

Local

Barter community thrives in Kuwait in time of COVID-19 pandemic crisis

Jobless expats offer household goods in exchange of basic commodities

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Salmiya's old souq has become a meeting point for many Filipinos wanting to sell something or barter anything in exchange for groceries or cash to help their families survive during the coronavirus crisis. The old souq is a popular hangout for Filipinos in Kuwait, with many Filipino restaurants and groceries serving the area.

To survive with no work and no pay, many expats have turned to selling homemade and ready-to-eat food, and many are engaged in bartering. They sit on the benches in one corner carrying with them something to sell or barter.

Rolieto was waiting for a buyer, with whom he earlier spoke through Facebook Messenger, in the old souq to sell his mountain bike because he said he no longer had enough money to send to his family back home. He said he had bought it brand new for KD 120 as a means of transport to his workplace located nearby.

Over three months

"I don't have work for more than three months now, and no salary too. But I was able to survive because I have good flat mates sharing food almost every day. I had little savings, and I withdrew my money to pay for rent and to send money back home," he said. "I got KD 50 for the bike, but the buyer said he will get back to me when he gets more money so he can add KD 20 more. I accepted the initial KD 50 so I can send money to my family in the Philippines," Rolieto said. "I had been waiting for cash assistance from the Philippine Embassy, but it seems I was not approved for the program, so I have to do something to help myself and my family," he added.

There are more than a dozen barter-focused pages

for Kuwait on Facebook and many people post items they want to sell or barter there before meeting potential buyers in person. Jay posted images of baking utensils which he wanted to exchange for a portable AC. "Without bartering, we'll all end up in the hospital because the heat is unbearable. When I posted it, within a few hours I got an offer and I immediately requested him to send the portable AC to us," he said.

"It was timely because of the lockdown and curfew. We couldn't wait for the electrician, who was in the locked down area of Hawally at that time. The AC condenser was not working and the parts needed for the repair could only be purchased in Shuwaikh, and the store was closed. Imagine the days and nights spent without the AC - it was unbearable and in fact my wife is still sick because of the AC problem we experienced," Jay added.

Salmiya's old souq hotspot for barter

Serious crisis

A barter page administrator who spoke to Kuwait Times on the condition of anonymity said: "When I created it, I never knew that it would catch the attention of so many people. Now I realize how serious the crisis is and how this small community of bartering people is able to save families during the pandemic. When people posted to barter bags and shoes in exchange of milk and diapers for babies, I cried and I realized the importance of this page to Filipinos in Kuwait. They are ready to exchange their valuables for baby food! They even post to barter watches, bags, clothes, refrigerators and washing machines in exchange of food. That is really something serious and I thank God I made this page."

Items for barter run the gamut from shoes, handbags and clothing to household goods, musical instruments, makeup, toys and electronics, with most asking for food, diapers and other basic commodities in re-

#KBCMoment
#KBCStory
My first barter
Maraming salamat sa group na to, marami pong natulungan, natutulungan at matutulungan pa ❤️
From 1 bag to grocery items na napaka laking tulong sa taong pinagbigyan ko nito.



KUWAIT: Facebook screenshots showing barter deals made by residents in Kuwait during the COVID-19 crisis (used with permission).

turn. "Cleenwood flat iron - used once, in good working condition, with free 3 Sensodyne toothpaste 15 ml," reads a post. "Willing to barter for 3 liters of cooking oil, plus 3 kg of detergent," the post adds. Another post reads: "Sofa (5-seater), clean and excellent condition...for baby formula S-26 stage 3 900 gm (2 pieces), baby diapers."

"Normally you only barter with people you know. Now everything is being bartered in exchange for food. The rise of the bartering community is phenomenal because of the fact that we are in a crisis situation now and many need food to survive," the barter page administrator said.



KUWAIT: Salmiya sea firemen rescued three Kuwaiti men who went swimming in a restricted area off of Abu Al-Hasaniya. The three were hospitalized, and one of them was admitted inside the intensive care unit in a critical condition. —By Hanan Al-Saadoun

Roads authority completes works during curfew



KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Roads and Transportation completed the maintenance of Jahra Road westward towards Abdaly, the author-

ity announced Tuesday. The completed works spanned over 3.9 kilometers in length, with five lanes in each direction covering an area of 77,690

square meters, the authority said, noting that 2,249 tons of asphalt were used. The maintenance works were carried out between June 17 and June 21,

2020 taking advantage of the curfew hours to carry out as much road maintenance works as possible, the authority explained.

