

## Neighborhood Tales: Kuwait Under Lockdown

The Neighborhood Tales: Kuwait Under Lockdown project sprouted out of a painful realization that even as history was sure to remember the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, and its impacts on every aspect of our human life, there are some stories, some voices, some experiences that might never be recorded for posterity. In Kuwait, where history still struggles to break out of the official and mainstream narrative, there would be many who, if not completely unheard, would find their experiences subject to but an ephemeral burst of public interest in the newspapers and social media. They might be heard. But not listened to.

This project is an effort to prevent that loss. It's a community-based effort to document what we've lived through. So that we may all remember. But more importantly, so that we can act to bring change. What did we get right? What do we need to fix? Pessimism and conventional thinking come easy in crisis. And it's these two instincts we hope this project remedies against. We are guided by the belief that, no matter how challenging the times, there is always hope-- waiting for us to wield it. Hiding, in unexpected places.

**FARHAN** - An Indian white-collar professional recalls his journey through institutional quarantine

[In this clip, Farhan talks about his experience at Amiri hospital after he went there with his brother to get tested, and his subsequent move to an institutional quarantine facility in Mishref...]

Farhan: The problem now started there, what happened is the Amiri Hospital in, I think was, was already full or no, I don't know. Now, they had, they had made a temporary COVID area, you know, to keep the COVID patients, even if they are patients or not patients. There was a temporary area, which was turned into like, you know, for people who are coming for testing. So if they stay for two days, so those two days they have to spend there, right? Now, I wasn't knowing that they were gonna keep me in some facility for, for some time. I wasn't knowing this. I wasn't prepared for it. And nothing, like we weren't carrying anything with us, we just had our clothes and our Civil ID with us, that's it. So, now, we were told that, 'Okay, you guys need to be here because the swab results, once they come, then only you'll be released.' So, we weren't told before that we were gonna stay here for a couple of days or something, until the swab results come. And nor do I have told, you know, in my family, or---because you see, what happens is you are here, back there in India you know, if, if my family or anyone, whoever, whoever listens to this fact that you are going for the test of Corona and you are being held there, you know, in the testing center, so it's kind of, you know, like they, they, they think something else only, like 'What happened to you guys? Like why you are being held? You know, what happened? Like you got Corona or what?'

Layan: Of course.

Farhan: Getting Corona at-- because it was starting you know? People were, were not aware of what, what the thing Corona is, really. So, like even for my family, or even for myself, and even from my friends or whoever, if it was like, if I get Corona, like, I'm about to die. That was their first feeling, you know. Because no one knew how Corona is reacting, how bad Corona is or what Corona can do. I mean, it was quite the thing in the initial days. So, the thing is now we are kept in that facility. The problem that facility of Amiri was having some problem, because there were not separate rooms there, there were just like around-- I'll say some 50 beds. They were just like in a, in a big hall, there were 50 beds there. And, you are there with possible Corona patients or, like, if your results come negative, you're just told to leave. So now staying there, me, I'm thinking I might have Corona or not also, but I'm staying with these other 49 people, these may have Corona, may not have also. Right? So at this point now I'm-- I was like, more tensed, more scared. Because, even if I have, or I don't have, I'm in a facility where there are people who are coming for Corona tests and they might be positive. So like, I have now a bigger chance of getting Corona, even if I don't have, it was like that. Two days passed, two days passed in that facility and the thing is, I, I didn't carry any of my essentials, like bathing essentials, and there was no, there was only one washroom. Like one big washroom which has like three-- which were like, very bad. I mean, that-- this Amiri part was very scary for me, very very scary. I didn't have my essentials, my daily essentials. So for two days, I just managed somehow. After two days, the swab results came. For my brother, it came negative and they told my brother to go, so my brother left. So I was hoping that fine, my brother got negative, that means like, we all are negative, so my result will come. Now what happened is my result didn't come. I'm asking that guy, 'What happened? We came together. We give the test together. Why the results didn't come?' He said, 'Your results is non-conclusive.' The, the problem, is the medical guys there, they only know so much. They can't tell you what, you know [tuts], like the bigger picture or what's going to happen or what. They're saying your results didn't come. It's non-conclusive. You have to, you will have to stay. Now, this one-one second, or one-one minute I passed in Amiri was, was the most scary and tense moment of this whole journey I can say. Because it's the starting point. You are not aware what you are facing or what you are having. And the thing is, your family is very tense. Now the moment my brother's results came, was negative and my mom was like, crying, like, 'Why your result didn't come, didn't come? Like, what's the problem?' And my wife and like, everyone's tense. I said, 'Okay, it's, it's fine. It happens. Don't worry, I mean, maybe I'm also negative, I will just be okay, don't worry'. But I'm saying them don't worry but my-- me myself, I was scared to hell. I was scared to death, seriously. Because at that point of time, the only thing in my mind was I'm having asthma. If I get this Corona, that means it's going to attack my lungs and I'm going to die. This is like a basic instinct of every normal person, you know? Like no one will think what's your immunity? Or logging[ph] the details of the science, you say, you will not go into details of science at that point of time, 'cause you're just human. You know? You will have a lot of thoughts in my-- in your mind, you'll keep on thinking. So, another two days passed, there was a re-swab because they say, we cannot take a swab again, unless like-- in like some 24 hours or something, 48 hours or something. So I had to stay for, for that one day more. So the third day they took the re-swab. Fourth day the results came and they say you're positive.

