



Wuhan lab doubts linger ... Kuwait cases stubbornly high

Opinion

Tinker destroyed curricula, spin is in private education

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah

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AFTER 110 years of the inception of formal education, and with great hopes placed on Kuwaiti generations to take the country to higher levels, the last thing Kuwaitis expected to happen in the field of education, is to receive the lowest global scientific ranking at all levels – from primary school to university – in the year 2021.

Education is the salt of development; its corruption spoils life. This was realized from the beginning by those who sought an ideological society within the political frameworks wrapped in religion. Therefore, we are currently living in the face of underdevelopment in terms of health, urbanism, economy and services.

It is not the first time our official university is scoring a low grade. It has become common for Kuwait to receive a low rank in education because it did not work on building people, but rather surrendered to powerful partisan forces that imposed retarded curricula based on a narrow vision with the goal of controlling through social discrimination.

The outcome of such a retarded approach resulted in the seditious division which is evident in the relations between Sunnis, Shiites, Salafists, tribes, sects, and the insiders and outsiders. A good example is the elections of the Kuwait Students Union, which almost reaches the point of war among political groups supported by parties and factions representing those camps.

Kuwait's real crisis began in 1976 when the government turned a blind eye to the start of the infiltration of the Muslim Brotherhood Group, sectarianism and tribalism into the education sector. Curricula appropriate for those forces were developed, and public schools were weakened by surrendering to political groups in the parliament that sought to enact laws that contradict common sense and humanity, including the law to prevent coeducation.

Unfortunately, all these are becoming quite evident today. Kuwait, which recently celebrated the 60th anniversary of its independence, should have followed Singapore's approach in terms of adopting a strict and advanced educational system. Singapore gained its independence in 1965, and despite its limited area, lack of wealth, and large population, it attained financial stability and a good economy that is far better than Kuwait's because it worked on producing free and independent human beings.

Our Ministry of Education receives a huge budget annually. Last year alone, it was allocated KD 1.9 billion, but it did not achieve any progress. We witnessed the scandal in the results of distance education last year, while private schools and universities were keen about being proactive in producing better outputs to affirm their presence in the field.

Faced with the failure of the public sector in the education field, similar to the failure of the state policies in other fields, it has become necessary to encourage private education, with the Ministry of Education taking over the supervisory role. However, a major overhaul must take place in the ministry to rid itself of all the partisans who seek to sabotage everything that does not lead to the fulfillment of their goals.

All this devastation was caused by successive governments that were subjected to partisan blackmail. Therefore, the popular Arabic proverb "May the tinker eat what he'd baked" can be applied to the official lamentation over Kuwait's decline in the global educational ranking.

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Council 'aims' to train competitive graduates

KUWAIT CITY, June 21, (KUNA): Minister of Higher Education Dr. Muhammad Al-Fares affirmed that the Council of Private Universities aims to prepare graduates who are able to compete in the local and global labor market along with their brothers, graduates of Kuwait University and foreign missions to achieve Kuwait Vision 2035.

Al-Fares said, in a press statement Sunday, on the sidelines of presiding over the meeting of the Council of Private Universities, that the Council aims to provide academic and scientific care to all members of society by opening the door for submission in the plan of internal scholarships for Kuwaiti students, children of Kuwaiti women and children of diplomats, as well as children with special needs.

The meeting was discussed in the presence of the commissioned Secretary-General of the Council, Eng. Omar Al-Kandari, and members of the Council to review the items on the agenda and discuss many related topics.

The meeting discussed the request of the Kuwait College of Science and Technology to add new programs to it and the recommendation of the Academic Accreditation Committee on evaluating the institutional accreditation of the American College of the Middle East.

The Council also reviewed the initial request for the establishment of the Kuwait University of Peace, along with the request of Boxhill College of Kuwait regarding licensing academic programs and the request of Algonquin College to change the name of the college to Canadian College of Kuwait Algonquin and licensing of its academic programs.

During the meeting, Al-Fares listened to a detailed explanation about the mechanism of the electronic registration process in the internal scholarship plan for the first semester of the year (2021/2022), which was launched on the website of the General Secretariat of the Council of Private Universities on Saturday and will continue until the eighth of July.

Tax decrees feared

'Necessity'

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 21: The objective in holding the special session of the National Assembly on Tuesday is to end the current parliamentary round as fast as possible, says Chairman of the parliamentary Budgets and Final Accounts Committee MP Bader Al-Mullah.

He disclosed the government intends to issue a decree of necessity to implement the Public Loan Bill and other unpopular bills like the value added tax (VAT) and selective tax, away from the Assembly.

He argued the purpose of Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim in inviting the MPs and government to the special session – to ratify the general budget bill – is incorrect. He said the claim that the delayed approval of the general budget bill will affect the payment of salaries, suspend allowances, and delay the distribution of housing plots and overseas treatment is totally wrong.

He pointed out the bills on the previous general budgets were not approved before the fiscal year ended, yet none of the abovementioned services were suspended. He cited Article 145 of the Constitution, stating that the budget of the preceding fiscal year is implemented in case the bill on the budget of the current fiscal year is not approved.

