

MP Al-Dallal submits queries on coronavirus to Al-Saleh

'Parliament should discuss gradual re-opening plan with govt'

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
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KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The Parliament should discuss the gradual re-opening plan with the government, says MP Yousef Al-Fadalah. Al-Fadalah suggested that the plan should take into consideration the health condition of employees suffering from chronic diseases and female employees who are preg-

nant, because their immune system is weak. Meanwhile, MP Muhammad Al-Dallal submitted queries on coronavirus to Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. He asked if the Council of Ministers studied the impact of coronavirus on the plans of Kuwait such as the 2035 vision, if the council has alternative plans, if

the council studied the hypothesis that coronavirus will remain for a long period, and if there are plans to deal with the issue in the long term and 'coexist' with the virus in terms of social, economic, health and security fields. He inquired if Kuwait studied the plans of other countries in order to get some ideas to lay down its own plans, and steps taken by the Cabinet to coordinate the efforts of relevant

bodies to implement such plans like the civil society organizations, official planning institutions and academic institutions and figures. On the other hand, MP Hamdan Al-Azmi forwarded queries to Minister of Finance Barrak Al-Shitan on the privileges and allowances granted to the members and chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) before April 1, 2018 com-

pared to the privileges and allowances allotted after the appointment of the current board. He wants to know if the current board amended the decree on allowances and incentives. If yes, he requested for a copy of the decree. He also demanded for the list of current board members with their allowances and incentives, as well as the list of employees appointed as assistant of the chief executive

officer (CEO) of KAC along with their curriculum vitae. He asked if they were appointed according to the relevant procedures including job advertisements and interview, if those appointed as heads of departments and assistants of the CEO are highly qualified, if retirees were appointed to administrative posts, and if yes, he requested for a list of their names along with their positions and reasons for hiring them.

'Citizens, residents spend KD 537 million in 17 days'

KNET preps study to measure rates of spending during partial curfew

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The CEO of Joint Automated Banking Services Company (KNET) Abdullah Al-Ajmi revealed that the volume of spending by citizens and residents from May 1-17 reached 537.180 million dinars, reports Rai daily.

Al-Ajmi disclosed that the total withdrawals exceeded 1.123 billion dinars in April, compared to 1.672 billion in April 2019, while the expenses in March reached about 1.385 billion, all of which indicate successive declines in the volume of spending in general.

He pointed out that the total daily withdrawals of citizens and residents declined during the ban period to about 16 million dinars, compared to the size of last Saturday's withdrawals reaching 15.6 million dinars, compared to the average withdrawals of approximately 50 million dinars that were disbursed before the Corona crisis.

In details, Al-Ajmi indicated that KNET prepared a study to measure the rates of local spending during the partial ban period, specifically since the first of April. It was discovered that the exchange aspects during this period and within the total ban period focus on purchases in the cooperative societies and markets, which accounted for about 80 percent of the total exchange in this period.

Withdrawals

He explained that the rate of daily withdrawals executed through POS devices reached 10 million dinars during the period between April 1 and before the total ban scheduled for May 9, indicating the rate fell by 65 percent since the beginning of the total ban.

He pointed out that the highest daily withdrawal rate implemented through point of sale devices since the beginning of April and until 9 May this year amounted to 16 million dinars, which reached the lowest daily rate of 6 million dinars. This reflects a wide gap in the curve of withdrawals whose strength is determined according to various considerations.

He explained that the average withdrawals implemented through POS devices have declined significantly since the approval of total ban on the 10th of this month, registering a decline of about 3.5 million dinars out of 10 million dinars withdrawn during the partial ban period, noting the largest withdrawals made through the points of sale in the past 8 days amounted to 4 million dinars.

It is worth mentioning the points of sale operations during the month of March amounted to 547 million dinars compared to 784 million dinars withdrawn through devices last February, and 832 million dinars were withdrawn in March 2019, which means the value of operations declined by about 160 million dinars last April compared to March.

The highest number

With regard to automated "cash" withdrawals, Al-Ajmi said the highest number of cash withdrawals in the previous 50 days was recorded prior to announcing the date of the total ban, noting that cash withdrawals on Friday, May 8, amounted to 28 million dinars and the average of cash withdrawals up to the day of implementing the total ban reached 13 million dinars. The highest rate of withdrawals "other than the day of the attack on cash" reached an average of 20 million dinars, and the lowest rate of withdrawals amounted to 8 million dinars.

