



UK CUTS ISOLATION PERIOD ... CASES HERE TO 4,883

E-learning, airport closure 'in past'

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said Thursday that incoming flights have been diverted to nearby airports due to fog and low visibility.

In a press statement, the directorate said the take-off and landing of aircraft will resume once weather conditions improve in the country.

Kuwait forecasters warned Wednesday that the country was experiencing low horizontal visibility owing to fog.

DGCA's **Yousef Al-Fawzan**, announced that due to fog and low visibility below the permissible limit, 6 flights were diverted to nearby airports, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Al-Fawzan said that the low visibility led to the inability to land and take off by some flights to and from Kuwait International Airport, saying that the take-off and landing of aircraft will resume if visibility improves at any time possible. (Agencies)

KUWAIT CITY: The UAE condemned, on Thursday, the Houthis' seizure of a UAE-flagged civilian cargo ship in the Red Sea as an act of piracy.

This came during the United Nations Security Council meeting on the situation in the **Middle East**, Emirati News Agency (WAM) reported on its bulletin.

"We condemn, in the strongest terms, the Houthi act of piracy against the civilian cargo vessel 'RWABEE' off the port of Hodeida," said **Lana Nusseibeh**, Permanent Representative of the UAE to the UN.

Several Security Council members condemned the seizure of a civilian cargo vessel, known as the RAWABE, since Jan 3, while other countries and organizations issued statements condemning the Houthis' seizure of the vessel. (KUNA)

DUBAI: The emirate of **Ajman** is warning its government employees that they will be penalized for coming into contact for a second time with anyone who has contracted COVID-19, state-linked media in the **United Arab Emirates** reported Thursday.

Local media outlets said federal employees in Ajman will not receive paid sick leave for quarantine if they come into close contact with infected people outside the workplace or home for a second time.

The UAE has a vaccination rate of 99% among eligible residents and a total death toll of under 2,200 from the virus, but the spread of the omicron variant globally has pushed the number of daily infections up. The United Arab Emirates, home to **Dubai** and **Abu Dhabi**, has seen daily cases jump from around 50 a day in early December to more than 2,600 a day this week. (AP)

UNITED NATIONS: Escalating military action in **Yemen** displaced more than 15,000 people over the past month, killed or injured more than 350 civilians in December and left the Arab world's poorest nation facing growing hunger and economic collapse with no political solution in sight, senior U.N. officials said Wednesday.

U.N. special envoy **Hans Grundberg** told the U.N. Security Council that in the seventh year of conflict the warring parties seem to be seeking military victory. But, he said, "there is no sustainable long-term solution to be found on the battlefield" and both sides must talk even if they are not ready to lay down their arms.

Yemen's civil war began in 2014 when the Houthis took the capital **Sanaa** and much of the northern part of the country, forcing the government to flee to the south, then to **Saudi Arabia**. A Saudi-led coalition, backed at the time by the U.S., entered the war months later seeking to restore the government to power. (AP)

BIRMINGHAM: Attorneys for a woman who left her **Alabama** home to join the Islamic State terror group plan to continue fighting for her and her young son even though the Supreme Court declined to consider her lawsuit seeking to re-enter the **United States**, one of the lawyers said Wednesday.

Hoda Muthana and her 4-year-old child, the son of a man she met while with IS, have been living in a Syrian refugee camp for nearly the entire life of the child, and it's unclear what steps might come next to argue for their admittance into the United States, said **Christina Jump**, who represents the woman's family.

But **Jump**, who works with the Constitutional Law Center for Muslims in America, said attorneys are considering options. (AP)

KOBLENZ: A former Syrian secret police officer was convicted by a German court Thursday of crimes against humanity for overseeing the abuse of detainees at a jail near **Damascus** a decade ago, a ruling the top United Nations human rights official described as "historic."

Anwar Raslan is the highest-ranking Syrian official so far convicted of the charge. The verdict was keenly anticipated by those who suffered abuse or lost relatives at the hands of President **Bashar Assad's** government in **Syria's** long-running conflict.

"This trial cast a much-needed, renewed spotlight on the kinds of sickening torture, cruel and truly inhuman treatment — including abject sexual violence — that countless Syrians were subjected to in detention facilities," the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, **Michelle Bachelet**, said. (AP)



Thursday's special National Assembly session in progress.

