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Officials linked to Bangladesh MP in visa trading scam: Saleh

MP demands names of suspects • Govt likely to ease coronavirus restrictions

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh said yesterday that "officials" are involved in one of the largest trafficking in people cases operated by "an Asian expatriate", in a clear reference to a Bangladeshi lawmaker who is under investigations by authorities. Saleh wrote on his Twitter account that "great efforts" were carried out in the past few weeks by the interior ministry leading to "uncovering one of the largest trafficking in persons and residency cases by an Asian expat".

He said that investigations have uncovered "suspicious financial transactions that were carried out

by a network of officials in collaboration with companies which facilitated the transactions". Authorities have arrested a Bangladeshi MP after he arrived in the country on suspicion of running large-scale visa trading operations in cooperation with Kuwaiti officials and firms.

"All those found to be involved - whether they are government officials or prominent personalities - will be interrogated by the interior ministry and will be referred to the public prosecution to complete the legal process," the minister said. Saleh provided no details about the operations or the number of people and victims involved in the scam.

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic,

Kuwait launched a campaign against visa traders and arrested dozens of people, including police officers. "Trafficking in persons and residency is accorded top priority by the interior ministry," said the minister, adding that efforts exerted by interior ministry officials have achieved good progress, insisting that Kuwait's security is a red line.

MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari yesterday demanded the names of all suspects linked to the Bangladeshi MP should be published, including government officials and MPs. Local media reported that the Bangladeshi MP has been dealing with at least two current Kuwaiti lawmakers and a former MP.

Kandari also asked the interior ministry about

the Malaysian sovereign wealth fund scam in which a number of Kuwaitis are suspected to be involved. He said that a report in the Wall Street Journal last week said the main suspect in the scam, a Malaysian businessman, was allowed entry into Kuwait in 2016 although he was wanted by Interpol. He demanded to know if this is true and who facilitated his entry.

Meanwhile, the government is expected to ease lockdown restrictions because of the coronavirus as the country moves next week into the second phase of the return to normal life. Government offices are expected to reopen but only with 30 percent capacity, the curfew will be further eased to start at

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Petra a ghost town as virus hits tourism

PETRA, Jordan: For over two millennia the ancient city of Petra has towered majestically over the Jordanian desert. Today its famed rose-red temples hewn into the rockface lie empty and silent. As the novel coronavirus spread around the world, Jordanian authorities imposed a lockdown, and the last tourists left on March 16, a day before the Hashemite kingdom closed its borders.

"It's the first time I've seen this place so empty. Usually there are thousands of tourists," said Nayef Hilalat, 42, who has worked as a guardian at the ancient archaeological site for a decade. "Every year at this time the place would be buzzing with people," he lamented, wearing a khaki cap bearing the Jordanian flag. "Today all we can hear is the birds singing."

One of the seven wonders of the world, and classified as a UNESCO world heritage site in 1985,

Petra was once the capital of the nomadic Nabataean Arab peoples and dates back to at least 200 years BC. With the passage of time, it has become a beacon for tourism in the country and the region. Its spectacular Al-Khazneh, or Treasury, with its stunning sandstone facade, is one of Petra's most famous attractions, and was a location for Steven Spielberg's 1989 movie "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade".

But now, the steep winding Siq path - a gorge over a kilometre long that leads into Al-Khazneh - is deserted. Gone are the tourists normally thronging the pathway on foot, or riding on donkeys or in horse-drawn carriages. Life is in limbo. Tables at the site's cafes forlornly gather dust or are littered with forgotten plastic cups, while items like T-shirts in the souvenir shops fade in the desert sun.

The vast site, lying in a deep valley between the Red Sea, in the south, and the Dead Sea, to the north, is a ghost town. Around 200 tour guides, along with 1,500 horse and donkey owners, are out of work. It's "a catastrophe", said 55-year-old Naim Nawafleh, who has been a guide here for about 30 years.

Jordan welcomes some five million visitors a year, and tourism accounts for 14 percent of the

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PETRA: Nayef Hilalat guards the empty ancient city of Petra on June 1, 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. — AFP

Fears of second wave amid new China infections

BEIJING: China reported its highest daily number of new coronavirus cases in months yesterday with parts of Beijing still under lockdown, offering a second wave warning as more European countries prepare to open their borders for travel. The shock resurgence in domestic infections has rattled China, where the disease emerged late last year but had largely been tamed through severe restrictions on movement that were later emulated across the globe.

It also gives a bleak insight into the difficulties the world will face in conquering COVID-19 - even as Europe prepares for the summer holiday season after an encouraging drop in contagion, with some countries set to welcome visitors from elsewhere on the continent from today.

Of the 57 new cases logged by Chinese authorities, 36 were domestic infections in the capital, where a large wholesale food market at the center of the outbreak has been closed and nearby housing estates put under lockdown. "The meat sellers have had to close. This disease is really scary," said a fruit and vegetable trader surnamed Sun at another central Beijing market, adding there were fewer customers than normal. Others were more sanguine. "As long as you wear a face mask, it should be fine... Anyway, I have to buy food, right?" said shopper Song Weiming.

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Delhi virus fears rise as beds run out

NEW DELHI: Ashwani Jain succumbed to the coronavirus in an ambulance as his family pleaded with several hospitals to take him in, the latest victim of the pandemic sweeping through the Indian capital and exposing a deadly shortage of hospital beds. "They don't care whether we live or die," said his 20-year-old daughter Kashish, whose uncle, Abhishek, sat with Ashwani in the back of the vehicle on its desperate journey across Delhi. "It won't matter to them but I have lost my father, he

was the world to me," she said, tears welling up as she showed a photo of him.

All of the hospitals the 45-year-old businessman's family tried refused to admit Ashwani, even though an app set up by the city government indicated Covid-19 beds were free, Abhishek told AFP. With surging infections highlighting the precarious state of the Indian healthcare system, the death of Jain and others like him have heightened anxiety in Delhi over the growing threat.

More than 1,200 have died from the virus in the Indian capital and more than 1,000 new cases are being reported each day. Mortuaries are overflowing with bodies and crematorium staff say they cannot keep up with the backlog of victims.

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Militarization of cops stoked by Pentagon

WASHINGTON: When US police flooded the streets around the country to confront protesters two weeks ago, for many it appeared like the army had deployed, with camouflage uniforms and combat gear, heavily armored anti-mine vehicles, and high-powered assault weapons.

That's not by accident. For years the US Defense Department has been handing its surplus equipment over

for free to police departments - and the departments, large and small, have revelled in it. Critics say it has been part of the overall militarization of the police, and helped fuel mass nationwide demonstrations against police abuse and deadly tactics that began after the May 25 killing of a handcuffed African American, George Floyd, by a Minneapolis police officer.

As soon as protests began in Minneapolis, the city's troubled police department rolled out armored vehicles appearing more suited to Middle East battlefields. Other large cities have them too, but also small towns.

In 2013 police in Flathead County, Montana, which has 90,000 residents

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NEW DELHI: This photo taken on June 11, 2020 shows a man in an ambulance outside the COVID-19 coronavirus ward at the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Hospital. — AFP



PALMDALE, California: Sheriffs block marchers from continuing down E Palmdale Boulevard after a demonstration on Saturday. — AFP