

Kuwait – a welfare state

“FAMILY dignity is an integral part of the dignity of the homeland”. Within this perception, the government of the State of Kuwait makes great endeavour to ensure the best possible services and comfort to its citizens.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour functions realistically to accomplish major objectives focused on erecting a social structure fulfilling balance, conformity and security among the people, enhancing their standard of living and taking care of the handicapped. The various welfare services it renders has endeared the Ministry to the people ever since these were introduced in the

1960s.

For Kuwaitis, the state provides comprehensive welfare services such as housing, employment, generous retirement pensions and benefits, free health services and educational services at all levels. The state also offers comprehensive facilities for orphans, the handicapped and the elderly.

Kuwaitis pay 5 per cent of their monthly salaries in social security contributions.

The Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour deals with the individual, whether he is an employer or an employee, a citizen or an alien, through the organisation of employment, the settlement of labour disputes and provides care for

labourers and guidance to trade unions.

The state's care for the family takes several forms, beginning with care for children and youth. The category of those under 24 years of age constitutes 55 per cent of the total population for whom the concerned Ministry provides cultural, social, recreational and sports services and facilities in order to build their personalities, develop their skill and satisfy their ambitions. It also facilitates through financial assistance and material services a decent life for families facing emergencies.

The 'Reserve for Future Generations' was established to invest at least 10 per cent of annual reve-

nues to provide a fund for posterity.

The concerned Ministry provides preventive and therapeutic treatment to juvenile delinquents in an attempt to protect them and help transform them into useful members of society.

The elderly, the handicapped, trauma victims of the Iraqi aggression and the mentally retarded also receive all kinds of health, social, psychiatric and professional care to help them become effective and active members of society.

On the social level, the government gives generous endowments to consumer cooperative societies, welfare societies, clubs

and sports federations, to enable them to offer better services to the people. The services offered by the state to its people is unparalleled and are worth emulating in that region.

Many of the benefits of the welfare system, such as subsidised electricity, water, petrol, basic food stuffs and many medical services are available to expatriates.

Before the Iraqi invasion, comprehensive health services were available to Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis alike. Non-Kuwaitis are now being charged for certain procedures. Since mid 1994, the government and the National

Assembly have been considering setting up a compulsory insurance scheme to cover these charges.

The success of the government in bringing happiness and prosperity to its people is borne by the fact that in June, 1994, the UNDP published Human Development Index ranked Kuwait at 53 out of 173 countries in the world, the highest in the Arab world and the second highest among the Muslim countries, in terms of enjoying a high standard of living by its people.

Abroad, Kuwait established one of the most impressive aid records in the world. Disbursements reached a staggering 8 per cent of the annual GNP for several years at a time when few members of the UN were achieving a recommended target of 0.7 per cent of GNP.

Kuwait is leading the enlightenment march and is seeking to provide its citizens with their rights in keeping with Islam with a view to establish a society based on mutual understanding and equality among the populace irrespective of their creed, gender and status.

KUWAIT AT A GLANCE

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Ports	: There are 4 ports: Mina Ahmadi, Mina Abdullah, Mina Al-Zoor, Mina Shuaiba
Islands	: There are 9 Islands: Wara, Bubiyan, Miskan, Failaka, Auhha, Umm Al-Naml, Kubbar, Qaruh and Umm Al-Maradim
Territorial waters	: 5625 sq km
Flora and fauna	: 400 species of wild plants and flowers grow in Kuwait. There are 20 species of native birds. Although many of the desert rabbits, wolves and gazelles have long become extinct, yet rodents, lizards and other animals still survive.
Main occupation	: Pearl diving and fishing have been replaced with trading and business enterprises.
Main industry	: Oil refining and processing industry and petro-chemical industry.
Main export	: Mainly oil and petro-chemical by-products. Further, Kuwait re-exports many products, which it imports. Depending on the production, Kuwait sometimes exports tomatoes and cucumbers.
Main import	: Food, medicines, garments, manufactured goods, etc.
Touristic enterprises	: The waterfront, the Yacht Club, the Swimming Complex, Kuwait Towers, Entertainment City, The Musical Fountain, Ice Skating Rink, Sea Clubs, Recreational Parks and the Sea Beaches.

