



■ The delegation during their visit to Salmaniya Medical Complex

Key plan to fight heart diseases

MANAMA: An ambitious plan to reduce heart diseases in the GCC by up to 25 per cent within the next 15 years and encourage scientific research was yesterday approved.

Twelve recommendations were endorsed on the last day of the 11th Gulf Heart Association Conference and the fourth Bahrain Heart Association Congress.

The forums were held under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa.

Cutting-edge electrocardiogram (ECG) technologies were discussed at the conferences, the biggest forum of cardiologists in the world. Lecturers said ECG transmission by mobile phone could save lives and

speed up treatment for heart attacks.

A high-level delegation also visited Salmaniya Medical Complex (SMC) and was updated on equipment and treatment procedures.

The delegation included American Heart Association chairman Professor John Harold, former American College of Cardiology president Prof William Zagheb, and SMC consultant cardiologists Dr Anwar Jamsheer and Dr Saed Al Saed.

They visited wards 207 and 208 and gave their opinion regarding the treatment of certain acute cases.

The competence of the cardiovascular medical staff and the efforts of the government to promote health services in Bahrain were hailed.

Discounts benefit elderly

MANAMA: Thousands of Bahrainis are benefiting from massive discounts on government-funded public services. According to latest statistics, the number of elderly beneficiaries topped 37,472 – of whom 18,916 are men. They are all eligible for the elderly cards which entitle them to a 50pc discount on services provided by the ministries of Interior, Health, Municipalities and Labour, in addition to the Central Informatics Organisation. Meanwhile, the total number of disabled people stands at 8,811 – including 5,144 men. Responding to a question in parliament, Social Development Minister Dr Fatima Al Balooshi said the Northern Governorate has the highest number of disabled people.

Arab forum

MANAMA: Bahrain could host the next session of Arab Parliament. The Arab Parliament bureau will discuss the issue in its next meeting and take a decision, Bahrain parliament's second deputy chairman Adel Al Ma'awda said. It would be the first time such a session is convened outside host country Syria.

Meeting set – Page 15

Detainee dies

MANAMA: The director-general of Reformation and Rehabilitation Directorate

announced the death of a detainee, 40, arrested in a drug case yesterday morning. He said the detainee suffered from hepatitis and was found unconscious in his cell at 1am. He was pronounced dead by medical staff at the detention centre. The Public Prosecution was notified and an investigation has been launched.

Pre-marital tests

MANAMA: Couples planning to tie the knot may soon be subjected to pre-marriage tests to diagnose hereditary diseases. A draft law making pre-marital medical examination compulsory will be on the agenda of the weekly parliament session. The bride and groom will have to sign the marriage contract before a special court in case one of them tests positive for a hereditary disorder. The couple will also have to sign another legal document making it mandatory to get married despite results of the medical test.

Condolences

MANAMA: Shura Council chairman Ali Saleh Al Saleh yesterday sent a cable of condolences to his Qatari counterpart Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khualifi following a gas tank explosion in Doha, that killed 12 people.

Death blaze safety probe is launched

By SANDEEP SINGH GREWAL

AN investigation has been launched by the Labour Ministry after three Bangladeshis died in a fire at a residential building in Manama.

They died of smoke inhalation in their sleep as the blaze quickly spread through the two-storey building in Mukharqa, forcing close to 80 tenants to flee for their lives.

The Civil Defence director-general said the fire, which started on the first floor, was caused by "safety negligence".

"The operations room received at 2.38am a call reporting the fire," he said.

"Civil Defence teams reached at 2.42am and put out the fire before it spread to neighbouring buildings.

"The bodies were removed from the scene."

Two other tenants were injured and required hospital treatment as a result of the blaze, which gutted the building.

Civil Defence teams were at the building until noon yesterday.

Meanwhile, forensic experts, Civil Defence officials and specialists representing the Municipalities and Urban Planning Affairs Ministry have been assigned to examine the scene and submit a report.

In a statement last night, the Public Prosecution vowed to take legal measures against violators for negligence and exploitation of poor labourers.

Investigators near the cordoned-off building said a major tragedy was averted and the death toll could have been much higher.

