



U.S. MANDATES FACE MASKS ON AIRLINES, PUBLIC TRANSPORT

6 PCR posts set to airport arrivals



Minister of State for Services Affairs Dr Abdullah Marafi inspects latest health procedures at Kuwait Airport.

KUNA photo

Kuwait lists 635 new cases

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 31, (Agencies): The Council of Ministers say there is a plan to open six PCR test centers at the Kuwait International Airport (KIA) for arriving passengers provided the sites designated for these tests work as one unified electronic platform, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting reliable sources.

If implemented the plan will go into effect from February 7, 2021 and Directorate-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is expected to assign ground service providers to implement the government decision and ask the airlines to foot the PCR bill for all arrivals, while at the same time a source indicated that ground service providers are in the process of contracting with 4 accredited laboratories to conduct this test.

In spite of what the sources said, there is a possibility of change in plan because of the increasing number of new strains of Corona virus infections.

However, the six PCR test sites are to be distributed as follows - three at the T1 building and one site each at T4, T5 and T3. The sources pointed out work on these sites is expected to be completed this week, while the unified platform is being prepared by the Central Agency for Information Technology based on the recommendations of the Council of Ministers.

It is noteworthy to mention the commercial activities at the airport currently remain suspended from 8 pm until 4 am due to the lack of availability of medical staff around the clock, but with the presence of accredited private laboratories, the airport will be able operate around the clock to run checks on all arriving passengers.

This step aims, according to the same source, to facilitate the movement of passengers and not increase the numbers, explaining that the air traffic will return to the percentage of operation it was during the first phase, that is, not exceeding 30 percent.

Measures

The Minister of State for Housing Affairs and Minister of State for Services Affairs Dr Abdullah Marafi inspected at Kuwait International Airport (KIA) the latest regulatory and health measures following the cabinet's mandate for airlines to conduct Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests for all arriving passengers to the country.

In a statement to KUNA on Sunday, Dr Marafi said that the task of checking passengers arriving at KIA will be assigned to airlines to ease the burden on health teams from Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MoH), which have done great efforts since the start of the COVID-19 crisis.

The airlines, in cooperation with the country's ground services companies and local laboratories, will conduct PCR examinations to travelers arriving to the nation, he added, underlining that MoH will only monitor and supervise these swabs.

During Marafi's tour, he commended the great efforts made by MoH and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) during this phase, which played a vital and clear role to confront the COVID-19 pandemic in various fields and sectors.

Travelers on airplanes and public transportation like buses and subways will be required to wear face masks starting next week to curb the spread of COVID-19.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a mask-wearing rule late Friday that builds on an order announced Jan 21 by President Joe Biden.

The rule "will protect Americans and provide confidence that we can once again travel safely even during this pandemic," said Dr Marty Cetron, director of CDC's division of migration and quarantine, who signed the order.

The 11-page CDC order takes effect just before midnight on Monday night. It makes refusal to wear a mask a violation of federal law, enforced by the Transportation Security Administration and other federal, state and local authorities.

The rule applies to passengers on airplanes, trains, subways, buses, taxis and ride-shares. It says travelers must wear a mask that covers their nose and mouth while riding and while getting on and off rides. The order extends to waiting areas such as airports, train platforms and subway stations.

Airlines already require masks and have banned more than 2,000 passengers for refusing to wear one. Flight attendant unions have said a federal rule will make it easier for crews to enforce the requirement.

Exempts

The order exempts children under 2 years of age and people with a disability that makes it unsafe to wear a mask. Airlines struggled with an exemption for safety and stopped allowing it. The CDC said transportation operators can require medical documentation. Travelers will be allowed to remove masks while eating or drinking.

The CDC said some face coverings aren't good enough to comply with the rule. The don't-travel list includes face shields, bandanas, masks with exhalation valves and masks that are too big or otherwise don't fit properly.

The CDC said transportation operators may require a negative COVID-19 test from passengers. Cetron said this week that the health agency is considering requiring testing of passengers on flights within the United States, but the airline industry is fighting a testing requirement out of fear that fewer people will fly. U.S. air travel is already down more than 60% from a year ago.

The CDC rule came just over a week after Biden's executive order, which already mandated masks on certain modes of public transportation including planes and trains, and it mandated masks on federal property.

Kuwait Health Ministry on Sunday listed 635 new coronavirus (COVID-19) cases but no deaths during past 24 hours, raising the caseload of contaminations with the virus to 165,257 while fatalities' overall count stood at 959.

