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Assembly panel seeks ban on new expat recruitment

Kuwaitization, quotas, residence curbs eyed • MP warns finance minister



KUWAIT: Cuban medical personnel arrive at Kuwait International Airport on Saturday to assist the country's effort in the fight against COVID-19. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Head of the Assembly's human resource development committee MP Khalil Al-Saleh said yesterday the panel will propose a ban on new recruitment of expat labor into the country during a meeting with the government this week. Saleh said on Twitter that resolving issues related to expatriate manpower and the imbalance in the demographic structure requires "draining" the sources of visa trading and a "ban on the recruitment of new expat labor".

It also requires Kuwaitization of jobs, imposing certain quotas on expat communities and limiting the duration of residence of expats, he said. The lawmaker said these issues will be raised during a meeting with the government later this week, adding that resolving the imbalance in the population structure requires strong decisions that are

implemented. He said the crisis has snowballed and now poses security, economic, social and health risks to the society of Kuwait.

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah said last week that expats form 70 percent of the population against 30 percent of Kuwaitis and that the ideal composition is by reversing the percentage to be 70 percent for citizens against 30 percent for expats. Achieving the premier's vision requires getting rid of at least 2.5 million expats from their existing number of 3.35 million.

MPs have already submitted legislation calling to impose quotas of foreign communities and to replace all expat jobs in the government within one year. The two bills have not yet been debated by Assembly panels. Meanwhile, MP Riyadh Al-Adasani yesterday warned Finance Minister

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OPEC, Russia to extend cuts, Mexico refuses

VIENNA: OPEC members, led by Saudi Arabia, and other key oil producers agreed Saturday to extend historic output cuts through July, as oil prices tentatively recover and coronavirus lockdowns ease. The 13-member cartel and its allies, notably Russia, decided to extend by a month deep May and June cuts agreed in April to boost prices, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries said in a statement.

But Mexico, which had already made clear ahead of the talks that it "could not adjust... production further", announced that it would not be complying. Oil prices have plummeted as a result of falling demand as countries around the world impose strict lockdowns to stop the spread of the new coronavirus.

"All participating countries... agreed the option of extending the first phase of the production adjustments pertaining in May and June by one further month," the OPEC statement said. Under the terms of the April agreement, OPEC and the so-called OPEC+ pledged to cut output by 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd) from May 1 until the end of June. The cuts were then to be gradually eased from July, to 7.7 million bpd until December.

Algerian Oil Minister Mohamed Arkab, who currently holds OPEC's rotating presidency, told AFP that the agreed cut for July was 9.6 mbpd, just slightly below the 9.7 mbpd for May and June. Oil ministers from key producers will meet monthly to assess the agreement, he added. US Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette welcomed the

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World rallies against George Floyd's death

WASHINGTON: Taking a knee, banging drums and ignoring social distancing measures, outraged protesters from Sydney to London on Saturday kicked off a weekend of global rallies against racism and police brutality. Tens of thousands of peaceful protesters rallied for racial justice Saturday in cities across the United States following the death of African American George Floyd at the hands of police.

Protests took place from New York to Los Angeles but Washington was at

the epicenter, as thousands of people – black, white and brown – flooded downtown streets surrounding the White House, which was barricaded with black metal fencing. "This fight has been happening for many, many decades, hundreds of years, and at this point it's time for a change," said Washington native Christine Montgomery. "I'm here so my son is not the next hashtag that is circulating worldwide," she added, indicating her 10-year-old child standing next to her.

On a sunny but oppressively hot day, many people wore masks because of the coronavirus pandemic. Volunteers gave out water, hand sanitizer and other supplies as the area took on a block party vibe, with music, mural painting, food trucks, and vendors selling Black Lives Matter T-shirts.

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WASHINGTON: Demonstrators hold placards at the Lincoln Memorial on Saturday during a peaceful protest against police brutality and the death of George Floyd. — AFP

Dozens hurt as protesters flood Beirut

BEIRUT: Protesters poured into the streets of the Lebanese capital Saturday to decry the collapse of the economy, as clashes erupted between supporters and opponents of the Iran-backed Shiite group Hezbollah. Hundreds filled the streets in and around the protest hub of Martyrs Square in the center of Beirut, with skirmishes also between protesters and security forces, who fired tear gas.

Forty-eight were wounded in the violence, 11 of whom were hospital-

ized, while the rest were treated at the scene, the Lebanese Red Cross said. It was the first major anti-government rally attracting demonstrators from across the country since authorities relaxed a lockdown imposed in mid-March to fight the spread of the coronavirus. "We came on the streets to demand our rights, call for medical care, education, jobs and the basic rights that human beings need to stay alive," said 21-year-old student Christina.

Many protesters wore face-masks as part of hygiene measures imposed to fight the pandemic, which has severely exacerbated an economic crisis, the worst since the debt-burdened country's 1975-1990 civil war. But Saturday's protest turned violent

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BEIRUT: Lebanese riot police fire tear gas at protesters in central Beirut on Saturday. — AFP

Morocco artisans fear 'knockout punch' from virus

RABAT: Pottery, basketwork and wrought-iron furniture pile up in the deserted stalls of the Oujda arts and crafts complex in Sale near the Moroccan capital Rabat. Artisans have been starved of income for almost three months because of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Coronavirus is the knockout punch: without help, without support, our profession will disappear," said Youssef Rghalmi, a 49-year-old potter.

In the family workshop, where skills

have been handed down from generation to generation, the clay has dried up, the oven is turned off and the nine employees no longer turn up for work. The last order, for a customer from France who called off her visit because of border closures, is gathering dust in a corner.

"We were already struggling to survive because lifestyles have changed," said Mohamed Touel, a master carver of "gebs" decorative plaster. "Traditional trades are being lost because young people don't want to take over." The enterprising 62-year-old had added a small restaurant to his shop but it closed because of lockdown measures imposed since mid-March.

Foreign tourists have vanished, the lockdown has paralyzed economic life and local customers "have other priorities",

Ahmed Driouch said in his store cluttered with copper lamps, ceramics, daggers, jewelry, inlaid chests and carpets. Business has been "two hundred percent affected by the virus", he said, grimly forecasting it would take "at least two or three years" to return to normal.

Upstairs, employees dusted some 10,000 carpets in stock, one by one. "We must clean everything even if, for now, nobody's coming," one of them said ruefully, vacuum cleaner in hand. Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts Nadia Fettah has proposed ideas such as exhibition spaces in supermarkets to revive a sector that provides employment to two million people. That includes about 230,000 traditional artisans.

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SALE, Morocco: A Moroccan rug weaver creates a carpet at a workshop in this city north of the capital Rabat on June 3, 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP