

Local

# Air ambulance service rescues over 4,500 people in Kuwait

Rescuing patients in areas out of ambulances' reach



KUWAIT: These handout photos provided by the Ministry of Health show helicopters of the Kuwaiti ambulance and medical evacuation fleet.

KUWAIT: Having been launched by the Kuwaiti Health Ministry in the first quarter of 2015, the air ambulance and medical evacuation service has rescued more than 4,500 people. Air medical services are mainly intended to use air transportation, airplane or helicopter and to take patients from accident scenes to healthcare facilities, offering them prehospital and emergency care. In this context, the Health Ministry's Medical Emergency Department Monther Al-Jalalma underlined that airborne medical services are now unquestionably essential for rescuing patients, specifically at outlying desert and frontier areas where ambulances can hardly reach.

Speaking on the facility, the official said the paramount significance of the project stems from the fact that it provides critical medical care and transports those wounded in accidents, and even handles natural disasters like fire, where fast-track help matters a lot. The substantial service is always done in collaboration between several state bodies concerned, primarily the health, interior and defense ministries and Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), he said. He emphasized that his directorate is using all its potential in order to save the lives of citizens and residents, boasting that medical services are careful-

ly done nationwide. Swiftness matters so much in view of airborne rescue services, so it just takes a few minutes for a medically equipped plane to be on the spot, the medical official pointed out.

Meanwhile, Chairman of Al-Sabah Health District's Air Ambulance Center Naser Al-Sarhan said the facility is a landmark in medical services in



## Landmark in Kuwait's medical services

the country, and is part of the Health Ministry's blueprint purposed to revamp the medical system and back clinics and hospitals. The center boasts some 65 highly qualified, efficient and professional medical workers, two air ambulance planes and a jet aircraft to transport patients in need of overseas



medical care, he elaborated.

The service provider's Air Ambulance Base Commander Captain Jassem Boqambar said that they had initially used two helicopters for air ambulance services, together with a jet aircraft for medical evacuation. Boasting that all pilots are retired Kuwaiti aviators of the Air Force, he said they have carried out 4,565 operations since the air ambulance and medical evacuation facility was put in place. The contracted company was established by retired officers of the health, interior and defense ministries, KFF and Kuwait National

Guard, he said, expounding that it has 20 pilots, 20 medics, eight maintenance technicians, four helicopters and two jet aircraft.

Under the contract signed between the Health Ministry and the company, once given a tip about an emergency, a helicopter or a jet aircraft must be on the spot within 15 minutes and 24 hours respectively, he pointed out. Immediate response is of paramount significance to rescuing those wounded in accidents, he said, noting that medically equipped planes are always on standby for medical emergency.—KUNA

## Kuwait has the right to invest in residents' expertise: KCCI Chief

KUWAIT: Kuwait has invested in the expertise of residents and has the right to continue benefiting from their skills, Chairman of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) Mohammad Al-Saqer said, adding that world studies have proved that the age period between 60 and 70 years are the most productive.

The senior official was commenting in a statement yesterday on the Public Authority for Manpower's recent decision to allow residents aged 60 and over who do not hold a university degree to renew their residence permits, provided they pay an annual fee of KD 500, in addition to paying for private health insurance. Saqer said Kuwait views the issue of reforming the labor and population structure as a three-dimensional national cause, as it is seen as a key component in efforts to reform the



Mohammad Al-Saqer

state's budget situation "and the basic condition to strengthen the national identity through which Kuwait can move to become a producing country."

Saqer added that reforming the labor and population structure cannot be done with "partial and unstudied decisions," rather

through an integrated long-term plan that relies on Kuwait's needs and its developmental model. He said another dimension revolves around the argument of creating job opportunities for Kuwaitis in place of residents over 60 who wouldn't have been able to renew their visas under the old ban. Saqer noted that those job opportunities would not have attracted national manpower anyway "at least not at the present time." "It would have been better if efforts were instead redirected towards eliminating visa trafficking," he said. And while the new decision helps reduce pressure on the state's health services system, Saqer says it remains an "isolated decision" that is away from a comprehensive plan to reform the population structure.

statement. "This recent chaos in Iraq, escalated by this shameful attempt on the prime minister's life, proves once again that the Iraqi state should resolutely handle the issue of (unlicensed) firearm and outlawed groups," he underlined.

However, the bloc's chief voiced confidence that Iraqi security organs are able to protect state institutions and stand against any bid to undermine this Arab country's security and stability. He restated that the Arab League would carry on standing by Iraq and its people in order to overcome this critical time peacefully and safely.

The Arab Parliament also strongly condemned the failed drone "terrorist" attack that targeted Kadhem's residence. The Parliament stated in a statement that they stand with Iraq and its people in any measures they take in order to keep their country's security, stability and territorial integrity. The Parliament also affirmed that "the security of Iraq is part of the Arab national security", and demanded an urgent investigation regarding the failed assassination attempt targeting the Prime Minister.

