

## Two women figure in Kuwait's new 15-member cabinet

Two women are among a new 15-member cabinet formed in Kuwait following elections in the Gulf city-state earlier this month.

Kuwait's ruler Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah approved the new cabinet unveiled late Wednesday with Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah being retained as prime minister.

The cabinet has seven new faces including a woman. In the last cabinet, there was only one woman.

While Nuriya Al-Sebih retained her post as education minister, Mudhi Al-Humoud, a liberal academic and university professor, was appointed as state minister for housing and administrative development.

Though Kuwaiti women were allowed to participate in elections in 2006, no woman has won a seat to the 50-member National Assembly in the two elections since then.

Kuwait went to the polls May 17 after the entire cabinet resigned March 17 this year amid strained relationship between the legislative and the executive wings of the country.

Tension arose between cabinet members and legislators in March after the latter demanded higher pay hikes for the nationals than what the government had announced.

In February, the Kuwaiti government had announced a salary hike of 120 Kuwaiti dinars (\$440) for all Kuwaitis, including those working in the private sector.

Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, had then dissolved parliament. It was the fifth time that Kuwait's parliament was dissolved in the Gulf nation's 45-year-old parliamentary history.

Kuwait had voted for its first parliament in 1963, two years after gaining independence from Britain.

Four ministers in the new cabinet - apart from Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser, who is a nephew of ruler Sheikh Sabah - are from the ruling Al-Sabah family and they continue to hold the key posts of interior, defence, foreign affairs and information.

Only one winner in the polls made it to the cabinet - Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs Hussein Al-Huraiti.

According to Kuwaiti law, all unelected ministers become ex-officio members of parliament. This takes the current strength of parliament to 65.

Though Kuwaiti rules do not allow official political parties, it does allow informal political groups whose members can stand for parliamentary elections.

While congratulating the members of the new cabinet, Sheikh Sabah encouraged them to cooperate with the National Assembly 'in order to deepen the concept of the state of law and institutions and to embody the spirit of democracy and virtues that were inherited by previous generations of Kuwaitis'.

'This is a stage burdened with challenges and future achievements, which requires us to double efforts, and exert the utmost in Kuwait's best interest. Finally, may God Almighty be on your side through your tasks,' reports quoted him as saying.

Kuwait, the fourth largest oil-producing nation in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Nations (OPEC), is home to around 550,000 expatriate Indians.

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