

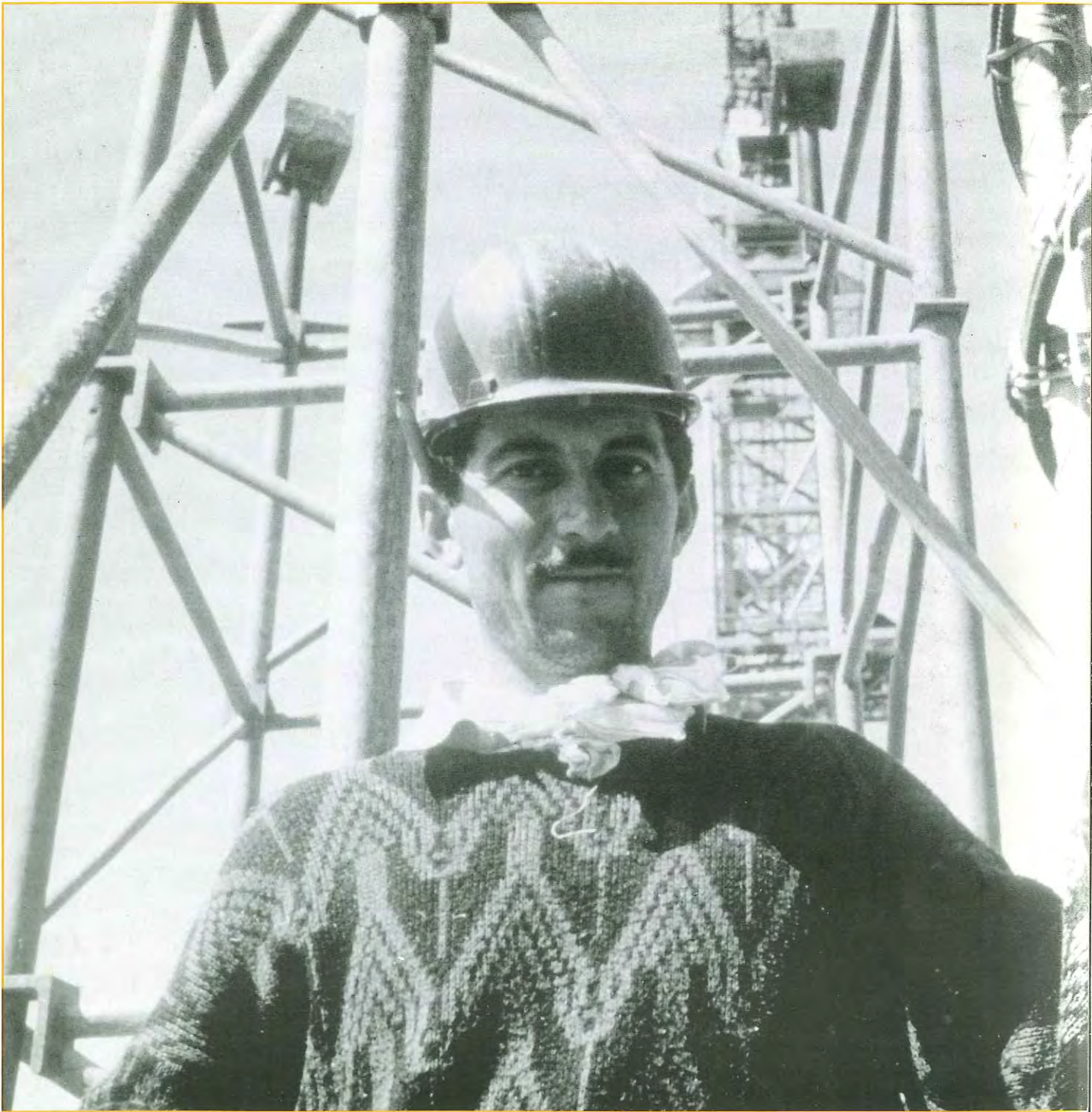
MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP INTERNATIONAL

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1992

# MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE GULF

A MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP INTERNATIONAL REPORT • MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE GULF



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BY DR ROGER OWEN



# THE MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP

is an international research and information unit registered in Britain as an educational charity under the Charities Act of 1960. Its principal aims are –

To secure justice for minority or majority groups suffering discrimination, by investigating their situation and publicizing the facts as widely as possible, to educate and alert public opinion throughout the world.

To help prevent, through publicity about violations of human rights, such problems from developing into dangerous and destructive conflicts which, when polarised, are very difficult to resolve; and

To foster, by its research findings, international understanding of the factors which create prejudiced treatment and group tensions, thus helping to promote the growth of a world conscience regarding human rights.

**The Minority Rights Group urgently needs further funds for its work. Please contribute what you can. MRG is eligible to receive a covenant from UK taxpayers.**

## MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE GULF

by Dr. Roger Owen

with an update by Dr. Nicholas Van Hear

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# Migrant Workers in the Gulf

By Dr. Roger Owen

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# THE UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

*Whereas* recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

*Whereas* disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from any fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

*Whereas* it is essential, if a man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

*Whereas* it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

*Whereas* the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

*Whereas* Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

*Whereas* a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, Therefore,

## THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims

THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

*Article 1.* All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

*Article 2.* Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

*Furthermore*, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

*Article 3.* Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

*Article 4.* No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

*Article 5.* No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

*Article 6.* Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

*Article 7.* All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law: All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

*Article 8.* Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

*Article 9.* No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

*Article 10.* Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

*Article 11. (1)* Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

*(2)* No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

*Article 12.* No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

*Article 13. (1)* Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

*(2)* Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

*Article 14. (1)* Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

*(2)* This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

*Article 15. (1)* Everyone has the right to a nationality.

*(2)* No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

*Article 16. (1)* Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

*(2)* Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

*(3)* The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

*Article 17. (1)* Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

*(2)* No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

*Article 18.* Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

*Article 19.* Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

*Article 20. (1)* Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

*(2)* No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

*Article 21. (1)* Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

*(2)* Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

*(3)* The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

*Article 22.* Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

*Article 23. (1)* Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

*(2)* Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

*(3)* Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

*(4)* Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interest.

*Article 24.* Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

*Article 25. (1)* Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

*(2)* Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

*Article 26. (1)* Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

*(2)* Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

*(3)* Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

*Article 27. (1)* Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

*(2)* Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

*Article 28.* Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

*Article 29. (1)* Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

*(2)* In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

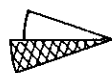
*(3)* These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

*Article 30.* Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

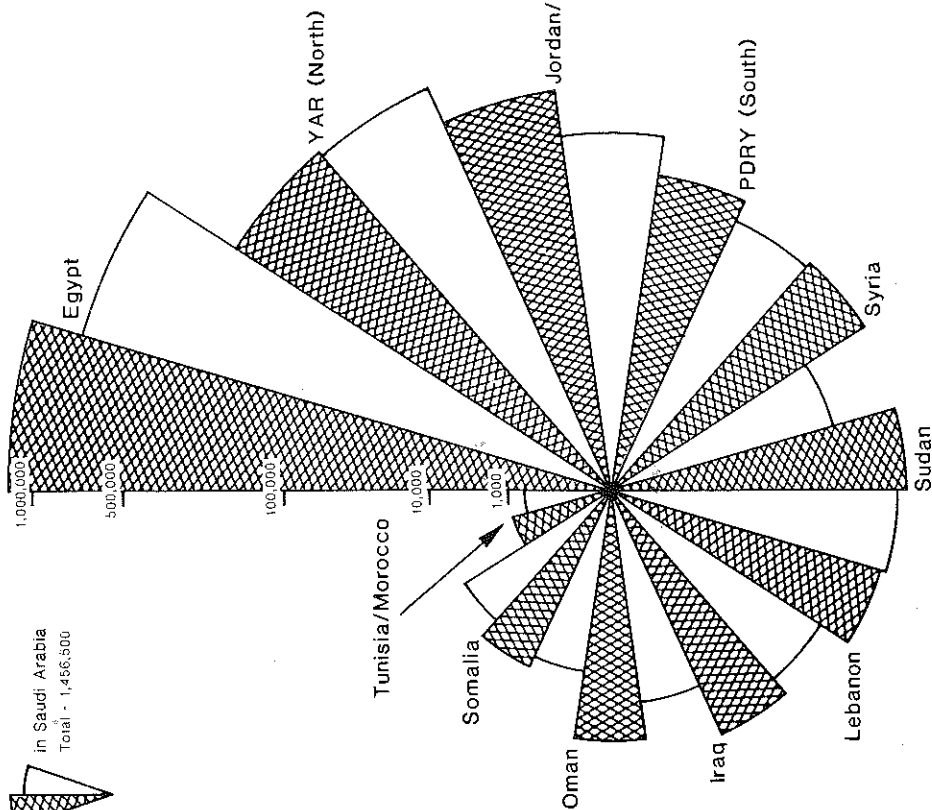
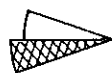
# MIGRANT WORKERS IN SAUDI ARABIA AND THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL STATES (early 1980s estimates)

Arab Workers  
(by country of origin)

in 6 GCC states  
Total - 2,075,640



in Saudi Arabia  
Total - 1,456,500



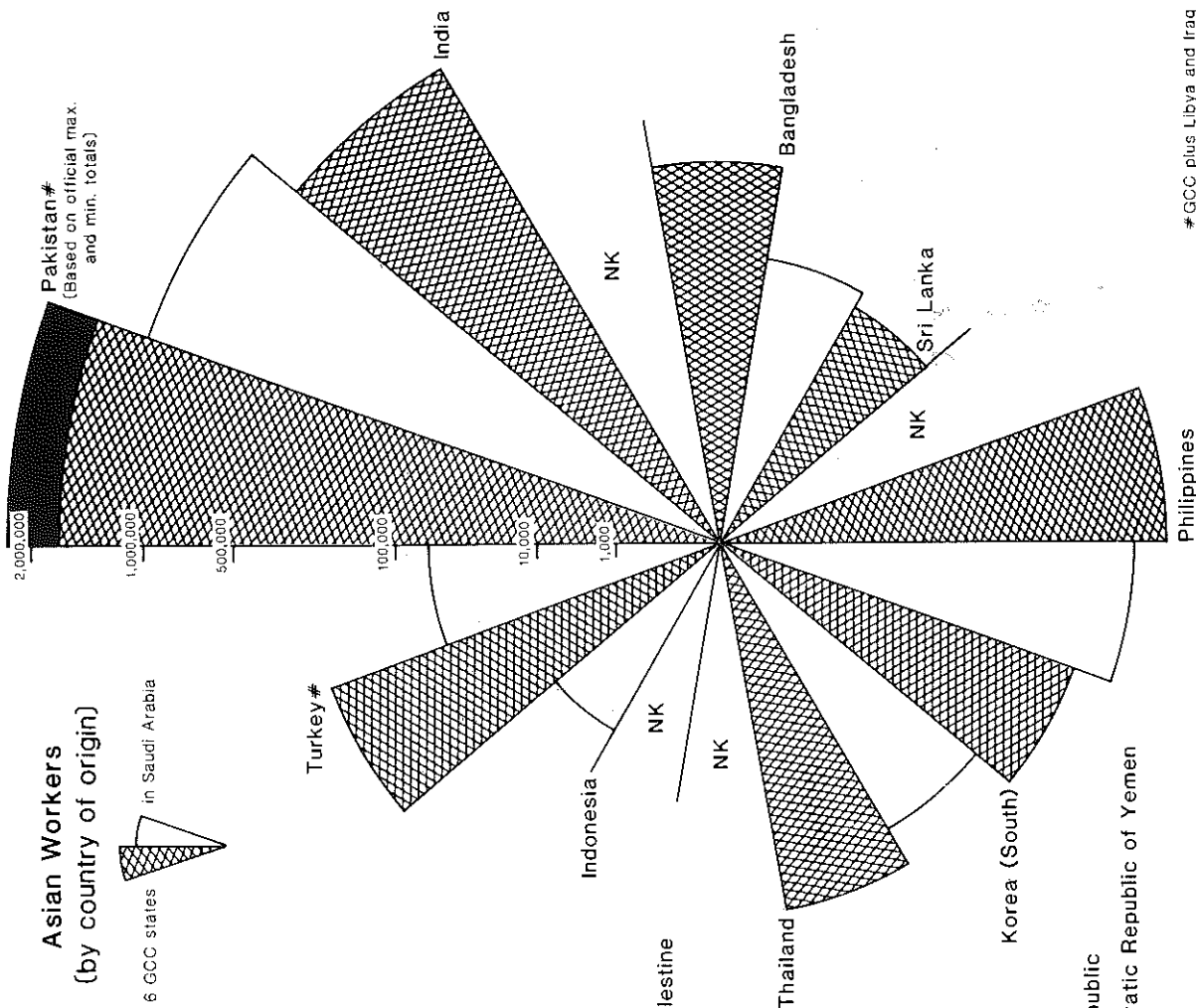
YAR Yemen Arab Republic  
PDRY People's Democratic Republic of Yemen  
NK Not Known

Asian Workers  
(by country of origin)

in 6 GCC states  
Total - 1,456,500



in Saudi Arabia  
Total - 1,456,500



\* GCC plus Libya and Iraq

Sources: as per Tables 1 and 2

## INTRODUCTION

The oil price explosion of 1973-4, and the huge increase in revenues which followed, triggered off a massive wave of labour migration to the six Gulf states – Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Saudi Arabia – of a new and unusual type in world history. It consisted, first of Arabs, then increasingly of Asian workers from the Indian sub-continent, from Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan and from South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Statistical estimates are of variable quality, but probably by the early 1980s there were some 6,000,000 foreigners at work in the Gulf region, of whom over 2,000,000 were Arabs, about 3,750,000 from Asia and the rest from Africa (including many refugees from Ethiopia and elsewhere), Europe and the Americas. (This compares with a figure of only about 660,000 migrant workers in 1970, the product of the earlier boom and 1,250,000 in 1975 – perhaps a fifth of whom were Asians.) Such was the mix of nationalities that by 1980 Kuwait was employing workers from 68 different countries.

