

Local

Stranded Kuwait-based workers struggle for re-entry

Desperate residents waiting for 'green light' to return to their jobs

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Residents stranded abroad are required to be fully vaccinated before they are allowed to enter Kuwait. They should also register and get certification from their governments and validate their health vaccines with the health ministry in Kuwait. But many are facing difficulties getting their vaccines approved.

Abidugun, a resident from Lagos, Nigeria who has been working in Kuwait for the past 15 years, said he followed all the necessary procedures required by Kuwait, but to his dismay his health status is unchanged. "I have taken both doses of the AstraZeneca COVID vaccine since June and

For example, people from several countries including Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka cannot access direct flights. Although there has been no official statement in this regard, people traveling from these five countries should quarantine for 14 days in a third country and undergo a PCR before coming to Kuwait.

"We tried transiting through a third country in April, but we were stuck in Dubai for 40 days," said Lalu, an Indian currently in Kerala and unable to return to Kuwait. "We are really anxious about the situation. We want to re-enter Kuwait as a family, but it's very risky because of the direct flight ban," he said.

"My concern is about my family members - what if one of them gets a positive result? This will lead to further delays and additional expenses. I cannot afford this now because most of my savings were gone when we tried our luck in Dubai in April. My plan B is for me to leave alone for a third country so that I can re-enter Kuwait and work again. I need to go back to work and earn money. My family situation is getting worse every day - it's very difficult," Lalu lamented.

"I hope Kuwait will open its borders. They can easily implement a 20-day quarantine inside Kuwait. At least it will help the hotels and give jobs to many. It'll be a win-win solution. Why force us to quarantine in a third country when we can stay inside Kuwait and pay the hotel?" he asked.

There are no official statistics available on how many residents are still waiting to return to Kuwait. But local Arabic media, quoting unnamed sources, has reported more than 165,000 residents have applied for approval of their vaccines received abroad.

A Filipina who went to the US in February for vacation had to wait days for her vaccine status to be updated. "I was supposed to arrive in Kuwait on August 2, but my immunization status wasn't changed - it was still red. I told my husband to check with the ministry of health, but for several days he wasn't successful," she said. "Only on August 8 when I tried for the tenth time that suddenly the green status appeared on my civil ID. Thank God, I will be flying back to Kuwait next week," she said.

Stranded in Dubai

Meanwhile, some residents stranded in the UAE



KUWAIT: In this August 1, 2021 file photo, people are seen shortly after arrival at Kuwait International Airport on the first day of allowing residents fully vaccinated against COVID-19 to re-enter Kuwait after a six-month ban. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

are having difficulties getting vaccines from the UAE government, even though tourists are allowed to get vaccinated. Grace Martinez, a Filipina married to an Egyptian and a resident of Kuwait, said her two sons have been stranded in Dubai since Jan 25 and are facing several challenges.

"There has been no luck until now for the vaccine for my two sons stranded in Dubai. They have tried several places set up for tourists to get the job, but they were unsuccessful. They went to several places in Dubai, only to be turned down by vaccination officers. They are told the vaccines are only for residents of Dubai and not for tourists," Martinez said, quoting her son.

"My two sons - Rashid (23 years old) and Raed (21) are stranded in Dubai for the last eight months. They have valid residency of Kuwait since the government allowed them to renew their visas from abroad, but the problem is Kuwait needs two doses of vaccines to be taken before they can enter the country. We are still hoping for my two

boys to get the vaccine; it's really very difficult. I am too stressed with this situation right now," she added.

Abu Dhabi is offering tourists free COVID-19 vaccinations that were previously restricted to UAE citizens and residency visa holders. But they have implemented travel restrictions with other emirates. "It's not easy to move from one emirate to another. We were told that the same program was available for tourists in Dubai, so we visited several vaccination centers, but they won't vaccinate tourists," Rashid said.

Just before the rollout of vaccines in December last year, residents from certain countries had to spend 14 days in a third country before arriving to Kuwait, so many residents chose Dubai as their quarantine destination. But months after the implementation of this third-country quarantine rule, Kuwait cancelled the order, leaving hundreds if not thousands of Kuwait-based workers stranded in these countries.

