

News in brief

Teachers' return cleared

KUWAIT: The government's higher COVID-19 emergency committee has approved the education ministry's request to return expatriate teachers stranded abroad. Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday.

Moderna awaiting approval

KUWAIT: The health ministry is awaiting approval from the State Audit Bureau to sign a KD 12 million contract with Moderna in order to import one million doses of its COVID-19 vaccines. Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday.

Kuwaitization at 81%

KUWAIT: The percentage of Kuwaiti employees in the public sector has reached 81 percent, which is in line with the government's Kuwaitization plans. Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday.

KRCS distributes
Eid Al-Fitr coupons

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced on Sunday distributing Eid Al-Fitr coupons to families in need inside Kuwait, at the cost of KD 30 (around \$100) for each family. Eid Al-Fitr aid is part of the seasonal support KRCS offer to people in need, including widows, orphans, divorced, people in need, patients, elderly, and people of low wages, she said. KRCS allocated a team of volunteers to distribute the coupons, food parcels, and sanitary goods for poor families. KRCS Director of local aid department Mariam Al-Adsani said. —KUNA

Ramadan Diwaniya

Pandemic still poses enormous challenges for all of us: Indian Ambassador

'Around 100,000 left, but they could be back soon'

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Various ambassadors in Kuwait were interviewed by Kuwait Times to learn more about their local traditions and culture during Ramadan. We also asked about the current coronavirus situation in their respective countries and how they are handling and reacting to this pandemic. The following are excerpts of Kuwait Times' interview with Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George.

Enormous challenges

Kuwait Times: What are your thoughts and views about this pandemic, seeing the current situation of both countries - Kuwait and India?

Sibi George: The COVID-19 pandemic is a major global socioeconomic disruptor. Everyone across the world has been impacted by this deadly pandemic. The situation continues to evolve and poses enormous challenges for all of us. In the past few weeks there has been a spike in the COVID-19 situation in India. We were hit just like any other country in the world. Over the last year, we were able to control it and managed it quite well, despite being the second most populous country in the world.

India has been supplying vaccines to other countries. We supply medicines related to COVID-19 to 150 countries, while the vaccine is supplied to 75 countries. We follow the policy to work with other countries in terms of providing the medicines needed. My prime minister promised at the United Nations in September 2020 that our vaccines will be shared with the rest of the world.

This spike is the second wave, and we are confident that we will bring it under control soon. Our government has been meeting every day to address the surge. The government is rolling out the vaccine quickly. We have 120 million people vaccinated in our country right now. That is more than 10 percent of the total population of India.

From the beginning of the pandemic, the government took quick and decisive actions including imposing a nationwide lockdown, effective implementation of cluster containment strategies, large-scale ramping up of the healthcare infrastructure in the country to meet the demands for COVID-19 care, securing protective equipment and other medical supplies, and research and development and mass production of COVID-19 vaccines.

I am proud of the fact that India stood true to its civilizational ethos of universal brotherhood and led from the forefront in supporting countries around the world in this collective fight against COVID-19. Made-

in-India vaccines were sent to more than 75 countries. India also shared other COVID-19 related medicines with more than 150 countries around the world. Indian healthcare professionals also assisted many countries around the world in facing the pandemic - a 15-member rapid response team from India visited Kuwait in April 2020 for this purpose.

Kuwait took early, concrete and decisive action against the pandemic including preventive restrictions on the movement of people, banning public gatherings and starting the vaccination program as early as Dec 2020. I must congratulate the leadership and the government of Kuwait for taking such swift and effective decisions to control the spread of the pandemic. I would like to take this opportunity to thank His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for taking such good care of the Indian community in Kuwait during these challenging and difficult times.

Indians' death toll in Kuwait is around 300, with thousands infected. We are appealing to Indians to get the vaccine. If the ministry calls with your appointment, please attend to it. It's available for everyone and it's free.

Kuwait Times: What about Indians here in Kuwait. How do you manage their concerns during this pandemic?

George: We have around one million Indians here. Roughly around 100,000 plus left during the pandemic, but I think they'll be back soon. Some are already back, especially those working for the health ministry. The good thing about Kuwait is that we are being cared for here. We are not abandoned, but managed systematically. We have hospitals here enough for the total population of Kuwait, so we have no complaints from the government.

The Indian community is getting the necessary support from the Kuwaiti government where healthcare is concerned. Our Indian community groups here are vibrant. We are getting support from the community since the pandemic began. We have been supporting our community by giving them food packs, shelter if needed and even providing them with air tickets if they need them. We also provide free lunch to laborers if they come to our embassy.

Ramadan pre-pandemic

Kuwait Times: Can you take us back to how Ramadan was spent in India before the pandemic?

