

Local

# Unscrupulous recruiters target helpers, encouraging absconding

Some helpers run away after they're promised higher salaries, union says

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Facing a dearth of workers, some local recruitment agencies are poaching domestic helpers already under contract, and in some cases, enticing them to abscond from their current employment in exchange for higher salaries.

"We reported them [illicit recruiters] to the police and they will catch them eventually. They are unlicensed recruiters and are illegal. Some of them are also using social media to entice household helpers to abscond," Khaled Al-Dakhan, head of Kuwait Union for Domestic Labor Offices (KUDLO), told Kuwait Times.

"Many of our member recruitment agencies have complained against them. We are really concerned because we discovered some domestic helpers are running away because they were promised a higher salary. We reported them to the police, and these people involved in illegal recruitment will be punished," he said.

Since the start of the pandemic, Kuwait has throttled the recruitment of domestic labor. This has not only led to shortages in the formal, regulated market, but also in the black market. Domestic laborers, especially house help from places like the Philippines, come to Kuwait on two-year contracts. But some end up fleeing their sponsors' homes before the end of the contract, working illegally for hourly wages or in other peo-

ple's homes and businesses.

As the demand for domestic helpers has grown, some recruiters are now targeting domestic helpers already in the country, encouraging them to leave their sponsors, whether they've completed their contracts or not. Dakhan warned against licensed offices that are leased to recruiters allegedly encouraging domestic helpers to escape from their sponsors to work by the hour, which is more profitable for the helpers and the office.

"This is illegal, and the only person affected by a helper's escape is the sponsor, plus us - the legal recruiters. The sponsor is harmed financially and morally as following a long wait of around five months to hire the helper, she absconds after a week," he said.

Kuwait Times also spoke to a local recruitment agency that has posted ads on social media to recruit domestic helpers already in the country. "I don't think we can be called illegal recruiters - we have a licensed office here in Kuwait and we recruit only local workers who are searching for a job. We help people - also those on domestic helper visas - but only those who are ready to transfer or released

by their sponsors," said the secretary of the company, which requested not to be named.

"Why not earn a bigger salary? For someone earning KD 120 as a domestic helper, we can raise that to KD 300 or even KD 400. We all came here to work, and if there are opportunities like this, we must take advantage of them," she added. Another ad, seemingly targeted at domestic helpers, offered anyone interested in a job in Jahra as a caregiver a salary of KD 500 per month.

Mariam Macapudi, President of the Filipino Association of Secretaries of Employment Agencies in Kuwait (Fil-Aseak), a group comprising of 200 licensed recruitment agencies, said she was among those who brought this matter to the attention of KUDLO.

"The problem here is as a licensed agency, we invest money in our recruits. When this worker runs away, the government will demand airfare from us. Other financial issues must also be settled before they are sent home. If the worker is arrested two years later, she will be fingerprinted and deported without punishing the person who harbored her or employed her. There are many unofficial offices



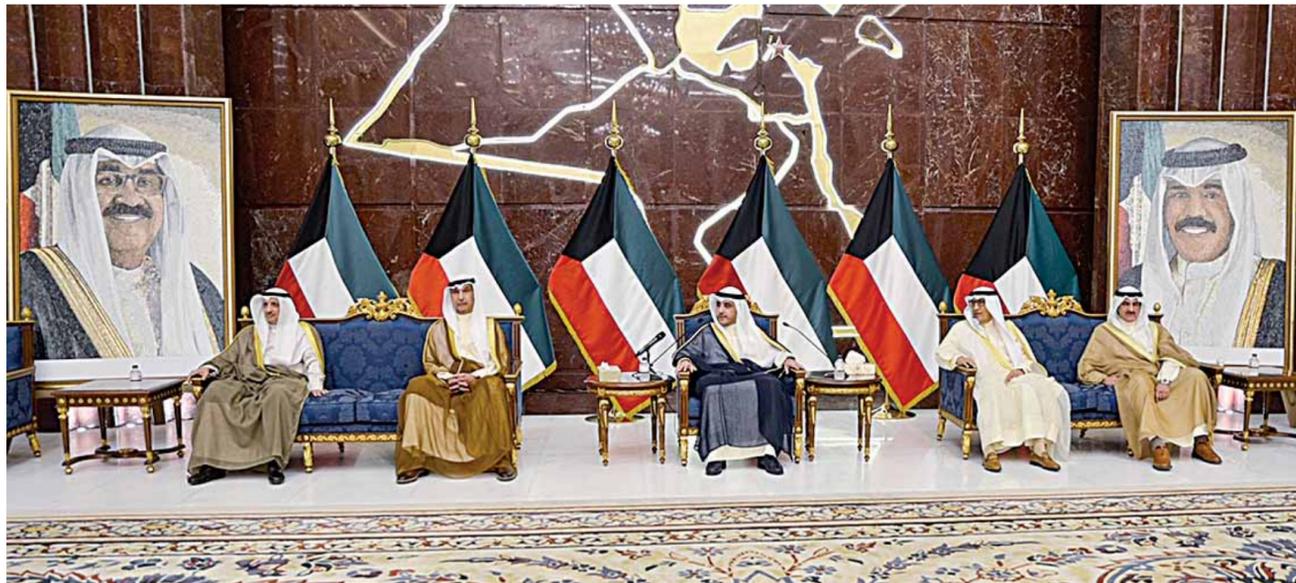
around Kuwait, and some are using social media to post vacancies. Some domestic helpers will be tempted to run away, especially those who suffer abuse at their workplaces. At the end of the day, authorities will look for the offices that brought them here," Macapudi said.

