

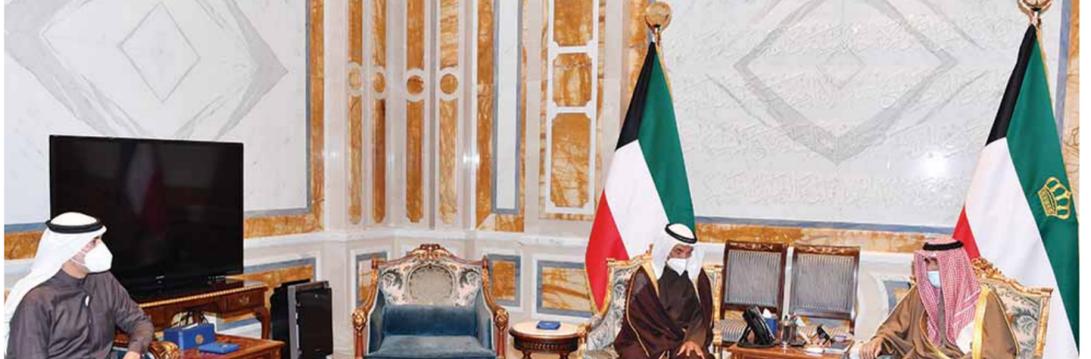
Local

Amir receives 2021 King Faisal Prize winner

Programmer honored for efforts in Arabizing computer programs



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Chairman of Sakhar Computer Programming Company Mohammad Al-Sharekh.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received the Chairman of Sakhar Computer Programming Company Mohammad Abdulrahman Al-Sharekh on winning 2021 King Faisal Prize granted by King Faisal Foundation for his efforts in Arabizing computer programs and enriching the Islamic arena and Arab culture.

His Highness the Amir wished him more success to continue his remarkable bid and hoist the country's flag in regional and international forums. President of Amiri diwan Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Saud Al-Sabah attended the meeting. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh

Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad at Bayan Palace yesterday.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences yesterday to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia over passing of Princess Lamyia bint Hathloul bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah the Almighty to bestow blessings upon the deceased and to grant solace to the royal family. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. — KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Damage caused to SMEs painful: PM

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said the damage caused to the owners of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) was "painful," and the same goes for the educational attainment of students and the failure of athletes to practice their activities. "But the greater pain is the continuing epidemic situation amid the rise (of cases)," he said in a speech at the extraordinary session of the National Assembly, held yesterday to discuss governmental procedures and policies in dealing with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and the mutated strains.

"Today we completed a year and we welcome a new one, and now, after 45 days of the new year, we have begun to enter into an alarming situation, as the number of deaths in the past 15 days has reached 50 cases," said the Premier. "Occupancy of intensive care beds and hospital admissions has increased largely, as we are heading towards reaching five intensive care units at Mubarak Hospital," he noted. "We must pause and examine this matter and adhere to what needs to be done. Yes, we suffer from

the damage of small and medium businesses, and we suffer from the damage to our children's educational achievements, and we suffer when athletes do not practice their activities, but the biggest pain is when we see the situation continues to rise," he stressed.

"With cooperation, solidarity, understanding, acceptance and implementation, yes, we went through losses, but we passed the stage of ascension, then stabilized, and now we have a second wave. If we do not cooperate, stand together and understand what is required to do, the situation will be difficult for everyone, the whole world has been affected and we must deal with reality," he continued. "The readings that the officials had prepared are based on careful follow-ups and analysis that reached conclusions that the executive and legislative authorities must take into account. We all appreciate their hard work and dedication." His Highness expressed his thanks to the members of the National Assembly for submitting the request to hold this extraordinary session, which shows the interest of the National Assembly in following up the government's actions towards the pandemic.

Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Faisal Al-Medlej had affirmed earlier that SME owners are one of the main and important cornerstones of commercial sustainability and development in Kuwait. According to His Highness the Prime Minister's directives, the Board of Directors of the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises Development formed a committee to look into the defaulting projects and financiers, said the minister. He stated that a committee was formed in mid-January, consisting of NGOs, federations concerned with these projects, and consultants from the Ministry of Commerce, to help solve any existing problems the SMEs owners are facing. The minister also said that the Financial Security Law was one of the very important draft laws that were discussed in the previous legislative term of the National Assembly, but was not approved. Therefore, the committee presented a more comprehensive view towards the beneficiaries of this law.

The Cabinet on Monday had examined a petition presented by entrepreneurs of SMEs, in the aftermath of the



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah attends an extraordinary session of the National Assembly to discuss procedures to deal with COVID-19 yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

resolution closing some commercial businesses and decided to financially support this segment of the labor force, according to the law of establishing the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development. Additionally, the Cabinet decided to assign the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development to work out

mechanisms for disbursement of the funds for the eligible businessmen. The decision is effective as of March and valid for three months. Another decision stipulates assigning the competent authorities to delay payment of the State services fees to the entrepreneurs whose businesses have been shut for three months. — KUNA

Compliance or lockdown: Virus....

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The health minister warned there are new strains of the pandemic and their health and economic impacts will be immense if they enter the country. "The pandemic is spreading rapidly... all arrivals at the airport are tested for the disease," the minister said.

An official from the health ministry, Mohammad Al-Saeedan, said the situation now from a clinical point of view is similar to the period before imposing the first lockdown last year. "We must be ready for any decision," he warned.

