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Health minister assures no Omicron cases in Kuwait

Sheikh Basel: New vaccines in new year • MoH launches Q8Seha app



KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah inaugurates the Funaitees Medical Center yesterday. — KUNA

By B Izzak & KUNA

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah yesterday said although the Omicron variant of COVID-19 has spread in many countries, there are no reported cases of the strain in Kuwait. On the sidelines of celebrating the opening of the Al-Funaitees Medical Center, Sheikh Basel confirmed that the ministry's procedures in this regard were exceptional even before the existence of this mutation.

Health regulations and procedures imposed in Kuwait had prevented this virus from spreading among citizens and residents, the minister noted. "We urge all people to keep wearing their masks in closed areas, get vaccinated, get the third booster dose and do their PCR tests," he stressed. He added that even with the good vaccination rate in the country, the number of cases will rise if the new variant spreads in the country, and this is why "we have to increase our protection level among the people and society".

Sheikh Basel said that the ministry conducted genetic sequencing during previous periods to make sure there was no such mutation in the country. "Although people appear fearful of the new mutation, we can assure that this mutation is similar

to the regular seasonal flu viruses; therefore the effectiveness of vaccines varies from one period to another," he added.

He pointed out that the effectiveness of vaccinations now lies in reducing the possibility of severe symptoms and not only transmitting the infection, as happened with the (Delta) variant. "We are not only concerned with infection, but with patients in intensive care, severe symptoms and death cases. The vaccines are still effective in this respect, and next year will witness the introduction of new vaccines," he confirmed.

Regarding the vaccination of children aged five to 11 years old, Sheikh Dr Basel confirmed that the ministry of health has opened registration for this age group and the process to obtain the appropriate vaccine for children.

Sheikh Basel also announced the launch of a mobile application called Q8Seha, stating that it will provide reports of all types of tests and x-rays conducted in the public healthcare sector. He said 70 percent of tests will be available and the rest will follow in the coming months, adding this will be in collaboration with the Kuwait Mobile ID app in order to ensure the identity of users, as the information provided is very sensitive.

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News in brief

Panel rejects any OCA move

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's sports and youth committee announced its strong rejection of attempts to move the headquarters of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) out of Kuwait, where it has been located since its inception in 1981, head of the panel MP Abdullah Al-Turaiji said. The lawmaker said the panel was told by Hussein Al-Musallam, the Kuwait Director General of OCA, that there were "suspicious attempts" by unnamed quarters to move the headquarters out of Kuwait.

Saudi allows entry with Sputnik jab

MOSCOW: Saudi Arabia has granted approval for people vaccinated with Russia's Sputnik jab to enter the country in a move that will enable Muslims to take part in religious pilgrimages, the vaccine's developers said yesterday. Foreign tourists vaccinated with Sputnik will still be required to quarantine for 48 hours and take a PCR test. — AFP

Pre-departure tests must for UK

LONDON: The UK government has announced that those travelling into the country will need to show a negative coronavirus test pre-departure as it reintroduces COVID-19 restrictions due to the Omicron variant. From 0400 GMT tomorrow, anyone travelling to the UK will have to show evidence of a negative lateral flow or PCR test taken within the last 48 hours before boarding a flight, the health ministry said. — AFP (See Page 6)

10 COVID cases on cruise ship

MIAMI: Ten COVID-19 cases have been detected among crew members and passengers on a Norwegian Cruise Line ship returning to New Orleans yesterday with thousands on board, a US health authority said. "The Norwegian Breakaway departed from New Orleans on Nov 28 and stopped in Belize, Honduras and Mexico on its voyage," the Louisiana Department of Health tweeted Saturday. — AFP

Agencies defend extra charges for returned maids

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Domestic helper agencies in Kuwait are charging employers more to recruit housemaids who were returned by their original employers as opposed to hiring a new helper from abroad. There have been complaints in Kuwait alleging that offices

are demanding excessive charges compared to the fixed KD 890 fee set by the government to recruit a housemaid. However, a representative of employment agencies in Kuwait said the offices usually charge extra for returned maids for many reasons, mainly the need to refund and compensate employers.

"When the sponsor returns the housemaid to the agency, they demand back the money they spent to recruit the housemaid," said Mariam Macapudi, President of the Filipino Association of Secretaries of Employment Agencies in Kuwait (Fil-Aseak), a group comprising of 200 licensed recruitment agencies. She claimed that upon returning the maid, employers usually demand more money than what they had initially paid to recruit the helper, thus increasing the

cost of re-employment. In addition to asking the new employer to bear the cost of compensating the old employer and sheltering the maid until they find them a new home, agencies see this as an opportunity to turn a profit as well.

"The local agency here would also want to earn revenue from the fact that their services are used," Macapudi said. Once a new employer is found, the cost for recruiting a returned helper can reach up to KD 2,000. According to Macapudi, this is justified because agencies are essentially a business that seek to make a profit. "This is normal," she said. "Local agencies are charging more because that's their nature of business - they also want to earn something as well."

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CNN fires Chris Cuomo over help he gave to bro

WASHINGTON: CNN fired veteran anchor and correspondent Chris Cuomo, the cable news channel said Saturday, amid an investigation into his involvement with helping defend brother Andrew Cuomo, the former New York governor, against sexual misconduct allegations. Chris Cuomo had been suspended from CNN over the matter just days before his termination.

"We retained a respected law firm to conduct the review, and have terminated him, effective immediately," a statement posted to CNN's official communications Twitter account said. "While in the process of that review, additional information has come to light."

The termination comes after documents surfaced showing that Cuomo, who anchored the 9:00 pm news slot, offered advice to his politician brother that was deemed too close for comfort by his employer. "The documents, which we were not privy to before their public release, raise serious questions," a CNN spokesperson said Tuesday, adding they "point to a greater level of involvement in his brother's efforts than we previously knew."

CNN on Saturday found itself in the awkward

position of reporting on the firing of one of its own anchors. "This is not how I want my time at CNN to end but I have already told you why and how I helped my brother," Cuomo, 51, said in a text message statement read out on the air by CNN media reporter Brian Stelter. "So let me now say as disappointing as this is, I could not be more proud of the team at 'Cuomo Prime Time,'" Cuomo added.



Chris Cuomo

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Incomplete mosque bares Iraq divisions

BAGHDAD: It was meant to compete with the Taj Mahal in grandeur, but former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's monumental Al-Rahman Mosque project was never completed. Instead, the half-finished edifice of grey concrete stands in the heart of Baghdad as testimony to the sectarian and political strife that has shaped much of Iraq's modern history.

The aim was for the mosque, with a

capacity for 15,000 worshippers, to be one of the largest in the Middle East. Launched in the 1990s in the midst of a crippling Western embargo over Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, the construction of the mosque was designed to be a snub to Washington. But the dictator's dreams of grandeur - along with them his iron-fisted rule - would come crumbling down with the 2003 US-led invasion.

Today, a vast hole gapes at the sky from where an 84-metre-tall, gold-adorned ceramic dome was supposed to cover the central prayer hall. Around it, eight secondary domes 28 m high, each flanked by eight smaller domes, stand in a suspended state of

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BAGHDAD: This picture taken on Nov 16, 2021 shows a view of the Al-Rahman Grand Mosque in the Al-Mansour district of Iraq's capital. — AFP