



Top and above: The COVID-19 drive-thru testing center at the airport ready to receive visitors.

Photos by Samer Shaqir

Sponsors whose employees abscond to face legal action

'Visa traders detention extended'



Volunteers from the Institute of Applied Nursing Authority getting ready to report for work.

KD 100m installments postponed

May salaries for govt sector ready

KUWAIT CITY, May 18: Local banks have started depositing salaries and financial privileges for the month of May into the accounts of government sector employees, reports Al-Anba daily quoting sources.

Sources confirmed the banks are working hard to deposit salaries immediately after receiving the salary statements from government institutions, such that salaries of all employees in the sector will be deposited within this week -- before the Eid Al-Fitr holiday.

Sources added the banks also deposited the social allowance for graduates.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Public Works and Housing Dr Rana Al-Faris clarified that the decision to postpone the collection of Kuwait Credit Bank (KCB) installments covers only those who obtained loans from the bank, reports Al-Anba daily.

She affirmed the decision guarantees that the postponed monthly installments will not increase and this applies to all types of loans obtained from KCB.

It has been reported that about 150,000 citizens shall benefit from the decision and total amount of postponed installments is estimated at KD 100 million.

Decisions to cushion economy from COVID-19 effects yet to be realized

KUWAIT CITY, May 18: Weeks after the statement of the Higher Steering Committee for Economic Stimulus chaired by the Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Muhammad Al-Hashil saying its decisions to cushion the economy from the effects of the outbreak of coronavirus on the local economy, the practical and executive measures for those decisions have yet to be achieved on the ground, reports Al-Jaridah daily.

Owners of small and medium enterprises and those working in private sector are mostly affected by the crisis, as their businesses are at a free fall due to slow implementation of government's procedures in terms of soft financing, which contradicts the nature of crises wherein decisions must be fast and flexible to amend in the event of deviations in their implementation, adding such decisions will lose value and become futile if delayed, and they'll lead to greater costs in the future, the daily added.

It's been more than one month and the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises has yet to start financing the companies under its umbrella and those affected by the pandemic, given that the Higher Steering Committee for Economic Stimulus had set the conditions for soft financing at 80 percent from the fund, and 20 percent from local banks, the daily said.

According to the daily, repercussions of the delay in implementation fall on the shoulders of entrepreneurs, which is more

burdensome when considering the financial obligations to be met to avoid the closure of businesses or even footing multiple expenses such as salaries and rents, which may cause many of them to falter or fall into bankruptcy; thus missing the objective of the fund that encourages Kuwaiti youth to initiate value added projects to boost the national economy.

Nonetheless, if government's mechanism continues on such a slow decision-making pace by treating the crisis as an ordinary problem, then we fear that failure of small and medium enterprises would greatly affect the bigger entities, especially sectors that depend on small enterprises in their dealings, it noted.

It said proposals having positive impact on the Kuwaiti youth who are employed in private sector even remain at the mercy of bureaucracy and slow decision-making mechanism despite the clarity of data and completion of studies for that purpose. Foremost of which is the decision to raise financial support for the national manpower employed in private sector by 100 percent, as the delay in issuing such decisions will take a toll on the young people in terms of salary reduction and lay-off.

Ultimately, the situation will increase the burden on the state, besides holding the state responsible for appointing a greater number of them in public sector due to limited job security in private sector, it added.

KUWAIT CITY, May 18: Public Authority for Manpower has submitted to the Ministry of Interior a list of names of employers (sponsors) whose domestic workers frequently abscond with the aim of taking legal action deemed appropriate by the ministry against them, reports Aljarida daily.

In a statement to the daily, Director of the Department for Recruiting Domestic Workers in the authority, Nasser Al-Mousawi indicated continuous coordination with the Ministry of Interior to prevent domestic workers from infiltrating the labor market in private sector, which according to Law No. 68/2015, are restricted to work in domestic sector only and not shops or commercial complexes.

"In the event that any domestic worker is caught working for a different employer, the authority will refer him/her to the General Directorate of Residency Affairs and legal measures taken against the employer," Al-Mousawi said, adding concerned authorities will continue monitoring the internet in search of those trading in domestic visas, and anyone caught in the act will be referred to the Cybercrime Department in the Interior Ministry.

Detention continued:

The Sentences Renewal Judge has ordered the continued detention of 22 Egyptians and 6 Kuwaitis, reports Al-Rai daily.

The daily added, the men face the charges of trading in visa and bringing into the country bulk labor and receiving huge sums of money in exchange.

The daily added, the suspects were arrested after their names were disclosed by the residence law violators who took advantage of leaving the country without paying fines after the Ministry of Interior offered the amnesty in April.

In the same context, the Public Prosecution is in the process of investigating other suspects (Kuwaitis and expatriates) who the Ministry of Interior is accusing of bringing into the country thousands of workers and leaving them on the streets to fend for themselves after taking huge sums of money from each worker.

