

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** Al-Maqsab Gate is one of the five main gates that used to provide access to Kuwait City in its early days along with the gates of Bneid Al-Qar, Shamiya, Shaab and Jahra. It is located in Kuwait City near the Holy Family Cathedral, positioned on one end of Soor Street which once encircled early Kuwait City. Al-Maqsab Gate has been refurbished and serves as a historical monument to Kuwait's trading past. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

# Tailoring, dressmaking shop workers struggle to survive, meet daily needs

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Barber shops, beauty salons and spas or massage parlors are closed in this stage of returning to normalcy in Kuwait. The list of businesses that remain shut down as part of precautions against the spread of the novel coronavirus include dressmaking and tailoring shops too. Kuwait Times visited the shops of tailoring businesses in Murgab and Sharq areas, which remain closed until further notice.

Leonarda Fortin is just one of many tailors in Kuwait City who are still struggling to survive since their businesses were closed in March. "I accepted a part time job of cleaning at a clinic for a month. Thank God, the owner gave me KD 200 for my one-month service," she said. "Maybe he felt that I am in dire need. We had only agreed for KD 100, but at the end of the month and when his cleaner returned to work after Farwaniya's lockdown ended, he gave me KD 200 instead of KD 100." Five areas had remained isolated after Kuwait ended its total curfew on May 31st. The lockdown ended in Hawally and Khaitan on June 21, 2020, in Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh on July 9, 2020, and in Farwaniya on July 26.

"I know his act was out of mercy because he knew I was struggling. If it wasn't for that payment, I would not have been able to pay rent or buy food during the five months I've been without work," she admitted. Fortin shares an apartment with others in Hawally where she pays KD 80 a month for a partition room. "Until our shops are open, I am still feeling very weak and sad. I am now 55 years old, and this is my first time to be in this state of panic and anxiety," she said.

Fortin started running her own dressmaking shop in Awqaf Mall in late 2019. "I just started running my own shop after almost 20 years of being an employee myself, but I am sad to experience the worst nightmare of my life over the COVID-19 pandemic. I was happy that the shop I had been running for many years was formally given to me by my Kuwaiti sponsor to run it by myself as my own business, but less than a year later, COVID-19 arrived and my business was shuttered," narrated a teary eyed Fortin. Before the pandemic, she said that she was earning a large amount of money as the shop was fully entrusted to her by her sponsor. But most of her earnings go straight to her family back in the Philippines

"Now I don't know when we could be allowed to restart. They said maybe by the end of August or in September, so until then, it means more time to struggle," she said. Fortin added that even as they have no work and their shops are closed, the real estate company which runs the commercial facilities in Awqaf Mall continue to ask her to pay her monthly shop's rent. "My rent for that shop is KD 385 a month. I used to pay that amount every month since I run the business myself. But since we closed, I have been struggling to find money to pay for the shop's rent, or even my house's rent and basic daily necessities. So I asked my Kuwaiti sponsor to take over the shop temporarily and pay the rent. Thank God she agreed, but I have to pay her back once everything returns to normal," she noted.

"Now my concern is just to survive and be safe; Insha'Allah we are allowed to open soon. There are customers who are back and calling, although very few. Some of them want to have their gowns finished, so I am slowly accepting some of those small jobs inside my house. If not because of them, maybe I would not be able to survive," she said. Her sponsor also gives her some amount of money for food. During the total

lockdown, she found herself queuing for food distributed by the government and charities.

Textile and retail shops inside a mall in Murgab near Mubarakiya Market opened since last month when malls were allowed to operate at the start of stage three of return to normalcy. But tailoring and dressmaking shops located on the second floor of the mall remain closed. Despite that, some tailors await customers inside the mall, and offer them their services. "In case customers want our service, we do it inside our shops but behind closed doors to avoid being caught by the municipality," one of the tailors told Kuwait Times. "We sit there and wait for potential customers, but only accept minor works since we have to be very careful because our shops could be closed if the municipality finds out," he said.

According to him, tailors were told they are not allowed to operate despite the fact that other shops in the mall have opened because of the nature of their work, which usually requires them to get too close to customers while taking their measurements. "But we have been closed for five months now and are all struggling to meet our daily needs," he lamented.