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## Amir condoles Bangladesh as capital blaze kills 81

Toll likely to rise

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 21. (Agencies): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent Thursday a cable of condolences to the President of Bangladesh Mohammad Abdul Hamid.

His Highness the Amir expressed his utmost condolences and sincere sorrow over the victims of the massive fire, which broke out through several apartment buildings in Dhaka earlier and left 81 people dead and many wounded.

His Highness prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow His mercy upon the deceased victims and place them in His heavens, and grant the wounded and injured with a swift recovery.

For their parts, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to President Abdul Hamid.

Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim also sent a cable of condolences to his Bangladesh counterpart Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury over the victims of the apartment building fire in Dhaka.

A devastating fire raced through densely packed buildings in a centuries-old district in Bangladesh's capital, killing at least 81 people, officials and witnesses said Thursday, warning the toll was likely to rise.

The fire in Dhaka's Chawkbazar area was mostly under control after more than 10 hours of frantic firefighting efforts. About 50 people were injured, with some critically burned.

The district dating to the Mughal era 400 years ago is crammed with buildings separated by narrow alleys, with residences commonly above shops, restaurants or warehouses on the ground floors. Denizens of the Muslim-majority nation throng to Chawkbazar each year for traditional goods to celebrate Iftar, when the daily fast is broken during Ramadan.

### Damage

"I was talking to a customer, suddenly he shouted at me, 'Fire! Fire!'" said Javed Hossain, a survivor who came to assess the damage to his grocery store Thursday afternoon. "I said 'Oh, Allah,' in a fraction of a second the fire caught my shop."

Hossain's brother took his hand and they leaped onto the street before the shop was engulfed in flames.

Outside the gutted store, the road was strewn with charred vehicles, pieces of still-burning metal and plastics and hundreds of cans of body deodorant.

The blaze started late Wednesday night in one building and quickly spread to others, fire department Director General Brig Gen Ali Ahmed said.

Many of the victims were trapped inside the buildings, said Mahfuz Riben, a control room official for the Fire Service and Civil Defense in Dhaka.

"Our teams are working there but many of the recovered bodies are beyond recognition. Our people are using body bags to send them to the hospital morgue, this is a very difficult situation," he told The Associated Press.

Another control room official, Russel Shikder, said 81 bodies had been recovered.

The fire services director, Maj AKM Shakil Newaz, said many were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Ambulances were arriving carrying bodies, and relatives were mourning in front of the morgue.

First responders were delayed in reaching the site in part because nearby roads were closed for national holiday commemorations on Thursday. Just after midnight as the fire blazed, Bangladesh's prime minister and president laid wreaths at a monument less than a mile (1.3 km) away to commemorate protesters who died in a 1952 demonstration for the right to speak Bengali, the local language.

US\$/KD 0.30340/50
Euro/KD 0.3438
Yen/KD 0.0027
British £/KD 0.3959

KSE +18.96 pts at closing Feb 21  
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DOW -52.21 pts at 20:35 Feb 21  
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Nasdaq -22.98 pts at 20:35 Feb 21

FTSE -61.23 pts at closing Feb 21

Nikkei +32.74 pts at closing Feb 21

Gold \$1,345.75 per oz (London)

NYMEX crude \$56.84 per barrel

Brent crude \$66.86 per barrel

3-month \$ LIBOR rate 2.66338%

## Clash with Israel possible: Iran

Tehran announces navy drill in Hormuz

TEHRAN, Iran, Feb 21, (Agencies): Iran's navy says it will hold an annual drill in the strategic Strait of Hormuz as pressure mounts on the country months after the United States re-imposed sanctions on Iran, targeting its vital oil sector.

The strait is located at the mouth of the Arabian Gulf and is crucial to global energy supplies, with about a third of all oil traded at sea passing through it.

Iranian Adm. Hossein Khanzadi told state TV on Thursday the 3-day maneuvers will start on Friday and extend as far as the Sea of Oman and the fringes of the Indian Ocean.

He said submarines, warships, helicopters and surveillance planes will participate in the drill, dubbed as "Velayat-97." The exercise will include missile launches from the vessels.

Iran regularly holds maneuvers in the strait. Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif accused Israel of engaging in "adventurism" with its bombing campaigns in Syria and said he could not rule out the possibility of a military conflict between the countries.

Zarif told the Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper that Iran was in Syria at the invitation of the Syrian government, while Israel was violating Lebanese and Syrian air space, as well as international law.

"There is adventurism on Israel's side, and adventurism is

always dangerous," Zarif told the newspaper in an interview to be published on Thursday.

Asked if he saw an emerging military conflict between Iran and Israel, Zarif said, "I do not, but we cannot exclude the possibility."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that Israel has carried out hundreds of attacks in Syria over the past several years and will ramp up its fight following the planned withdrawal of US troops from the country.

