

LOCAL

HH Amir's envoy hands letters to Qatar, Oman, UAE leaders

Focus on strong relations



Letter handed to Qatari Amir



Letter handed to Oman's Deputy PM for Relations & Int'l Cooperation Affairs.



Letter handed to Vice-President and PM of UAE.

KUNA photos

KUWAIT CITY, May 14, (KUNA): The representative of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Deputy Premier and Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, delivered a letter from HH the Amir to Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani.

The letter focused on the strong relations between Kuwait and Qatar, as well as the latest developments in the region and international community and mutual interests.

Sheikh Sabah Khaled then headed to Oman where he handed over HH the Amir's letter with the same contents for Sultan Qaboos bin Said to Deputy Prime Minister for Relations and International Cooperation Affairs Sayyid Asa'ad bin Tariq Al-Said.

He also delivered a similar letter to Vice-President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum.

Director General of Arab Planning Institute (API) Dr Bader Malallah said Sunday His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has humanitarian, philanthropic and development contributions in many parts of the globe.

His Highness the Amir has been relentless in offering multifaceted aid around the world, thus the UN named him the "humanitarian leader," and Kuwait as a "humanitarian center," Malallah said during a ceremony to honor the Kuwaiti leader.

His Highness the Amir, he added, was keen on transforming philanthropy in Kuwait from an individual act into organized and institutionalized action.

This has contributed to the development of charitable action in Kuwait, he said.

Malallah said Kuwait, under instructions of His Highness the Amir, also contributed to the development of countries around the world, hosting international conferences and offering aid to needy.

VAT seen

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Corporation (KPC) explained that after studying the fundamentals of the market, the risks and average price of oil in the region, they suggested that the price of oil in the new budget should be \$50 per barrel.

AbdulSamad said although oil prices improved because of the commitment of countries to the agreement to reduce oil production, there are still fears of oil price decline. He added the concerned world agencies, international banks and consultants expect oil prices to fall in 2019; hence, the need to be careful in estimating oil prices in the new budget.

He revealed the estimated revenues in the State budget for the new fiscal year reached KD 15 billion and KD 13 billion of which are oil revenues. This is after deducting production costs estimated at KD 2.3 billion based on the technical study conducted by the Ministry of Finance.

He said the estimated revenues from taxes and fees increased by 11 percent — KD 551 million — compared to the previous fiscal year due to the introduction of development contracts, such as the new airport and housing cities.

He added the committee also inquired about the value added tax, including postponement of its implementation in the State of Kuwait until 2021; while the ministry sees the need to expedite procedures to impose selective tax on certain commodities like tobacco, energy drinks and soft drinks which are expected to increase State revenues by KD 200 million with positive effect on non-material aspects like public health.

In a related issue, Finance Minister Nayef Al-Hajraf said the government asked the Parliament to expedite ratification of the Gulf value added tax agreement.

"Personally, I do not think there will be an opportunity to discuss the agreement within the current legislative term. We hope it will be finalized in the next legislative term," he concluded.

Meanwhile, member of the Human Rights Committee MP Jaman Al-Harbash disclosed that they discussed the security restrictions on Bedouins with representatives of the Ministry of Interior and Central System for Remediating the Status of Illegal Residents (CSRSIR) on Monday.

He added the Interior Ministry confirmed the formation of a committee to tackle these restrictions and give Bedouins the right to file complaints.

Record set

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This accomplishment, which is dedicated to His Highness the Amir, is part of the company's 2018 social responsibility aimed to support the society in general, particularly the youth, added Al-Terkait.

The company decorated the poster on the facade of its headquarters' building last February as part of celebrating Kuwait's National Day and Liberation Day, he noted, adding His Highness the Amir's photo, which bears the slogan "Sabah of Grace" was chosen as an appreciation to his multiple efforts on all levels, especially economic and development.

His Highness the Amir's economic efforts have been recently crowned with the launch of the National Program for Economic and Financial Sustainability, which aims to increase competitiveness towards improving the investment environment, said Al-Terkait.

Furthermore, he affirmed Al-Safat Investment's keenness to boost youngsters' awareness of the private sector's local role, as well as the importance of investment institutions as one of the economic pillars in the country.

The "Kuwait 2035" vision aims to transform the country into a financial and commercial hub that attracts regional and international investment, Al-Terkait said.

He stressed the importance of encouraging the spirit of competition among Kuwaiti economic sectors in order to bolster production competency, provide a basic infrastructure, establish advanced legislations, and create an attractive business environment. (KUNA)

Exit over

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For her part, MP Safa'a Al-Hashem told the daily. "The consensus in the visions between the KCCI and PAM and the Employers' Union on preventing work permits for those who reached the age of sixty-five is a good step in the right direction.