The law says a domestic help visa (article 20) can be transferred to a private sector work visa (article 18) if the employer has a business of their own. As of June 2020, there were nearly 680,000 domestic workers in Kuwait - 325,000 from India and nearly 150,000 from the Philippines. Local and their international partner agencies are allowed to charge employers up to KD 990 for hiring new domestic helpers. Employers are also obliged to pay for 14 days of quarantine at local hotels.



## Unofficial offices post vacancies on social media

## Diplomatic attaches take oath



**KUWAIT:** Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday attended a ceremony at the Foreign Ministry's Diwan where 39 diplomatic attaches swore in to assume their posts. —KUNA

## Kuwait offers Apple to enter through KDIPA

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Finance proposed Apple to enter Kuwait through Kuwait Direct Investment Public Authority (KDIPA) to ensure its listing on the roster of foreign companies that are exempt from paying taxes under double taxation treaties, according to sources. The US technology giant had postponed entering Kuwait through its Apple Pay service, adding that the ministry held several meetings with company representatives to explain its tax situation in case it signed up with local banks to apply the Apply Pay service.

The company first asked the finance ministry to exempt it from the rule that stipulates a 5 percent deduction from the total returns of Apple Pay in Kuwait, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday, quoting the sources. Apple argued it should not be considered an investment that must pay taxes, as the company presented a description of its financial payment service done through apps and not through its presence in Kuwait, which exempts it from any local taxes.

It seems finance ministry officials were not convinced, said the sources who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "They believe that activating the Apple Pay service locally will constitute moving of money outside Kuwait to a foreign company, as Apple will collect a percentage of each transaction from banks that use its payment services, be they Kuwaiti or others," they explained. "They insist Apple must pay taxes as the law stipulates, which is at five percent in this regard." Ministry officials also believe that even if the company doesn't have premises in Kuwait, this will not exempt it from paying taxes as long as it benefits from the country's markets, the sources noted.



## Fire reported in Salmiya restaurant



**KUWAIT:** This handout photo released by Kuwait Fire Force shows a fire engine at the site of a blaze reported in Salmiya yesterday.

**KUWAIT:** Salmiya firemen put out a blaze reported in a restaurant in the area, Kuwait Fire Force said yesterday. The fire started in the chimney of the eatery located on Amman Street. The blaze was

brought under control before the flames could spread further, KFF explained.

No injuries were reported as an investigation was opened into the case, it noted. Meanwhile, Kuwait



**Kuwait Fire Force Director Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mikrad visits injured fireman Major Nasser Al-Malik.**

Fire Force Director Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mikrad yesterday visited Major Nasser Al-Malik in Razi Hospital, where he was hospitalized after he was injured while on duty, KFF said.

## Kuwait allows sports fans back into stadiums

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Cabinet decided yesterday to allow sports fans back into stadiums with the start of the 2021-2022 season. The Center for Government Communication said on Twitter that only vaccinated fans would be given access to stadiums. It added that fans would be allowed to use only 30 percent of stadium capacity, emphasizing that health guidelines should be followed during games and training. —KUNA