“We did all that is needed but are still stuck”

submitted all my details and documents to the MoH website as recommended, after which I got a confirmation message of receipt. But surprisingly, I have not got the 'green approval' till date, even though the MoH told us the process will only take three days," he said.

"It is so frustrating: I have changed my ticket two times, which resulted in a lot of expenses. Some of my friends who traveled to Europe and other countries didn't even need to take the vaccine. All that was required was a (negative) PCR test. But here we are - we did all that is needed but are still stuck here. I hope everything will be okay in the coming days," Abidugun added.

Difficulties despite vaccines

Legal residents may enter Kuwait since Aug 1, but they must be fully vaccinated with jabs recognized by Kuwait - namely Pfizer-BioNTech, Oxford-AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and Moderna. But even those who are vaccinated and have approval from the health ministry are finding it difficult to return.

Hospitals in Lebanon grapple...

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burns, overwhelming hospitals. Fuel shortages since the start of summer have aggravated hardship in Lebanon, a country of more than six million that is in the throes of an economic crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the worst since the mid-19th century.

Without the diesel fuel needed to power private generators, businesses, hospitals and even the country's main telecom operator have been forced to scale back operations or close entirely due to outages lasting up to 22 hours a day. In Akkar, hospitals still storing corpses of victims charred in Sunday's blast were left without power, Internet and working landlines, as health officials pleaded for help from the authorities.

"We have a stock of 700 liters of diesel fuel which will last for only one day," said Riad Rahal, director of Rahal Hospital in the Akkar town of Halba. The nearby El-Youssef hospital also had enough stock of diesel to last until Wednesday morning and no working phone lines, said Nathalie El-Chaar, assistant to the director. "Since yesterday, landlines have been out of service... and we are try-

ing hard to secure diesel," she told AFP. She said the hospital's diesel provider had delayed deliveries fearing attacks on a north Lebanon highway where incidents in recent days have seen angry groups seize fuel from trucks.

The official National News Agency said yesterday that diesel fuel shortages and power outages had forced the Ogero telecom provider to cut Internet, landlines and mobile phone services in several parts of Akkar, effectively paralyzing banks, businesses and state offices. Ogero head Imad Kreidieh warned that other regions in Lebanon would have to follow suit unless the situation improved.

In the southern suburbs of Beirut, live shots were fired at a gas station, the latest in a series of lethal incidents rattling motorists lining up in long petrol queues. The NNA said the army deployed in the area after several people were injured in the shootout, but it did not provide more details. A security source told AFP that people who had illegally stored petrol at a pumping station fired live rounds as army soldiers tried to confiscate their stock.

They also started a fire at the gas station, accusing its owner of having tipped off the army. Videos and pictures circulating on social media showed men opening machine-gun fire. AFP could not independently verify the authenticity of the footage. The army on Saturday started raiding gas stations and confiscating stocks of fuel that distributors have been hoarding to sell at a higher price in the black market or across the border in Syria. — AFP

Mohammed's mother. She took her son in her arms and burst into tears.

In the meantime, Mohammed is determined not to lose touch with his old classmates. Yesterday, he insisted on going to school to catch up with them - and his parents obliged. Sitting in the front row, he tried briefly to follow a lesson, his mother Somaya and friends sitting beside him. "He was really excited to hear the school clock," his mother said. — AFP

horses of the US Air Force transport fleet - have been used for such a large evacuation. In 2013, a US C-17 flew out more than 670 people from the eastern Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan. In its usual configuration, a C-17 carries just over 100 troops with equipment.

There have been desperate and chaotic scenes at Kabul airport, where the apron and runway were flooded Monday by thousands of people hoping to get a flight out of the country. Many were not eligible for evacuation flights, did not have tickets on commercial flights or even visas. In harrowing videos shared on social media, hundreds of people are seen running next to a C-17 as it appears to gather speed, some clinging to the sides of the plane.