The ministry spokesperson Dr. Abdullah Al-Sanad said in a statement to KUNA that number of people who are receiving treatment at intensive care units has amounted to 58, thus the whole count of the confirmed infection cases and remained under medical care has stood at 6,367.

He pointed out that 8,994 swab tests were conducted in the past 24 hours bringing the total of such examinations to 1,529,581.

Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MoH) announced Sunday that 200,000 doses of the UK-based AstraZeneca with the University of Oxford vaccine against COVID-19, will arrive at dawn tomorrow, Monday - which is manufactured at the Serum Institute of India (SII).

In a press statement, Assistant Undersecretary for Drug and Food Control Affairs Dr Abdullah Al-Bader said that the ministry authorized the vaccine for emergency use based on the decision of the joint technical committee between the Pharmaceutical and Herbal Medicines Registration and Control Department, also the Public Health Department for the evaluation and registration of vaccines.

Day by Day

YOUR Highness the Prime Minister!

The manner in which you addressed the editors-in-chief of local newspapers during the press conference tells a lot and what is most important is that you have understood what the Kuwaitis want. It is important for us to achieve this either through the National Assembly or by other means.

Your soft words have pleased the deputies. However, at the end of the day what we want is the 'honesty' to read between the lines, cooperate and show progress. ... Tomorrow will be another day.

Zahed Matar

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Sunday expressed heartfelt condolences to Custodian of the two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud on Prince Turki bin Nasser bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud's demise.

His Highness the Amir, in a cable to King Salman, prayed to Allah the Almighty to bestow blessing upon the deceased, and solace for the royal family.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. (KUNA)

JERUSALEM: Thousands of ultra-Orthodox Israelis on Sunday thronged the funeral of a prominent rabbi in Jerusalem, flouting the country's ban on large public gatherings during the pandemic.

The funeral procession for Rabbi Meshulam Soloveitchik, who died at age 99, wended its way through the streets of Jerusalem in the latest display of ultra-Orthodox Israelis' refusal to honor coronavirus restrictions. Police estimated that more than 10,000 people joined the procession and said they had issued dozens of tickets for failing to heed lockdown rules. (AP)

The phenomenon has undermined the country's aggressive vaccination campaign to bring a raging outbreak under control and threatened to hurt Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in March elections. One challenger accused Netanyahu of failing to enforce the law due to political pressure from his ultra-Orthodox political allies.

Densely packed throngs of people gathered outside the rabbi's home, ignoring restrictions on outdoor gatherings of more than 10 people. Many did not wear masks. (AP)

High Court to examine plea on polls



Syrian children stand in a camp for displaced muddied by recent rains near the village of Kafr Aruq, in Idlib province, Syria, recently. (AP)

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 31, (KUNA): The Constitutional Court on Sunday decided to adjourn hearing in the cases of appealing legality of the parliamentary elections until February 24.

The rules concern pleas that had been forwarded from the first and fourth constituencies. Moreover, the tribunal also decided to examine the case of challenging election of the parliament speaker; also on February 24.

Furthermore, the court decided to adjourn cross examination into other constitutional pleadings concerning voters' tallies in the elections, held on December 5, until February 9.

The court in a hearing held on January 20 decided to delay cross examination into the electoral pleas until today, pending detailed statements that must be presented by the Ministry of Interior, containing names of the candidates for the 2020 elections in the first constituency, in addition to the number of the electorate.

It had also requested proportions of the eligible voters who had actually cast their ballots - as compared to the whole electorate, in addition to the number of votes garnered by each nominee, number of valid ballots, invalidated votes and names of the winners in the said constituency.

The tribunal had also decided to delay the hearing until February 1, pending filing a report by the MoI containing names of the nominees in the fifth constituency, number of the registered eligible voters, proportion of the voters who cast their ballots as compared to the whole count of the electorate, number of votes garnered by each candidate, count of the valid and invalid ballots.

It had also asked for names of the winners in the said constituency and count of the whole ballots.

The tribunal on January 10 set January 20 as the date for cross examining all the appeals in the five constituencies.

Also:

KUWAIT CITY: INTERPOL extradited to Kuwait a Kuwaiti woman who was sentenced to seven-year imprisonment with hard labor and a fine of KD 70 million, after being convicted of real-estate fraud, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

INTERPOL coordinated the extradition process with the cooperation of a Gulf country where the citizen had visited a few days ago before fleeing to Europe where she resides.

She is accused of defrauding more than 50 citizens by deceiving them into buying properties in Europe.

