

Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:00 Asr 14:30
 Sunrise .. 06:24 Maghrib .. 16:49
 Zohr 11:36 Isha 18:11

Local

VACCINE REGISTRATION WEBSITE: https://cov19vaccine.moh.gov.kw/SPCMS/CVD_19_Vaccine_Registration.aspx

Weather

Expected weather for the next 24 hours:
By Day: Mild and partly cloudy with light to moderate north-westerly wind to light variable wind with speeds of 08-32 km/h.
By Night: Rather cold and part-

ly cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind with speeds of 06-26 km/h.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	27	18
Kuwait Airport	28	15
Abdaly	27	12

Jahra	28	16
Salmiyah	26	19
Ahmadi	27	16
Nuwaisib	29	15
Wafra	28	14
Salmiyah	26	12
Jal Aliyah	28	15

Borders

Continued from Page 2

issuing of visas and currently does not allow in foreigners, except those with residency permits and those who have special circumstances.

Health Minister Chen Shih-chung said officials are reserving rooms in government facilities for travelers from countries with reported omicron cases. The Central Epidemic Command Center listed six countries as high risk: South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, and Zimbabwe.

Taiwan is bracing for a surge of visitors ahead of the lunar new year, and has allowed those returning to complete the two-week quarantine partly at home. However, anyone arriving is still required to stick to the entire 14-day quarantine schedule and face fines if they break quarantine.

North Korea, which claims no virus cases and which has taken among the world's harshest anti-virus measures, says it's making all-out efforts to prevent omicron from entering the country. Many question its claim of being coronavirus-free. Since the start of the pandemic, North Korea has sealed off its international borders and jetted out diplomats.

Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health in the United States, meanwhile, said no data as yet suggest the new variant causes more serious illness than previous COVID-19 variants.

"I do think it's more contagious when you look at how rapidly it spread through multiple districts in South Africa. It has the earmarks therefore of being particularly likely to spread from one person to another. ... What we don't know is whether it can compete with delta," Collins said on CNN's "State of the Union."

Collins echoed several experts in saying the news should make everyone redouble their efforts to use the tools the world already has, including vaccinations, booster shots and measures such as mask-wearing.

The U.S. is banning travel from South Africa and seven other southern African countries starting Monday. "It's going to give us a period of time to enhance our preparedness," the United States' top infectious diseases expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, said of the ban on ABC's "This Week."

Fauci says it will take approximately two more weeks to have more definitive information on the transmissibility, severity and other characteristics of omicron, according to a statement from the White House.

South Africa's government responded angrily to the travel bans, which it said are "akin to punishing South Africa for its advanced genomic sequencing and the ability to detect new variants quicker."

David Hui, a respiratory medicine expert and government adviser on the pandemic in Hong Kong, said the two people who tested positive there for the omicron variant had received the Pfizer vaccine and exhibited very mild symptoms, such as a sore throat.

"Vaccines should work but there would be some reduction in effectiveness," he said. (AP)

Decrease seen in cash spent on KPC projects

KUWAIT CITY, Nov 29: According to reliable sources, there is a decrease in the amount actually spent on the capital projects of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) that are included in the five-year plan of 2019/2020-2022/2023 by about KD 876.8 million, or 26.1 percent of the planned amount, which amounts to about 3.356 billion, reports Al-Rai daily.

They explained that the amount actually spent on capital projects during the 2020/2021 fiscal year amounted to about KD 2.356 billion.

The spending on projects is linked to several factors, most notably the postponement and cancellation of parts of the scope of work for implementing some projects with the aim of rationalizing capital expenditures.

The decline in expenditure is also due to the suspension of some projects with the aim of re-evaluating them in light of the COVID-19 outbreak and the closure of international outlets, which affected the supply of necessary materials and customs clearance. Other factors were the late response from suppliers, and the delay and difficulty in obtaining the necessary permits for the entry of labor required to implement projects.