The Assembly session was called by a group of MPs to debate new measures imposed by the government and compensation for small and medium businesses affected by partial closures. Around 24 opposition MPs boycotted the session on the grounds that the government represented in the

meeting had resigned and the prime minister has taken long to form a new Cabinet.

During the debate, lawmakers criticized the government for taking the partial closure decision and called for compensating small and medium businesses. MP Hesham Al-Saleh wondered what measures authorities have taken against expats who had allegedly produced fake PCR test certificates. The minister said it is not possible to prove that a certain PCR test is fake, and insisted all arrivals are tested at the airport.

MP Saadoun Hammad criticized the slow pace of the vaccination program, saying the United Arab Emirates has vaccinated five million people already, pointing out the UAE is not different from Kuwait.

At the end of the debate, the Assembly passed a number of recommendations calling on the government to speed up legislation to compensate businesses. The recommendations called on the government to review the latest measures imposed around two weeks ago. It also called on authorities to apply tough measures against the entry of expats into the country and delaying all forms of loan repayment for a year. It also called for speeding up the vaccination drive.

their intent to relocate their headquarters to Riyadh at last month's Davos-style Future Investment Initiative forum in the capital, SPA said. Monday's announcement "will not affect any investor's ability to enter the Saudi market or to continue their business with the private sector", SPA said. But the decision will pile pressure on private sector companies heavily dependent on lucrative Saudi government contracts.

"Pressing multinationals to establish headquarters in Saudi Arabia centers upon the belief that foreign companies benefitting from the Saudi market should bolster their physical presence in the country," Robert Moglemicki, a resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, told AFP. "This is ultimately a reevaluation of the sustainability of Saudi Arabia's economic development model and not an intentional commercial challenge to the UAE. If done successfully though, it is likely to have a commercial impact on the UAE." — AFP

UN slams Iraq rocket attack...

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rockets - the same caliber used in recent attacks in Baghdad - was fired Monday evening from around eight kilometers west of Arbil.

They appeared to be aimed at a military complex inside the Arbil airport that hosts foreign troops deployed as part of a US-led coalition that has helped Iraq fight jihadists since 2014. But they struck all over the city's northwest, including in residential districts where they wounded five civilians, the Arbil health directorate told AFP. Coalition spokesman Wayne Marotto said three rockets hit Arbil airport and killed one civilian contractor, who he said was neither an Iraqi nor US national. Another nine people were wounded, including eight civilian contractors and one US soldier, he said.

A shadowy group calling itself Awliya al-Dam (Guardians of Blood) claimed the attack and in a follow-up statement yesterday vowed to keep targeting US forces in Iraq. Over the past year, around a dozen previously unheard-of formations have claimed responsibility for rocket attacks on Western diplomatic and security installations.

US and Iraqi officials have told AFP they believe such factions to be "smokescreen" entities for more prominent pro-Iran groups including Kataeb Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq. Those factions are members of the Hashed al-Shaabi, a powerful state-sponsored armed network whose pro-Iran members often act independently of the government.

The ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) accused groups "under the guise of the Hashed al-Shaabi" of being behind the attack - a bold claim given the Hashed's status as being part of Iraq's state security network. The Kurdish region's premier Masrour Barzani pledged with his counterpart in Baghdad, Kadhemi, to launch a

joint probe into the incident.

The new violence has revived fears of a possible conflict on Iraqi soil between Tehran and Washington, two rivals who have long tried to draw Iraq into their respective spheres of influence. Iran yesterday condemned the attack and strongly denied rumors it was involved in the incident.

The rockets left small craters in the paved streets of Arbil and in plaster walls of buildings. The attack "put our lives at risk," said resident Nariman Mohammad, 51. "I don't see any meaning to any of this. We're also people, and we want to live." Arbil airport, after being closed to flights throughout the morning, resumed its normal schedule at noon, a government spokesman told AFP.

Western military and diplomatic facilities have been targeted by dozens of rockets and roadside bombs since late 2019, but most attacks have been on Baghdad, not Arbil. Following the deaths of US service members in two incidents in 2019 and 2020, former US president Donald Trump ordered several bombing raids on Kataeb Hezbollah. Iraqi and even US officials have told AFP in recent weeks that it was not clear whether Joe Biden's administration would pursue the same "tripwire" response.

Since Iraq declared victory over the Islamic State group in late 2017, the coalition presence has been reduced to fewer than 3,500 troops, of whom 2,500 are American. Most are concentrated at the military complex at Arbil airport, a coalition official told AFP, adding that the phased drawdown had left "gaps" in the security structure.

Arbil has been targeted very rarely, although Iranian forces fired missiles at the same airport in January last year, a few days after Washington assassinated prominent Iranian general Qasem Soleimani at Baghdad airport. Both Iran and hardline Iraqi armed groups have repeatedly pledged to take revenge for Soleimani's killing. The same groups have recently vowed to boost their military activity in Iraq's Kurdistan region, ostensibly against a Turkish incursion. — AFP

Saudi pushes firms to move Mideast...

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Many multinationals doing business in the conservative kingdom prefer to have their regional headquarters in the neighboring UAE and other gilded Gulf capitals that offer a relatively more liberal lifestyle and permit alcohol. Under a previous government initiative known as "Program HQ", Saudi Arabia - which has sought to shake-off its austere image by allowing cinemas, concerts and sporting extravaganzas - offered multinational companies tax breaks and incentives to relocate their Middle East headquarters to the kingdom.

Twenty-four international companies declared