Of course, electronic payment has been most prevalent after the total ban, as Al-Ajmi indicated the average daily rate of electronic withdrawals reached 10 million dinars in the first phase of the ban, then rose to 15 million dinars after instituting home delivery service.

Last March, the value of online withdrawals amounted to 354 million dinars, compared to 307 million dinars in March 2019. As for the number of operations, Internet withdrawals increased from 5.3 million transactions in February to 6 million in March, compared to 4.4 million in March 2019.



Top: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet meeting, and (above) another photo of the meeting.

Operations resume next Wed

Kuwait stock exchange to go on 3-day Eid recess as of Sunday

KUWAIT CITY, May 19, (KUNA): Kuwait's stock exchange, Boursa Kuwait, said it would go on a three-day break for the Eid Al-Fitr holidays starting Sunday.

The stock exchange's working hours will begin again on Wednesday, read a statement on its website.

Trading closed on Tuesday with the stock market index up by 68.98 points to 4,894.35 points, representing a 1.43 percent leap.

Value of govt contracts for 64 days reaches KD 752m

SAB prevents waste of hundreds of thousands of dinars

KUWAIT CITY, May 19, (KUNA): Kuwait State Audit Bureau (SAB) said Sunday it prevented waste of hundreds of thousands of Kuwaiti dinars for cancelling a Ministry of Defense's request to buy a large quantity of sanitizers because the Ministry of Health submitted a similar demand but with lesser prices.

The MoD submitted a request to SAB to purchase 200,000 sanitizers, 500ml size, for 2,950 KD each, but the MoH tabled a demand to purchase the same sanitizers from a local factory but with 880 fils per unit, said Khawla Al-Hathran, acting director of prior monitoring department for economic affairs. SAB, she said, informed the MoD about the variation of prices which prompted the ministry to withdraw the request.

SAB, added Al-Hathran, thus prevented the waste of KD 390,000 (USD 1.248 million).

Al-Hathran said SAB was keen on preventing waste of public funds.

Meanwhile, the value of government contracts for urgent cases from March 12 to May 16 (64 days) reached KD 752 million -- about 558 contracts, while the savings from these contracts totaled KD4.1 million, reports Al-Anba daily.

The State Audit Bureau (SAB) studied urgent contracts related to ongoing efforts to deal with coronavirus. The data released by the bureau recently revealed that the number of Health

Cash decline

Al-Ajmi noted that after the total ban, cash withdrawals decreased at extremely large rates, with an estimated average of about 2.5 million dinars per day, while withdrawals from the ATM in cooperative societies that are within the residential areas were concentrated.

A day in the ban

Regarding the nature of withdrawals that took place during the past few days, Al-Ajmi clarified that KNET officials prepared a study entitled (Day of Ban Withdrawals) to show the sources of daily withdrawals and aspects of exchange, and concluded that withdrawals of this day included 2.6 million dinars

Bid to resume work gradually

Banks draw preliminary action plan

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: Local banks have drawn their preliminary action plan for gradual resumption of work once the total curfew is lifted by the end of May, reports Al-Anba daily quoting a source from the banking sector.

According to the source, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) instructed the banks to develop an operational plan for their branches and departments in the main branches at a rate ranging from 25 to 50 percent; but the banks decided to resume 25 percent of their operations to cover minimum banking services at the initial stage of implementation.

The source disclosed the banks set preliminary scenarios for resumption of work in their branches in order to ensure strict

Ministry contracts reached 205 valued at KD221 million, the Ministry of Finance maintained 32 contracts worth KD30 million as it did not sign any new contract, the Ministry of Electricity and Water has 39 contracts valued at KD80 million, the Ministry of Defense has 45 contracts valued at KD41 million, the Cabinet has 37 contracts valued at

compliance with precautionary and health measures. The source confirmed that social distancing will be observed between customers and employees as per the directives of health authorities, while the working hours in branches will be limited to four hours at the beginning of the resumption of work. The start of work hours has yet to be determined -- 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning, the source added.

Asked about the plan of some banks to require their clients to book appointments, the source clarified some banks offer this particular service while others do not have such a facility. He stressed the decision ultimately depends on the instructions of the Council of Ministers.