Layan: Ufff.

Farhan: So these four days, I, I removed in that Amiri containment zone where they were keeping the people who are getting tested. Those were the scariest days-- four or five days I spent there. It was the scariest days, because there were people coming, going, people coming, going, you can see they're coming, they are getting tested. They are going. They are negative, someone's positive. And the thing is like, who is, they're like, you know, five-five, six-six sets of reports coming. So like five-five, six-six people at a time. And the reports were coming in the night in afternoon, in the morning. It was-- of course, there were testing going on, like unlimited testing going on. Everyone was getting tested that time. So we were like, okay, now my report will come. Now my report will come. Now, now. Like every time we are just in that and we are praying that the report comes negative, negative, negative. So in all that, we, we are so tensed, my family is so tensed, they are crying. It's-- and, you know, it was a very tough time. I mean, if you see like that, then you will say, 'what happened? Why you were like so, but when you feel it, when you feel it, you, you, you will be like, what the hell? Like this is some kind of situation, you know? So after all the result comes, and I was tested positive. Fine. I was very sad. I was like, I asked, I confirmed with the doctor, like at least ten times. Like, 'are you saying that I'm positive? [tuts] Like really?' Because I wasn't, you know, ready to believe that I'm positive. Because my brother was negative and, all--I was like having little fever, like, you know? It wasn't much. So now what happens is, the moment the result comes, that guy told me, 'You will either go to Jaber Hospital or you will go to Mishref.' Now this was another tension. Because people learn [ph] that there are speculation also, you know? Like when you are there. Like people will say, 'Listen, dude, if you are taken to Jaber, that means you are serious, because only serious guys are going to Jaber Hospital.' You know? Or, I mean, if you go to Mishref, 'Man! Mishref, you know, this is what's happening.' Because there are speculations. There are people who already have gone and, you know? There are news everywhere and it's like a chaos. You're not sure of anything. You don't know anything. And even the medical staff, they are, they are not a hundred percent sure, because as I said, that's only that much what they are, they are told, or they are known also. The result came. Now, the next morning, they said, 'Okay. This, this, this, this, this, this, A, B, C, D, Farhan or this guy and this guy, this guy. You guys are up for Mishref.' Now, like, speculatively talking, now Mishref was a better option for us. Because in, in the back of our mind, it was like Jaber is for serious guys and Mishref is for like not much serious guys, so we are at least in that, that zone, that we are not serious. So little like hope came, you know, like, okay, we are not that serious and things might get okay, like it's, it's not to worry anything. So, we were put in a bus and we were taken to Mishref and in all this time, you know what's happening is? We went for like fever. Right? So, that was the only medicine we were given, for like, okay you take Panadol and that's it. Because the problem is there wasn't any medicine for this thing. So even if you expect them to give you some medicine, there is no medicine. They won't give you anything. So now that's more hurting you because you are staying there in that facility, you don't have any medicines and you're just waiting for, for-- you know, what's next *yaani*? [sound of paper note-taking] What, what can be done? Like *khalas*, we are like, you know, I mean, we are so sad, we are so nervous, we are so scared. What to do? So that all thing passed and-- but I'll tell you, the food was coming properly on time, there was water, everything was good. In Amiri, they took care of those things. But that, the facility, where, where we were staying, wasn't that great. It wasn't that great. We just