George: India is home to more than 200 million Muslims, second to Indonesia. All festivals in India are celebrated with great enthusiasm, traditional fervor and gaiety. And Ramadan - or Ramzan, as we call it back home - is no different. We have many Indian Muslim groups in Kuwait. I am invited to talk to these groups online and we are engaging them, even if it's online. We are a very connected community and we respect all religions.

Ramadan is a particularly special month in India, a land with great diversity of religions and beliefs, with people from different sociocultural and religious backgrounds living in complete harmony. This unique spirit of universal brotherhood is rekindled during this month, when people from different faiths join in for community iftars, traditional festivities, colorful decorations and all the other wonderful, festive activities.

It is truly a fabulous time to be in India to witness this beauty of unity in great diversity, and also to catch glimpses of the colorful celebrations, the fun and frolic, and the whole festive buzz of a young and vibrant nation. Ramadan is also a month of inner reflection, patience, charity, gratitude, love, humility and self-restraint. It teaches collective commitment towards society at large.

Kuwait Times: How will Ramadan celebrations differ this year?

George: Given the pandemic situation, the festi-

ties and the celebrations are expected to be muted this year, much like last year. We may not be able to have large gatherings or visit our friends and family on the occasion, but we may still be able to connect digitally and celebrate in an innovative manner. I hope and pray that this Ramadan may inspire us all to join hands and collectively overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. May we achieve in this holy month a decisive victory in the ongoing battle against COVID-19 and create a healthier planet.

Kuwait Times: Is your family with you?

George: Yes, my family is here with me - my wife, two daughters and son. Before the pandemic, we were all in different countries. When the situation started taking a turn for the worse, with much difficulty I was able to bring all my family members in one place. At a time like this, it is good that we are together, else there will always be worries. I am particularly happy, as this is a blessing in today's challenging times.

Kuwait Times: When was the first year of your assignment as ambassador of India to Kuwait?

George: I came to Kuwait as the ambassador of my country in August 2020 - this is my first assignment to this beautiful and friendly country. I have now spent over eight months here and I feel like I am in my second home here, I have received warmth and affection from everyone that I have interacted with here in Kuwait. The people here are very affectionate - they have a special affinity towards India given our historical and age-old connections.

I feel privileged to be here and I am doing my best, despite the challenging times, to further strengthen bilateral relations between our countries. There is so much potential to further enhance our cooperation in multiple fields and domains of mutual interest and importance. I am quite excited to see this huge scope and potential for further mutually beneficial collaboration.

This year is a milestone year for India and Kuwait. We celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two friendly countries. This is also a year when India launched its two-year-long celebrations of 75 years of its independence. This is a wonderful confluence of milestones. We, at the embassy, would like to celebrate these milestones in a befitting and appropriate manner.

Unique traditions

Kuwait Times: What is special or unique that you see here during Ramadan?

George: This is my first Ramadan in Kuwait. So, naturally I have not witnessed firsthand how traditional Ramadan celebrations used to take place here. But I have heard a lot about the festivities during this period. A few unique traditions I have learnt of are the Ramadan diwanis and ghabqas. These sound very interesting as these traditions bring people together. They improve social cohesion and also place value on family bonding, as family members, relatives, loved ones and friends gather at one place and share food and fun together.

I have heard that every one of the visitors to these diwanis and ghabqas feels valued and welcomed. This reminds me of our traditions with regards to welcoming people to our houses. Back home in India, we have a belief where we treat our guests with utmost respect and warmth, akin to our treatment of gods.

