

Kuwait promotes Arab interests as well as its own: Sheikh Nasser

Cabinet convenes, discusses domestic and other issues

KUWAIT: The cabinet held its regular meeting yesterday at Seif Palace presided by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad and discussed an array of local, regional and international issues. Deputy Prime Minister and State Minister for Cabinet and

Parliament Affairs Mohammad Dhaifallah Sharar reported that the ministers started with a review of a letter to His Highness the Amir from the President of The Cameroon Republic Paul Biya on cooperation and ties.

Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah then reviewed the results of his recent visit to Brazil as representative of the Amir for the Arab-Latin summit. He discussed the resolutions, recommendations and views of attending leaders on political, cultural, economic and other issues. Then there was the report of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Kuwait Stock Exchange and guidelines to preserve and ensure transparency. Minister of Commerce Abdullah Al-Taweel reviewed measures that constitute an infrastructure for proper and transparent KSE performance. This included legislation, strategy and authority. The report was referred to the Legal Affairs

Committee for consideration prior to implementation of recommendations. Another report that was discussed was the Ministry of Energy's report on water consumption status. Energy Minister Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad reviewed measures the ministry intends to implement to counter the problem of increased consumption that exceeds production of potable water. He also discussed public response and cooperation with the campaign to ration water consumption and keep water reserves at their highest. He said the ministry pleads with the public to best use water resources to avoid strict involuntary measures to cut and

regulate consumption. There was also the usual discussion of National Assembly Affairs and parliament agenda. The ministers concluded their discussions with review of political reports in view of recent and current Arab and international developments. * Meanwhile, Minister of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Nasser Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said in an interview with the Jordanian newspaper Al-Dustoor that Kuwait strives to look out for Arab interests as well as its own. He noted the increasing ties between Jordan and Kuwait with a reference he made to growing Kuwaiti investments in the Jordanian economy. Turning to Kuwait's positions vis-a-vis Arab issues, he empha-

sized Kuwait's support of the Palestinian people and praised Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas's efforts at bringing about implementation of the Sharm El-Sheikh accords and the road map to peace. On Iraq, he said Kuwait sought security and stability for that country and much needed prosperity in years ahead. Kuwait, he added, has done a great deal since the collapse of the former Iraqi regime to assist Iraq to get up on its own feet and be master of its own destiny. While Sheikh Nasser indicated that recent terrorist acts in Kuwait were perpetrated by a select few and that the country enjoyed total security, he also affirmed the fact that Kuwait was not being in any

danger from any outside threats. On the question of granting political rights to Kuwaiti women so as to run for a seat and vote at the National Assembly, he underscored the fact that such an aspiration was an Amiri wish that should be taken seriously by lawmakers. As long as Kuwaiti women could not take part in the National Assembly, the democratic process would be lame and not whole, he said. He hoped that in the next round of voting on women's participation as lawmakers in the National Assembly, women would get the required votes from lawmakers to work side-by-side with men for the ultimate well-being of society. —Kuna



Indian Ambassador Swashpawan Singh presents a plaque.



Sageer Trikarpur

Indian envoy vows to solve issues of unpaid workers

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Aware of the latest uproar of some expatriates workers in Kuwait wrought by unpaid salaries and other labour related issues, Indian Ambassador Swashpawan Singh cautioned his countrymen not to be misguided by others, but rather present their issues at their embassy for legal consultations and promised they would do all it can to solve their problems. Inaugurating the third anniversary meeting and 5,000 plus membership achievement celebration of Kuwait Kerala Muslim Association (KKMA) recently, at Indian Central School in Jleeb, the ambassador urged his countrymen to follow rules as they have been doing ever since and should be cautious enough to act and respect Kuwaiti laws. "We are here as their guests so we need to abide by their rules," the ambassador added.

On the other hand,

Ambassador Singh lauded its countrymen for its loyalty and dedication to their jobs, as many employers have noted him the utmost approval for their work-force. Correspondingly, the ambassador commended activities of KKMA and noted their transparency and well-organised plan. Ambassador Singh presented KKMA's congratulatory plaque to Mohamed Ghareeb Hatem, in appreciation of receiving an honorary doctorate degree from Cheshire University, in London for his contribution in publishing history of Arab region. Hatem is the Chairman of Indo Arab Relations Committee of KKMA. Singh also presented an appreciation award to Shahul Hameed, a member of KKMA and a great singer of Indian community in Kuwait who is leaving for good to India.

