

Local

Constitution provides parliamentarians with freedoms to play prominent legislative role

MPs can supervise government programs, grill ministers

By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: With recent opinions skeptical of the role of the legislative process in Kuwait and its actual effects on policymaking, we should look back to the constitution and the freedoms it provides to members of the parliament with regards to their role in interacting with the government.

In Kuwait, the constitution allows MPs a degree of freedom with regards to the legislative process and its supervision with the executive body. It also protects MPs and their views, as they are seen as representatives of the entire nation. Moreover, it necessitates that the Cabinet must provide a program that would be followed. Furthermore, MPs can question and force the resignation of a minister, in addition to their usual duties as legislators.

Constitutional rights and legal immunity

Article 108 states "A member of the Assembly represents the whole nation. He shall safeguard the public interest and shall not be subject to any authority in the discharge of his duties in the Assembly or in its committees."

Article 109 states "A member of the Assembly shall have the right to initiate bills. No bill initiated by a member and rejected by the National Assembly may be re-introduced during the same session."

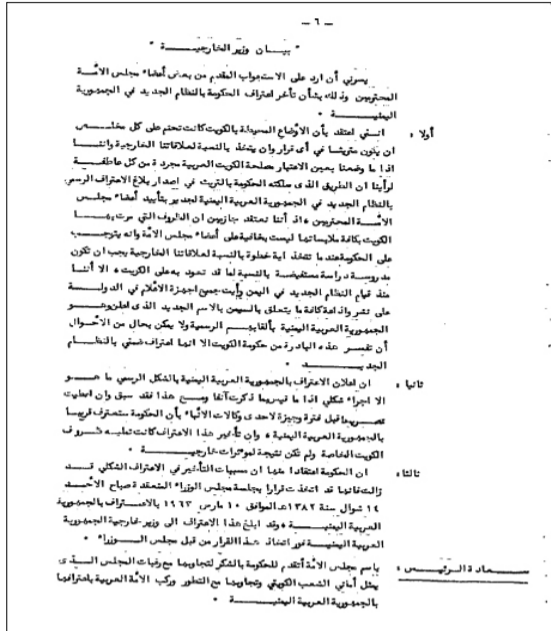
Article 110 states "A member of the National Assembly shall be free to express, any views or opinions in the Assembly or in its committees. Under no circumstances shall he be held liable in respect thereof", meaning no legal action can be taken against an MP.

Supervising the government program

Article 98 states that immediately upon the formation of a Cabinet, it shall present its program to the Assembly, and the Assembly may make comments with regards to the program. This program is then set as a basis for the supervision work of the parliament. If any issue is found, article 114 gives MPs the right to form investigation committees in any matter they see fit, with the ministry obliged to produce a reply.

Questioning

Article 99 states clearly, "Every member of the



KUWAIT: This photo shows Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's answer to the first question asked to a minister in the National Assembly.

National Assembly may put to the prime minister and to ministers questions with a view to clarifying matters falling within their competence." There are 34,324 questions listed in the official Assembly database to date, with the first question addressed by a number of MPs to then foreign minister, the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Feb 20, 1963, asking about the delay in recognizing the then newly formed Yemeni revolutionary government. Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad replied the recognition of a state is a mere formality, as the recognition has already been agreed upon, but the ministry felt for Kuwait's best interest to delay the recognition, stressing that no foreign pressure has been a reason for the case.

Interpellation

Article 100 gives the right to members to address the Cabinet in an interpellation (grilling), which is a prolonged debate on an issue as long as it falls within



the ministry's competence, with an 8-day brief period given before the interpellation takes place. Usually, members request an interpellation should they believe a previously requested question was not adequately answered.

Subject to the provisions of articles 101 and 102 of the constitution, an interpellation may lead to a motion of no-confidence being put to the Assembly. Article 101 states "Every minister shall be responsible to the National Assembly for the affairs of his ministry", and if a no-confidence vote is passed after an interpellation, the minister must submit a formal resignation. Ministers cannot participate in a vote of no-confidence, which passes by a majority vote by MPs.

As for article 102, it allows for the ability to file a non-cooperation request that would be delivered to HH the Amir, who would then decide to either dissolve the parliament or appoint a new prime minister. It states: "(If the new Assembly) cannot co-operate with the said prime minister, he shall be considered to have resigned as from the date of the decision of the Assembly in this respect, and a new Cabinet shall be formed."

There have been 135 interpellations listed in the

Assembly's database to date, the first of which was an interpellation addressed to the social affairs and labor minister by late MP Mohammed Al-Rushaid regarding the distribution of 30 1,000 sq m plots in Adaliya.

The Kuwaiti parliament is clearly a harbor of freedom that should be exercised responsibly. If the constitution allows this much freedom for the monitoring of the executive body, it should be seen as a privilege that would accelerate the development of society and not hinder its progress for the sake of personal interests.