"I do not think that going ahead with this step will have an impact on the labor market or expertise," she said.

"What experiences are we talking about? They (the expatriates) simply do not care about Kuwait's development. Their main concern is getting high salaries, live a prosperous life in a country that has never asked them to pay any fees for all the services it offers them free of charge."

Al-Hashem stressed, "The expatriates have never worked even for one day to train the Kuwaitis and make room for them. I hope the decision will be implemented. I will be very keen that this agreement includes all foreign consultants working in the state institutions and occupies important posts in the country."

The chairman of the Replacement Committee of the National Assembly, MP Khalil Al-Saleh, explained that "the reduction of the number of expatriates who exceed three million has become a popular and government demand, in the absence of jobs for Kuwaitis."

He talked about the termination of services of unqualified expatriates who are a burden on the state. We do not support ending the services of all ex-

patriates, especially those who have experience in some fields which are not available among Kuwaitis. There are professions that still need expatriates, even if they are 65 years old, especially those with experience and professional excellence."

Meanwhile, PAM said the motive behind issuing this decision is keeping in mind of regulating the labor market and providing opportunities for young workers, both citizens and expatriates.

However, the representatives of federations also presented their views on this decision, and explained that it may be positive in some respects, but should take into account the experts and some of the humanitarian and professional conditions that surround them, including the abandonment of experiences that are difficult to compensate.

The unions have been asked to submit their views and suggestions on the draft resolution to the Chamber, which in turn will communicate with PAM to reach a compromise formula that meets the needs of the private sector and taking into account the interests of the national economy.

Israeli forces

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Clouds of black smoke from tyres set alight by demonstrators rose in the air. Demonstrators, some armed with slingshots, hurled stones at the Israeli security forces, who fired volleys of tear gas and intense rounds of gunfire.

"Today is the big day when we will cross the fence and tell Israel and the world we will not accept being occupied forever," said Gaza science teacher Ali, who declined to give his last name.

Trump's recognition of contested Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December outraged Palestinians, who said the United States could no longer serve as an honest broker in any peace process with Israel.

Palestinians seek East Jerusalem as the capital of a state they want to establish in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Israel regards all of the city, including the eastern sector it captured in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed in a move that is not recognised internationally, as its "eternal and indivisible capital".

Most countries say the status of Jerusalem — a sacred city to Jews, Muslims and Christians — should be determined in a final peace settlement and that moving their embassies now would prejudice any such deal. Peace talks aimed at finding a two-state solution to the conflict have been frozen since 2014.

The Palestinian dead on Monday included a medic and a man in a wheelchair who had been pictured on social media using a slingshot. The Israeli military said three of those killed were armed militants who tried to place explosives near the fence.

The latest casualties raised the Palestinian death toll to 88 since the protests started six weeks ago, the worst bout of bloodshed since the 2014 Gaza war. No Israeli casualties have been reported.

Thousands of people approached the barrier as the protest unfolded, some rolling burning tyres and hurling stones. Others flew flaming kites to try and torch bushes on the other side and distract Israeli marksmen. Hundreds of Palestinians were treated for tear gas inhalation.

"The IDF (Israel Defence Forces) will act forcefully against any terrorist activity and will operate to prevent attacks against Israelis," the military said in a statement.

Throughout the day sirens of ambulance vehicles carrying casualties to hospitals were almost non-stop. In Gaza mosques, loudspeakers mourned the dead, who carried for burial in funeral marches.

The killings have drawn international criticism since the series of protests began but the United States has echoed Israel in accusing Gaza's ruling Hamas movement of instigating violence, an allegation it denies.

More than 2 million people are crammed into the narrow strip, which is blockaded by Egypt and Israel.

The Trump administration says it has nearly completed a new Israeli-Palestinian peace plan but is undecided on how and when to roll it out.

Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, in a statement on Monday, accused the United States of "blatant violations of international law".

Europe 'mulls'

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above all asking for visibility on the subject.

Macron will use the opportunity of an informal EU summit in Sofia, Bulgaria, on Wednesday and Thursday to reaffirm a firm stance on the issue with his EU counterparts.

"There is no sign of division among Europeans," the adviser said. "Everything indicates that the European position will be firm and united," he added.

Asked about the possibility of negotiating a new free-trade agreement with the US to avoid the imposition of tariffs on EU aluminium and steel exports, the adviser said President Donald Trump should waive tariffs beyond the current June 1 deadline before any talks can start.

