

Local



KAFFEEKLATSCH

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Of haircuts and survival games

After months of lockdowns and curfews, Kuwait is slowly returning to normality - if there remains such a thing anymore - in gradual phases. Taxis were among the latest services to resume operations, curfew hours have been eased, and to the delight of shopaholics, mall timings have been extended.

But salons and barbershops remain closed - they are only scheduled to reopen in the final phase. But take a look at people around you and you will find many of them with fresh or recent haircuts. Turn on the TV and all the officials are well-coiffed with neatly trimmed facial hair. This begs the question: Where is everyone getting their hair cut?!

Of course it is no secret that hairdressers these days are providing home services to make ends meet. Salons have been closed for more than four months now, and it is normal that

people who work in them have to do something to survive, as most of them are not being paid for sitting at home. But in these times of social distancing, it seems irresponsible to bring an outsider to your home to cut your hair and that of your children, considering you have to be in close proximity to the barber, who may have cut the hair of any number of other people before coming to your home.

Nevertheless, people are getting their locks shorn by roaming barbers - who have become a part of the informal 'gig' economy in Kuwait, mostly run by expats. While it is common in other countries for people to work part-time jobs to supplement their incomes, the strict sponsorship system in Kuwait makes it very difficult for expats to legally make money on the side - for instance by driving for ride-sharing or delivery apps or running home businesses.

But this doesn't mean it's not done. When taxis were off the roads, private cars ferried people around, despite this being a crime punishable by deportation in Kuwait. Home-based nurseries, daycare centers and creches can be found all over the country. Maids have been working by the hour in households in Kuwait for decades, when they are only allowed to work for their sponsors. Not to mention an entire army of car washers who make sure your vehicle is spotless when you leave for

work early in the morning.

Go to any building and you will find scores of business cards and scrawled phone numbers of carpenters, electricians, plumbers, AC technicians and satellite dish installers. Add to this other assorted repairmen, handymen and construction workers who openly sit on the curb waiting for daily jobs. And on Eid Al-Adha, butchers - some experienced, some opportunists - can be seen peddling their services, despite warnings from the Municipality.

In many areas, both residential and commercial, hawkers selling everything from fruit and fish to mobile accessories and clothes are engaged in a daily game of cat-and-mouse with municipal teams. Crackdowns on makeshift markets that spring up in densely populated areas are regularly announced. Online too is a grey area, with thousands of people selling or bartering goods and services.

There is no denying that rules are meant to be followed for the safety of all residents and to maintain law and order in the country. Commercial activities that are conducted legally are a major source of income for the government too, in the form of taxes and other levies. But sometimes the authorities turn a blind eye to certain benign activities - even inspectors need haircuts!

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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