

Photo of the day



People celebrate a traditional Kuwaiti sea song and dance. — Photo by Jaber Abdulkhaliq/KUNA

Local Spotlight

EXPAT FEES



By Muna Al-Fuzai

muna@kuwaittimes.net

It's clear to all that Kuwait is facing an imbalance in the population structure and severe pressure on health and other services. But the solution should not be at the expense of expatriates by increasing all fees. This issue has gone very far now and seems as an act of revenge and not a regulatory decision by the government.

Last year, some members of the National Assembly called for a new fee policy to regulate foreign remittances and protect the national currency, as MP Kamel Al-Awadhi proposed a law imposing a 5 percent fee on the value of transfers, which will likely pour more than KD 200 million into the state coffers annually.

The justification for this request was that this fee on transfers of funds abroad is in return for what the state offers to expatriates with regards to health and education services and other facilities, as well as other services provided by the state, such as petrol, gas and electricity. Some studies have shown that expatriates' remittances are almost equal to the budget of some state facilities. Currently, the parliament seems to be in the process of approving a package of such decisions as the right of the state.

A new decision was also made to increase the fees for issuance, transfer and renewal of work permits, which will start from June. Based on this decision, work permit fees for the first time will be KD 50 instead of KD 2, transfer fees will KD 50 instead of KD 10, while renewal of the work permit will cost KD 10 instead of KD 2 in the past.

All Gulf states take fees from expats, whether on remittances abroad or residence or even regular visits, and fees are sometimes paid at the airport. The problem here in Kuwait is that throughout the years, we have put in the minds of expats that we are a goldmine from which they can take uncontrollably, until they lost their sense of rights and duties, the same thought which we allowed to citizens as well. It was we who allowed the misconceptions about the fact that the country is open for taking and not giving, and possibly escaping from legal punishment sometimes.

I understand and sympathize with the angry response of expats against fee increases. We citizens created an illusion for them and for ourselves and that is why Kuwaitis don't approve of the idea of giving as much as taking and the idea of state rights. We must remember that we are the citizens who allowed this demographic imbalance by bringing in a large number of marginal laborers or unskilled and useless people because of courtesies or laziness. We also authorized the deployment of nepotism and corruption. We ignored these kinds of negative practices against our country and after many years, the government comes up with the fee decision - something no one ever did.

Property owners who want to increase rents significantly are not bothered by the anger of the expat, who came to the country believing that he will make a fortune, but found that he can only meet his daily needs. Wealth is not known to many except from the news.

The main problem here is not in the decision to increase fees, but in the ways of addressing the demographic imbalance that must set specific percentages for each category of expatriates, employment and even domestic workers, and should not be passed because of nepotism or pleasantries. As long as this issue is impossible to solve, expats will remain under the radar.

In my opinion

THE SAD AFFECTS OF EXCESSIVE LITTERING IN KUWAIT

By Nora Salem Al-Aati

local@kuwaittimes.net

According to Litter: It Costs You, "about 75 percent of people admitted that they have littered in the past five years". People all around the world need to stop littering because of its hazardous effects on our health, safety, welfare and food cycle. Living in a country where people litter on a daily basis, I cannot express the feeling of frustration. I see garbage piled up in streets and people throwing trash from their cars. Don't people know the consequences of littering? Does something bad have to happen for them to realize that littering is a bad thing? Kuwaitis, such as myself, should feel outraged about the amount of littering that is happens here! I think laws should be enforced to stop littering in Kuwait.

The large population of feral cats in Kuwait are greatly affected by the excessive littering. These cats run through our streets and forage through our garbage bins looking for food. Because of littering, some cats can suffocate and die due to the cans, containers, plastic bags and plastic bottles on the streets, not to mention all the toxins we carelessly throw out of our homes. Their dead bodies lay around in the streets and neighborhoods, and lead to a drastic increase of bugs, rats, mice, and life-threatening diseases.

According to the Washington State Department of Health in the United States: "As dead animals decompose, bacteria that may normally be contained within the animal's body can be released, exposing people to potential disease-causing pathogens" (Animal Transmitted Diseases). Diseases such as arbovirus, cryptosporidiosis, Escherichia coli (also known as E. coli), and tularemia occur because of the dead animals and vermin.

Has anyone heard of bubonic plague? The plague, also known as The Black Death, occurred because of the increase of vermin due to the killing of cats and an increased food supply for vermin thanks to an increase in corpses left to rot.

Another effect of littering in our country is that it dis-

courages tourism and the growth of diversity. Tourism provides economic benefits to a country, and when a country is disgustingly filled with garbage, no one will want to visit it. People want to go on vacation and travel the world, but if a country can't even keep itself clean, that means something is wrong. In addition, tourism promotes diversity and economic opportunities in a country, allowing for successful projects and organizations to emerge.

Lastly, and most importantly because this affects the region and not just us, is that littering destroys the health within our region and causes safety concerns. How many of you have visited Al Kout on a nice sunny day? How many of you had to then leave because the gas emissions from the factories was just too much to handle? Most of those particles in these emissions consist of chemicals that have been proven to cause serious diseases that threaten human life, such as asthma and cancer.

Let's face it - countries with littering have the highest rates of disease. Countries with littering have a disregard for their country and its beauty. Countries with littering tend to have problems with their governments and a lack of unity among their people. Countries with littering need to do something about this universal problem, and enforce laws against it. There is absolutely no reason for us to litter.

People litter because they don't feel responsible for public areas, but they are responsible! If you are living in this country, you must respect this country. If you are living in this country, you are responsible for your ugly habits. Moreover, you can't just ruin a country's beauty and environment because you are too lazy to do the right thing! People litter outside to make the trash someone else's problem, and this is unacceptable. Indeed, we must enforce laws to keep our country, Kuwait, free of filth and make it beautiful once again.