Kuwait—a partner in progress



General hospital at Uttara, Dhaka (left), orphanage at Gazir Darga, Jessore (right) built with Kuwait's assistance.

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million equivalent to BDT 36 million. The project was for power supply for irrigation scheme stage 1. Since that time, 15 soft loans have been provided to Bangladesh.

Further, in 1980, on a directive from the Amir, Kuwait maintained a deposit of US dollar 100 million with Bangladesh Bank. In the same year, Kuwait gifted to Bangladesh a Boeing aircraft to help the national carrier of Bangladesh to expand its fleet. Kuwait is financing the construction of two bridges in Shikarpur and Dwarika to connect Barisal with the capital city as well as to improve socio-economic condition of the south-western part of Bangladesh and a road connecting Dhaka with Jallong through Sylhet.

As Bangladesh stood on the threshold of a new millennium, Kuwait pledged an additional loan of US Dollar 125 million to Bangladesh for implementing 4 new

projects in energy and transportation sectors. The projects are:

1. Greater Chittagong Power Distribution Project;
2. Construction of Doptopota Bridge on Barisal-Patuakhali Road;
3. Construction of Sangu Bridge on Chittagong-Banshkhali Road;
4. Expansion of Dhaka-Joydepur Railway Line;

Most non-government assistance come through the Kuwait Joint Relief Committee (KJRC) which is a conglomerate of several Kuwaiti Islamic Charitable Organizations including the Kuwait Zakat House which implements all the projects of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. KJRC's network of operation extends to forty-three districts of Bangladesh. Besides financing the constructions of mosques and madrasahs, KJRC has undertaken a number of projects, which specifically aim at improving the socio-economic life of the most disadvantaged segment of the rural society. These projects

are as follows:

1. Housing projects;
2. Income generating programme;
3. Safe water project (tube wells);
4. Agriculture programme (distribution of seeds, fertilizers);
5. Orphan project;
6. Relief and rehabilitation programme;
7. Medical assistance programme;

Under the Housing Project, KJRC has so far constructed five self-reliant clustered villages in Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Bogra, Bagerhat and Feni for the destitutes.

Through the income-generating programme, KJRC helps impart vocational training to unemployed youths. It provides sewing machines and rickshaws to earning members of different families while others are provided with small shops or poultry farms.

With a view to making safe drinking water available to the people in remote villages, KJRC has undertaken a massive tube well installation scheme covering thirty districts.

KJRC distributes seeds and fertilizers to poor farmers who have no ability to pay for them.

An amount of Tk 7,50,000 has been spent so far on construction of mosques and educational institutes, Kuwait-Bangladesh Maitri Hall, a dormitory for female students of Dhaka University has been built with KJRC fund.

KJRC runs an orphan sponsoring programme in over 40 districts which has so far cost them over 7,00,00,000. It is also running a large orphanage complex in Jessore.

In times of natural calamities, KJRC undertakes massive relief and rehabilitation work in the affected areas. During last year's unprecedented flood, KJRC in collaboration with Kuwait Embassy and Kuwait Red Crescent

Society in Dhaka, carried out extensive relief operations in most of the affected areas.

KJRC has been rendering medical services to the poor people through numerous medical treatment centres set up in the villages.

They have also financed the construction of a 250-bed Friendship hospital building at Uttara which is another instance of the depth of love of the Kuwaiti people for their Bangladeshi brethren.

Further, in every Ramadan and Eid-ul-Adha, KJRC runs Ifari and Qurbani programmes throughout the country for the poor.

The third source of Kuwaiti private assistance comes through the Popular Committee of Kuwait, which is an organisation of Kuwaiti individuals who contribute their Zakat money for carrying out welfare projects and construction of mosques and madrasahs. This organisation, alone, has built over four hundred mosques throughout Bangladesh. It carries out programmes ensuring supply of safe drinking water through installation of tube wells. It also has an orphan sponsorship programme.

Two other Kuwaiti NGOs involved in poverty-alleviation activities in Bangladesh are the Islamic World Committee and the Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage. The latter has also set up a huge Children's Orphanage Complex in Gazipur and a Kidney Dialysis Centre in Dhaka.

The money that these private organisations have spent so far, exceeds billions of taka. Their assistance programme has ushered in a hope of a better future for the under privileged segment of society in Bangladesh.