Moreover, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) expressed strongly worded condemnation of the assassination attempt on life of the Iraqi Prime Minister, affirming that it is closely following latest updates on the situation. The Organization's Secretary-General Yousef Al-Othaimeen said in a press statement that the assassination attempt is a "terrorist act targeting Iraq's unity, security and stability". Othaimeen stressed the necessity of protecting Iraq's security, stability and territorial integrity, urging all political parties to resort to peaceful dialogue in order to overcome obstacles. Earlier yesterday, the Iraqi Joint Operation Command announced that Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi survived an attempted assassination involving an explosive-laden drone attack.—KUNA

## Many 60+ workers mull leaving Kuwait for good

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Many foreign workers aged 60 and above (without university degrees) are still contemplating whether to renew their residencies, wait for some more time or not renew at all. "I am still waiting for clarification about the private health insurance charges. The new rule is that KD 500 must be paid to the immigration department, and around KD 500 to KD 700 to private insurance companies. But many of us in this category are still waiting," a Jordanian employee told Kuwait Times.

"I have to pay it, whether it's KD 1,500 or KD 2,000, because I have to stay in Kuwait legally since my children are under my sponsorship," he said. "I hope the authorities will be sympathetic towards us. I've been in Kuwait since I was 18. I got married here, had kids and they are all under my sponsorship. I am 60 with a steady job here, so I have no option but to pay the new fees. It's difficult, especially during the pandemic, but again I have no choice," he added.

Last week, the Public Authority for Manpower allowed expats aged 60 and over who do not hold a university degree to renew their residence permits, provided they pay an annual fee of KD 500, in addition to paying for private health insurance. The decision means that the authority has scrapped a controversial decision it issued last year for elderly expats to leave Kuwait, some of whom have spent most of their lives here.

The government's legal body, the Fatwa and Legislation Department, ruled last month that the decision breaches the constitution and called for abolishing it. Close to 90,000 residents were reportedly affected by this decision.

A Filipina restaurant worker in her early 60s said she is no longer willing to renew her residence permit. "My employers won't pay - they said it's a big amount. So my decision is to stay as I have a job, even though I have no iqama for the past four months. But I am also packing my bags in case I am arrested," said Linda, who has worked in Kuwait for almost 33 years.

"I was very happy to hear last month that they were scrapping the KD 2,000 fee agreed before, but after I heard the new rules, I still don't think I have enough money to pay. I will set aside this amount instead and go home. KD 1,200 is a huge amount in the Philippines and I can start a small business with it," said Linda.

When private health insurance companies were contacted, they told Kuwait Times they have not received any directives about this new decision. "We are waiting for confirmation. At the moment, we only deal in regular health insurance," an insurance agent said.

Residents aged over 60 under article 22 (dependent) visas will continue paying the usual immigration fees plus the regular health insurance. Meanwhile, Minister of Commerce and Industry Abdullah Al-Salman exempted children and spouses of Kuwaiti women, holders of Palestinian passports and people born in Kuwait from the new decision.

The earlier decision was harshly criticized by many MPs and local human rights bodies as "inhuman", who repeatedly called on the government to cancel it. It was also seen by some as a means to reduce the number of foreign residents, who form close to 70 percent of Kuwait's population of 4.5 million.

## Kuwait strongly condemns attempted assassination on Iraq PM

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday strongly condemned the assassination attempt on Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi. The ministry said in a statement that this criminal act does not only target the Prime Minister, but it also targets Iraq's unity and achievements made on all levels, voicing confidence that the Iraqi people are able to face any act that undermines their national unity. It emphasized that Kuwait stands with Iraq in solidarity and supports all the measures taken to preserve its security, stability and sovereignty.

Meanwhile, GCC Secretary-General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf condemned the "wrongful" assassination attempt targeting Iraqi Prime Minister. Hajraf affirmed in a press release absolute opposition to such aggressions threatening the stability and security of Iraq, which is part of the security of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The GCC chief also expressed solidarity with Iraq and its people to safeguard the country's security, stability and territorial integrity.

In the meantime, Secretary-General of the Arab League Ahmad Abul-Gheit denounced, in the strongest words, the "disgraceful attempt" to target Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa. "This explosive-laden drone attack on the (Iraqi) prime minister's house targets the Iraqi state's prestige, security and stability," the Cairo-based Arab bloc said in a press

## PAAAFR, volunteers plant Sidr trees in Kaifan walkway



KUWAIT: A team from Kuwait's Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) planted seedlings of Sidr trees in Kaifan area's walkway, as part of the authority's efforts to increase the green areas in the country. PAAAFR's Director-General, Sheikh Mohammad Al-Yousef, and a group of volunteers planted around 240 seedlings of the Sidr tree. Ziziphus tree or Sidr is an evergreen tree or plant native to northern and tropical Africa, Southern and Western Asia. It is native to the Levant, East Africa and some tropical countries.—KUNA