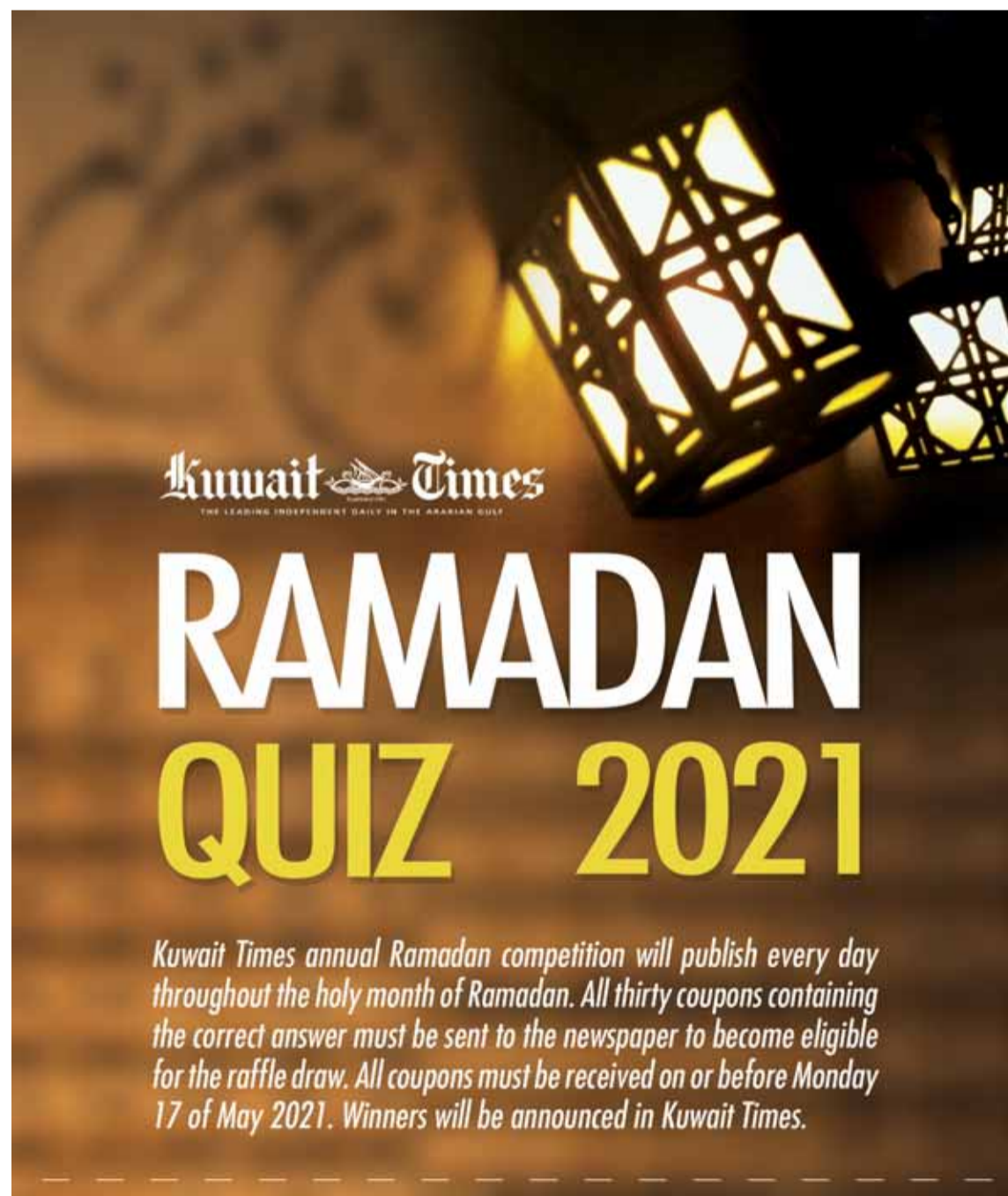
Kuwait Times: Do you cook? What is your favorite food?

George: As a bachelor, I used to cook regularly, but these days I seldom do. My favorites among Indian foods are idli, dosa and a variety of spicy kebabs.

Kuwait distributes 1,100 food baskets to Rohingya refugees

KUALA LUMPUR: Kuwait's embassy in Malaysia distributed yesterday 1,100 food baskets to Rohingya refugees as part of its ongoing campaign during the holy month of Ramadan in cooperation with Kuwait's Awqaf General Secretariat. Kuwait's Ambassador in Kuala Lumpur Hamad Burhama said in a statement that the food packages, which consist of rice, flour and sugar, were provided by Kuwaiti charities and organi-

zations to Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. He added that the project also targeted poor and needy families, orphans and refugees in Malaysia, explaining that the embassy made sure over the past years that the largest possible number of the needy benefit from this project. Burhama expressed gratitude to the institutions and charities in Malaysia that cooperated with the embassy in implementing this project. Meanwhile, Director of Dar Al Ihsan Academy for the Rohingya Mohammad Siddiq expressed his gratitude and appreciation to Kuwait and the embassy in Kuala Lumpur for "this generous donation in this holy month." He said there were more than 4,000 beneficiaries from this project, expressing his hope that Kuwaiti aid to Rohingya refugees will continue, whether in Malaysia, Bangladesh or Myanmar. —KUNA



Kuwait Times
THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

RAMADAN QUIZ 2021

Kuwait Times annual Ramadan competition will publish every day throughout the holy month of Ramadan. All thirty coupons containing the correct answer must be sent to the newspaper to become eligible for the raffle draw. All coupons must be received on or before Monday 17 of May 2021. Winners will be announced in Kuwait Times.

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Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

22- In which year of the Hijrah was the fasting of Ramadan enjoined?

- A. First year
 B. Second year
 C. Third year

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

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