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NEW COVID-19 CASES RISE TO 717 IN 24 HOURS, 3 DEAD

Firms test stopgap antibody drugs

Kuwait awaits WHO-approved vaccine

KUWAIT CITY, Aug 12, (Agencies): Kuwait's Ministry of Health said Wednesday that 717 people tested positive for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), while three patients died of the disease in the past 24 hours.

The fresh figures bring the country's total number of confirmed infections and death toll to 73,785 and 489 respectively, the Health Ministry's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad told KUNA.

Sanad added. Medical teams conducted 4,397 swab tests in the past 24 hours, raising total swabs since the outbreak of the virus to 543,858.

Earlier, the Health Ministry announced the recovery of 692 people from the virus, taking the total up to 65,451. After the recent announcement made by Russia to adopt the first Russian vaccine against COVID-19 amid expectations to begin production in September, Ministry of Health in Kuwait has begun following the latest developments and clinical trials for any COVID-19 vaccine that is officially approved by the World Health Organization (WHO), reports Al-Qabas daily quoting informed sources.

They said, "The ministry has a specialized technical committee to follow up the most prominent treatments and vaccines used worldwide. This committee includes consultants and experts in infectious and internal diseases. They follow up the latest global developments and medicines that can be used for treating diseases including the treatments currently used by the ministry for treating coronavirus patients".

In response to a question about whether Kuwait is one among the 20 countries that have requested for one billion doses of the Russian vaccine according to statements issued by Russian officials, the sources clarified that no doses have been requested for by Kuwait until now.

Requests to import any quantity of this vaccine or any others are subject to standards. Measures that must be met before ordering include obtaining the desired scientific medical results, efficacy against the virus, and official approval of the World Health Organization or the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI).

None of the other Gulf countries have initiated a request for the Russian vaccine, as it has not been formally approved by regulatory health organizations. No comprehensive scientific studies were submitted on its effectiveness, safety and assurance.

Companies test drugs

With a coronavirus vaccine still months off, companies are rushing to test what may be the next best thing: drugs that deliver antibodies to fight the virus right away, without having to train the immune system to make them.

Antibodies are proteins the body makes when an infection occurs; they attach to a virus and help it be eliminated. Vaccines work by tricking the body into thinking there's an infection so it makes antibodies and remembers how to do that if the real bug turns up.

But it can take a month or two after vaccination or infection for the most effective antibodies to form. The experimental drugs short-cut that process by giving concentrated versions of specific ones that worked best against the coronavirus in lab and animal tests.

"A vaccine takes time to work, to force the development of antibodies. But when you give an antibody, you get immediate protection," said University of North Carolina virologist Dr Myron Cohen. "If we can generate them in large concentrations, in big vats in an antibody factory ... we can kind of bypass the immune system."

These drugs are believed to last for a month or more and could give quick, temporary immunity to people at high risk of infection, such as health workers and housemates of someone with COVID-19. If they proved effective and if a vaccine doesn't materialize or protect as hoped, the drugs might eventually be considered for wider use, perhaps for teachers or other groups.

They're also being tested as treatments, to help the immune system and prevent severe symptoms or death.

"The hope there is to target people who are in the first week of their illness and that we can treat them with the antibody and prevent them from getting sick," said Dr Marshall Lyon, an infectious disease specialist helping to test one such drug at Emory University in Atlanta.

Having such a tool "would be a really momentous thing in our fight against COVID," Cohen said.

Vaccines are seen as a key to controlling the virus, which has been confirmed to have infected more than 20 million people worldwide and killed more than 738,000. Several companies are racing to develop vaccines, but the results of the large final tests needed to evaluate them are months away.

The antibody drugs are "very promising" and, in contrast, could be available "fairly soon," said Dr Janet Woodcock, a US Food and Drug Administration official who is leading government efforts to speed COVID-19 therapies. Key studies are underway and some answers should come by early fall.

One company, Eli Lilly, has already started manufacturing its antibody drug, betting that studies now underway will give positive results.

"Our goal is to get something out as soon as possible" and to have hundreds of thousands of doses ready by fall, said Lilly's chief scientific officer, Dr Daniel Skovronsky.

Another company that developed an antibody drug cocktail against Ebola - Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Inc - now is testing one for coronavirus.

"The success with our Ebola program gives us some confidence that we can potentially do this again," said Christos Kyrtas, a Regeneron microbiologist who helped lead that work.

Regeneron's drug uses two antibodies to enhance chances the drug will work even if the virus evolves to evade action by one.

Emerged

Lilly is testing two different, single-antibody drugs - one with the Canadian company AbCellera and another with a Chinese company, Junshi Biosciences. In July, Junshi said no safety concerns emerged in 40 healthy people who tried it and that larger studies were getting underway.

Others working on antibody drugs include Amgen and Adaptive Biotechnologies. The Singapore biotech company Tychan Pte Ltd also is testing an antibody drug and has similar products in development for Zika virus and yellow fever.