He went on to say that Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs Khalifa Hamada issued a circular on March 23, 2021 based on Article 145, in which he specified the manner of spending on development enterprises, salaries, scholarships, overseas treatment and new appointments according to the budget of the previous fiscal year or the estimated budget for the current fiscal year.

On the claim that the delayed approval of the budget will disrupt the launching of new development enterprises, he said Hamada informed the committee that there is no new enterprise in the budget for fiscal 2021/2022. He revealed the circular issued by Hamada specified the way of spending on 403 existing enterprises.

He added a report published by Al-Anba daily on May 14, 2018 quoted the government as saying that the new appointments are not linked with the approval of the budget. He explained the appointments are executed in four stages per year and this does not require the availability of job grades.

On the allegation that the committee delayed its report on the budget, he pointed out the committee recorded the highest number of meetings compared to others – 59 ordinary meetings, nine sub-meetings and seven meetings of its office.

He said the representatives of Kuwait Credit Bank (KCB) had earlier informed the committee that there is no cash for housing loans, so the problem has nothing to do with the approval of budget as the required step is to provide cash.

On the other hand, MP Abdullah Al-Turajji urged his colleagues – who claimed that the special session will be held for the government to issue decrees of necessity on the implementation of VAT, selective tax and public loan bill – to attend the session in order to prove their claim or apologize.

He said it is impractical to adopt the previous budget until the new budget is approved.



Iran's President-elect Ebrahim Raisi leaves at the conclusion of his press conference in Tehran, June 21. Raisi said Monday he wouldn't meet with US President Joe Biden nor negotiate over Tehran's ballistic missile program and its support of regional militias, sticking to a hard-line position following his landslide victory in last week's election. (AP)

Won't talk to Biden, give on missiles, support to militias

DUBAI, June 21, (Agencies): Iran's president-elect said Monday he would not meet with US President Joe Biden nor negotiate over Tehran's ballistic missile program and its support of regional militias, sticking to a hard-line position following his landslide victory in last week's election.

Judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi also described himself as a "defender of human rights" when asked about his involvement in the 1988 mass execution of some 5,000 people. It marked the first time he's been put on the spot on live television over that dark moment in Iranian history at the end of the Iran-Iraq war.

"The US is obliged to lift all oppressive sanctions against Iran," Raisi said at the news conference.

Raisi sat in front of a sea of microphones, most from Iran and countries home to militias supported by Tehran. He looked nervous at the beginning of his comments but slowly became more at ease over the hourlong news conference.

Asked about Iran's ballistic missile program and its support of regional militias, Raisi described the issues as "non-negotiable."

Tehran's fleet of attack aircraft date largely back to before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, forcing Iran to instead invest in missiles as a hedge against its regional Arab neighbors, who have purchased billions of dollars in American military hardware over the years. Those missiles, with a self-imposed range limit of 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles) can reach across the Mideast and US military bases in the region.

Iran also relies on militias like Yemen's Houthi rebels and Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group for counterbalance against enemies such as Saudi Arabia and Israel, respectively.

On a possible meeting with Biden, Raisi simply answered: "No." His moderate competitor in the election, Abdolnasser Hemmati, had suggested during campaigning that he'd be potentially willing to meet Biden.

The White House did not immediately respond to Raisi's statements Monday. Raisi will become the first serving Iranian president sanctioned by the US government even before entering office, in part over his time as the head of Iran's internationally criticized judiciary – one of the world's top executives.

The victory of Raisi, a protégé of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, came amid the lowest turnout in the Islamic Republic's history. Millions of Iranians stayed home in defiance of a vote they saw as tipped in Raisi's favor after a panel under Khamenei disqualified his strongest competition.

News watch

BOSTON: If your business falls victim to ransomware and you want simple advice on whether to pay the criminals, don't expect much help from the US government. The answer is apt to be: It depends.

"It is the position of the US government that we strongly discourage the payment of ransoms," Eric Goldstein, a top cybersecurity official in the Department of Homeland Security, told a congressional hearing last week.

But paying carries no penalties and refusing would be almost suicidal for many companies, especially the small and medium-sized. Too many are unprepared. The consequences could also be dire for the nation itself. Recent high-profile extortion attacks led to runs on East Coast gas stations and threatened meat supplies. (AP)

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SEA: Britain's newest aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, is helping to take on the "lion's share" of operations against the Islamic State group in Iraq, UK commanders said. It has also piqued the interest of Russian warplanes, who try to keep tabs on its cutting-edge F-35 jet in a "cat-and-mouse" game with British and US pilots.

