

Local

Kuwait Amir receives more cables on successful surgery

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Tuesday a congratulatory cable from Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa. In the cable, King Hamad wished His Highness the Amir a speedy recovery after his successful surgical operation. In turn, His Highness the Amir thanked King Hamad for his sincere sentiments, wishing him good health, and prosperity for the Kingdom of Bahrain. His Highness the Amir also received a congratulatory cable from Bahrain's Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa. In the cable the Bahraini Crown

Prince, also Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister wished His Highness the Amir everlasting good health, wellbeing and speedy recovery after his successful surgical operation. In turn, His Highness the Amir thanked Bahrain's Crown Prince for his sincere sentiments, wishing him good health, and prosperity for Bahrain under the wise leadership of King Hamad Al-Khalifa.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir received a cable from King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck on his recent successful surgery. In the

cable, King Bhutan wished His Highness the Amir swift recovery and Kuwait to prosper under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. His Highness the Amir responded in a cable, expressing gratitude and wished King Bhutan good health and progress as well as prosperity for his country. His Highness the Amir received similar cables from Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf, Secretary General of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Dr Yousef Al-Othaimeen, as well as Sheikh Mubarak

Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

In the meantime, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received a phone call from United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres expressing sincere sentiments and congratulations on His Highness the Amir's successful surgery, wishing him good health and well-being. His Highness the Prime Minister thanked the UN chief and expressed appreciation for the kind sentiments, which reflected on the strong ties between Kuwait and the international organization. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 60,434 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Tuesday, in addition to 412 deaths. With the exception of 127 cases in intensive care, all infected cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while tens of thousands have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 50,919 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 9,103 people receiving treatment.

Curfew

Kuwait imposed a three-week partial curfew starting May 31 (from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am), as part of a five-phase plan for a gradual return to normal life, brought to a standstill by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The curfew hours were later reduced to start on 7:00 pm and end at 5:00 am, starting from June 21, 2020. The first phase includes a total lockdown on Farwaniya, Khaitan, and Hawally, joining Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh which were put under lockdown earlier. The lockdown ended in Hawally and Khaitan on June 21, 2020, and in Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh on July 9, 2020. Activities resumed in the first phase included home deliveries of restaurants, telecommunication companies, food retailers, companies' transportation of employees, gas stations, private clinics and car workshops.

Kuwait moved to the second phase starting from June 30, 2020. The second phase saw the curfew shortened to be between 8:00 pm and 5:00 am, while resuming work in the government and private sectors with the workforce being less than 30 percent, in addition to resumption of constructions, banking sector, pickups from restaurants, as well as reopening of commercial complexes, malls, parks, and other places of leisure between 10:00 am and 6:00 pm.

Friday prayers resumed at around 1,000 mosques around Kuwait on July 17, with strict social distancing and health precautions observed. Mosques in the so-called 'model residential areas' had reopened their doors for worshippers on June 10 amid strict health precautionary measures. Worshippers must wear face masks, keep social distancing between queues and between worshippers must be strictly observed. Worshippers must bring their own mats so they do not get in contact with mosque carpets. Mosques will reopen five minutes before prayer time and close 10 minutes after prayer.

The third phase would see an end of curfew, and health authorities would be assessing situation of areas under lockdown. It would see increase of

workforce to less than 50 percent. Visits for social care homes would be allowed, reopening of hotels, resorts and hotel apartments. Taxis will be allowed to operate with only one passenger.

Phase four would see an increase in workforce, restaurants would be receiving customers but with restrictions, and public transportation resumed but with distancing. All activities would resume in phase five, government and private sector returned to normal, families could gather, weddings and graduation ceremonies, health clubs and gyms to reopen, as well as cinemas and theaters.

School year ended

The Ministry of Education announced on July 17 ending the 2019-2020 school year, with the remaining part of the curriculum of the year's second half will be integrated into the first chapter of the next academic year 2020-2021 virtually effective as of October 4, after modifying the curriculum. Pre-school pupils, students of elementary and intermediate levels will be promoted to the higher classes. As to the high school level, students who desire to improve their grades can re-enroll in the scholastic year. As to class 12, the remaining period of the second semester was set at six weeks, while curricula were amended in tandem with the complementary study period, due between August 9 and September 17, and that will be via electronic means. Students' assessment will be on weekly basis through interaction and virtual presence at the set educational website. Earlier, the Ministry of Education had suspended classes at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs): first from March 1 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages.

