

Inside: 60-page TN Magazine

We shine spotlight on Abu Dhabi Art, Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim and Kengo Kuma



Turnout beats expectations in closely watched Iraq vote

Coalition led by Prime Minister Al Sudani claims victory but drawn-out negotiations lie ahead

SINAN MAHMOUD
Baghdad

Iraq's electoral commission last night announced the initial results of national elections, setting the stage for tense and drawn-out negotiations between political blocs over forming the next government.

There were signs yesterday that momentum was building for a coalition led by Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al Sudani. Sources close to him claimed victory, telling AFP they expected to secure about 50 seats – a significant number in Iraq's fragmented 329-seat

parliament. Two sources said they expected Mr Al Sudani's alliance to have "won the largest bloc".

No single party is expected to obtain the majority needed to form a government. Once preliminary results are announced, negotiations will begin among leading blocs.

The final total turnout reached 56.11 per cent, the electoral commission said, despite a boycott led by influential Shiite cleric Moqtada Al Sadr. About 12 million people cast their votes.

During the last parliamentary elections in 2021, a record low 41 per cent of voters turned out.

Mr Al Sudani is seeking a second term in office, but rivalries within Iraq's Shiite camp and possible disputes with Kurdish and Sunni partners could complicate his path. The electoral commission was releasing results region by region, meaning a clear national picture had not yet emerged last night.

The commission also said 40 complaints had been received regarding early voting for security forces and displaced families, which took place on Sunday, and 37 complaints regarding the main balloting on Tuesday. Late on Tuesday, Mr Al Sudani welcomed the

high turnout as "a significant milestone". "The noble people of Iraq have taken yet another significant step towards protecting their constitutional and democratic system," he added.

"This achievement represents a significant milestone on the path to restoring the trust of citizens, a goal that our government has placed at the forefront of its priorities."

There had been fears that few voters would show up following weeks of calls for a boycott from the political movement of Mr Al Sadr, which dominated the last parliament before it withdrew from politics last year. Mr Al

Sadr himself stepped back from the political process in 2021, after he failed to form a majority government following that year's election. He claims Iraq's political elite have failed to control Iran-backed militias, remove Tehran's influence or fight against corruption.

The main challenge for the next government will be to address long-standing grievances over poor public services, corruption and unemployment.

The new government will also need to maintain the delicate balance in ties between Iran and the US, the country's two main allies.

DP World begins operations at Syria's Tartus Port

THE NATIONAL

DP World has begun operations at Tartus port after a formal handover from the Syrian General Authority for Land and Sea Ports.

The ports operator agreed to a 30-year deal to operate Tartus in the summer, which includes an \$800 million commitment to upgrade infrastructure at the site.

Fahad Al Banna, chief executive of DP World Tartus, said the group worked with the Syrian government and the ports authority to transform Tartus into a "world-class maritime gateway".

In a report by state news agency Wam, he said DP World was committed to building "a modern and digitally enabled port that will grow trade, create opportunities and firmly position Tartus as a key trade hub in the Eastern Mediterranean".

A new 22-metre harbour tug also began service at the facility.

President offers condolences



President Sheikh Mohamed attends a condolence majlis in Al Ain after the death of the mother of Awad Al Ahbabi. Several senior officials accompanied Sheikh Mohamed, who expressed his sincere sympathies to the family Hamad Al Kaabi / UAE Presidential Court

UAE offers inspiration for film on female astronaut

CHRIS MAXWELL

A film that will take the story of the UAE's historic space programme to the big screen is set to begin production.

Called *The Desert Beyond*, the Emirati-produced film is to chart the journey of the Arab world's first female astronaut as she reaches for the stars.

The film is inspired by the success story of Nora Al Matrooshi, who was selected as the first female Emirati or Arab astronaut in 2021.

The 90-minute film is supported by the Dubai Films and Games Commission. The executive producer will be Rasha Al Mubarak, founder of Naiy Production House, an Emirati company focused on socially driven storytelling. Oscar-nominated and Emmy-winning filmmaker David Darg is to direct.

Ms Al Mubarak said the film is about "honouring our heritage as we take bold steps towards the future".

Houthis detain Red Cross staff in Sanaa office raid

NADA ALTAHER

The Houthi rebels in Yemen have raided offices belonging to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Sanaa for the first time, detaining dozens of employees, including foreign workers, for questioning.

Armed men confiscated mobile phones and laptops, cutting off communications for staff, including the ICRC's head of mission Christine Cipolla, a

source at the humanitarian organisation told *The National*.

Hours later, the devices were returned and many employees were released. It was not immediately clear whether any had been forcibly taken from the offices to Houthi-run locations.

The source said the head of IT was on Sunday held for 24 hours before being released.

The Iran-backed group has intensified raids, arrests and interrogations of foreign and

Yemeni staff working with NGOs, which they accuse of collaborating with Israel.

The militants attacked ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden during the two-year Gaza war. The Houthis said the assaults were carried out in solidarity with the Palestinians.

The Houthis have hinted at a pause in that campaign since the ceasefire took effect, with Yusuf Al Madani, commander of the rebels' forces, telling

Hamas they would "reinstate the ban" on shipping off Yemen if the war resumed. A French-owned ultra-large cargo ship this week became the first to cross the Red Sea in two years.

The manner of this weekend's raid in Sanaa is not new for the Houthis, who previously detained people for questioning. A UN worker died in Houthi custody in Saada in February.

But the latest raid is unprecedented. The Red Cross has

previously helped with the release of people detained by the Houthis.

There have been claims of the torture and execution of dozens of humanitarian workers held in Houthi prisons, after the group's leader, Abdul-Malik Al Houthi, last month accused the World Food Programme and Unicef of complicity in "dangerous espionage cells".

Further report, page 7