



Top and above: Tests for coronavirus conducted at the airport facilities. Cars are disinfected after the occupants undergo the virus tests.

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A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

'Expats, no awareness major cause'

Pandemic... Kuwait and Singapore

"SINGAPORE – the beautifully developed republic – which sits on an area of no more than 720 square kilometers and boasts of a population of just over 5 million people, is one of the great tigers of Asia. It has the distinction of being an advanced nation in the area of health services that guarantee its citizens the best wellness and managed in record time to control the pandemic," columnist *Dr Ali Abdul Rahman Al-Huwail* wrote for *Al-Rai* daily.

"However, within a few weeks its control over the virus fell apart and went on to become one of the worst coronavirus infected countries in Asia with the number of people infected with the virus exceeding 9,000 cases and with the detection of average 1,400 new cases daily.

"The Singapore Health Ministry and the US Time magazine reported that the cause of this decline is due to the large number of expatriate workers and about 10 to 12 people huddled in one room, lack of minimum health awareness and disregard for the commitment of personal hygiene and disrespect for instructions issued by the World Health Organization (WHO).

"Professor Larry Brilliant -- who predicted in 2006 of a health pandemic -- says quarantine, social distancing and personal protection are very important measures because they save time for medical staff to deal with illnesses other than COVID-19, reduces stress on health services, and they give the opportunity to conduct diagnostic examinations and pursue the infected people and identify those who should be isolated. Professor Brilliant's views explain the negative impact of the presence of large numbers of people who do not commit to personal protection and their controls on successful efforts for combating the virus.

"Kuwait, with its four and a half million population, including 1.45 million Kuwaitis and the rest expatriates, a majority of who are marginal workers with irregular income and human characteristics are believed to be living in similar conditions to their 'counterparts' in Singapore.

"Kuwait has achieved outstanding success in the face of Covid-19, but it is vulnerable to what happened to Singapore and even to what is worse than what the latter is currently facing, unless exceptional measures are taken, most importantly -- as Bill Gates emphasizes -- the expansion of diagnostic examination, and isolation according to the results of the examination which is the method by which South Korea has achieved its success.

"The second necessity is the emptying of public hospitals in the country from epidemic cases by transferring stable and non-critical cases to field hospitals under the management of the armed forces, and keeping only critical cases in the hospitals. Without this procedure, the medical institution will face the difficult task and deciding who should be given the priority, to the citizens or the expatriates who occupy most hospital beds.

"The low level of some newly appointed nursing staff doubles the chances of putting stress on health services, in addition to the fact that the numbers available are not sufficient to deal with epidemic cases, so the final class students in the nursing institutes must be trained and prepared for use when necessary, and this procedure may apply to the graduates of the College of Supportive Medical Services, and reducing the numbers of marginal employment during the next 6 to 8 months, by half, or more, thus reducing the stress and depletion of health services.

"However the expatriate workers residing in Kuwait entered the country in an official and legal manner, so you cannot deport any of them unless by mutual consent between the parties. If mutual consent is absent, Kuwait is obliged to host them and treat them as Kuwaitis, including the provision of full health care."

Also:

"Coronavirus appeared several months ago, and everyone thought it would go away quickly, but it has been with us for a long time now and no one knows when it will end and when it will disappear forever," *Dr Hind Al-Shoumar* wrote for *Al-Anba* daily.

"This virus is like the rest of the viruses; when they first appeared, the whole world was not accustomed to their presence, and did not know how to treat infected cases or how to prevent infection. However, people now seem to know how to prevent infection, which is by avoiding contact, social distancing, wearing protective clothing such as gloves, masks and face cover, and washing hands for not less than 20 seconds using soap and water, as well as using alcoholic sanitizers.

"A weak virus, which we do not see with the naked eye, has been able to infect those who do not adhere to precautionary measures and sometimes even cause death. All that is required for all is to adhere to all measures that limit its spread so that we can get rid of it.

"What is important now, considering Eid Al-Fitr holidays are fast approaching, is for us not to go easy on all these procedures and return to social communication, as this is dangerous for everyone. We should stick to communicating through social media and video calls and enjoy the holiday together without trying to make physical contact so that we do not give the virus an opportunity to spread among us.

"Eid, which is fast approaching, will be different this year compared to the previous years, as we must adhere to social distancing to protect us from COVID-19, so that we can return to our normal lives.

"Coronavirus has given everyone an opportunity to think, hold oneself and others accountable, keep people staying in their homes and avoiding family visits and visits to markets and complexes. This time must be spent in homes for activities that are beneficial such as worshiping and reading the Quran, cooking, practicing hobbies and sports and communicating with family and friends via phone and messages.

"We should not succumb to depression or distress because of the changes to the lives that we are accustomed to, especially those who are extroverts and enjoy being with people. Because of the current exceptional circumstances, it is necessary to adapt to the new situation in order to defeat this virus and eliminate its existence. After its elimination, we can go back to communicating with family and friends happily and lovingly.

"Those who want to meet with their families and loved ones in the future must sacrifice now in staying away from them in order to protect everyone and prevent the spread of the virus among us. 'After hardship comes ease,' said God Almighty."