Some of the reasons behind this dramatic movement are given later in this Report. The most immediate causes were the acute shortage of labour which existed in the thinly-populated Gulf states – once they tried to develop their own economies and to provide a wide variety of welfare services for their citizens – and the fact that wages and salary differentials between the labour receiving and labour sending countries were so striking. To give only a few examples:

- the official Bangladeshi position when negotiating contracts for its workers going to the Gulf is based on the assumption that Gulf salaries are 6-8 times as high as local ones for professionals and skilled labour, and 5-6 times as high for unskilled<sup>1</sup>;
- Sri Lankan house maids, labourers and cooks can obtain 12 times their local wages in the Gulf<sup>2</sup>;
- an Egyptian school teacher who earns \$600-700 a year in his own village can save at least \$12,000 a year while teaching in Saudi Arabia<sup>3</sup>;
- an unskilled Egyptian peasant can earn more in Saudi Arabia than one of his own cabinet ministers back home<sup>4</sup>.

The migration of labour was clearly tied very closely to the oil price boom in two important ways. It was the boom which vastly increased the demand for labour in the oil-exporting countries while, at the same time, giving the labour sending countries every incentive to try to compensate for the crippling rise in the cost of their oil imports by encouraging their citizens to work abroad and to remit as large a proportion of their wages as possible. In a number of countries workers' remittances soon overtook commodity exports as the major foreign currency earner. But compared with other waves of labour migration the movement to the Gulf also had several other unusual and significant features. First, unlike the import of Mediterranean workers into Western Europe in the 1960s, it involved many technicians and professionals – not just simply unskilled and semi-skilled labour. Second, the huge influx of Arabs and Asians into the smaller Gulf states meant that, by the early 1980s, something like 70 to 80% of their labour force had come from abroad. Third and perhaps most important of all, this huge movement took place with hardly any official cooperation between labour sending and labour receiving states – a situation which stands in marked contrast to the very detailed planning which went into the arrangements governing the movement of Turks to West Germany after 1962 (see MRG Report 28).

These and other significant features are explored in the following sections of this Report, concentrating on who the migrant workers are, how they were recruited to go to the Gulf, what their conditions of work are like and how the present employment of foreign labour is likely to develop in the future. The Report will also examine the political economy of the movement and the role of the labour importing and labour exporting states. In doing this it will focus only on the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council whose problems and policies have been much the same, and ignore the situation in other oil-producing states like Iraq (at least 2,000,000 foreign workers) and Libya (300,000) or in states which have also profited from the oil boom, like Jordan (140,000).<sup>5</sup>

## 1: WHO ARE THE MIGRANT WORKERS?

### a) The problem with numbers

The figures in Tables 1 and 2 represent a very rough attempt to estimate the numbers of foreigners at work in the six Gulf states in the early 1980s. Drawn mainly from two pioneering efforts by Birks and Sinclair and by Demery,<sup>6</sup> they suggest that there were then some 5,750,000 non-national workers of whom the great majority were from India, Pakistan and Egypt and over a third were employed in Saudi Arabia. However, these figures consist only of a set of best guesses, as the problem involved in making such calculations are enormous. They also appear to contradict figures produced in the Gulf states themselves (Tables 3 and 4) which – although not fully compatible with each other – suggest a much lower figure closer to 3,000,000. Some of the discrepancy may be accounted for by the fact that most of the figures in Table 2 refer to 1983 or even 1984 (for example, the Pakistanis) and thus represent the situation as it existed a few years after that reported in Tables 3 and 4 when the wave of Asian migration had not yet reached its height. But it may also represent a systematic effort by many Gulf states to keep the figures as low as possible and thus to reduce their apparent dependence on foreign labour. Table 4 shows that, according to an Omani publication, Kuwait was the one small Gulf state with a majority of Arab workers in 1980 and that in all the others Asians outnumbered Arabs by at least three to one.

The basic difficulty involved in calculating the number of migrants is that hardly any of the countries involved publish accurate statistics of the numbers of workers entering and leaving their national territories. This is partly because of the difficulties involved in setting up the administrative mechanisms to do the counting. But in many cases, particularly in the Arab countries, there has been an official unwillingness either to try to begin the process of registration or to reveal what they know. This can be explained in the case of the labour senders by their anxiety to benefit from increased remittances and thus their unwillingness to place any barriers in the way of workers moving abroad or to suggest, for one moment, that efforts to register workers might be a preliminary to taxation or some form of control. They have also been unwilling to throw light on a situation that may well be seen as politically embarrassing by the oil producers of the Gulf on whom they have become dependent for large sums of money in aid and budgetary support. A similar situation, in which migrants do not wish to be counted, and in which governments are reluctant to count them, may also exist in a number of the Asian states as well.

Another set of problems arises from the fact that there has been a huge amount of irregular migration by workers who, for one reason or another, do not wish to go through the official process of obtaining work permits, residence and visas. Some from the Islamic countries have entered Saudi Arabia among the over one million pilgrims who come each year for the annual Hajj or the Omra (the minor pilgrimage which can be performed in any month) and then stayed on. This was a method much favoured by Egyptians and Sudanese in the 1970s, although it has undoubtedly become much more difficult since then as a result of a powerful Saudi drive to eliminate the practice and to deport those who were found to have remained in the country without proper papers. Other Arabs – for example Sudanese and Syrians working in the public sector – have had to leave their own countries without being properly registered in order to get around government regulations forbidding certain categories of state employees from leaving their jobs – or from staying abroad too long.

But undoubtedly the major type of irregular immigration has been that of poorer Arabs and Asians who have simply found ways of crossing international frontiers without detection. In the case of Kuwait one estimate has put the number of unregistered foreign workers at the time of the 1980 census at 40-50,000 – compared with the legal foreign workforce of 380,000.<sup>7</sup> But the country where the problem has been at its worst is certainly Saudi Arabia where, given its long land and sea frontiers, the difficulties of controlling movement are obviously enormous. Some idea of the numbers involved can be gained from the occasional release of Saudi figures about the number of deportations for illegal residence, for example 88,000 in 1979.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, in the case of the labour sending countries, estimates of the numbers of their nationals at work in the Gulf without proper papers are even more

staggering. One suggests that there may have been 500,000 illegal Pakistani workers in the early 1980s.<sup>9</sup> Calculations based on the value of remittances sent back through formal channels also indicate that a great deal of Asian labour migration is unrecorded, for example from Thailand.<sup>10</sup>

Given the difficulties with statistics it is obviously still more complicated to calculate changes in the total of each country's workers abroad. Even where proper figures may exist for arrivals and departures, it is still necessary to know how many workers are coming and going on a temporary basis (perhaps for their holidays) and how many are returning home for good.<sup>11</sup> Finally, if figures for the movement of migrants are so unsatisfactory, how much more so must be those relating to the place of origin, the level of skill and the length of work experience of those who leave for jobs in the Gulf, let alone what happens to them overseas and the employment they take up on their return? In these circumstances, the type of information presented in the next few sections will inevitably be more of an impressionistic nature, based on a few national sample surveys, than a precise estimation of the numbers and proportions involved.

## b) Some national profiles

According to a set of huge generalizations presented by Arnold and Shah, some two-thirds of the Asian workers in the Middle East are young (between 20 and 35), married and of rural origins – while the overwhelming proportion of them are also male.<sup>12</sup> But even if these assertions could be shown to be based on precise statistics – which they cannot – they would also hide the fact that there are enormous variations between the workers sent to the Gulf by one labour exporting country and another. Far and away the easiest labour donor to describe in simple terms is the Republic of Korea, some 98% of whose citizens at work in the Middle East are employed in some aspect of the construction industry. It can also be confidently assumed that the majority of these workers come from urban areas, given the tiny proportion of the Korean labour force still engaged in agriculture.

For the rest, efforts to construct the different national profiles must be based on sample surveys of hundreds (and occasionally thousands) of properly registered labour migrants, most of which are probably biased in the direction of the skilled and the urban. In addition, the information from these surveys is difficult to use on a comparative basis, as their definitions of skill levels and job categories vary so widely. Nevertheless, for what they are worth, the Pakistani sample shows that 79% of the Pakistanis working abroad were originally manual workers, as opposed to 4.5% who were clerical and 1.6% professional; while that for Bangladesh indicates that only 56% of its migrant workers are unskilled, as opposed to 40% skilled and 6.5% professional.<sup>13</sup> Surveys conducted in the East Asian countries of the Pacific would seem to show that their workers generally had a higher level of education than those from the sub-continent. In the case of the Philippines, for instance, 30-40% of the 800 workers in the survey had been educated beyond high school while some 35% were classified as craftsmen and 25% as professionals.<sup>14</sup> As for Thailand, 64% of the sample were classified as skilled and 11.4% as semi-skilled, with an average age of 31.<sup>15</sup> Lastly, one Asian country with quite a different profile is Sri Lanka where something like half its migrant workers are women, most of them engaged in domestic service.<sup>16</sup>

Turning to the Arab states, to my knowledge only one national survey has been conducted and that was of a sample of nearly 2000 in Jordan.<sup>17</sup> This showed that in the early 1980s, 95% of those working abroad were male and that, as a rule, the migrants were better educated than the population at large. For the rest, the supposition must be that the overwhelming proportion of the other Arab workers are males and that, in the case of Egypt and Sudan at least, they come from predominantly rural backgrounds. The only major exception to this rule is the Palestinians who moved to the Gulf in large numbers as families during the two great waves of dispersion following the 1948 and 1967 military defeats at the hand of Israel.

Here and there, the surveys also provide fragmentary information relating to other important aspects of the migratory process. One is the extent to which workers keep in regular touch with their families or their own towns and villages. Thus according to Al-Moosa and McLachlan's survey of Egyptians working in Kuwait, 64% said that they returned home on an annual basis.<sup>18</sup> Findings of this kind

are important for it can well be argued that, the closer a worker keeps in touch with his family, the more likely he is to remit a considerable proportion of his salary and also to return to his old place of residence and, perhaps, to his old job once he leaves the Gulf. A second concerns the extent to which the type of workers being exported may be changing over time. With the ending of the major construction phase in the Gulf, it might be assumed that the proportionate demand for skilled workers will increase over time. But the only evidence that this is actually happening comes from the increase in the skill levels of Sri Lankan, Filipino and Jordanian migrants in the early 1980s.<sup>19</sup>

A last source of information about foreign workers is provided by the few Gulf statistics which produce detailed breakdowns of its foreign labour force. According to the Omani figures in Table 4, the ratio of expatriate workers to the total expatriate population in the five small Gulf states (excluding Saudi Arabia) is about 1-2, suggesting that perhaps one of four workers has been able to bring his family with him. And in the particular case of Kuwait the 1980 census revealed that out of a total foreign labour force of 380,171, 331,942 were men and 48,229 were women. Of these, 110,589 (29%) were classed as 'illiterate', while almost exactly the same number had had either a secondary or a university education.

