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# SYRIA ENCLAVE REBELS SAY READY TO EXPEL JIHADISTS UN calls for ceasefire to be observed



A general view taken from Damascus shows smoke rising from the rebel-held enclave of eastern Ghouta following fresh air strikes and rocket fire on Feb 27. A fledgling 'humanitarian pause' announced by Russia in Syria's rebel-held enclave was rattled by fresh air strikes and rocket fire, several sources said. (AFP)

## Newswatch

**RABAT:** Morocco's King Mohammed VI "successfully" underwent a heart operation in a Paris clinic on Monday for an irregular heart beat, his medical team announced.

The doctors, in a statement, said the 54-year-old monarch had felt the symptoms on Jan 20.

"Radiofrequency ablation of the arrhythmia," or irregular rhythm, had successfully normalised his heart beat.

King Mohammed, who would resume his normal activities after a period of rest prescribed by his doctors, has ruled Morocco since the death of his father Hassan in July 1999.

He underwent an eye operation in the French capital last September. (AFP)

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia has replaced top military commanders, including its chief of staff, in the latest move to bring fresh blood into the kingdom's upper ranks.

The changes, announced in a string of royal decrees late Monday, come a month before the third anniversary of a Saudi-led military intervention in the Yemen war which has killed thousands and triggered a humanitarian crisis.

Saudi Arabia for decades has been home to some of the world's most restrictive policies, banning women from driving or mixing with men and outlawing cinemas and other forms of entertainment.

But since King Salman Continued on Page 8

## Philippine legislators back ban

### MP weighs in on domestics

US threatens action

### Iran touts DC 'defeat' after Russia UN veto

By Abubakar A. Ibrahim  
Arab Times Staff

MANILA, Feb 27, (Agencies): In spite of Kuwait exerting tremendous efforts which led to the arrest of the two alleged killers of the Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) Joanna Demafelis, one of the Philippines Congressmen said the ban on the deployment of workers to Kuwait must not be lifted until the leaders agree to sign a bilateral agreement, according to tempo.com.ph website.

During a press conference which was called for by the House majority bloc, Reps. Ana Siquian-Go (NPC, Isabela), Randolph Ting (PDP-Laban, Cagayan), and Jesulito Manalo (Angkla party-list) said a congressional investigation will determine the liability of Philippine Labor and Foreign Affairs officials who allowed the Filipino workers to go to Kuwait without signing the bilateral agreement.

Siquian-Go, chairperson of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, said the House investigation must also cover other countries which hire OFWs without guaranteeing to protect and ensure the welfare of OFWs.

Last week, John Bertiz representing the ACTS OFW party-list said the Philippine government officials have been violating the Migrant Workers Act that makes a bilateral agreement a requisite in the deployment of OFWs.

Bertiz said Kuwait was allowed to receive OFWs despite its refusal to sign any agreement guaranteeing that OFWs will be treated fairly and protected against abuses.

Manalo said the revelation made by Bertiz indicates there "is already a prima facie instance" that certain officials in the Department of Labor and other agencies tasked to look after OFW welfare had failed in their jobs.

"Without good faith especially in the light of many incidents of abuse, it is now a must that they must sign a bilateral agreement," said Manalo, Chairman of the House Committee on OFW Affairs.

The murder of the Filipina maid whose body was found in a freezer in Kuwait has triggered outrage and prompted Manila to impose a departure ban for its citizens planning to work in the Gulf state.

But the estimated 252,000 Filipinos and Filipinas already working in Kuwait must weigh their fear of sharing the fate of Joanna Demafelis against the potential loss of vital income for their families.

TEHRAN, Feb 27, (Agencies): Iran said on Tuesday that the vetoing of a UN resolution that would have criticised its role in Yemen represented another setback for the United States.

Russia vetoed a resolution at the UN Security Council on Monday that would have expressed concern over Iran's failure to block supplies of missiles to Yemen's Houthi rebels and called for "additional measures".

"Based on a one-sided report, they intended to pass a resolution that referred to Iran, but they failed," said Iran's deputy foreign minister Abbas Araghchi, according to the official IRNA news agency.

"This is yet another failure by the US government to drag Iran to the Security Council," he added.

The resolution was drafted by Britain, but strongly supported by the United States.

"Over the past year the US government has tried many times to drag Iran to the Security Council and it has failed every single time," said Araghchi, on the sidelines of a water conference in Tehran.

In January, Washington called an emergency session of the Security Council to discuss protests in Iran, only to face strong criticism from other members who said the move was hypocritical and inappropriate.

Later that month, a Security Council panel of experts released a report into missiles fired by the Houthis into Saudi Arabia, saying they were made in Iran.

The report did not say Iran had supplied the missiles, but said the country was still in breach of an arms embargo on Yemen by failing to stop them reaching the rebel group.

"The biased allegation was absolutely clear in the way the report was formulated," said Araghchi.

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Fireworks held near the Kuwait Towers as part of the National Days celebrations. Photo by Bassam Abu Shanab

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 27: MP Waleed Al-Tabtabaei has submitted a proposal related to Al-Durra Company for Recruiting and Employing Domestic Workers.

He pointed out that the cost for recruiting domestic workers remain high although the company has been operating for quite some time now and there are even indications that the situation will get worse.

