



**4** US Embassy commemorates Kuwait's national celebrations



**6** Kenya locust hunters on tireless quest to halt pest



**13** In Iraq, generous Mideast tradition of istiftah lives on



**16** Djokovic follows Williams, Osaka into Australia semis



## FRONTLINE HEROES OF KUWAIT

Student Art Competition 2021

See Page 4

Kuwait Times | ZAIN | HUAWEI

# Compliance or lockdown: Virus here to stay 'till Judgment Day'

## Citizens account for 60% of cases, expats not main cause of pandemic



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh gestures as he speaks with Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah during a special National Assembly session yesterday on measures taken by the government to limit the spread of COVID-19. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The government yesterday issued a stern warning to the public to comply fully with health measures or face a total lockdown to contain a steep rise in the number of new coronavirus cases. Speaking during a special session of the National Assembly, Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah bluntly said if people do not comply with using facemasks and observing social distancing, "we will be compelled to impose a total lockdown".

The health minister declared "the pandemic will not end and will stay with us until the Day of Judgment", adding the only way to face it is through vaccination. Later, he explained COVID-19 is caused by a virus and this virus will continue to exist and people will deal with it like any other virus through medication and vaccination.

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah said Kuwait is facing a second wave of the deadly pandemic that saw 50 deaths in the past 15 days, and "if we do not cooperate...the situation will be difficult for all". The prime minister warned the situation is "very disturbing" as the number of cases at intensive care units and hospi-

talizations have substantially increased. He noted many countries larger than Kuwait are continuing with lockdowns, but expressed hope Kuwait will not reach that stage.

"We will be compelled to take tougher measures. If there will be no compliance (with health measures), we will be compelled to impose more closures and a total lockdown" in a bid to prevent the entry of new coronavirus variants, the health minister said.

Sheikh Basel denied that expatriates, who form more than two-thirds of the population, were the main source of infection. "It's untrue that expats are the ones who transfer the infection. Only very few cases come from abroad. Infection is widespread among citizens, who account for 60 percent of the cases, and expats 40 percent, many of them domestic helpers," the minister said.

He said as many as 454,000 people have registered online for the COVID vaccination, 215,000 of whom are citizens and the rest expats. As many as 137,000 people, including 119,000 Kuwaiti citizens (87 percent of those inoculated), have received the first shot of the vaccine. Around 38,000 people have received the second shot.

Continued on Page 2

### News in brief

#### National holidays announced

**KUWAIT:** The Civil Service Commission announced yesterday that all ministries, government authorities and public institutions will be closed from Feb 25 to 28 on the occasion of the national and liberation days. Thursday and Friday are official holidays, while Saturday and Sunday have been considered as rest days. Official work will resume on March 1. — KUNA

#### 5G can interfere with aircraft

**PARIS:** The latest generation of smartphones, 5G, can interfere with aircraft altitude instruments, the French Civil Aviation Authority warned yesterday as it recommended they should be turned off during flight. This interference can cause errors "in instruments that are extremely critical during landing", said the agency. — AFP (See Page 8)

#### 39 dead in India bus crash

**NEW DELHI:** Thirty-nine people were killed yesterday when a bus plunged into a deep canal in the state of Madhya Pradesh, officials said. The accident happened when the bus, which was carrying more than 50 passengers, veered off a bridge and crashed into the 9-m-deep canal in Sidhi district early yesterday. Officials said the driver and six others swam to safety. — AFP

#### Bitcoin surges past \$50,000

**LONDON:** Bitcoin soared above \$50,000 for the first time yesterday after jumping almost 75 percent so far this year as heavyweight companies back the world's most popular virtual currency. At around 1235 GMT, bitcoin hit an all-time high of \$50,547.70, a 4.4-percent gain since Monday. It later pulled back to stand at \$49,213.54. — AFP (See Page 8)

## Domestic helper recruitment fee includes airfare

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** The ministry of commerce and industry confirmed to Kuwait Times yesterday that the official fee for recruiting domestic helpers from abroad includes the cost of the air ticket of the worker. Ministry decree 33/2021, published in the official gazette Kuwait Al Youm last week, set the fee for hiring domestic workers through

recruitment agencies at KD 890, or KD 390 if the sponsor provides the passport of the worker to the agency.

As the decree doesn't mention details about what this fee includes, some agencies are trying to take advantage of people's lack of information. A recruitment agency contacted by Kuwait Times said the fee does not include airfare, while other agencies said it includes the price of the air ticket.

"The agency is obliged to pay for the ticket, otherwise the customer can file a complaint against the agency. But the fee of KD 890 does not include quarantine charges, which is set by the ministry of health," a commerce ministry official told Kuwait Times. One of the agencies said the quarantine fee is around KD 170, but Kuwait Times could not confirm the exact

charges as the ministry of health did not respond to repeated queries.

Previously, the fee for importing domestic workers was different depending on their nationality, and prices differed from one agency to another. But this new decree set a unified fee that applies to all nationalities and all agencies.

Ali Al-Shammouh, Secretary General of Kuwait Union for Domestic Labor Offices, told Kuwait Times earlier this month that Kuwait will face an acute shortage of approximately 160,000-180,000 domestic helpers by Ramadan (in mid-April). He said the shortage existed even prior to the coronavirus pandemic, but worsened when the airport was closed during the lockdown last year. Many domestic helpers then left the country for good following the reopening of the airport.

## UN slams Iraq rocket attack as 'reckless'

**ARBIL, Iraq:** The United Nations warned yesterday that tensions in Iraq could escalate after a rocket attack killed a foreign contractor for the US military and wounded at least 14 others in the Kurdish regional capital Arbil. The hail of more than a dozen rockets late Monday was the first attack in nearly two months targeting Western military or diplomatic installations in Iraq after a series of similar

incidents blamed on pro-Iranian Shiite factions.

"Such heinous, reckless acts pose grave threats to stability," the UN top representative in Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, wrote on Twitter, calling for "restraint" on all sides. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken earlier said he was "outraged" and pledged American support in holding those responsible to account.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi said that "the terrorist act that targeted the Kurdistan region aims to create chaos" and vowed to keep Iraq from becoming a "backyard" where regional conflicts play out. The barrage of 107 mm

Continued on Page 2



ARBIL: A worker clears shattered glass yesterday outside a damaged shop following a rocket attack the previous night in the capital of the northern Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region. — AFP

## Saudi pushes firms to move Mideast HQs to kingdom

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia on Monday heaped pressure on foreign companies to move their Middle East headquarters to the kingdom, saying it will stop signing contracts with firms with hubs in oth-

er countries from 2024. The bold ultimatum could intensify competition for business and foreign capital between the kingdom and other Gulf states, especially its principal ally the United Arab Emirates, as they reel from an economic slump.

"Saudi Arabia intends to cease contracting with companies and commercial institutions with regional headquarters not located in the kingdom," the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported, citing an unnamed official source. "The cessation will include agencies, institutions and funds owned by the government and will take

effect January 1, 2024."

The decision seeks to "create more jobs, limit economic leakage, increase spending efficiency and guarantee that the main goods and services purchased by the different government agencies are made in the kingdom", it added. Saudi Arabia, the biggest Arab economy, has been struggling to attract foreign investment, a key pillar of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's "Vision 2030" economic diversification plan to boost non-oil revenue.

Continued on Page 2