

Local

Indians fret about delays in going home as flights remain suspended

More than 5,000 Indian workers clear amnesty papers, 8,000 more to apply

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Hundreds of Indian expats who availed the amnesty offered by the Kuwait government are worried and waiting for a green signal from the Indian government for their repatriation to their home country, as flight services to the country remain suspended over the coronavirus lockdown. The Kuwait government, in an unprecedented initiative, has offered free air passage to all illegal residents to their home countries as part of the amnesty program.

However, Indian workers will remain sheltered indefinitely in various repatriation centers while their counterparts from other countries fly home. The Indian government has made it clear last week that it would not allow commercial flights to operate until it is fully confident that the COVID-19 pandemic is under control. The country is under lockdown until May 3.

"We are not sure when we will be able to go home, because there are no flights to India now," said Abdulkareem, an Indian worker from Telangana state who applied for an emergency certificate (EC) with the Indian Embassy. India's aviation regulator has told airlines not to take bookings, as the government has not yet decided when to recommence flights after the lockdown scheduled to end on May 3. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) issued the notification after some Indian airlines started taking bookings for May 4 onwards.

Unprecedented initiative

The amnesty program for people in the country without residency permits continues till April 30, 2020 and allows violators to leave Kuwait without paying any fines. According to the Indian Embassy,



KUWAIT: In this file photo, Indian nationals wait inside a school in Farwaniya to apply for an amnesty announced by Kuwaiti authorities for residency violators. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

applications after April 26 in view of the surge in the number of amnesty-seekers.

"We are waiting for a green signal from the civil aviation authority. However, the DGCA is not expected to take a decision before May 3. It will review the prevailing situation when the lockdown ends and take a decision on resuming flights," an Indian Embassy official told Kuwait Times. "When flights resume, our priority will be to send home around 250 Indians who are already in deportation centers in Kuwait," the official added.

As part of the amnesty program, the Kuwait government has announced that it would forgo all residency-related penalties of the amnesty-seekers and offered a 30 percent waiver on all other debts or fines incurred by them. "The government is keen on making this amnesty program a big success. And it is for the first time that a Gulf country is offering free air passage to residency violators to leave the country. The government has offered special flights to various countries to repatriate foreign expat workers. It is an unprecedented initiative and a kind gesture," said Ajith Kumar, Kerala Pravasi Welfare Board Director.

Sympathetic approach

India's Minister of State for External Affairs V

Muraleedhan told Indian media last week that the repatriation of non-resident Indians (NRIs) from Gulf countries would not happen anytime now as the country is under lockdown. "We hope that our government in India would take a more sympathetic approach in this case and open its airspace as soon as possible," said Ajithkumar. Other countries like the Philippines, Bangladesh, Egypt and Pakistan have begun repatriation of their nationals. The Philippines has already brought home around 2,000 workers who obtained the amnesty in Kuwait.

Meanwhile, the alarming rise in coronavirus cases among Indians in Kuwait has unnerved community members. As of Tuesday, more than 1,200 Indians have tested positive for COVID-19 in Kuwait. "People living in labor camps and laborers working in construction sites must become more serious about the epidemic. They must strictly adhere to the COVID-19 containment guidelines issued by the government," Kuwait Kerala Muslim Cultural Center (KKMCC) President Sharafuddeen Kanneth said. KKMCC, KALA Kuwait, Overseas Indian Cultural Congress, KKMA and other Indian cultural associations have opened help desks and their volunteers are providing assistance to amnesty seekers in processing their papers.

India under lockdown until May 3

5,000 residency violators with valid passports have cleared the amnesty papers so far. They have been moved to repatriation centers, while around 8,000 people without valid passports have applied for emergency certificates (ECs) from the embassy.

According to official estimates, there were around 24,400 illegal Indian residents in Kuwait as of Feb 28, 2020. Although the days allocated to Indian residency violators for processing their applications ended on April 20, the Indian Embassy is seeking more time for Indian workers to submit ap-

Egyptian Consul in Kuwait to follow Egyptians' deportation

KUWAIT: A Jazeera Airways plane repatriating Kuwaiti citizens from Cairo Tuesday also carried Egypt's Consul General in the State of Kuwait who would follow up deportation of Egyptians violating residency law, Kuwait Ambassador to Egypt said. Mohammad Al-Thuwaikh explained that the deportation of Egyptian nationals were at the request of the Egyptian authorities. He was reacting to social media reports that the Jazeera Airways plane carried non-Kuwaiti passengers.

Speaking to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Thuwaikh said all passengers on board the Jazeera Airways were Kuwaiti citizens but the Egyptian Consul

who "returned to carry out his duties in taking care of affairs of our Egyptians brothers in the country including following up deportation of violators at the request of the Egyptian authorities." He called on those circulating these false reports to refrain from doing so.

