

## Local

# No work, no pay and no money for rent: Jobless expats plead for help

## Calls for reprieve for tenants similar to businesses

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The 10th of every month is the deadline for paying rent for many tenants. But many expatriates nowadays say they can no longer afford to pay the rent, as many workers have been out of work without pay during the past three months. "How can I pay? I was not working for the last three months. Then a few days ago, I received very depressing news from my company - I was fired from the job," said Marlon, 35, who works as a restaurant supervisor in Kuwait City.

"The flat owner is reminding me to pay, without any discount. Where will I get the money? Who will hire me now? We are still amid the pandemic and companies are closed. I am in a state of anxiety now and am praying to God that I will be able to overcome this," Marlon said.

### Exemption

There have been recent moves to exempt businesses affected by the coronavirus outbreak from paying rent throughout the crisis. But it stops short on requiring building owners to provide a reprieve of payments for tenants. The National Assembly's legal committee last week approved amendments to the rent law stipulating that landlords will not be able to evict their apartments if tenants fail to pay the rents during shutdowns. It only states in the amendment that a court will decide the way such tenants would pay the unpaid rent, mostly in installments.

"I hope the Kuwaiti government will be

able to help us with regards to rent, so we are able to overcome the effect of the global crisis. We are not asking them to make our stay free in Kuwait, but at least come up with a mechanism to support us in the next few months so we are able to survive," he added. "We are in very bad shape, and we need some support. Going back to our country is not really the choice now, because they too have troubles."

Marlon has two children in the Philippines with his wife. His company recently emailed him saying his service is no longer

including food delivery services, car mechanics, restaurants and others have reopened. But salons, malls, taxis and other businesses remain closed, and hundreds of thousands of expatriates are out of work and without a salary or income.

Vilma Dela Rosa, 57, who lives in Kuwait City, pays rent on time, but for the first time, her monthly payment is now overdue. "I normally pay my house rent between the first and fifth day of the month. Today is the 9th but I have no money to pay, so I told my flat owner I will not be able to pay. She told me OK for now. However, if the haris asks for it, we'll have to do something and pay," she said.

"So I've been thinking of borrowing from a loan shark. That is the only way, because my company said they have no money at all. I tried earlier to borrow from them, but they said they cannot spare anything," she said. Vilma said her company will probably open by the end of June. "We don't know yet. My last salary was in April - they gave it full even though we were no longer working at that time, but we were informed that for May and June, we will not get any salary at all," she said.

Safi, an Indian tenant in Mangaf in his mid-40s, said his building owner told them to pay the full rent for May and June. "I am a taxi driver and till now, there is no work for me. I explained to him we cannot pay the May and June rent because we have no work, but he insisted and told us if we do not pay, we will be evicted. We were informed last Friday, so we need to give the



money. Our deadline is mid-June for the May rent and the same deadline for next month. I am looking for money so I can pay," he told Kuwait Times.

### At half rent

Emie rents several apartments in Mahboula and then sublets them to fellow nationals. She is thankful to the building owner because most of the flats she's renting are at half rent for four months. "Since March we were told to pay only half of the rent," said Emie, a salon worker who rents seven flats. Many low-income expats share rental accommodations in order to lower the cost of living. Sub-renting flats without the owner's permission is illegal however.

"I am very thankful to the building owner because he knows the situation of many tenants. Many of them are trapped

without work or pay, so we cannot do anything. Thank God, my building owner, who is a Kuwaiti, told us to pay only half the rent. Some of my tenants are able to pay because they still get a salary, but the majority of my tenants could not pay anymore. I told my Kuwaiti flat owner to give us some time to pay, so he said pay when you have the money. So the pressure is less now," Emie said.

Subletting flats provides Emie additional income. "My income from subletting flats ranges from KD 60 to KD 100 per flat. But if you are the flat owner, you have to provide everything, from water filters to fridge to cooking range and washing machine. I do not want a flat, but the Kuwaiti owner insisted to take the flat and sublet it. Now I have extra income plus my salon job," she said.



## Tenants consider loan sharks as option

required, as they are planning to close the business. He has been given three months to look for a new job or his iqama will be cancelled. "if I am able to get a new offer during the next three months, I'll stay, or I will go back home," he said.

