

# REGULAR CRACKDOWNS DISRUPT IRREGULAR TRADE

## 'STREETSIDE SELLERS FACE MYRIAD HARDSHIPS'

By Ben Garcia

Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh is home to many South Asians, and vendors hawking goods on the sidewalk is a common sight here. The vendors set up their displays on pieces of cloth or cardboard late in the evening when people start returning home (approximately 6 pm to 8 pm) from a long day at work. They sell almost everything, from fruits and vegetables to carpets and even garbage bins. One can also find them in Mirqab, Fahaheel and other areas heavily populated by South Asians.

The people involved in this underground business are mostly from the Indian subcontinent and bedoons (stateless Arabs), who have no other source of livelihood, since many of them are jobless. Police regularly crack down on these illegal markets, but more often than not, only a few vendors are caught because the moment authorities arrive, they disappear in the night without a trace. Their products will be confiscated, but the hawkers don't seem to care.

Sujatha, a street-smart Indian sidewalk vendor in Jleeb, works for a bedoon from Sulaibiya. She is paid KD 60 per month. She said she has been advised by her employer not to talk to strangers, because she is "paid to sell goods and is not in the business of entertaining strangers", but agreed to speak to Kuwait Times nevertheless. "My boss comes every now and then to check my sales. This is my second job. I also work in a baqala, with some cleaning and laundering jobs on the side," she said.

Sujatha is 55, and works hard to feed her grandchildren back in India. "I have been doing this job for many years now. I've made many friends in this place and I enjoy it every day," she asserted. She is not the only vendor in the area where she sells her products. There are dozens more, many of them women wearing abayas and niqabs.

Sujatha is unperturbed by the possibility of a police raid or even the fact that what she is doing is illegal. "The police don't come here, unlike other areas. We've been here for many years selling these items, and the police do not bother us. Sometimes they even buy stuff from us, so I don't really fear any threat from the police. I have an iqama so I am not bothered," she told Kuwait Times. "I don't know whether this work is illegal. What I know is that I am paid for selling these items. I don't complain - I need the money at the end of the month. For me, this is a reasonable job, and I don't see anything illegal in this," she added.

Rajul is another street vendor from Bangladesh who displays his merchandise of used



clothing in Mirqab near the central KPTC bus depot. He told Kuwait Times that many of the items he sells are carefully selected from the Friday Market. Every Thursday and Friday between 5 to 8 pm, Rajul and his friends set up shop to sell their items. They only sell for two or three hours, aware of the intermittent police raids. "If we see the police, we disappear immediately," he said, matter-of-fact.

