

Local

Egypt's President appreciates Kuwait's mediation efforts

Amir sends letter to Sisi on efforts to reach Arab reconciliation

CAIRO: Egyptian President AbdelFattah Al-Sisi received on Saturday a letter from His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Kuwait's efforts to reach Arab reconciliation. The letter was handed over by Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah during his meeting with President Sisi in the presence of Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukri and Kuwait Ambassador to Egypt Mohammad Al-Thuwaikh.

President Al-Sisi expressed, during the meeting, "great appreciation of the sincere efforts made by the State of Kuwait over the recent years to reach Arab reconciliation," Egyptian Presidential Spokesman Bassam Radhi said in a press release. President Sisi recalled that His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah started the mediation efforts and His Highness the Amir

Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah built on this genuine goodwill and resumed these efforts. He also commended the Saudi role in the framework of the Arab Quartet, made up of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt, Ambassador Radhi said.

In his message to President Sisi, His Highness the Amir reviewed the efforts to bridge the rift between some Arab countries and dealt with the deep-rooted relations between Kuwait and Egypt. He expressed desire to further strengthen the relations with Egypt, and spoke highly of Egypt's strategic and pivotal role in protecting the Arab national security under the leadership of President Sisi, the spokesman pointed out. President Sisi asked Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser to convey his best wishes to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, renewing Egypt's commitment to furthering the fruitful cooperation in all areas



Desire to further strengthen relations

5th decade of GCC cooperation: Hajraf

RIYADH: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is stepping steadily towards the fifth decade of cooperation march due to the wisdom of GCC leaders, the GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf. This came in a statement yesterday on the occasion of the GCC 41st summit, to be held Tuesday in Al-Ula, northwest Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The summit will be held at the invitation of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and with participation from GCC leaders and members. Holding the summit despite the exceptional circumstances the world is going through, confirms the keenness of the GCC leaders of preserving the Cooperation Council as a cohesive system capable of overcoming difficulties and challenges, Hajraf said.

The summit would push the economic file as the title of the fifth decade of the march of the GCC and by strengthening and supporting joint work to contribute to restoring economic recovery, restoring growth and returning life to normal after the pandemic and achieving sustainable development goals, he added. Hajraf affirmed that GCC states have achieved many accomplishments and projects over the past four decades, including the Gulf common market, the customs union, the electrical connection, the freedom of capital movement and

many others, he confirmed. Hajraf expressed thanks and appreciation for the great efforts made by Saudi Arabia under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman and the Kingdom's government in preparing for the summit.

Common destiny

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Ambassador in Riyadh said he believes Gulf Cooperation Council leaders will discuss challenges with "belief in a common destiny." The talks come amid a "fraternal and positive atmosphere," said Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Sabah. "This reflects a sense of responsibility and sincere belief in the importance of strengthening Gulf solidarity, facing common challenges and maintaining peace and stability in their countries," he added.

"The Arab Gulf region faces great economic, development and political issues and challenges," said the ambassador, adding that the leaders "will discuss all these issues and challenges with one vision stemming from their belief in a common destiny and their keenness to preserve the interests of the region's countries and its people." The ambassador recalled the loss of the late Amir of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who "long strived for Gulf solidarity and unity." He also expressed confidence in the success of the summit under the wise leadership of Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. — KUNA



CAIRO: Egyptian President AbdelFattah Al-Sisi reads a letter from His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photo

and promoting coordination of stances on Arab issues. He affirmed Egypt's resolve to continue its fundamental policy and strategy towards the Arab solidarity based on mutual respect and non-interference in the domestic affairs of other

nations, the spokesman noted. Both sides agreed to intensify coordination in the coming stage with a view to guarding against risks posed to the security and stability of the Arab countries, he added. — KUNA



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf.