In another, attack helicopters are seen flying low near the crowds in an apparent attempt to clear the runway for an aircraft. Afghan media reported that several people died after falling from planes as they took off. One person died in the landing gear well of a C-17 that took off from Kabul, the Washington Post and Politico reported. — AFP



KABUL: Taliban fighters on a pickup truck move around a market area full of local people in the Kote Sangi area of the capital yesterday. — AFP

Taliban declare end to war...

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and then Afghan peace negotiators - crowns a stunning comeback for the Taliban after being ousted 20 years ago. Tens of thousands of people have tried to flee the country to escape the hardline Islamist rule expected under the Taliban, or fearing direct retribution for siding with the US-backed government that ruled for the past two decades.

Significantly Baradar, now deputy leader of the group, chose to touch down in Afghanistan's second biggest city Kandahar - the Taliban's spiritual birthplace and capital during their first time in power. He landed hours after evacuation flights from Kabul's airport restarted after chaos Monday when huge crowds mobbed the apron, with some people so desperate they clung to the fuselage of a US military plane as it rolled down the runway for take-off.

The Taliban led a pariah regime from 1996 to 2001, infamous for a brutal rule in which girls could not go to school, women were barred from working in jobs that would put them in contact with men, and people were stoned to death. US-led forces invaded following the Sept 11 attacks, in response to the Taliban giving sanctuary to Al-Qaeda, and toppled them.

Now the Taliban are back in power, they have sought to project an air of restraint and moderation, including by announcing a "general amnesty" for government workers. "Those working in any part or department of the government should resume their duties with full satisfaction and continue their duties without any fear," a Taliban statement said.

Some shops also reopened as traffic police were back on the streets, while Russia's ambassador to Afghanistan Dmitry Zhimov met with the Taliban in Kabul, hailing on state television a "positive and constructive" meeting. "They are currently engaged in restoring order in the city and have succeeded in this," Zhimov said in an interview

from Kabul with Rossiya 24.

A Taliban official also gave an interview to a female journalist on an Afghan news channel, and a girls' school reopened in the western city of Herat. Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said the Taliban had sent a "positive signal" by showing a "readiness to respect the opinion of others".

In the capital, however, schools and universities remained closed, few women openly took to the streets and men had shed their Western clothes for traditional garb. "The fear is there," said a shopkeeper who asked not to be named after opening his small neighborhood provisions store. The UN Security Council also said Monday the international community must ensure Afghanistan does not become a breeding ground for terrorism. "The world is watching," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

The Taliban took effective control of the country on Sunday when president Ashraf Ghani fled and the insurgents walked into Kabul with no opposition. It capped a staggeringly fast rout of all cities in just 10 days, achieved with relatively little bloodshed, following two decades of war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. The collapse came after US President Joe Biden withdrew US troops, under the false belief that the Afghan army - with billions of dollars in American funding and training - was strong enough to withstand the Taliban.

In his first comments since the Taliban victory, Biden admitted their advance had unfolded more quickly than expected. But he heaped criticism on Ghani's government, insisted he had no regrets, and emphasized US troops could not defend a nation whose leaders "gave up and fled". "We gave them every chance to determine their own future. We could not provide them with the will to fight for that future," Biden said in his address at the White House. "American troops cannot and should not be fighting in a war and dying in a war that Afghan forces are not willing to fight for themselves."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg also blamed Afghan leaders for the "tragedy". "Ultimately, the Afghan political leadership failed to stand up to the Taliban and to achieve the peaceful solution that Afghans desperately wanted," he said. — AFP

Blinded Gaza boy dreams...

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"In the future, I hope he can go to a special school for the disabled," said Somaya Shaban,

600+ Afghans cram into US...

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Among the people visible in the photo is a small child holding a feeding bottle in the lap of a woman. Several other people are seen holding small children. Hardly any belongings are visible among the passengers, except a small suitcase and a backpack in the foreground.

The flight - which Defense One said had the call sign Reach 871 - landed in Qatar in the early hours of Monday, according to the tracking website FlightAware. The US military did not specify the destination. This C-17 was not the only one to take so many Afghans out of the country - Defense One cited the US official as saying several planes took off from Kabul with similar numbers.

It is also not the first time Boeing C-17s - work-