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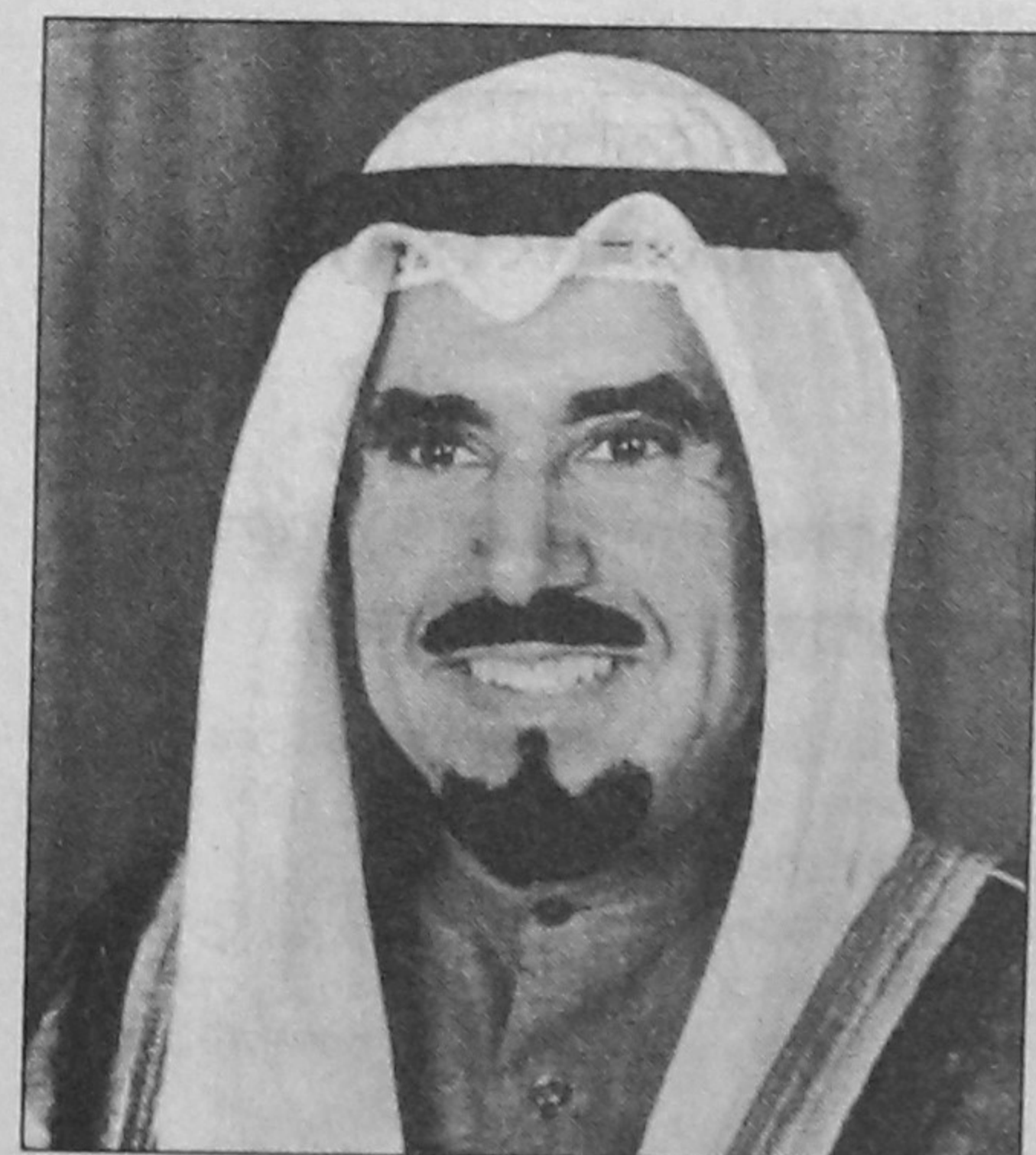
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Bangladesh Tel: 9887326, Fax: 8826484

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National Medical Centre Ltd
(G.C.C Approved Medical Centre)

HOUSE 152 ROAD 11 BLOCK E
BANANI DHAKA- 1213
BANGLADESH

GPO BOX 3589
TEL 8814809 FAX 880 2 8110185
E-Mail sgco@bdmail.net