

Uber, others must register apps: official

Abu Dhabi eyes new regulations for ride-hailing apps



Syrian Abu Ahmed (left), and Abu Majid prepare a barrel filled with plastic as part of a refining process to produce fuel on Sept 10, in Aleppo's rebel-held eastern district of Sakhur. (AFP)

ABU DHABI, Sept 19, (RTRS): Ride-hailing services such as Uber and others will have to register their apps and heed new regulations to operate in Abu Dhabi, a top official at the Gulf emirate's taxi regulator said on Monday.

US-based Uber and regional rival Careem suspended services in the capital of the United Arab Emirates on Aug 27 after many of their drivers were stopped by authorities over violations of regulations, sources told Reuters at the time.

Careem has since resumed services in Abu Dhabi, although Uber has yet to do so as it awaits clarification on some issues. The new regulations are coming "very soon" and will include

a provision requiring ride-hailing apps to register with The Centre for Regulation of Transport by Hire Cars (Transad), its general manager Mohamed Darwish al-Qamzi said.

"This will help us to control the market easier by blocking any unregulated application with us," he told Reuters. Currently, ride-hailing services are not regulated in the UAE.

Qamzi said companies such as Uber and Careem suspended their services after Abu Dhabi began enforcing tighter regulations to curb malpractices and a growing black market.

"There was a black market, many illegal drivers doing part-time work, over-charging customers and not fol-

lowing regulations," he said.

A spokesman for Careem denied any wrongdoing by the company and its drivers. An Uber spokeswoman was not immediately available for comment, although the company has previously said it complies with all existing regulations.

According to the new Abu Dhabi regulations, ride-hailing apps must work only with luxury private hire companies and strictly follow their price structure. They must also send a list of drivers and cars to Transad, he said.

At the moment, ride-hailing apps work with drivers who operate limousines as well as smaller cars that are not registered with Transad.

Transad works with seven franchise taxi companies with 7,645 registered taxis operating in Abu Dhabi.

"We are not against the apps services," said Qamzi. "It is the choice of the people. But we need to make sure the cars are safe, drivers are genuine and the safety of customers is first."

Uber, which launched services in Abu Dhabi in 2013, said last year that the Middle East and North Africa contained some of its fastest-growing markets and that it planned to invest \$250 million to expand in the region.

It said on June 1 that had raised \$3.5 billion from an investment by Saudi Arabia's state-owned Public Investment Fund.

Significant use of 'steroids' among Kuwaiti males: study

FSRI publishes int'l paper on AAS use

KUWAIT CITY, Sept 19: A recently published local study examining the use of Anabolic-Androgenic Steroid (AAS) amongst gym users in Kuwait found there to be significant use of AAS amongst Kuwaiti male gym-goers. The study, which was published in the International Journal of Men's Health, was carried out by a research team at Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute (FSRI) and funded by Kuwait Foundation of Sciences (KFAS).

The study analyzed data collected and collated from 200 individuals of different gender, age, and nationality from across six gyms in Kuwait, amongst which 35% reported usage of AAS. The main findings listed age, smoking and nationality as the top predictors for AAS use; younger adults were significantly more likely to be AAS users, as are smokers and Kuwaiti males — both of whom are more than three times likely to be users of AAS than non-smokers and non-Kuwaitis, respectively.

Dr Elham Al-Hamdan, President and Medical Director of FSRI, and one of the authors of the study commented: "The literature on AAS use in Kuwait is still fairly limited, and with our latest research we are hoping to build upon this and help shed light on the gravity and prevalence of this issue in Kuwait. One of the pillars of the Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute is research and education, and in the past we have published a range of study's focusing on health issues that impact the lives of people in our local community. AAS has become a prevalent issue amongst the large gym-going population in Kuwait, and hence has become a topic that needs to be studied and researched further."

Harmful

Due to the harmful effects that AAS use can have on the body, the study suggests that health policy and institutional reforms are needed in order to tackle the issue before it spreads. Although the complete elimination of AAS is not realistic, the study poses that reforms, public awareness and controlled distribution and administration of steroids are important steps to negate the harmful effects and draw attention to AAS use.

Dr Al-Hamdan further added: "We will be publishing a follow-up paper that explores the psychological and emotional impact AAS use can have on individuals, further strengthening the framework we have set out to provide education and insight into AAS use in Kuwait."

Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute (FSRI) was founded in 2006 as a non-profit healthcare institution, becoming the only organization of its kind in Kuwait. Dr Elham Al-Hamdan, Co-founder & Medical Director, established FSRI with its mission to be a holistic medical institution providing high quality multi-disciplinary services, whilst also serving as a regional hub for health, research, education & advocacy. FSRI houses a highly specialized and intensively trained team of physicians and clinicians, providing exceptional quality of healthcare services and compassionate care across a number of speciality areas including: pediatric rehabilitation (at its Children Evaluation & Rehabilitation Centre: CERC), family medicine, preventative medicine, psychology, physiotherapy & occupational therapy, speech therapy, neurology, elderly care, women's health and research and education.



Dr Elham Al-Hamdan, President and Medical Director of FSRI



French President Hollande and Prince Alwaleed at Elysee

Economic, cultural matters among agenda

French president, Prince Alwaleed meet at Elysee

PARIS, Sept 19: HE French President Francois Hollande and HRH Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Chairman of Kingdom Holding Company (KHC) and Chairman of Alwaleed Philanthropies (AP) held a meeting at the French presidential Palace, The Elysee.

The meeting was attended by Ms. Hassna Alturki, Executive Manager for International Relations to HRH the Chairman, Hani Agha, Head of Travel & External Affairs Manager and Kacy Grine, Advisor to HRH the Chairman. The meeting was also attended by Jacques Audibert, Advisor for Diplomatic Affairs to HE President of France, Julien Pouget, Advisor for African and Near East affairs to HE President of France and Ms. Adrienne Brotons, Advisor for Economic & Financial Affairs to HE President of France.

During the meeting, the two discussed economic, cultural matters and topics related to investments. They also discussed the bi-lateral relations between Saudi Arabia and France, and the strong relations between HRH and France, especially KHC's investments in France that are considered to be the largest Saudi Arabian presence in France through the full ownership and the management of the iconic landmark The Four Seasons Hotel George

V, the management of Le Royal Monceau Hotel (Raffles), the management of the Grand Hotel du Cap Ferrat in the South of France, in addition to, Disneyland, Paris (Euro Disney), 7 hotels in Disneyland, Paris, and through the presence of Citigroup. Also Prince Alwaleed's cultural contributions through Alwaleed Philanthropies that is chaired by His Highness that have donated US\$20 million in 2005 to establish the center of Islamic Art at the Musée du Louvre.

In 2015, HE President Hollande and Prince Alwaleed held a meeting at the French presidential Palace, The Elysee. In a strategic alliance between France & KHC. A consortium of France's big companies led by the CDCIC International Capital, the International investment arm of Caisse des Depots, France's Sovereign Wealth Fund, announced that they have approved an investment in KHC. The deal constitutes the acquisition of KHC's shares with a minimum amount of \$150 million dollars (SR563,000) subject to increase. Moreover, HRH Prince Alwaleed retained all the 95% stake in KHC. In a separate deal, KHC & CDC France's SWF had announced a launch of \$400 million fund. The investment fund will be to seek attractive investment opportunities in small and me-

dium size enterprises in Saudi Arabia with the participation of large French corporates, in addition to diversifying KHC's investment portfolio.

In 2006, HRH was bestowed the medal of "Legion of Honor," with the rank of Commander by the former French President, Jacques Chirac during an official ceremony held at the Elysee Palace. The medal is the country's highest civilian honor, and it was bestowed to the Prince in recognition of his role in strengthening Saudi-French cultural, business and economic relations. In 2009 Former President Nicolas Sarkozy awarded Prince Alwaleed with the "President of France Medal". In 2007, HRH was awarded the "Golden" medal by the French Minister of Culture and Communication.

Founded in 1980, KHC is a publicly traded company which was listed on Tadawul (the Saudi Stock Exchange) in 2007. Today, KHC is one of the world's most successful and diversified business organizations with investments across 12 sectors. For over two decades, the company has been a leading player in the global hospitality industry, building shareholder value by acquiring, developing, actively asset managing and monetizing high-quality hospitality assets.

