

Local

# Kuwait registers 964 new COVID cases, five deaths

## Govt voices alarm at spike in coronavirus cases

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MoH) registered yesterday 964 additional COVID-19 cases over a 24-hour span, increasing the total number of infections to 179,488, while five fatalities were recorded, raising the death toll to 1,014. Plus, 810 fresh recovery cases were added to a total of 167,601 cured people, MoH's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said during the 106th regular press conference.

Active cases amounted to 10,873 with 141 of them in intensive care units (ICU) as of yesterday, the ministry confirmed. Health authorities conducted 10,328 swab tests to a total of 1,687,183, he revealed. Dr Sanad urged everyone in Kuwait to comply with the precautionary measures against the virus and maintain social distancing. He recommends that everyone should visit MoH's official accounts and official authorities in the country to view the instructions, recommendations, and everything that would contribute to crush the virus.

### Deep alarm

The Cabinet's weekly session on Monday was marked with deep alarm following a presentation made by the minister of health about the latest status of the pandemic in the country, amid mounting cases and deaths. Following the session, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet

Affairs Anas Al-Saleh stated that it kicked off with a briefing by Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah about the latest local health status with respect to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Statistics showed a spike in the cases of infections, deaths and patients who receive medical treatment as well those being admitted at the intensive care units, amid decline of recovery rates, minister Dr Basel affirmed during the session.



### ICU patients rise to 141

He attributed the drastic increase of the cases and infections to non-compliance by the health terms, holding gatherings and social occasions' activities. The ministers expressed profound concern at the "phenomenal slack and complacency" with respect to applying the health conditions, trig-

gering a second pandemic wave in the country. The cabinet urged the public to take all necessary precautions and remain vigilant to spare themselves infection with the contagion and curb its spread.

Moreover, the government urged everybody to rapidly seek to get the vaccination against the virus noting that the extraordinary health situation warranted cooperation from all in the country. After revising recommendations by the ministerial committee for emergency response to the coronavirus, the Cabinet decided to task the fire force and the National Guard to aid the health authorities in enforcing the health precautions and ensure serious abidance in various sectors. Online teaching will continue in the private and public sectors until stabilization of the pandemic status in the country.

### Official sources

Dr Sanad had said on Monday that people should be aware of inaccurate information that undermine the efforts of all workers in the health sector facing the Coronavirus pandemic. Dr Sanad added that misleading information threatens all the work made so far against the virus. He noted that misguided news about the vaccines could throw people off from the truth, and interrupt the implementing of the safety measures announced by the government. The spokesperson also said that WHO also warned peo-



ple about inaccurate information and the dangers of the spread of rumors between people. He stressed on following official sources of information about the pandemic and to ignore all other means of misguided information, especially in social media and any other technological way that can spread information vastly and quickly. — KUNA

## Salon, gym, barbershop, massage parlor workers express grievances

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Some workers in Kuwait again face a no work-no pay situation for the entire month of February, after salons, barbershops, gyms and massage parlors were ordered by the Cabinet to shut down for a month (from Feb 7) due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Anwar, an Indian barber in Mirqab, recalled they had struggled for six months last year. "We were closed in 2020 for six months when the government imposed lockdowns and curfews. Now in 2021, we were told to close for 30 days, which can be extended. I don't know what will happen to us. In fact, I am considering giving up my job in Kuwait and going back to India," he said.

Anwar's barbershop has five employees, who all confirmed they are not getting paid this month. "We cannot blame the owner, because we agreed when we joined we will work on a 50-50 percent basis without any salary. It means the income will be divided in two - 50 percent goes to the owner and 50 percent to the barbers. Now there is no income, so we are not getting anything as well," he told Kuwait Times.

The problem, according to Anwar, is sending money to his family in Andhra Pradesh. "I have two kids and a wife to feed - that is why I need money badly. But for more

than a week now, I am at home doing nothing. My wife told me to come back home, and maybe we can survive in India," he said.

