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# MP proposes evening work amid soaring temperatures

## Minister questioned over delays in payment of salaries to contract workers

### MP calls on govt to establish new mobile operator

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Majed Al-Mutairi submitted a draft law yesterday calling on the government to establish a fourth telecom company that offers mobile and data services. The bill states that 50 percent of the new company's shares will go to Kuwaiti citizens, 24 percent to the government and the remaining 26 percent to be sold to a strategic investor in a public auction.

Kuwait has one of the highest mobile penetration rates in the world, and while this has led to market saturation, the three operators - Zain, Ooredoo and Viva - are combating this by building extensive 5G networks and developing mobile broadband content and services.

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Faisal Al-Kandari yesterday proposed a draft law stipulating that government departments dealing with the public work in the evening to avoid the scorching heat of the sun. The draft law, which must be passed in the Assembly and accepted by the government to become effective, states that government offices, especially those dealing with the public, must open from 5.00 pm to 10.00 pm in the summer months. The bill also states that the summer evening timing should start from June 1 and continue until the end of August, a period when the temperature soars in Kuwait to around 50 degrees Celsius.

According to an Al-Qabas report yesterday, Kuwait recorded the highest temperature in the world on Saturday - 52.2 degrees Celsius in the shade - in Mitribah in the north of the country, according to member of the Arab Union of Space and Astronomy Dr Khalid Al-Zaaq of Saudi

Arabia. Soaring temperatures have also caused a spike in the consumption of power, as the load register hit 13,500 megawatts on Friday. Informed sources said it is expected that power consumption will go over the 13,800-megawatt limit in the next three days. Temperatures are expected to reach 50 degrees Celsius today and 51C tomorrow.

Government offices currently open from around 7.30 am to around 2.00 pm for almost all departments throughout the year, except in Ramadan, when working hours are reduced. Kandari said in his proposal that during the summer months, temperatures rise to over 50 degrees, posing a threat to people's lives and constituting a huge pressure on services - especially electricity - sometimes resulting in major fires.

The bill provides flexibility to the Civil Service Commission to decide which departments should open in the evening and can exclude some departments which do not deal with the public. The

lawmaker said a number of studies and researches on climatic change have concluded that temperatures are forecast to rise rapidly in the Arabian Gulf to the brink of 60 degrees Celsius in the future. He said the law is important for the health of both the employees and the public. Several previous attempts to change working hours in the summer months had failed.

Meanwhile, MP Osama Al-Shaheen yesterday asked Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel about government measures to force contractors pay the salaries of their workers. The lawmaker said the United Nations selected III the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as a humanitarian leader and Kuwait as an international humanitarian center. As a result, the government must live up to this honor by preserving the image and reputation of the country, he said.

Shaheen added that it has been noticed that many contractors with gov-



MP Faisal Al-Kandari

ernment projects fail to pay the salaries of their workers on time, which could lead to strikes and social unrest. The lawmaker asked the minister about measures being used currently to guarantee and ensure that salaries of workers are paid on time, and inquired if the ministry and the manpower authority have any plan to eliminate any delays in salary payment.

### Oman to impose new excise tax to boost revenues

DUBAI: Oman will impose a new tax on sugary drinks and tobacco products starting on June 15, as the small Gulf oil producer seeks to boost state revenues strained by years of low oil prices. A 100 percent excise tax will be introduced for tobacco products, energy drinks, alcohol and pork meat, while a 50 percent tax will be applied on carbonated drinks, according to a statement from an official at the Secretariat General for Taxation published by Oman's state news agency on Saturday.

"The excise tax is a consumption tax and is considered to be indirect taxes. Thus, the final charge is on the consumers, but it is collected in advance at a stage of the supply chain, notably through the business sectors,"

said Sulaiman bin Salim Al-A'adi, director general of survey and tax agreements. Oman has been slow in implementing fiscal reforms aimed at limiting the widening of its budget deficit, while it has increasingly relied on external funding - through bonds and loans - to refill its coffers.

The sultanate had originally planned to introduce a 5 percent value-added tax in 2018, which is now expected to start in 2020. "Further delays in implementation, along with a scenario of lower oil prices, pose downside risks to our assumption of narrower fiscal deficits relative to 2015-2017," S&P Global Ratings said in April, adding that it expected fiscal gains in 2019 coming from the implementation of excise taxes on tobacco and energy drinks.

Oman said at the start of the year it expected its budget deficit to be 2.8 billion rials (\$7.27 billion) this year, or 9 percent of gross domestic product. Sources told Reuters last month that to cover part of the deficit, Oman is expected to issue a new international bond soon in a deal likely to go up to \$2 billion in size. — Reuters

### Civil disobedience campaign empties streets of Sudan

KHARTOUM: Four people were killed in Sudan yesterday as protesters launched a civil disobedience campaign against the military after a bloody crackdown on a sit-in demonstration calling for civilian rule. The campaign got underway nearly a week after the assault on demonstrators at the sit-in outside army headquarters in central Khartoum, which followed talks breaking down between protest leaders and military rulers over who should lead a new governing body - a civilian or soldier.

Following the call for the campaign of civil disobedience, protesters set about building roadblocks in Khartoum while markets and shops were closed in several other towns and cities. A doctors committee linked to the demonstrators said two people were killed yes-



KHARTOUM: Residents walk on the first day of a civil disobedience campaign across Sudan. — AFP

terday in unrest that rocked Khartoum and two others in its twin city of Omdurman, just across the Nile river.

The Central Committee for Sudanese Doctors blamed forces of the ruling military council and paramilitary "militias" for the four deaths, which it said took the

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### Modi visits bombed Sri Lankan church

COLOMBO: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an unexpected visit yesterday to a Colombo church bombed during the Easter suicide attacks on his first trip to neighboring Sri Lanka since his election triumph. Modi's cavalcade made a detour to St Anthony's shrine on the way to President Maithripala Sirisena's seafront office in the capital, where a red carpet military parade awaited. "I am confident Sri Lanka will rise again," Modi said on Twitter where he posted photos of himself at the church. "Cowardly acts of terror cannot defeat the spirit of Sri Lanka. India stands in solidarity with the people of Sri Lanka."

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who received Modi at Colombo's airport, said the two discussed ways to combat militant attacks like the assault on the three hotels and three churches which left 258 dead



COLOMBO: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays respects to victims of the Easter Sunday attacks at St Anthony's Church yesterday. — AFP

and 500 injured. "The two leaders discussed the collective steps to stamp out international terrorism," Wickremesinghe's office said in a statement.

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