

Kuwaiti women 'not supported in political arena'

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By Laila Ali, Special to Gulf News

Kuwait City: Women have a very slim chance of making it into the Kuwaiti parliament due to the total absence of political support, said a political analyst.

Talking to *Gulf News* in the wake of the approaching legislative elections, constitutional expert and political analyst Dr Mohammad Al Mikata said "thus far, several female figures had shown enthusiasm in taking part in the elections despite their failure in the previous elections of 2006."

Al Mikata, however, foresaw a similar ending in the 2008 elections as political blocs are still showing no support. Parliament was dissolved last month after the Cabinet submitted its resignation, saying Parliament had failed to cooperate efficiently with the Cabinet.

Relations between the two have been thorny, and both executive and legislative authorities have reached deadlock regarding several issues including salaries for Kuwaitis, the removal of guest houses owned by MPs in violation of laws and a condolence meeting held by Shiites to eulogise a figure widely regarded amongst Kuwaitis as a terrorist.

Keen

A number of hopeful female candidates have announced their intention to take part in the elections despite hitting out at a lack of back-up from political parties including liberals. Dr Khaleda Al Khidr, a former candidate who has announced her intention to run for office in the upcoming elections, told Gulf News that women have "shown sincerity in serving the nation since the last elections."

She added that women who do run for elections are locally renowned for their achievements, educational qualifications and competence.

"Voters are keen to give women a chance," she said.

Meanwhile, Al Mikata said that this election sets a more challenging experience for women willing to take part since the number of electoral constituencies has decreased in favour of an increase in their size.

Commenting on how a modification may hinder women, Al Mikata said "women now will have to reach out to a larger audience, which isn't easy in a conservative community such as Kuwait," he added.

Asserting that women would succeed if they were endorsed by existing political blocs, Al Mikata added that blocs with liberal tendencies had failed women's expectations.

"Women candidates have to run for office as part of a bigger bloc in order to achieve their goals. Plans to create a bloc of solely female members is also deemed to fail as society isn't ready to fully trust women as their legislative representatives," he added.

Fact file: Polls in May

- Women first participated in legislative elections in 2006 after being granted political rights.
- Out of 27 women candidates who took part, however not one managed to gain a seat in Parliament.
- Kuwait's Parliament was dissolved in March. Fresh elections are to be held on May 17.

- Laila Ali is a journalist based in Kuwait City