

New passport rules backed

RIGHTS activists have called for tougher punishments against employers who withhold passports of foreign workers.

The Migrant Workers Protection Society (MWPS) has backed new rules to tackle the long-standing problem.

Bahrain is on the verge of piloting a system that involves ensuring all workers are given contracts that clearly outline their duties to prevent exploitation and stop runaway cases by only allowing them to leave Bahrain when authorised by their company.

But immigration officials say they want to create a scheme that benefits both bosses and expatriates.

"We recommend that penalties should be imposed on those who persist in

By SANDEEP SINGH GREWAL

confiscating and withholding the passports of expatriate workers," said MWPS chairwoman Marietta Dias.

"The MWPS recommends that these penalties should be made public and must be robust enough to act as meaningful deterrents."

Ms Dias said once a case of passport confiscation is transferred to Bahrain's courts it can drag on "endlessly".

"The option of paying a fee of BD34 to take the matter to the Urgent Court is more time-consuming than its name would suggest," she said.

"Sponsors have been heard to boldly state to judges, with impunity, that they have lost the passport, which they were

holding illegally."

Ms Dias said they recognise the importance of regulating residency statuses, but urged authorities to consider reasons that force a worker to be an illegal resident.

Mobility

"For example, even though the Labour Market Regulatory Authority database holds the relevant information, it continues to unnecessarily ask workers for their passports when they apply for mobility and transfer, and directs applicants to report to the police if they cannot produce them," she said.

"If workers cannot then retrieve their passports within the 30-day time limit

to complete the transfer they become illegal residents."

MWPS general-secretary Beverley Hamadeh supported comments made by Interior Ministry Nationality, Passports and Residence Affairs Under-Secretary Shaikh Rashid bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, who dubbed the confiscation of passports of foreign workers as an illegal act.

"We welcome the statements by Shaikh Rashid as it confirms this is a real issue that needs to be dealt with," she said. "Unfortunately, however, this unjust and widespread practice continues unabated."

"Furthermore, police seem powerless when faced with sponsors who often flatly refuse or ignore their request to return passports to their owners."

"MWPS considers that if sponsors or others break the law by confiscating and withholding passports, and put workers in such impossible situations then they should no longer be able to act with impunity."

The GDN reported earlier this month that Shaikh Rashid proposed a new mechanism that will benefit both employers and workers and tackle the problem of passport confiscation.

Shaikh Rashid said this is not a new legislation that would affect the business community, but create a system to store the job contracts accepted by both parties that states the employee cannot leave the country without the permission of his employer.

sandy@gdn.com.bh

EU-GCC talks to focus on co-operation

A KEY meeting between the European parliament members and Gulf ministers will be held in Bahrain next week.

The EU-GCC Ministerial Meeting is scheduled to take place on Sunday under the chairmanship of Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton.

Participants are expected to agree to the preparation of a joint work programme for the next period, 2013-2016, to further promote political, trade and economic ties.

The meeting will also aim to promote co-operation in economic, financial, trade, higher education, scientific research, electricity and water energy, environmental, climate change, copyright, telecommunication, information technology, combating money laundering and terrorism financing as well as nuclear safety.

Meanwhile, seven members of European parliament yesterday issued a joint statement calling for the release of opposition and rights activists from prison – ahead of the meeting.

It calls for the immediate release of "all individuals in Bahrain who have been imprisoned solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly".

It also mentions the cases of Nabeel Rajab, Abdulhadi Al Khawaja and his daughter Zainab, and Naji Fateel.

"Three of those imprisoned – including Abdulhadi Al Khawaja – are EU citizens," it said.

The statement was signed by European parliament responsible for democracy and human rights vice-president Edward McMillan-Scott and chair of the European parliament's subcommittee on human rights Barbara Lochbihler among others.

■ An online photograph showing a water tank set on fire allegedly by rioters in Buri yesterday.



Man accused of running over sleeping teenager

By NOOR ZAHRA

A MAN has been charged with manslaughter after he ran over a teenager, who was sleeping on a pavement.

Eighteen-year-old Ayoub Ali Al Baloushi was sleeping when a truck driven by the Asian man ran him over, said Traffic Prosecution chief Hussain Al Bouali yesterday.

It happened on Monday morning around 7am near the Central Market in Manama.

The suspect will stand trial at the Lower Criminal Court next Monday, where he will face other charges, including driving without a licence, using a vehicle without the owner's permission and reckless driving.

He took the unsupervised truck and drove over a pavement after losing control of the vehicle, said Mr Al Bouali.

He then ran over the victim and crashed into two parked cars.

"He used the opportunity when the truck driver was sleeping and drove the vehicle using the key that was in it," he explained.

Mr Al Bouali said the suspect confessed to the charges during questioning.

Mr Al Baloushi became the 35th known person to have died in traffic related accidents this year. Bahrainis Manal Adel Qambar and Ramla Ali Alaskari died on their way towards Hamad Town when the car they were travelling in crashed through a metal barrier and plunged 15 metres to the ground last Thursday.

Survivor Sana Ali Awadh, 26, was driving.



EMBASSY OF AUSTRALIA, RIYADH

Work Week Change

Due to the change in the Saudi Weekednd to Friday/Saturday, the Embassy will be closed on 27 to 29 June inclusive. From then on, the Embassy's work Week will be Saunday to Thursday inclusive.

Telephone Number Change

The Embassy of Australia in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia now has a new contact Numbers.

Telephone: +966 11 2500900
Fax: +966 11 2500902

Registration

The Embassy of Australia also encourages its citizens and permanent residency visa holders that are living/ travelling to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and Yemen to register at:

smartraveller.gov.au
Every traveller, every trip.