"This building housed close to 80 people living in eight rooms with some of them in makeshift rooms created by wooden boards and planks," said a security source.

"When the fire broke out and was spreading, these workers rushed out from the main door, which was the only entrance of the building, to save their lives.

"If they had been stuck inside for even a couple of minutes it would have been a disaster."

One of the survivors said he felt lucky

Workers 'were spending their last night at labour camp'

ABOUT 80 workers living at the scene of yesterday's deadly labour camp fire had been about to move out.

They had packed all their belongings and were spending their last night in the property, according to a senior diplomat.

The landlord had served notice to the tenants to vacate the building as he wanted to renovate it, said Bangladesh Embassy labour counsellor Mohammed Islam.

"The workers informed me that Friday was their last day to move out," he said.

"The landlord gave them notice as he wanted to renovate the building, and then this tragedy happens."

Mr Islam said the survivors had moved to their new accommodation and were waiting to collect whatever was left of their belongings in the charred remains of the building.

to be alive.

"I woke up in the middle of the night as there was smoke everywhere and it was hot inside," said the Bangladeshi, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"I just ran outside and saw several people from different rooms rushing outside to save their lives.

"All our belongings were damaged, but we are lucky to be alive."

Identified

Bangladesh Embassy labour counsellor Mohammed Islam told the *GDN* the bodies of the three victims were found in their beds.

"I reached the scene at around 4.30am and was told by security officials that three bodies were found," he said.

"There were no signs of any injuries and the men died in their sleep because of smoke inhalation."

Two of the victims were named as Musharraf Hussain, 40, and Abu Jalal, 36, but the body of the third has still to be identified.

Mr Islam said security officials at Naim Police Station shared video footage they recorded of the scene with friends and roommates to establish the identities of the men.

'Step up inspections' call

ACTIVISTS have called for intensified inspections of labour camps across the country and tough penalties for greedy landlords who rent out unsafe buildings.

The Migrant Workers Protection Society (MWPS) said it was high time authorities inspected labour camps on a regular basis.

"We are very sad after learning about the death of three Bangladeshi workers in the fire that broke out in a building in Manama," said MWPS chairwoman Marietta Dias.

She said the tragedy comes at a time when the group is working closely with the Rotary Club of Manama to install smoke detectors in labour camps across the country.

"We have installed close to 400 smoke detectors as part of our work with the Rotary Club of Manama to create awareness and educate workers about their safety such as not to keep gas cylinders in bedrooms and giving safety instructions," said Ms Dias.

"It is sad that such tragedies are repeated and we head out to help the survivors."

The Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society (BHRWS) described the fire as another "blot" on the country's record when it comes to the rights and treatment of migrant workers.

"It is very bad to see poor workers dying in their sleep because of fire," said BHRWS secretary-general Faisal Fulad.

"It is sad for us to see our nationals die in such a manner and despite telling them on several occasions to live in proper accommodations they choose to live in dilapidated buildings," he said.

Labour Minister Jameel Humaidan offered his condolences to the families of the victims and called for landlords to ensure their properties have proper safety measures to prevent such tragedies.

"A team from the Labour Ministry visited the site after security authorities informed us about the incident and a technical investigation has been launched to find the cause of the fire," he said.

The minister said employers had a duty to not only ensure their workers have proper legal status, but also provide safe accommodation.

"Preliminary investigations have revealed that the building owner rented his property to an Asian worker, who further sub-let it to workers based on bed space available," said Mr Humaidan.

The ministry is working with several government bodies to find ways of avoiding such tragedies and enact new legislation to tackle such issues, he said.

The gutted building is located in an area of the Manama suq known locally as Bengali Gali, which has several labour camps, some of which are dilapidated yet still house thousands of low-income workers of different nationalities.

The scene of the fire is also close to the area where 13 Bangladeshis died in a fire that broke out in a rundown three-storey building on January 11 last year.

A total of 135 people lived in the building, which has since been demolished.

Capital Governor Shaikh Hisham bin Abdulrahman Al Khalifa announced a plan to improve safety at more than 800 labour camps earlier this month.

In 2006, 16 workers died during a fire at a labour camp in Gudaibiya, making it one of the deadliest in Bahrain's history.

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