KD68 million, the Ministry of Interior has 25 contracts valued at KD60 million, the Ministry of Public Works has 36 contracts worth KD195 million, and other agencies have a total of 139 contracts worth KD57 million.

According to the bureau, these contracts are valid for several fiscal years.

April with 1,400 additional point of sale devices, explaining those devices were distributed to cooperative societies, central markets and others due to an increase in demand for them in the recent period.

He stated that many cooperative societies, including catering, family supplies and the library, recently stopped trading with cash and only receive payments through points of sale, as part of the preventive measures.

Al-Ajmi reiterated that this trend, in addition to the delivery of orders from cooperative societies and pharmacies, further strengthened the need to order more POS devices, especially as they're relied upon and transferred to the customer to pay from his home.

1,073 cases

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The conditions embrace a certificate showing that masks are compatible with relevant standards, along with samples of various sizes, the ministry's undersecretary for drug and food control Dr. Abdullah Al-Bader told KUNA.

Should China be the country of origin, then the name of the Chinese supplier has to be mentioned in both Chinese and English and the number of a registered certificate be attached, he stressed.

The fresh criteria mainly aim at thwarting the entry into the country of any medicinal product incompatible with relevant global standards with a view to protecting medical teams in the country, Al-Bader noted.

Time extended for food supply

Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Social Affairs Abdulaziz Shuaib said Monday the cooperative stores are allowed to receive farm produce and other foodstuffs from 2:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.

"The decision of the ministry to extend this time is meant to ensure that the cooperative stores are well supplied, thus providing the citizens and residents with sufficient fruits, vegetables and other foodstuffs," he said in a press release.

"The total lockdown, meant to combat coronavirus pandemic, forced consumers to shop only once in six days," he said, noting that the measure will ensure the availability of basic supplies for everybody.

Shuaib added that the ministry spares no effort in coping with the current emergency, praising the cooperation of the union of cooperative stores with the ministry in serving the consumers.

Cabinet touts SAB scrutiny

The Kuwaiti Cabinet on Monday underlined the significant role of the State Audit Bureau (SAB) in surveillance over spending on the fight against novel Coronavirus (Covid-19).

This came following a briefing by SAB Chairman Faisal Al-Shaya during a cabinet meeting held at Al-Seif Palace under chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Al-Shaya expounded on the mechanism of considering spending orders from different state agencies for combatting the virus and fulfilling all relevant needs, said a cabinet statement.

The cabinet voiced satisfaction with the briefing of the SAB's chief and stressed the agency's constructive supervisory role and positive cooperation with other state bodies, leading to smooth disbursements and financing.

Billionaire Saudi

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The Wall Street Journal had reported at the time that U.S. intelligence and counterterrorism officials had information linking the Dallah Albaraka Group to transactions by suspected al-Qaida members. However U.S. officials gave no indication that Kamel or his son, Abdullah, knowingly aided al-Qaida or other militant groups.

Kamel was also reportedly swept up in Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's anti-corruption purge in 2017. The unprecedented Saudi crackdown saw the country's top princes and businessmen detained at the Ritz-Carlton in Riyadh, with many forced to sign over billions of dollars in assets. The sweep, which was conducted largely in secret behind closed doors, helped the young crown prince consolidate power and was widely criticized by international rights groups.

Across Muslim countries and at home, Kamel was heavily involved in philanthropy and charity.

A multi-million dollar donation in 2010 established the Abdallah S. Kamel Center for the Study of Islamic Law and Civilization at Yale Law School in the U.S.

Issues dent

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Nearly a month after Utah launched its Healthy Together app to augment the state's contact-tracing efforts by tracking phone locations, state officials confirmed Monday that they haven't done any contact tracing out of the app yet. Instead, people who download the app have been able to "assess their symptoms and get testing if appropriate," Utah's state epidemiologist, Angela Dunn, said last week.

The state with the highest known rate of participation so far is South Dakota, where last week about 2% of residents had the Care19 app on their phones. Last week was also the first time it recorded a single infection. The same app is getting even less support in North Dakota.

"This is a red state," said Crystal Wolfrum, a paralegal in Minot, North Dakota, who says she's one of the only people among her neighbors and friends to download the app. "They don't want to wear masks. They don't want to be told what to do. A lot of people I talk to are, like, 'Nope, you're not going to track me.'"