"Both the leadership and people of Kuwait are characterized by the spirit of initiative and creativity, so we were ahead of almost the entire region after gaining our independence from British," columnist *Dr. Anwar Shari' an* wrote for *Al-Shahid* daily.

"Kuwait was a forerunner in building the state of institutions and adopting the Constitution in 1962, in addition to building unique economic models and redistributing income through valuation of properties and other policies.

"From its early years, Kuwait managed to establish a distinguished educational system which was, at that time, at par with the developed countries, and also built an integrated health sector. The fact is that creativity covered all aspects of its cultural, social, urban and human life.

"However, we started stepping backwards and ruining all that is beautiful when personal interests overwhelmed public interest. Portfolios were handed to undeserving people, and the distribution of wealth got contaminated with nepotism and favoritism.

"Knowledge turned into certificates, and things started falling apart one after the other. However, despite all that, Kuwait remained the forerunner and proactive, but once we conceive a beautiful idea - in terms of an initiative, decision, law or appointment, we end up facing poor implementation until we reach the stage of questioning everything that is beautiful and rejecting all initiatives.

"At the early stages of dealing with the coronavirus, His Highness the Amir directed the government to take all necessary measures to combat the pandemic, and everyone praised what the State of Kuwait has done in dealing with it, but currently, it appears we have returned to our old habits of poor implementation of policies; persisting on mistakes until we reach a state of chaos in every step we take in combating the pandemic.

"For us to achieve the ultimate goal of preserving the health of society and the well-being of the economy and other aspects of life, there must be an administration capable of implementing and translating such policies into a reality. Such administration should include all qualified and well experienced brains, and most important of all, be strong and firm in enforcing the rule of law and executing their responsibilities."

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"The powerful and influential figures or the so-called 'shadow government' decided to attack Finance Minister Barrak Al-Shitan, in conjunction with the increasing pace of talks about the economic package," columnist *Dr. Hamoud Hattab Al-Enzi* wrote for *Al-Jarida* daily.

"Media outlets with strong influence and are supported by some lawmakers began to silence the minister in a vulgar way with the aim of intimidation, because they were apparently affected by his opposition to their tendencies from the beginning. The attack intensified after the minister issued a series of decisions that contravene the directions of the shadow government as follows:

- Referring several officials in the Public Authority for Social Security to the Anti-Corruption Authority for buying shares of a private company and increasing shares of the institution during the corona crisis.

- Halting the merger of Kuwait Finance House with Ahli United Bank.

- Issuing a directive to hand over billions of oil profits that could expose their irregularities.

"At this point, it is useful to cite the monitoring encountered by the Trends Center for Research and Studies, which yielded several results. Following are the most important of these results:

- Systematic campaign to remove the finance minister from the government despite the repercussions of corona.

- The minister confronted the 'crises dealers' by taking decisive steps, and then the lawmakers attacked him fiercely!

- The minister courageously took decisions to protect public money and confront the 'crises dealers', but these decisions drew negative parliamentary statements, instead of praising him and motivating him to continue this approach."

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"The Ministry of Interior -- represented by the port security, rescue, public security and traffic sectors, Ministry of Health and Customs General Administration exerted tremendous efforts to implement the directive of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the return of his people, resulting in the arrival of about 40,000 citizens on 185 flights from 58 destinations and about 2,000 who traveled by land through Nuwaiseeb border," columnist Lieutenant General *Eng Tariq Hamada* wrote for *Al-Anba* daily.

"Thousands of citizens, who were stranded in various countries, expressed their desire to return home under exceptional circumstances caused by the coronavirus outbreak.

"In these circumstances, we monitor those who spread information that Kuwait intends to open the way for expatriates residing here to return to their home countries. This prompted us to raise the following questions:

"Is this the time to allow dissemination of such confusing and far-fetched information, away from logic? Why do we bring tens of thousands of people to sit in their homes due to the lockdown and suspension of work in most institutions and companies? Is there food and health security to provide for their needs? Neither circumstances nor time permits this.

"In view of the number of infected cases, we find that it doubled among the Asian and Arab arrivals, while the quarantine centers are almost full. There are humanitarian considerations for expatriates. It is normal for Kuwait to allow them to enter, but their number shall remain very limited and within the controls in place until this epidemic is addressed."

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"Those who monitor medical circles today find a lot of different opinions about coronavirus -- that it can be controlled or not controlled. This could be natural because it is impossible to unify opinions about it. These contradictory views abound because corona is a new virus and there are few studies on how to control the disease and save us from this evil," columnist *Sagr Al-Ghilany* wrote for *Al-Anba* daily.

"Imposing curfew is one of the methods that many countries have adopted to implement the principle of social distancing, but there are different opinions on this procedure.

"In an interview, Professor Johan Giesecke -- a Swedish epidemiologist -- said Sweden follows a path different from the rest of the countries. He disclosed there is no curfew, but there are constant public awareness messages and instructions about the importance of hand washing and preventing the gathering of more than 50 people.

"This is due to the fact that Sweden is adopting evidence-based procedures, not assumptions, since there are no studies proving that social distancing and curfew could curb the spread of the virus.

