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Court backs MoE over English test; MP blames Islamic groups

Lawmaker calls for recruiting experienced teachers of diverse nationalities

Morocco, Saudis, Egypt out of World Cup



MOSCOW: Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo shoots a free kick during the Russia 2018 World Cup Group B match between Portugal and Morocco at the Luzhniki Stadium yesterday. — AFP (See Page 27)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The controversy over an education ministry decision requiring scholarship students to pass an English-language exam widened yesterday, with the court backing the ministry and MP Safa Al-Hashem accusing Islamic groups of dragging the country backward. MP Omar Al-Tabtabaei meanwhile submitted a proposal to upgrade public education in the country, calling for hiring highly experienced teachers from various countries.

The administrative court yesterday supported the education ministry's decision that Kuwaiti students selected for scholarships must pass the IELTS test before being sent abroad. A number of lawmakers have criticized the decision as unfair because it favors students who study at private English-language schools over students from public schools, whose English skills are not as developed. A number of MPs have warned that the issue could snowball into a major political crisis, calling on the education minister to first upgrade the level of English language education in public schools.

But MP Hashem welcomed the court's ruling, which she said proves that the decision is in line with the constitution and does not discriminate between students, adding that it also preserves public funds after the ministry lost around \$61 million after some scholarship students failed the IELTS exam in foreign countries. She alleged that most of these students are supported by Islamic groups, whom she claimed have contributed to the country's slide in cultural and scientific aspects. Hashem declared her total support to the education

minister's decision over the language test and curbing cheating in exams.

MP Ahmad Al-Fadhli yesterday called on lawmakers to support ministers who make reform decisions, like the education minister's decision on IELTS. He denied that the decision targets students from Kuwaiti tribes, saying that the minister himself belongs to a tribe. Fadhli had on Tuesday praised the decision and said it will improve the level of education, and regretted that 22 MPs including six with doctorate degrees oppose the decision for electoral purposes.

Meanwhile, MP Tabtabaei called in his proposal to set a quota for nationalities of foreign teachers recruited by the education ministry in order not to rely on a specific nationality. In his proposal, he called for recruiting teachers with at least 10 years of experience and who hold master's degrees with a very good grade. Tabtabaei also called for recruiting English teachers from countries whose mother tongue is English, and similarly for French teachers.

Separately, the National Assembly bureau yesterday discussed the issues on the agenda for coming sessions and arrangements and procedures for concluding the current legislative term. The meeting, presided by Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, postponed some issues for further discussion, said National Assembly Secretary MP Ouda Al-Ruwai. He added that the bureau urged various parliamentary committees to complete discussions of the topics on their agendas and refer them to the Assembly. Ruwai pointed to certain measures to be adopted for discussing the state budget and the country's financial status in a private session.

Coalition seizes Hodeida airport from Houthis

KHOKHA, Yemen: Yemeni forces seized Hodeida airport yesterday in a major step towards retaking the rebel-held port city after a week of fighting that has left nearly 350 people dead. Fresh clashes later erupted between UAE-backed government forces and the Iran-allied rebels on a road linking the airport to Hodeida port on the Red Sea coast, a Yemeni army source said. The city, a crucial entry point for imports and humanitarian aid, is the target of a massive operation launched last week by a Saudi-led coalition fighting on the side of the government.

Pro-government forces announced the capture of Hodeida airport in the morning, a day after breaking through the perimeter fence. "The airport was completely cleared, Thank God, and is under control," the coalition commander for the Red Sea coast, Abdul Salaam Al-Shehi, said in a video distributed by the United Arab Emirates' official WAM news agency. UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash tweeted that the "liberation of Hodeida is the beginning to ending the war". "The choice in Yemen is between the state and militia, between order and violence, between peace and war," he wrote, referring to Houthi militiamen.

At least 156 Houthis and 28 soldiers were killed in the fight for the airport, according to Hodeida hospital sources. That raised the death toll in the week-old battle for the city to 348. No civilian casualties have yet been confirmed. On June 13, Yemen's army and its allies launched their offensive to clear Hodeida of rebel fighters who have held it since 2014, raising UN concerns for vital aid shipments and food imports through the city's docks.

The airport is disused but housed a major rebel base just inland from the coastal road into the city from the south. It lies eight kilometers from the city's port, through which three-quarters of Yemen's imports pass, providing a lifeline for some 22 million people dependent on aid. UN envoy Martin Griffiths held four days of talks in the rebel-held capital Sanaa in a bid to avert an all-out battle for the city but flew out on Tuesday without announcing any breakthrough.

