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## PHILIPPINES DEMANDS EXPLANATION ON ENVOY EXPULSION

# Manila suspends talks on labor pact

Ministry said to suspend dealings with some foreign centers

Row deepens

## MP queries pre-employment medical test offices

By **Abubakar A. Ibrahim**  
Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 26: MP Mohammed Al-Dalal in a parliamentary query has asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid details about pre-employment medical test offices operating overseas.

Al-Dalal said he based his inquiry on a report that has been published by the Al-Rai newspaper (April 26, 2018) that Kuwait's Ministry of

Foreign Affairs has suspended dealing with such medical centers in a number of countries including Egypt and India although these offices were, over the years, accredited by Kuwait's Ministry of Health.

He added, in view of the importance of the issue, its impact on domestic workers and the health of citizens, residents and expatriate workers in Kuwait, he wants answers for the following queries.

On what legal basis has the Foreign Ministry taken the decision in this regard and if the decision is linked to practical investigation or reports received from embassies or complaints submitted in this regard which have been investigated and discrepancies found.

If so, the MP has asked for a copy of such reports and a copy of the decision to stop dealing with these centers.

As is apparent, the MP said, from the nature

of the work of these medical centers, they operate on contractual basis signed with the Ministry of Health and therefore the authority responsible for contracting and the commitment of those offices to the terms of the contract is the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health.

He therefore wants to know if there was any type of coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Health for

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**MANILA, April 26, (Agencies): A dispute between Kuwait and the Philippines over reports of abuse of Philippine workers took a turn for the worse on Thursday with the Philippines expressing "great displeasure" about Kuwait's expulsion of its ambassador.**

The conflict has been simmering for three months, sparked by reports that several Filipino domestic workers had been driven to suicide by abuse at the hands of Kuwaiti employers.

The two countries have been working on a pact to protect expatriate workers after the Philippines banned its workers from going to Kuwait.

But on Wednesday, Kuwait ordered the Philippine ambassador to leave within a week and recalled its own envoy for consultations after the Philippine foreign secretary said the embassy was forced to "assist" Filipino workers who sought help as some situations were a matter of life and death.

The Philippine foreign ministry on Thursday summoned the Kuwaiti ambassador to demand an explanation for Kuwait's action but was told the envoy, Musaed Saleh Ahmad Althwaikh, had left the country late on Wednesday.

### Displeasure

"The department served a diplomatic note to the Embassy of Kuwait conveying its strong surprise and great displeasure over the declaration of Ambassador Renato Pedro Villa as persona non grata," the ministry said in a statement.

"These acts are inconsistent with the assurances and representations made by the Kuwaiti ambassador on the various concerns that were brought to his attention."

Officials at Kuwait's embassy in Manila were not available for comment.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano said Manila would suspend talks on the labour pact until Kuwait clarifies its actions.

"Now this is happening, why would I recommend that we sign the memorandum and lifting of the ban? (We were) hoping this will be clarified," Cayetano told reporters in Singapore, where he is attending a regional summit.

"We're still optimistic, we're hoping for the best but also preparing for the worst," he said late Thursday, adding there are around 262,000 Filipinos in Kuwait, nearly 60 percent of them domestic workers.

### Bilateral

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's spokesman Harry Roque said he hoped bilateral ties would not worsen further.

Tensions rose earlier this year following the murder of maid Joanna Demafelis, prompting Duterte to ban Filipino workers from deploying to Kuwait for work.

Duterte had alleged that Arab employers routinely rape their Filipino workers, force them to work 21 hours a day and feed them scraps.

Relations appeared to recover after a Kuwaiti court sentenced to death in absentia a Lebanese man and his Syrian wife for Demafelis' killing.

Following the verdict, Duterte this month announced plans to visit Kuwait to seal an agreement on workplace safety guarantees for the 252,000 Filipinos working in the Gulf nation.

Domestic helpers account for more than 65 percent of the more than 260,000 Filipinos in Kuwait, according to the Philippine foreign secretary.

In February, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte imposed a ban on Filipinos going to Kuwait to work and called on workers already there to return home after the discovery of a domestic worker's body in a freezer in an abandoned home.

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### Donors up short on Syria

## Kuwaiti efforts win praise in Brussels

BRUSSELS, April 26, (Agencies): The second Brussels conference on Syria concluded Wednesday evening with a co-chairs Declaration reaffirming that only an inclusive, comprehensive and genuine political solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people for dignity and freedom will ensure a sustainable end to the Syrian conflict.

"The co-chairs, together with all participants, reiterated their appreciation for Kuwait's and Sweden's efforts in drafting UNSC Resolution 2401 (2018) and called for its immediate and full implementation," it said.

Participants pledged, for both Syria and the region, \$4.4 billion for 2018, as well as multi-year pledges of \$3.4 billion for 2019-2020. In addition, some international financial institutions and donors announced around \$21.2 billion in loans.

The Second Brussels Conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region" took place on 24-25 April. It was hosted by the European Union and co-chaired by the United Nations.

