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New COVID cases top 4,500 despite 82% vaccination rate

One MP, several Assembly employees test positive for coronavirus



KUWAIT: This photo taken yesterday shows the Kuwait Towers and Kuwait City engulfed in heavy fog. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The health ministry yesterday reported 4,548 new coronavirus cases as the pandemic continued to spread, despite an 82-percent vaccination rate announced by the ministry. National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said he declined a request by the health ministry to suspend Assembly sessions, adding that at least one lawmaker and a "large number" of Assembly employees have tested positive.

The health ministry also said the number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care units rose to 17, while those receiving treatment at hospitals increased to 200. With the number of cases detected yesterday, Kuwait has reported close to 30,000 cases since the start of the month, with the infection rate climbing to as high as 12.9 percent.

Kuwait currently has 28,466 active cases, a sharp hike from 3,467 cases at the start of January. There were only 272 active cases at the start of December, according to official figures. The ministry said in a statement yesterday that 568,000 people have

already taken the third booster dose. As many as 3.35 million people or 85.4 percent have taken one dose and 3.23 million, 82.4 percent, have taken two doses.

Meanwhile, a special Assembly session demanded by opposition MPs was not held yesterday because no Cabinet minister showed up, as ministers are in home quarantine after the health minister tested positive last week. Ghanem said yesterday he prevented some lawmakers from entering the Assembly chamber because they did not have a negative PCR test result, adding that no MP or employee will be allowed into the Assembly chamber without a negative PCR test result.

MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf said he was prevented from entering the Assembly chamber because the result of his PCR test did not come out. The speaker however insisted that he only applied the law and will continue to do so. Ghanem added the Assembly will hold a special session today to debate a number of draft laws on creating jobs for Kuwaitis, and amendments to the audiovisual law.

News in brief

Minister suspends four officers

KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Sabah gave orders to suspend four officers involved in an ongoing investigation for suspected violations committed during interrogations, the interior ministry announced yesterday. Sheikh Ahmad also gave orders to reconsider all procedures taken by the State Security Bureau and improve them in line with international practices, it added. — KUNA

80-yr-old dead after Zionist raid

RAMALLAH: An 80-year-old Palestinian was found dead in a village in the occupied West Bank yesterday, with the mayor reporting his body was still handcuffed after arrest by Zionist soldiers. Around 30 to 40 Zionist troops took part in the predawn operation in the village of Jiljiliya. Omar Abdulmajeed Asad and other family members were returning from visiting relatives when they were stopped by the soldiers. — AFP

Saudi harasser named and shamed

RIYADH: A Saudi has been named in a newspaper after his conviction for sexual harassment, in an apparent first under new laws tackling a subject that is often seen as taboo. A court in Madinah ordered the public identification of Yasser Muslim Al-Arawi, who was named in Okaz newspaper after he was sentenced to eight months in prison and fined 5,000 riyals (\$1,300). — AFP

Thailand eyes \$9 visitor fee

BANGKOK: Thailand will introduce a \$9 entry fee for foreign visitors from April, officials said yesterday, even as the kingdom seeks to lure travelers back and repair its COVID-battered tourism sector. The new 300 baht (\$9) charge will be incorporated into airfares, government spokesman Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana said. An estimated five million foreign tourists are expected to enter the kingdom in 2022, down from nearly 40 million a year before the pandemic. — AFP

UK PM sorry for partygate scandal amid calls to quit

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday apologized for attending a lockdown-breaching party held in his Downing Street garden, but deflected calls to resign as the opposition leader called him a "man without shame". After days of dismal headlines and collapsing poll ratings, Johnson said he regarded the newly revealed boozy get-together in May 2020 as a work event for Downing Street staff.

He conceded he did not appreciate how the event

would look to millions of Britons who were respecting COVID rules, even missing out on farewells to dying relatives. "And to them and to this House I offer my heartfelt apologies," Johnson told a stormy session of questions in the House of Commons. "With hindsight I should have sent everyone back inside. I should have found some other way to thank them (his staff)," he added, admitting he had been present for about 25 minutes.

Keir Starmer, leader of the main opposition Labour party, said the public believed Johnson was "lying through his teeth". "The only question is will the British public kick him out, will his party kick him out, or will he do the decent thing and resign? The prime minister's a man without shame," Starmer added, for the first time joining other opposition leaders in demanding Johnson's ouster.

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LONDON: A video grab shows British Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaking in the House of Commons yesterday. — AFP

US on 'threshold' of living with coronavirus: Fauci

WASHINGTON: Despite soaring cases and record-high COVID-19 hospitalizations, the United States is approaching the "threshold" of transitioning to living with the coronavirus as a manageable disease, Anthony Fauci said Tuesday. Speaking to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the top US scientist said eliminating COVID was unrealistic and that "Omicron, with its extraordinary, unprecedented degree of efficiency of transmissibility, will ultimately find just about everybody."

"There's no way we're going to eradicate this" virus, he said, given its contagiousness, its propensity to mutate into new variants and the large pool of unvaccinated people. Those up to date with their vaccines remain well protected against severe outcomes, but vaccine efficacy against infection has fallen. But "as Omicron goes up and down," the country will hopefully enter a new phase "where there'll be enough protection in (the) community, enough drugs available so that when someone does get infected and is in a high risk group, it will be very easy to treat that person," said Fauci.

"When we get there, there's that transition, and we may be on the threshold of that right now," he said, while also stressing that with the country currently recording almost a million infections a day, nearly 150,000 people in hospital and more than

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WASHINGTON: Dr Anthony Fauci shows a screen grab of a campaign website while answering questions during a Senate hearing on Tuesday. — AFP

Archaeologists from Europe back in Iraq

NASIRIYAH, Iraq: After war and insurgency kept them away from Iraq for decades, European archaeologists are making an enthusiastic return in search of millennia-old cultural treasures. "Come

and see!" shouted an overjoyed French researcher recently at a desert dig in Larsa, southern Iraq, where the team had unearthed a 4,000-year-old cuneiform inscription. "When you find inscriptions like that, in situ, it's moving," said Dominique Charpin, professor of Mesopotamian civilisation at the College de France in Paris.

The inscription in Sumerian was engraved on a brick fired in the 19th century BC. "To the god Shamash, his king Sin-iddinam, king of Larsa, king of Sumer and Akkad," Charpin translated with ease. Behind him, a dozen other European and Iraqi

archaeologists kept at work in a cordoned-off area where they were digging. They brushed off bricks and removed earth to clear what appeared to be the pier of a bridge spanning an urban canal of Larsa, which was the capital of Mesopotamia just before Babylon, at the start of the second millennium BC.

"Larsa is one of the largest sites in Iraq, it covers more than 200 hectares (500 acres)," said Regis Vallet, researcher at France's National Centre for Scientific Research, heading the Franco-Iraqi mission.

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