"I'm cautiously optimistic" about the drugs, said the nation's top infectious diseases expert, Dr Anthony Fauci. "I'm heartened by the experience that we had with Ebola," where the drugs proved effective.

What could go wrong?

The antibodies may not reach all of the places in the body where they need to act, such as deep in the lungs. All the antibody drugs are given through an IV and must make their way through the bloodstream to wherever they're needed.

The virus might mutate to avoid the antibody - the reason Regeneron is testing a two-antibody combo that binds to the virus in different places to help prevent its escape.

Skovronsky said Lilly stuck with one antibody because manufacturing capacity would essentially be cut in half to make two, and "you will have less doses available." If a single antibody works, "we can treat twice as many people," he said.

The antibodies might not last long enough. If they fade within a month, it's still OK for treatment since COVID-19 illness usually resolves in that time. But for prevention, it may not be practical to give infusions more often than every month or two.

A San Francisco company, Vir Biotechnology Inc, says it has engineered antibodies to last longer than they usually do to avoid this problem. GlaxoSmithKline has invested \$250 million in Vir to test them.

Giving a higher dose also may help. If half of antibodies disappear after a month, "if you give twice as much, you will have two months' protection," Lilly's Skovronsky said.

The big fear: Antibodies may do the opposite of what's hoped and actually enhance the virus' ability to get into cells or stimulate the immune system in a way that makes people sicker. It's a theoretical concern that hasn't been seen in testing so far, but large, definitive experiments are needed to prove safety.

"As best as we can tell, the antibodies are helpful," Lyon said.

Opinion

Beirut Med Switzerland, not Nasrallah's Kandahar

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

RESIGNATION of the Lebanese government is not the end; rather it is the beginning.

In this case, the responsibility of the human conscience comes before the national responsibility which forces all officials in power - from the top of the pyramid to the bottom - to stand in front of the truth mirror and say everything they know. This also applies to Hassan Diab, the head of the government.

In addition, all the ministers who participated in the government of "burying the dead", as referred to by the Lebanese, should swallow their arrogance for a moment in order to expiate for this unforgivable sin. Instead of Diab casting blame on ghosts, he should name the corrupt, the perpetrators and facilitators who enabled this "nuclear bomb" to enter his hometown.

Considering what recently happened in Lebanon and based on historical events, never before had a war destroyed 70,000 housing units and turned a port into smooth plain ground within just a minute.

Therefore, revealing the facts is no longer a matter related to political game, but rather to the conscience of the individual, hence becoming a necessity.

People want to know how the militias and the mafias imposed their decisions. How did the Iranian devilish party prevent the advancement of reforms, the fight against corruption, and deterring gangs of pillage and plunder from subduing the Lebanese people?!

It is true that the crisis in Lebanon throughout the past two decades was caused by this terrorist group that violated everything. However, it would not have been able to bully everyone without having someone who colluded with this group to cover its weapons, and in return, cover corruption.

Today the opportunity is available for officials to cleanse themselves from their sins. The popular uprising, which has reignited after this scandalous disaster, is the last chance for the Lebanese to be liberated from the clutches of the mercenary gang that made their country a base for Iranian terrorism in the Mediterranean region.

Whoever thinks that the world will act based on the saying, "Allah forgive whatever may have happened in the past" is mistaken.

Rather, it is far from whether Hezbollah filled the port with its smuggled explosives, or facilitated the detonation, or participated in the corruption that is protecting the perpetrators of the crime.

This disaster itself makes everyone, especially the countries bordering the Mediterranean region, to anticipate any terrorist act of this kind, since the sponsor of Hezbollah, i.e. Iran, is challenging the international community with a nuclear project and ballistic missiles, and brags that it is in the scope of a number of capitals, not only in this region, but also in Europe and other regions.

In the past, Saddam Hussein, before he committed his heinous crime in August 1990 against Kuwait, had bragged that he was in possession of weapons that could "burn half of Israel", and that there were weapons of mass destruction through which he could "bring the enemies to their knees".

Subsequently, the matter escalated to the point of the coalition forces being advised to prepare 50,000 caskets for their soldiers in the event that their army attacked to liberate Kuwait.

Eventually, Saddam's forces were defeated and the weapons were never found. In fact, when the coalition forces entered Iraq in 2003, it became clear that the hype was just aimed to intimidate, and he himself could not find shelter to hide apart from a hole located in a remote farm.

Today, the world will not allow Iran, which extends its octopus arms to Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Lebanon and leads major networks for drug smuggling and money laundering, to become an international blackmail force.

The sanctions imposed on Iran continues, and we have started seeing the Iranian influence diminish even in several regional arenas, and currently weaken in Lebanon.

Therefore, if the honorable people do not take advantage of this opportunity to get rid of Hassan Nasrallah's gang, they will remain prisoners of terrorism that will keep on ravaging their country, preventing any reform, and transforming Beirut from the Switzerland of the Mediterranean to Kandahar.