The sources highlighted that one of the reasons for the closure of drilling rigs is the lack of manpower and the poor performance of some contractors, as well as the length of the documentary cycle and the requests of the relevant committees to obtain the required approvals.

They stressed that KPC and its companies spare no effort to improve capital expenditure, expedite the completion of strategic projects, follow up their implementation, and overcome all obstacles and challenges.

The sources said that the decline in expenditure came in accordance with the trends imposed by the global conditions that the world experienced during the last period.

They indicated that the projects included in the five-year plan of KPC and its subsidiaries include not only the new and current programs and projects, but also the future capital programs that are still being studied, adding that progress is expected with them during the period of the five-year plan.

'There may be an increased risk of reinfection with new strain'

What we know and don't know about omicron variant

GENEVA, Nov 29, (AP) — The World Health Organization says it could still take some time to get a full picture of the threat posed by omicron, a new variant of the coronavirus as scientists worldwide scramble to assess its multiple mutations.

Stock markets swooned, some public gatherings got canceled, and countries across the globe suspended incoming flights after scientists in South Africa last week identified the new version that appears to have been behind a recent spike in COVID-19 infections in the country's most populous province.

Over the weekend, the list of countries that have spotted the new variant in travelers grew. Portugal detected 13 cases linked to the new variant among members of a single soccer club — only one of whom had recently traveled to South Africa.

On Friday, WHO designated it as a "variant of concern," its most serious designation of a COVID-19 variant, and called it "omicron" as the latest entry into its Greek alphabet classification system designed to avoid stigmatizing countries of origin and simplify understanding.

What do we know about omicron?
 By Sunday, UN health agency issued a statement on omicron that boiled down to: We don't know much yet.

It said it wasn't clear whether omicron is more transmissible — more easily spread between people — compared to other variants like the highly transmissible delta variant. It said it wasn't clear if infection with omicron causes more severe disease, even as it cited data from South Africa showing rising rates of hospitalization there — but that could just be because more people are getting infected with COVID-19, not specifically omicron.

From just over 200 new confirmed cases per day in recent weeks, South Africa saw the number of new daily cases rocket to more than 3,200 on Saturday, most in Gauteng, the country's most populous province.

Now, up to 90% of the new cases in Gauteng are caused by it, according to Tulio de Oliveira, director of the KwaZulu-Natal Research Innovation and Sequencing Platform.

"There is currently no information to suggest that symptoms associated with omicron are different from those from other variants," WHO



Passengers queue to check in at Heathrow Airport in London on Nov 29. The new potentially more contagious omicron variant of the coronavirus popped up in more European countries on Saturday, just days after being identified in South Africa, leaving governments around the world scrambling to stop the spread. (AP)

said. It said there's no evidence — yet — that COVID vaccines, tests and treatments are any less effective against the new version.

Why are scientists worried about this new variant?

So far, the main difference with other variants appears to be that there may be an increased risk of reinfection with omicron — in other words, that people who've already had COVID-19 could get reinfected more easily.

The variant appears to have a high number of mutations — about 30 — in the coronavirus' spike protein, which could affect how easily it spreads to people.

Some experts say that could mean that vaccine makers may have to adapt their products at some point.

Sharon Peacock, who has led genetic sequencing of COVID-19 in Britain at the University of Cambridge, said the data so far suggest the new variant has mutations "consistent with

enhanced transmissibility," but said that "the significance of many of the mutations is still not known."

Lawrence Young, a virologist at the University of Warwick, described omicron as "the most heavily mutated version of the virus we have seen," including potentially worrying changes never before seen all in the same virus.

What sets omicron apart?

Scientists know that omicron is genetically distinct from previous variants including the beta and delta variants, but don't know if these genetic changes make it any more transmissible or dangerous. So far, there is no indication the variant causes more severe disease.

It will likely take weeks to sort out if omicron is more infectious and if vaccines are still effective against it.

Peter Openshaw, a professor of experimental medicine at Imperial College London said it was "extremely unlikely" that current vaccines

wouldn't work, noting they are effective against numerous other variants.