Justice min complains of being sidelined

Tensions within Moroccan govt heat up

RABAT, Sept 19, (RTRS): Tensions have erupted between Morocco's royal establishment and the Islamist ruling party, with the Islamist justice minister complaining of "weird" goings-on in the run-up to a parliamentary election next month.

Mustapha Ramid accused his government colleague Mohammed Hassad, a technocrat appointed by the royal palace as interior minister, of monopolising decisions on organising the election and failing to consult with the justice ministry.

Unlike rulers in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya who were overthrown in Arab Spring revolutions in 2011, Morocco's King Mohamed rode out popular protests while ceding some authority to the government, which has been led for the past five years by the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD).

But the coming election is straining the delicate political balance in the country of 34 million people by exacerbating divisions between the palace and the PJD.

"The justice minister used to decide with the interior minister on all election matters but now, three weeks before Oct 7 elections, weird and strange things are happening," Ramid said on Facebook, without going into details.

Last week, the interior ministry rejected the application of a conservative cleric allied to the PJD who wanted to run as an election candidate in the tourist city of Marrakesh, with officials accusing him of making hate speeches. The PJD dismissed the charge, but replaced him with another candidate.

Last week the king accused a minister from the PJD's junior partner of dragging the monarchy into the campaign by describing a royal adviser as an incarnation of authoritarianism.

On Sunday, hundreds of people demonstrated in the city of Casablanca against what they called the "Islamisation of society". The PJD said the protest was supported by organisations that should be neutral in politics, a veiled accusation against the interior ministry.

Justice minister Ramid said that because of his alleged exclusion from decisions on the running of the election, he could not be held responsible for any "errors, deviation or excess."

Hassad, the interior minister, played down his colleague's accusations and said he had contacted Ramid since the Facebook posting "in order to stay mobilised to carry out the mission that His Majesty has entrusted to us".

He denied any involvement by his

ministry in the Casablanca demonstration.

The king still holds ultimate power under the constitution of the North African country. The elections will be only the second since his reforms, and the PJD is looking to solidify its position after running a campaign stressing its commitment to fight corruption.

The royal establishment and its political supporters are distrustful of the Islamists. The PJD and its junior ally have accused the establishment of favoring their main rival, the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), whose founder is now a palace adviser. The palace says the king maintains the same distance from all political parties.

The PJD, which does not openly challenge the king's authority, made gains in local elections last year to control the capital Rabat and other major cities, where its anti-corruption drive struck a chord with voters.

"It is the worst confrontation between the regime and the PJD since 2011," said Issandir El Amrani, North Africa project director at International Crisis Group. "I don't think this confrontation will continue after the election; what we are seeing are warning shots as the elections approach."

Plastic raw material in primitive process

'Besieged' Aleppo turns to dangerous alternative fuels

ALEPPO, Syria, Sept 19, (AFP): In a destroyed building in Syria's Aleppo, neighbours Abu Ahmed and Mohammed Ibrahim desperately rummaged through rubble and debris in search of scraps of plastic to turn into fuel.

Residents of the rebel-held eastern districts of the city have struggled to keep their cars running or their electricity on since government forces first besieged their neighbourhoods this summer.

"There's no more fuel on the market, no heating oil, no petrol, no gas," said Abu Ahmed, 40.

"So we've decided to turn to alternatives," he added, with plastic as the raw material in a dangerous and primitive process of extracting fuel to fire up electricity generators.

Fierce clashes south of Aleppo this summer damaged the only power plant that served eastern parts of the city, leaving 250,000 residents without electricity since July.

In their native Sakhur district, Abu Ahmed and Mohammed packed plastic objects into black barrels, which were then sealed and heated on a wooden fire.

The plastic melts and produces a gas that is piped and cooled, resulting in a yellow liquid used as diesel by the desperate residents of eastern Aleppo.

"We found out about this by looking on the Internet and seeing how residents of Ghouta produce diesel, so we are copying them," Abu Ahmed said, referring to another rebel-controlled and besieged area near Damascus.

Food and fuel shortages have combined to make life a daily grind for residents of Aleppo, where many districts have to survive on three hours of generator-powered electricity a day — and some make do with none at all.

The price of the rare fuel supplies in Aleppo has rocketed to 1,200 Syrian pounds (\$2.3 at the current black market rate) for a litre or nearly a quarter of a gallon of diesel, compared with 350 pounds before the blockade.

