

Pandemic Diaries

Walk a mile in
their shoes

By Jamie Etheridge

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The air felt fresh and clean yesterday when we left our apartment and went outside to walk during the two hours allotted for exercise under the full curfew. A handful of people, all safely distanced from each other and most wearing masks, strolled along the street. Birds chirped and a few stray cats slunk along the sidewalks and behind the wheels of parked cars.

Our daughters, outside for the first time in more than two months, laughed and joked, excited and happy just to be outdoors for a few minutes. It felt wonderful to be outside, to walk in the sunshine and feel the slight breeze on our bare faces.

We walked for half an hour, circling our block and keeping as much as possible to the shaded areas on the streets. Along the main street, the road grew busy as dozens of walkers and joggers passed by. Most wore masks and thankfully there was still enough space that everyone kept a distance from each other. We are incredibly lucky to live in an area that is not overcrowded.

Many people in Kuwait, however, are not so lucky. They live in densely populated areas with narrow streets crammed with parked cars, no sidewalks and no gardens or walkways. Videos and photos from Khaitan, Salmiya, Farwaniya, Jleeb and other areas showed closely-packed crowds (most of whom were men) walking almost side by side through the streets. Some of them were wearing masks but many were not. There were fights on the streets between knots of 'exercisers'; others exploited the outdoor hours to dash to the grocery store for supplies, people driving cars and even riding bicycles against the Cabinet's directive.

The full curfew completed its third day only and already people are feeling the intense pressure of the lockdown. The outdoor exercise hours are meant as a time to allow people to maintain their physical and mental health, offering an important break from the feeling of being trapped indoors. No one wants to lose the freedom of these two precious hours.

But for those who live in a crowded area with no park or walking path, with tens of thousands of others stacked on top of each other in tiny apartments, what other option do they have?

It's easy to judge those people walking crowded areas and the comments on social media illustrated the harsh lack of empathy. But in these times of global crisis, what's needed is more empathy. Instead of judging or criticizing those who were out walking, people need to try walking a mile in each other's shoes.

Full curfew expected to help reduce
COVID-19 cases: Health Minister

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs a cabinet meeting via video call. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Government urged the public Monday to abide by the full curfew and comply with health authorities' instructions as the curfew was expected to reduce the number of coronavirus cases. Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, in an online briefing for the cabinet, chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, said number of infections amongst citizens and expatriates increased due to failure of the public to abide by physical distancing. Sheikh Basel however said the health situation was under control and "the number of infections is expected to decline after the implementation of the full curfew in the country," a statement by Deputy Premier, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said. The full curfew began Sunday and the government allowed the people to exercise outdoors for two hours daily: 4:30-6:30 pm.

Sheikh Basel, meanwhile, said the Ministry of Health filed three lawsuits against persons who attempted to undermine reputation of the MoH and its staff regarding alleged corruption and profiteering crimes related to purchase of masks and protective garments, said Saleh. Sheikh Basel reiterated full confidence in the MoH officials who were "carrying out their responsibilities faithfully and in integrity."

Examining procedures

Saleh said the cabinet, keen on brushing aside any claim, assigned the State Audit Bureau to examine direct contracting procedures carried out by the MoH, as of March 1, 2020, in order to confront ramifications of the coronavirus. The government urged the public to come forward to legal departments and anti-corruption authority to provide information and documents proving commitment of corruption crimes. It also assigned relevant government authorities to take legal action against any person publishing false allegations against integrity of officials, said Saleh.

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.

On the other hand, Minister of Oil and Acting Minister of Electricity and Water Dr Khaled Al-Fadhel and MEW's officials briefed the cabinet members that 13,340 megawatts of electricity would be generated this month, a three-percent increase than the 2019 figures. In the meantime, Foreign Minister and head of a special team tasked with repatriation of citizens from abroad, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah, briefed the government about preparations for nationals' return from Saudi Arabia via the land checkpoint Al-Nuwiseeb were complete. He said the operation would be carried out between May 12 and 20, and the foreign ministry and the State of Kuwait Embassy in Riyadh started registering names of citizens seeking to return home. He expressed gratitude for Saudi Arabia for facilitating the return of Kuwaiti citizens.

13,340
megawatts
enter service

Amir's speech

The cabinet also discussed speech of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, which he addressed to the nation two days ago, during which he urged the international community and specialists to search for a vaccine for the coronavirus pandemic. His Highness the Amir highlighted the professional and transparent way the government was dealing with the pandemic, thanking all those who were fighting the disease. His Highness the Amir also called for learning lessons to strengthen national unity, rationalize resources, lessen dependence on others and diversify income. The cabinet assigned relevant ministerial committees to implement guidelines in the speech.

The cabinet meanwhile urged the parliament to postpone a National Assembly's session, scheduled for today, until after May 30, the last day of the full curfew. The government said the scheduled session entailed health hazards because the parliament would house more than 100 people in one place, which would contradict with preventive measures to confront the virus. — KUNA

In My View

Corona sets
the rules

By Abdellatif Sharaa

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Allow me first, during the last 10 days of the holy month of Ramadan, the most blessed period of the month, to wish everyone all the best. Please dear readers of all faiths - do pray day and night that Allah (God) Almighty accept our worship and clean our world from the so-called COVID-19 pandemic.

We went to bed one night, then without warning we woke up in a different world that was almost turned upside down. Europe, all of a sudden, is no longer the dream destination of migrants, the United States is no longer the strongest, Paris is no longer a romantic hub, New York is no longer exciting, the Great Wall of China is no longer a fort! Makkah and Madinah lost worshippers, mosques are empty, churches closed their doors. All became afraid of death. Everyone realized their true size as there is no value of human beings on the face of earth.

Suddenly, many wars stopped and both the killer and the killed became hunted by a virus that can only be seen with compound microscopes. Suddenly, shaking hands, hugging and kissing became weapons we fear. The lack of visits by parents, family and friends became a symbol of love.

Suddenly we realized that there is no true value of power, beauty, money and weapons, and our major concern is to get oxygen and make sure it is available in case we become prey to the virus. All life's facilities came to a halt - no airports, schools, universities or restaurants.

The world became cleaner, the environment improved. The ozone layer stopped deteriorating, wildlife became relatively vibrant in urban areas while human beings are quarantined in homes that all of a sudden became virtual prisons of choice. This is a message from the heavens, that earth, water, skies and air are safe without you; the world is going on without you. When you return to a guest life again, do not forget that you are just a guest in this world.

Finally: "Oh Allah, grant health to my body, Oh Allah, grant health to my hearing, Oh Allah, grant health to my sight, Oh Allah, I ask You by Your mercy which envelopes all things, that You forgive me, there is no might nor power except with Allah."

PS: The idea of this column was inspired by a message from a friend

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 9,286 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Monday, in addition to 65 deaths. With the exception of 131 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 hundreds have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 2,907 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 6,314 people receiving treatment and 2,619 quarantined.

Curfew

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. Earlier, 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.

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 (Capital 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-health.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-Khaldi (head of this team): daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.
 - Dr Ahmad Al-Khaldi: 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.