

Local

National Assembly to debate Prime Minister's grilling over rain

Financial panel rejects new govt proposals for retirement

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly is scheduled today to debate a grilling against His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah over alleged government mishandling of recent heavy rains amid an attempt to delay the debate.

The grilling was filed by leading opposition MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri who charged that the government ministries and agencies failed in taking the necessary measures and actions to face the heavy torrential rains which caused heavy damage.

Muwaizri is charging that the prime minister is responsible for the failure because he is the head of the government who failed to effectively coordinate between government agencies in facing the heavy rains.

It was not immediately clear what will happen in the session today and whether the debate will go ahead after the premier expresses reservations that the grilling is unconstitutional or other steps may be taken.

Pro-government MP Khalaf Dumaitheer said on Sunday that he and some other lawmakers will submit a proposal to refer the grilling to the assembly's legal and legislative committee to examine if it was in line of the constitution.

Muwaizri however insisted that the grilling is constitutional because it targets the head of the government

who is responsible for coordinating between ministries and agencies. He said that he did not hear any constitutional expert saying it is against the constitution. If the debate goes ahead, it will most likely be held in a secret session.

Another government-assembly controversy is expected to come up for debate today: the long dispute over a law providing additional benefits for Kuwaiti civil servants who go on early retirement. Head of the financial and economic affairs committee MP Salah Khorshid said the panel rejected a new government draft law that stipulates that early retirement seekers should bear some cost. Instead, the committee agreed to delete a controversial provision in the law to make its passage easier and allow the government to accept it.

Under the new amended law, Kuwaiti males and females can seek early retirement after serving for 30 years and 25 years respectively or after reaching 55 years and 50 years of age, respectively. In both cases, their pension will be equal to 95 percent of their full salary.

The law allows men to seek early retirement after only 25 years of service if they agree that their pension will be reduced by deducting five percent of their basic salary every year. The same applies to female employees who want to retire five years early.



KUWAIT: Lightning strikes during a recent thunderstorm in Kuwait. —KUNA photo

Search still on for missing warehouse worker

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFS) Director General Lt Gen Khalid Al-Mikrad inspected the site where warehouse shelves collapsed in a major store on Salmi road. He was following efforts to find a missing worker, thought to be buried under tons of goods. Another worker was injured and taken to hospital.

Smuggling foiled

Airport customs officers foiled an attempt by a woman to smuggle illicit tablets hidden in the lining of leather clothes. Member of the Customs Information Committee Nawaf Al-Matar said an inspection system indicated foreign objects in the luggage of a passenger, so it was searched manually and the tablets were found hidden in various places including the lining. Officers found 3,200 Tramadol and other tablets. The suspect and drugs were sent to concerned authorities.

Fires

A power transformer in Kaifan caught fire yesterday, so Shuhada and industrial Shuwaikh centers responded and put out the flames. A nearby college was evacuated, and no injuries were reported. Meanwhile,

firemen put out a fire in the bedroom of a Funaitees house. Firemen from Qurain and Mishref stations evacuated two children and a helper from thick smoke. Investigations are ongoing to find out the cause of the fire.

Worker freed

A laborer was stuck between the steel girders of a building under construction. Firemen from Bidaa fire station and technical rescue teams responded, freed the man and handed him to paramedics, who took him to hospital.

Broken spine

An officer at the Drugs Control General Department suffered a broken spine when he attempted to break up a fight in a Salmiya mall. Al-Rai daily reported yesterday. The lieutenant was near a mall late at night and was surprised by a fight between 10 men, so he attempted to break up the fight, but was beaten and suffered several injuries. Policemen and medics arrived at the scene and took the officer to Mubarak Hospital, while the others disappeared.

Blackmail

An Egyptian woman discovered that her Syrian ex-husband had planted cameras in her room to blackmail her with images and video clips, so she complained against him and he was arrested. The woman noticed a lens in the ceiling of her room, so she informed police, and they went to the house. They asked her if she suspected anyone, so she told them it may be her ex-husband, due to severe differences between them. The man confessed to placing the camera, saying he wanted to blackmail his ex-wife to settle their divorce.

Ministry official prosecuted over corruption charges

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Public Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) referred an assistant undersecretary at the ministry of services and others to the public prosecution for involvement in corruption, the authority's official spokesperson Dr Mohammed Abdul Rahman Bu Zobar announced yesterday. Nazaha added that Minister of State for Services Jenan Bushehri had reported suspicions of corruption after forming a special committee to conduct an inventory on postal stamps that found stamps worth KD 1,236,316 were missing, before referring the matter to Nazaha for investigations.

