

Iraqi PM Al-Abadi lauds

Kuwaiti support for refugees

BAGHDAD, Oct 22, (KUNA): Iraq's Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi lauded his country's relations with Kuwait, as well as the support provided by the Kuwaiti government and people to the refugees inside liberated Iraqi towns and cities.

Al-Abadi made his remarks in a statement Wednesday after receiving Kuwait's Ambassador to Iraq Ghassan Al-Zawawi.

The Kuwaiti support illustrated good relations between the two countries, the

Iraqi Premier said, adding that he reviewed bilateral relations with the Kuwaiti diplomat, as well as the fight against ISIL, and efforts to reinstate refugees to their home cities.

For his part, Al-Zawawi reaffirmed Kuwait's keenness in completing the USD-200-million goal of the fundraising campaign in support of Iraqi refugees, noting that the first installment of the amount was delivered, while the second is on the way.

GCC anti-graft authorities' co-op important: Kuwait

RIYADH, Oct 22, (KUNA): Cooperation among GCC anti-corruption authorities is important for the regional efforts to combat fraud and corruption, said a Kuwaiti official here Wednesday.

On the sideline of the fourth meeting for the GCC integrity and anti-corruption. Head of Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority's Dr Mohammad Buzbar told KUNA his country was keen on exchanging expertise within the field

of anti-corruption.

Regarding the meeting which began yesterday, the official said that participants were informed on the recent recommendation which came out of meetings held in Oman and Saudi Arabia on the roles of audit bureaus and awareness programs in the anti-corruption efforts.

The meeting will continue till tomorrow, said the official. Meanwhile, Director General of

Kuwait Municipality Engineer Ahmad Al-Subaih revealed, on Thursday, a joint plan to set up a unified urban strategy among the GCC states in order to achieve comprehensive urbanization.

This remark was made during the 19th meeting of the GCC municipal ministers which was held today as a prelude to the 31 meeting of the GCC senior municipal officials.

Al-Subaih, who is representing Kuwaiti Minister of Communication

and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Essa Al-Kandari, told KUNA that applying this strategy should be done through exchange of visits, holding workshops and lectures.

He pointed out that the GCC municipal ministers had endorsed bylaw of a municipal work a prize for excellent achievements in the fields of architecture, waste management and environment in order to create a healthy competitive atmosphere.



Left to right: Khalaf Al Habtoor, ex-US president Jimmy Carter, Rosalyn Carter.

Mideast issues discussed

Khalaf A Al Habtoor receives Carter, wife in US

PLAINS, GEORGIA, Oct 22: Khalaf Ahmad Al Habtoor, Chairman of the Al Habtoor Group, paid a courtesy call on former US president Jimmy Carter and first lady Rosalyn Carter at their home in Plains, Georgia in mid-October.

Al Habtoor, who was in the US for his keynote speech in Washington DC at the 24th Annual Arab-US Policymakers Conference, spent a couple of hours with the Carter's to discuss Middle East issues, including the situation in Palestine. President and Mrs Carter have met Al Habtoor several times in Dubai, and last year president Carter joined Al Habtoor at Illinois

College to launch his 'Pathways to Peace' initiative aimed at finding a realistic solution to the Middle East peace process.

President Carter briefed Al Habtoor on The Carter Center's activities in the Middle East, and updated him on how Al Habtoor's donations are being utilised on the ground in Palestine. They also discussed the escalating situation in Syria, and their shared concerns over rising tension, and increased terrorism in parts of the Middle East.

The Al Habtoor Group Chairman passed on his well-wishes to the 91-year-old former president, who is cur-

rently undergoing treatment for cancer. Al Habtoor said, "President Carter was in good spirits. I have the utmost respect for unwavering commitment to world peace. Despite his personal health issues he remains committed to global issues via The Carter Center".

They also discussed the Carter's role in the peanut industry, and the outpouring of support president Carter received from the general public at the 19th Annual Plains Peanut Festival last month.

President Carter gave Al Habtoor a signed copy of his memoirs, 'A Full Life, Reflections at Ninety'.

Libyans democratic hopes kindled

3 years after US consulate attack, Benghazi still at war

BENGHAZI, Libya, Oct 22, (RTRS): Partly burned and still abandoned, the high-walled villas that once housed the US consulate compound in the Libyan city of Benghazi now sit on a frontline of a nation at war with itself.