But Anwar has saved something for rainy days. "Saving is very important. In times like these, I can survive because I have some money in the bank. I can buy food and pay rent at least. My family is living with my parents, so they are okay. But I hope this doesn't last long," he said. Anwar admitted he provides home service for those he knows. "We are talking about one or two home visits per day. I accept 500 fils or KD 1 for nearby home visits. I don't go to far-away places," he said.

### Pay cut

Ron, a gym receptionist in Khaitan, draws a monthly salary of KD 350. But his boss told him for the month of February, he will only pay him KD 150. "I did not complain because I am new to the job. I previously worked at a children's entertainment facility. From March to October 2020, we were not paid at all. When I got this job in November, I was really happy and grateful. But only after two months, we are closed again," he said.

Ron - who has two children in the Philippines - survived because he accepted a janitor's job, supervised by a cleaning company. "If not for them, I wouldn't have been

able to eat and pay rent. I got KD 1 per hour for cleaning the houses of Kuwaitis," he said.

Myrna, a salon worker in Sabah Al-Salem, doesn't know how she will pay the rent this month and remit money to her family. "I am stressed by just thinking about where will I get money this month for my house rent and to send to my family. I have five kids and they are all studying. My husband is also working, but doesn't earn much being a tricycle driver. When I told my husband I am facing a tough life in Kuwait, instead of supporting me and saying positive words to give me strength, he expressed his own similar situation back home," she told Kuwait Times.

"So for me, the message is clear - he cannot do anything. It means I will have to do something for my family. I am tired! All I get is hardship and grievances left and right. Oh God, bless us," Myrna lamented. "I am about to give up, but I still pray that God will help me and my family survive."

Tom, a masseur at a five-star hotel in Kuwait, also expressed disappointment at the sudden closure of their business. He said his monthly house mortgage payments will be affected again. "I have two homes mortgaged back home. Without a regular monthly income, how can I pay? I don't do home service because we are not allowed to do so by the management. If I am caught, I will be terminated as per the company policy. They said they will pay 50 percent of our salary, but I earn more than my salary in tips," he said. Tom is unmarried, but most of his income goes into his home investments and the rest to his nephews and nieces.



**KUWAIT:** Jahra police arrested three Asians involved in brewing illicit liquor in Rehaya. After authorities received information about a liquor brewery in the Rehaya scrap area, a field force was formed and went to the scene. After the information was confirmed, a warrant was obtained to destroy the factory. The three suspects were sent to concerned authorities.

### News in brief

#### Expats' vaccination in six weeks?

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait plans to start vaccinating expats in six weeks, depending on if the vaccination process go on at the current pace and the continued arrival of contracted shipments, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday, quoting Health Ministry sources. The first group of expats to be vaccinated will be domestic helpers, especially that this group is considered among the most exposed to infection or transmitting due to close contacts, the sources said.

#### 45 hotels for quarantine

**KUWAIT:** Forty-five hotels applied for registration on the "Kuwait-Mosafer" platform, as institutional quarantine is required at 3-, 4- or 5-star hotels from Feb 21 for all citizens and expats arriving in Kuwait for seven days at their expense, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday quoting official sources at the Kuwait Hotel Owners Association. The sources said this number can be increased due to the large number of hotels wanting to be involved, especially since hotel revenues dropped by over KD 100 million during the pandemic.

#### 80,000 domestic helpers

**KUWAIT:** General Manager of National Aviation Services (NAS) Mansour Al-Khuzaim said the "belsalama" project - which was prepared at the government's request - has achieved great success. Around 80,000 domestic helpers benefited from it, most of whom are from India, Philippines and Bangladesh. Khuzaim said "belsalama" allows a sponsor to submit an application for the return of the helper, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday. After meeting all requirements, three PCR tests will be conducted - the first in the country where they are coming from through approved laboratories, the second upon arrival and the third after institutional quarantine is complete. Khuzaim said the plan was for the project to start on Dec 14, but due to government requirements, it was postponed until all procedures were completed. He said the response was excellent, adding issuance of new visas began on Jan 17. About reducing the cost, Khuzaim said there are many positives about the platform, including direct flights, hotel quarantine, meals and health procedures, along with three PCR tests. He added the platform's prices are reasonable.

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