



**3** Defense ministry runs expat quarantine camp in Subhan



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## Ramadan KAREEM

|         |       |
|---------|-------|
| Fajr    | 03:30 |
| Dhuhr   | 11:44 |
| Asr     | 15:20 |
| Maghrib | 18:30 |
| Isha    | 19:56 |



# Kuwait goes into lockdown, essential services continue

163 coronavirus cases reported at two co-ops • Another doctor dies



KUWAIT: Cars jam the streets of Shuwaikh as people panic buy on Saturday before a total lockdown began yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 5)

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** A decision by the government to place the country under a total lockdown to prevent the spread of the coronavirus took effect at 4 pm yesterday and continues until May 30. Only essential services, in addition to the military, police and security agencies and medical services will be allowed to operate. Food and essential supplies will be accessed through an online reservation system of cooperative societies. Prior reservations can be made at [www.moci.shop](http://www.moci.shop).

Authorities have appealed to the public to stay indoors to avoid the deadly disease and health authorities said they plan a testing campaign to detect infections. About 163 coronavirus cases have been detected at Khaldiya and Adailiya cooperative societies, forcing them to shut down for sterilization. Khaldiya Cooperative Society said as many as 103 of its workers tested positive, while MP Abdulwahab Al-Babtain said another 60 workers at Adailiya Co-op also tested positive.

Several MPs called on the health ministry to launch a concerted campaign to test employees at all cooperative societies and supermarkets. The state-owned Flour Mills Co said it has plenty of supplies to provide all types of bread throughout the lockdown. The health ministry announced that a second physician has died of coronavirus. Vasudeva Rao, a 54-year-old dentist, was working at Kuwait Oil Co hospital where he contracted the disease. Two days ago, an Egyptian doctor, Tareq Hussein,

also died of the disease.

The National Assembly was to decide later yesterday whether to go ahead and hold the emergency Assembly session scheduled for Tuesday, as a number of lawmakers called for holding the session. The Assembly's health and labor committee is scheduled to debate new government amendments to the labor law allowing distressed companies to reduce the salaries of employees after the approval of the ministry of social affairs.

The bill was debated last week but the government withdrew the amendments after lawmakers wanted guarantees that the measures will not apply to over 55,000 Kuwaitis employed in the private sector. Rapporteur of the committee MP Saadoun Hammad said the new government proposals do not clearly stipulate guarantees for Kuwaitis, adding that he will submit such amendments.

The interior ministry said yesterday it has referred a volunteer at a cooperative society for investigation after he was shown physically assaulting an expatriate shopper in a video posted on social media. The ministry said legal measures have been initiated against the volunteer.

The civil aviation authority said yesterday that travelers are allowed to go to the airport during the lockdown provided they show a photocopy or an electronic image of the air ticket to the police if asked. Each traveler is allowed to be escorted by one driver who should also carry a copy of the ticket. The authority said that seven flights, including four to Cairo, were due to operate yesterday.

## Fear in Iran as infections rising anew

**TEHRAN:** While many residents in Iran's capital are taking advantage of loosened COVID-19 controls, some worry about a new spike in infections in what remains the Middle East's deadliest virus epicenter. "The line of fools," muttered shopkeeper Manouchehr, peering disdainfully at a queue of customers outside a foreign currency dealer in the Sadeghieh district of western Tehran. Many in the long line stood close to one another and did not wear masks.

A traffic policeman told AFP such

queues have appeared regularly ever since the money changers re-opened. People rarely observe basic anti-contagion protocols, he complained. The government began paring back coronavirus controls outside Tehran on April 11, arguing that the economy - already sagging under punitive US sanctions - needed to get back to bare bones operations. It allowed small businesses to reopen in the capital a week later, before permitting malls to welcome customers on April 21 and barbers on Wednesday.

At 802, declared daily infections in Iran on May 2 reached their lowest level since early March. But this critical daily number has since begun resurging, breaching 1,500 on Saturday to take the country's total number of confirmed infections beyond 106,000. The capital's streets, bazaars and malls are now bustling after

being nearly deserted for weeks after the bulk of control measures were imposed in March.