Even though some of the genetic changes in omicron appear worrying, it's still unclear if they will pose a public health threat. Some previous variants, like the beta variant, initially alarmed scientists but didn't end up spreading very far.

"We don't know if this new variant could get a toehold in regions where delta is," said Peacock of the University of Cambridge. "The jury is out on how well this variant will do where there are other variants circulating."

To date, delta is by far the most predominant form of COVID-19, accounting for more than 99% of sequences submitted to the world's biggest public database.

How did this new variant arise?

The coronavirus mutates as it spreads and many new variants, including those with worrying genetic changes, often just die out. Scientists monitor COVID-19 sequences for mutations that could make the disease more transmissible or deadly, but they can't determine that simply by looking at the virus.

Peacock said the variant "may have evolved in someone who was infected but could then not clear the virus, giving the virus the chance to genetically evolve," in a scenario similar to how experts think the alpha variant — which was first identified in England — also emerged, by mutating in an immune-compromised person.

Are travel restrictions justified?

Depends on who you ask. Israel is banning foreigners from entering the country and Morocco stopped all incoming international air travel. Scores of countries in Europe, North America, Africa and beyond restricted flights from southern Africa.

Given the recent rapid rise in COVID-19 in South Africa, restricting travel from the region is "prudent" and would buy authorities more time, said Neil Ferguson, an infectious diseases expert at Imperial College London.

But WHO noted that such restrictions are often limited in their effect and urged countries to keep borders open.

South Africa's government said the country was being treated unfairly because it has advanced genomic sequencing and could detect the variant quicker and asked other countries to reconsider the travel bans.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah holds talks with the Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang. (KUNA photo)

Defense minister meets envoys

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah explored on Monday with the Chinese and Ukrainian ambassadors, individually, bilateral relations.

The Ministry of Defense stated in a press release that Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah received earlier Monday in his office the Chinese Ambassador Li Minggang to discuss various topics of common interest.

Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah and Chinese Defense Attaché to Kuwait Xue Chuanlai attended the meeting along with senior officials.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense also received the Ukrainian Ambassador Dr. Oleksandr Balanutsa to discuss bilateral ties, cooperation, and topics of common interest. Several senior officials attended the meeting. (KUNA)

Medical authorities nod awaited

Full return to school eyed in 2nd semester

KUWAIT CITY, Nov 29: The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, Dr. Ali Al-Yacoub, confirmed the preparations are in full swing for the full return to school during the second semester, indicating that there is continuous communication and coordination with the Ministry of Health in this regard, reports Al-Anba daily.

Al-Yacoub, in an exclusive statement to the daily said if the medical authorities agree to the return, the ministry and all its sectors and educational areas are working in this direction to achieve "what we all aspire to, which is the full return of our students to their schools," pointing out that the Ministry of Health is a key partner with us in decision-making, and there are medical teams that conduct inspection tours of schools, and the indicators of those visits are good.

He added, the authorities are following up the situation carefully and in all cases, God forbid, if the situation worsens, then "we have more than one alternative option to continue education in schools during the second semester."

Al-Yacoub touched on the participation of Kuwaiti students in the tests, where the National Center for Education Development, in cooperation and coordination with the Ministry of Education, will organize a feature test during December, which is an electronic test aimed at assessing the level of the educational system's outputs for boys and girls in the fifth and ninth grades in Arabic language, English language, mathematics and science, not to mention measuring the strength of learners' achievement through performance test, noting that this test is a prelude to participating in the national test to be held in April next year.

Meanwhile, the children's clubs under the Childhood and Motherhood Department, which the Ministry of Social Affairs and Societal Development established earlier, resumed operations recently, reports Al-Qabas daily.

During the opening ceremony for Martyr Abdul-Wahhab Abdul-Razzaq Club in Qadisiyah, Assistant Undersecretary for the Social Development Sector Hana Al-Hajri confirmed that all the clubs for children opened their doors after a two-year closure.