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Riot police stand guard in front of the Mohammad al-Amin Mosque, during a protest following last week's explosion that killed many and devastated the city, in Beirut, Lebanon on Aug 11.

Director General of Kuwait Ports Authority (KPA) and President of the Arab Sea Ports Federation Sheikh Yousef Abdullah Sabah Al-Nasser Al-Sabah said Tuesday the KPA is ready to provide all necessary assistance for the re-operation of the ports of Tripoli, Sidon and Tyre in Lebanon. This was brought up to KUNA in a statement by Sheikh Yousef Abdullah, who is also CEO of the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport (AASMTM), on the sidelines

of his meeting with Lebanese Charge d'Affairs to Kuwait Basil Oweidat. A couple of Kuwaiti Air Force planes carrying humanitarian aid landed on Tuesday at Rafic Hariri International Airport after the deadly explosion in Beirut. Abdullah Al-Shaheen, a counselor at Kuwait's embassy in Lebanon, told KUNA that both aircraft carried more than 105 tons of food, to reach a total of 505 tons carried by 11 aircraft since the Beirut explosion. Kuwait's relief aid included food and medical supplies, he said, adding that it will continue supporting Lebanon in the coming days. (Agencies)

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Other Voices

Oh Minister of Health, this is the reward of those who did this to us

By Ali Ahmed Al-Baghli

Former Minister of Oil

ONE of the bribes our rational government gives the voters who elected the disgraceful and shameful members of Parliament is overseas medical treatment.

Until the Day of Judgment, we will never know what grave sin we committed to deserve such magnitude of corruption, which is breeding without deterrence in our country.

The scandals of the oil tankers and investments persist to this day. They are laden with laundered money worth billions, and bribes that contaminate all projects without shaking the chairs of any of the honorables - until Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad came and shook the highchairs of his kins and kiths; perhaps he was removed in order to prevent him from serving as an example to others - even the honorables among the aides and influential who are controlling from behind the scene had blinked.

We are not talking about the heads of the oversight authorities, control and quasi-judicial bodies only, because they are fortunate and steadfast on their highchairs to the extent that even the Sphinx in the desert of the pyramids envy them for their highchairs where they sit and do none of their oversight and control duties against corruption, interpreting the saying - "I see no evil, I hear no evil, I speak no evil," and so on.

They do not even give silent appreciation and gratitude, which preserves blessings, to those who put them on the highchairs ... nevertheless, this is not our topic for the day.

Our topic is about the Ministry of Health and its catastrophic or "coronic"



Al-Baghli

Draft residence bill hikes fines

KUWAIT CITY, Aug 12: While many are still trying to understand the new draft law on residency of foreigners, which was approved by the Council of Ministers during its meeting held a few days ago, informed sources denied that the law sets a higher time limit for an expatriate's stay in the country or that it has been set at "five years", reports Al-Seyassah daily.

They clarified that this misunderstanding resulted from misinterpretation of the text of the bill's Article 13, stressing that the bill mainly aims to address deficiencies and combat residency trafficking.

The sources explained that the draft law stipulates an increase in the fine for violators of the residency law from KD 2 per day to KD 4, and KD 10 per day for violators of visit visas.

Article 13 grants a new type of normal residency, which is valid for a period of ten years, to investors and real estate owners as well as divorced women or widows of Kuwaiti men with children, and for the non-Kuwaiti husbands and children of Kuwaiti women.

The draft law introduces new provisions in Articles 18 and 19 for combating residency trafficking and identifies the violations associated with it, in light of what has been proven through the illegal practices of a few individuals who have taken residency trafficking as a means of profit.

According to the draft law, "A domestic worker may not stay outside Kuwait for more than four months, otherwise his right

to the granted residency shall be forfeited". Regarding the rules for the deportation of foreigners, Article 21 stipulates that the deportation order includes the members of the relevant foreigners' families, and those who are assigned to support them, unless it is proved that they have a clear means of subsistence".

As for Article 22, the period for the arrest of a foreigner, against whom an order has been issued for deportation, has increased to a maximum of 30 days at the end of the granted period instead of 15 days stipulated in the current law.

Article 26 prohibits a foreigner who was previously deported from returning to Kuwait except with the permission of the Minister of Interior.

Article 6 mandates every foreigner who gives birth to a newborn to submit an application with the child's passport to the Ministry of Interior within four months from the date of birth of the child to obtain either a residence permit or a time limit to leave the country.

As for Article 14 (paragraph 3), an employer is required to notify the Ministry of Interior if his domestic worker or equivalent has left work, within a week of the latter's leaving.

According to Article 27, those who violate the provisions of Articles 6, 14 (paragraph 3), 15 (paragraph 3), and 16 of the law shall face punishment of a fine not less than KD 600 and not more than KD 2,000.