

# Kuwaiti politician gets jail term for slander

Al Fadhala accused PM of money laundering

- By Habib Toumi, Bureau Chief
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Manama: Khalid Al Fadhala, the secretary-general of the Kuwait Democratic National Alliance, was yesterday sentenced to three months in jail for slandering the Kuwaiti Prime Minister, Al Aan newsportal reported.

Kuwait's lower court also ruled that Al Fadhala pay a 150 Kuwaiti dinar (Dh1,883) fine for accusing Prime Minister Shaikh Nasser Mohammad Al Ahmad Al Sabah of involvement in money laundering. The civil case against Al Fadhala will be reviewed on July 9, the court said, according to Al Watan daily website.

The Prime Minister had sued Al Fadhala for slandering him at a public rally in Kuwait City last November. Emad Al Seefi, the lawyer for the prime minister, told the court that political activism should not be used to launch accusations and slander people.

"Such an attitude reflects a misinterpretation of the freedom of political activism and the right to criticise other people," he said.

"The dignity of national icons should not be undermined by slandering them or intruding on their private lives. Everybody has the right to go to court to preserve their freedom, private lives and dignity, and this applies to all common people and politicians," he said.

The verdict was expectedly supported and criticised by bloggers who were divided on its merit.

Several people welcomed it as "a means to ensure that freedom of expression is not turned into abuse of people's names and dignity", but others said that it was "a move against people's rights to express their views and opinions."

A group of 56 activists, lawyers and writers issued a petition prior to the ruling to express solidarity with Al Fadhala and to urge Kuwaiti officials to deepen democratic practices by not taking political statements out of their contexts.