

COVID-19 Monitoring Committee Vows to Further Tighten Precautionary Measures

01 April 2020

On Wednesday morning, the COVID-19 Monitoring Committee held its 42nd meeting. Chaired by the Minister of Health, Dr. Tawfiq bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah, the meeting was attended by the committee members, who represent the relevant government agencies. During the meeting, all relevant COVID-19 updates and reports were reviewed. The committee has discussed the global epidemiological situation, as well as the cases reported locally and their health condition. All precautionary measures carried out at the points of entry into the Kingdom will continue in full, the Committee stressed, and will be further tightened. Meanwhile, the Committee commended the citizens' compliance with the curfew, and called on them to stay home, and refrain from going unless necessary (during the hours when going out is permissible).

The meeting was followed by a joint press conference, the participants in which included Dr. Muhammad Al-Abdulaali, MOH spokesman, Col. Sami Al-Shuwerekh, Public Security spokesman, and Nasser Al-Hazzani, Ministry of Labor and Social Development (MLSD) spokesman. The MOH spokesman mentioned that the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases worldwide has amounted 874,000 cases, of which 185,000 cases have recovered to date. As for the COVID-19 death toll, it has jumped to 43,000.

“157 new COVID-19 cases have been reported in the Kingdom,” said Al-Abdulaali. “These include one case coming from abroad, and is currently quarantined. While the remaining 156 cases have been in contact with previously reported cases.” Al-Abdulaali pointed out that these new cases were recorded in the following cities: 78 in Madinah, 55 in Makkah, 7 in Riyadh, 6 in Al-Qatif, 3 in Jeddah, 3 in Hofuf, 2 in Tabuk, 2 in Taif, and 1 in Al-Hanakia.

This brings the total cases tested positive for COVID-19 in the Kingdom up to 1104 cases, of whom the health condition is mostly stable; with the exception of 30 critical



cases receiving intensive care. Additionally, six new deaths were reported: two residents and one citizen in Madinah, one resident in Riyadh, and one resident in Makkah. This brings the total COVID-19 deaths reported in KSA to 16. Besides, he added, 99 new recoveries were reported, bringing the total recoveries to 264.

The MOH spokesman reiterated that anyone who develops symptoms, or is willing to get medical advice, can use the self-assessment application 'Mawid', or call 937 which works around the clock.

For his part, the Public Security spokesman, Col. Al-Shuwerekh, called on all society members to adhere to the curfew, and stay at home during non-curfew hours unless there is a dire need to go out. Al-Shuwerekh's call comes in response to the crowdedness and gatherings observed over the past few days in markets and public places. He reiterated that staying home remains one of the most effective strategies recommended by MOH, as well as all relevant health authorities worldwide. Staying home has enabled countries to win the fight against the pandemic.

Al-Shuwerekh revealed that the General Directorate of Public Security, in its quest to help people with emerging, exceptional or humanitarian conditions, has made it possible to contact the Public Security by email. He was disappointed, though, that the many emails included requests that can be put off till the crisis is over, or till the curfew is lifted. Over the past two days, he added, over 37,000 requests were received, of which only 300 requests were approved, because they had to do with extremely urgent conditions, such as the death of a first-degree relative, or pre-scheduled medical appointments for treatment of severe medical conditions. Some of the retests have been declined, he pointed out; others are still being considered.

A crisis unit monitors enforcement of the curfew order, Al-Shuwerekh said, and follows up all the developments as they take place. It also proposes a package of solutions meant to meet the people's needs while ensuring application of the social distancing policies, and strictly enforcing the curfew.



On the appeals to curfew-breaking penalties, Col. Al-Shuwerekh pointed out that an adjudicating body has been formed of the various security sectors, as well as representatives of the security men on the ground, and the competent security public security departments at the Kingdom's regions, with the aim to decide on the appeals to curfew-breaking penalties. Whoever is willing to appeal a curfew-breaking penalty can, in no longer than one month of the date of reporting the said violation, head to the committee reporting to the chairman of the Standing Security Committee at his respective region, who is the sheriff of that region, he expounded. He also revealed that a technical team reporting to the Director-General of Public Security is working on a new mechanism, to be released during the coming few hours, for receiving curfew-breaking appeals, as well as considering and deciding on them. It will be announced through the Public Security Twitter account.

As the curfew is put into effect, Al-Shuwerekh added, instances of manipulation of the online services and mobile applications have been observed. One of the home-delivery staffers of the companies licensed to work during the curfew hours has manipulated that license for his vested interest, thus violating the curfew obligations. Such violations are monitored, and the security men stop deliverymen to make sure that they adhere to the curfew rules.

Nasser Al-Hazzani, MLSD spokesman, mentioned that the Ministry has allotted SAR 17 billion to address the reverberations of coronavirus outbreak. This allotment comes within the government's unabated efforts to contain this crisis, as well as supporting the private sector, furthering economic growth, and helping companies retain their employees.

Al-Hazzani pointed out that MLSD has prompted the Social Development Bank (SDB) to launch a SAR 12-billion initiative centered on five basic pillars: supporting the low-income households portfolio with SAR 4 billion; creating a new portfolio for supporting the medical sector with SAR 2 billion; extending the grace period of all the



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establishments financed during 2019 and 2020 for six additional months, and covering this decision with SAR 2 billion.

The pillars of the SDB initiative, Al-Hazzani added, involved supporting micro and small-sized enterprises with SAR 2 billion, so as to enable 6,000 entrepreneurs to get financial support, and hence start their developmental enterprises. It also involved supporting financial intermediary portfolios with SAR.

The MLSD spokesman revealed also that the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) has launched a SAR 5-billion initiative centered on four basic pillars: supporting employment with some SAR 2 billion, to support 100,000 job seekers in the private sector; supporting training with SAR 800 million to enroll 100,000 beneficiaries; supporting 100,000 of new job-seekers with SAR 1.5 billion; and supporting the private-sector employees recruited as of July 1, 2019, with SAR 1 billion.

He went on to say that the Ministry has launched a package of initiatives, including: lifting the moratorium on wage protection, temporarily lifting the moratorium on private-sector enterprises to redress the situation, and lifting the moratorium imposed on the ground of failure to pay the fines due.

Besides, the labor recruitment fines have been revoked, in addition to making it possible to recruit workers through 'Ajeer' program, with a view to streamlining the work processes, and alleviate the labor-associated burden on the affected sectors. It also seeks to support to the affected sectors, under these challenging circumstances. Furthermore, the fines imposed on the foreigners whose residence are over have been revoked till June 30, 2020, and expanded for three months. And the work visa issuance fees, if not used owing to the moratorium on travel, can be restored, and the validity period of those visas have been extended for three months.

Al-Hazzani highlighted the recent decision by the Minister of Labor and Social Development, by virtue of which, none of the beneficiaries eligible for Shaaban health



insurance shall be dropped, and those eligible for Rajab health insurance shall be reinstated in retrospect.

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