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Kuwait enters election silence ahead of crucial Assembly polls

Prosecution detains several candidates, voters over vote buying

By B Izzak & Agencies

KUWAIT: As Kuwait prepares for its third parliamentary elections in less than 30 months as a result of a high level of political divisions, campaigns enter into election silence on Monday, a day before the crucial June 6 snap polls. Under regulations by the information ministry, interviews, statements or campaigns by candidates are totally banned until ballots close late in the evening on Tuesday and counting of votes starts.

The public prosecution has been extremely busy in the past few days after the interior ministry busted several vote-buying networks including brokers, candidates and voters who agreed to receive a sum of money to vote for a certain candidate. In a series of decisions, the public prosecution has ordered the arrest of a former MP who is contesting the election in the second constituency after a female citizen was caught trying to buy votes in his favor.

The prosecution also ordered the arrest of four more candidates, including two former MPs, on suspicion of

buying votes. The candidates are running for seats in the first, second and fourth constituencies. In a third decision, the public prosecution ordered the detention of a candidate and five voters and ordered the arrest of a number of former MPs and dozens of voters on charges of buying votes.

Earlier, the prosecution freed on KD 1,000 bail two candidates, including a former MP, running in the fifth constituency, in addition to four voters, but detained a Pakistani for 21 days for vote-buying activities. The prosecution had in the past few days made similar decisions regarding other candidates accused of being involved in vote buying.

Meanwhile, the nationality department at the interior ministry said on Sunday that producing the original citizenship ID is essential to be able to vote. It said it will remain open on election day to issue new citizenship IDs to voters who have lost their IDs. Campaigning continued to focus on a lack of political stability in the country as voters head to express their second franchise in just eight months.

Fearing that widespread skepticism will discourage many people from voting, the authorities have festooned the capital with posters in an attempt to encourage a better turnout. "We have to wake up and face up to this great frustration," activist and university professor Sheikha Al-Jassem told AFP of the political crisis.

In Tuesday's vote, 207 candidates, including 13 women, are standing, the lowest number of candidates in a legislative election since 1996. Jassem has herself stood for election in the past, but will no longer do so under a current stalemate she attributes to the lack of voter lists and political parties being banned. "Political life needs to be better organized," she said. "Everyone acts too individually. Our commitment is superficial and our democracy incomplete."

Kuwaiti analyst Ayed Al-Manaa told AFP the people have a "lack of confidence" in the political class. "Kuwaitis are tired" by the situation, he said, adding that he feared the latest election would again result in a scenario in which the government resigns and parliament is dissolved.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Taikonauts return to Earth

BEIJING: Three Chinese astronauts working at the country's space station have returned safely to Earth, state media reported Sunday, hailing the mission as a "complete success". The return capsule of the Shenzhou-15 spaceship touched down at a landing site in northern China's Inner Mongolia region. Taikonauts Fei Junlong, Deng Qingming and Zhang Lu emerged from the capsule in "good physical condition", Xinhua reported. The trio had spent six months at the Tiangong space station. Footage showed medical officials in white jumpsuits and face masks swaddling the astronauts in blue blankets and carrying them away from the arid landing site, where the copper-colored capsule lay flanked by red flags. — AFP

Kerry meets head of COP28

DUBAI: US special climate envoy John Kerry has met senior Emirati officials in Abu Dhabi, including the head of the United Nations' upcoming COP28 climate change conference, official media reported Sunday. Kerry met Sultan Al-Jaber and the UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed on Saturday, discussing "the existing partnership across various fronts with a special emphasis on climate-related issues", the official WAM news agency said. — AFP

Suez Canal traffic resumes

ISMAILIA, Egypt: Egypt deployed three tugboats Sunday to tow away an oil tanker that had broken down and caused brief delays in the Suez Canal, authorities in charge of the vital waterway said. Traffic in both directions returned to normal after a brief disruption when the Malta-flagged Seavigour experienced a "machinery malfunction" while en route from Russia to China, the Suez Canal Authority said. Three tugboats "successfully towed and moored the ship" at a shipyard where the technical fault will be fixed before the tanker "resumes its crossing", according to a statement. — AFP

Kuwait, Manila seek to resolve labor issues

KUWAIT: Informed sources said the Philippine visa ban issue will be resolved before the end of the year, adding that recent communications took place between

the two countries and it was agreed that a meeting will be held between the two sides to sign a new labor agreement that satisfies both sides.