RIYADH: Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubair receives from Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah a letter from His Highness the Amir of Kuwait to Saudi Arabia's King. — Amiri Diwan photo

Sheikh Ahmad delivers Amir's letter to Saudi King

RIYADH: His Highness the Amir of Kuwait's envoy Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah delivered a handwritten letter to Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. The message illustrated the close-knit bilateral brotherly ties between both countries and

their people and means to support and strengthen these relations across all spectrums, along with recent developments on the regional and international fronts.

It was delivered to Saudi Arabia's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubair. Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad met Gulf Cooperation Council's Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf at the GCC General Secretariat's headquarters in Riyadh. The officials reviewed arrangements being made ahead of the upcoming Gulf Summit in its 41st session, due to be held at Saudi Arabia's northwestern city of Al-Ula on Tuesday. — KUNA

Iraqis mourn commanders...

Continued from Page 1

Tehran yesterday also unveiled his autobiography - focusing largely on his childhood and early adulthood - and a postage stamp in his honor.

In Iraq, the powerful, state-sponsored pro-Iranian Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary network which Muhandis commanded has led the angry vigils for him and General Soleimani, who headed the foreign operations arm of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Yesterday's Baghdad rally was a show of force for the armed groups, which despite being formally integrated into the Iraqi security apparatus have increasingly challenged the Kadhem government.

Thousands of mourners had Saturday night converged at the spot near Baghdad's international airport where the US hit the two vehicles and killed Soleimani, Muhandis and eight other men. By candlelight, they honored their "martyrs" and con-

demned the American "great Satan" at the site where nearby walls are still pockmarked by shrapnel. "We tell America and the enemies of Islam that they can inflict the greatest sacrifices on us, but we will continue to resist despite the bloodshed," said Hashed supporter Batul Najjar.

The Hashed - factions of which Washington has blamed for rocket strikes against its embassy and troops in Iraq - has increasingly challenged Kadhem, whom it accuses of having helped plot the drone strikes. This has brought to the boil once more tensions in the war-battered and politically fragile country which the United States invaded in 2003, and which remains mired in economic crisis amid low oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic.

Ahead of the Tahrir Square rally, Ahmed Assadi, one of the leaders of Hashed's parliamentary bloc, vowed: "Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, we will go out by the millions to brandish your portrait on Tahrir". Giant posters of Soleimani and Muhandis were hung up above the iconic square, which in late 2019 became the center of large anti-government protests, from an abandoned building known as the Turkish restaurant that was once the protesters' unofficial headquarters. — AFP

in Saudi and Bahraini airspace.

Experts had warned that the UAE could be the spoiler for any regional reconciliation attempt, having heaped criticism on Qatar and its leadership since the spat erupted. Abu Dhabi's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash tweeted on Dec 22 that "political and social atmospheres in the Gulf are looking to end the Qatar crisis" but complained about Qatari media - a longstanding grievance in the boycotting countries.

It also remains unclear if Qatar's ruler, Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, will attend the summit in person, having skipped the gatherings since 2017. Earlier this month, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said a resolution of the Gulf diplomatic crisis was in sight, with all governments involved "on board" and a final agreement expected soon.

Egypt and the UAE have since given their public support to the negotiations, although diplomatic sources say the UAE has been reluctant to compromise. The potential thaw comes as Gulf states prepare for the incoming US administration of President-elect Joe Biden. Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, whose country is leading mediation efforts, said all sides had expressed keenness for a "final agreement" during recent "fruitful discussions", which have included the United States. Past mediation efforts to broker reconciliation between key US ally Qatar and its rivals have proved fruitless after apparent progress. — AFP

Nations race to inoculate; India...

Continued from Page 1

India, the world's second-most infected nation, yesterday authorized the use of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine as well as one by local pharmaceutical firm Bharat Biotech.

The Serum Institute of India, the world's biggest manufacturer of vaccines, has said it is making between 50 and 60 million doses a month of the former vaccine. India has already held nationwide drills to prepare for one of the world's biggest vaccination programs, aiming to inoculate 300 million of its 1.3 billion people by mid-2021.