## c) How are the workers recruited?

One very obvious difference between Arab and Asian workers in the Gulf lies in the pattern of their recruitment. Whereas the Arabs generally make use of the multiplicity of ties of kinship and community which transcend Middle Eastern political frontiers, the Asians rely to a very large extent on official and private recruiting agencies and labour contractors. One significant exception to this on the Arab side consists of the large number of government employees – certainly several hundreds of thousands – who have gone to the Gulf on official secondment as teachers, civil servants or to work in the defence and security apparatus. But this form of recruitment apart, all the surveys conducted among Egyptians, Jordanians, Lebanese and others testify to the employment of informal networks which generally provide the migrant with the promise of a job before he leaves his own town or village. Thus in one Jordanian sample, two-thirds of the migrants had a personal contact in their future place of work while, in another, 60% had a job arranged for them before they left.<sup>20</sup> The same is true for the Egyptians in Al-Moosa and McLachlan's sample, half of whom found employment in Kuwait through relatives.<sup>21</sup> Asians, on the other hand, generally require the assistance of some type of intermediary, although the proportions using any one particular method vary widely. Whereas in Thailand 95% of the workers going overseas were recruited by private agencies in the early 1980s, the figure for Bangladesh was only 8%.<sup>22</sup> Again, the role of the construction company – either as direct employer or recruiter for a Middle Eastern firm – is more prominent in Korea and the Philippines.<sup>23</sup> There is, however, some scope for individual initiative; for example in the case of Bangladesh where 56% of the sample indicated that they had found jobs abroad through their own efforts.<sup>24</sup>

The method of recruitment has an obvious effect on the expenses which the would-be migrant has to pay, the length of his stay abroad and the opportunities which he may be given to take his family with him. In the case of the Asians, the main outlay is that of the fee charged, legally or illegally, by the agency, while the cost of a round-trip ticket is usually met by the future employer. Fees vary greatly: although the officially sanctioned maximum is often no more than \$100-200, the real cost may go as high as \$1000 per person.<sup>25</sup> Given the fact that this sum sometimes has to be borrowed at a high rate of interest it may require many months of a workers first year's salary to repay.<sup>26</sup> A final implication where recruitment agencies are concerned is that the first employment contract they negotiate is unlikely to be longer than one and a half to two years which is the maximum permitted in the Gulf. And, in some cases like that of the Korean construction companies, there are significant financial advantages to the employer if it can even be kept down to a year, for this means that there need be no provisions for holidays spent back home and, in Saudi Arabia, no need to pay social insurance payments to the government.<sup>27</sup> For the Arabs, on the other hand, the main costs of a migrant are those of obtaining a visa (where necessary), a work permit and transport. Furthermore, because of the use of informal contacts, periods of work abroad tend to be much longer than for Asians. In the case of a Jordanian

sample, for instance, the average time abroad was given as four and a half to five years.<sup>28</sup> For the same reason it is probably easier for Arabs to bring their families.

#### **d) What do the migrant workers do?**

Given the lack of statistics about the economic structure of the six G.C.C. states, perhaps the only safe generalization is that the largest proportion of the foreign labour force has been engaged in some aspect of construction, whether as unskilled labourers or as skilled and semi-skilled electricians, plasterers, carpenters and so on. According to Zahlan, in 1980 the total Arab construction market was worth some \$100 billion a year and employed over 3,000,000 persons. Of these expenditures, 80% were in the Gulf where Saudi Arabia alone was spending just over \$37 billion on airports, roads, schools and universities, hospitals, defence facilities and industrial cities.<sup>29</sup> Other estimates suggest that 80% of the Pakistanis in Saudi Arabia were employed in construction and a third of the Egyptians.<sup>30</sup> After this, the next largest single employer of immigrant labour was almost certainly the public service in which schools, hospitals and much of the central administration was largely staffed by non-nationals, mostly Arabs for whom there was no barrier of language. In the early 1980s, for example, there were some 120,000 Egyptian government servants on secondment to Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states, in 1978 perhaps 30,000 of the Egyptians abroad were teachers.<sup>31</sup> Figures from Kuwait make these same points: of the total foreign labour force of 380,171 recorded in the 1980 census, 95,893 were employed in construction and 89,668 in the public service (excluding the defence and diplomatic establishments), of whom over half were in the Ministries of Education and Public Health. For the rest, given the demand for all types of labour right across the board, foreigners can be found in every type of employment from the highest to the lowest, a point well made in the Saudi official figures for 1980 which show that of a total foreign work force of 783,000, some 277,000 were classed as 'professionals'.<sup>32</sup> Lastly, it should be noted that many of the migrant workers may have more than one source of employment even though this is almost always strictly forbidden. For what it is worth, some 10% of the Egyptians in Al-Moosa and McLachlan's Kuwait sample acknowledged that they had at least two jobs.<sup>33</sup>

#### **e) What do the migrant workers learn?**

Due to the fact that the majority of Arab and Asian migrants come from rural areas it is unlikely that all of them are employed in the same jobs when they go to the Gulf. According to one sample survey in Kuwait, only 68% of the foreign workers were employed in their previous type of activity.<sup>34</sup> The question then becomes: to what extent do migrants learn new skills? To this should be added the related question: to what extent do migrants either under-utilize, or even forget, old skills as a result of being employed in jobs which are below their educational or technical level – like the Egyptian school teacher who works in the Gulf as a bank clerk or the university-educated Pakistani who becomes a hotel-receptionist? As always, the hard evidence is scarce. But according to the various sample surveys, it would seem that only a proportion of returned migrants were able to claim that their skills had been enhanced in any way, even though there were the usual national differences. Claims of skill enhancement vary from 10% among the Jordanians to 25% for the Pakistanis and 37% for the Thais.<sup>35</sup> Against this, the proportion of Thais who admitted that they had experienced a loss of skill was only 4.5%.<sup>36</sup> There is also one country which has made a substantial effort to ensure that its own migrants receive specific training to improve their skill and that is Korea whose overseas construction firms were ordered to institute training programmes designed to upgrade their unskilled workers employed in the Gulf. Between 1978 and 1980 they had trained about 30,000 such workers a year.<sup>37</sup>

#### **f) What do the migrants earn and save?**

Once again, the problems involved in making these calculations are enormous. Not only are the workers and their employers unlikely to want to reveal the sums involved, but there is also the fact that foreigners, particularly in construction, can augment their basic wages by a considerable amount with overtime. Estimates of the monthly earnings of foreign workers in construction vary from \$390 a month for the Filipinos in the early 1980s, to \$748 for Koreans working for their own national companies and \$1055

when they work for non-national firms.<sup>38</sup> If overtime is included, Thai workers can earn an average of \$587 a month.<sup>39</sup>

The process of estimating what proportions of these sums are saved and then remitted is even more difficult and obviously depends a great deal on the situation in which the worker finds himself and how much it costs to maintain himself while resident in the Gulf. In the case of construction workers living in camps, with their board and lodging provided, and with very little on which to spend what they earn, the level of savings can be very high indeed – perhaps even higher than the 80% of monthly wages which is the South Korean government's officially required remittance for its migrant builders overseas.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, a foreigner who has brought his own family and who has to pay for accommodation, food and even education for his children at the very high prices ruling in the Gulf will only be able to save a very much smaller proportion of his earnings – perhaps no more than the 20 to 30% which was the average for Egyptians in al-Moosa and McLachlan's Kuwait survey.<sup>41</sup>

Some guide to the amount of money which single Arab workers remit to their families comes from research conducted in North Yemen where, in the late 1970s, it seems to have been the standard practice to send back between \$200 and \$450 a month, with other (larger) sums being brought personally by the worker himself during his annual holiday or at the end of his employment.<sup>42</sup> Turning to the Asians, the economist Javid Burki has estimated that an average Pakistani skilled or semi-skilled worker 'could' remit \$8600 during a four-year period in the Gulf, or some \$170 a month.<sup>43</sup> This, he reckons, would be at least ten times the worker's pre-migration wage. Other estimates give the average saved and remitted by Thai workers as \$4358 a year and by unskilled Indonesians who work overtime and thus obtain a one month end-of-contract bonus, as \$319-444 a month.<sup>44</sup>

## **2: A BRIEF HISTORY OF MIGRANT LABOUR IN THE GULF TO THE EARLY 1970s**

The Gulf region has a long history of labour migration through its association with international trade across the Indian Ocean and with economic activities connected with the annual Hajj pilgrimage. There has also been a certain amount of internal migration from one part of the Gulf littoral to another. However, the present dependence on foreign labour only began with the start of the Arab oil era in the 1930s. Outside workers were required, first for the process of exploration, then for the drilling of wells and the construction of pipelines and terminals as well as of all the necessary roads, port facilities and housing which local governments were too poor to provide. All this was accompanied by an associated expansion of government administration – for example, police, public works and financial and legal departments – some of which was necessary to control both the foreign oil companies and their workers. Lastly, beginning with Kuwait, there was a sustained attempt to introduce a high level of welfare services – schools, clinics, hospitals etc. – all of which were extremely labour intensive.

Developments of this kind required large supplies of labour of every type, hardly any of which was to be found in the Gulf states themselves. At the beginning of their oil era they all had tiny populations with a very low level of literacy and little or no female employment. To give only one example, when oil was first exported from Qatar in 1949, only 650 of its inhabitants could read and write out of a total population of 30,000.<sup>45</sup>

The first Gulf state to start along the path towards oil-related development was Bahrain where the first successful well was drilled in 1932. Initially the oil company used Persian workers to man its main construction activities. But both the ruler and his British Advisor soon worried that this might be seen to underline Iranian claims to the island and the company was encouraged to turn to Indian labour. Some Indian workers were recruited locally. But when the company tried to obtain more from India itself it was soon forced to bring its operations into line with the Indian Labour Law of 1922. As a result it opened a recruiting office in Bombay in July 1936 and brought its workers to Bahrain under proper contract and subject to the supervision of the Government of India Office for the Protector of Emigrants.<sup>46</sup> This early experience already



points to the existence of a number of important – and persistent – problems. One was the tension between a commercial enterprise which was anxious to find workers locally – with no particular interest in whether they were illegal migrants or not – on the grounds that residents were easier to fire, possessed their own housing and did not require expensive transportation – and a government which was inevitably concerned with the nationalities of the workers concerned and the conditions under which they had entered the country. A second was the political aspect resulting from the rulers' anxiety lest a rapidly growing labour force became a source of danger, either as a possible bridgehead for outside interests or, after the first strikes in 1938, as a focus for the development of unions which might create difficulties both inside and outside their place of work.

Oil was also discovered in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in the 1930s, but the major expansion of production facilities did not take place until after the Second World War. While ARAMCO in Saudi Arabia initially used Italian labour (first Allied prisoners of war and then from Eritrea) and later Palestinians, the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) made considerable use of Indian labour and obtained workers by means of officially sanctioned recruiting agents subject to the control of the local British Political Agent who was required to issue what were called 'No Objection' certificates for each foreign migrant. But after a while they began to turn increasingly to Arab labourers, drawn either from the lower Gulf states where they were often recruited by local contractors or from Palestine (particularly after the huge surge of refugees in 1948/49), Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, Aden and Sudan. Thus, by 1952, ARAMCO employed 2430 Indians and Pakistanis (some 10% of its total labour force) and 2254 non-national Arabs (9%), while a year later the KOC had 3000 Indians and Pakistanis under contract (37% of its total labour force) and 1800 non-national Arabs (22%).<sup>47</sup> At this time Arabs were thought to be much more tractable than Asians and were also much in demand to staff posts in the rapidly expanding public service. Hence, for a short period, governments were prepared to offer quite considerable inducements to persuade them to come to live in the small, hot, underdeveloped towns of the Gulf, including, in some cases, the offer of citizenship.<sup>48</sup> Within a few years, however, the rising tide of foreign labour was already beginning to excite quite considerable local alarm and there began to be a new emphasis on the establishment of official mechanisms for regulation and control.

