today and is expected to debate a grilling filed by MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri against Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah over alleged failure to perform his duties. The minister has the right to demand a delay of the debate, but the Assembly should vote on such a request.

But Muwaizri said yesterday he is confident the minister will face the grilling today and answer a series of questions. The lawmaker alleged that the minister has failed to protect Kuwait's political and security interests abroad and failed to stop squandering of public funds at agencies under his supervision.

The Assembly is also scheduled to debate a draft law stipulating to grant tens of thousands of stateless people, known as bedoons, their basic humanitarian rights like free education, healthcare and jobs in both the private and public sectors. Such rights should continue to be offered until the issue of bedoons is resolved, according to the bill.

News in brief

Kuwait rewards frontliners

KUWAIT: The government has started to disburse incentives to frontliners including health workers as reward for the selfless services they rendered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Doctors, nurses and all paramedical staff working in the ministry of health began to receive their rewards from Sunday. The government has earmarked KD 660 million in rewards for front-line workers.

Australia to reopen borders

SYDNEY: Australia will reopen its borders to tourists from Feb 21. Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced yesterday, ending some of the world's strictest and longest-running pandemic travel restrictions "If you're double vaccinated, we look forward to welcoming you back to Australia," he said. In recent months, rules have been gradually relaxed for Australians, long-term residents and students. — AFP

Iraq presidential vote postponed

BAGHDAD: Iraq's parliament yesterday indefinitely postponed a scheduled vote for the republic's president after most major political blocs boycotted the session. The sweeping no-show deepens a political crisis in the war-scarred country which, almost four months after a general election, still hasn't chosen a new prime minister. — AFP

Antiquities returned to Iraq

BAGHDAD: More than 300 ancient cuneiform writing tablets were returned to Iraq yesterday from a private Lebanese museum, as part of Baghdad's widespread efforts to restore antiquities looted during years of war. Sealed wooden boxes transported the 331 tablets bearing ancient cuneiform script from the Nabu Museum in northern Lebanon to Baghdad. — AFP

Morocco lays Rayan to rest

IGHRANE, Morocco: Moroccans yesterday attended the funeral of Rayan, a five-year-old boy who spent five days trapped down a well, sparking a vast rescue operation that gripped the world but ended in tragedy. The boy had fallen down a narrow, 32-m dry well last Tuesday, sparking a complex earth-moving operation to try to reach him without triggering a landslide.

Well-wishers had flooded social media with messages of sympathy and

prayers that he would be brought out alive, but their hopes were dashed. On Saturday night, crowds had cheered as rescue workers cleared away the final handfuls of soil to reach him, after the marathon digging operation in the village of Ighrane in northern Morocco's impoverished Rif mountains.

But the joy turned to grief when the royal cabinet of the North African nation announced that the boy was dead. King Mohammed VI called the parents to voice his condolences. The child's body was taken to a military hospital in the capital Rabat, accompanied by his parents. Yesterday it was transported to the Douar Zaouia cemetery near his village, where

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BAB BERRED, Morocco: Moroccans bury five-year-old Rayan Oram in the village of Ighrane in Morocco's rural northern province of Chefchaouen yesterday. — AFP

Protests over classroom hijab ban in India

UDUPI, India: A ban on Islamic headscarves at schools has prompted an outcry among Muslims in southern India, with large crowds taking to the streets yesterday to protest against the restrictions. The standoff in Karnataka state has galvanized fears among the minority community about what they say is increasing persecution under the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Students at a government-run high school were told not to wear hijabs last month, an edict that soon spread to at least two other educational institutions in the state. "It's discriminatory in nature and also it's against the rights that are provided under the constitution of India," Sumayya Roushan, president of the Girls Islamic Organization Karnataka, said at a press conference yesterday. Roushan said the ban violated "a personal choice that the students are entitled to, which doesn't... harm any other person".



KUNDAPUR, India: The principal talks with students of a pre-university college who arrived wearing hijabs in Karnataka's Udupi district yesterday. — AFP

Social media footage showed hundreds of people gathered on roads and waving Indian flags in at least two towns in Karnataka, the latest in several days of demonstrations held to condemn the bans. One of the schools has since partially yielded, allowing its female Muslim students to attend class with a hijab but instructing them to sit in separate classrooms, according to local media.

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Spinal cord implant helps paralyzed patients walk again

TOKYO: In 2017, Michel Roccati was in a motorbike accident that left his lower body completely paralyzed. In 2020, he walked again, thanks to a breakthrough new spinal cord implant. The implant sends electrical pulses to his muscles, mimicking the action of the brain, and could one day help people with severe spinal injuries stand, walk and exercise.

It builds on long-running research into using electrical pulses to improve quality of life for people with spinal cord injuries, including a 2018 study by the same team that helped people with partial lower-body paralysis walk again. "It was a very emotional experience," Roccati told journalists of the first time the electrical pulses were activated and he took a step.

He was one of three patients involved in the study, published yesterday in the journal Nature Medicine, all of them unable to move their lower bodies after accidents.

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