### Phased reopening

Kuwait has been under lockdown since March, with a full curfew for 20 days in May and most businesses shuttered for the last two months. It has now entered a phased reopening and some businesses

### In my view

## Let us return to basics

By Abdellatif Sharaa

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A few years back, I was very excited to hand my baby daughter her first laptop for being a grade A student in her school, and yes I do admit that I was pleased to her using it, not knowing that this blessing will turn into a curse down the road!

Day after day, the girl started to get attached to this device, and mind you her mobile did not leave her hand at all. Even when she went to bed and seemed sound asleep, when her mother attempted to remove the phone from her side on the bed, she used to wake scared as if someone had removed her life support line and scrambled to put her hands on the device.

We noticed the grades of this bright girl drop, and when we discussed why, we found out that she was paying less attention to academics and was involved in many activities and that took much of her time. I found myself blaming teachers who did not guide and advise her on how to manage her time and priorities.

I became somewhat sad for giving her that laptop, because she kept using it for her activities and many times I found her awake late at night working on it and I got very angry. All she did was beg me to let her complete her group activities for the week. My daughter was addicted to technology.

My concern was her education in the era of technological development, which is something that cannot be avoided. When it comes to education of our children, we often go the easy way. We place the computer in their hands believing that we provide them with comfort with these devices and programs to prepare them for the future. But simply, it will not do that because many of the current technological methods and means to teach mostly concentrate on training children to use the devices and are not suitable.

What children need instead is education that prepares them as citizens to help solve our urgent social and environmental problems. They need an education that helps them understand the fact that technical skills alone cannot solve these problems and that active social participation and ethical commitment of human beings who represent various cultures will always be necessary.

Our children face a wall of technological challenges that cause changes in the human and environmental biology of the world. They need a different type of technological horizon to get wise choices for their future. The screen with its various colors has invaded children's lives at all times and places, and they do not have enough time.

There is no evidence of good benefit in the long run - that children receive a good education; rather there are increasing harmful indicators about bad lifestyles and the poor quality of education some governments are strongly promoting.

Finally: It is time for citizens, institutions and decision makers to restore childhood to children.

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 33,140 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Tuesday, in addition to 273 deaths. With the exception of 173 cases in intensive care, all infected cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while thousands have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 23,288 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 9,579 people receiving treatment and 23 quarantined.

### Curfew

Kuwait imposed a three-week partial curfew starting May 31, as part of a five-phase plan for a gradual return to normal life, brought to a standstill by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The first phase also includes a total lockdown on Farwaniya, Khaitan, Hawally and Maidaan Hawally, joining Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh which were put under lockdown earlier.

Activities to resume in first phase included home deliveries of restaurants, telecommunication companies, food retailers, companies' transportation of employees, gas stations, private clinics and car workshops. The second phase will see the curfew shortened to be between 9:00 pm and 6:00 am, while resuming work in the government and private sectors with the workforce being less than 30 percent, in addition to resumption of constructions, banking sector, malls opening for eight hours and according to special instructions, parks and pickups from restaurants.

The third phase would see an end of curfew, and health authorities would be assessing situation of areas under lockdown. It would see increase of workforce to less than 50 percent. Visits for social care homes would be allowed, reopening of hotels, resorts and hotel apartments. Taxis will be allowed to operate with only one passenger, and mosques would be allowed to perform Friday prayers.

Phase four would see an increase in workforce, restaurants would be receiving customers but with restrictions, and public transportation resumed but with distancing. All activities would resume in phase five, government and private sector returned to normal, families could gather, weddings and graduation ceremonies, health clubs and gyms to reopen, as well as cinemas and theaters.

Mosques in the so-called 'model residential areas' reopened their doors for worshippers on June 10 amid strict health precautionary measures. Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs Mohammad Al-Afasi said that mosques in commercial, markets and heavily-populated areas will remain closed for the time being. Worshippers must wear face masks, keep social distancing between queues and between worshippers must be strictly observed. Worshippers must bring their own mats so they do not get in contact with mosque carpets. Mosques will reopen five minutes before prayer time and close 10 minutes after prayer.

