

Local

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian GulfTHE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961Founder and Publisher
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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
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prevent waste
of KD 72 million

KUWAIT: Kuwait's State Audit Bureau examined 2,401 financial transactions between April 2020 and January 2021 with a value of KD 2.7 billion (\$8.9 billion), and succeeded in preventing a waste of KD 72 million (\$237 million), a SAB official said yesterday. Yasmeen Al-Wasmi, assistant auditor at the Pre-Audit for Economic Affairs Department, said in a statement 92 percent of transactions, or KD 2.5 billion (\$8.2 billion), were related to government budgets, and the rest belonged to budgets of independent authorities.

The auditing took place between April 1, 2020 and January 31, 2021. The pre-auditing process, she added, discovered some calculation mistakes in quotas which were in contrast variation with market prices in addition to decreasing quantities requested to cope with actual consumption of authorities. SAB, said Wasmi, approved 1,273 transactions, or 72 percent, worth KD 1.9 billion (\$6.2 billion), and would conduct post-auditing after execution of the transactions.

The pre-auditing department informed SAB's financial penalties department about violations in 47 transactions, or KD 104 million (\$343 million), because authorities concerned carried out the transactions without obtaining SAB's approval. Wasmi said the department rejected 107 transactions, or KD 282 million (\$931 million). She added the department requested provision of all documents of 778 incomplete transactions.

Wasmi said failure of authorities to abide by SAB's regulations would undermine governance, which would negatively affect the government sector's transparent development. —KUNA

Kuwait has up to 180,000
shortage of helpers: Union

People will feel the shortage when Ramadan arrives, says union's secretary general

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Kuwait will face an acute shortage of domestic helpers by Ramadan, a local union official has warned. Ali Al-Shammouh, Secretary General of Kuwait Union for Domestic Labor Offices, told Kuwait Times there is a shortage of approximately 160,000-180,000 helpers. He said the shortage existed even prior to the coronavirus pandemic, but worsened when the airport was closed during the lockdown last year. Many domestic helpers left the country following the reopening of the airport on one-way tickets.

According to Shammouh, when Ramadan arrives this year (in April), Kuwaitis and expats alike will feel the shortage of helpers. "Probably, some expats and Kuwaitis do not need them any longer, but we are slowly going back to normal, and if the forecasts are correct, students will go back to schools by the middle of the year. So we need to address this problem as soon as possible," he said.

Whilst some labor-exporting countries resumed transactions with Kuwait, the Philippines - the second largest source of domestic helpers - said it will not send any helpers until Kuwait formalizes a unified work contract, a Philippine embassy source told Kuwait Times last week.

\$10,000 bond

Under the new unified contract, provisions will be added such as prohibiting employers from confiscating the passports of their housemaids. Domestic helpers also have the right to own a phone, work not more than 12 hours a day and get enough rest and a weekly day off. They are also prevented from being transferred to other employers without written consent from the worker.

"According to the Philippine Embassy, the unified contract is a done deal. But I think what is preventing them from resuming transactions with Kuwait is the \$10,000 bond which they require us to pay as assurance. They said we need to open a bank account in Manila to ensure domestic helpers get all their rights, and in the event of unpaid salaries or any problem, they will take it from the bond," Shammouh said.

"The \$10,000 bond was not mentioned dur-

ing joint meetings last year. It was not part of the talks. They said they will return the bond in full if we don't have any problems with the domestic helpers. Not only this, they are also demanding the cases of all their 200 remaining runaway housemaids currently housed at the embassy must be resolved too," he added.

"Our union's chairman Khalid Al-Dakhnan already told the Philippine Embassy to put everything in writing so that the Kuwaiti government is able to study the proposal and see how we can proceed. We hope to settle everything so we can address the helper shortage problem in Kuwait," Shammouh told Kuwait Times.

When reached for comment, Philippine Embassy Assistant Labor Attache to Kuwait Catherine Duladol said the embassy is hopeful an agreement will be reached, after the labor attaché to Kuwait (who is also the current labor attaché in Saudi Arabia) arrived in Kuwait. "Our

the Philippines were held, and the only remaining part is the signing of what has been agreed upon. But due to the lockdowns, these efforts are pending. Technically speaking, all the concerns of both sides were tackled and almost resolved, but due to the coronavirus, talks were suspended and documents have not been reviewed and signed yet," the source added.



Ali Al-Shammouh

Recruitment ban

On Jan 3, 2020, the Philippines implemented a ban on sending domestic workers to Kuwait following the death of Jeanelyn Padernal Villavende on Dec 28, 2019. The ban was lifted a month later after consultations with the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the filing of appropriate charges against the perpetrators and after Manila and Kuwait City agreed the full implementation of a harmonized employment contract for Filipino domestic workers.

On Dec 30, 2020, a death verdict by hanging was handed by the criminal court to a Kuwaiti woman who killed Villavende. The woman's husband was sentenced to four years in jail for covering up and not reporting the crime. As of June 2020, there were nearly 680,000 domestic workers in Kuwait - 325,000 from India and nearly 150,000 from the Philippines.

Kuwait had allowed the return of domestic helpers with valid visas but stuck abroad starting Dec 7, 2020. An online platform named 'BelSalamah' was launched to facilitate the return of domestic workers from so-called 'high-risk' countries, in line with specific procedures and mechanisms that take into account the required health measures. The platform aims to decrease the cost of return that the sponsor will pay, in addition to relocating the 14-day quarantine to be in Kuwait instead of a transit country. Local and their international partner agencies are allowed to charge employers up to KD 990 for hiring new domestic helpers.

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Saudi-based Labor Attache Nasser Mustapha is in home quarantine. Once the 14-day quarantine period is over, he will start discussing the issue with Kuwait. This is his priority," she said.

The Kuwaiti government recently allowed the entry of newly-recruited domestic helpers from labor-exporting countries such as the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka and elsewhere. According to a Kuwait Times source, if the unified contract is signed, deployment of new domestic helpers will resume immediately from the Philippines.

Before the lockdown in March 2020, talks were ongoing between Kuwait and the Philippines (joint committee meetings) on the rights of domestic helpers and employers, but the talks stalled due to the pandemic. "A series of joint committee meetings between Kuwait and

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National Guard
Deputy Chief
inspects vital sites

KUWAIT: Deputy Chief of the National Guard Lieutenant General Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday urged the personnel to perform devoutly for protection of Kuwait's vital and key installations. There is necessity to give "everything precious for the

sake of protecting vital sites and locations under protection of the National Guard," Sheikh Ahmad said. His remarks came in a statement released after he examined the installations manned by the National Guard, including the central oil zone, Sabhan fuel warehouses, the convoys and movement position of the military police tasked with protecting military convoys. He conveyed the personnel greetings from His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, the National Guard's Chief, and the pride of the supreme leadership of the key roles played by the guardsmen for maintaining defense and security of the homeland. —KUNA