DIWANIYA ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

'Increase private sector role'

'Corona hell & privatization paradise'

"ALL Kuwaitis highly appreciate and respect the commercial class for its historical political and economic role, and for preserving the social and political system. The Kuwaiti political environment -- consisting of the ruling family, merchants and the middle class is the outcome and pillar of such a social and political system," columnist, Professor at Kuwait University's Political Science Department and the Assistant Under-secretary at the Ministry of Information Dr. Haila Al-Mekaimi wrote for *Annahar* daily.

"Political scientists confirm that the middle class plays an essential role and contributes to the political stability, for this all emerging societies are working to expand that class and reduce the class of the poor. That is the basis of the strategy pursued by China and India and this made these emerging powers play a major role in shaping international politics.

"This is also the case in Kuwait, where the ruling system has realized that fact from an early period, and it sought to strengthen the middle class, which essentially strengthens the system itself, through many mechanisms including democratic work, civil society, education, and cooperative work, and the latter is considered the most important one because it is related to the basics of human survival in terms of food. Cooperative work constitutes one of the sources of legitimacy of the system, at the same time it forms a safety valve for the vast majority of the Kuwaitis.

"Consequently, any intrusion into cooperative work is in fact a blatant interference in the relationship between the political system and its people, and the seizure of civil gains laid down by those in power, and any acquisition of it will undoubtedly affect the popular balance of the political system and even if it came under the slogan of improving cooperative work, then what about whoever offended the food security.

"Since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, some of the merchants with cinematic movements made us feel that we are living in the era of *The Godfather* movie, however the protagonist Marlon Brando who played the role of Don Corleone is replaced by 'Don Onion', and the onions became a rare commodity and got the title of 'yellow gold' and continued to disappear for twenty days until we recently saw some of the video clips showing the onions were thrown in garbage containers after they became unfit for human consumption.

"Then we moved on to the problems of vegetables and fruits market, spoiled meat and fish auctions, selling a bag of bread at imaginary prices, and fighting for Kuwaiti agricultural products. The Ministry of Commerce was following it up thankfully, and the calamity is that all of this is happening and we live daily the problems of marginal employment, which are brought either by individuals or companies that have large contracts with the government.

"Daily the media writes about food delivery 'boys' working for restaurants and who insisted on working although infected with the virus, which contributed to prolonging the duration of the curfew and the futility of the partial curfew and now we are in a total lockdown.

"The tragedy is that after all those 'onion films' which made us shed tears, there are still those who rudely demand the privatization of the cooperative sector and cooperative societies, which is the main point through which the government gained its popularity in this crisis, along with the flour, catering and health care sectors -- sectors related to the basic needs of the human being.

"That claim lacks the understanding of the new environment post-corona crisis, which is to restore confidence in the state and the public sector that took over the management of this crisis, a role that will grow stronger with the escalation of global health challenges.

"This does not mean that I am against privatization, rather, I see the necessity of an increased role of the private sector in supporting the national economy, especially during the coming stage, but 'hands off' from the sectors that directly affect the basic needs of the Kuwaiti citizen but goes beyond in humiliating him.

"Our brothers, who are affected in the *Godfather* movie, I would like to remind you that the population of Kuwait is one million, I mean, the subject is not worthy of all of these Hollywood films, not everything is negotiable, and there are new economic sectors imposed by Corona preferring to invest away from tampering with the safety networks of the Kuwaiti citizen, most importantly the cooperative sector, even if marred by 'corona' or some abuses, is capable of reform and development, as the onion crisis and the food crises that followed then forced the citizen to choose 'the corona hell' not the paradise of privatization."

Also:

"Will the corona fix what is spoiled by time? Will this fatal crisis lead to a change in thinking and approach for the coming years," columnist, Professor at Kuwait University's Political Science Department, an advisor to Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the secretary general of the Arab Fund for Human Rights (AFHR) Dr Ghanim Al-Najjar wrote for *Al-Jarida* daily.

In crises the voices for future reform increase, and promises increase that there is no return to the previous situation, but what usually happens is the opposite.

"Have we learned one or more lessons from one of the most serious crises we have had, which is the 1990 invasion? Corona showed the gravity of the demographic imbalances on the surface, as it is clear that successive government plans aimed at achieving a population balance of 50 percent, but this was only achieved by invasion.

"Once the country was liberated, thousands of visas were granted, to a number of influential people, to drown the country with marginal employment, and leave them on the streets of Kuwait (to find job for themselves and feed themselves) as companies winning government contracts brought into the country thousands of workers in excess of their needs and threw them into the street.

"This gave rise to a number of smaller companies and for the purpose of attracting only bulk workers and this resulted in a rapid loss of population balance, and, by an effective act, the demographics became worse than they were before the invasion."

"The crux with the thing is that the senior officials addressed their Bedouin, and they are on the Kuwaiti borders as members of the Kuwaiti army ready for liberation, that you are Kuwaitis, and there is no such thing as without, as soon as the country was liberated, those promises evaporated, and they became illegal residents, so we are creative in solving problems by changing their names.