Milad, a shopkeeper in a mall, was conflicted about the easing of movement restrictions. "All these customers coming in will endanger our lives - us who are forced to come" to work, he said. The mall gets very busy in the evenings, noted the 22-year-old, who did not have any protective equipment. The COVID-19 respiratory disease has killed nearly 6,600 people in Iran since the first two fatalities were reported in the city of Qom on February 19, according to authorities.

Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi has called Tehran the country's "Achilles heel" in the fight against the virus. The city's eight million residents are densely packed together and it is a magnet for hundreds of

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TEHRAN: Iranians, without observing social distancing, queue outside a money exchange office in the capital on Saturday. — AFP

## Digital voice tech gets fresh momentum

**WASHINGTON:** In a world suddenly fearful of touch, voice technology is getting a fresh look. Voice-activated systems such as Google Assistant, Amazon Alexa and Apple's Siri have seen strong growth in recent years, and the virus pandemic could accelerate that, analysts say. Voice assistants are not only answering queries and shopping, but also being used for smart home control and for a range of business and medical applications which could see increased interest as people seek to limit personal contact.

"Voice has already made significant inroads into the smart home space and voice control can mean avoiding commonly touched surfaces around the home from smartphones, to TV remotes, light switches, thermostats, door

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## Tunisians get food aid via text messages

**TUNIS:** A Tunisian NGO has set up a food bank that dispenses aid by text message to some 300 needy families rendered more vulnerable because of the coronavirus pandemic. The initiative, which had been long in the making, was finally launched at the end of April to coincide with the start of the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. It targets families who have lost jobs because of the lockdown imposed by Tunisia to contain the spread of the virus, like that of Messaouda Raouafi, a cleaning woman forced to stay indoors.

"Because of Ramadan and the lockdown I can no longer go out to work," said the 49-year-old. "I cannot clean homes and earn money to feed my seven children." Her family was among the 300 chosen by the women's affairs ministry and signalled to the NGO known as the "Banque Alimentaire Durable" or Sustainable Food Bank. Under the initiative, Raouafi receives a code by text message allowing her to spend 40 to 60 Tunisian dinars (around \$21-32)

weekly at specially designated grocery stores. With that money, Raouafi has been able to buy basic goods such as oil, milk, coffee and flour.

Farah, who runs a grocery store in the working-class district of Kram, is among those who signed up to take part in the project. "The money is sent to us ahead of time - that way the clients can buy what they want with the funds allocated to them," she said. Farah said this works much better than allowing customers to buy on credit, a system that takes its toll on her own finances. "In our area there are many poor families and unemployed people," she said, explaining why she decided to embrace the initiative.

A member of the NGO, Aisha Zakraoui, said she hopes the initiative will grow so as to reach more needy families across Tunisia. The NGO also aims to help families become more self-sufficient through training in skills such as growing their own vegetables or baking bread to sell. "Our objective is to provide food aid to needy people and in exchange they agree to take part in initiatives aimed at integrating them socially and professionally," Zakraoui said.

Even before the virus outbreak, Tunisia has been struggling with economic and social hardship that has worsened since the country went into lockdown in March to battle the pandemic. The government estimated that two million of Tunisia's 11.5 million

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## Obama slams Trump handling of pandemic

**WASHINGTON:** Former president Barack Obama has launched a scathing attack on Donald Trump's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, calling it an "absolute chaotic disaster". In a leaked web call Friday night with former members of his administration, Obama also said the Justice Department's decision to drop charges against Michael Flynn, the former Trump national security adviser who pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI in the Russia probe, endangers the rule of law in the US.

In the audio, first obtained by Yahoo News, Obama urges former staffers to join him in rallying behind Joe Biden as he prepares to take on Trump in the November presidential election. The United States by far leads the world in the number of coronavirus infections, at nearly 1.3 million, and deaths, with more than 77,000.

Trump has been criticized as essentially abdicating any leadership role in guiding the country

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