In the meantime, there are around 6,000 Egyptian teachers in Kuwait who are hoping to return to Egypt, and have appealed to Egyptian authorities to open airports and receive those who wish to return. Al-Sayed Al-Malki, the teachers' representative, told Al-Qabas daily that they made a survey to count the people who wish to return to Egypt, where 6,000 teachers showed

their desire to go back.

He added that Kuwait's Ministry of Education suspended schools until August, giving them the green light to travel without a permit, and all they

need is the Egyptian authority's permission. Teachers assured that they are willing to bear the expenses of their travel, and even the expenses of governmental quarantine in Egypt.

Wellbeing Amidst Pandemic

Managing overall health

By Sadie Hussain

Do your best to view this disruption as a new, if abnormal, experience that may reap some benefits if you just take the time to adapt. Eat healthier food that strengthen the immune system and are rich in vitamins, including fruits, yogurt and nuts. The immune system is weakened by smoking, alcohol and poor nutrition, including processed foods and those high in sugar. Be more aware of what you are delivering to your body. By maintaining routines where possible or creating new daily routines, you will benefit all aspects of your life. In fact, a healthy routine is more so important during this time to ensure that you safeguard your health.

Decades of research have highlighted the importance of that. Not only do routines help alleviate mental fatigue and regulate circadian health, but they also contribute to productivity. Establishing a solid routine, especially in the morning, is key to your success in working remotely. Try to maintain your regular sleep patterns, although some may have difficulty in setting a routine absent of the pressures to get out of bed. It is certainly achievable by ensuring that you sleep at reasonable times and wake up at the same time every day. You may spend time doing an activity before you start work i.e. exercise (morning workouts increase productivity), have a healthy breakfast, catch up with friends and family on the phone or spend some extra time with children or loved ones. By doing so, you are also giving yourself time to map out your day so that when you sit down on your laptops, computers or smartphones to start your work day, you are operating at peak productivity. Try and take regular breaks to stretch, hydrate and eat.

Remote working has altered our lives both in positive and negative ways, though the option of remote or flexible working has always been discussed by corporates worldwide, the deterrent has always been the level of responsibility exercised by individuals. Take this time to be an example of a responsible employee, this will only produce positive bi-products such as efficiency and trust. Although some of us may have erratic work schedules, try your best to differentiate weekends in order to preserve some routine and offer yourself some downtime.

When you are not working, be mindful of your cognitive health: take time to try new relaxation activities (aside from watching television) such as reading, writing or a hobby. Find new knowledge in order to stimulate your minds and better yourselves (whether professional or personal). When you take time for yourself and give your body the food, rest, and activity it needs, you will have more energy to meet the demands of daily life. Bringing more balance to your daily routine will also help you be more resilient. With Ramadan around the corner, it is imperative that we all take steps to manage our physical and mental wellbeing and support those around us that are struggling.

— The above advice should not be considered as a comprehensive report or medical advice concerning issues that may affect physical and mental wellbeing.

PACI launches digital ID cards

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) has launched a new application, "ID Mobile Kuwait," via which citizens and residents can obtain a digital civil identification card that can be used in various government and non-government transactions. PACI Assistant Director General MUSAED AL-ASOUSI said yesterday that the application was launched in line with the Ministerial Resolution 1/2020, issued by Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and PACI Chairman ANAS AL-SALEH. The authority has also launched another service, "Authentication," for safe access to electronic services and transactions, in addition to e-signature site, "Signature Digital," for electronic documents for public and private authorities.

Asousi added that the application could be effected by self-service or by referring to PACI's bureaus. However, due to current extraordinary circumstances in the country, effecting the application with these methods is halted, thus PACI has developed another method via smart phones. The application for now solely provides issuing a digital ID card as a re-

placement to the material one. Digital authentication will be available soon through smart phones. Asousi added that the application is a digital alternative to the tangible ID card, amid current circumstances related to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) where PACI could not distribute IDs through conventional ways. The digital application is useful for those who cannot get their physical IDs, kept in automated 'delivery' machines, before work was halted on March 12, or for those whose cards expired during the time since then.

Asousi noted further that priority of giving the digital service would be for those whose IDs expired and have new ones kept in the delivery automated machines or those who applied for renewing the ID via PACI website. Exemptions for now includes newly born, those who filed for registration first time, applicants for cards who lost theirs and domestic workers. Full information about the application are available on PACI's website: www.paci.gov.kw. Technical support is available by emailing the website, "MIDSupport@paci.gov.kw", or by sending a WhatsApp message via number: 50008018. — KUNA

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