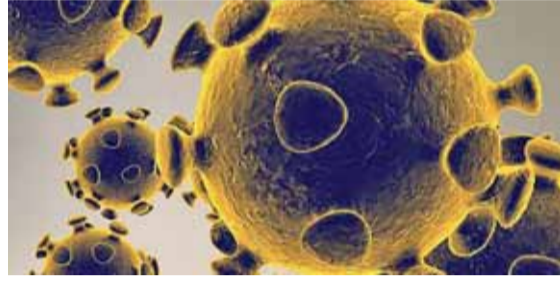




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MPs call on government to end partial lockdown

Kuwait reports 11 deaths, 1,192 new COVID-19 cases



KUWAIT: People queue as they wait to receive a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at the vaccination center at the international fairgrounds in Mishref yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A number of lawmakers yesterday called on the government to "immediately" end the partial lockdown that was imposed two weeks ago to curb a spike in the number of coronavirus cases, saying it has hurt the society and the economy. Opposition MP Hasan Jowhar said the partial lockdown has failed to deal with the crisis as it has not helped bring down the number of new cases, as he cast doubt on the "accuracy" of official figures released by the ministry.

The lawmaker said the health minister and the ministry have made "blunders" while dealing with the health crisis, and wondered why the number of coronavirus cases has been dropping worldwide except in Kuwait, where it continues to rise. He also asked how is it logical that the number of cases among Kuwaitis is twice the number of cases among expats, although Kuwaitis make up just 30 percent of the population.

Jowhar said the partial 12-hour lockdown has forced people to carry out their essential needs like shopping in a highly shortened period, which has caused harm to the people and the economy. He said this and other issues will be included in a grilling that Jowhar and another MP plan to file against the health minister.

Another opposition MP Ahmad Al-Azemi yesterday

reiterated that he will file to grill the health minister over the alleged mishandling of the coronavirus issue and other subjects. MP Khalil Al-Saleh called on the ministry to stop sending people who have taken two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to so-called institutional quarantine. He also demanded that the government must pay the cost of the hotel quarantine for citizens, otherwise it should send them home.

The health ministry yesterday reported 1,192 new cases of COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, taking total cases to 219,125, while 11 deaths were recorded, taking the death toll to 1,226. Ministry Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said the number of people receiving treatment in intensive care units has reached 232, with 14,360 others undergoing treatment. Sanad said the number of swabs performed in the past 24 hours reached 7,072, taking total tests to 1,967,210. Earlier, the ministry announced 1,331 cases had recovered in the past 24 hours, taking total recoveries to 203,539.

Meanwhile, Islamist MP Saleh Al-Mutairi yesterday submitted a draft law to amend article 79 of the constitution to make all future legislation in line with Islamic sharia. He called on MPs and Kuwaiti voters to help him in passing the amendment that will require that any law in the future must comply with sharia.

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Kuwait launches first Mobile Virtual Network Operator

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) announced yesterday the launching of a Mobile Virtual Network Operator (MVNO). The license for the first virtual operator, aimed at attracting foreign investors, is to be run by Virgin Mobile Middle East and Africa (VMMEA) and Kuwait Telecom Company (STC), the authority said in a statement to KUNA, adding that this step will boost competition in Kuwait's market.

It will also provide multiple new services in Kuwait with competitive prices, as well as provide job opportunities for both citizens and expats, CITRA noted. — KUNA (See Page 9)

Women's rights icon, author Saadawi dies

CAIRO: Famed Egyptian author Nawal El-Saadawi, a champion of women's rights who revolutionized discussions on gender in the Arab world, died yesterday at the age of 89, Al-Ahram newspaper said. Saadawi died in a Cairo hospital after suffering a long illness, her family said. A prolific author who shot to fame with widely translated novel "Women at Point Zero" (1975), Saadawi was a fierce advocate for women's empowerment in Egypt's deeply conservative and patriarchal society.



Nawal El-Saadawi

With more than 55 books to her name including the taboo-breaking work "Women and Sex", she was briefly jailed by late president Anwar Sadat and

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Morocco oasis farmers mourn date palm loss

FIGUIG, Morocco: Moroccan farmers in an isolated oasis on the Algerian border are bearing the brunt of regional tensions after Algiers expelled them from date groves they have worked for generations. The border between the arch-rivals has been closed since 1994, but Algeria had allowed some residents of the Moroccan frontier town of Figuig to cross into the date groves of Al-Arja, known to Algerians as the

Laaroda oasis.

In recent days, Algeria has withdrawn that right, deploying soldiers to enforce the move. "Everybody feels wronged," said Mohamed Jabbari, an unemployed 36-year-old who joined a protest in Figuig against the move. "Agriculture is the only resource we have. There's no work here, no factories."

On Thursday, some 4,000 people - around half of Figuig's population - attended an angry demonstration against Algeria's decision. Morocco's regional authorities organized a meeting to "examine possible solutions to mitigate the impact" of a decision they said was "temporary".

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FIGUIG, Morocco: A woman stands at a viewpoint overlooking this oasis town on the border with Algeria on March 19, 2021. — AFP

Lebanon moms march against ruling class

BEIRUT: Around one hundred women demonstrated in crisis-hit Lebanon on Saturday on the eve of Mother's Day in the country, expressing outrage at the ruling class. The mothers, some with their children, marched from an area once on Beirut's dividing line during the 1975-1990 civil war, to the city's port, which saw a catastrophic explosion last year - blamed on official negligence - that

killed more than 200 people and injured thousands.

Chanting anti-government slogans, they held signs addressing the ruling class. "You have stolen our money and our children's futures," several placards read. "The best gift would be your leaving," read another. Lebanon is battling its worst economic crisis in decades. The national currency has lost almost 90 percent of its value against the dollar on the black market and consumer prices have soared.

Some 55 percent of Lebanese now live below the poverty line, the United Nations says, and unemployment stood at 39.5 percent late last year. The government resigned after the

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BEIRUT: Lebanese women hold placards as they protest against the country's political paralysis and deep economic crisis on the eve of Mother's Day on Saturday. — AFP

Large asteroid (safely) zips past Earth

PARIS: The largest asteroid to pass by Earth this year swung closest yesterday, giving astronomers a rare chance for a good look at a space rock that formed at the dawn of our solar system. While in astronomical terms this marks a close encounter with the asteroid - called 2001 FO32 - NASA says

there is no threat of a collision with our planet "now or for centuries to come".

The nearest it gets will be two million kilometers away, according to the US space agency. That is roughly 5.25 times the distance of the Earth from the Moon but still close enough for 2001 FO32 to be classified as a "potentially hazardous asteroid". "We know the orbital path of 2001 FO32 around the Sun very accurately," said Paul Chodas, director of the Center for Near Earth Object Studies.

NASA says 2001 FO32 will pass by at about 124,000 km per hour faster than the speed at which most asteroids encounter Earth. The asteroid is estimated to be about 900 m in diameter and was dis-

covered 20 years ago. Astronomers are hoping to get a better understanding of the asteroid's size and a rough idea of its composition by studying light reflecting off its surface.

"When sunlight hits an asteroid's surface, minerals in the rock absorb some wavelengths while reflecting others," NASA said. "By studying the spectrum of light reflecting off the surface, astronomers can measure the chemical 'fingerprints' of the minerals on the surface of the asteroid." The asteroid was at its closest to Earth at around 1600 GMT yesterday, according to the Paris Observatory, France's largest astronomy research center.

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