

Kuwait decides not to imprison or penalise over 24,000 illegal Indian workers

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New Delhi: In a rare gesture, the Kuwait government has said that it will not imprison or penalise over 24,000 illegal Indian workers if they report to the Interior Ministry for deportation or transfer of job visas.

File pic - Indian workers at a construction site in Kuwait

"We are lenient towards Indian workers but have asked them to strictly follow the rules and regulations. The Immigration Department is ready to help them in the deportation process," Maj General Talal Ibrahim Marafie, who heads the department, said.

â€œThis was being done "in view of good and strong ties with India," Marafie added.

There are around one million Indian workers in Kuwait, who contribute immensely to the development of the country.

Marafie said that there were multiple reasons for overstays. In most cases, workers leave their sponsors and work for other companies for financial benefits. There are also cases where the sponsor is abroad and when visas expire there is no one to help the workers get their travel documents legalised. Some sponsors retain the passports of workers. Such workers leave their sponsors for monetary benefits and better jobs.

Marafie said that the government is keen to help illegal workers if they report to the US.

The Immigration Department will make necessary arrangements for their deportation. The workers have to pay a small amount as a penalty, but in most cases, this has been waived. However, Marafie made it clear that if any of the workers had indulged in malpractices, they would not be spared.

He said that 2,018 illegal Indian workers had already been helped to leave the country without any penalty.

As for the non-payment of dues to the workers, he said the government attached great importance to this critical issue.

Senior Interior Ministry official Mohammed Ajami stated that thousands of such cases had been resolved. The ministry also offers legal assistance to workers to fight their cases in court. The verdict has to be given within one month's time so that the workers don't suffer any delay. The government has also formed a committee of lawyers to help foreign workers in settling their dues.

Ajami He said the government has proposed certain changes in the labour laws under which workers will have the right to retain their passports and travel documents. Moreover, sponsors will be made responsible to pay dues within a one-month period or face legal action.

On the drop in oil revenue, Marafie said this has not impacted on recruitment. More than 50,000 Indians have been recruited this year, he noted.

- With IANS Inputs