

## Local

## Maids and the virus



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

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Last week, a local private TV channel interviewed two Asian domestic workers in Kuwait. Both were in tears and confused over their situation, because they suddenly found themselves on the street without shelter in difficult circumstances, as they were thrown out from their sponsor's house on the pretext of the spread of the coronavirus. Their painful oppression made me and others wonder about the conditions of some of the workers who may be suffering due to the repercussions of this virus – financially and morally.

It was sad to watch these women, relatively old in age, who found themselves on the street and did not know where to go and what they did wrong. They said their embassy did not receive them, so they walked aimlessly in the streets until they met the reporter and made their voices heard. They were taken to a shelter under state custody. The video was also published on social media. They are safe now, but are victims of abuse by their sponsor.

The women were lucky and are undoubtedly secure now, but I wonder if there are more similar cases who may be struggling under the hard conditions because of the damage they suffered because of the coronavirus. We all know there are families who have lost their salaries or part of it due to the stoppage of businesses, and this has certainly hurt them.

Some of these families may have domestic workers who are also in desperate need to support their families back home, so stopping the maid's salary for any reason will hugely harm her family as well. She may be able to afford to eat and sleep, but who knows what her family is going through.

Those two women represent an example of what a sponsor can do in the event he is unwilling to pay the maid. He may find it easier to throw the worker out of the house like a used item or trash on the excuse of spreading the virus, instead of taking responsibility for her as per her contract. Some people have no sense, otherwise we wouldn't see people like those two women.

I felt comfortable that the state intervened and placed those women in a shelter to protect them, as it is not possible to leave them on the street without a roof or money. Yet I wonder about the position of the law in this case and if the sponsor can act in this aggressive manner. To my understanding, he is responsible to care for these dependents. I also believe their embassy has to demand the rights of these women if the sponsor hasn't paid their salaries.

I believe that throwing out the maids was an inhuman act, and the sponsor must be punished, knowing that the government did not cut the salaries of employees in the government sector, whether they are expatriates or citizens. The same holds true for many in the private sector as well.

I hope Asian embassies will alert all their citizens to contact them directly in case they are expelled and the coronavirus outbreak is used as an excuse to harm them. The entire world, as well as Kuwait, is recovering from this virus and preparing to return to normal life. There is no need to cause harm to others. There is no excuse because businesses are on their way back soon.

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MP Safa Al-Hashem is seen during a session at the National Assembly on June 16, 2020. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Different but similar



By Abdellatif Sharaa

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I came across a piece about customs that distinguish people from each other, and it was amazing how a subject is approached differently by people of different nations; even in different parts of the same country. There is no doubt that every nation has its own exclusive customs due to various factors such as geopolitical location, environment, history and even civilizations that existed there.

In many cases, the existence of certain customs in a place does not mean they will not spread somewhere else. Our current world seems to be a very small town when it comes to social media, communications and ease of travel.

If we look at languages for example, we find Arabic is described by many as the most difficult language to learn, and its difficulty comes from the sound of some of its alphabets. Actually it has one alphabet that is exclusive to it – dhad – after which the language is described or referred to.

Yet I am amazed at the number of people from all parts of the world –from the US all the way to China – who learn and speak the language with its grammar and the masculine and feminine differentiations!

Sometimes it seems that some customs are universal, although with some modifications here and there. In the Gulf region for example, we have Girgian during the month

of Ramadan, where children go from house to house singing traditional songs while carrying specially-sewn bags to collect candy and even money. This reminds me of the trick or treat custom in the West, although the backgrounds of both are totally different.

Another custom that exists in this part of the world has to do with weddings. On the eve of the wedding party, the female relatives of the bride will be invited to celebrate a henna night, during which the hands of the bride will be decorated with henna and the women will sing and dance the night out to mark the end of being single. Is not this close to what is called a bachelorette's party in some other countries?

It seems that as much as there are differences, there are similarities regardless of language, location, color, belief and so on.

On a lighter note, I was amazed at hearing one supposedly educated person who was claiming that we have a highly effective remedy for COVID-19, which is actually a dish that is very popular in Egypt and the rest of Arabia. It is mulukhiya!

He said that if it is eaten in the shaloulou way, it will not allow the virus to find refuge in your body. I do not know about this but I mentioned mulukhiya because it was a dish exclusive to royalty in Egypt before it became popular – mulukiya actually means 'it is royal'.

Finally, Allah says: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed the most noble of you in sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted." — Holy Quran (49:13)