Looked at in statistical terms, the rapid expansion of the foreign labour force and the concomitant rise in local dependence on outside labour was quite extraordinary, particularly in the boom conditions which followed the Saudi 50/50 profit-sharing agreement with ARAMCO in 1950 and the huge increase in oil production which took place in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the 1950s and in Bahrain, Qatar and Abu Dhabi a decade later (see Table 5). In the case of Kuwait, the population grew from 70,000 in 1944 to 206,473 in 1957 before doubling to 467,339 in 1965.<sup>49</sup> Much of this increase was accounted for by the influx of foreign workers and their families – mainly Arabs – who, by the early 1960s, had already outnumbered the local Kuwaitis. The growth of dependence on foreign labour was equally striking. By 1957, according to one local estimate, 95% of the workers in hotels and industry were foreign and 90% in airlines, tourism and travel.

Much the same process was taking place in Bahrain although, there, the impact of migration was masked for a time by the Ruler's liberal policy towards granting citizenship to other Arabs, particularly from the lower Gulf.<sup>50</sup> Thus, while the total population increased from 109,650 in 1950 to 182,203 in 1965, the numbers of foreigners went up from 15,930 to 38,389 during this same period. Of the latter, just over half were Persians or people from India and Pakistan, and the rest were Arabs.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, a breakdown of part of the labour force in 1956, excluding such categories as transport workers and sailors, shows that Bahraini nationals were still just in a majority – 17,393 to 12,203.<sup>52</sup> Figures for Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Abu Dhabi are much less precise. According to official 'guesstimates', the Saudi population grew from 1.5-2,000,000 in the 1930s to 3,300,000 in 1962/3 and perhaps 5.5-6,000,000 at the time of the 1974 census (still unpublished), of whom 1,500,000 are supposed to have been foreigners.<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, in Qatar, the population is said to have grown from 12,000 in 1940 to 190,000 in 1976, of whom just over half were foreign.<sup>54</sup> Finally, in Abu Dhabi, where oil exports

began in 1962, the increase was from 46,375 in 1968 to 235,662 in 1975, of whom nearly three-quarters were from abroad.<sup>55</sup>

A huge influx of outsiders of this kind posed many difficult problems, particularly for the ruling families who presided over what were still very rudimentary state structures. Some idea of the immensity of the problems they faced can be seen from the fact that, for a long time, it was necessary to employ one set of foreigners to establish the police, and even to write the first labour laws, needed to regulate all the others. Efforts to bring the situation under control took three main forms: the introduction of laws defining the terms on which foreign labour could be imported and the creation of agencies to enforce them, the formation of general policy guidelines towards the future development of the labour force and the creation of special measures to protect the rights and interests of local nationals. I will deal with each of these in turn.

Statutes defining the conditions of entry and the status of foreign workers were usually included in the first labour laws introduced to cover first public sector and then private sector employment. These included the Saudi Labour and Work regulations of 1947, the Kuwait Labour Law of 1957 and the Bahrain Labour Law of 1958. The need to define policy towards a labour force increasingly dominated by foreigners also required the introduction of other types of legislation such as those towards social security and towards unions and strikes. All the rulers in the Gulf were worried by the first signs of workers' organizations in the oil sector, for example the strikes in Bahrain in 1938, 1947 and 1953 and the strike in Dhahran in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia in 1956. Significantly, it was this last event which led directly to the 1956 Saudi decree making all future strikes illegal. Suspicion of any forms of labour organization can also be seen in the ruler of Qatar's refusal to allow the Qatar Oil Company (QOC) to establish a joint consultative committee with its workers in the 1950s.<sup>56</sup> The only Gulf state to follow a different path was Kuwait whose 1957 Labour Law included provision for the establishment of unions, to which foreign workers who had been resident in the country for at least five years were allowed to belong, but not to hold office. Finally, an example of one of the first institutions created especially to regulate the growth of the workforce was the Kuwait Labour Office opened in 1954 to undertake the task of registering all existing workers and to issue work permits. It was as a result of these efforts that it discovered in 1955 that 21,000 out of the State's 34,356 manual workers had entered the country illegally.<sup>57</sup>

The question of defining a satisfactory labour policy proved to be more difficult. As a rule, the general desire was to reduce dependence on foreign labour wherever possible, while protecting the interests of the local population. This led on to efforts to promote the training of national workers or to the establishment of categories of jobs which were either reserved for nationals or to be filled by nationals as soon as they were available. Particular attention was paid to posts in sensitive parts of the public service such as the senior grades in the bureaucracy, the police and the oil company. In addition, most labour regulations began to contain reference to the principle that foreign workers should only be admitted if there were no local nationals who could do the same job.

However, all such policies ran into the very obvious problem that with the public and the private sector expanding at such a rapid rate, there was a continuing demand for labour which simply could not be met out of local resources. Other features of the lack of fit between demand and supply also became apparent. First, it was discovered that there were a large number of jobs which local nationals were unwilling or unable to perform, ranging all the way from menial ones like domestic service or the cleaning of public offices through those which posed problems for local women such as nursing or being an airline stewardess to highly technical ones which required many years of training. Second, the fact that certain well-paid posts were reserved for local nationals itself acted as a disincentive for them to seek work anywhere but in the higher echelons of the public service. Third, the initial presence of a large foreign population required an increasing number of foreign workers just to cater to its own needs, particularly in the field of education, health and private services. Other problems, just as serious, will be mentioned after a brief discussion of the third line of policy relating to the growing size of the migrant community, that of preserving the rights of the local population as citizens.

As far as the Gulf states were concerned, this process of protecting local rights was a two-stage affair. The first, completed in Kuwait by the passage of the Nationality Law of 1959, was to define just who the local nationals were. In the case of Kuwait this involved the implementation of the formula that 'The Kuwaitis are basically those people who inhabited Kuwait before 1920'. The law then went on to establish a second category of citizenship for those who came to Kuwait after 1920 who, among other things, were not given the right to vote. Finally, it was laid down that people who arrived later could apply for citizenship but that it would only be granted in very special cases. Although the rules governing the granting of Kuwaiti nationality have been amended a number of times they have always been implemented in such a restrictive way that, for example, only 13,570 people were naturalized between 1961 and 1973, or about 1000 a year.<sup>58</sup> Second, having created such a narrow category of citizenship, the rulers then went on to provide its nationals with a whole host of special privileges. These generally included the sole right to own property, to open new businesses and to receive social security payments. In addition, local nationals alone were eligible for the wide variety of benefits which the rulers created in order to maintain political support for themselves, for example the award of cheap loans and mortgages, grants of land and the official purchase of inexpensive private property for huge sums of money.

In the event, the situation produced by all these measures turned out to be highly inimical to the implementation of a labour policy aimed at self-reliance as it contained a number of basic contradictions which have yet to be resolved. These can probably be best seen by looking at the ambivalent attitude of each local population to the question of dependence itself. On the one hand, as a group, they were anxious to reduce this as much as possible. On the other, as individuals, they were equally anxious to maximize their own advantages by keeping the numbers of persons with the privilege of nationality to a minimum while continuing to benefit in every possible way from the presence of the large non-national labour needed to work for them and to provide them with many opportunities to make a sizeable, and virtually unearned, income. One mechanism by which this took place was the legal creation of monopolies, like those concerning the local ownership of new companies, forcing would-be foreign entrepreneurs to find a Kuwaiti (or Bahraini or Qatari) partner to whom, in many cases, they had to pay a substantial share of the profits simply for the use of his name. Another example of the same kind was the income to be earned from renting houses and flats to foreign workers who were not allowed to own them themselves.

A second mechanism which was even more self-defeating from the point of view of the stated aim of reducing dependence on foreign labour was that by which, in many areas of economic activity, the state simply handed over responsibility for ensuring that the labour regulations were observed to a local sponsor (or *kafeel*) in return for permission to import whatever workers he, or his business, said that they required. Evidence of the existence of officially-sanctioned sponsors goes back at least to the 1930s. But it was only during the post-war oil boom that the practice of making individuals and companies personally responsible for the good conduct of their foreign employees seems to have been almost universally implemented by governments which did not have the organizational strength to police their own regulations. And it was then that sponsoring found its way officially into some of the first labour laws. As it developed, the system gave an influential *kafeel* enormous powers, first to import foreign workers simply on the strength of his assertion that they were economically necessary to him, and then to exploit them either directly (with the help of the fact that he could easily have them deported for a technical breach of regulations) or by taking a share of their wages if he allowed them to work for others.

Evidence of the contradictory nature of local attitudes can be seen over and over again in the debates held in the Kuwait National Assembly or in the comments of business and professional associations further down the Gulf. For every person or organization which demanded a reduction in dependence on foreign labour there are others who were equally quick to attack any government which tried to prevent them from importing the workers they want. And whenever one group suggested that a simple way out of the problem might be to admit more long-term foreign residents to local citizenship, there were others to point out that such a step would mean a reduction in the economic value of their own privileges.

Meanwhile, governments which were little more than the sum of the ruler's family and some important local merchants and notables, would bend this way and that to manage an impossible situation. Whatever might be said in policy documents or national plans, the trend was generally in the direction of increasing differentials between nationals and foreigners as well of implementing the type of social segregation to be found in the local amendments to the official town plan for Kuwait of the early 1950s by which separate housing zones were set aside for the Kuwaiti and the foreign communities.<sup>59</sup> There was also little obvious support for suggestions such as those made by the Kuwaiti reformer, Dr. Ahmed Khatib, to the National Assembly in 1963 that the privileges enjoyed by Kuwaiti workers should be extended to foreign labour as well.<sup>60</sup> It is against the background of this kind of history, this type of experience and these types of measures of self-advantage and self-protection that I now want to examine the effects of the second great oil boom which began with the price explosion and the huge increase in supply of the early 1970s.

### 3: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LABOUR MIGRATION FROM THE EARLY 1970s

The vast increase in oil revenues after the dramatic price rise of 1973/4 and the spread of the oil boom to new exporters like Dubai (now joined together with Abu Dhabi and several other tiny shaykhdoms to form the United Arab Emirates) and Oman led to a huge explosion in the demand for foreign labour in the Gulf (Tables 1 and 2). Even though it proved impossible to spend all the new money, due to innumerable bottlenecks, it acted as the spur to the implementation of vast programmes designed to provide the oil rich states with a modern infrastructure, with an energy-intensive petrochemical and metallurgical industry and with welfare services the rival of Kuwait's. Inevitably such developments were also accompanied by a big expansion of government administration, including very much larger military establishments. All this could only be managed by importing millions, rather than hundreds of thousands, of foreigners from all over the world. To begin with the majority of workers came from the poorer Arab countries. But, as the boom progressed, there was an increasing tendency to recruit from Asia, partly because much Asian labour was cheaper, partly because Asian workers were regarded as less of a risk politically than most Arabs, more transient and less likely to strike deep roots. Whereas many Arabs found ways of staying in the Gulf for quite considerable periods of time and of bringing their families with them, Asians, so it was believed, could be kept within the confines of a short-term contract with no incentive to bring their dependents along with them. The result was another enormous leap in the degree of dependence, so that by 1980 foreigners provided at least two-thirds of the labour force in every state except Bahrain where oil exports had slowed down to a trickle (Tables 3 and 4).

Meanwhile, potential labour exporting countries were only too happy to oblige. Having little or no oil themselves, they were faced with the prospect of huge balance of payments deficits as a result of the sudden increase in their oil import bill. In the case of Turkey and the Arab states of North Africa they were also faced with a virtual bar to the once flourishing European labour market after 1973. The lure of the vast sums of money to be earned in workers' remittances proved overwhelming. And once a country had become dependent on this new source of wealth there were powerful pressures acting to ensure that the flow continued. The figures given in Table 5 for remittances transferred through the formal banking system represent only a proportion of the total sums involved given the widespread use of unofficial channels to send money back home. But even these reduced figures show that by the early 1980s for countries like Egypt and Pakistan, workers remittances had become the major source of foreign exchange earnings, and that for a country like South Korea they had almost exactly paid for the increased cost of oil imports after 1973.

One major example of a country which immediately sought to benefit from the new opportunities opening up in the Gulf was Egypt. In the 1960s, the Nasser regime had placed considerable barriers in the way of its nationals working abroad. But under the new rule of President Sadat all such restrictions were swept aside, leading to the final abolition of the exit visa in 1973. Other governments, like that of Korea, went to great lengths to promote

the interests of their important construction companies when it came to obtaining lucrative Gulf contracts. And when countries such as Sudan, Syria, Somalia and South Yemen tried to enact regulations to stem the tide of migration and to hold up the loss of skilled manpower, they found it almost impossible to enforce them, given the lure of high wages and salaries which petro-money produced.