Residents have been anxiously awaiting deliveries of food and fuel since a ceasefire came into force on Monday, but no aid has entered the city yet.

Forty UN trucks carrying food aid — enough to feed 80,000 people for one month — remain stuck on Syria's border with Turkey.

With living conditions so basic, Mustafa Marjan, a 30-year-old resident of the Zabadiya district, remained unimpressed by the truce.

"I don't only want the bombs to stop — we want vegetables and fuel to be allowed in!" he bellowed.

"How can we cook and feed our children if there's no fuel on the market?"

Their diesel-starved cars and buses parked on debris-ridden routes, Aleppo's residents are left with only their feet for transport.

"We're only extracting between 70 and 80 litres a day," said Abu Ahmed of the plastic-based process he used.

Most of what he and his colleagues make goes to feed generators used by residents to pump water from wells.

"Our goal is not to make a profit but to serve our neighbourhood, by giving people a degree of self-sufficiency," said his neighbour, Mohammed Ibrahim.

The operation is riddled with dangers, and in this case had a shocking outcome.

Just days after speaking to AFP, Abu Ahmed and one of his colleagues were burned to death when a barrel exploded during the melting process.

New rules of voting

Jordan election seen as small step toward democratic reform

AMMAN, Jordan, Sept 19, (AP): Jordan's parliament election on Tuesday is being touted as proof that the pro-Western monarchy is moving forward with democratic reforms despite regional turmoil and security threats.

Officials point to new rules of voting and the participation of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood for the first time in almost a decade. But critics argue that this year's electoral reform — ostensibly meant to strengthen political parties — has fallen short and that the revised system continues to favor King Abdullah II's traditional tribal supporters.

They expect the parliament being chosen Tuesday to be similar to the outgoing one — largely an assembly of individuals with competing narrow interests, widely dismissed by Jordanians as ineffective in dealing with endemic unemployment and other crises.

Such a legislature is still a long way from what Jordanians have long been told would be the goal of gradual reform — a strong parliament with a say in choosing the government, now the exclusive domain of the king.

The new election rules are "a step forward, but it is not yet enough to create a serious breakthrough on the reform track," said analyst Oraib Al-Rantawi. The rules replace the "one man, one vote" system that was introduced in 1993 and weakened political parties.

In Tuesday's election,

Jordanians will choose 130 members of parliament, with 15 seats reserved for women, nine for Christians and three for minority Chechens and Circassians. More than 4 million Jordanians over the age of 17 are eligible to vote, more than twice the number in the 2013 election, when voters had to pre-register.

Under the new rules, the country is divided into 23 districts, and voters choose candidates from competing lists in their district. In all, 1,252 candidates are running on 226 district lists. Voters can select one or more candidates on a list.

Lists

Only six percent of the lists are affiliated with a specific political party, 11 percent have some party representatives, 39 percent are independent and 43 percent are based on tribal affiliations, according to the International Republican Institute, a US-based non-partisan group that seeks to promote democracy.

"The majority of voters base their voting habits on tribal affiliations, community roots and identity rather than approaches to policy," the group said.

The most organized party is the Islamic Action Front, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, a veteran opposition movement linked to the regional organization of the same name. The IAF competed in 2007, but boycotted parliament elections in 2010 and 2013, arguing the elec-

toral system was unfair.

The Brotherhood has suffered setbacks in the region and in Jordan in recent years, in part because of a backlash of various governments to the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. In Jordan, ideological arguments split the group into rival factions, with one recognized by the government as the official Brotherhood.

The original group has been outlawed in Jordan, but its political arm, the IAF, remains legal.

Al-Rantawi said he believes the IAF is running in this election — despite misgivings about the system — to avoid becoming irrelevant.

The mood among supporters was subdued at an IAF election rally over the weekend in Sweileh, a neighborhood in the capital, Amman. The outdoor gathering on a sandy lot drew a few hundred people, but several back rows of plastic chairs remained empty.

IAF spokesman Murad Adayleh said his party would push for economic and educational reform. "Our role will be to uncover the government's wrong policies and address any mistakes," he said, dismissing suggestions that a vocal, but small IAF faction could inadvertently serve as democratic window dressing.

Adayleh, who is also a candidate, said he expects his party will win between one-fourth and one-third of the seats.