Three years after militants killed US ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans in an attack on the facility, Benghazi is back in US news headlines as White House contender and former secretary of state Hillary Clinton faces a Congressional hearing on the incident on Thursday.

For Libyans and Benghazi, though, the war never really disappeared. After their democratic hopes were kindled following the 2011 revolt against Muammar Gaddafi, Libya has steadily spiralled into chaos among a myriad of armed factions.

The North African state now has two rival governments, with two parliaments and even two state oil companies, each one backed by loose coalitions of armed forces mostly inspired by local or tribal loyalties rather than any concept of the state.

Benghazi, cradle of the uprising against Gaddafi, is now just one front in a many-sided war threatening to fragment the vast desert nation. For many in Benghazi, the consulate assault became a symbol for their own city's slide into chaos.

"That attack proved to the world there was terrorism in Benghazi," local activist Jamal al-Fallah said, remembering the 2012 assault on the compound. "It spread fear and confusion on to the Libyan streets."

Since Gaddafi's demise, heavily armed rebel brigades who once fought side by side against the strongman slowly turned against one another, allying with competing political poles and carving out fiefdoms in a war for control.

For a year, Tripoli has been held by Libya Dawn, an armed alliance of former rebels from the city of Misrata and Islamist-leaning brigades who have set up their own self-styled government and reinstated the former parliament.

The country's internationally recognized government and elected parliament work from the east of Libya, backed by a loose network of armed factions, including a divisive former Gaddafi ally, General Khalifa Haftar.

In the vacuum, Islamic State has gained momentum, taking control of Sirte city and attracting foreign fighters to its ranks, while people smugglers profit from the chaos to send their cargoes across the Mediterranean from Libya's coast.

The United Nations is trying to broker a unity government between the rival factions as a way to end the crisis, but months of tortured talks have yet to reach a final accord.

Clinton, a former secretary of state, testified before Congress about the incident in 2013. Now the frontrunner in the Democratic presidential primary cam-

Political talks in Libya will continue, says UN envoy

TUNIS, Oct 22, (RTRS): The UN envoy to Libya said on Wednesday consultations would continue with both the country's warring factions after the chief of the elected parliament said the congress had rejected a UN proposal to end the crisis.

Libya is mired in a conflict between its internationally-recognized government and elected parliament on one side, and a self-styled administration holding Tripoli on the other, with each backed by loose coalitions of armed factions.

After months of talks, the United Nations has drafted a deal to form a national unity government and has proposed a six-member executive council to lead it. But both sides have balked at parts of those accords, stalling any final agreement.

On Monday, the chief of the elected House of Representatives based in the eastern city of Tobruk said the congress had rejected the UN proposal. But there were conflicting reports on whether lawmakers had officially voted on the deal.

"In the coming days I will be conducting meetings with the Libyans," UN envoy Bernardino Leon told reporters in the Tunisian capital Tunis. "We hope to see the majority of the members in Tripoli and in Tobruk approving this accord."

Leon said "small groups" of politi-

cal leaders could not block a dialogue and a unity government.

The international community is pushing for both sides to accept the UN deal to end a conflict which has allowed Islamist militants and people-smugglers to gain ground in the chaos just over the Mediterranean from mainland Europe.

Since last year, Tripoli has been controlled by Libya Dawn, an alliance of armed factions linked with Misrata city, and more Islamist-leaning armed groups who took over the capital and set up their own government and reinstated the old parliament.

The internationally-recognized government and elected parliament have since operated out of the east, backed by a coalition of other armed factions, including Gen Khalifa Haftar, once an ally of autocrat Muammar Gaddafi.

But the Oct 20 end of the elected parliament's mandate has critics questioning its legitimacy, especially after lawmakers extended their own term until they can hand over power to the next elected body.

The recognized government's prime minister, Abdullah Al-Thinni, on Wednesday criticized the international community for what he said was a lack of support for the country's legitimate institutions to fight Islamist militant groups on the ground.

some of the city has returned to normal, with restaurants and banks reopening. But fighting flows back and forth and shelling and air strikes have wrecked neighbourhoods. Rockets often hit civilian targets.

Even the former consulate compound itself has been damaged in the fighting, according to one military source in the city.

The city is divided into a patchwork of areas controlled either by Haftar's forces or by their rivals, an alliance known as Majlis al-Shura.