Faced with this tide of foreign labour, the authorities in the labour receiving countries tried desperately to bring it under some kind of control. Once the first wave had passed there were general efforts to tighten the procedures under which work permits were issued, to deport illegal migrants and to try to ensure that each new worker came for a stated job for a stated period of time – and then returned home. One example of the new policy was the regulations issued by the government of the U.A.E. in 1980. According to these, the Minister concerned could only accept applications for work permits for non-nationals provided that (a) they were presented by an employer authorized to engage in commercial, industrial or service activity and (b) that the work in question could not be accomplished by national workers or by resident non-nationals registered at the local placement office. Another decree of the same year restricted the right of foreign workers to transfer from one job to another, specifying that in order to be allowed to do this they must have spent at least a year in their previous post and that they had to have the permission of their previous employer. A second type of control involved the Saudi campaign against the misuse of the Pilgrimage, often in cooperation with specific labour exporting countries like Sudan. A third was the general tightening of regulations concerning the migrant's family, with importing states only granting the right to bring in their dependents to professionals and technocrats earning relatively high salaries. To give just one example, a Saudi law of 1980 restricted the right to teachers, lawyers, engineers, defence experts and executives with companies with more than 100 employees or a capital of SR1 million and only a few others.<sup>61</sup> Finally, there was a concerted effort designed to prevent the entry of migrants who might constitute a threat to security, particularly after the Iranian Revolution and the outbreak of the Iran/Iraq war which heightened fears about the possible militancy of local Shiite communities in Kuwait, Bahrain and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

Nevertheless, given the still quite rudimentary bureaucratic structures, the huge disparity in salary levels between the oil exporting states and the rest of Asia and the Middle East and the involvement of powerful local and international interests concerned to promote further labour migration, it would be difficult to show that measures of this type had had any great effect. Frontiers are porous and difficult to control, a fact well demonstrated by the continuing problem of illegal movement. Programmes to train local nationals to replace foreign workers – like the 'Ten thousand Bahraini' programme – had little success.<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile, the pace of technical change was such that foreign oil companies like ARAMCO still found it difficult to recruit qualified Saudis to fill top management positions as required by their agreements with local governments. But, perhaps most important of all, Gulf populations have become so personally dependent on foreign labour, and on the economic rewards to be gained from it, that they continue to act as a powerful force inhibiting the rulers' attempt to reverse the situation. A good example of this is a recent plea by a committee of the Chamber of Commerce in the UAE that migrants be required to contribute more to the local economy by being forbidden to send anything but a tiny fraction of their salaries and wages back home.<sup>63</sup>

In these circumstances, each Gulf society has become used to the idea of being able to rely on an unlimited supply of foreign workers, either as personal employees or as doctors and teachers or as a market for their own services, whether as landlords or merchants or simply local citizens with a name or a position to sell. They have come to see access to foreign labour as a right, one which they will readily lobby members of the ruling families or friends in the bureaucracy or, in Kuwait, their representatives in the National Assembly, in order to maintain. They build houses which require large numbers of foreign domestic servants to manage and buy increasing numbers of foreign cars which require foreign chauffeurs to drive and foreign mechanics to maintain. The fact that they are well aware of what they are doing only makes the situation more frustrating. There have been many voices which have tried to describe the chaos which would ensue if migrant labour was

suddenly withdrawn. Others have tried to calculate the knock-on effect of more foreign workers, for example the Kuwaiti MP who calculated that for every 10,000 new migrants (workers and dependents) you would also require 14 extra migrants to work in education, 125 in the health sector and 135 in the security services.<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps it would not be too strong a statement to say that the contradictory nature of the situation has produced a species of communal schizophrenia which has prevented peoples from thinking rationally about their own social and economic futures, encouraged them to dream that the problem will somehow go away and promoting atavistic reactions like those in Kuwait which focus on the dangers of marrying foreigners and thus extending the privileges of Kuwaiti nationality to more and more children.<sup>65</sup> Communities which demonstrate powerful pressures towards endogamy are usually ones which feel themselves under terrible threat. Governments too suffer from the same type of pressure. And it is perhaps no wonder that some Cabinet Ministers actually appeared to welcome the fall in oil revenues after 1981 as perhaps the only way of promoting policies of greater economic discipline which, until then, they had felt too weak to carry out.

To turn now to the labour-exporting countries – both Arab and Asian – it would probably be true to say that, for all of them, the overriding aim has been to maximize the numbers of their workers migrating to the Gulf in the interests of earning scarce foreign currency. Efforts to protect their own nationals from exploitation, either by domestic recruiting agents or by Gulf employees, have come a long way second. And, with only a few exceptions, policies to protect themselves from the adverse effects of migration, like a shortage of skilled labour, are still only in their infancy.

As far as the Arab labour exporters are concerned, much of their behaviour towards their own migrant workers can be explained either by the special character of the Arab state system or by their double reliance on the Gulf states both as a market for labour and a source of financial aid and investment. Even though the creation of the Arab League (officially, the 'League of Arab States') involved a mutual recognition of each other's sovereignty, Arab regimes have continued to act as though their peoples were connected by fundamental ties of tradition, culture and language which permit, and even positively invite, an unregulated and informal involvement in each other's affairs at every level. For long periods it was not necessary for Arabs to possess passports to cross most Arab borders, while many states gave visiting Arabs privileges which they denied to others. More generally, ad hoc solutions to mutual problems have almost always been preferred to the establishment of formal mechanisms. From this it follows that, although the Arab League, or some other regional organization, has occasionally attempted to draw up pan-Arab rules designed to regulate the rights of nationals who wish to move from one Arab country to another – for example, the Inter-Arab Agreement on the Migration of Labour (1975) – these have seldom had any effect and remain, to this day, largely unratified and unenforced.<sup>66</sup>

On top of this, since the early 1970s, the power of petro-dollars has meant that states with little or no oil have been particularly careful in their relations with their richer neighbours, bending over backwards in many cases to accommodate their ways of managing the migration of labour in return for budgetary support, economic aid and direct investment. The fact that a number of the important labour exporters like Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan and Somalia were weak states with little diplomatic power served only to reinforce this pattern of behaviour; while Egypt, the one labour exporter with the strength to insist on obtaining good terms for its workers abroad was virtually excluded from influence in the Eastern part of the Arab world after its separate peace with Israel at Camp David in 1978.

In these circumstances, Arab workers have been able to expect little help from their own governments when they move to the Gulf. Nor is it clear that many of them would wish it were otherwise, if access to regular methods of assistance also meant greater control. A good example of this is provided by the difficulties experienced by the Jordanian government when it tried to persuade its migrant workers to enter its domestic social security scheme, only to find that very few of them would agree to register in case this might lead to attempts to regulate their movements or even tax their foreign earnings. Apart from the civil servants who go abroad on secondment and whose position is governed by an officially-recognized contract, most of the remainder also employ the same

unofficial contacts which they first used to obtain their jobs, to protect them if things go wrong. At worst, even if they find themselves deported, they stand a good chance of making their way back to their old job, or one like it, provided they do not make too much fuss. The result is a very obvious lack of public complaint about harsh treatment by Arab workers, either in the press or in response to requests for information by academic researchers. One of the few occasions when an official attempt was made to try to ascertain the facts concerning individual cases of mistreatment was the dispatch of a Kuwait delegation to Cairo in 1984 in order to learn more about the fate of Egyptian women, mostly domestic servants, who had been married to, and then abandoned by, their Kuwaiti employer.<sup>67</sup>

As far as the Arab labour senders in general are concerned, the state which has done most to try to ensure that its workers obtain jobs abroad in a well-regulated and orderly fashion is Jordan which has concluded a number of bilateral agreements concerning the employment of certain specified types of labour – usually of a skilled variety – with such major importers as Saudi Arabia and the UAE. It has also established posts of Workers' Advisors in its embassies in these same two states, as well as in Qatar and Kuwait. But, for the most part, the few bilateral agreements which have been negotiated between Arab states are mainly concerned with exploiting a mutual interest in control over illegal migration or putting an end to the widespread practice of civil servants either leaving for posts abroad without official permission or extending their leave of absence year after year until they themselves are ready to return. Many countries like Syria, Jordan and Sudan have strict rules governing the migration of certain categories of officials, but these have proved difficult to enforce without the cooperation of the labour importers.

Where control is deliberately so lax, and where there are such strong pressures against even counting the numbers of workers going abroad let alone trying to find out vital information about them like their level of skill, it is virtually impossible for labour sending governments to draw up effective policies designed to protect themselves from the ill effects of almost unrestricted migration. Egypt provides a good example of this. Although the government has established a Ministry of Migration and Egyptians Abroad, it has also deliberately prevented it from doing anything but acting as a rather weak organization for looking after the general interests of Egypt's migrants. And even in Jordan, where the government has established a programme of training schemes designed to compensate for some of the skilled labour lost through migration, this has been undercut to some extent by the government's own policy (until the autumn of 1984) of permitting the almost free import of foreign skilled workers by employers who obviously found this more effective than waiting for Jordanians of the requisite quality to finish their technical education.<sup>68</sup>

The situation in the Asian donor countries is obviously somewhat different. Although most of their governments are officially committed to sending as many workers as possible, they have been forced to concern themselves much more with questions of recruitment than the Arabs and, to some extent, with the problem of how best to protect their workers' rights abroad. This has meant the passage of new laws, the creation of new institutions under the existing Ministries of Labour to administer them and, in some cases, the use of their embassies in the Middle East. What this has not led to so far is any serious attempt to deal with the situation on a state-to-state basis by negotiating directly with the Gulf labour importers, other than in the case of workers covered by agreements involving the supply of specific quantities of, usually skilled, labour.

For the four countries of the Indian sub-continent the basis for action seems to have been the long-term experience of labour migration regulated by the provisions of the 1922 Indian Emigration Act. But in each case the new circumstances of the huge increase in workers going overseas which began in the 1970s led to the need for considerable revision and expansion of existing rules. In Pakistan this resulted in the creation of the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment; in Bangladesh of the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training and in Sri Lanka of the Foreign Employment Division of the Ministry of Labour. These new institutions both recruited labour themselves and also supervised the activities of licensed recruiting agencies – some 550 of them in Sri Lanka in 1980, some 300 in Bangladesh by 1984. They were also active in trying to establish minimum standards for workers going overseas – concerning such vital matters as wages, hours of

work and holidays back home – which were sometimes enshrined in standard contracts which recruiters and Gulf employers were expected to use in their negotiations. In addition, Pakistan and India have built on the old British Indian Government concept of having officials known as Protectors of Emigrants stationed at the major points of exit to examine the migrants' contracts and other documents and to try to ensure that outgoing workers knew what it was they had signed and what conditions they could expect.

