Expats stranded in Dubai lose hope for chance to come back to Kuwait

Some still waiting for a miracle

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Some expat families and workers stranded in Dubai en-route to Kuwait have finally decided to go back to their home countries. Some however are still waiting for a miracle, like a Filipina mother who has decided to stay a bit longer in Dubai in hope of reuniting with her family in Kuwait. Kuwait Times has no official numbers of workers stranded en route to Kuwait, but a source said there are hundreds, possibly thousands, of expats from countries like Egypt, India and the Philippines.

Flight restrictions started in March last year in order to stop the spread of the coronavirus in Kuwait. In Aug 2020, Kuwait resumed most flights but banned anyone traveling directly from a number of 'high-risk countries' from entering Kuwait. Passengers from these countries have to spend 14 days in a third country before arriving in Kuwait. Since the restrictions in March 2020, the airport has never returned to full operations.

When the new strain of COVID-19 was discovered in the UK in December last year, Kuwait re-imposed a new airport shutdown, besides restrictions on 68 countries with high numbers of coronavirus cases. The closure does not apply to air cargo operations. Kuwait continues to report record daily new coronavirus cases after it saw daily infections fall below 300 late last year from a peak of more than 1,000 in May 2020.

In a dilemma

Tessy, not her real name, has been in Dubai since Jan 23, hoping to enter Kuwait. "Last year I was waiting for a direct flight to Kuwait, but it did not happen. So on Jan 22, I finally decided to fly back to Kuwait via Dubai to be with my child and husband. My daughter, who is 13 years old, is alone daily in our flat in Salmiya when my husband goes to work. She has been attending online classes. I always call and support her studies online, but being away from her for a year now is driving me crazy," Tessy said.

Tessy, who has a dependent visa, left Kuwait in Feb 2020. "I went home alone to the Philippines because my mother had died. Even though the situation was unclear at that time, I had to be with my mother because I loved her so much. I went home thinking I can come back in a month or so. My child was studying, so I told my husband to look after her. I am very afraid for her safety and have been in this state of mind over the last one year," she agonized via call on Facebook Messenger.

"I was ready to stay in Dubai for 14 days. My flight to Kuwait was scheduled on Feb 8, but on Feb 7, they extended the ban on the entry of foreigners again. On Feb 21, Kuwait said it will allow foreigners to fly back, but then extended the ban indefinitely. Now, I don't know what to do. I am in a dilemma whether to return back to the Philippines or remain in Dubai. We don't have enough money. My only wish for now is to be able to reach Kuwait and be with my family," she said.

"I am too stressed to handle my situation. I am even willing to walk from Dubai to Kuwait so long as I know I can be with my family. My visa will expire in May and my passport validity is less than a year. This is killing me slowly, mentally and physically," Tessy lamented.

> **There is no hope for returning**

Rooms booked

Kuwaiti authorities had earlier agreed for the return of foreigners, provided they quarantine for seven days at a local hotel and seven days at quarantine. Many expats were elated by the decision, but only a few days after this decision, Kuwait suspended the entry of foreigners indefinitely. Some expats had already booked hotel rooms.

A family from India who had booked a three-star hotel in Mangaf finally decided to go back to India tomorrow. "There is no hope for returning to Kuwait soon. I think the government is not ready yet for foreigners to come back. So my family and I decided to return to India for financial reasons. Our funds will not be able to sustain us anymore in Dubai, so we are going back to India," the head of the family told Kuwait Times.

"Even if we feel we are unfairly treated by the uncertainty, we cannot do anything. At the end of the day, it is because of the coronavirus that we are all struggling, and we don't blame Kuwait for this mishap. We hope we can still come back when everything is settled," he said.

Kuwait curfew: What you need to know

KUWAIT: Kuwait imposed a one-month partial curfew from 5 pm to 5 am starting from March 7, 2021 to help curb the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases registered in recent weeks. During the curfew hours, pharmacies, medical stores, Co-operative societies and supermarkets to continue operation only through delivery services. Also during the curfew, people are allowed to go to Fajr, Maghreb and Isha prayers at mosques only by walking, while taxis are allowed to carry only two passengers. The government meanwhile allowed salons and health clubs to reopen during the day after a one-month closure but kept restaurants and cafes closed except for drive-through and delivery services.

Where to obtain a curfew pass?

Citizens and residents that need a pass during the curfew hours to leave their homes can apply for a pass at https://www.paci.gov.kw/. The pass is available for those in need of emergency medical treatment, doctor's visits, blood donation, COVID-19 swaps and COVID-19 vaccinations.

Co-op delivery during curfew hours

During curfew hours, co-ops, grocery stores and other markets will be allowed to offer delivery services. Most co-ops will accept orders via delivery. Here is an incomplete list of co-op WhatsApp numbers. Each co-op will be responsible for deciding if and when they provide delivery services and not all may be providing.