The United Arab Emirates and other members of a Saudi-led coalition that intervened in support of the government in 2015 have accused regional arch foe Iran of using Hodeida as conduit for arms smuggling to the rebels. Tehran has denied the allegation. The United Nations has warned any attack on Hodeida port could cripple shipments of desperately needed aid to the 8.4 million Yemenis facing imminent starvation.

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In Syria, race to save precious property deeds

BEIRUT: The external hard drive had been smuggled from Syrian regime territory through militant-held towns and into Turkey. When Ghazwan Koronful finally got his hands on it, he sighed in relief. Loaded onto the disk were pictures of thousands of title deeds from towns in central Syria recently recaptured by government troops and largely emptied of their residents. Fearing Syria's regime would expropriate abandoned properties or tamper with deeds, a network of activists and lawyers set their covert plan into motion.

"It was our most complex operation yet," said Koronful, a 65-year-old Syrian lawyer who heads the network from Turkey, where he has lived in exile since 2012. For nearly five years, Koronful's

Free Syrian Lawyers (FSL) have been working to preserve property deeds and other civil paperwork in Syria's opposition areas. They enter town registries, photograph the documents, carefully log and organize them, then smuggle the hard drives across Syria's sealed northern border into Turkey. "In total, we've got eight terabytes of documents, about 1.7 million documents - court records, wills, birth, marriage, and death certificates," said Koronful.

Among them are up to 450,000 land-related documents from northern and central Syria - title deeds, contracts, and other papers that displaced Syrians could use to prove property ownership. These documents are crucial now, Koronful explained, as the government passes a series of laws that rights defenders fear may unfairly dispossess Syrians from their homes. "Our work simultaneously protects against hostilities that could damage the deeds, and against the regime's attempts through these new laws to tamper with people's

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Eight year-old Maya Mohammad Ali Merhi, using prosthetic legs made by her father from tin cans, walks with him and another child in a camp for displaced people in the northern Syrian province of Idlib yesterday. Maya and her father were both born without lower limbs. Unable to afford real prosthetic limbs, her father made her a pair out of tin cans filled with cotton and scrap pieces of cloth. Maya's family had to leave their home in the Aleppo province to flee battles. — AFP

Trump signs order to end border family separations

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump backed down yesterday on an immigration policy that sparked outrage at home and abroad, signing an executive order to end the separation of children from their parents when immigrant families are caught crossing the US-Mexico border illegally. The order requires that immigrant families be detained together when they are caught entering the country illegally, although it was not immediately clear for how long.

It also moves parents with children to the front of the line for immigration proceedings. The order does not end a "zero tolerance" policy that calls for criminal prosecution of immigrants crossing the border illegally. "It's about keeping families together while at the same time making sure that we have a very powerful, very strong border," Trump said as he signed the order in a hastily arranged Oval Office gathering.

Videos of youngsters in cages and an audiotape of wailing children had sparked anger in the United States from groups ranging from clergy to influential business leaders, as well as condemnation from abroad, including Pope Francis. Trump, a frequent viewer of cable television newscasts, had recognized the family separation issue was a growing political problem. White House



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump displays the executive order he signed yesterday. — AFP

sources said. First Lady Melania Trump, in private conversations with the president, urged him to do something, a White House official said. "The first lady has been making her opinion known to the president for some time now, which was that he needed to do all he could to help families stay together," an official said.

Yesterday's move marked a rare instance since Trump took office in January 2017 in which he has changed course on a controversial policy, rather than digging in. Trump has made a tough stance on immigration central to his presidency. In recent days, the Republican president had insisted his hands were tied by law on the issue of family separations and had

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Tehran signals compromise for modest output rise

VIENNA: Iran signalled yesterday it could compromise on a small increase in OPEC oil output when the group meets this week, as Saudi Arabia scrambled to convince fellow members of the need for a larger rise in production. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries meets tomorrow to decide output policy amid calls from major consumers such as the United States and China to cool down oil prices and support the global economy by producing more crude.

Iran said on Tuesday OPEC was unlikely to reach a deal, setting the stage for a clash with kingpin Saudi Arabia and non-member Russia, which are pushing to raise production steeply from July to meet growing global demand. But yesterday, Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh said OPEC members that had over-delivered on cuts in recent months should comply with agreed quotas. That would effectively mean a modest boost from producers such as Saudi Arabia that have been cutting more deeply than planned despite production outages in Venezuela and Libya.

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