"To make matters worse, the term 'fake companies' appeared on the scene a few years ago. These companies were given license that enabled them to bring large numbers of people, especially the menial labor, and threw them in the street although each of the migrant workers paid a lot of money to get a job in Kuwait.

What measures have been taken against them?

"The security authorities threatened the workers who were brought in by these companies with immediate deportation, even though they were not guilty, without any consideration for being victims, and the documents showed they are staying legally in the country.

"As for the fictitious companies, the maximum that can be done is closure, and there is no accountability for their owners, or the officials who contributed to this phenomenon."

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"Without a doubt, abstract numbers differ from useful information. Therefore, the presentation of numbers only without converting them into information may be ineffective for decision makers or partners, so this must always be taken into account during crises," Dr. Hind Al-Shomar wrote for *Al-Anba* daily.

"The emerging corona crisis could be a vivid example, as each number has meanings and messages that need to be clearly presented so that irrational decisions are not taken due to numbers alone. Disseminating the numbers alone in terms of the infected, deaths and recovery for the new corona cases without explaining the meaning of each number positively or negatively makes it difficult for the partners to assess the situation or be convinced of the usefulness of the decisions taken.

"I think a lot of specialists and non-specialists do not feel it when websites publish numbers about novel corona, so the legitimate question for everyone is: What do we benefit from displaying these numbers and knowing them, and what do these numbers mean?"

"Also, the partners have the right to say something about the sources of these numbers, the stages and steps for converting them into useful information, comparisons, statistical and informational methods that have become available to everyone.

"As to how the officials deal with numbers and information, this is another matter. There are officials who are satisfied with the numbers only to issue decisions that may not be appropriate or not at the appropriate time, while there are officials looking for information and not the numbers which support their efforts to make important decisions; such that the decisions are logical and able to facilitate mobilization of partners to implement them.

"In this context and with the digital revolution that the world is witnessing in the applications of artificial intelligence, our dealing with numbers -- whether from decision-making sites at all levels or the sites of followers and spectators -- must be in a way with which we improve the utilization of numbers by converting them into valuable information and feasibility to address the minds in a way that supports decision-making.

"Some decisions, if not supported by information, lose justifications for issuing and implementing them and become useless or are described as randomness. Undoubtedly, there are many examples around us in many areas."

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"I will briefly list a number of 'human and legal tragedies' carried out by Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor by reviewing its performance in labor issues as presented by the State Audit Bureau," columnist *Mudhaffar Abdullah* wrote for *Aljarida* daily.

"However, before that, let me present a very strange issue that the State Audit Bureau mentioned in its 2012/2013 financial report. It stated, 'The government contracts supply unpaid standby manpower at a rate of ten percent, which leads to marginalized manpower with the expectation of non-payment of salaries ...' and that is the text of the report that I leave for you to comment on.

"Is this a joke? Is the ministry supplying people and then throwing them out on the street like beggars? How did Minister of Social Affairs and Labor allow this? Why did the Parliament miss this in its interpellations? After this calamity, I present to you a number of violations that would make you embarrassed.

"The following violations were highlighted in the reports of the State Audit Bureau for the 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 fiscal years:

1. Ignoring the defect in the automated system for the purpose of issuing false work licenses.
2. Granting powers to employees to tamper with the data of some companies and manipulate the actual estimate of labor force needed through the automated system for which the ministry spent KD 6.5 million.
3. Taking it easy with dummy companies.
4. Adopting personal assessment of employees in determining the employment numbers of some companies.
5. Falsification of employment salary certificates by company representatives.
6. Expanding the issuance of a business invitation card and turning it into a work permit... among many others.

The question is: Do you understand the aforementioned violations? Do you need an explanation of what I have presented from the reports of the State Audit Bureau? Why do workers go out like locusts during the two-hour exercising period?"

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"A press conference is required after every Cabinet session, as it has been happening since the beginning of the corona pandemic," columnist *Iqbal Al-Ahmad* wrote for *Al-Qabas* daily.

"This communication should not stop even if life gradually returns to normal. It should be a habit to open the door for questions to all media outlets in order to inquire about everything discussed in the Council of Ministers' meetings and any decision taken by the council.

"All forms of media represent public opinion and the Cabinet's openness to the entire Kuwaiti society.

We, in Kuwait, now need two press conferences following the sessions of the executive and legislative authorities (government and Parliament).

"The Kuwaiti citizen has the right to know what is going on in these two authorities, to be aware of everything discussed therein, to address issues and express his opinion and observations. Perhaps, there will be a scope for remediation of some things that may be absent from any party.

"Well-trained journalists and media people, who know how to ask and understand the meaning of questions, should attend these press conferences ... journalists who know how to ask and how to convey their thoughts, questions and comments to these two authorities.

"Unfortunately, as we monitored press conferences which have been broadcasted on television since the corona crisis started, we were surprised by the superficiality of some questions or the way they were raised and explanation of ideas.

"Some personalities present in the press conferences are important and powerful source persons from whom we can obtain valuable information on issues under discussion, yet we did not come out with important information in the end."

— Compiled by Ahmad Al-Shazli