Adding to the chaos, other Islamist militants proclaiming themselves loyal to Islamic State — the group that controls much of Syria and Iraq — have also started exploiting the security vacuum and attracting foreign jihadists to their cause.

Haftar's Libyan National Army forces have used air support to help win back territory from Islamist fighters, including the airport area, eastern districts and several barracks that had been overrun last summer. But militant groups are holding out.

Regional efforts to combat fraud, corruption

'Kuwait fully committed to UN disarmament treaty'

Nuclear nations must reduce their arsenal

NEW YORK, Oct 22, (KUNA): Kuwait renewed its full commitment to the UN's weapons disarmament to protect international peace and security.

The remarks were made during the speech of the Third Secretary of the Kuwait Mission to the UN Mohammad Al-Huweila at the meeting of the UN General Assembly's First Committee on Disarmament and International Security late Wednesday.

He added that Kuwait firmly supports the UN's Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) agreement, adding that member-states are looking forward to create a world free of weapons of mass destruction through implementing the results of the UN's international conventions on the matter.

Meanwhile, Al-Huweila noted that nuclear countries must reduce their arsenal of nuclear weapons, follow the terms of their previously signed nuclear agreements, and present assurance to non-nuclear countries that such weapons would not be used against them.

The Middle East is facing difficulties in creating a weapons of mass destruction-free zone, despite the final statement of the 1995 NPT Review Conference, said the official.

He also stressed on the importance of the technical cooperation programs of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in developing the abilities of developing countries to use nuclear power for peaceful purposes.

Kuwait has already agreed with the IAEA to execute a joint program on development projects two years ago. The country has by now executed six projects in different sectors, while seven other new ones are already approved by the agency as part of Kuwait's development plan for 2016-2017

Egypt loyalists lead in election

CAIRO, Oct 22, (Agencies): A political alliance loyal to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has scooped all 60 list seats up for grabs in the first round of a parliamentary election in which opposition parties were all but absent, official results showed on Wednesday.

The initial round of voting for what will be Egypt's first parliament in three years was held on Sunday and Monday, with turnout at just over a quarter of the electorate and images of empty polling stations splashed across local media.

The vote has been hailed by Sisi as the final step in a political transition that is meant to lead Egypt to democracy but critics say it has been undermined by widespread repression.

The main opposition Muslim Brotherhood, which won almost half the seats in 2011-12, has been banned and declared a terrorist group. Thousands of its members are behind bars and its supporters boycotted the vote.

A list of socialist and liberal parties which would have therefore presented the main opposition choice on ballot papers eventually withdrew, leaving the field dominated by Sisi supporters, former apparatchiks of ousted president Hosni Mubarak, provincial notables and wealthy businessmen.

The High Election Committee announced a turnout of 26.36 percent over the two days, lower than the 2014 presidential election won by former military chief Sisi and much lower than the 2011-12 parliamentary election held just months after a popular uprising ended Mubarak's 30-year rule.

The new parliament will comprise 568 members — 448 elected on an individual basis and 120 through winner-takes-all lists.

All but four of the 226 individual seats up for grabs in round one will be contested in run-offs between leading candidates to take place on Oct 26-27 after none of those running clinched more than 50 percent of the vote.

Three of those four seats were won by former members of Mubarak's ruling party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), which was disbanded in the wake of the 2011 Tahrir Square revolt that inspired hopes of sweeping democratic and economic reform. The fourth seat was won by a Sisi supporter.

"For the Love of Egypt", a coalition of parties led by former intelligence officer and military general Sameh Seif ElYazal, won all 60 list-based seats contested in round one and is expected to secure the remaining 60 seats in the next voting round on Nov 22-23.



KUNA photo
Kuwaiti Ambassador to Bahrain Sheikh Azzam Mubarak Al-Sabah during his meeting with Chief of Staff of Bahrain Defense Force Sheikh Khalifa bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa.

'Co-op vital for GCC security'

Kuwaiti Ambassador to Bahrain Sheikh Azzam Mubarak Al-Sabah stressed the importance of cooperation among the GCC states to protect the Gulf security and face the challenges.

The official's remarks were made during his meeting with Chief of Staff

of Bahrain Defense Force Sheikh Khalifa bin Ahmad Al Khalifa on Thursday.

