

Kuwait police clash with opposition activists
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Kuwait riot police fired tear gas and stun grenades at thousands of opposition activists who were protesting against authorities for raiding the house of a key opposition leader.

Several protesters were wounded in the clashes on Wednesday, the first in about three months in the oil-rich Gulf state which underwent violent protests late last year against the amendment of an electoral law, witnesses said.

Violence broke out hours after Special Forces raided the house of Mussallam al-Barrak, the former opposition MP, with assault rifles in an attempt to arrest him to serve a five-year prison term for insulting the country's emir.



Kuwaiti courts have sentenced at least 10 former opposition MPs and tweeters for insulting the emir (AFP)

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"I think there are ten or more [people] in the hospital right now," he added.

The estimated 10,000-strong crowd marched on a police station southwest of the capital Kuwait City but police pushed them back by firing tear gas and stun grenades and protesters responded with fireworks and stones.

Barrak, who says he is prepared to go to jail at any time, had refused to turn himself in three times in the past two days because interior ministry officials failed to produce an original arrest warrant.

'Cowardly action'

The former lawmaker described the raid on his house as a "cowardly action by the government" and said some of his relatives were beaten up and badly treated.

On Monday, a court ordered Barrak, an outspoken critic of the ruling family-controlled government, jailed for five years after he was convicted on charges of insulting the emir in a public speech in October.

Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad al-Humoud al-Sabah, a senior member of the ruling family, called on Barrak "to give himself in and then challenge the jail sentence in court".

Barrak told local pro-opposition television station Al-Youm that although the judgement is illegal and unfair, he was not refusing to go to jail but only needed to see the original arrest order as required by the law.

'Police state'

On Tuesday, New York-based Human Rights Watch called on Kuwait to drop charges against critics, while former opposition MP Mohammad al-Dallal said Kuwait is increasingly becoming a police state.

Unidentified activists hacked the information ministry website during the night on Tuesday and posted the speech of Barrak for which he was punished.

Kuwaiti courts have already sentenced at least 10 former opposition MPs and tweeters for insulting the emir.

The oil-rich Gulf country has been rocked by a bitter political crisis over the past several months after the ruler amended the electoral law in a move the opposition claims was unconstitutional.

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