Corruption charges

In collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MSAL) closed a subsidized goods outlet at a Mubarak Al-Kabeer Co-op Society branch after the outlet's manager was found involved in corruption, said informed sources, noting that both the manager and other involved suspects were referred to the public prosecution for further investigations. The source explained that the suspects had been regularly selling subsidized goods remaining in the outlet after giving citizens' rations and splitting the money.

Salary increments

The government will not look into recent parliamentary demands for salary increments for public sector employees as it deems such demands unjustified in view of the state budget imbalances and unstable oil prices, well-informed sources said. "Salary increments will not be made according to traditional methods because the government wants to solve the problem in view of the reports made by IMF and the World Bank demanding salary cuts to promote productivity," the sources said. They noted that the government may tackle the salary issue if lawmakers approve the strategic payroll alternative bill, which is stuck after its rejection by the oil sector.

Fake degrees

Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah said the foreign ministry submitted an inquiry to the ministry of higher education about a list of universities abroad from which some of the ministry employees had degrees. Jarallah added that the inquiry involved the validity of those degrees and accreditation of the concerned universities, and stressed that the ministry will never tolerate having employees with fake degrees and hold them accountable.

Electricity projects

The Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) is currently executing a number of projects to deal with rising electricity and water consumption resulting from urban expansion, said informed sources. The sources added that MEW is collaborating with the Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects to execute two projects in Zour and Khairan to produce a total of 16,000 megawatts of electricity.

AUK hosts seminar on domestic violence

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: A seminar on 'Attitudes on Violence in Kuwait: Findings from the Abolish 153 Survey' was held at the American University of Kuwait (AUK) yesterday, attended by academics and students as well as US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman. The lecture was presented by two of the main advocates of the 'Abolish 153' campaign - Dr Alanoud Al-Sharekh, Director of Ibtikar Strategic Consultancy, and Dr Fatma Al-Salem, Assistant Professor of Mass Communication at Kuwait University.

The campaign to abolish article 153 reaches its peak in the next few days as the result of the survey it conducted will be presented to the parliament. Article 153 of Kuwait's penal code states that any man who surprises his mother, sister, daughter or wife in an unsavory sexual act (zina) with a man and kills her or him or both will be treated as committing a misdemeanor punishable by a maximum of three years in jail and/or a fine of KD 225.

Abolish 153 believes that violence against women and domestic violence in general are easily committed because the law allegedly protects the perpetrators. It says the penal code effectively gives men regulatory, judicial and executive power over their female kin in blatant disregard of the constitution, international agreements on human and women's rights and even the sharia.

Abolish 153's ultimate goal is to create a safe environment where mothers, daughters, sisters and wives are protected from all forms of violence, to raise awareness of these violent practices and the legislation that sanctions them, and ensure the creation of safe houses for women under threat of violence, which are lacking in Kuwait. Abolish 153 supports not only legal changes but those who suffer as a consequence of existing legislation.

Based on statistics released by the justice ministry, an average of 368 acts of violence against women were reported annually in Kuwait between 2000 and 2009. "This is not reflective of reality. Many cases are unreported because of many religious and sociocultural factors. People in Kuwait are still protective of the background, honor and reputation of the family," said Sharekh, who is the lead advocate of Abolish 153. She added that violence against children is also on the rise since 2000 and keeps growing annually. Sharekh also blamed the media and even commercial advertisements for suggesting violence is okay if the victims fail to follow instructions. "In Ramadan, I saw a flood of advertisements with violent messages - a man threatening his wife for buying the wrong brand of honey and so on. What are we trying to teach our children? In a television interview, a woman was asked: 'What will you do if your husband beats you?' The answer was: 'I will beat him too'," she said.

Whether economic standing or transgender violence is also included in the report, Sharekh said violence is connected to the socioeconomic background of a person, as more educated people are less likely to fall victim to violence, although she argued they are not spared as well. When it comes to violence against transgender people, Sharekh said Kuwait is still a very conservative society and so violence against them must be high as well, but they have no records or stats on this. Abolish 153 is also working with other NGOs, psychologists and doctors. "We want to support people who are seeking guidance and help from us," she said.

Salem narrated an incident in which she was confronted by one of her students at Kuwait University, saying the survey that she presented was correct but not reflective of the reality on the ground. "The student was angry and I could sense that she had a heavy load on her heart. I told her to speak up. She said that her friend was badly beaten by her father, but I realized she was referring to herself. She said her friend is being abused since she was five years old, but after one incident, she could not take it anymore, so she went to the police to file a case," she said.

"But the policewoman convinced her to sign a release report noting that nothing had happened. The policewoman told the girl that she had to recant the complaint because her father was a religious man and that she was tarnishing the name of her father. The policewoman told her that she beats her daughter too and this is just part of disciplining a member of the family. I eventually found out that she was indeed referring to herself," Salem said.

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