Israel is trying to counter the influence carved out in Syria by Iran, which has supported Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the war that erupted in 2011. It said Tehran's actions are the main destabilising factor in the Middle East.



On every national occasion Souk Al-Mubarakiya which is considered one of the most important historic and heritage sites in the country brightens up with its beautiful decorations reflecting the joy of national holidays. Most of the shops and walls are painted and decorated with Kuwait's flag colors. Al-Mubarakiya Market is considered one of the important tourist destinations for both Kuwaitis and the country's guests who come especially to enjoy the national days celebration.

### Jihadist Clain believed killed

PARIS, Feb 21, (Agencies): The US-led coalition fighting Islamic State is verifying whether French jihadist Fabian Clain, who claimed the November 2015 Paris attacks, has been killed in Syria, a French source said on Thursday.

"Checks are being made," the source said.

France Info radio and BFM TV reported on Friday Clain had been killed and his brother Jean-Michel seriously wounded after a coalition air strike in Baghouz, the final pocket held by the militants in northeastern Syria.

Clain was identified as the man who voiced the recording claiming Islamic State carried out the attacks that killed 129 people and injured more than 350 in Nov. 2015.

France's military and foreign ministry declined to comment.

### Also:

**OUTSIDE BAGHOUZ, Syria:** US-backed Syrian forces fighting the Islamic State group in Syria handed over more than 150 Iraqi members of the group to Iraq, the first batch of several to come, an Iraqi security official said Thursday.

The official said the IS militants were handed over to the Iraqi side late Wednesday, and that they were now in a "safe place" and being investigated.

### News watch

**ANKARA:** Turkey on Thursday rejected a recent resolution by a European Parliament (EP) committee calling for halting Ankara's EU membership negotiations.

The European Parliament's Committee for Foreign Affairs voted Wednesday to accept a draft advisory report that calls for suspending accession talks between Ankara and the EP.

"The call in the draft report - which is not legally binding and bears only the status of an advisory decision - to officially suspend our country's accession negotiations with the EU is absolutely unacceptable," Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Hami

Aksoy said in a statement carried by Anadolu news agency. (KUNA)

**BEIRUT:** Hezbollah hit back on Thursday against US condemnation of its role in Lebanon on Thursday, calling it a "violation of sovereignty", after the United States expressed concern over the organisation's expanding influence.

After meeting Lebanon's prime minister on Tuesday, the US ambassador said the United States was worried about the "growing role" in the cabinet of Hezbollah, an armed Shi'ite group backed by Iran and listed as a terrorist organisation by Washington. (RTRS)



Pianist Faisal Al Bahairi led a classical music performance at the Yarmouk Cultural Centre's weekly Music Circle as part of the Dar Al Athar Al Islamiyyah's 24th cultural season. He was joined by cellist Mohammed Abu Ouf and violinist Manuel Druminski as they regaled their audience with popular and beloved melodies.

### Rights panel places focus on deportation cell, prison

By Ahmed Al-Naqeeb  
Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 21: Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Sa'ad Al-Kharaaz has stressed that the Public Authority for Handicapped Affairs (PAHA) reserves the right to re-evaluate the medical condition of those registered at the authority.

The minister made the statement amid uproar on the suspension of financial aid for some people with disabilities. He said 4,531 individuals with disabilities were summoned by the authority for medical re-evaluation, as they registered before the implementation of Law No. 8/2010.

He added that 563 of those summoned did not comply, so the authority suspended all files which were not reviewed by the Medical Re-evaluation Committee in a bid to stop the squandering of public funds.

The authority's obligations include periodic summons for medical re-evaluation and updating information without discrimination as per the recommendation of the National Assembly to protect public funds and ensure that every individual with disability receives adequate support.

In another development, the parliamentary Human Rights Committee on Thursday discussed the condition at the deportation cell and the Central Prison as per the directive of the Assembly to ensure the

implementation of international human rights agreements.

Present at the committee meeting were Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Lieutenant General Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah, the assistant undersecretary for legal affairs and officials from the Correctional Department.

Committee Chairman MP Adel Al-Damkhi affirmed the committee does not only prepare reports as it also follows up recommendations approved by the Assembly.

He explained that protecting the rights of prisoners necessitates full cooperation among governmental bodies, foremost of which are the ministries of Interior and Health.

He added the public prosecutors inspect prisons weekly, but it is also important for other concerned bodies such as the Human Rights Society, Kuwait Red Crescent Society and the parliamentary Human Rights Committee to conduct inspections to guarantee that all human rights protocols are followed.

During the meeting, the minister was briefed on the committee's report. He then instructed the concerned top officials to provide the committee with a detailed report on the condition of the deportation cell and Central Prison every three months. He confirmed the ministry is keen on working with the committee to improve the condition of correctional facilities in accordance with the National Anticrime Program.