"All Europeans are very clear that, before considering any option of this nature, Americans must offer a permanent and unconditional exemption" to Europe, the official said.

"There is very strong US pressure on this, which requires a firm European response, that's what the president will say," he added.

"We can't negotiate under pressure, with a gun to our head."

The United States' top diplomat said Sunday Washington still wants to work with Europe to counter Iran's "malign behavior" as President Donald Trump called his withdrawal from the landmark nuclear deal key to contain-

ing Tehran.

But while Secretary of State Mike Pompeo talked up the prospect of renewed coordination with America's allies, another top aide reminded Europe its companies could face sanctions if they continue to do business with the Middle Eastern power.

The development came as Iran's foreign minister said he was hopeful of forging a "clear future design" for the pact, while speaking in Beijing at the start of a diplomatic tour aimed at rescuing it.

Trump's announcement last Tuesday that the US was exiting the 2015 nuclear accord was met with widespread dismay among its other signatories — China, Russia, France, the Britain and Germany.

But Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Washington was keen to thrash out a more wide-ranging deal with its European partners.

Cleric, pro-Iran

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him in a position to pick someone for the job.

But even then his bloc might not necessarily form the next government since whoever wins the most seats must negotiate a coalition government in order to have a majority in parliament. The government should be formed within 90 days of the official results.

Saturday's election is the first since the defeat of Islamic State, with the capture of its de facto capital Mosul, last year. The group overran a third of Iraq in 2014.

Turnout was 44.52 percent with 92 percent of votes counted, the Independent High Electoral Commission said — that was significantly lower than in previous elections. Full results are due to be officially announced later on Monday.

Sadr and Amiri both came in first in four of the 10 provinces where votes were counted, but the cleric's bloc won significantly more votes in the capital, Baghdad, which has the highest number of seats.

A document provided to Reuters by a candidate in Baghdad that was also circulating among journalists and analysts showed results from all 18 provinces.

Reuters could not independently verify the document's authenticity but the results in it showed Sadr had won the nationwide popular vote with more than 1.3 million votes and gained 54 of parliament's 329 seats.

He was followed by Amiri with more than 1.2 million votes, translating into 47 seats, and Abadi with more than 1 million votes and 42 seats, according to calculations made by Reuters based on the document. Ex-prime minister Nuri al-Maliki, a close ally of Iran like Amiri, came in fourth with 25 seats.

NewsWatch

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towards Yemen's Houthi-held **Hodeidah** port city, long a key target, but do not plan to launch an assault on densely populated areas nearby, local officials said on Monday.

The Western-backed military alliance last year announced plans to move on Hodeidah, Yemen's second most populous province, but backed off amid strong international pressure, with the United Nations warning that any attack on the country's largest port would have a "catastrophic" impact. (RTSR)

RIYADH: Yemen's armed Houthi movement launched a ballistic missile at a Saudi Aramco facility in Saudi Arabia's southwestern **Jizan** province on Monday, the group's al-Masirah TV reported, but a Saudi-led coalition said the rocket fell in the open desert.

The Houthis, an Iran-allied group that holds much of Yemen including the capital **Sanaa**, have fired a series of missiles into the kingdom in recent months, part of a three-year-old conflict in Yemen widely seen as a proxy battle between Saudi Arabia and Iran. (RTSR)

ADEN: Yemeni Prime Minister **Ahmed bin Dagher** announced on Monday that a dispute over the island of **Socotra** sparked after the deployment of **United Arab Emirates** troops has been resolved.

"The crisis on the island is over," Bin Dagher wrote on Facebook, adding that the crisis had "almost divided" the Saudi-led Arab coalition fighting Yemen's Houthi rebels. (AFP)

BEIRUT: US-backed fighters were advancing on Monday against Islamic State group jihadists hiding out in a small sliver of desert in eastern **Syria**, the force and a monitor said.

The Syrian Democratic Forces, an alliance of Kurdish and Arab fighters, has been bearing down on the small IS-held zone along the Euphrates River since May 1. (AFP)

DOHA: Qatar's Amir held talks on Monday with the Somali president in Doha and pledged support for the East African country, amid tensions between the two countries and the UAE.

Sheikh **Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani** said that the relationship between Qatar and **Somalia** was one of "brotherhood and mutual respect". (AFP)

WASHINGTON: Facebook said Monday it has suspended "around 200" apps on its platform as part of an investigation into misuse of private user data.

The investigation was launched after revelations that political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica hijacked data on some 87 million Facebook users as it worked on **Donald Trump's** 2016 campaign. (AFP)



Breaking News

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