Earlier, Kuwait imposed a total curfew from May 10 to May 30, allowing room for people to walk out for daily exercise between 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm, and to shop at co-ops and supermarkets once every six days during the curfew hours by making an appointment through www.moci.shop. Before that, Kuwait enforced a country-wide partial curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am, which was later extended to start from 4:00 pm

until 8:00 am during Ramadan, while allowing restaurants and food stores to make home deliveries from 5:00 pm until 1:00 am. The government also locked down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and enable health workers to test inhabitants. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed supermarkets, restaurants and shops to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people. The Ministry of Commerce launched a website (www.moci.shop) to enable people to book appointments to shop at co-operative societies in their areas. The Public Authority for Industry also announced that companies can apply to evacuate their workers from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula. To do so, they must fill a 'workers evacuation form' available on www.pai.gov.kw, and send the form via email to: Jasiri@moh.gov.kw.

### Precautions

Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice, and has sent special flights to repatriate Kuwaitis back home from countries affected with the virus' spread. Kuwait took all measures to test Kuwaitis repatriated from infected areas for potential infection. Kuwait had required all expatriates who arrived from travel on March 1 and beyond to visit Kuwait International Fairground where the Ministry of Health has set up a center to test people for possible infection. Meanwhile, the Cabinet announced on April 9 the operation of all airline flights for expats who are wishing to return back to their countries. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to May 28, with work resuming on May 31, while entities providing vital services will remain open. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes for March at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs): first from March 1 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages. State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public.

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. The Interior Ministry issued an amnesty allowing residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30 without paying any fines or airfare with a chance to return to Kuwait later. The amnesty was issued in view of the circumstances the country is currently going through and as part of the precautionary measures taken to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). During the amnesty period, individuals desiring to procure valid residencies in Kuwait and were willing to pay the fines without being subjected to investigations were allowed to pay the fines and legalize their status if they meet the required conditions.

### Hotlines

The Ministry of Health has set the following hotlines to receive inquiries about the coronavirus 24/7: 24970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.

The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:

- 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
- 51575591 (Cajal Educational Zone)
- 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)

- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

### Medicine delivery

Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MOH) launched a new medicine delivery service for people in Kuwait, which they can use to order medications to be delivered during curfew hours. The medications will be delivered within 72 hours after the order is submitted. To place an order, patients should send a WhatsApp to the numbers for the hospitals and medical centers as listed below. The patient should include their name, Civil ID number, hospital or clinic file number, mobile phone number and the medicine needed to the following numbers:

- Amiri Hospital: 50880699
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
- Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852
- Adan Hospital: 50880908
- Jahra Hospital: 50881066
- Sabah Hospital: 97632660
- Jaber Hospital: 96992079
- Ibn Sina Hospital: 99613948
- Chest Hospital: 99258749
- Razi Hospital: 97633487
- Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242
- Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113
- Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037
- Maternity Hospital: 98559531
- As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508
- Zain Hospital: 97552031
- NBK Hospital: 96931761
- Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470
- Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164
- Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786
- Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469
- KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363

Meanwhile, all licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day. The Ministry of Health is also asking doctors and nurses affiliated with the private medical sector to volunteer in order to contribute to the fight against the virus. Volunteering is available through the link: <http://volunteering.q8-ehealth.com>. The ministry had closed all private clinics and medical centers effective March 22, 2020 until further notice.

### Mental health assistance

The Kuwait Psychological Association (KPA) is providing consultation through the phone for people suffering from the psychological impacts of coronavirus. Different doctors are working on the hotline in different timings as follows:

- Dr Rashed Al-Sah: on Monday and Wednesday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9797-6168.
  - Dr Fahad Al-Tasha: daily from 8:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 9904-8258.
  - Dr Othman Al-Asfour: daily 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Call 9938-5350.
  - Dr Mohammed Al-Khalidi (head of this team): daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.
  - Dr Ahmad Al-Khalidi: daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.
  - Dr Muneera Al-Qattan: Monday and Wednesday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9953-3108.
  - Dr Zainab Al-Saffar: Sunday and Thursday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9954-9908.
  - Dr Sameera Al-Kandari: Tuesday 9:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 6770-9434.
  - Dr Kawthar Al-Yaqout: Monday and Wednesday 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 5521-0088.
- For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.