

A sensitive and important issue

# Project Kuwait debate sparks fire at Graduates Society

By Nancy Oteifa

**KUWAIT:** The Graduates Society held a debate on Sunday dealing with Project Kuwait, the exploitation of the country's northern oil fields. It is both a sensitive and important issue because oil represents 96 per cent of Kuwait's total income. It has proven contentious, as supporters insist that using for-

"The idea of Project Kuwaiti started immediately after the Gulf War. In 1991 we got a recommendation from Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) to return the market to its old position and start improving our local production," he said.

He described how in 1995 KOC examined the issue and began to alter its strategies to accommodate rapid growth and development and to allow Kuwait to increase production from 4 to 5 million barrels by the 2010. Initially, KOC concentrated its efforts in the south. Al-Refai added, "In 1997, studies revealed that Kuwait needed help from foreign countries." However, unlike in the past, when foreign oil companies were used only to discover oil reserves, this project would involve foreign partners in the entire process. However, further research was necessary and MPs began to debate the issue. After presenting their findings to parliament a decision was reached.

"I don't see any reason not to allow foreign countries to participate in the project. It's a positive step because this will increase our production and also it's time to develop the country with some outside help," Al-Refai said.

Al-Nebari held the opposite view. "There is no need for foreign countries to interfere with this project. What benefits will be there and what



**KUWAIT:** Debate on Kuwait's northern oil fields in progress at the Graduates Society.

rules and regulations will be agreed upon?" he said. He insisted that if Kuwait needed outside help then it wasn't correct to develop the northern oil fields. He added that after the Gulf War they recovered without the presence of foreign oil companies.

"We are capable of doing our own work and carrying out our own development so there is no point in handing over our oil fields to foreign countries

for 20 years," he said. He added that all the necessary studies were complete and that Kuwait could see them through with their own graduates and experienced professionals.

He added that the necessary production techniques were already in use in Wafra, in southern Kuwait. He argued that training workers was easier and cheaper than using outside assistance. "The use of

foreign companies will have certain advantages while others argue that they will cost the country too much. Attending the conference were Abdullah Al-Nebari, a former MP and Hashem Al-Refai, executive assistant for the Kuwait Oil Developing Company. Al-Refai noted, "The northern oil fields have become the most important issue in our society and every one is busy thinking about the future of Kuwait's oil."

foreign companies is a waste of time and money and we will not benefit as much as they will benefit from our oil," he said in conclusion.

Opinions differ over the issue of the northern oil fields. There are those that believe foreign assistance is necessary while others argue that the costs will outweigh any benefits and that Kuwaitis should be the main beneficiaries of their natural resources.