Speaking aboard the 65,000-ton carrier on its first-ever deployment, Commodore Steve Moorhouse said the UK is carrying out most of the missions to wipe out the remnants of IS in Iraq as the US focuses on its withdrawal from Afghanistan. (AP)

GAZA CITY: Israel on Monday eased some restrictions on the Gaza Strip that have threatened a fragile cease-fire, Palestinian officials said. Hamas, however, said the move was really Israel's attempt to pressure the militant group into making concessions.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media, said 11 truckloads of clothes were exported through Kerem Shalom crossing for the first time in 40 days. On Sunday, Israel said it will allow limited agricultural exports from Gaza. (AP)

Day by Day

THE Chinese vaccine has been okayed by all the Gulf countries except Kuwait because Kuwait, as they say, is different in everything. It means the Emiratis, the Bahrainis, the Egyptians, the Moroccans and the citizens who have received the Chinese vaccine are forbidden to enter Kuwait based on the decisions issued by the ministries of Health and Interior.

In the midst of all this, what is surprising is that the government sometimes blames the Ministry of Interior and at other times on the Ministry of Health for its shortcomings and tells the people that the government is not responsible for anything. 'Our poor government...'

In Kuwait, everything is forbidden, and when they disagree on a specific decision, they slap a ban, and everything that is a source of disagreement becomes 'a ban'.

... Yet, tomorrow is just another day.
Zahed Matar

China rebuffs charge

BEIJING, June 21, (Agencies): China on Monday "rejected anew recurring US charges" that the novel coronavirus had leaked from a Chinese laboratory before mushrooming worldwide.

Tracking down the virus is strictly a scientific matter, said Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian in a press briefing, reacting to a statement by the US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, on Sunday.

Sullivan reportedly warned Beijing that it would face international isolation if it "fails" to conduct a genuine investigation "on its territories to pin point source of the virus."

In reaction, the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry labelled Sullivan's remarks "as blackmail and a threat to China," urging Washington to stop "politicizing the issue of the coronavirus to tarnish China's image."

China has taken an open and transparent approach with respect of investigating source of the virus, he said, adding that Beijing has been coordinating closely with the World Health Organization (WHO) in this regard.

The US has repeatedly said that the virus leaked from a laboratory from Wuhan, a province in central China, where the killer germ had hit it hard with heavy casualties before the Chinese made a game changer with a series of strict precautions that contained the germ outbreak.

Kuwait Ministry of Health said Sunday eight persons died of coronavirus while 1,661 people tested positive for the virus in the past 24 hours.

Ministry spokesman Dr. Abdullah Al-Sanad said that the total deaths in the country reached 1,870 and tally of infections topped 339,032.

Recovered

He added 1,466 people recovered from the virus in the past 24 hours to reach 319,885, noting that recovery-to-infection ratio was 94.35 percent.

Al-Sanad said 204 Covid-19 patients were receiving treatment in the intensive care units while people receiving medical care were 17,277.

The spokesman said 11,984 PCR swab tests were conducted in the past 24 hours to reach a total of 2,837,466. He added infection-to-swab ration was 13.86 percent.

Al-Sanad called on the public to maintain social distancing and wear masks, as well as following instructions from the official sources.

The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health declared on Monday receiving the first consignment of anti-covid vaccines from Pfizer platform via the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (Gavi).

Dr. Abdullah Al-Badr, the health assistant undersecretary for pharmaceutical affairs and medical equipment, said in a statement to KUNA that the shipment was the first to be taken by Kuwait through Gavi.

Coordination is underway to take delivery of vaccines from other platforms via Gavi soon, he said, indicating that the supplies would be shipped to Kuwait in line with contracts worked out by the MoH.

The shipment handover is part of continuous efforts to speed up momentum of vaccinations against COVID-19 and to back up the ministry action for securing the vaccines and reach the aspired objectives of the national immunization campaign.

The Ministry of Health meanwhile has obtained approval from the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) to sign a contract with Janssen Pharmaceuticals to procure 200,000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine against coronavirus, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting sources.

Approval

Sources told the daily that the contract will cost up to \$2 million or about KD602,000. Sources said this will be referred to the State Audit Bureau (SAB) for final approval in preparation for supplying the vaccine in the coming period.

Domestic workers, who took one dose of the vaccine against coronavirus and were infected after traveling abroad, will not be allowed to enter the country starting from Aug 1, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting sources.

Sources disclosed that domestic workers who got one dose of Pfizer vaccine must wait for 10 weeks before taking the second dose, while those who got one dose of Oxford vaccine must wait for 16 weeks before taking the second dose.

The State of Kuwait on Monday affirmed nations of the globe must close ranks in the face of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

The stance was expressed by the Permanent State of Kuwait Representative at the United Nations and International Organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghuneim, during the 47th session of the UN Human Rights Council, set between June 21 and July 13.

Ambassador Al-Ghuneim affirmed that the top responsibility lies on every state to secure facilities and required resources to attain the aspired level of health care for citizens.

As for the State of Kuwait, it has been in the lead among states that support the international system in facing the pandemic, keenly cooperating with many partners and effectively contributing to a number of significant initiatives with respect of coordinating international efforts for facing the contagion, Al-Ghuneim added.

At the time the State of Kuwait raced against time in confronting this pandemic locally, it was among the first to respond to the UN appeal for combating the pandemic, keenly maintaining the international cooperation and helping to enable the World Health Organization and other health stakeholders in the efforts to save lives, particularly the most vulnerable, he added.