It brought together 86 delegations including 57 States, 10 representatives of regional organisations and International Financial Institutions as well as 19 UN agencies. More than 250 Non-Governmental Organisations were also associated throughout the preparations and the two days of the Conference.

One year after Brussels I, and following the previous three pledging conferences in Kuwait as well as the London Conference in 2016, the Conference renewed and strengthened the political, humanitarian and financial commitment of the international community to support the Syrian people, the neighboring countries, and the communities most affected by the conflict, it said.

### Substantial

The former co-chairs of Brussels I: Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar and the United Kingdom (UK) brought substantial input to the preparations and the proceedings of the Conference. Jordan and Lebanon were closely associated, said the Declaration.

The Conference expressed its strong support for the work of the UN Special Envoy for Syria in his mandate to facilitate the political process, with a view to a lasting political settlement. More than 12 million people have now been displaced, including more than 5.6 million refugees hosted in neighboring countries and 6.6 million displaced inside Syria.

Nearly 13.1 million people, almost half of whom are children, urgently need humanitarian assistance and protection inside the country, it noted.

The \$4.4 billion raised by international donors in emergency aid for Syria and its neighbours this year on Wednesday, fell well short of the UN target for 2018 after the United States failed to submit a pledge.

Humanitarian agencies also pleaded for peace before the Syrian military and its Russian and Iranian backers turn their firepower on the rebel-controlled Syrian city of Idlib, warning of civilian suffering on a greater scale than during the siege of Aleppo last year.

"What I fear is a very cruel battle engulfing Idlib. We cannot accept the war moves towards what is essentially a gigantic refugee camp," Jan Egeland, a senior UN adviser on Syria, said of the northwestern region.

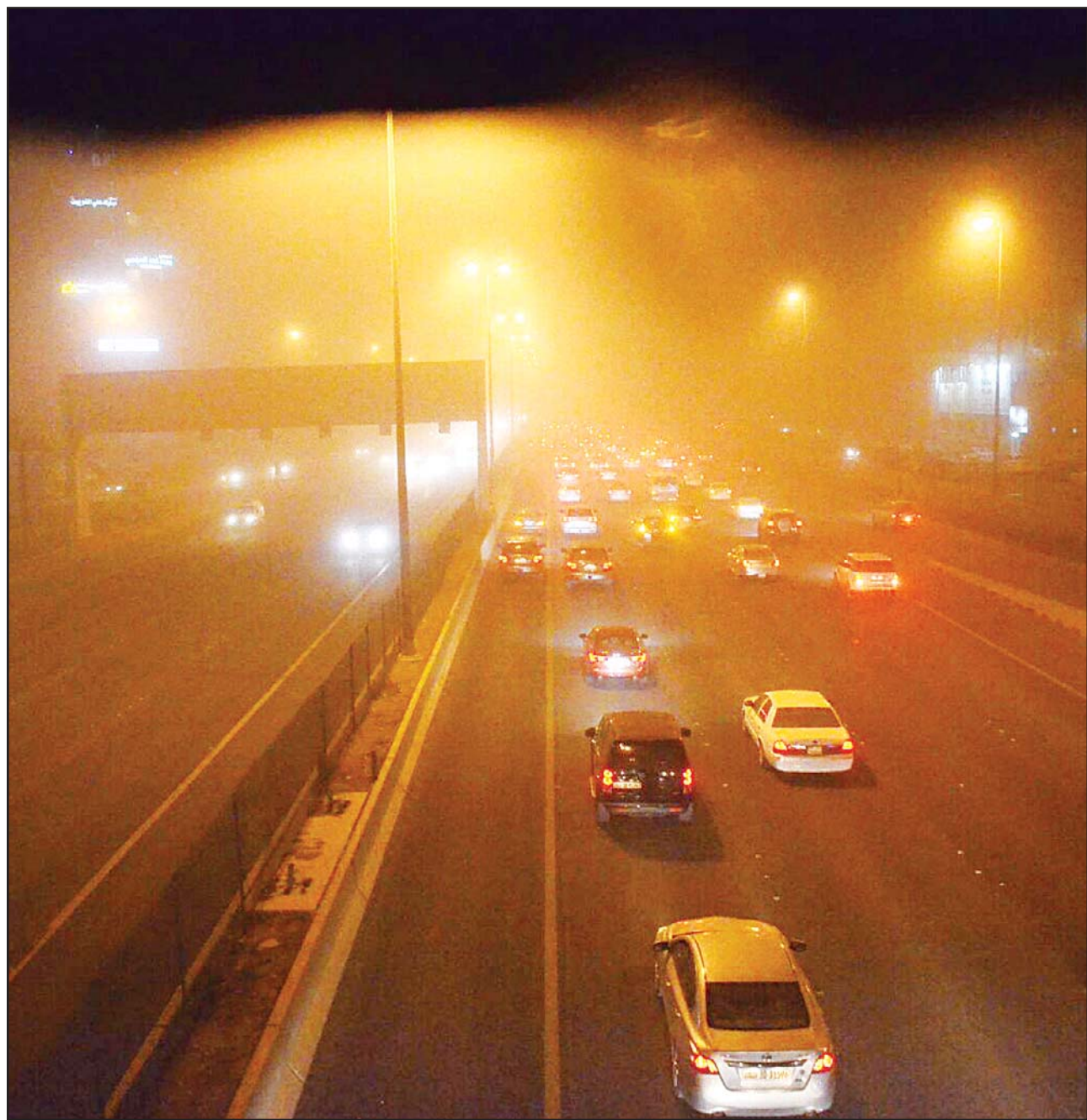
"There have to be talks to spare the civilians from the fighting," he said, adding that 2.5 million people were at risk.

