



6 Biden joins battle for Senate as top Republican accepts win



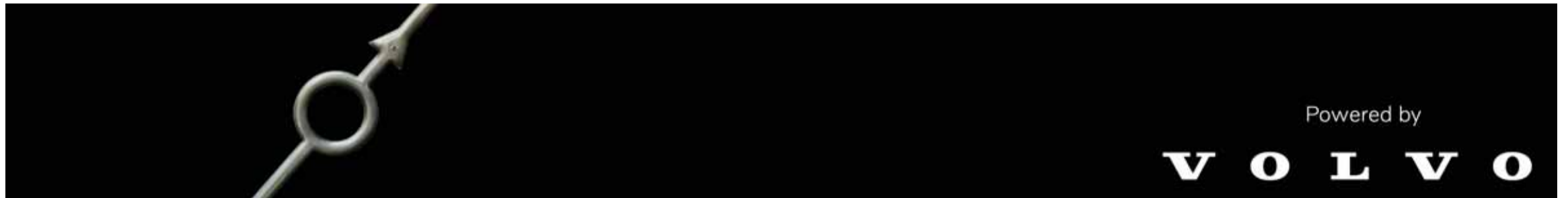
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MP files amendment to end secret voting for speakership

Lawmakers file law for general amnesty for political activists



KUWAIT: Opposition MPs react after the re-election of incumbent speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem during the National Assembly's inaugural session on Tuesday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari yesterday filed amendments to the National Assembly internal charter to end secret voting for the speaker and other office bearers, apparently in a bid to make MPs comply with their pledges. During the Assembly's opening session on Tuesday, incumbent speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem was re-elected with a comfortable majority, although over 40 MPs out of the 50 elected members had pledged publicly not to vote for him.

The same thing happened in 2016, when Ghanem was elected with an overwhelming majority, although at least 28 MPs had said they would not vote for him. Kandari proposed changes to two articles in the internal charter, which stipulate secret ballots for the election of the speaker, his deputy, secretary and supervisor of the Assembly.

Kandari said in the request that public voting for the speaker's post is the right way for a transparent beginning of the new Assembly, adding that the people have the full right to know how the lawmakers they elected have voted. The outcome of the speaker's election was shocking to a number of opposition lawmakers, some of whom cried betrayal and said they will ask for an investigation.

Opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum said at least eight MPs who publicly pledged to vote for

Ghanem's only rival MP Bader Al-Humaidi changed their mind. Three other ballots were invalid. MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa said the outcome of the speaker's election was disappointing, adding that those who changed their mind will be exposed during voting on crucial laws and issues.

MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri charged "foul play" in the election, and said the Cabinet's support for Ghanem calls for non-cooperation with the government. MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf said he will demand the formation of an investigation committee next week into allegations of violations into the election of the speaker.

But new MP Fayez Al-Jamhour said that the election of the speaker "is behind us and the Assembly should look forward". He said lawmakers have not come to trigger crises or for confrontation with the government, but for cooperation to approve essential laws. Jamhour said a bloc of MPs will be formed to propose new legislation and call for the cancellation of others, and called on Ghanem to understand the message that as many as 28 MPs did not vote for him.

Meanwhile, five opposition lawmakers filed a draft law calling for a general amnesty for political activists convicted over cases related to freedom of speech. The law was rejected by the previous Assembly, but opposition lawmakers believe that their number has increased and they are capable of forcing it through.

News in brief

Bitcoin above \$20,000 for first time

LONDON: Leading virtual currency bitcoin yesterday traded above \$20,000 for the first time following a sustained run higher in recent weeks. Just 12 years old, bitcoin reached a record-high \$20,398.50 before pulling back to \$20,145, which was still an intra-day gain of nearly four percent. It has seen a meteoric rise since March, when it stood at \$5,000, spurred by online payments giant PayPal, saying it would enable account holders to use cryptocurrency. A number of central banks have meanwhile responded to the rise of cryptocurrencies and the dwindling global use of cash by announcing plans for bank-backed digital units. — AFP

Pakistan approves anti-rape laws

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has approved the chemical castration of rapists as part of sweeping new legislation sparked by outcry over the gang rape of a mother on a motorway. Under the new laws, special courts will be established to try cases of rape and sexual abuse against women and children, which must be completed within four months. They also create the country's first national sex offenders register, establish anti-rape cells across the country for conducting initial investigations and medical examinations within six hours of filing a police complaint - while abolishing an invasive medical examination known as the two-finger virginity test for rape victims. — AFP