Earlier, Sageer Trikarpur, President of KKMA presented the public report of the associ-

ation. He narrated activities conducted by the association in the past three years and gave an account of aid provided to its members and community. Sageer explained that nearly one million Indian rupees were spent in various support activities for the community and members. This includes, family benefit schemes, members welfare scheme, student adoption program, and low cost housing and relief aid for needy poor. KKMA is the largest non-profit welfare organisation of Indian nationals in Kuwait. The association was established on December 16, 2001 with a mission to aid and secure development of its members who are mainly low salaried and middle-income group of Indian nationals working in Kuwait. KKMA currently has 14 units in different parts of Kuwait having unit and zonal level committees to look after its activities.

KUWAIT DIGEST

Straight talk - or its lack - in Kuwaiti politics

By Raymond Barrett
Kuwait Times Exclusive

Trying to get a straight answer is always difficult whenever politicians are involved. The recent elections in the United Kingdom have shown that straight talk is a rare commodity. Tony Blair's exact views on the contentious issue of Britain joining the Euro will not be definite until he finds out what the majority of the people think, through a referendum scheduled during his third term in office. Despite the fact that representative bodies throughout the world deal with issues that generally require a Yes or No answer, they manage to constantly create situations where uncertainty, rather than clarity, is the order of the day. The same point holds true in Kuwaiti politics, where a May 2nd vote in parliament on allowing women to vote and stand for office in forthcoming municipal elections ended inconclusively. Though 29 deputies voted in favour and only 2 voted against the motion, the abstention of 29 others meant that the necessary quorum for the bill to carry wasn't reached. This large number of abstentions (a de facto No vote) by Islamist and tribal MPs must in part be political gamesmanship in the face of previous warnings from the

Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah that parliament could be dissolved if such a move was deemed to be in the best interest of the state. Even the result was interpreted differently by different sides. Those that opposed the motion announced that it had been defeated; while the Speaker of the House Jassem Al-Khorafi declared that the motion was "neither accepted nor rejected." Another vote was then rescheduled to take place May 16. An additional inconsistency present in the Kuwaiti political firmament at the moment is the issue of political parties. Some groups have interpreted the constitution as allowing freedom of political association even though there are laws prohibiting the formation of political parties. In January, Al-Ummah (the Nation) became the first declared political party in Kuwait. Prior to this, the nearest thing to political parties in Kuwait was a selection of societies and interest groups. Like a child dipping its toe into the water to gauge the temperature, commentators have interpreted this move by Al-Ummah as a test to see how the government would react. After an initial period of inactivity, the government's response has been firmer than many would have imagined. The founding members were interrogated recently by the authorities and subsequently charged with a litany of

offences, some carrying the possibility of up to five-ten years' imprisonment. Just as the existence of this political entity is a grey area, it remains to be seen exactly how keen the government is in following through with these charges. It may be current actions are designed simply to intimidate and neutralise potential opposition for the current bill advocating women's suffrage. An even grander inconsistency exists in the spread of democracy and liberalism, both in Kuwait and the Middle East as a whole. The greatest misunderstanding that exists in the West on this issue is that these two ideas are somehow mutually inclusive. Kuwait is a country where the ruling elite are far more liberal than the majority of the people they govern. There are two separate strains in Kuwaiti society at the moment, often denoted as "liberal" and "tribal", and are generally characterised by their attitudes towards the participation of women in politics. The argument that an increase in the level of public representation through elections will then lead to more liberal governments is a complete misnomer. Since the Gulf War in 1991, Kuwait has had a far more influential parliament and active participatory democracy than before the invasion. What has been the result? Kuwait University which was once co-educational now sees gender segregation, visiting Lebanese singers are protested against before they perform and, as mentioned earlier, the first political party in Kuwait is a Salafist organisation, which adheres to a strict, traditional interpretation of Islam. Today, the Kuwaiti parliament is scheduled to vote again on this issue of women voting in the municipal elections. It remains to be seen if the government's recent crackdown on Al-Ummah will nudge any opponents of the government-sponsored bill in a different direction. Regardless of the outcome, these elections will take place in June and it will be too late for women to register as candidates. All across the country at the moment, you can see election posters with the photographs of those campaigning for local office. Whether female candidates join these men at some time in the future remains to be seen.

LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

Abortion: The unspoken misery in Kuwait



By Muna Al-Fuzai

Think of it as an argumentative issue not locally but globally. There are a multitude of views on the matter. Some are in favour and others oppose it. Some think its only acceptable in instances of rape or when the foetus has known birth defects or endangers the life of the mother. So think its never acceptable under any circumstances.

Is it matter of choice? Why some ladies take this option for self-induced abortion? What do they feel and what comes after this step? Is it just a matter of getting rid of something in your stomach or is it killing the soul of living creature?

Abortion is one fact of our life. Is it really happening? I will not judge those who have done it. There are too many scenarios where women may choose abortion but in fact have no choice. There are so many true and desperately sad stories about this issue. Some was even printed in the newspapers; others have been kept in the dark. Some of the victims were lucky to survive and go on with their life. But not everyone.