"Also, majority of the studies are based on assumptions, so they could be incorrect. One of these assumptions is that the number of hospitals remains the same in the fight against the epidemic, but in reality, hospitals have expanded and additional hospitals were built to treat the infected persons."

– Compiled by Ahmad Al-Shazli

'GCC banks will be forced to cancel dividends this year'

'Will survive but profitability low'

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: Analysts at S&P credit ratings agency suggested that banks in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries will be forced to cancel dividends for the current year, with profits declining due to the repercussions of the effects of the coronavirus, indicating that this may lead to the emergence of a new wave of mergers in the long term, reports Al-Rai daily.

"It is unlikely that lenders in the region will need additional capital in the event of high loan defaults, despite facing the headwinds related to the impact of the coronavirus and low oil prices," the agency said in a report.

According to S&P, 23 the GCC banks had assets totaling \$1.5 trillion at the end of 2019, and can absorb up to \$36 billion in additional provisions, before capital rules begin to erode.

For his part, the chief director and head of the global Islamic finance at the agency, Mohammad Damak, expected that Gulf banks will witness deterioration in asset quality indicators, due to the multiplication of bad loans during the current year, but he indicated that the capitalization of those banks will continue to support their ratings.

In turn, the head of the financial affairs division for the Middle East and North Africa and researcher in the shares of the EFG-Hermes group, Elena Sanchez, explained that Gulf banks are supposed to be able to lead the current situation in a relatively appropriate manner, indicating that the banks will be able to survive the current crisis, but that their profitability will decrease significantly, and in some cases they will have to cancel the distribution of profits during 2020.

According to the S&P report, the MSCI index for Gulf banks fell by 18.2 percent during the first four months of this year, compared to a 16 percent drop in broad Gulf indexes during the same time period, and according to the banks index on April 30. It provided a dividend yield of about 5.16 percent.

On the other hand, the agency estimated that credit losses take up to 3 years to appear in the budgets of Gulf banks, noting that on average, lenders in the region can absorb up to 2.7 times their normal losses, despite the existence of a large discrepancy between the banks covered by the ratings.

S&P indicated that Saudi banks are the most flexible in the face of these losses, unlike the Bahraini banks, which are the lowest in the region. In return, the agency emphasized that the large real estate exposure to Kuwaiti banks makes them more vulnerable to their counterparts in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.



Photo by Rizk Taufiq
Minister of Information and Youth Affairs, Mohammad Nasser Al-Jabri, who also looks after the local agricultural produce paid a visit to the Fruits and Vegetable Market. Local farmers have delivered their produce to the market in abundance.

Economy

Kuwait among emerging markets but some negativity seen: report

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: A report published by the 'Global Finance' magazine ranks Kuwait among the regions for emerging markets that enjoy investment opportunities, but they face some negativities, reports *Al-Rai* daily.

The magazine's report confirmed the strength of the Kuwaiti banking sector for incentives for foreign direct investment, but the report pointed out that the negatives lie in the heavy dependence on the oil sector, in addition to the presence of a huge and inefficient public sector, which lacks transparency.

This classification was based on the aggregation of a number of data, including growth forecasts for the current year, as the country is likely to witness a contraction of 1.1 percent, in addition to the percentage of change in foreign direct investment during 2018/2017 in which Kuwait recorded a decline of about 1 percent.

This is in addition to the country's ranking in the Global Competitiveness Index, the Corruption Perceptions Index for 2019, and the Ease of Doing Business Index for the current year.

Despite the expectations issued by the International Monetary Fund a few months ago, which indicate a positive growth in per capita income in 2020 for more than 160 member countries, the report pointed out that these expectations run contrary to the Fund's expectations that it will witness negative growth in per capita income in more than 170 countries, with low-income countries especially at risk.

According to the report, it may seem almost inappropriate to celebrate the power and achievements of many emerging countries in the world in the midst of one of the worst crises in modern history, indicating that the commercial clashes and global geopolitical tensions that were the

hallmark of the past year seem almost trivial now, compared to the frightening epidemic caused by the spread of coronavirus.

However, the report pointed out that the experts agree at the present time that these conflicts, along with the deterioration of confidence, made us weak and unable to provide a coordinated response, pointing out that the current circumstances remind us of the extent of dependence on each other.

On the other hand, the report pointed out that despite the epidemiological setback, emerging economies are preaching the greatest amount of new growth, indicating at the same time that it will also be inaccurate to look back and into the future and see adversity only, rather than the determination and flexibility that these enormous challenges.

The report pointed out that despite all the experiences and difficulties, the emerging markets have never stopped on their path to sustainable development and prosperity.

The report noted that in the face of one threat after another, the governments of these countries often intervened more quickly and firmly than their more developed counterparts to protect their hard-earned gains, which confirms that these efforts were not in vain.

From a more optimistic point of view, the report indicated that the recession will be short-lived for emerging markets, and after this painful interruption, the start button will be pressed again to return life to normal. On the other hand, others reject this explanation and insist that the recovery will take years.

In both cases, the report stated that most developing countries are today stronger, richer, and more competitive than ever before, and are in a better position to withstand and recover from a crisis of this magnitude.