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Four NGOs to monitor elections

Prosecution frees 3 vote-buying suspects • Candidate calls for controls on expat numbers

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Cabinet on Monday agreed to allow four local civil societies to monitor the June 6 general elections, Minister of Social Affairs Mai Al-Baghli said after the council's weekly meeting. She said Kuwait Journalists Association, Kuwait Transparency Society, Kuwait Integration Society and the Society for Follow Up of Parliament Work have been allowed to take part in "supervising the election process". The minister said the approval came to allow the highest degree of transparency in the elections.

The public prosecution meanwhile freed three people, a Kuwaiti and two expats, but kept seven

others in detention as it continues to investigate a vote-buying network busted by the interior ministry. One of those in detention is a Pakistani national who has reportedly been buying votes for candidates for KD 400 each. The interior ministry said on Saturday that it had busted a 10-member network of people buying votes in favor of some candidates. The prosecution also summoned two candidates suspected of links to the network, one of them a former MP.

Candidates for the June 6 National Assembly election stepped up their campaigns with just seven days left for the polls. Basel Al-Bahrani, a candidate running from the first constituency, called on authorities to apply strict controls on the growth of expats,

especially large communities. Bahrani said the number of native Kuwaitis is still under 1.5 million people, while the number of expats is two-and-a-half times larger, or 3.7 million.

He added that five communities form the majority of expats and together they are twice the number of Kuwaitis, some three million people. Bahrani said the solution to this problem is in issuing legislation to prevent the number of any expat community from exceeding 40 percent of Kuwaitis, or under 600,000 in accordance with the current numbers.

The government is currently engaged in applying measures aimed at reducing the number

of foreigners, but it has not yet issued a well-defined plan for that. Former MP Abdullah Al-Mudhaf, running in the first constituency, said Kuwaiti people are upset and angry and the country needs lawmakers capable of confronting corruption.

Also, a number of female activists on Monday issued a joint statement demanding that children of Kuwaiti women married to foreigners should be granted citizenship. The statement rejected calls by civil societies and candidates urging the government to grant such children permanent residence in Kuwait, warning that they will not vote for any candidate who supports permanent residency at the expense of Kuwaiti citizenship.

Expats struggle to obtain driving licenses in Kuwait



By Ghadeer Ghloum & Faten Omar

KUWAIT: One of the biggest challenges that expats face in Kuwait is obtaining a driving license. Expats can only get a driving license if they adhere to a list of rules, including having a university degree, drawing a monthly salary of at least KD 600 and residing in Kuwait for at least two years. The process of obtaining a driving license in Kuwait is expensive and time-consuming. Besides the strict regulations, expats must take driving lessons from a certified driving school, which can be costly, especially since they may need to be tested more than once. Drivers must also pass a series of theoretical and practical tests before being able to apply for a driving license.

Kuwait Times spoke to a number of expats to get a closer look at their struggles in obtaining a Kuwaiti driving license. Abdul Wahab Hossam, 19, who is studying at a university in Kuwait, said he has been trying for a year to obtain a driving license to make his life easier, to no avail. "I have been trying to get a driver's license through the university, but this facility was suspended for non-Kuwaiti university students. Then I tried to get it through my job, and of course, it is necessary to wait for three months to have a work visa. Still, the requirements are difficult. A salary of KD 600 for a 19-year-old isn't an option," he told Kuwait Times.

"Even after graduating and maybe five years later, you will be destined not to have a driving license. There is no alternative, as public transportation in Kuwait is bad," he pointed out, adding he even looked for a driving job to get the license, but drivers must have a license from their country of origin. "And of course, even if you fulfill all the miraculous requirements, wasta is required to pass the driving test," Hossam rued.

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Erdogan calls for unity; Amir sends congratulations

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday confronted the tough task of uniting his deeply divided country after winning a historic run-off election to extend his two-decade rule to 2028. Turkey's longest-serving leader brushed aside a powerful opposition coalition, an economic crisis and anger following a devastating February earthquake to beat secular challenger Kemal Kilicdaroglu in Sunday's vote.

But the four-point victory margin was Erdogan's narrowest of any past election, highlighting the sharp polarization the Islamic-rooted conservative will contend with in his final term. Erdogan, 69, called on Turks to "come together in unity and solidarity", whereas Kilicdaroglu vowed to "continue the struggle" against the president and his AKP party, which has dominated Turkish politics since 2002.

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ANKARA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and his party's allies greet supporters following his victory in the second round of the presidential election at the Presidential Palace on May 29, 2023. — AFP

Iran open to resuming ties with Egypt

TEHRAN: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Monday he would welcome a resumption of diplomatic relations with Egypt, during a meeting with Oman's visiting Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. Ties between Tehran and Cairo soured following the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and Egypt's recognition of the Zionist entity, the Islamic republic's sworn enemy. Khamenei said that the Omani leader had told him that Egypt would be willing to resume relations.

"We welcome the Omani Sultan's statement about Egypt's willingness to resume relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and we have no problem in this regard," Khamenei said, according to his official website. AFP could not immediately reach the Egyptian foreign ministry for comment. Recent months have seen sweeping shifts in the Middle East, following a China-brokered rapprochement between regional heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Iran announced in March.

It has led to improved ties between Iran and other Arab states. Khamenei also called for a deepening of ties between Oman and Iran. "It is important to increase cooperation between Oman and Iran because the two countries share the very important waterway of the Strait of Hormuz," he said.



TEHRAN: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei meets Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said in the presence of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on May 29, 2023. — AFP

Shanghai bakes in hottest May day in 100 years

SHANGHAI: Shanghai recorded its hottest May day in more than 100 years on Monday, the city's meteorological service announced, shattering the previous high by a full degree. Scientists say global warming is exacerbating adverse weather, with many countries experiencing deadly heatwaves and temperatures hitting records across Southeast and South Asia in recent weeks.

"At 13:09, the temperature at Xujiahui station hit 36.1 degrees Celsius, breaking a 100-year-old record for the highest temperature in May," a post on the service's official Weibo account read, referring to

a metro station in the center of China's largest city. The temperature at the bustling station climbed even higher to 36.7C later in the afternoon, the meteorological service said. That put it a full degree above the old record, 35.7C, which has been recorded four times previously, in 1876, 1903, 1915 and 2018, according to the service.

Shanghai residents sweltered under the early-afternoon sun, with some apps showing a "feels like" temperature estimate of more than 40C. "I almost got heatstroke, it's really hot enough to explode," read one post on Weibo. A man who gave his surname as Wu told AFP: "It's an environmental problem, the world is going to get hotter and hotter. I have the feeling that summers are becoming much hotter every year. I'm turning on the air conditioning sooner than before." Parts of India saw temperatures above 44C in mid-April, with at least 11 deaths near Mumbai attributed to heat stroke on a single day.

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SHANGHAI: Women wearing sun protective clothing commute on bicycles amid hot weather on May 29, 2023. — AFP



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