Al-Hajri added the efforts exerted for more than two years greatly contributed to reaching a safe stage

Building nurseries

MC panel rejects plan

KUWAIT CITY, Nov 29: The Legal and Financial Committee at the Municipal Council has rejected the proposal of Council Member Eng Maha Al-Baghli to add an article to the building regulations in order to obligate governmental and private institutions and agencies whose number of workers exceed 50 or 200 to establish their own nurseries, reports Al-Rai daily.

In its recently concluded meeting, the committee also discussed the request of five members — Hamad Al-Madraj, Ali Al-Azmi, Hamdi Al-Azmi, Abdulaziz Al-Mojel and Muhammad Al-Mutairi — to assign a committee to monitor the implementation of the council's decisions regarding the housing sites in South Saad Al-Abdullah; particularly the need to remove obstacles from these sites. The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) has already started calling the housing grant applicants who are eligible for housing in this project. Representative of the authority and the Ministry of Finance were invited to the meeting to discuss the violations of companies that encroached on the housing project sites, which are properties of the State.

The committee also referred to the Legal Department the proposal of member Hammoud Al-Anzi to discuss the consequences of the ruling of the Criminal Section in the Court of Cassation to refrain from punishing the contractor and engineer unless the property collapses.

after the Corona pandemic hit the country.

She pointed out that the suspension of children's activities for more than two years had a negative impact on children; especially in the psychological, social and behavioral aspects due to the closure of schools, nurseries and facilities for a long time.

MP queries big rise in hiring domestics cost

'Improve quality of fuel used'

By Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
 Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Nov 29: Secretary General of the National Assembly Adel Al-Lugani attended the meeting of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP) in Madrid, Spain on the sidelines of the 143rd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

Al-Lugani confirmed that the association discussed the proposed amendments to the ASGP decree, registration of the new members, payment of the subscription fee, and the experience of several parliaments during Covid-19 crisis.

He said Speaker of Moroccan Parliament Najib Al-Khaddi was elected chairman of ASGP during the meeting, succeeding Philipp Schwab.

He also expressed his gratitude to Schwab for the efforts the latter exerted throughout his tenure.

Secretary General of Arab Parliaments Jassem Al-Nisf also attended the meeting.

In another development, MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa forwarded queries to Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali about the establishment of a central market in Jahra to serve those working at Kuwait Army. He also confirmed the allocation of a plot for the project. He wants to know if the tender was floated or not, value of the tender and the company that will execute the project.

In light of the fact that the cost of hiring a domestic worker has reached KD1,500; MP Osama Al-Shaheen forwarded queries

to Minister of Electricity and Water and Renewable Energy and Minister of State for Social Affairs and Societal Development Meshaan Al-Otaibi about the achievement of Durra Company for Domestic Labor Recruitment in terms of reducing the cost of hiring domestic workers.

He wants to know the number of domestic workers that the company hired since it started operating. He asked if the company provides guarantees for sponsors in case the workers do not want to continue working or in case of absconding.

MP Bader Al-Humaidi forwarded queries to Minister of Oil and Higher Education Dr Muhammad Al-Fares about the quality of fuel used by public buses. He wants to know the plan of the ministry to improve the quality of fuel and minimize emissions.

Meanwhile, MP Hesham Al-Saleh submitted a proposal for the Ministry of Higher Education to increase the allowance granted to scholarship students. He also suggested that the amount of allowance should be reviewed every three years in order to consider the inflation rate.

Moreover, MP Abdulkareem Al-Kandari posted on his Twitter account that the government did not issue the executive decree on the Demographic Imbalance Law although the one year grace period has ended. He holds His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid responsible for such delay.

Kuwait's Ambassador to France, Sami Al-Sulaiman commended recently the ongoing progress and prosperity of strategic partnership between Kuwait and France.

This came in a statement to KUNA after the Ambassador's meeting with chief and members of friendship with Gulf States committee in French senate.

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