

## Local



center'. We all have to exert efforts to fight whatever harms the reputation of our nation," Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said.

Asked about the government's efforts against human traffickers, the prime minister said the government was "fighting human trafficking and all companies that violate the laws, and we have taken legal action against 224 companies and referred them to prosecution". Asked about the Malaysian sovereign wealth fund and alleged corruption-related charges against Kuwaiti individuals, he said: "We will not be covering up anyone, and no one is immune from prosecution, be it in relation to the Malaysian fund or any suspected abuse of public funds or money laundering or human trafficking. This is a government priority."

The prime minister said they referred the Malaysian fund issue to the competent authorities for investigation. He said he met former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad three times when he was foreign minister and he did not mention any "role of Kuwait in this issue".

#### Population discrepancy

Kuwait is facing a "big challenge" to address a discrepancy in the structure of the population, Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said. Kuwait has a population of some 4.8 million people - of them 1.45 million are Kuwaitis and around 3.34 million are non-Kuwaitis, or a 30 to 70 percent ratio, he said. "The ideal population structure is to have Kuwaitis being 70 percent and non-Kuwaitis 30 percent, so we have a big challenge in the future which is to address the discrepancy in population," he underscored.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said there are 750,000 foreign domestic helpers, which equal half of the Kuwaiti population. "The population structure needs time to be resolved, and it should be divided into phases until reaching a final adjustment to the population in future," he said. "We rely on our sons and daughters to work in all professions," he added, citing the forefathers who contributed to the building of Kuwait by working in all jobs.

The government, he said, was keen on cooperating with the parliament to reach fruitful results. Asked about resumption of air travel, the prime minister said competent authorities were paving the ground for the resumption of risk-free travel. "The right time will come to open this domain and everybody will be able to travel freely," he said.

#### Human traffickers

The prime minister stressed the government's seriousness in dealing with human traffickers. "We are responsible for every human being on this land; therefore, what happened cost the country's institutions a lot and affected the country's demography," he said. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled pointed out that 224 companies were referred to the public prosecution based on information regarding violation of laws and trading of workers. He expressed pride in the people's cooperation, understanding and appreciation of the government's efforts in dealing with the coronavirus crisis.

#### Financial situation

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled affirmed that Kuwait's financial situ-



ation is excellent, but the economy needs a major change in its structure. "We cannot rely on one depleted resource, which is oil, because this is difficult, and we must diversify the sources of income in the country," he said. "The repercussions of the coronavirus caused a huge collapse in oil prices from \$65 to \$11. Kuwait was investing all of its money and portfolios in world markets, but we had fenders that absorbed shocks as a result of planning to cope with any crisis," he added.

#### Rescue package

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said the government adopted a rescue package to address economic ramifications of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The package includes bills about public debt and bankruptcy, which aim at preserving many companies and save the jobs of 73,000 Kuwaitis in the private sector, he said. "We should act to mitigate the expected negative effects on the economic situation, and the (pandemic) crisis that has shaken the world and impacted the economy heavily," he said.

The prime minister called for addressing the economic conditions through a bundle of laws. "We might not need the public debt law today, but later. However, we need laws that precede it in order to lessen the damage caused by the health crisis," he added. He said the priority now was the health situation, but the government was also focusing on security and economic condi-

tions, specially of people living in areas under lockdown in Hawally, Khaitan, Farwaniya, Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

The government, he added, was working on approving the rescue package "which will decrease the impact and pave way for the next government to focus on the population structure, corruption and unstable economic situation." Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's instructions to honor people working during the pandemic included Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis.

#### Gulf dispute

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled affirmed Kuwait's continuous efforts in resolving the Gulf dispute. The prime minister stressed HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's keenness on the continuation of Gulf joint cooperation. The premier also reminded everyone that he was a foreign minister in the past, and he was close to the efforts exerted by the Amir to end the dispute.

"I am sure that all Gulf states see the path of the Gulf Cooperation Council as important to them and to the region and the world," the prime minister added. "Unfortunately, we are now in the fourth year of the Gulf dispute, but attempts are still continuing and hopes are greater than they were," he said. — KUNA