Most admitted to taking this step simply because there was no other choice for them. What are the options for a female in a conservative society? Whether married or not, its difficult for a woman here to take this decision.

Not one of those ladies is ready to talk to the media directly about it. Abortion is not legal in Kuwait. The police arrest any who encourage others to do it. Some unfortunate ladies will keep trying to do it.

Some expatriates did it and ended up dead. Others who have survived now suffer from bad health conditions and spend their days in the hospital. They were sent to the police station for further investigation with a case against them, being accused of adultery. The partner as usual is either one of the male house workers or the sponsor himself. They encourage the maid to take this step in order to cover the crime of rape or the sexual relations they had. Most of those who committed this act are married previously in their own country.

The victim is usually treated as if she did it alone. A maid who is pregnant isn't likely to have the means or capabilities to do this on her own. She would need the help of her sponsor or the man who got her pregnant in order

to pay for the abortion or get the pills from the druggists or whatever.

Another true story: A rich Kuwaiti lady fresh to life with a happy ending. Involved in a relationship with another rich Kuwaiti. Several weeks after their fling, the girl found herself pregnant. Typically she asked him to marry her to avoid the scandal: the unforgettable shame of being single and pregnant. If the society still looks down on a divorced woman with kids how would they treat an unwed mother?

The man refused to marry her. Claiming this might not be even his child. Typical thought of an Arab man. She bought some tablets from the pharmacy. If you have some money you can buy whatever you want from the right pharmacist. A few days later she was lucky to get rid of the baby and survived safely with no damages with some medical assistance privately she was in a good health condition. She admitted that it was nightmare for her life. She got over it. But she was worried about other girls who face the same problem and could not handle it well.

I'm sure that many such related issues are happening right now. I think it is time for the locked doors to be open. Challenging the old and abused thinking. Will this girl and others like her be able to find a man in this society to marry? That was a question I asked, she repeated carelessly, "I will buy one."

How important is it for a woman in this society to be a virgin? Most men in this society refuse to marry a woman they know to be 'sullied.' Men think of virginity as a sign of purity. Its not, exactly but maybe they just don't want to think of another having slept with their woman.

As for abortions, they may be illegal but they still happen. I don't think any written words will stop this tragedy. We point to the lady ignoring the man, giving him excuses. The society can be blamed too. It is pushing the young generation to be so perfect, liberal and conservative both. A hard formula. To be like what you are expected to be and to be yourself at the same time. It is madness. I think the parents can warn their daughters - and their sons - of the problems they could face. Teach them to be self-respecting and careful. Who will take the lead though in protecting the thousands of house maids who are subjected to sexual abuse and harassment? The society or the embassy or the recruitment agencies? That is an open question for all of us to think about.

Email me at munaalfuzai@kuwaittimes.net with your comments, questions and opinions.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ukrainian ambassador dead

By Hanan Al Saadoun

KUWAIT: Ukrainian Ambassador to Kuwait Anatoly Pormakov suddenly felt exhausted at home and collapsed at his residence. He was immediately rushed to the Amiri Hospital and was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit. All medical efforts to revive him failed. He was 65 years old. The Ambassador lately complained of uneasiness before he succumbed to his death. Condolence messages were sent by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah and the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah to the President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko.

Medical equipments stolen

The staff of the Natural Medicine Hospital at the UN roundabout reported to work as usual in the morning only to find that some miscreants came earlier than them, broke into the hospital premises and managed to steal KD1500 plus some medical equipments. The staff reported the matter to the police who came and lifted finger prints. A case was registered.

Suicide attempt

An eighteen year old Kuwaiti girl student living in Al-Khalidiya tried to commit suicide by swallowing a large number of medical pills after which she lost consciousness as her pressure dropped down sharply. Her family rushed her in an ambulance to Amiri hospital and was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit. Her father told security men the cause being a dispute between him and his daughter for reasons he refused to divulge. Security men are waiting for the girl to regain consciousness, and hear her version of the story to enable them to determine the cause of the suicide bid.

Dangerous drivers

A police patrol at Jahra suspected a car, which was veering dangerously on the road. They tailed the car and stopped it. Two young men in the car were found in possession of 79 drug tablets, in addition to a liquor bottle. One of the men was a Kuwaiti and the other stateless. They were taken to police station and referred to the concerned authorities.

Citizen surrenders arms

A Kuwaiti man called Jahra police to his residence last night requesting to take possession of two boxes of ammunition and a machine gun which he kept in his house. He told police that he had made his mind up in surrendering the illegal ammunition in response to the amnesty offered for surrender of illegal weapons. Security sources repeatedly call for such surrender before the grace period, which expires Thursday, May 19, and those who do not comply will be liable for legal action and imprisonment landing them upto 3 years imprisonment.