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CONSERVATION MESSAGE

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.OCAL SPOTLIGHT

More is needed to spread conservation message

Published Date: July 03, 2007
By Rania El Gamal, Staff writer

KUWAIT: In a recent move to curb the soaring power usage in the country, the Ministry of Energy initiated a conservation campaign called "Tarsheed" or 'Conservation" targeting both citizens and expatriates to cut down on electricity usage. The campaign started with sending residents text messages to their mobile phones asking them to turn off the air conditioners and lights in unutilized rooms. However, two weeks since the start of the campaign, not all residents know exactly what Tarsheed is about, and those who know don't take it seriously enough and believe that such a problem shouldn't occur in Kuwait in the first place.

'I received an SMS on my mobile from something called 'Tarsheed' but the message was in Arabic, so I didn't understand it and deleted it," said 30-year-old British national, Claudio. "I only knew about it later from a friend who knows Arabic. But honestly speaking, I wouldn't put my AC on 25 C because it's boiling hot outside. Also, I saw streetlights sometimes on during daylight, so how come the ministry is asking us to conserve while it is wasting electricity," he added.

Not knowing the language is not the only reason for residents to ignore the campaign. Sherine, a 30 something female working in a local bank said that though she got the text message from Tarsheed and she can read it, she immediately deletes it from her mobile.

'I don't have time for Tarsheed," she said and added "Our bank started conserving electricity following orders from the ministry. Now every unit uses only three electric lamps instead of the whole six." Sherine also added that other government offices were ordered to start conserving electricity by switching off the AC during the night shifts. "It's a shame that an oil rich country like Kuwait has power problems," she added.

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Hany, another expatriate agreed. "Conservation is not a bad idea and low power consumption is always better," he said. "If this was in a poor country I could have understood it, but Kuwait has enough money to solve this problem," he added. Last year, Kuwait faced serious power shortages during the summer leading to continuous power cuts in almost every area of the country. Though scheduled power cuts this year are not yet publicized as previous years, some residents are already facing electricity outages.

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"There has been no electricity in my home for the past two days," lamented Faisal, a resident of Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. "I always get text messages on my mobile from this Tarsheed, but I delete them because I don't understand Arabic. Then I saw it later in the newspaper, what is it about?" he wondered and added "Why can't Kuwait build another power station with all the money they are spending on this conservation campaign?"

Mobile text messages are not the only way to spread the word for the conservation campaign. Ads and flyers distributed with newspapers in Arabic, English, Hindi and Filipino include basic instructions on power conservation, such as adjusting the A/C thermostat to 25 C or turning it off when out of the house and turning off water boilers as they are unnecessary in summer. Moreover, ministry staff call people in their homes to remind them to conserve.

"I got a phone call from the Tarsheed campaign staff asking about my electricity consumption methods, such as the turning off the TV and the AC," said Mohammad, an Arab expatriate living in Salmiya. "I always switch off lights in unused rooms and I conserve electricity by nature because I pay for it at the end of the year. But they asked me to put the AC on 25 C which is very hot, and I can't do that," he added.

Not all expatriates pay for their electricity bills in Kuwait as sometimes it is already incorporated in the rent. This is sometimes a reason which make people less interested in conserving power. "I don't pay for electricity here, so actually I am not bothered if I use more electricity than I should," said an Egyptian expatriate who lives in Kuwait City. "My father usually switches off the lights in any unused rooms and we are by nature not very wasteful, but to switch off the air conditioner or turn it down is not possible in this heat," she added.

With a temperature officially announced as 45 degree Celsius yesterday, power usage in Kuwait reached 8,440 megawatts at 2:30 pm. Though this is 190 megawatts lower as compared to the usage registered on Sunday, more is still needed to be done in order to avoid any serious power cutoffs this year. The Tarsheed campaign could be one step, but it still needs to reach more people and get the message out there.