

New law to curb free visa trading



The law aims to end trading in free visas while reducing the number of illegal expats.

Fines to go up from BD1,000 to BD8,000

● Sources say the price of a free visa in the black market varies between BD1,200 and BD2,000.

TDT|Manama
Thamer Tayfour

The Parliament will this week vote on a draft law that will impose stricter penalties on those involved in selling work visas.

According to the new law, fines will be increased from the existing BD1,000 to BD8,000 apart from one year imprisonment.

MP Adel Al Asoomi said the proposed law aims at eliminating visa trade along with reducing the number of illegal expatriates who flee their work places.



In 2015, Nationality, Passport and Residence Affairs reported 2,587 residency violations that had occurred between 2013 and 2015 after conducting 759 inspections to different locations.

Sources say the price of a free visa in the black market varies between BD1,200 and BD2,000. In addition, the buyer will have to pay

Labour Market Regulatory Authority and insurance fees.

Khursheed, a Bangladesh national, told Tribune that he bought a free visa for BD1,200 from the black market and had to pay additional BD520 towards other expenses.

"I paid 370,000 Bangladeshi takas to get the visa. With that amount we can start a small business in our country. But many prefer coming to Gulf countries as they are land of opportunities."

"I bought the visa from an Asian, who works under the Bahraini supervisor. I am free to work anywhere until I pay BD50 a month to my sponsor. I was asked to tell cops that I had fled my workplace if arrested in order to rescue my original sponsor from paying a fine of BD1,000," he said.

Khursheed said it's not easy for 'free visa' expats to find jobs in the Kingdom. "I now work as a cleaner at various



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MR AL ASOOMI

companies. My only aim is to earn the money spent on free visa before returning to my home country."

AbuAli, a Jordan citizen, had to buy free visa from the black market to come here after marrying a Bahraini women.

"At times expats are left with no other option to come here. I spent BD1,400 to get a work visa."

"I was hunting for jobs a whole year and couldn't get any. After a year, my sponsor informed me that he wouldn't renew my visa. So, I ended up paying huge fines for four months after which I found a job at a private school for a monthly salary of BD230. But at least I could legalise my stay here."

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Family reiterates plea for help

TDT|Manama
Muhannad Mansour

Housing Ministry has been urged to immediately look into the condition of a dilapidated house in Karzakkan village, as the safety of its four Bahraini inhabitants, including a bedridden man, is threatened by its cracked walls and unstable roof.

A team from the ministry had visited the house in the small village which is located to the west of Hamad Town in the Northern Governorate.

The visit came few days after Tribune published the plea of the house owner, Hassan Habib, 65, earlier this month, as he appealed to the authorities for assistance after being financially incapable of renovating the house or moving to a safer one. Mr Habib is a bedridden retiree who lives in the house with his wife and two children.

He confirmed that "an inspector from Housing Ministry visited the house and took pictures and notes, before promising that the matter will be urgently looked into".

"This restored our hope, but this feeling quickly turned into

a disappointment as we haven't heard from the ministry since then," Mr Habib added.

Tribune yesterday spoke to the area's MP, Dr Jameela Al Sammak, who stressed that "each day that passes by without the walls of the house tumbling down on its residents is a miracle".

As reported earlier, Dr Al Sammak adopted the family's case and referred it to the highest authorities. She sent an urgent request to the



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DR AL SAMMAK



Dr Al Sammak during one of her visits to the house.



The house can collapse anytime.

Housing Ministry, demanding its interference to either provide Mr Habib with a housing unit or instantly initiate revamping works at the house.

"We didn't receive any response since then. We weren't even informed about the shyly visit of the inspector. As MPs, it's the core of duty to link citizens with the competence authorities to meet their needs and requirements. The Prime Minister HRH Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khal-

ifa repeatedly emphasised on the importance of cooperation between the executive and legislative authorities to serve citizens. If this is how the ministry is responding to MPs, how is it expected to fulfill citizens' needs," Dr Al Sammak commented.

The MP earlier told that "there many housing units, mainly flats, in the nearby Al Louzy government housing project that weren't handed over to

any beneficiaries", suggesting that one of the units could be allocated to shelter the family. She also underlined that "the safety of Mr Habib and his family is the responsibility of ministry".

Mr Habib's house was built in the old-fashioned designs of Bahraini houses around 60 years ago. The materials used in building such houses are difficult to be repaired and usually require replacement.