Nevertheless, for all this effort, there were certain basic weaknesses in each system which meant that they were far less effective than first planned. To begin with there has been a major problem about the degree of control which should be exercised over the recruitment agencies. For one thing most governments have come to see the need to cooperate with such agencies as they seem to be much better than the government itself in finding jobs for workers abroad. For another, there is the belief that if private recruiters are pressed too hard they will simply carry on in an illegal and unlicensed fashion, with many opportunities for sharp practice. For these reasons, an effective relationship between government and agencies has still to be worked out. In addition, it has often been found that potential workers are usually so anxious to obtain jobs abroad that they are unwilling to complain about their treatment, even when they are forced to pay many times the legal fee. And in Thailand, a journalist has recently been shot for attempting to investigate the activities of a bogus employment agency.<sup>69</sup> Workers have also suffered from the activities of gangs of forgers like the 99 who were apprehended in India between 1981 and 1983 after making large sums of money out of selling false passports or forged papers bearing the seal of the Protector of Emigrants.<sup>70</sup>

A second, even more difficult, problem concerns ways and means of extending protection to workers overseas. As has been reported many times, a worker may leave his home state with one contract and be given a totally different one in Arabic to sign when he arrives in the Gulf, often specifying quite different terms of service and, sometimes, quite a different type of job as well.<sup>71</sup> One attempt to control this practice has been to try to ensure that the agency involved in the worker's recruitment takes more responsibility for protecting him from contract substitution or has the money to bring him home if all else fails. Another is to make use of Labour Attachés in their Gulf embassies. But neither method has proved particularly satisfactory as the testimony of both workers and some Attachés has proved. Gulf employers are quick to complain of foreign interference, recruiters have their own interests to look after, while – as yet – no Asian government has had either the power or the will to overcome the obstacles placed in its way by local inertia, let alone local ill-will. This last point comes out with particular clarity in the testimony of a former Bangladeshi Labour Attaché in Jidda, made to a conference in 1982, in which he described the enormous problems he had faced in trying to visit all the Saudi establishments seeking to recruit Bangladeshi workers such as shortages of transport or lack of cooperation by the potential employer. Indeed, so difficult was his task that he was forced to conclude that the business of checking up on such concerns might best be left to the Saudi authorities themselves, on instructions from the Saudi embassy in Dacca.<sup>72</sup>

To make matters worse, all sub-continental governments are faced with contradictory pressures from their own people. On the one hand, there is a tremendous wish to be allowed to go off to the Gulf to work, a pressure which is very obviously expressed in the long lists of persons who register their name with official agencies as potential migrants and the vigorous complaints of those who find the process of getting on such lists too time-consuming or the queue too long. There are also powerful vested interests involved in continuing free migration like airlines, merchants sending exports to the Gulf and others. Pressures of this kind have sometimes been strong enough to frustrate government efforts to prevent abuses as was the case when the Indian authority was forced to lift its ban on the migration of single, uneducated women to Kuwait or all migrants to Oman, even though workers of this type had been subject to persistent abuse.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, Indian and Pakistani newspapers are often full of stories by returning workers about the harsh treatment they have received overseas, coupled with demand for redress. As in the Indian case just referred to, governments like to appear to take such complaints seriously, particularly if they relate to women. However, in the last analysis, it would seem that it is the desire to increase remittances which determines the direction of official policy, to the extent that a



government like that of Pakistan has recently been willing to lower the minimum level of acceptable wages for new migrant workers by 10% in order to make sure that they were more competitive with other Asian exporters.<sup>74</sup>

The states of East Asia also created new institutions to regulate and control the export of their labour but with a great deal more variety. Given the fact that almost all its workers were employed overseas by its own construction companies, the government of Korea had the easiest task. The companies themselves were licensed, forced to issue standard contracts to their workers while their labour camps in the Gulf were subject to inspection by officials stationed in the local embassies. Controls of this kind were also used to ensure that the workers themselves were properly qualified for their jobs and that their families back home were given access to certain welfare services designed to ameliorate the problems of the prolonged absence of the father. Nevertheless, conditions in the camps still left a great deal to be desired and there were more than the usual pressures for government and the companies to keep the differential between overseas and domestic wage rates as low as possible in the interests both of profitability and competitiveness.

A quite different example is provided by the Philippines, where attempts to regulate the export of labour have gone through a much longer process of trial and error. They began with the creation in 1974 of the government's Overseas Employment Development Board with a monopoly over recruitment. Then almost immediately, in response to the pressure of local entrepreneurs, the whole business was handed over to the private sector, as a result of which there was a huge expansion in the numbers of recruitment agencies – to perhaps 1000 by 1982. Policy changed again in that same year with the creation of the joint public and private Philippines Overseas Employment Administration which immediately began to try to impose new order on the situation by reducing the numbers of licensed recruiters by nearly half, by publishing lists of those which had received its official approval and by speeding up the complaints procedures for workers who wished to protest against their treatment. Lastly, in 1983, the government opened a Labour Assistance Centre at Manila Airport in an effort to see that every departing worker possessed a proper contract.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, yet another system has been tried in Indonesia and Thailand by which the export of labour is largely in the hands of private contractors with much less government control than in the Philippines or most other sender countries. In Thailand the agencies do not have to post a monetary bond with the government as a surety for the proper performance of their legal duties, while in Indonesia there is neither a legal maximum on the fees which recruiters can charge nor a legal minimum for overseas wages. The result is that many workers sometimes have to work for up to nine months or a year to repay the money they have borrowed to pay the charges. The Thais have, however, appointed Labour Attachés in some of their Gulf embassies.<sup>76</sup>

To conclude, although the export of large numbers of Asian workers to the Middle East is only a recent phenomenon, it has been in existence long enough to allow some provisional lessons from its first ten years. First, it is extremely competitive. This is partly a function of governmental anxiety to increase the flow and to maintain it at a high level, partly of the pressure for employment abroad by sections of the Asian population. It is also the result of an enormous increase in the flow of information from labour recruiters and others so that would-be employers in the Gulf can now know with great precision where to find the cheapest carpenters or technicians or domestic servants at a moment's notice. Second, given the great wage and salary differentials that exist between Asia and the Gulf, there is great scope for middlemen to increase their share, either by offering their recruits lower wages than has been the conventional norm or by charging very much more for their services. The former practice has been very much in evidence with construction companies which employ their own nationals or which recruit their own nationals for Gulf enterprises, particularly if they have been given a monopoly of such recruitment as in the Philippines. Third, all governments have tried to regulate labour migration by means of some attempt at partnership between state agencies and private organizations. This has given rise to many problems – particularly so far as the protection of workers' rights are concerned – and will certainly require continuous modifications. Fourth, and last, all the Asian governments have experienced considerable difficulty in looking after the interests of their workers

overseas, either for political reasons, shortage of funds or simply because they do not appear to have attached a very high priority to making the attempt.

#### 4: THE CONDITIONS EXPERIENCED BY MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE GULF

There are so many foreigners at work in the Gulf at so many levels and under so many different conditions that generalization is difficult. Nevertheless, the vast majority do share one thing in common and that is their lack of protection due to the absence of clearly defined legal rights, the ineffectiveness of local courts and administrative procedures and the fact that they are overly dependent on the good will of their institutional or individual sponsor. In addition, they also suffer from the fact that they are allowed access to few of the privileges enjoyed by local nationals and that – particularly at times of political tension – many of them are regarded as a potential danger to local security.

As far as the legal status of foreign workers is concerned, there are a small minority whose rights are protected either by bilateral arrangements between donor and host country or, where public officials on secondment are concerned, a contract which contains an official definition of their terms of service. For the rest, the vast majority of new migrants are subject to the terms of local labour laws which insist that all foreigners are imported on a short-term contract – generally for no more than two years at most; that they be employed in one specific task; that they can only change employers with the permission of their first sponsor; and that, once their contract is over, they must leave the country for a clearly specified period before reapplying for a new contract – for example one year in the UAE or two years in Kuwait. On top of this, a worker's right of residence is tied directly to his work permit and lapses immediately he loses his job or moves to one for which he does not have special permission. And, to make matters worse, any foreigner can be deported at any time by a local Minister of the Interior, all of whom seem to have been given absolute discretion where national security is concerned. In Kuwait, at least, this power of deportation can be extended to the worker's family as well. Only in Bahrain does there seem to be a right of appeal.<sup>77</sup>

Other disabilities from which foreign workers suffer are as follows:

- only those earning over a certain salary or employed in a particular technical or professional occupation are usually allowed to bring their dependents.
- the sole country in which foreign workers are entitled to benefit from the provisions of the local Social Security law is Saudi Arabia. But this can only happen if they have paid their contributions (5% of wages) for five years and have reached the age of 60. Contributions required from temporary migrants after one year in the country are supposed to be repaid on departure, although it is often difficult to get reimbursement.
- the only state with legal trade unions is Kuwait. And here foreign workers cannot join until they have been resident for five years.

What makes matters more complicated is that the Gulf States have devolved responsibility for ensuring that these laws and regulations are obeyed on the worker's first sponsor. It is the *kafeel* who is supposed to notify the appropriate government agency if an offence has been committed. This clearly gives an employer great power, the more so as it is standard practice for the employer to ask for the worker's passport as soon as he arrives (whether he is unskilled or a university professor) and only to return it when a holiday outside the country has been specifically agreed to or when the contract comes to an end. Significantly, this measure is almost universally defended up and down the Gulf as the only way an employer can make sure that a foreign worker does not leave his employment without permission or simply run away leaving him without recompense for any money he may have spent on providing housing or paying for the initial travel ticket. I have even heard it defended as a necessary precondition for trusting a foreign employee with such tasks as taking his master's money to the bank.

Given these great powers, it is easy to see how a sponsor can exploit his workers or change their conditions of service at will. In most cases the only redress against such practices is an appeal to the migrant's own embassy, to the local Ministry of Labour or to a

court of law. But all such steps present obvious difficulties. Many workers must fear loss of their job or even deportation if they attempt to complain. Others, employed out in the construction camps far away from a city or working long hours as a domestic servant simply do not have either the time or the opportunity to go off in search of their own Labour Attachés, should they exist. Ministries of Labour are occasionally helpful when workers band together but not in individual cases. Courts are probably the best hope and have a reputation for applying the Islamic sharia in ways which seek to protect workers' rights. However, they conduct their business in Arabic (often necessitating the employment of an expensive interpreter), work at a slow pace and require the use of one of the local lawyers who alone have the right to plead. For these reasons they would seem most useful to those migrants with money.

The other side of the picture is that the personal nature of the relationship between a worker and an individual *kafeel* clearly allows for a certain amount of negotiation and bargaining, such that many employers have proved quite willing to allow migrants to get round local regulations, perhaps by turning a blind eye if they take more than one job, perhaps by helping them to obtain visas for their family, to change jobs or to stay on for a second term of contractual employment rather than leaving the country for a period as the law requires. It also seems likely that the position of irregular migrants without *kafeel* is much worse.

Conditions outside the place of work are also difficult. Accommodation is expensive and hard to find: according to al-Moosa and McLachlan's survey 58% of the local expenditure of migrants working in Kuwait goes on rent.<sup>78</sup> Not only are foreigners prevented from owning property but they are also usually ineligible for the subsidized housing which is one of the methods by which Gulf governments like that of Kuwait seek to distribute oil money among their own citizens. There are other problems connected with access to free medical care and education. Although foreigners are supposed to be able to obtain these services on the same basis as local nationals, it is often the case that schools and hospitals are full or not easy to get to, forcing foreigners to pay for private health care or private schooling instead.

More generally, most workers in the Gulf are on their own in a harsh, foreign environment with access only to the company of other males. Not only do they have to cope with the insularity and prejudices of the local citizens but also with the bewildering array of migrants of other nationalities, cultures and religions. Movement is difficult as there is little public transport, recreational facilities are limited and there are few places of worship for non-Muslims. In these circumstances, urban migrant workers tend to congregate together in groups based on language, religion and place of origin, something which can easily be observed in Kuwait on a Friday – the day of rest – with the Christian Indian female domestics squatting together in the gardens near the Catholic church, the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi males playing their own games of cricket on rough waste land near the American embassy and a continuous use of the city's few public soccer pitches, first by native Kuwaitis, then by Iranians, then Afghans, with each activity acting as a focus for spectators from the relevant foreign community.

The degree to which all this constitutes a serious problem for the migrant workers themselves is impossible to judge. No doubt the majority of them are in the Gulf to make money as quickly as possible so that, provided their wages are what they expect, and they can save what they have bargained for, they will be willing to put up with a great deal of hardship and are unlikely to voice any major complaint. It is also true that a great many of them make strenuous efforts to stay on after their first contract is at an end in order to earn more. For what it is worth, the few sample surveys conducted among returned migrants tend to bear this out. 89.1% of the Egyptians polled by al-Moosa and McLachlan said that they had no complaints to make about their life in Kuwait.<sup>79</sup> Again, as far as Asian workers are concerned, the great majority of the 800 Filipinos in the Institute of Labor and Manpower's sample said that they had found conditions in the Gulf 'good' to 'excellent', while 70% said that they had had no major difficulties.<sup>80</sup>

Against this, even the rather bland results of such surveys reveal that a minority of migrant workers did experience serious problems. 16% of the Filipinos sample complained that they had been the victims of contract substitution and a smaller proportion mentioned delays in payment of wages and salaries. And in the case

of Sri Lanka, of the 2375 complaints made by migrants to the Department of Labour between 1982 and 1984, 191 concerned an unwarranted adjustment in the conditions of service specified in the contract and 120 of underpayment. Surveys also point to some of the stresses and strains connected with migration such as the difficulties of readjustment on return to the workers' own country (for example the Egyptians in al-Moosa and McLachlan's Kuwaiti sample) or problems connected with family life and family discipline (50% of the Jordanians in Keely and Saket's sample).<sup>81</sup>

Another source of information is provided by the few strikes by foreign workers about which some public information is available. Apart from the periodic troubles in the construction camps (to which I will return below), there have also been disputes about the inequality of treatment between local and foreign workers and the differentials paid to workers from different countries for doing the same job. This last will clearly be a constant source of complaint so long as Gulf wages are based on a three tier system with Europeans at the top, Arabs in the middle and Asians at the bottom, and so long as it reflects domestic wage rates in the labour sending countries. At the moment (in 1985) Bangladeshi and Sri Lankans tend to get paid less than everybody else. A last source of inequality is the accumulation of prejudice which must inevitably accompany the extensive use of foreign labour: for example, the general Kuwaiti assumption that Filipino maids are 'cleaner' than Bangladeshi ones (and therefore must be paid more) or that Iranians and Afghan unskilled labourers work harder than anyone else.