spend the horrible days there, like four to five days. But after that, we were shifted to Mishref. Now, the episode of Mishref starts here. Okay? Now, when we got to enter Mishref, we were given our separate cubicles, right? So that was one very good thing. There was separate cubicle. The bed was very nice. The mattress was good. We had one wardrobe, a small cabinet you can say, and we were given a charging point near us. So it was a very good facility, Mishref. Like the food, there was proper breakfast was coming in the morning. There was proper lunch. There was proper dinner. At proper time. And the guys, the, the medical staff were coming twice a day, taking the temperature over there. So now we ask the guys who say, okay, you will stay 14 days here and then *khalas* [tuts]. So, we said, okay, fine. Okay. That's it, like that is what we have to do, and so-- like now my family you know, started to realize that, okay, he got this, now he has to do whatever thing and then go back to, to home. They are just praying, praying, praying that somehow you will just go back to home, like in one piece, let's say. Now, four days, five days, days passed in Mishref and I was just in this mindset that, okay, 14 days I have to finish in Mishref and then *khalas*, I'm back home.

I think that is the thing. Because, maybe they'll take a re-swab and they'll just confirm that this guy is again negative, so you can go home. Something like that. Then we were like, continuously in, in touch with the outer world by, you know, websites, or this, and then we are reading like every, every day WHO was coming up with something or something else, some other rules. Now, WHO said, okay, after 14 days, they'll take three swabs and if all the three swabs are negative, the guy is good to go. So we are in this mindset, fine mood. We have to just spend 14 days and then we'll go, we'll just go out from here. The thing was, in the facility in Mishref, was not bad at all, it was very good. Like, there were like bathrooms outside the hall. And then there were quite a few bathrooms. So like, you could use an, you know, you could take a shower, there were shower facilities. So all these things were there and like it was okay. So days pass, days pass, seven days, eight days, ninth day, the medical staff came saying, 'Are you feeling feverish? Are you having fever or something?' And--because I wasn't having fever at all. Even you will not believe, the moment I went to Amiri, I went in that facility, out of scare I feel my fever went. You know? Like I wasn't feeling feverish at all after that, I don't know how I got positive also, like I--till this day I'm wondering why I got positive. We went to Mishref, there was no fever and I said, no, I'm perfectly okay. Ninth day, they made a paper that this guy is... non-a---asymptomatic. Okay? So this is the word they say that this guy is asymptomatic and he's good to leave this facility. So we were thinking okay fine, *khalas* now we'll go home because we are like, we are asymptomatic, so why like... That's again, another turning point. Ninth day we have come to know that we are being transferred to another facility, which is the Jaber Stadium facility. So, this was again a shock for us. Like, okay come on, after five, four or five days in that Amiri place, nine days here. And like, we are praying that we go home, now suddenly we got this thing that we, we are being transferred to Jaber Stadium. But-- I mean, you're not given any choice, [audio lag] you don't have any choice. This is what it is. This is what you're in, in a quarantine mode, so whatever-- the problem is, like, I don't blame anyone here because even WHO was, was changing decisions like everyday. Sometimes like, okay [audio lag] we'll take your swab, then they say, you know, wait for 14 days, then they say like 21 days. But like, you know, this whole thing [audio lag] the upcoming rules or anything like that. 'So now you are transferred to Jaber Stadium facility,' I said, fine, let's go there, whatever, we'll see

what happens. Now, by this time, I have-- like because I knew like in Mishref there would be, there would be some time I'll have to spend, so I asked my brother and my cousins to give me my clothes and essentials and my charger and everything. So it's like, I was, I was stocked up for some time. And then they finally transferred us to the Jaber Stadium facility. There, there were cubicles also. You have your own bed. There was no charging point. There were like four beds and there was one charging point. And there were like bathrooms outside the facility. Like it was a tent, it was like a big tent and there were like 128, around 130 cubicles in that tent.

Layan: Uff.

Farhan: And these are all, these are all like, all asymptomatic people, or I'm not sure, maybe like, these are like all asymptomatic people strictly here for quarantine. Then that same night we asked the medical staff like, okay, how many days are we going to be here? They said, 14 days you'll be here. So I was like like come on, we spend nine days already in Mishref, now you're saying again, 14 days?! They said yeah, yeah, this is what we have got instructions. Now we're counting again, days. That okay, *khalas*, if that's the thing, that's the thing. 14 days again, 14 days is fine, we will spend 14 days in this facility, no problem.

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***Important Note on Privacy:*** All narrators have given consent to the public dissemination of their recorded and written testimonies. The audio files contained below capture only a snippet from the full recorded interviews. The latter will only be made available to researchers and educators upon request. In order to protect the anonymity of our narrators, all their names have been changed, and any identifying details have been redacted. Some of the narrator's voices have also been modified for additional security.

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