Lab-grown meat to make debut

SINGAPORE: Lab-grown chicken meat will make its debut at a Singapore restaurant in a culinary first this weekend after the company behind the product announced its inaugural sale yesterday. US start-up Eat Just said earlier this month that its product had been approved for sale in the city-state as an ingredient in chicken nuggets after Singapore became the first country to allow meat created without slaughtering any animals to be sold. Yesterday, the company said it had made its first commercial sale of the product to 1880, a restaurant in Robertson Quay, a posh riverside entertainment center. — AFP

Record German deaths, US cases; Europe tightens curbs

BERLIN: Several European countries tightened restrictions yesterday, as Germany set a record for daily deaths and the United States broke its own daily high for infection numbers. The tougher measures came as EU countries agreed to rollout vaccinations on the same day. "To get to the end of the pandemic, we will need up to 70 percent of the population vaccinated," European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen told MEPs.

Pressure has been mounting on the bloc since Britain and the United

States both started their programs, using a vaccine developed in the EU by Pfizer and BioNTech. The World Health Organization's European wing yesterday warned of a resurgence of the virus on the continent early next year, urging special precautions over the holiday season. "It may feel awkward to wear masks and practice physical distancing when around friends and family, but doing so contributes significantly to ensuring that everyone remains safe and healthy," the health agency said.

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BOGOTA: Smoke comes out of a mannequin's mouth to show how viruses can spread in the air during a campaign to raise awareness for the prevention of the novel coronavirus on Tuesday. — AFP

Al-Sadu, couscous listed as intangible world heritage

PARIS: UNESCO has placed Kuwait and Saudi Arabia's traditional Al-Sadu weaving on the world's intangible cultural heritage list, a Kuwaiti diplomat said yesterday. The achievement comes partly due to the efforts of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letter's Department of Antiquities and Museums, Kuwait's representative to UNESCO Adam Al-Mulla told KUNA.

It becomes the second cultural practice to be added to the list for Kuwait after date palm production and related cultural activities. Al-Sadu is a conventional textile hand woven by Bedouin women, using natural fibers found in their environment and characterized by embroidery in geometrical shapes. In Kuwait, the Al-Sadu Weaving Co-operative Society was launched in 1978 to preserve, document and promote this rich and diverse textile heritage.

Meanwhile, couscous, the Berber dish beloved across northern Africa's Maghreb region and beyond, also joined the UN list of the world's intangible cultural heritage. The countries that submitted the listing to UNESCO - Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania - may have their differences, but their common love of the grain staple runs deep.

"Couscous, present at every social or cultural



A woman makes a traditional Sadu weaving.

event, is at once ordinary and special," their joint presentation argued. "Ordinary because of the frequency of its use in a family setting, and special because of the unifying and propitiatory role it plays at convivial community occasions at which food is shared."

Bland by itself, couscous is served with meat or fish, spicy stews, chickpeas and vegetables in a mouth-watering variety of dishes. Moroccan restaurant owner Hicham Hazzoum was among the couscous connoisseurs who applauded UNESCO's honor. "I think we are the only Arab countries to have a high regard for this dish," he said. "It is impossible not to eat it every Friday. Moroccans are crazy about couscous and even children love it. It shows that the couscous flame will never go out."

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Baghdad booze attacks: Turf war or vice squads?

BAGHDAD: Escalating attacks on the Iraqi capital's few liquor stores have terrified shop-owners who fear hardline Islamists are flexing their muscle against alcohol consumption. But there may be a bigger story behind the Baghdad booze bombings, as some suspect turf wars for control of the lucrative niche trade in the Muslim majority country.

Over the past two months, at least 14 alcohol shops across the city have been firebombed in the middle of the night or just before dawn, with three simultaneous attacks in different districts Monday night alone. Most businesses are run by Christians or Yazidis, minorities who for decades have been granted the licenses required to sell alcohol in broadly conservative Iraq.

Andre, an Iraqi Christian, said his shop was firebombed a few weeks ago by two people on a motorcycle just before dawn, according to the store's security camera footage. He said it had cost him thousands of dollars to replace the lost merchandise and repair the shop. "These groups want the last of the Christians to leave the country."

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