Sources said Philippines will not object to Kuwait conditions to not open new shelters for absconding workers, cancel the high financial deposits imposed on Kuwaiti labor offices and undertake to respect Kuwaiti laws, provided that Kuwait will have a clear workplan on how to guarantee

Philippine domestic workers' rights in case disputes occur between them and their employers and how to protect them in case they refuse to work for their sponsors.

The sources said Manila wants to decide on certain points that must be agreed on, on how to provide Filipino domestic workers their rights, working hours and salaries, adding Kuwait does not see these matters as obstacles, provided salaries are not inflated. The

sources said Kuwait and Philippines may hold a meeting within two months to reach a new labor agreement.

Kuwait suspended all types of work and entry visas for Filipinos in May after the country allegedly violated a bilateral labor agreement with the state. In February, the Philippines halted the deployment of first-time workers, especially domestic helpers, to Kuwait following the gruesome murder of a 35-year-old Filipina maid by a Kuwaiti teenager.

Saudi announces fresh output cut to boost oil price

VIENNA: Riyadh on Sunday announced it would slash output further by one million barrels per day in a bid to prop up prices, despite fears of a recession. The announcement came following a meeting of the 13-member Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) headed by Saudi Arabia and its 10 partners, led by Russia. The cut is for July but "can be extended", Saudi Energy Minister Prince

Abdulaziz bin Salman told reporters.

It is a "voluntary" cut announced after the in-person hours-long OPEC+ meeting at the group's headquarters in Vienna, which saw some tough negotiations. Analysts had largely expected OPEC+ producers to maintain their current policy, but signs emerged this weekend that the 23 countries may make deeper cuts. Kuwait will continue its voluntary oil output reduction by 128,000 bpd until the end of 2024, Finance Minister Manaf Al-Hajeri said.

In April, several OPEC+ members agreed to cut production voluntarily by more than one million bpd — a surprise move that briefly buttressed prices but failed to bring about lasting recovery. Bloomberg news agency reported a fight with the grouping's

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VIENNA: Kuwaiti Finance Minister Manaf Al-Hajeri arrives for the 35th OPEC and non-OPEC ministerial meeting on June 4, 2023. — AFP

Sudan battles rage as US, Saudi urge new truce

KHARTOUM: The United States and Saudi Arabia on Sunday made a renewed push for truce talks between Sudan's warring generals as deadly fighting has raged into its eighth week.

Multiple ceasefires have been agreed and broken, and Washington slapped sanctions on the two warring generals last week, blaming both sides for the "appalling" bloodshed.

Envoys of Sudan's regular army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have remained in the Saudi coastal city of Jeddah despite the earlier collapse of ceasefire talks, the kingdom's foreign ministry said. The foreign mediators called for "the parties to agree to and effectively imple-

ment a new ceasefire, with the aim of building to a permanent cessation of hostilities", Riyadh said.

A five-day extension of a US- and Saudi-brokered truce formally expired on Saturday with no signs of the conflict abating and fears that the rival sides were poised for an escalation. Upwards of 1,800 people have been killed, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, and the UN says 1.2 million have been displaced with more than

425,000 fleeing abroad. The RSF on Sunday claimed it had shot down a fighter jet after the army "launched an audacious airborne assault upon our forces' positions" in northern Khartoum. A military source told AFP a Chinese-made jet crashed near Wadi Seidna base north of Khartoum because of a "technical malfunction". Witnesses said they saw an aircraft travelling from the south to the north of the capital with flames

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Syria FM talks aid on visit to key ally Iraq

BAGHDAD: Syria's foreign minister on Sunday discussed humanitarian aid and combating the illegal drugs trade with key ally Iraq during a visit to Baghdad as Damascus emerges from years of diplomatic isolation. The visit by Faisal Mekdad comes weeks after the Arab League agreed to end Syria's suspension from the 22-member bloc, bringing President Bashar Al-Assad's regime back into the regional fold after years of civil war.

Iraq remained an ally of Damascus throughout the wider Arab boycott, never severing relations and maintaining close cooperation during Syria's civil war, particularly over the fight against the Islamic State group. During the visit, Mekdad met with Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani and conveyed "an invitation to visit Damascus" on an unspecified date, a statement from the Iraqi premier's office said.

Baghdad was "one of the initiators" of Syria's return to the Arab League, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said in a joint press conference with Mekdad. The two also discussed the issue of Syrian refugees who fled the country after war erupted, many of whom now live in Iraq as well as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

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BAGHDAD: Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein receives his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mekdad on June 4, 2023. — AFP



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