On his part, Sheikh Khalifa praised the security cooperation between Kuwait and Bahrain and the strong ties shared by the two countries. (KUNA)

Sympathetic to Brotherhood

Egypt locks up lawyers in Islamist militant fight

CAIRO, Oct 22, (RTRS): As Egypt cracks down on its Islamist dissidents, many of the country's lawyers are finding themselves on the wrong side of the law as well. Attorney Mohsen al-Bahnasy says so many fellow lawyers have been arrested or charged in recent months that he now spends much of his time defending them in court.

One of the lawyers he represents is accused of distributing leaflets supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist group banned by the government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. According to Bahnasy, his client, a lawyer, was in a police station with his own clients at the time of the alleged crime. Bahnasy says the lawyer, like others deemed sympathetic to the Brotherhood, has never distributed such leaflets and is the victim of trumped-up charges.

An official in the police station said that the accused lawyer had supported several Brotherhood protests. "It is not logical that we would accuse him of inciting protests" if he had not done so, the official said.

In all, more than 200 lawyers are behind bars in Egypt for defending the government's Islamist opponents, according to attorneys and human rights groups. They say the number of arrests is far higher than during the rule of President Hosni Mubarak, who imposed an emergency law allowing individuals to be imprisoned for any length of time. Even under Mubarak, lawyers rarely faced jail and were free to defend his fiercest opponents, attorneys say.

Held

A senior Ministry of Justice official confirmed that a large number of lawyers are being held on charges connected to the Muslim Brotherhood. He said the number is "probably up to 10 times" the number held under Mubarak: "They are locked up in accordance with the law and accusations from the prosecution."

But attorneys and rights activists say Sisi and his government are arresting lawyers to intimidate them into avoiding political cases. Egypt's justice system is meant to be independent of politics, but activists say it is being directed by the government.

"The authorities are attacking the legal profession so that their opponents have no-one to defend them," said veteran lawyer Montasser al-Zayat, who heads a campaign for the release of detained lawyers. Zayat, himself a former jihadist, has been defending Islamists for decades — including those put on military show trials during an insurgency in the 1990s. A burly man with a white beard, he helped mediate a truce in 1997 that ended years of militant violence against the state. He says things now are worse than he has seen them. "I've never been so scared."

Interior Ministry officials say Abu Aish is guilty of inciting violence and taking part in an arson attack alongside a man he had been defending. Prosecutors say the pair set fire to a Cairo telecommunications shop along with other Islamists. Abu Aish says he is innocent and complains that he has not been formally charged since his detention in March. Judges keep renewing his 45-day detention and he is held in a cell with 35 others.

In June, lawyers launched a general strike after a one of them was assaulted by a police officer inside a police station in the town of Damieta. The lawyer was pressing the police to move his client's case along, and in the ensuing argument one of the police hit him with his shoe — a particularly insulting act in the Arab world. Sisi apologised "to every Egyptian citizen" for the incident and urged the police and other government bodies to be aware that "they are dealing with humans."

The government says it is not systematically cracking down on lawyers. Ayman Hilmy, a spokesman at Egypt's Interior Ministry, said, "There is no crisis or problem between the police and the lawyers. All sides work according to the law." He said the Interior Minister has repeatedly said the police respect the judiciary and lawyers and that police brutality will be punished through the courts.

Counter

Sisi, a former military chief who became president in 2013, has often said he has to take a tough line to counter the Islamist insurgency that has led to two years of bloody bombings and attacks. The crackdown began soon after the military overthrew President Mohamed Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood member who was elected in 2012. After Morsi fell, Egyptian security forces killed hundreds of Brotherhood sympathisers in Cairo protest camps. Thousands of others have been arrested. Human rights groups estimate 40,000 political prisoners are held in Egyptian jails.

Sisi argues that the Brotherhood, which renounced violence years ago, shares the same ideology as Islamic State, the militant group that has seized vast swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq. Islamic State has now spread into Libya and Egypt's Sinai desert, where separate groups are fighting an insurgency against Egyptian security forces.

Lawyer Sayid Abu Aish believes he is one of those targeted as part of the government's campaign to repress Islamists. In August, Abu Aish arrived at a Cairo courthouse alongside suspected criminals in a truck with small slits for windows. Under a slow-turning fan that struggled to cut the stifling heat, he sat handcuffed to an alleged criminal.

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