From the first interpellation in 1963 until 2006, there were a total of 35 interpellations, averaging 0.81 interpellations per year. In the period from 2007 to date, there have been 100 interpellations recorded, averaging 6.67 interpellations per year. The excessive increase in the number of interpellations points out there might be some misuse of this constitutional tool, with some grillings deemed personal rather than constructive. Interpellation is an effective tool rightfully granted by the constitution and its misuse can only result in the harm of the nation for the benefit of a few.

Experts warn election candidates against exploiting family issues

KUWAIT: Those eager to secure a seat at the National Assembly during the June 6 elections must highlight issues pertaining to family welfare during the campaigns, said experts on Wednesday. Issues such as housing, education, employment and the welfare of families in Kuwait are a key component that have the power to determine the success or failure of a campaign if not provided adequate attention during the election.

Speaking on the issue, Professor of Psychology at Kuwait University Saud Al-Ghanim said that family matters were sort of a bridge that would



Saud Al-Ghanim

Ghannam Al-Ghannam

enable candidates to possibly win a seat in parliament. The issue is not individualistic by nature, it is a matter that concerns every household in Kuwait, affirmed Ghanim. However, Ghanim warned that some candidates might hijack this important matter for political gains, saying that voters must choose wisely those who would bring benefits to

all families in Kuwait. In a similar fashion, Professor of Social Science at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) Ghannam Al-Ghannam affirmed that the welfare of families was an issue of great importance. Most candidates focus on social justice issues including providing more social security to all families in Kuwait, he affirmed, saying that in order to elevate the financial stability of families in Kuwait, salary increases must be on top of the priorities for candidates vying for a seat at the parliament's Abdullah Al-Salem Hall.

Safeguarding the family structure against hardships such as divorce and boosting education material that propagates and calls for family rights are also important matters that should be on the mind of any candidate. He also warned candidates not to exploit the matter for their own gains, saying that such a political step would backfire against any parliamentary hopeful. — KUNA

Diwanias have power to shape election results

KUWAIT: Diwanias, where men usually gather to socialize and discuss social and political issues, are very famous in Kuwait for bringing people together. During elections, they play an important role in shaping public opinions and even influencing voters.

Diwanias, experts said, will once again play a pivotal role in the upcoming 2023 National Assembly election by encouraging the democratic process in the country and boosting the importance of political awareness.

Political discourse at diwanias helps educate the masses on the vitality of partaking in the political and democratic process that help shape the future of the country, said Kuwait University psychology professor Kamal Al-Farraj. He indicated that issues pertaining to society, the economy and other important aspects of life are usually discussed during diwanिया gatherings. Diwanias, he said, also provided a place for people to network, share opinions, and collaborate on a multitude of matters.

Hussein Ibrahim, professor of public relations and media at Kuwait University, said that diwanias sometimes have a stronger voice than media outlets. Diwanias help move the proverbial democratic wheel in Kuwait, steering individuals — through dialogue and arguments — towards certain candidates and ideals, he added. He argued that diwanias could also be digitized in a sense that candidates could hold virtual diwanिया gatherings on any social media platform to connect with more people and get their opinions.

Yaqub Al-Kandari, professor of social studies and services at Kuwait University, said that such venues could plant the initial political seeds of individuals and groups. Diwanias, he said, are sometimes referred to as "miniature parliaments" due to the vast political opinions and discussions on how to deal with social and economic problems facing Kuwait. While diwanias in the past were gathering places to the well-known figures in society prior to the discovery of oil, nowadays any normal citizen could establish his diwanिया and all were welcomed to attend, he added.

Diwanias in Kuwait, since the 1920s, were venues dedicated to gatherings amongst people to discuss life in general and find solutions to problems facing society as a whole, he pointed out. He noted that currently, diwanias play a part in monitoring MPs and letting them know what the people are really thinking about them and their efforts at parliament. Speaking thoroughly on the history of diwanias, Historian Yaqub Al-Ghunaim revealed that diwanias existed in Kuwait for some 300 years. The modern version of the diwanिया as we know today began around 1921 with the establishment of the Shura (consultation) Council, he indicated, adding that diwanias continued to develop as the political scene between 1961-63 after independence and the first National Assembly elections. — KUNA

Headquarters still preferred by many election candidates

KUWAIT: While some candidates in the 2023 Kuwaiti National Assembly elections announced that they would not set up campaigns at headquarters and go with social media, others still prefer direct communication with voters to present their programs and goals. Kuwait Municipality has licensed over 100 campaign headquarters across all governorates since the 2023 elections were called. The majority of headquarters are located in the Capital. On Wednesday alone, the municipality announced issuing 48 — 22 in the Capital, 18 in Hawally, three in Ahmadi and five in Farwaniya. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Spread across the country, headquarters allow candidates to directly communicate with voters. — KUNA photos