KUNA photo

Kuwaitization to panel

Kuwait National Assembly agreed to return to the Parliamentary Human Resources Committee's the proposals regarding the increase of Kuwaiti staff at public posts and jobs.

The head of Thursday's session MP **Hamad Al-Harshani** adjourned the parliament's special session after reviewing the proposals for laws and projects listed on the agenda.

The parliament is scheduled to hold regular sessions next Tuesday and Wednesday.

The National Assembly, on Thursday, approved in the second deliberation a draft law to amend some provisions of the Printing and Publish-

ing Law.

Out of 50 attendees, only one voted against the Law, forty-seven voted for the amendment, while two others declined.

The amendments reduced the prohibitions from 11 to five, so the law prevents outraging public morals, as well as the disclosure of confidentiality and prejudice to the dignity of people and their religious beliefs, advocating or inciting contempt for any group of society and harming Kuwaiti relations with other Arab or friendly countries.

The amendments reduced the value of infringing the Amir authority's fine for no more than KD 10,000 (USD 33,000). (KUNA)

Mutual return to N-deal key

Strike paralyzes Lebanon

BEIRUT, Jan 13, (AP): Schools, universities and many shops were closed in Lebanon on Thursday as a general strike by public transportation and labor unions paralyzed the crisis-hit Mideast nation.

Protesters closed the country's major highways as well as roads inside cities and towns, starting at 5 a.m., to protest fuel prices that have increased at an alarming rate after the government lifted subsidies. Taxi and truck drivers used their vehicles to block roads. In the capital of Beirut, many roads were blocked by giant trash bins and vehicles.

The nationwide protests, dubbed a "day of rage," were scheduled to last 12 hours but appear to have petered out by early afternoon. The number of protesters were small.

The protest action comes as the Lebanese pound has continued to tumble against the dollar. About 80% of people in Lebanon live in poverty after the Lebanese pound lost more than 90% of its value in the past two years. Filling up a gasoline tank now costs more than the monthly minimum wage.

The ruling class, which has run Lebanon into the ground, has proved unwilling to reform and has done almost nothing to try to pull the country out of its meltdown, rooted in decades of corruption and mismanagement.

"The clear indifference of Lebanese policymakers to the suffering of the pop-

Agency eyes banking data

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 13: The Competition Protection Agency (CPA) has started extrapolating all banking data for the years 2019 and 2020, as part of its move to study the economic concentration that could result from the merger deal of Kuwait Finance House (KFH) and Al-Ahli United Bank (AUB), and to ensure there is no banking control in the local market, which indicates that the agency has begun examining the deal from its side, reports Al-Rai daily quoting reliable sources.

They explained that CPA has requested the concerned authorities to provide the financial statements of all banks operating in accordance with Islamic law in Kuwait for the two specified years. This is aimed to study the expected impact on the market from the merger of KFH and AUB in a manner that ensures the prevention of monopolistic practices in dealing with applications of this deal in the future.

WASHINGTON, Jan 13, (Agencies): The US affirmed it continues to seek a "mutual return" to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), saying "we still believe that a mutual return to compliance is in America's national security interests." "We believe it's in the interests of our allies and partners," State Department Spokesperson Ned Price told reporters late Wednesday. "We are focused at the moment on seeing if we can achieve a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA." He added "this Administration has been very clear, we are prepared to return to full compliance with the JCPOA and to stay in full compliance with the JCPOA as long as Iran does the same." On the Iran nuclear talks in Vienna, Price said "we have seen modest progress in recent weeks. Now modest progress is better than no progress."

"Modest progress is not as good as significant progress. Modest progress is also not sufficient if we are going to be able to achieve what we sincerely and steadfastly seek to achieve and that's a mutual return to compliance," he continued. "What we hope to see in Vienna going forward is more than modest. But that is up to the Iranians the pace at which they want these indirect negotiations to proceed," he remarked.

Meanwhile, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said during a briefing "now where we're at, even as these negotiations are ongoing, and as we conveyed back in December that we were a bit frustrated by the lack of seriousness that negotiators came to the table." She added "right now the negotiations are ongoing and we're, of course, eager to see the diplomatic path move forward." The website of Iran's supreme leader has showcased an animated video that appears to show a robot calling in a drone strike to assassinate former President Donald Trump.

