



## 4 Court ruling a win for press freedom in Kuwait



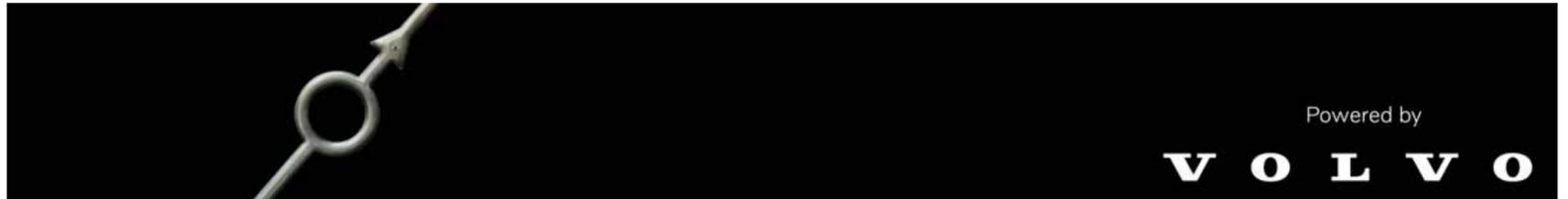
## 9 From small businesses to farmers, middle India is driving demand



## 12 Loneliest elephant heads to Cambodia after campaign



## 14 Tyson comeback fight at 54 ends with draw against Jones



# 74 former MPs among 321 candidates left in the fray

## Local, foreign volunteers to monitor National Assembly elections

### Zain KSA: Strategic transformation opens door to new era of growth

#### Remaining offer of priority shares oversubscribed by 469%

RIYADH: Zain Group, a leading mobile telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa announced the successful competition of its subsidiary Zain Saudi Arabia's (Zain KSA) capital restructuring. This follows the high demand by institutional investors in the remaining priority shares that were oversubscribed by an unprecedented 469 percent.

These last steps came as part of Zain KSA's plan to restructure its capital, which included the reduction of the capital and then raising it through the offering of priority rights shares. This contributed to extinguishing most of the telco's accumulated losses, paying part of the Murabaha financing, and capitalizing part of other dues. The transaction paves the way for the company to enter a new era of strategic transformation of its financial performance.

Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Vice-Chairman and CEO of Zain Group said: "The successful competition of the company's capital restructuring and the massive demand in the remaining priority rights subscription reflects the confidence of shareholders and investors in Zain KSA's opera-



Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi

tional strategy and future growth plans, reinforced by the company's return to profitability over the last three years. The transaction enhances Zain KSA's capabilities to expand its strategic investments in the kingdom's telecommunications sector, growing its profitability and paving the way for dividends." (See Page 8)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: As many as 74 former MPs are among 321 candidates left in the fray for the 50 National Assembly seats after withdrawals of candidacy closed for the Dec 5 elections. Of the 395 candidates who registered to contest the polls, 54 dropped out and an interior ministry commission disqualified 34 others, of whom 14 have so far been reinstated by the court. The final number of hopefuls could change after the court of cassation issues its final verdict on the issue today.

There are 27 female candidates left in the race, including MP Safa Al-Hashem. In the 2016 general polls, about 300 candidates contested the polls, with around 80 former lawmakers. Forty-four members of the outgoing Assembly along with 30 former MPs from previous assemblies are bidding for re-election amid a very quiet and dull election campaign hit by the coronavirus pandemic that lacks "explosive" issues.

Around 25 opposition members, a majority of them Islamists, are in the race with the main aim to create a strong opposition bloc capable of stopping what opposition figures claim is an unprecedented slide in Kuwait's domestic politics. Pollsters and analysts believe that some 40 percent of the members of the outgoing Assembly will be replaced, but barring a last-minute major event that could influence the outcome, the same policies are expected to be maintained with the government and its supporters retaining their solid control.

Marzouq Al-Ghanem, the house speaker for the past two parliaments, is expected to be reelected for the coveted post as no real threat has emerged to challenge him. Only former MP and minister Roudhan Al-Roudhan said he will contest the speakership post if he

wins a seat in the Assembly, with most analysts ruling out that he can mount any challenge.

As many as 568,000 Kuwaitis are eligible to vote, a 17 percent rise from four years ago. About 51 percent of the voters are females because members of the military and police forces, overwhelmingly men, are barred from voting. Local and foreign observers will monitor the elections, according to the Anti-Corruption Authority, which held a training course for 187 volunteers from Kuwait Transparency Society, which was invited by the government to monitor the polls.

The Anti-Corruption Authority also said 11 Arab and foreign observers will also participate. Kuwait Human Rights Society also announced it will take part in monitoring the polls with an unspecified number of observers. The observers are allowed to monitor and report illegal practices like vote-buying, violations in campaigns and other violations that could impact the outcome of the election.

