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Damascus back in Arab fold

Kuwait says Arab League keen on resolving Syrian conflict



CAIRO: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah attends an emergency meeting of Arab League foreign ministers on May 7, 2023. — KUNA

CAIRO: The Arab League on Sunday welcomed back Syria's government, ending a more than decade-long suspension and securing President Bashar Al-Assad's return to the Arab fold after years of isolation. In Nov 2011, the body suspended Damascus over its crackdown on peaceful protests which began earlier that year and which spiraled into a conflict that has killed more than 500,000 people, displaced millions and battered the country's infrastructure and industry.

While the frontlines have mostly quietened, large parts of the country's north remain outside government control, and no political solution has yet been reached to the 12-year-old conflict. "Government delegations from the Syrian Arab Republic will resume their participation in Arab League meetings" starting Sunday, said a unanimous decision by the group's foreign ministers.

Arab foreign ministers agreed to allow the Syrian delegation to take part in the Arab League's meetings in a step showing keenness to resolve the conflict in the fellow Arab country, Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah said on Sunday. Sheikh Salem revealed that the decision reflected Arab keenness on the unity of Syria and a strong desire to resolve the long conflict. He affirmed that the Syrian government must fulfill its commitment to ensure the safe return of the refugees and the displaced in accordance with UNSC resolutions connected with the matter.

There was a decision to form a ministerial committee grouping Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt and the Arab League to implement what was agreed upon during the Amman meeting on Syria, he indicated. He noted that the Amman meeting agreed to continue direct dialogue with the Syrian

government to reach a comprehensive solution for Syria based on UNSC resolution 2254. Sheikh Salem indicated the committee would be reporting to the Arab League regularly to provide updates.

He also noted that the Arab foreign ministers' gathering also touched on developments in Sudan as well as Zionist violations against the Palestinians. The Arab foreign ministers called for respecting Sudanese sovereignty and finding solutions to the crisis in Sudan with the participation of Sudanese and international parties. He affirmed that there were calls to provide urgent humanitarian support to Sudan. He also mentioned Kuwait's campaign to aid Sudan launched on May 4. On Palestine, Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah said the Arab League had issued a statement regarding the brutal Zionist treatment of Palestinians.

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Movement slams new blood bag fees for expats

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti leftist political group, Kuwaiti Progressive Movement, on Sunday strongly criticized a decision by the health ministry to impose charges on blood units for expats, describing the measure as "discriminatory". The ministry of health on Saturday issued a decision imposing a fee of KD 20 per bag of blood for expat patients if they have legal residency and KD 40 for visitors. The ministry also increased charges on 37 laboratory tests, ranging from half a dinar to KD 15 for residents and between KD 5 and KD 70 for visitors. Emergency cases are exempt from the charges.

The Progressive Movement said in a statement the decision discriminates between patients on the basis of religion, creed, social class and gender. The movement claimed "class-based discrimination has increased rapidly in state institutions", adding that the level of discrimination reached in the country is "unprecedented".

Meanwhile, the low turnout of candidates for the upcoming parliamentary polls continued Sunday, as only 24 hopefuls filed papers, bringing the total number of candidates to just 85 after three days of registration, compared to as many as 222 who registered in the first three days of the Sept 2022 elections.

But with seven days remaining for registration and many prominent candidates who have not filed nominations, the number will most certainly increase sharply. In the Sept 2022 polls, 367 candidates registered, but only 305 remained in the fray after withdrawals. Among the 24 candidates who registered on Sunday, there was only one former MP and two members of the court-scraped 2022 Assembly. So far, 20 former lawmakers and as many as 16 members of the annulled house have registered.

A majority of candidates called for fundamental reforms with the hope to put an end to almost non-stop political disputes that have engulfed Kuwaiti politics for almost two decades. Prominent among candidates who registered on Sunday was Fahad bin Falah Al-Azemi, the son

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Zionists raze Palestinian primary school

JABBET AL-DHIB: Zionist forces on Sunday demolished a Palestinian primary school in the occupied West Bank, citing safety issues and drawing sharp criticism from the European Union which had funded the project. Palestinians hurled rocks at Zionist forces who fired tear gas at them as bulldozers moved in on the site at Jabbet al-Dhib village near Bethlehem.

The EU said it was "appalled" after Zionist forces arrived at dawn at the school site, which a Palestinian Authority official said served 45 students and consisted of five classrooms. The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War. The territory is home to around 2.9 million Palestinians. Around 475,000 Zionist settlers also live there in state-approved settlements considered illegal under international law.

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JABBET AL-DHIB: Palestinians pick up papers and books from the site of a school that was demolished by Zionist authorities in this village east of Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank on May 7, 2023. — AFP

Gunman kills 8 in rampage at Texas mall

WASHINGTON: Americans were grappling Sunday with yet another mass shooting after a heavily-armed man stormed a shopping mall in Texas, murdering eight people and wounding several others before he was killed by police. Responders, distressed witnesses and police described scenes of panic and horror north of Dallas, where video footage circulating online showed the shooter getting out of a sedan in the outlet mall's parking lot Saturday and opening fire on people walking nearby.

An officer inside on an unrelated call quickly responded to the gunfire and "neutralized" the shooter at the sprawling facility in Allen, police said. The identity of the shooter was not released and no motive was put forward. The suspect's body, sprawled on a sidewalk, was one of seven deaths at the mall when more police arrived. Two others died in the hospital while "three are in critical surgery, and four are stable," said Allen fire chief Jonathan Boyd.

US President Joe Biden, a proponent of stricter gun laws, released a proclamation Sunday "as a mark of respect for the victims of the senseless acts of violence" in Allen. It ordered US flags be lowered to half staff at the White House, public buildings and military facilities. The attack is the latest in a shocking spate of deadly gun violence to convulse the United States. Barely a week earlier, a man shot and killed five neighbors in Cleveland, Texas after one of them

asked him to stop firing his rifle in his yard at night while a baby slept.

Awash in firearms, the country has already endured 199 mass shootings this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive, a non-governmental organization which defines a mass shooting as four or more people wounded or killed. The gunfire Saturday at Allen Premium Outlets, 55 km north of Dallas, began around 3:30 pm (2030 GMT), when it was busy with weekend shoppers, police said. The officer in the mall "heard gunshots, went to the gunshots, engaged the suspect and neutralized the suspect," said chief Brian Harvey of the Allen police department.

Some of the victims were as young as five, a hospital official told NBC News. Texas Governor Greg Abbott called the mass shooting an "unspeakable tragedy".

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Qeshm hopes to cash in on regional shifts

QESHM, Iran: Years of sanctions on Iran have taken their toll, but on the strategically located island of Qeshm, people can still find goods from major global brands otherwise out of reach. Off Iran's southern coast, some 150 km from the United Arab Emirates' commercial hub of Dubai, Qeshm's merchants have been closely watching regional shifts since Tehran's landmark rapprochement with

Saudi Arabia in March.

"The main thing in life is to have good relations with your neighbors," said 50-year-old retailer Mohammad Bazmandegan, who imports electric appliances from Dubai. He has been following the diplomatic developments since his government resumed ties with Riyadh after a seven-year freeze, a shift affecting the entire Gulf region. Along with Saudi Arabia, Tehran is also seeking to mend relations with other neighbors including the UAE and Bahrain, which also severed ties in 2016.

"If relations with our neighbors improve, they will also improve with other parts of the world," said

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QESHM, Iran: A picture taken on April 30, 2023 shows people in a bazaar on this Gulf island. — AFP