Wolfrum said she's doubtful the app will be useful, both because of people's wariness and its poor performance. She gave it a bad review on Google's app store after it failed to notice lengthy shopping trips she made one weekend to Walmart and Target stores.

North Dakota is now looking at starting

a second app based on the Apple-Google technology. The existing app "was rushed to market, because of the urgent need, Vern Dosch, the state's contact tracing facilitator, told KFYR-TV in Bismarck. "We knew that it wouldn't be perfect."

The ACLU is taking a more measured approach to the Apple and Google method, which will use Bluetooth wireless technology to automatically notify people about potential COVID-19 exposure without revealing anyone's identity to the government.

But even if the app is described as voluntary and personal health information never leaves the phone, the ACLU says it's important for governments to set additional safeguards to ensure that businesses and public agencies don't make showing the app a condition of access to jobs, public transit, grocery stores and other services.

Among the governments experimenting with the Apple-Google approach are the state of Washington and several European countries.

Swiss epidemiologist Marcel Salathé said all COVID-19 apps so far are "fundamentally broken" because they collect too much irrelevant information and don't work well with Android and iPhone operating software. Salathé authored a paper favoring the privacy-protecting approach that the tech giants have since adopted, and he considers it the best hope for a tool that could actually help isolate infected people before they show symptoms and spread the disease.

"You will remember your work colleagues but you will not remember the random person next to you on a train or really close to you at the bar," he said.

Other U.S. governors are looking at technology designed to supplement manual contact-tracing efforts. As early as this week, Rhode Island has said it is set to launch a "one-stop" pandemic response phone app. It will pair with a new contact-tracing database system built by software giant Salesforce, which has said it is also working with Massachusetts, California, Louisiana and New York City on a similar approach.

Salesforce says it can use data-management software to help trained crews trace "relationships across people, places and events" and identify virus clusters down to the level of a neighborhood hardware store. It relies on manual input of information gathered through conversations by phone, text or email.

"It's only as good as a lot of us using it," Democratic Gov. Gina Raimondo said of the soon-to-be-launched mobile app at a news conference last week. "If 10% of Rhode Island's population opts in, this won't be effective." The state hasn't yet outlined what people are expected to opt into.

The ACLU hasn't weighed in on the Salesforce model, but has urged contact-tracing public health departments to protect people from unnecessary disclosure of personal information and to not criminalize the requirement for self-isolation.

Trump threatens

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government's failure to meet its obligations." He said that since China was "the source" of the outbreak, it had "a special responsibility to pay more and give more."

Xi insisted that China had acted with "openness, transparency and responsibility" when the epidemic was detected in Wuhan. He said China had given all relevant outbreak data to WHO and other countries, including the virus's genetic sequence, "in a most timely fashion."

Xi said that in recent weeks, China has dispatched medical supplies to more than 50 African countries and that 46 Chinese medical teams were currently on the continent helping local officials.

Other world leaders including the presidents of France, South Korea and South Africa and Germany's chancellor were also pipped in to throw their support to the WHO, which has been put on the defensive from a Trump administration that has blamed it for mishandling the outbreak and showering excessive praise on China's response. The European Union and others staked out a middle ground.

The Trump administration has claimed that WHO criticized a U.S. travel ban that Trump ordered on people arriving from China.

Trump ordered a temporary suspension of funding for WHO from the United States - the health agency's biggest single donor - pending a review of its early response.

The advisory body, echoing comments from many countries, said such a review during the "heat of the response" could hurt WHO's ability to respond to it.

Xi said China supports the idea of a comprehensive review of the global response to COVID-19 and that it should be "based on science and professionalism led by WHO, and conducted in an objective and impartial manner."

Tedros emphasized that WHO declared the coronavirus outbreak to be a global health emergency on Jan. 30, its highest level of alert, at a time when there were fewer than 100 cases outside of China. In the following weeks, WHO warned countries there was a narrowing "window of opportunity" to prevent the virus from spreading globally.

During the first few months of the outbreak, WHO officials repeatedly described the virus's spread as "limited" and said it wasn't as transmissible as flu; experts have since said COVID-19 spreads even faster.

It declared the outbreak to be a pandemic on March 11, after the virus had killed thousands globally and sparked large epidemics in South Korea, Italy, Iran and elsewhere.