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Opposition MPs cancel sit-in after interior minister's visit

MP Dahoum faces three challenges in court to nullify his election victory



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah (center) visits the diwaniya of MP Mohammad Al-Mutair (second right) yesterday. Also present are MP Bader Al-Dahoum (second left) and other opposition MPs.

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MPs yesterday cancelled a planned gathering in support of leading opposition lawmaker Bader Al-Dahoum - whose National Assembly membership is on the line awaiting a court ruling on March 3 - after a visit by the interior minister. Dahoum is facing three challenges in the constitutional court against his election victory in the Dec 5 parliamentary polls, all demanding that the court, whose rulings are final, to nullify his win.

A large number of opposition MPs and activists had decided to stage a sit-in outside Dahoum's home tomorrow ahead of the court's ruling to declare their total support to him. However, Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah yesterday visited the diwaniya of MP Mohammad Al-Mutair and discussed with a number of lawmakers the emergency health conditions due to the coronavirus pandemic, and as a result the lawmakers called off the gathering.

Mutair said on Twitter that following the meeting with the interior minister and due to the prevailing health conditions, the gathering will not be held. Instead a press conference will be held that will be

broadcast on social networks.

A special interior ministry commission had disqualified Dahoum from contesting the Assembly election, so he appealed the decision in court. The lower court supported the decision, but it was overturned by the appeals court and later upheld by the court of cassation, whose rulings are final.

But three petitions challenging Dahoum's election were filed at the constitutional court. One of the petitions claims that Dahoum is barred for life from contesting elections because he was convicted for taking part in storming the National Assembly building during an opposition protest in Nov 2011.

Top constitutional experts said the case is very sensitive, especially after the court of cassation had already granted Dahoum full approval to contest the election. The constitutional court in Kuwait reviews decisions to ensure they are in line with the constitution. Regular courts cannot tackle such issues.

The court must first decide to accept or reject to handle the case. Three legal experts - Mohammad Al-Fili, Hussein Al-Abdullah and Fawaz Al-Jadaei - said they believe the court might refuse to take the case.

News in brief

Belgium hit by UK variant

BRUSSELS: The more contagious British variant of the coronavirus is now the dominant strain in Belgium, authorities said Friday, as they explained why infection numbers have again started to rise. "Last week, we estimate that 53 percent of infections were caused by the UK variant, against 38 percent a week earlier," a spokesman for the government's coronavirus response, Steven Van Gucht, told a news conference. — AFP

EMA approves Regeneron therapy

THE HAGUE: Europe's medicines regulator on Friday provisionally approved use of US biotech firm Regeneron's COVID-19 therapy, saying it prevented patients with from getting worse. Regeneron's synthetic antibody treatment was used to treat former US President Donald Trump after he contracted coronavirus last year. The European Medicines Agency said preliminary results showed treatment with REGN-COV2 reduced the amount of the virus in the back of the nose and throat and led to fewer medical visits. — AFP

Rooster kills owner with blade

NEW DELHI: A rooster fitted with a knife for an illegal cockfight in southern India has killed its owner, sparking a manhunt for the organizers of the event, police said yesterday. The bird had a knife attached to its leg ready to take on an opponent when it inflicted serious injuries to the man's groin as it tried to escape, officers said. The victim died from loss of blood before he could reach a hospital in the Karimnagar district of Telangana state earlier this week. — AFP

NY gets Trump tax records

NEW YORK: New York prosecutors investigating former president Donald Trump's finances have finally received his tax returns following a marathon legal battle, a spokesman said Thursday. "Our office obtained the records on Monday," Danny Frost, a spokesman for Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance, told AFP. The prosecutor is investigating hush payments made to two women who allege they had affairs with Trump and possible fraud. — AFP

Thousands support patriarch

BKERKE, Lebanon: Thousands rallied yesterday in support of the Maronite patriarch following powerful Shiite group Hezbollah's recent criticism of the Christian leader's positions. Earlier this month, Patriarch Bechara Al-Rahi had called for a UN-sponsored "international conference", but Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah last week slammed the proposal. — AFP

Kuwait supports Saudi statement on Khashoggi case

KUWAIT: Kuwait's foreign ministry yesterday expressed support towards the Saudi foreign ministry's statement regarding the US Congress report on the case of journalist Jamal Khashoggi's 2018 murder. In a statement, the Kuwaiti foreign ministry stressed the important role played by Saudi Arabia under the leadership of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz both regionally and internationally in support of moderation and denouncing of violence and extremism.