Omariya Co-op
WhatsApp 6041-0067
Farwaniya Co-op
WhatsApp 6767-8211
Qairawan Co-op
WhatsApp 9000-3749
Jahra Co-op
WhatsApp 5160-2458
Abdulla Al-Mubarak Co-op
WhatsApp 6066-6338
Nuzha Co-op
WhatsApp 9784-5531
Khaitan Co-op
WhatsApp 6777-9745
Ardhiya Co-op
WhatsApp 6902-0779
Rabiya Co-op
WhatsApp 2438-8316
Wafra Farm Co-op
Tel: 9883-5245 / 5170-0085
Salmiya Co-op
Tel: 22253225
Jabriya Co-op
Tel: 1805-353
WhatsApp 6566-6084
Rawdha & Hawally
WhatsApp 9662-2883
Shaab Co-op
WhatsApp 9090-4455
Wafra Co-op
WhatsApp 5055-0539
Keifan Co-op
WhatsApp 5178-1719
Rehab Co-op
WhatsApp 9222-2358
Mishref Co-op
WhatsApp 5055-9900
Faiha Co-op
Tel: 1861-000
WhatsApp 9098-6000
Rumaithiya Co-op
WhatsApp 6066-0045
Bayan Co-op
WhatsApp 9004-2500
Fahaheel Co-op
WhatsApp 5178-9951
Adan & Qusour Co-op
Tel: 5034-3111 / 6593-3975
Salam Co-op
WhatsApp 9788-7832

US stands with Kuwait to counter cyber threats

By US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L Romanowski

This year, Kuwait and the United States will celebrate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our nations. As we commemorate this important milestone, it is important to take stock of what we have achieved in this relationship, as well as what we still must accomplish together. Thirty years ago, a coalition of 38 countries led by the United States helped liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation - an experience that has bonded Kuwait and the United States forever. Today, there are new threats facing our countries, and the United States is again prepared to stand with the people of Kuwait to ensure peace and prosperity throughout the region.

Recent incidents demonstrate that the battlefield today has moved into cyberspace. In 2019 Iranian cyber espionage campaign targeted critical networks in Kuwait. During the first half of 2020 there were 1,305 cyber-attacks in Kuwait tied to COVID-19. Recently, Russia attacked the United States in the largest spying operation in history. These incidents validate how malicious state and non-state actors can exploit vulnerabilities in mobile networks, data, internet connectivity, social media, and artificial intelligence. Since these digital tools are integrated in critical and non-critical infrastructure such as the energy grid, water distribution system, transportation, and military and law enforcement networks, things we rely on everyday can now be disabled or destroyed with keystrokes rather than missiles and bombs.

While tanks and missiles still defend our physical borders and important installations, it is crucial to complement them with strong cyber defenses against those intent on causing widespread damage to our financial systems, national security, privacy, and our democratic way of life. Given how interconnected we are and how much we depend upon each other, if our networks are vulnerable, those vulnerabilities pose a security threat to our allies and partners.

This is why the United States is urging our partners to develop open, interoperable, reliable, and secure networks. We strongly encourage our allies and partners, including Kuwait - whose national security the United States is committed to protect - to craft legislation, regulations, and other measures that ensure our common security in 5G and other networks. These measures include supporting vendor diversity and transparent standards via national regulatory frameworks. Participating in organizations that develop and help implement telecom standards and developing a skilled workforce that supports these goals are also important.

As the United Sates and Kuwait continue to strengthen our partnership, we want to foster a more robust and diverse information and communication technology supply chain that would allow Kuwait to exclude untrusted vendors and build a network that enables secure transmission of data on 5G networks.

In addition to ensuring data privacy and protecting against hackers, a secure and safe telecom infrastructure is key to attracting multinational tech companies and businesses. Kuwait aspires to be a data hub between the Middle East and Europe. But, to attract reliable, world-renowned, and cutting-edge technology firms, Kuwait must assure data safety and security, and build strong cyber defenses by investing in trusted vendors and clean networks.

In a networked world, economic prosperity and the strength and security of our relationship can only be assured if we are unified in our approach to cybersecurity. Today once again our nations must unite as we did thirty years ago. This time, we must build our collective cyber-defense, against an enemy that may already be lurking within our critical systems ready to inflict damage not only on us but also on our allies and partners.

Just as the pandemic has shown us that wearing a mask protects ourselves as well as others, we must protect our mutual interests by wearing a mask of strong cybersecurity defenses. The United States is ready to support the people of Kuwait to prepare for and defend against cyber threats. By doing this, we will expand and deepen the historic partnership between our nations that has created decades of peace and prosperity.