The animated video was part of a contest to mark the Jan. 3, 2020 killing of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was slain in an American drone strike in Baghdad.

The video, posted Wednesday on the website of Khamenei's office, appears to show Trump, on the golf course at his Mar-a-Lago, Florida, being targeted in a drone strike.

Protocols followed

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 13, (Agencies): Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Chairman of the Ministerial Committee for Corona Emergencies **Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali** said there is no decision to close the airports, nurseries or return children to distance learning calling it 'a thing of the past', reports Al-Rai daily.

He told the daily, the government difficult decision had to be taken in terms of recommendations submitted to the Corona Emergencies Committee. He stressed that distance education had very big negative impact and "we are trying to balance the procedures."

He added: "There was a recommendation to close nurseries, but the Corona Committee decided to keep them open with an emphasis on immunization and other requirements to respect health protocols."

A team from the Ministry of Health is following up on the application of health requirements in anticipation of the National Assembly sessions, reports Al-Qabas daily.

In the meantime, a technical team from the ministry, including specialized doctors from public health, in this regard continues to implement health requirements and provide the necessary preventive instructions.

Prevention

The team that supervised the implementation of health requirements inside the parliament hall and the MPs' lounge included doctors from the public health sector in the Ministry of Health, who continued to provide health instructions, and to check on ways of prevention and precautionary measures within the National Assembly.

The Ministry of Health announced on Thursday 4,883 COVID-19 infections, 792 recoveries, and one death in the last 24 hours.

The Ministry's official spokesman Dr. Abdullah Al-Sanad said the tallies for infections and recoveries hit respectively 451,430 and 416,400.

Deaths went up to 2,474, said the spokesman, revealing that there were 17 patients in ICU, 213 in COVID-19 wards, and 32,556 people receiving treatment for the virus.

He indicated that swabs hit 6,346,761 with 37,917 new tests carried out in the last 24 hours.

British officials said Thursday the self-isolation period for people in England who test positive for COVID-19 will be reduced from next week to five full days, instead of seven.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid also said that early signs indicate that the rate of hospitalization from the coronavirus in the country is starting to slow.

Javid told Parliament that official data suggested two-thirds of people are no longer infectious by the end of the fifth day after they test positive. He said that starting Monday, those infected can leave isolation from the start of day 6, after taking two negative tests.

Currently, those infected can be released from self-isolation after seven days if they test negative on both days six and seven.

Javid urged people to continue to self-test for the virus, so that "we can restore the freedoms to this country while we're keeping everyone safe."

Disrupted

The U.K. saw record numbers of daily confirmed infections over Christmas and New Year, topping 200,000 cases on some days, as the more transmissible omicron variant spread rapidly. Industries from retail to education, and infrastructure like public transport and postal services, have been severely disrupted because scores of workers had to isolate and could not go to work.

The superfast spread of coronavirus omicron variant in the US has pushed the seven-day average of new daily cases to new high of 751,000.

This is "an increase of about 47 percent over the previous week," said Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Rochelle Walensky at a news briefing to the White House coronavirus taskforce on Wednesday.

She pointed out that the seven-day average of hospital admissions is about 19,800 per day, an increase of about 33 percent over the prior week.

"And the seven-day average of daily deaths are about 1,600 per day, which is an increase of about 40 percent over the previous week," she added.

The CDC chief noted that the ultra-transmittable omicron variant is to blame for 98 cases of infection in the United States.

"Over the past several weeks, we have seen the number of daily cases increase substantially. The magnitude of this increase is largely related to the Omicron variant, which now represents about 98 percent of the COVID-19 cases in the country," he said.

Online still on

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 13: The online residency renewal for expatriates who are outside the country remains in effect, reports Al-Seyassah daily quoting a senior security source.

According to the source, the Residency Affairs General Deputy at the Interior Ministry did not activate the mechanism for the cancellation of the residency of expatriates who have been outside the country for six months or more due to the current health situation.

He explained that the expatriates can stay outside the country for more than six months, provided their residency is valid and return whenever possible without facing any problems.



Photo shows part of a 4,500-year-old highway network called 'funerary avenues' in north-west Arabia. The existence of the funerary avenues suggests that complex social horizons existed 4,500 years ago across a huge swathe of the Arabian Peninsula. — See Pages 2 & 3