According to informed sources, the Criminal Investigation Department had received a number of complaints from citizens, stating that they had been subjected to real-estate fraud by a Kuwaiti woman. As a result, the description of the accused was circulated to the INTERPOL, and investigations revealed that she had traveled to a Gulf country about four days ago.

Last December, the Criminal Court had sentenced the Kuwaiti woman and her partner, who is still at large, to seven-year imprisonment with hard labor, and imposed a fine of about KD 70 million.

KFAS in focus

MP urges boycott of oath session

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 31: The National Assembly Office has approved the resignation of Secretary General of the Assembly Allam Al-Kandari, affirming this will not affect the work of the committee tasked to investigate incidents in the inaugural session of the legislature.

The Office assigned Assistant Secretary General Adel Al-Lughani as acting Secretary General. Al-Kandari submitted his resignation in line with Amir Decree No. 3/2021 on the termination of senior officials with the rank of minister who completed their term.

Meanwhile, MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri disclosed in a press statement that he will not attend the session slated for the constitutional oath taking of the new government.

He pointed out it is unconstitutional that the new government is chaired by Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid, considering the latter resigned after the submission of a grilling motion against him. He asserted Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid should not have been assigned to form the new government in view of the grilling motion.

He asked his colleagues to recall what happened in 1964 when the then MPs did not attend a similar session, so the new government at the time was unable to take its oath and then it resigned. He added the then Assembly Speaker Abdulaziz Al-Sagor submitted his resignation to HH the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem but the latter did not approve it.

Intention

Stressing that he has no intention to seek heroism or create troubles, Al-Muwaizri said Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid went against public will, and that the latter was biased in the election of the speaker and formation of parliamentary committees.

On the other hand, Education, Culture and Guidance Affairs Committee on Sunday discussed the reports of the State Audit Bureau (SAB) and Financial Controllers Bureau (FCB) on the budget of Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS).

Committee Chairman MP Hamad Al-Matar confirmed the attendance of acting KFAS Chairperson Dr Samira Sayyed Omar and some senior officials of KFAS, adding that interim Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr Ali Fahd Al-Mudaf apologized for his absence.

Al-Matar said the reports highlighted a big number of violations; some of which are financial in nature such as granting allowance to consultants without the approval of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and others are administrative like the failure to fill senior positions which have been vacant for a long time.

He added only 80 percent of employees at KFAS are Kuwaitis, indicating that FCB did not approve

186 requests of KFAS -- the largest number of requests rejected by FCB at the level of public institutions.

He went on to say that KD 458,000 was paid to expatriate consultants at KFAS in fiscal 2018/2019 and KD 371,000 in fiscal 2019/2020; hence, the need for the concerned incoming minister to ensure there is no such expenditure in the next fiscal year. He pointed out that Kuwait has enough number of researchers in all fields, so these researchers must take the chance to develop KFAS and replace the expatriate consultants.

Moreover, the Budgets and Final Accounts Committee on Sunday met the representatives of SAB. Chairman of the committee MP Badr Al-Mullah said the panel held 12 meetings since the beginning of this parliamentary term; four of which are with SAB.

During Sunday's meeting, the committee discussed the budget-related violations that SAB recorded from fiscal 1999/2000 to 2011/2012 which have yet to be settled. He said they agreed to forward a letter to the Assembly on referring this issue to the Public Funds Protection Committee and the latter should submit its report within two months, Al-Mullah narrated.

He affirmed the committee finalized discussions on budgets in fiscal 2019/2020, including the comments on employment and financial strategy of the State. According to SAB, the total debt that the government needs to collect has reached KD1.6 billion - six percent higher than the previous fiscal year. The Ministry of Finance confirmed it is ready to classify the debts from 2009 as per the due dates and then take the necessary steps to collect payments, he added.

He went on to say that the committee completed discussions on the budgets of Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Ministry of Public Works, and Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART).

He disclosed the discussion on the budget of the Foreign Affairs Ministry was postponed because of the low representation of the ministry in committee meetings, clarifying the committee had earlier reached an agreement to discuss the budgets of any ministry only if the concerned minister or at least the undersecretary is present.

In addition, MP Badr Al-Dahouh received information that interim Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali issued a decision to suspend the deal to import drones - a decision which contradicts the recommendation of the concerned committee. He found out that the suspension of the deal is in favor of the agent of a Chinese company, so he warned the interim minister against pushing ahead with such an erroneous decision.

MPs Osama Al-Shaheen submitted a bill on establishing a company owned by the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) which will grant loans to retirees according to Islamic Law.