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WHO recommendations on in Kuwait



Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway. — Jaber Abdulkhaleq — KUNA

'No cure'

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 4: Kuwait started implementing recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) meetings in dealing with coronavirus even before the issuance of these recommendations on Jan 29-30, says Health Minister Dr Bassel Al-Sabah.

The minister made the statement Tuesday when he and his accompanying team, which included Undersecretary Dr Mustafa Reda and Head of the Supreme Council for International Health Laws Dr Sundus Qabandi, delivered a presentation on the virus.

The Assembly allotted two hours of Tuesday's session for deliberations on the virus, during which the minister disclosed the Media Committee at the ministry met on Feb 2 to tackle the issue.

He clarified WHO have not taken a decision to impose travel ban due to coronavirus until now; adding the GCC responded to the request of Kuwait to hold an emergency meeting on Jan 29 when the recommendations were presented.

He said the Supreme Council for International Health Laws received the first notification from WHO on Dec 31, 2019.

He revealed the recommendations include recalling diplomatic delegations and their families from China and limiting travel to China for very urgent reasons only, affirming that Kuwait had earlier taken such precautionary measures.

In their presentation, the health minister and his team revealed the virus was discovered in China on Dec 31, 2019 while examining pneumonia patients. He explained the virus is transmitted from animals to humans and from humans to humans. He pointed out the virus was first recognized in 1960 but it was not dangerous then and the symptoms are similar to flu. He added the virus was known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003. It appeared as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in the Arab Peninsula in 2012. At the time, the virus was transmitted from camels to people.

He went on to say the recently discovered coronavirus has no cure until now; indicating patients are merely given medicines to reduce temperature, drips and antibiotics.

He added that he presided over the Emergency Committee meeting on Jan 22. He had a meeting with the directors of hospitals on Jan 26, during which the directors were informed about the recommendations. On the same day, the Central Emergency Committee met to take the relevant procedures such as installing thermal cameras in Kuwait International Airport and at the borders, as well as distributing masks, gloves and sterilization equipment to hospitals.

The public awareness plan of the Media Committee was implemented on Jan 28, including the heightened visibility of senior ministry officials through interviews on television, other media outlets, social media and daily newspapers in order to respond to questions and deal with rumors.

The media campaign included distribution of brochures in schools, universities and public facilities; in addition to organizing daily workshops and lectures.

Cards were given to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) including forms to be filled by passengers arriving from countries where the virus is active. In case these passengers have no symptoms, they are monitored for 14 days — the period that the virus remains in body before the symptoms appear. If symptoms appear any time during these 14 days, the patient is referred to the hospital, isolated and laboratory tests are done.

The minister affirmed distribution of the special equipment to all hospitals, whether public or private; where as special wards and isolated rooms are allocated in every hospital to be ready to receive possible coronavirus cases any time. He also confirmed the formation of a quick intervention team to assist emergency teams in hospitals.

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Opinion

Don't worry, Maryam, the truth is always bitter

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

ACTING based on the principle of hold-and-handcuff-him, the MPs in the National Assembly are working towards exploiting the remaining part of the current term for electoral accomplishments or heroism. This is why they deliberately escalated the issue against the Minister of Finance after they realized that the government was not ready to sacrifice its ministers in the first test.

However, the honorable lawmakers missed the target this time around, because their campaign against Minister Maryam Al-Aqeel indicates frivolity, and not that national responsibility that the national legislators should assume. Al-Aqeel talked about the financial situation of Kuwait with transparency and frankness.

They are striving to clamp down on every logical voice cautioning against the country's fate if the frivolous waste continues, because what she said contradicts the desires of the lawmakers who are facing electoral battles with public fund and national interest. They ignore the facts contained in the reports of reputable international and local institutions on a daily basis. Those people consider the truth according to a popular adage — "As someone who is authorized in Malta"

Apparently, the Minister of Finance understands very well that her statement is a reality and it is not meant to appease people, because some of its aspects affect the interests of the nominees and a segment of the society. She can't be different from all the finance ministers across the world in her position, or even the accountants who are most hated by people especially other employees in their companies. It is due to the nature of their job that forces them to save for sustainability, and prevent deficit or deal with it in case the budget has recorded an aspect of it. It means the minister must say the truth irrespective of how bitter it is.

The lawmakers in Kuwait neglected a whole lot of legislations without discussing them. They include, but not limited to, removal of subsidies which have been costing the country KD 7 billion annually or the public loan law that should have been approved many years back. They neglected it for their personal battles, settling scores with ministers for refusing to push their transactions through and several other parochial interests that hurt vast majority of citizens.

