

Stricter laws urged after maid's ordeal

By SANDEEP SINGH GREWAL

A HOUSEMAID who was kept in a state of "modern-day slavery" for more than a decade highlights the need for stricter domestic worker employment laws, according to rights activists.

The story of Ethiopian Seble Abebe Tessm, who was paid less than 18 months' salary for almost 15 years' work, was re-told yesterday at a Migrant Workers Protection Society (MWPS) Press conference in Adliya.

Ms Tessm first arrived in Bahrain in September 1999 at the age of 20 and was



■ Ms Tessm, fourth from left, alongside MWPS officials including Ms Almoayyed, second from right, at the Press conference yesterday

promised a salary of BD40 a month by her sponsor – a BDF employee.

Made to sign receipts for payments she never received, the former maid – who is now

35 – did attempt to escape her employer once during her first few months of employment, but was swiftly returned to him by the police.

"When we asked Seble why

she hadn't run away from the sponsor, she said she was afraid," said MWPS action committee head Eskedar Girmay.

"Her family did not receive any money and thought she must have been married and living peacefully in Bahrain."

The case only came to light when a woman named Sameera, who lives in Qatar and is a friend of Ms Tessm's family, visited Bahrain last month out of concern for her fellow Ethiopian and saw the conditions she was working in.

Ms Sameera then contacted the MWPS, which reported the case to the General Directorate of Criminal Investigation's anti-trafficking unit, whose officers brought the former housemaid to their offices in a matter of hours.

Ms Tessm said yesterday that she was too scared to report her former employer because of his position in the armed forces and had almost resigned herself to her fate.

"Since I left home, I think my friends must have gotten married and have children now," she said.

"When I think of how my life has ended up, I just want to cry."

MWPS general secretary Beverley Hamadeh told the GDN that Ms Tessm's family received less than BD600 for

her almost 15 years of work, when according to their estimates she should have received around BD7,000.

"This includes the money for seven air tickets and we are now following the case to ensure she gets the money she deserves," said Ms Hamadeh.

"Depriving people of their freedom like this is modern-day slavery and a form of human trafficking."

MWPS patron Mona Almoayyed added that strict action should be taken against Bahraini sponsors who are not paying workers, as this is not an isolated case.

"We continue to insist that salaries of domestic workers should be transferred to their bank accounts rather than by signing some receipts," said Ms Almoayyed.

Demand

"It is also important for embassies to play a bigger role in protecting the rights of their nationals in Bahrain," she added.

The MWPS is also calling for proper job descriptions to be laid out in domestic workers' contract – including a note making it clear that because of the nature of the work, the maid will often be confined to the house.

In addition, the society has called upon officials to not brand housemaids who approach police stations as "runaways" and to further increase the monthly salary bracket that is required for families to get a housemaid visa – currently set at BD350.

A family on a BD350 salary cannot afford to pay housemaids, according to the MWPS.

sandy@gdn.com.bh

Couple loses appeal in assault case

A COUPLE convicted of assaulting each other weeks before they got divorced have lost their appeals.

The fist fight started when the Bahraini father, a black belt in taekwon do, tried to take his 11-month-old son from his mother, according to court documents.

He allegedly kicked and punched his ex-wife after she attacked him from behind.

The Lower Criminal Court earlier fined them both BD100 and they appealed at the High Criminal Appeals Court, which has upheld the original decision.

The woman told prosecutors that her ex-husband, who weighs 120kg, was a martial arts expert and claimed she could not have assaulted him since she was less than half his size.

She said they agreed her ex-husband would see their child three times a week, but got into a row as she was about to leave their home.

Jewellery artists from Beirut to showcase work

AN exhibition featuring Beirut-based jewellery designers opens on Monday at Al Riwaq Art Space in Adliya.

The Dehab exhibition is being held in collaboration with gift shop Dukkan-3 and will feature artists Mustafa Ali, Raissa Traboulsi and Simone Kosremelli.

Mr Ali is known for his elegant sculptures, with nearly three decades of experience while Ms Traboulsi holds a diploma in diamond and coloured stones from the Antwerp World Diamond Centre and in jewellery design from the Gemological Institute of America.

Ms Kosremelli, on the other hand, is an architect who created her first jewellery line in 1995.

The exhibition will run for three days from Monday until Wednesday.

The gallery is open from Sunday to Thursday from 10am to 9pm.

Amwaj event to back orphans

A CHARITY event aimed at raising funds for orphans and cancer patients in Bahrain will be held at Amwaj Islands on Friday.

The Amwaj Marina Obstacles Challenge will see up to 200 fitness enthusiasts take on a gruelling four-kilometre course featuring mud crawls, weight carrying and wall climbs.

The event starts at 4.30pm with part of the money raised going to both the Bahrain Cancer Society and online classifieds listing Mowatens Bahrain's aid for orphans programme.

Spectators go free. For more information, call 39132102 or email adnan@adnanevents.com.

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■ Dr Al Sayed and Mr Thomas signing the deal

Free surgeries for the needy

THE Royal Charity Organisation (RCO) has signed a co-operation agreement with Royal Bahrain Hospital (RBH) to perform free surgeries on a number of orphans and widows during Ramadan.

Under the agreement, the hospital will also offer free breast

mammograms to 50 women all year round and provide free consultations in some emergency cases on a weekly basis for one year.

RCO secretary general Dr Mustafa Al Sayed and RBH operations director Jacob Thomas signed the deal.