To turn to particular cases, it would seem that there are two categories of workers most at risk: the large numbers of males housed in construction camps at some distance from major urban centres; and female domestic servants. Camps are built and managed either by multinational, Gulf or Asian companies – or by some combination of these two or three. Because of their location it is often difficult for workers to leave them to make a protest or even to get word out to the appropriate authorities. On the other hand, the presence of large numbers of foreign workers, living so close together, often of the same nationality, has led to a considerable number of strikes in favour of better conditions.

Probably the best run of the construction camps are those operated by South Korean companies which are subject to official regulation (and inspection) governing the facilities they provide. One set of rules relates to living conditions – at least 2.5 square metres of space per resident, no more than 16 persons to a room, a bathhouse for every 500 etc. – and another to the type of recreational facilities to be provided – for example, a volley ball court and table tennis tables for camps with a population of more than 50.<sup>82</sup> But these are still very Spartan conditions at best, and provide a great deal of incentive for workers to put in a large amount of overtime (which provides some 50% of their wages) beyond their 12 hour day and six day week. As critics have pointed out, this can well lead to great strain, bad health and increase in work-related accidents.<sup>83</sup> No unions are allowed in the camps and no collective bargaining. However, there are supposed to be regular joint meetings attended by management and labour, attended by Labour Attachés from the embassy if a dispute is expected. At least one strike has been recorded, among Korean construction workers in Saudi Arabia in 1978.

For the rest, the main source of information about conditions in the camps has come as a result of strikes and other labour disputes. These have generally involved either Indians or Pakistanis. In one camp run by ALBA, a local company in Bahrain, the workers protested in 1984 against the lack of electricity and drinking water. Some of the most vocal were then repatriated at company cost after which the owners were summoned to the Ministry of Labour and told to provide their workers with the basic living conditions for which they were asking.<sup>84</sup> At another, in Saudi Arabia in September of the same year, the *Sunday Times* reported that some 2000 foreign construction workers employed by a joint Saudi/American firm engaged in building the new King Saud University took their case to a labour court in Riyadh after the collapse of the company, complaining that not only had they received no wages since March but also that the very inadequate facilities in their camp had been made worse by their water and electricity being cut off until protests had been made to the Pakistani embassy. In addition, they said that although some of their number had taken their case to a Saudi labour court in August and had finally been offered four months wages in compensation, they had only actually



# MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE GULF

by Dr Nicholas Van Hear



Korean Workers – Saudi Arabia

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About six million foreign workers are thought to have been attracted to the oil-producing countries of the Middle East by the mid-1980s. There were probably over five million non-nationals working in the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Oman and Qatar — with another million in Iraq by the late 1980s. In addition, there were perhaps two or three million family members accompanying them.

Perhaps half of the expatriates were drawn from other Arab countries — principally Egyptians, Yemenis, Jordanians and displaced Palestinians — with most of the others from south and southeast Asia. They were engaged in a diverse range of occupations, ranging from manual labour and farm work to technical, managerial, administrative and professional positions. They also varied greatly in their length of stay; while some held short-term contracts, others formed long-settled communities.

## The Gulf War

This pattern of migration and residence was profoundly disrupted by the mass exodus following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq on 2 August 1990. Expatriate workers in Iraq and Kuwait together may have accounted for more

than one-third of the total in the region. By the end of 1990 around two million foreign nationals had left their countries of residence and work, mainly because of fear of the Iraqi regime in occupied Kuwait and of impending war. Further outflows of foreign nationals occurred after the war in early 1991.

- Most of those leaving Kuwait and Iraq passed through Jordan. By the end of 1990 these numbered more than a million people, the great majority en route to other destinations. Perhaps half of the 865,000 third-country nationals passing through Jordan were Egyptians; the remainder were from Yemen, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Sudan and other states. Returnees to Jordan, including Palestinians holding Jordanian documents, numbered up to 250,000. A further 220,000 foreign nationals were evacuated through Turkey, Iran and Syria. Many of these involuntary migrants lost assets and belongings and were harassed en route.

While international attention was focused on the evacuees from Iraq and Kuwait, another mass exodus was taking place. From mid-August 1990, increasing numbers of Yemenis began to leave Saudi Arabia as a result of tensions between the two states, arising partly from Saudi perceptions of the Yemen government's support for Iraq. In September, the Saudi authorities made far-reaching changes to the



rules governing work and residence permits which removed many of the exemptions previously enjoyed by Yemeni migrants and placed pressure on them to leave. Amnesty International reported that there was evidence of widespread harassment, arbitrary arrest, detention and torture of Yemeni workers both prior to the exodus and en route, adding weight to the view that the exodus was more in the nature of a mass expulsion than a simple deportation of illegal immigrants. By the end of 1990 an estimated 800,000 Yemenis had returned to Yemen. Many had been in Saudi Arabia for a decade or more and some had been born there.

### The aftermath of the Gulf War

The exodus of migrant workers abated during, and immediately after, the Gulf War when world attention turned to the mass flight of Kurds and Shias from Iraq. But a further wave of displacement of foreign residents took place after Iraqi forces withdrew from Kuwait. Increasing numbers of Palestinians fled the country as a result of violence against their community by Kuwaiti militia groups avenging alleged collaboration. Reports of killings and torture mounted and continued after the restoration of the al-Sabah rulers while trials (falling short of international legal standards) of alleged collaborators increased the insecurity of the remaining Jordanians, Palestinians and other foreign nationals and induced many more to leave.

Before August 1990, Palestinians in Kuwait were thought to have numbered up to 400,000. Many had lived there all their lives, and constituted what might be termed an 'alien' resident community rather than a category of migrant workers. Perhaps half of them left before and during the Gulf War for Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the Occupied Territories but substantial numbers long-settled in Kuwait could not make claims on these destinations for refuge. They included people from the Gaza Strip with Egyptian documents, but to whom the Egyptian authorities refused entry. They also included many whose documents had expired.

There were also substantial numbers of people of various nationalities who had fled from Kuwait to southern Iraq during the war and who had been refused re-entry when they attempted to return. In much the same position were those known as the *bidoon*, Arabs claiming Kuwaiti origin but without citizenship. They joined Iraqi civilians, disaffected soldiers and deserters who were stranded on the Iraq-Kuwait border. In Saudi Arabia too, there was a large number of foreign workers who, deserted by their Saudi employers before and during the war, were unable to leave because their employers held their documents.

From mid-1991 the exodus of Jordanians and Palestinians from Kuwait to Jordan gathered momentum. This took the total number of 'returnees' to Jordan since August 1990 to 300,000. While persecution of Palestinians had abated, there was continuing denial of access to employment, education or health services.

### Impact of mass displacement, 1990-1

Migrants and foreign residents suffered substantial losses as a result of their involuntary mass departure. These included unpaid wages, end-of-service benefits, remittances not transferred, savings, personal belongings, property and other assets destroyed, lost or rendered inaccessible. Kin and communities receiving returnees found themselves doubly affected — first, by the sudden removal of



Pakistani migrant workers making mosaic pavement — Saudi Arabia

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remittances they routinely received, and second, because they now had to support the returnees.

More widely, the exodus had a profound effect on the Middle East and beyond. If a conservative ratio is assumed of five dependents at home to each migrant abroad, the number of people directly affected by the mass return of migrant workers would total 10 million. The impact on individual countries is difficult to disentangle from other factors. The following summary concentrates mainly on the effects of the remittances forgone by Middle Eastern countries receiving returnees.

The impact on **Jordan** of the mass return was more severe than for other countries. In addition to its role as a transit country, Jordan had to cope with up to 300,000 of its own nationals or document-holders entering the country from Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. These arrivals may have added 8% to Jordan's population and 10% to its labour force. Their return meant a substantial loss in the remittances on which the Jordanian economy depended, estimated in 1989 to total \$US 627m. (10% of GNP.) Estimates of the remittances forgone varied between \$US 150m. and \$US 769m. The Jordanian 'returnees' included a large proportion of dependents, placing new strains on welfare services and the educational system. Many, although carrying Jordanian documents, had been absent for most of their lives or had been born and brought up abroad; according to one estimate, 90% had been away for more than 10 years and 43% for more than 20 years. Finally, while Jordan was far from unique in its severe economic difficulties before the mass return, it already accommodated the highest ratio of refugees to indigenous population in the world — nearly one in four of Jordan's population of four million are recognized as refugees.

**Yemen** was also very severely affected. If the estimate of 800,000 returnees was accurate, Yemen had to absorb a 7% increase in population and added 15% to its labour force within three months. The remittances lost were estimated at \$US 400m annually; this represented 90% of total remittances in 1989 and 5.5% of GNP for that year. Most returnees were apparently absorbed into their communities of origin, or into the homes of relatives but, as in Jordan, a substantial number, perhaps 20%, had been away for decades or had been born abroad and had no similar secure destinations. They were reported to have squatted in makeshift shanty settlements in and around Yemen's main towns.

**Egypt**, the most populous Arab state, received up to 700,000 returnees. Loss of remittances from Iraq and Kuwait were estimated by the Egyptian authorities as up to \$US one billion for 1990-1; total remittances for 1989 were estimated at \$US 4.25-4.5 billion. While this loss (perhaps 3% of 1989 GNP) and the impact on unemployment were substantial, these effects may have been offset by new sources of employment abroad. Egyptian returnees were



reported to have been finding work in Saudi Arabia, which began to reshape its foreign workforce of some 2.5 million, as Asian workers left and Yemeni, Jordanian, Sudanese and Palestinian workers and professionals were made unwelcome or expelled.

About 54,000 Palestinians were reported to have returned from Gulf states to the **Occupied Territories**, or to have been stranded there; of these 26,000 were said to have been working in Kuwait. Many families in the Occupied Territories relied heavily on remittances from relatives working in Kuwait. Estimates of these and other contributions forgone varied between \$US 80m. to \$US 146m. a year.

The Asian countries to which migrants returned were also hard hit by the loss of remittances and return of their nationals. These included **India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea and Vietnam.**

**Estimates of foreign nationals and their dependents in Kuwait, Iraq and other affected countries in mid-1990, and of returnees from the area in 1990-1 (measured in '000s).**

Country of origin	Kuwait		Iraq		Returnees
	1	2	1	2	
Egypt	180	35	850	50	500-700
Yemen	7	16	1	1	750-800 <sup>3</sup>
Jordan/Palestine	110	400	5	22	350 <sup>4</sup>
Lebanon	20	20	15	5	60
Sudan	12	3	190	10	35-200
Syria					50-130
India	130	42	7	2	180-200
Sri Lanka	79	21	1	0	73-101
Pakistan	77	13	7	2	90-142
Bangladesh	70	4	15	0	64-90
China				60 <sup>5</sup>	60
Philippines	38	7	7	2	30-55
Vietnam			16 <sup>6</sup>		8-16
Thailand					10

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Migrant workers or economically active foreigners.

<sup>2</sup> Dependents.

<sup>3</sup> The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the Yemen Arab Republic united in 1990 to form the Republic of Yemen. All figures cited here refer to combined total. Most Yemenis returned from Saudi Arabia.

<sup>4</sup> Not all the returnees were from Iraq or Kuwait.

<sup>5</sup> Total number of workers reported to be in Iraq and Kuwait.

<sup>6</sup> Total number of workers, mainly in Iraq.

#### Sources

International Labour Office; US General Accounting Office; International Organization for Migration; United Nations Development Programme.

## Reintegration or Re-emigration?

The governments of countries receiving large numbers of returnees approached the international community for assistance. A programme to assist returnees was eventually drawn up by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other concerned agencies. Among its proposals were a series of job creation programmes for Jordan, Yemen, the Occupied Territories, Sudan, Syria and Vietnam. However, the proposals still awaited funding early in 1992, long after the mass returns they were designed to ameliorate.

