

70m foreigners work in Gulf states

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There are an estimated 70 million foreign workers based in the GCC and in some member-countries they are as many as four times the size of local communities, Al Jazeera Arabic TV Channel said in a report yesterday.

With their sheer population, the expatriates are affecting local culture and society. Their influences on local lifestyles are huge.

The Channel also talked of the massive outflow of funds outside the region in the form of remittances routed by the foreign workers home.

On the other hand, accusations are aplenty about workers rights being abused by the GCC countries and there is growing concern among expatriate communities about sponsorship rules.

There are increasing complaints from sections of low-income workers in some member-countries about undue delays being made in salary payments and employers not abiding by accepted international workplace practices, especially about the number of hours a worker is required to put in daily.

The Channel featured Bahrain's Labour Minister, Majeed Al Alawi, in the programme and he admitted foreign workers were the key to development in the region.

While agreeing that foreign workers must be given their rights but not at the expense of citizens, he confessed that labour ministers of GCC countries were not able to forge a common policy and vision with regard to expatriates and that was why the issue was not raised at the 28th GCC Summit which concluded in Doha yesterday.

Meanwhile, the GCC Secretary General Abdul Rahman bin Hamad Al Attiyah said the member countries can not do away with their foreign workforce, as they have been witnessing an economic boom.

The comments came when he was replying to a query from the media about concerns raised by some member states about their growing expatriate population.

“The GCC countries are witnessing an economic and construction boom and they need to rely on foreign workforce,” said Al Attiyah.