Britain, Germany and France were among those offering new money for refugees at the conference, which brought together 86 governments, aid groups and financial and regional institutions.

Pledges of \$3.4 billion also came in for 2019-2020 and the EU's humanitarian chief, Christos Stylianides, said the bloc and its member states offered the lion's share of the sum.

But the figure was less than the \$6 billion gathered for 2017 as

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A massive sand storm hit Kuwait Thursday evening reducing visibility to the barest minimum and greatly affecting vehicular movement.

Photo by Bassam Abu Shanab

### Russia sees no room for additions

## No change to N-deal: Iran

WASHINGTON, April 26, (Agencies): US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis says the administration is still considering whether the Iran nuclear deal can be improved enough to persuade President Donald Trump to remain in it.

At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, Mattis was asked where the administration stands on the future of the 2015 agreement. Trump has called the deal "insane" and said he will decide by May 12 whether to withdraw from it.

Mattis in the past has said he believes the US should stick with the agreement. In his remarks Thursday, he did not express an opinion but said discussions with European allies about improving the agreement are still in progress. Iran's president on Wednesday ruled out any changes or additions to the accord.

A top adviser to Iran's supreme leader, meanwhile, said on Thursday Tehran would not accept any change to its nuclear deal, as Western signatories prepare a new package in the hope of persuading Trump to stick with the accord.

A May 12 deadline is looming for Trump to decide on whether to re-impose US economic sanctions on Tehran. French Presi-

dent Emmanuel Macron said on Tuesday he had discussed a "new deal" with Trump in which the United States and Europe would tackle outstanding concerns about Iran beyond its nuclear programme.

"Any change or amendment to the current deal will not be accepted by Iran," said Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the semi-official Iranian news agency Fars reported.

"If Trump exits the deal, Iran will surely pull out of it ... Iran will not accept a nuclear deal with no benefits for us," Velayati told journalists.

Under Macron's proposal, the United States and Europe would agree to block any Iranian nuclear activity until 2025 and beyond, address Iran's ballistic missile programme and generate conditions for a political solution to contain Iran in Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.

Trump has said that unless European allies fix the "terrible flaws" in the Iran nuclear deal by May 12, he will refuse to

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### Bush recovering

HOUSTON, April 26, (AP): Former president George H.W. Bush was moved out of intensive care and into a regular patient room at a Houston hospital on Wednesday as he recovers from an infection that required his hospitalization a day after his wife's funeral, a family spokesman said.

The nation's 41st president is expected to remain at Houston Methodist Hospital for "several more days," spokesman Jim McGrath said. Bush, who is 93, is being treated for an infection that spread to his blood.

"He is alert and talking with hospital staff, family and friends, and his doctors are very pleased with

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A butterfly feeding on a flower. (Rami Saber — KUNA)

### Bahrain commutes 4 death sentences

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates, April 26, (AP): Bahrain's king has commuted four death sentences handed down by a military tribunal in the island kingdom, which included three civilians and one soldier.

The state-run Bahrain News Agency reported King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's decision Thursday just as the men stood poised to be executed after losing their last appeal.

The men now will serve life sentences after being convicted of plotting to assassinate a military official.

Bahrain is in the midst of a major crackdown on dissent, years after its

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**US\$/KD 0.30060/20**  
**Euro/KD 0.3648**  
**Yen/KD 0.0027**  
**British £/KD 0.4194**  
**KSE -7.2 pts** at closing April 26  
See Page 29  
**DOW +251.66 pts** at 21:40 April 26  
See Page 30  
**Nasdaq +124.25 pts** at 21:40 April 26  
**FTSE +42.11 pts** at closing April 26  
**Nikkei +104.29 pts** at closing April 26  
**Gold \$1,325.70** per oz (London)  
**NYMEX crude \$68.18 pb**  
**Brent crude \$74.75 pb**  
**3-month \$ LIBOR rate 2.3%**

### NewsWatch

**WASHINGTON:** The US Senate confirmed **Mike Pompeo** as President **Donald Trump's** secretary of state on Thursday, putting the former CIA director in a pivotal role to handle US foreign policy challenges such as North Korea and Iran.  
Pompeo, a former Army officer who was a Republican congressman, is regarded as a Trump loyalist with hawkish world views.  
He is already deeply involved in diplomacy. Trump sent Pompeo to **North Korea** three weeks ago to meet with the country's leader, **Kim Jong Un**, ahead of a summit with the US president to address Pyongyang's nuclear programme. (RTRS)

**PARIS:** French authorities  
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