The laws concerning tenders and commitments require update and transparency to ensure the national treasury is not burdened by the current appeasement. Citizens end up bearing the brunt of the corruption that has reached the level of costing the country twofold or manifold of the actual cost through variation orders.

At this juncture, it will be lovely if the concerned authorities benefit from the review carried out by Saudi Arabia through which it discovered that all projects executed from 1980 until a few years back contained massive wastage in the form of bribes and gratifications of around 10-15 percent of the general budget. This is why the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman changed the system relating to projects.

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Anti-government protesters chant slogans while holding national flags during a demonstration against the newly-appointed Prime Minister Mohammed Allawi on Feb 3, in Tahrir Square, Baghdad, Iraq. (AP)

Top US general 'bids' to stem pullout moves

ABOARD A US MILITARY AIRCRAFT, Feb 4, (Agencies): The top US commander for the Middle East slipped quietly into Iraq Tuesday, as the Trump administration works to salvage relations with Iraqi leaders and shut down the government's push for an American troop withdrawal.

Marine Gen Frank McKenzie became the most senior US military official to visit since an American drone strike in Baghdad killed a top Iranian general, enraging the Iraqis.

McKenzie met with Iraq leaders in Baghdad and then went to see American troops at al Asad Air base, which was bombed by Iran last month in retaliation for the drone attack.

His visit comes amid heightened anti-American sentiment that has fueled violent protests, rocket attacks on the embassy and a vote by the Iraqi parliament pushing for withdrawal of US troops from the country. And it raises questions about whether the appearance of a high-profile US military commander could spur compromise, or simply inflame tensions and scuttle ongoing negotiations to put Patriot missile batteries in Iraq to better protect coalition forces.

Two reporters traveling with McKenzie for the past two weeks around the Middle East did not go with him into Iraq because the stop was added late and they didn't have required visas.

Top US leaders have so far flatly dismissed Iraqi demands for US troops to leave, adopting what appears to be a wait-and-see attitude with the hope that the problems will pass.

Iraqis, however, were furious over the drone strike at Baghdad's international airport on Jan 3 that targeted and killed Qassem Suleimani, Iran's most powerful general, but also struck down an Iraq general who was with him. The Iraqi, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, was the deputy commander of Iran-backed militias known as the Popular Mobilization Forces.

In response to what Iraqi leaders called a breach of sovereignty, Parliament passed a non-binding resolution urging US troop withdrawal.

But after Iran struck back on Jan 8, launching ballistic missiles at two Iraqi bases where American troops were stationed, the US doubled down and asked to bring the Patriot systems into the country.

There were no Patriots or other air defenses in Iraq capable of shooting down ballistic missiles at the time of the Iranian strike. No forces were killed, but at least 64 have been diagnosed with traumatic brain injury.

Thus far, the Iraqis have not approved the request. "That is one of the matters we have to work on and work through" with the Baghdad government, Defense Secretary Mark Esper told a recent Pentagon news conference. He and Army Gen Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have made clear that they want Patriots in Iraq to better protect service members there.

The United States has more than 6,000 troops in Iraq to train and advise Iraqi security forces in their fight against extremist groups like the Islamic State and to provide protection for those troops.

The European Union has welcomed the designation of a new Prime Minister, Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi, in Iraq as "an important step towards overcoming the political deadlock in the country."

Execution for alleged N-spy

TEHRAN, Iran, Feb 4, (Agencies): Iran said Tuesday that its top court confirmed a death sentence for an Iranian man convicted of spying for the CIA, with state media alleging that he had shared details of the Islamic Republic's nuclear program with the American spy agency.

Judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili identified the purported spy as Amir Rahimpour and said he would be executed soon. Esmaili did not elaborate on what Rahimpour was accused of doing, nor on his age or background.

A report by the state-run IRNA news agency alleged that Rahimpour received money from the CIA to share details of Iran's nuclear program.

"While being in touch with the spy agency, he earned a lot of money as wages as he tried to deliver some information from Iran's nuclear program to the American agency," the IRNA report said. Rahimpour "had been identified and prosecuted and sentenced to death and recently, the country's National Supreme Court confirmed the sentence and, God willing, he will be punished soon."

The CIA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Esmaili said two other alleged spies for the CIA each received 15-year prison sentences — 10 years for spying and five years for acting against national security.

Esmaili did not name those arrested, only saying they worked in the "charitable field," without elaborating.

Iran in the past has sentenced alleged American and Israeli spies to death. The last such spy executed was Shahram Amiri, who defected to the US at the height of Western efforts to thwart Iran's nuclear program. When he returned in 2010, he was welcomed with flowers by government leaders and even went on the Iranian talk-show circuit. Then he mysteriously disappeared.