The ministry affirmed that it categorically rejects all malicious attempts against Saudi sovereignty, saying the kingdom always played a role in security and stability, both in the region and worldwide. Saudi Arabia on Friday said it "completely rejects" the declassified US report.

Israeli vessel hit by blast in Gulf of Oman

DUBAI: An Israeli vessel travelling from Saudi Arabia to Singapore was hit by an explosion in the Gulf of Oman, maritime security groups and the owner said Friday. The MV Helios Ray vehicle carrier "suffered an explosion within the Gulf of Oman", the Dryad Global maritime security group said. The vessel was understood to have been travelling from Dammam, a port city in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, to Singapore when the blast occurred

Biden says US strike in Syria warning to Iran

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden said Friday that a US air strike against an Iranian-backed militia in eastern Syria, the first since he took office, should be seen by Iran as a warning. Asked what the message was from the air strike, Biden said: "You can't act with impunity." "Be careful," he added, speaking in Houston during a tour of relief efforts after a huge winter storm in Texas.

Syria and Iran on Friday condemned the attack with Damascus calling it a "bad sign" from the new Biden administration and Tehran saying it would further destabilize the region. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said two F-15E "Strike Eagles" dropped seven precision-guided munitions on Thursday on facilities in

eastern Syria used by the militias believed to be behind a spate of rocket attacks on US troops in Iraq.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Biden was sending "an unambiguous message". "He's going to act to protect Americans and when threats are posed, he has the right to take an action at the time and in the manner of his choosing," Psaki said. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the administration wanted to make it "very, very clear - notably to Iran - that they cannot act with impunity against our people, our partners, our interests. "And I think - and expect - that that message was clearly received," Blinken said.

Syria condemned the strike as "cowardly American aggression". "It is a bad sign regarding the policies of the new US administration which should adhere to international (norms)," the foreign ministry said. The Iranian foreign ministry strongly condemned what it called "illegal attacks" that are a "clear violation of

"The government of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia completely rejects the negative, false and unacceptable assessment in the report pertaining to the kingdom's leadership, and notes that the report contained inaccurate information and conclusions," the Saudi foreign ministry said in a statement.

"It is truly unfortunate that this report, with its unjustified and inaccurate conclusions, is issued while the kingdom had clearly denounced this heinous crime, and the kingdom's leadership took the necessary steps to ensure that such a tragedy never takes place again," the foreign ministry said. "The kingdom rejects any measure that infringes upon its leadership, sovereignty, and the independence of its judicial system," the ministry added.

Following the release of the report, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington wants to "recalibrate" but not "rupture" its relations with Riyadh, a longstanding security partner in the Middle East. Despite its anger over the report, Saudi Arabia also stressed that it was keen to maintain the relationship.

"The partnership between Saudi Arabia and the United States of America is a robust and enduring partnership," the foreign ministry said. "We look for-

Thursday, northwest of Oman, it said.

"The MV HELIOS RAY is owned by HELIOS Ltd, an Israeli company registered in the Isle of Man," it added. The owner of the vessel, Israeli businessman Rami Ungar, confirmed the blast in statements to Israel's Kan state television and said it caused some damage. "The damage is two holes about a meter and a half (five feet) in diameter," he said, without elaborating, according to Kan.

"But it is not yet clear to us whether it was caused by missile fire or mines attached to the ship," he added. "We have no idea if this is an incident that is part of the tensions between Iran and the United States and if it has to do with the fact that the owner of the ship is Israeli." Ungar said there were no casualties among the crew and no damage to the engine, Kan reported.



ward to maintaining the enduring foundations that have shaped the framework of the resilient strategic partnership between the kingdom and the United States." — Agencies

The Israeli state broadcaster said the vessel was transporting cars from Dammam to Singapore when the blast occurred. Dryad said it appeared the vessel was returning to its port of origin. But according to the Kan report, Ungar said the vessel was heading to the United Arab Emirates, where it was due to arrive yesterday morning to undergo checks.

Israel normalized ties last year with the UAE, a move followed by fellow Gulf state Bahrain. United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) also reported the blast and said the crew were safe, adding that an investigation into the incident was underway. The Marine Traffic website said the Bahamas-flagged vessel had left Dammam on Wednesday and was due to arrive in Singapore next week.

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AL-QAIM, Iraq: This handout satellite image released on Friday shows the aftermath of recent US airstrikes on a small group of buildings at an unofficial crossing on the Syria-Iraq border. — AFP

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