He stressed the need to stabilize the domestic labor market and encourage fair competition between service offices and companies through the establishment of more domestic labor offices as this will result in lower recruitment cost as per the law on supply and demand.

He proposed replacement of the required financial guarantee from a local bank with issuance of a license to recruit domestic workers such that the financial guarantees will be as follows:

■ Offices: from KD 5,000 to KD 40,000

■ Companies: from KD 10,000 to KD 100,000

■ Branches of companies: from KD 5,000 to KD 40,000 for each branch

In another development, MP Saleh Ashour revealed that the government's representatives have informed the parliamentary Kuwaitization and Employment Committee about the completion of a vision to unify salaries and prepare job descriptions for 4,000 posts which will be submitted under the strategic alternative salary scale draft law.

He clarified this will be applicable to those who work in the public sector once the draft law is approved and published in the Official Gazette.

He added the draft law on regulating leadership positions will be endorsed along with the strategic alternative salary scale to standardize the salary ladder in the public sector.

He said the salary for undersecretaries, assistant undersecretaries and general managers should not exceed KD 6,000 while other financial privileges like allowances, incentives and bonuses will be cancelled.

On another issue, MPs Adel Al-Damkhi, Omar Al-Tabtabaei, Ali Al-Daqbasi, Al-Humaidi Al-Subaie and Osama

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## Fresh violence mars truce

BEIRUT/GENEVA, Feb 27, (Agencies): A Russian call for a five-hour truce on Tuesday failed to halt one of the most devastating campaigns of the Syrian war, where residents said government warplanes resumed striking the eastern Ghouta region on Tuesday after a brief lull.

Moscow and Damascus blamed rebels for the collapse of the truce, saying fighters had shelled a safe route intended for civilians to leave the enclave. The insurgents denied such shelling.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Moscow would press on with a plan to stage similar daily pauses in the fighting, allowing aid to be delivered to eastern Ghouta through what Russia describes as a humanitarian corridor.

The United Nations said it was proving impossible to aid civilians or evacuate the wounded, and said all sides must instead abide by a full 30-day ceasefire demanded by the UN Security Council.

"We have reports this morning there is continuous fighting in eastern Ghouta," UN humanitarian spokesman Jens Laerke said. "Clearly the situation on the ground is not such that convoys can go in or medical evacuations can go out."

Hundreds of people have died during 10 days of government bombardment of the eastern Ghouta, an area of towns and farms on the outskirts of Damascus. The assault has been among the most devastating air campaigns of a war now entering its eighth year.

With its Ghouta offensive, the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad is drawing on the military methods it has used to crush its opponents in other parts of Syria, including eastern Aleppo in late 2016.

### Probing ground assaults

Intensifying bombardment of the besieged area has been coupled with probing ground assaults to test rebel defences.

With no sign of decisive international pressure to stop the attack, eastern Ghouta seems likely to meet the same fate as other areas won back by the government, where humanitarian corridors eventually became escape routes for defeated rebels.

"A concrete humanitarian corridor has been set up that will be used to deliver humanitarian aid, and, in the other direction, a medical evacuation can take place and all civilians who want to leave can," Lavrov told a joint news conference in Moscow after meeting French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian.

Residents in several towns in the eastern Ghouta described a brief pause in fighting, but said bombardment swiftly resumed. In the town of Hammouriyeh a man who identified himself by his first name Mahmoud told Reuters helicopters and warplanes were in the sky and conducting strikes.

Siraj Mahmoud, a spokesman for the Civil Defence rescue service, which is funded by Western governments and operates in rebel areas, said artillery and air strikes had hit the region.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said helicopters and warplanes had struck four towns and artillery shelling killed one person.

A UN Security Council resolution passed on Saturday called for a 30-day ceasefire across the entire country, but did not specify when it should start. It excludes some militant groups which are among the rebels in eastern Ghouta.

### Ceasefire not observed

That has meant the ceasefire has not been observed in practice. UN spokesman Laerke declined to comment on the Russian proposal for a five-hour truce, but called instead on all sides to obey the full 30-day ceasefire.

"It is a question life and death - if ever there was a question of life and death - we need a 30-day cessation of hostilities in Syria as the Security Council demands," Laerke, spokesman of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), told a Geneva briefing.

A rebel spokesman said people in eastern Ghouta did not want to leave the area despite the bombardment, because they feared arrest, torture or conscription by the government. Russia said it would guarantee the safety of any civilians who left.

Eastern Ghouta, where the UN says around 400,000 people live, is a major target for Assad, whose forces have clawed back numerous areas with military backing from Russia and Iran.

Rebels based in eastern Ghouta have intensified shelling of government-held Damascus. A medical official in the capital said on Monday 36 people had been killed in four days. Syrian state media

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US\$/KD 0.29975/85

Euro/KD 0.3673

Yen/KD 0.0028

British £/KD 0.4177

KSE +13.76 pts at closing Feb 27  
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DOW -40.88 pts at 21:30 Feb 27  
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Nasdaq -37.27 pts at 21:30 Feb 27

FTSE -7.13 pts at closing Feb 27

Nikkei +236.23 pts at closing Feb 27

Gold \$1,325.75 per oz (London)

NYMEX crude \$63.23 pb

Brent crude \$66.86 pb

3-month \$ LIBOR rate 1.98419%

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