He was hanged in August 2016, the same week that Tehran executed a group of militants and a year after Iran agreed to a landmark accord to limit uranium enrichment in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

Riyadh backs Palestinians

EU rejects US plan

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has contacted the Kuwaiti embassy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to follow up on the issue of abuses 'hurled' at Kuwait by a Saudi citizen in a video clip posted on a social networking site so that necessary measures can be taken, reports Al-Rai daily quoting diplomatic sources.

On the issue of Saudi Arabia's decision to prevent Kuwaitis from leaving without paying fines for traffic violations committed in the Kingdom, the sources emphasized that Kuwait does not interfere in the internal affairs and procedures of other countries.

KUWAIT CITY: The name Kuwait was mentioned in a court verdict in Britain looked into a suspicious contract involving the Airbus Company determined to know the truth about the alleged kickbacks, reports Al-Qabas quoting sources.

The court is said to have imposed a £3 billion fine on the company according to what the Guardian newspaper said recently. The countries in which bribes were received are Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Taiwan and Ghana ... between 2011 and 2015.

Other countries that are being investigated for the possibility of receiving kickbacks are China, Japan, Brazil, Turkey and Kuwait to win contracts for the supply of aircraft.

The Guardian stated there is a network of secret agents who pay huge bribes. Other sources confirmed that bribes are usually paid in some countries to politicians who urge national companies directly or indirectly to conclude contracts that they can benefit from in the form of commissions if the deal falls through.

On the domestic front, it was reported that in February 2014, the Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) signed a contract with Airbus for the purchase of 25 A350 and A320neo aircraft that began delivery in 2019, after the Kuwaiti government assumed an open financial guarantee to complete the deal.

BEIRUT: Lebanon's only English-language newspaper announced on Tuesday that it was temporarily suspending its print edition because of financial challenges as the country passes through its worst economic crisis in decades.

The Daily Star said its website and social media platforms would continue work as usual "to offer first-rate news coverage and content from Lebanon, the Middle East and beyond." (AP)

BEIRUT: A military investigative judge charged a Lebanese-American man with murder and torture of Lebanese citizens on Tuesday, crimes he allegedly committed during Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon, judicial officials said. The accusations could carry a death sentence.

Amer Fakhoury was confessed to working as a senior warden at Khiam Prison, which was run by an Israel-backed Lebanese militia. Fakhoury was detained after returning to his native Lebanon from the US in September. However, he's undergoing cancer treatment, and it remains unclear if he'll be able to stand trial. (AP)

BRUSSELS, Feb 4, (Agencies): The European Union on Tuesday rejected US President Donald Trump's proposal for securing peace in the Middle East and expressed concern about Israel's plans to annex more Palestinian land.

Trump's plan, which was unveiled last week, would foresee the eventual creation of a Palestinian state, but it falls far short of minimal Palestinian demands and would leave sizable chunks of the occupied West Bank in Israeli hands.

In a statement, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell underlined the bloc's commitment to a two-state solution, based along the 1967 lines, with the possibility of mutually agreed land-swaps, made up of the state of Israel and "an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable state of Palestine."

Borrell said the US initiative "departs from these internationally agreed parameters."

"To build a just and lasting peace, the unresolved final status issues must be decided through direct negotiations between both parties," Borrell said.

"This includes notably the issues related to borders, the status of Jerusalem, security and the refugee question."

Trump's plan was welcomed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has dismissed it as "nonsense." Gulf Arab states also rejected the White House plan as "biased." While Israeli officials were present for its unveiling, no Palestinian representatives attended.

Netanyahu has said he wants to move forward with plans to annex West Bank territory.

"We are especially concerned by statements on the prospect of annexation of the Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank," Borrell said.

He suggested that the EU might consider legal action by saying that any "steps towards annexation, if implemented, could not pass unchallenged."

The Palestinians seek all of the West Bank and East Jerusalem — areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war — for an independent state and the removal of more than 700,000 Israeli settlers from these areas.

But the plan sides heavily with Netanyahu's hard-line nationalist vision for the region and shunts aside many of the Palestinians' core demands.

EU foreign ministers have discussed in recent months whether the bloc should modify its Middle East policy amid growing concern that settlement activity and US diplomatic moves like the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, are undermining the chances of a two-state solution.

Ireland and Luxembourg are among a small group of countries that support a change of position but no heavyweight member country is backing them.

The Saudi cabinet Tuesday restated the Kingdom's backing to ongoing efforts to find a just and total solution to the Palestinian cause.

The cabinet said during its customary weekly meeting that Saudi Arabia has exerted great efforts to back the Palestinian people at international gatherings, citing its 2002 peace initiative as a relevant unequivocal paradigm.