Commercial flights

Commercial flights are set to resume on August 1, while the airport will operate at 30 percent capacity during the six-month first phase of a three-stage airport reopening plan. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation presented a set of rules for the safe resumption of air travel. The new rules mandate all travelers to wear protective facemasks and keep a hand sanitizer in their possession, besides strictly abiding by social distancing guidelines. Departing passengers are required to provide negative COVID-19 test results before boarding their flights, where they will be instructed to keep hand luggage to a minimum. Manual checks of tickets have now been scaled back as a result of the pandemic in favor of the more popular digital e-tickets, whose scanning requires no physical contact. Passengers must be present at the airport no less than four hours before departure to ensure a smooth and convenient

journey. Kuwait had earlier sent special flights to repatriate Kuwaitis back home from countries affected with the virus' spread. Meanwhile, the Cabinet announced on April 9 the operation of all airline flights for expats who are wishing to return back to their countries.

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. The Interior Ministry issued an amnesty allowing residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30 without paying any fines or airfare with a chance to return to Kuwait later. The amnesty was issued in view of the circumstances the country is currently going through and as part of the precautionary measures taken to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). During the amnesty period, individuals desiring to procure valid residencies in Kuwait and were willing to pay the fines without being subjected to investigations were allowed to pay the fines and legalize their status if they meet the required conditions.

Hotlines

The Ministry of Health has set the following hotlines to receive inquiries about the coronavirus 24/7: 24970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.

The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:

- 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
- 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)
- 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

Medicine delivery

Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MOH) launched a new medicine delivery service for people in Kuwait, which they can use to order medications to be delivered during curfew hours. The medications will be delivered within 72 hours after the order is submitted. To place an order, patients should send a WhatsApp to the numbers for the hospitals and medical centers as listed below. The patient should include their name, Civil ID number, hospital or clinic file number, mobile phone number and the medicine needed to the following numbers:

- Amiri Hospital: 50880699
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
- Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852

- Adan Hospital: 50880908
- Jahra Hospital: 50881066
- Sabah Hospital: 97632660
- Jaber Hospital: 96992079
- Ibn Sina Hospital: 99613948
- Chest Hospital: 99258749
- Razi Hospital: 97633487
- Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242
- Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113
- Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037
- Maternity Hospital: 98559531
- As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508
- Zain Hospital: 97552031
- NBK Hospital: 96931761
- Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470
- Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164
- Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786
- Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469
- KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363

Meanwhile, all licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day. The Ministry of Health is also asking doctors and nurses affiliated with the private medical sector to volunteer in order to contribute to the fight against the virus. Volunteering is available through the link: <http://volunteering.q8-ehealth.com>. The ministry had closed all private clinics and medical centers effective March 22, 2020 until further notice.

Mental health assistance

The Kuwait Center for Mental Health provides help through its suicide hotline: 24621770 (8 am - 5 pm). Meanwhile, the Kuwait Psychological Association (KPA) is providing consultation through the phone for people suffering from the psychological impacts of coronavirus. Different doctors are working on the hotline in different timings as follows:

- Dr Rashed Al-Sahh: on Monday and Wednesday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9797-6168.
 - Dr Fahad Al-Tasha: daily from 8:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 9904-8258.
 - Dr Othman Al-Asfour: daily 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Call 9938-5350.
 - Dr Mohammed Al-Khalidi (head of this team): daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.
 - Dr Ahmad Al-Khalidi: daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.
 - Dr Muneera Al-Qattan: Monday and Wednesday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9953-3108.
 - Dr Zainab Al-Saffar: Sunday and Thursday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9954-9908.
 - Dr Sameera Al-Kandari: Tuesday 9:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 6770-9434.
 - Dr Kawthar Al-Yaqout: Monday and Wednesday 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 5521-0088.
- For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

Pilgrims vie for hajj; king...

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behind a large desk. He thanked all those who had enquired about his health, SPA said.

"With so many applicants, we hardly had a one percent chance of being selected," said a Riyadh-based Jordanian engineer, 29, selected for the pilgrimage along with his 26-year-old wife, a health worker. "We were shocked and overjoyed." Also among the chosen few is Nasser, a Riyadh-based Nigerian expat, euphoric at winning what he called the "golden ticket" to hajj. "This feeling cannot be described," he told AFP.

But the Jordanian engineer, who declined to be named, said he felt compelled to delete his social media post announcing his selection, fearing he and his wife would attract the ire and envy of rejected applicants. Pilgrims typically wait for years to be chosen through a strict quota system for hajj, which last year drew some 2.5 million people. Saudi authorities initially said only around 1,000 pilgrims residing in the kingdom would be permitted for hajj, but local media reports say as many as 10,000 will be allowed.