Israel has claimed the fastest start to vaccinations so far, saying yesterday that two million people - around a fifth of its population - would have both the required shots by the end of January. "We are breaking all the records," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Friday, when one million had already received their first jab. Egypt approved the use of a vaccine developed by Chinese pharma giant Sinopharm yesterday, with its rollout expected later this month.

Hungary also turned its attention to the Chinese vaccine, despite flirting with acquiring Russia's controversial Sputnik V jab. "We know

that the Russian vaccine is good, but there is not enough of it and probably will not be," Prime Minister Viktor Orban said yesterday, while criticizing the EU's approach to acquiring shots. For its part, Russia said it had vaccinated more than 800,000 people and distributed 1.5 million doses.

Germany's Robert Koch Institute said yesterday that 238,809 people have been vaccinated there - a far cry from neighboring France, where the government has come under pressure over a slow rollout. "The whole healthcare community does not understand why there is such a difference with Germany: Germany vaccinates 20,000 people a day, we are at 50," Professor Mehdi Mejdoubi of the Valenciennes hospital center in France's north told BFMTV.

The new president of Switzerland, which borders both countries, admitted the country had underestimated the pandemic between July and September. "We thought we could bring the virus under control... we were far from it," Guy Parmelin, who took office on Jan 1, told the newspaper SonntagsBlick. The situation in the United States, already the world's worst-hit country, has continued to deteriorate as it saw the highest number of infections recorded in one day on Saturday, with more than 277,000.

As the US Senate delayed approving a long-awaited \$900 billion pandemic relief package, vandals targeted the home of its Republican leader Mitch McConnell. — AFP

Resolution in balance ahead...

Continued from Page 1

The White House has ramped up its rhetoric against Tehran, having walked out of an international deal to rein in Iran's nuclear program in 2018. US national security adviser Robert O'Brien said in November that allowing Qatari planes to fly over Saudi Arabia via an "air bridge" was a priority for the Trump administration. In return, analysts have suggested Qatar could agree to tone down the coverage of Saudi Arabia by its media, including the Al Jazeera broadcaster.

"They will announce the interim deal with the Amir most likely in attendance," said King's College London assistant professor Andreas Krieg. "Bahrain has still not signed but all of the other blockading states have." The country has repeatedly clashed with Qatar over the enforcement of maritime boundaries, with several incidents in recent months which have seen the Qatari coastguard intercept Bahraini vessels.

It then flew four of its fighter jets over Qatar's territorial waters on Dec 9, Doha alleged in a letter to the United Nations Security Council. In its own letter to the UN, Manama denied it breached Qatari airspace, during what it described as a routine exercise

Kuwait to suspend direct flights...

Continued from Page 1

Several flights carrying Kuwaitis stranded abroad because of the airport closure have already been arranged, the minister added, urging his compatriots to get vaccinated against COVID-19, which Kuwait is providing free of charge.

Citing "meticulous preparation", Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said the airport is ready to welcome all arrivals in Kuwait, advising nationals to avoid all "non-essential" overseas travel at this juncture, adding that measures have been taken to curb the potential spread of new COVID-19 strains. The two ministers, along with Minister of State for Services Affairs Abdullah Marafi, thanked all state bodies involved for their commitment towards protecting public health.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia yesterday announced

the reopening of borders and the resumption of international flights after a two-week suspension. The government ordered the lifting of "precautionary measures related to the spread of a new variant of coronavirus", the ministry of interior said, according to the official Saudi Press Agency.

Saudi Arabia has recorded more than 363,000 cases, including over 6,200 deaths - the highest among the Gulf Arab states - but has also reported a high recovery rate. Riyadh suspended international flights and access through land crossings and ports on Dec 21. Oman, which had taken similar measures, had lifted them in recent days.

But travellers returning from Britain, South Africa or "any country where the new variant of the coronavirus is spreading" are subject to more restrictions, the statement added. Foreigners coming from those countries must spend 14 days in another country before entering Saudi Arabia, and show a negative test. Saudi nationals returning from those countries will be able to enter directly - but must then spend two weeks in quarantine on arrival, and be subject to tests. — Agencies