A local pollster and research center Masarat expected that 13 Islamist candidates will win seats in the next Assembly. Its conclusion was based on a survey conducted by the center. Unlike previous elections, campaigning this time was mainly virtual, depending on social media and television interviews, but only for lucky candidates who could book their interviews in advance.

Local issues like housing, education, corruption, economy and freedom of speech dominated the campaign, with leading opposition figures charging that the country was being controlled by a "deep state". Almost all candidates insisted they will oppose any plans by the government to impose taxes or raise charges on public services to meet a growing budget deficit due to the sharp fall in oil prices.

### News in brief

#### Baby born with COVID antibodies

SINGAPORE: A Singaporean woman, who was infected with the novel coronavirus in March when she was pregnant, has given birth to a baby with antibodies against the virus, offering a new clue as to whether the infection can be transferred from mother to child. The baby was born this month without COVID-19 but with the virus antibodies, the Straits Times newspaper reported yesterday, citing the mother: "My doctor suspects I have transferred my COVID-19 antibodies to him during my pregnancy," Celine Ng-Chan told the paper. — Reuters

#### UAE names climate change envoy

DUBAI: The UAE yesterday approved the establishment of a new national cybersecurity council, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, UAE Prime Minister and Vice-President and ruler of Dubai, said on Twitter. The cabinet also appointed Industry and Advanced Technology Minister and head of Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) Sultan Al-Jaber as a special envoy for climate change. Jaber, who holds a PhD in business and economics, is also the chairman of Abu Dhabi's renewable energy company known as Masdar. — Reuters

#### Trump loses another challenge

WASHINGTON: The US state of Pennsylvania's supreme court dismissed another legal challenge to the election by supporters of President Donald Trump on Saturday. A Republican lawsuit had sought to invalidate mail-in ballots in the battleground state or to throw out all votes and allow the state's legislature to decide the winner. The court dismissed both claims in a unanimous decision, calling the second one an "extraordinary proposition that the court disenfranchise all 6.9 million Pennsylvanians who voted in the general election". — AFP

## Firemen rescue 83 people after heavy rainfall

KUWAIT: Firefighters rescued a total of 83 people during heavy rains that hit Kuwait over the past two days, Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) said yesterday. The persons rescued were trapped in their vehicles in areas where rainwater accumulated, mostly in Jahra governorate, the public relations and information department at KFF said in a statement. Authorities received more than 170 emergency calls, mostly from desert areas, KFF explained, adding that no injuries were reported as firefighters handled all emergency cases. — KUNA (See Page 3)

## Indonesian volcano belches huge tower of smoke and ash

JAKARTA: Indonesia's Mount Ili Lewotolok erupted yesterday, belching a column of smoke and ash four kilometers into the sky, triggering a flight warning and the closure of the local airport. There were no reports of injuries or damage from the eruption in a remote part of the Southeast Asian archipelago. But authorities raised the volcano's alert status to its second-highest level as they warned of possible lava flows.

A two-kilometer no-go zone around the crater was also expanded to four kilometers, while flights were advised to steer clear of the area as volcanic ash rained down on East Nusa Tenggara's Wunopitu airport, which was temporarily closed. "People are advised to not carry out any activities within a four-kilometer radius from the crater," Indonesia's geological agency said.

Indonesia is home to about 130 active volcanoes due to its position on the "Ring of Fire", a belt of tectonic plate boundaries circling the Pacific Ocean where frequent seismic activity occurs. — AFP



KUWAIT: A pickup truck and makeshift structure in Mutiaa are submerged in a pool of water yesterday after heavy rainfall a day earlier. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Residents gather to watch as Mount Ili Lewotolok spews ash during a volcanic eruption in Lembata yesterday. — AFP

## Iran mulling response to assassination

TEHRAN: Iran was weighing its response yesterday to the killing of its top nuclear scientist, which it blames on arch-foe Israel, as his body was taken to Shiite shrines ahead of being buried. Two days after Mohsen Fakhrazadeh died following a firefight between his guards and unidentified gunmen outside Tehran, parliament called in a statement for international inspectors to be barred from nuclear facilities.

Iran's Supreme National Security Council usually handles decisions related to the country's nuclear program. President Hassan Rouhani has stressed the country will seek its revenge in "due time" and not be rushed into a "trap". Israel says Fakhrazadeh was the head of an Iranian military nuclear program, the existence of which the Islamic republic has consistently denied.

His body arrived in the northeastern holy city of Mashhad late Saturday and was taken to the shrine of Imam Reza for prayers and a ceremonial circling of the tomb, state news agency IRNA reported.

Continued on Page 2