The hajj ministry has fielded a deluge of anguished queries on Twitter. "Why reject me without giving a reason?" a woman asked the ministry, posting a screenshot of her rejected online application. "Everyone around me has been declined." Two widows, a Nigerian and an Egyptian working in the kingdom, furiously speculated whether they had been denied the chance to attend the ritual because they had not registered a male guardian to accompany them. Others wondered if several slots had been reserved for diplomats and business and royal elites.

The ministry, which did not respond to AFP's request for comment, said Saudi pilgrims were selected from a pool of health practitioners and military personnel who have recovered from COVID-19. One man, who said he had survived the disease, tweeted: "I am a health practitioner and I had contracted coronavirus... I don't understand why I was not chosen."

The government invited online applications from foreign residents, saying they would make up 70 percent of the pilgrims, but did not explain how many applied or how they were picked. "Saudi authorities kept the selection process highly opaque since it is a sensitive matter," Umar Karim, a visiting fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in London, told AFP. "Keeping it hidden from public scrutiny is meant to generate less noise about who got selected and who didn't."

Just a week before the hajj, an annual global media event, it remained unclear whether it would be open to the foreign press. For Saudi Arabia, curtailing the hajj was a decision fraught with political and economic peril. Selecting a few from a vast pool of contenders risks further roiling public sentiment. To be among the chosen ones adds an aura of religious prestige to this year's pilgrimage, applicants say.

Despite the pandemic, many pilgrims consider it is safer to participate in this year's ritual without the usual colossal crowds cramming into tiny religious sites, which make it a logistical nightmare and a health hazard. Even in a regular year, the hajj leaves pilgrims exposed to a host of viral illnesses. "A lot of people want to do the hajj this year as it will likely be less burdensome and more organized due to a smaller crowd," said Karim.

Authorities said pilgrims will be tested for coronavirus before arriving in Makkah and are required to quarantine before and after the ritual. Pilgrims will be provided with bottled holy water from Makkah's Zamzam well and sterilized pebbles for a stoning ritual, they added. — AFP

Airborne virus likely...

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soon be published in a journal, according to the lead author. "It is actually fairly difficult" to collect the samples, Joshua Santarpia, an associate professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center told AFP.

The team used a device the size of a cell phone for the purpose, but "the concentrations are typically very low, your chances of recovering material are small". The scientists took air samples from five rooms of bedridden patients, at a height of about 30 cm over the foot of their beds. The patients were talking, which produces microdroplets that become suspended in the air for several hours in what is referred to as an "aerosol", and some were coughing.

The team managed to collect microdroplets as small as one micron in diameter. They then placed these samples into a culture to make them grow, finding that three

of the 18 samples tested were able to replicate. For Santarpia, this represents proof that microdroplets, which also travel much greater distances than big droplets, are capable of infecting people. "It is replicated in cell culture and therefore infectious," he said.

The potential for microdroplet transmission of the coronavirus was at one stage thought to be improbable by health authorities across the world. Later, scientists began to change their mind and acknowledge it may be a possibility, which is the rationale for universal masking. The World Health Organization was among the last to shift its position, doing so on July 7. "I feel like the debate has become more political than scientific," said Santarpia. "I think most scientists that work on infectious diseases agree that there's likely an airborne component, though we may quibble over how large."

Linsey Marr, a professor at Virginia Tech who is a leading expert on aerial transmission of viruses and wasn't involved in the study, said it was rare to obtain measurements of the amount of virus present in air. "Based on what we know about other diseases and what we know so far about SARS-CoV-2, I think we can assume that if the virus is 'infectious in aerosols,' then we can become infected by breathing them in," she said. — AFP

Pakistanis risk plasma...

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The Pakistan Society of Hematology said plasma hype had led the public - and even some health professionals - to believe the therapy was standard treatment for the virus. "Use of convalescent plasma can sometimes lead to life-threatening transfusion reactions and transmissions of infections," the society said.

Nawaz Murad, a lecturer from Lahore, said doctors advised him to organize plasma therapy

as a last-ditch attempt to save his father, rapidly deteriorating from COVID-19. Frantic, he turned to Facebook, where he found a donor within hours. To complete the treatment quickly, the family did not get the blood screened, leaving open the risk of infections such as hepatitis or HIV. "Of course it was worth the risk, there was no other option but to get the transfusion done as soon as possible," Murad told AFP. "It was not a normal situation, my family were under immense stress."

The donor provided his plasma for free, but Murad paid the equivalent of about \$100 to a doctor to provide the transfusion at home. Some private clinics are reportedly charging up to \$300 in the impoverished country. — AFP