Progress on issues of compensation for returnees was likewise slow. Under resolutions passed after Iraq's defeat, the UN undertook to find means of compensating for loss, damage or injury resulting from Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait. In August 1991, the UN Compensation Commission set guidelines for compensation, to be financed from the proceeds of UN-supervised Iraqi oil sales. Up to two million claimants, including many migrant workers, were anticipated, with claims expected to total up to \$US 5 billion. Those seeking

compensation were to make their claims through their government, although the Commission recognized that some groups, like the Palestinians, could not pursue this course and might claim through UN or other international organizations. Both courses were likely to be extremely time-consuming. More importantly, since Iraq refused to comply with UN conditions for oil sales, there was no means to finance any compensation.

A commonly expressed wish among returnees was to seek employment abroad once again, in the Middle East or elsewhere. The UNDP proposed an inter-regional programme whose principal purpose appeared to be information-gathering on the supply and demand of labour in the Arab and Asian regions, with a view to facilitating further or renewed migration. By the end of 1991, some workers, particularly south Asians and Egyptians, were finding work again in the Middle East, while others sought alternative destinations for employment.

## Host countries in the Gulf

Changes in patterns of labour migration both to and within the Middle East were already taking place before the Gulf crisis. As the construction boom came to an end in the mid-1980s, demand for foreign labour stabilized and cheaper Asian labour replaced Arabs. These trends appeared to be accelerating, with some modification, in the wake of the Gulf conflict.

The proportion of Arab migrant workers and professionals in **Kuwait's** total foreign population had been the highest among the Gulf states. After the restoration of the Kuwaiti regime in 1991, the Kuwaiti authorities asserted that they wished to reduce the emirate's heavy dependence on foreign labour, so that foreigners did not exceed 40% of the total population. Nevertheless, outside labour will be needed for reconstruction. However, new, more stringent rules for working, residence and the accompaniment of families will discourage long-term stays and are likely to diminish still further the rights of migrants and aliens in Kuwait. The registration of former and new migrants that was under way from late 1991 favoured Egyptian and south and southeast Asian labourers and professionals over other Arab workers.

**Iraq's** foreign labour force was also substantially Arab before the Gulf crisis. There were probably over a million Egyptian nationals in Iraq at the end of the 1980s. Late in 1989, thousands of Egyptian workers left Iraq when the Baghdad government introduced tighter regulations for the remittance of earnings. Rising tension between Iraqis and Egyptians led to the flight of thousands more of the latter, following a spate of killings. However, there remained a substantial Egyptian population in Iraq, many of whom had intermarried and were long-settled. The future employment pattern of foreign labour depends on a resolution of Iraq's internal politico-military situation and on the speed of subsequent reconstruction.

The mass exodus of Yemenis and the smaller scale departures of Jordanians and Palestinians from **Saudi Arabia** has enhanced the position of Asian workers: it is likely that Yemenis were already returning from Saudi Arabia before the crisis, attracted by hopes for new-found oil wealth and better prospects following Yemeni unification. As in Kuwait, Egyptian workers are also being engaged, although they may find themselves in competition with south Asian workers. The Saudi authorities may also suspect the loyalties of the nationals of those countries where public support was for the Iraqi side in the Gulf war. Non-Muslim nationalities may therefore find themselves in favour.



## Protecting Migrant Workers

The mass exodus of migrant workers generated by the Gulf conflict raises important questions for the international community. Since they were not refugees in the sense currently accepted internationally, they fell largely outside the system of international relief. They received protection and assistance in an ad hoc way, and with varying degrees of effectiveness. After the initial confusion precipitated by their sudden influx into Jordan, evacuation and relief for those in the first wave of flight was relatively well handled. In contrast, protection and assistance for other migrants and foreign communities — Yemenis expelled from Saudi Arabia, migrant workers and others attempting to return to Kuwait, those stranded in Saudi Arabia, and Palestinians, Jordanians, stateless persons and other communities persecuted in Kuwait — were often ineffective or non-existent.

Protection and assistance for forced migrants who fall outside the humanitarian net have for some time been a matter of debate. After a decade of deliberation, a Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families, supplementing and extending existing conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO), was passed by the UN General Assembly in December 1990. This convention awaits ratification and the implementation of its provisions will be difficult, but it at least provides a benchmark for the protection of migrant workers and their families.

Another reform has been the emergence of a more potentially timely and co-ordinated response by the international community to humanitarian emergencies. In early 1992 the UN appointed an emergency relief coordinator directly responsible to the UN Secretary General, with substantial resources to be earmarked for rapid disbursement in the event of a humanitarian crisis. If this impetus is sustained, some of the lessons of the Middle East's mass displacement of 1990-1 will have been learned.

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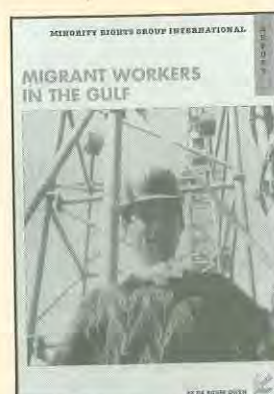
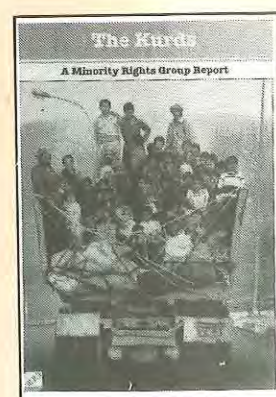
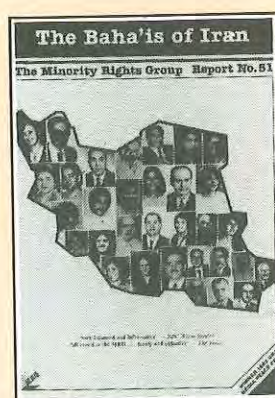
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received two. Other workers had agreed to be flown home with only one or two months wages out of the ten which they said that they were owed.<sup>85</sup> There can be no doubt that such cases represent just the tip of a very large iceberg.

A second group of migrant workers who are very obviously at risk is the many tens of thousands of females employed in the larger Gulf households – both local and foreign. One 1980 figure from Kuwait gives a total of 19,600 foreign female domestic workers – 41% of non-Kuwaitis who are domestic servants (private communication to author). To begin with the maids and other domestic servants came mainly from Egypt. But in recent years they have tended to come more from the Indian sub-continent, particularly Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, and from Thailand and the Philippines. They receive no protection from the local labour laws which specifically exclude domestic service and their conditions can only be guessed at by observing the long hours which many of them have to work – up to 14 and 16 hours a day – and the hard and back-breaking tasks they often have to perform. Some are undoubtedly subject to sexual abuse from their employers while others, to judge from the London court case in May 1985 involving a Kuwaiti princess of the ruling al-Sabah family, are regularly beaten.<sup>86</sup> Evidence of possible mistreatment also comes from the frequency of the advertisements in Gulf newspapers appealing for information concerning the whereabouts of ‘run-away’ servants who may well have fled from intolerable conditions of service (reminiscent of the era of slavery in the US). Asian governments are particularly sensitive to stories involving the plight of their women workers abroad. But unless the domestic servants in question dare to go to their embassy to complain it is difficult to see what they can do to protect them.

Just as worrying as the cases of actual exploitation and mistreatment is the fact that, so long as migrant workers are not properly protected under local laws, many of them will continue to live in fear while the potential for mistreatment will always remain. This is clearly a matter which only governments can settle and may well have to involve the abolition of the *kafeel* system, the extension of labour laws to cover domestic service, the establishment of mutually agreed minimum wages and joint action to ensure that contracts are compatible with local laws and also protected by them. The subject will be dealt with in greater detail in the Conclusion.

## 5: THE EFFECT OF MIGRATION ON THE COUNTRIES WHICH EXPORT LABOUR AND THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES FOR IMPORTING STATES

It is the effect of labour migration on both sending and host states which has attracted the greatest attention, no doubt because it is this which is of most immediate interest to the governments concerned which wish to know how best to profit from it and how to minimize its harmful consequences. But, perhaps for this same reason, the question has been treated largely in terms of economic advantage so that most studies tend to ignore the social, psychological and political factors involved. There has also been surprisingly little interest in the study of the reintegration of returned workers into the national labour force. Given the fact that a large proportion of them seem to come from rural environments it would seem likely that the majority of them return not only to their villages but also to their previous agricultural activities – but this has still to be properly investigated. (However, studies from North Africa and Turkey suggest that returned workers are unlikely to return to agriculture, preferring to settle in towns and cities and making some use of their work experiences while abroad.) Finally, very few writers have tried to treat labour migration as an on-going process with its own cumulative effects on regional and national economies.

So far there has been only one large-scale attempt to assess the balance of economic advantage and disadvantage on a major labour sending country – Javid Burki's study of Pakistan.<sup>87</sup> Its main conclusions can be summarized as follows:

1. As a result of labour migration and the consequent remittances the Pakistan economy grew at a rate of 5% a year throughout the 1970s rather than the 2% which it would have done without them. Translated into per capita terms this meant a growth of 2% a year rather than a fall of –1%.

2. Pakistan also benefitted greatly from the growth of the Middle East as a market for its exports, something which Burki links closely with the presence of such large overseas communities of its own workers.

3. Against these gains has to be placed the effect of the withdrawal of some 5% of the national labour force and the costs of training replacements. These effects were magnified greatly for certain types of skilled workers in certain areas where losses may have been as high as a third to a half of the total labour supply.

4. In addition, shortages of labour made an important contribution to inflation via a rise in local wages, while remittances both encouraged the consumption of imported goods as well as raising the price of non-traded goods like land which the migrants wished to purchase.

5. Nevertheless, on balance, the wage differentials between Pakistan and the Gulf were so great that the statistical value of all the economic losses would have had to be very large indeed to offset the many positive effects.

It is, however, important to remember that many of these conclusions are examples of the way in which migration accelerates already existing trends rather than starting them *de novo*. Other effects include:

1. The loss of agricultural production due to a combination of labour shortages and regular remittances which mean that rural families no longer need to depend on the income from their crops and fields. This is very much a feature of modern North Yemen, where large areas are no longer farmed. There are also cases of an increased trend away from the consumption of locally produced foods to more expensive imported ones as is the case with the switch from maize to fine white wheat in Egypt and Sudan.

2. Local industry may suffer from increased competition from foreign imports obtained either with workers' wages remitted in cash or by the easy import of commodities in kind by those who return.

3. The import of foreign electrical goods and the use of remittances to buy cars, pumps and other machinery places a very heavy burden on local services and may require a very large increase in public investment to satisfy. In countries like Egypt it can also be seen that some of these purchases are counter-productive in the sense that, if large numbers of returned migrants buy a new pump the water table drops and some at least are no better off than before.

4. Remittances allow a rapid privatization of many basic services which are no longer able to meet local demands. One example would be the establishment of private schools for migrants' children; another the installation of private generators to boost local supplies. This can well lead to the further atrophy of government services.

5. Government efforts to attract migrants' remittances into the official banking system encourage policies in which the local currency is effectively devalued by offers to exchange foreign currency remittances at a very attractive rate. Experience in Egypt, Bangladesh and the Philippines suggests that such policies do not prevent the existence of a black market rate for workers' wages. Efforts to increase remittances also encourage the creation of a liberal foreign-exchange regime which makes it difficult to ration scarce reserves of foreign currency for use where they are most needed or to control the flight of local capital abroad.

6. The existence of jobs overseas may cause the government to neglect policies needed to deal with domestic unemployment.

Apart from the economic effects of migration just outlined (and the many others which could have been added to the list) there is also the very important question of the individual use of remittances and the associated, and largely unexplored, subject of whether returning workers make any good use of what they have learned abroad. To begin with the remittances, some portion of them is used simply to keep the worker's family going and there is a great deal of evidence of the way in which particular groups send back a more or less fixed amount of money on a regular monthly basis.<sup>88</sup> As for the part which is saved, most of the studies show that much of it is either consumed or used to buy or construct or improve houses or to purchase land, leaving little for investment in new economic activity. Some of these expenditures clearly add to a country's capital stock. But the lack of productive investment has clearly come as a chastening experience to governments like those

of Turkey which created new institutions to channel workers' remittances into schemes for agricultural improvement and small-scale industry, leaving most of the sending countries regimes to assume that the only way in which they can convert foreign earnings into investment is through the formal banking system itself.

Much less is known about the use of skills which may have been learned abroad. As a rule, it can be assumed that those who already possess technical and professional qualifications are unlikely to learn very much from their new jobs in the Gulf, except perhaps in very exceptional circumstances. But the same is not necessarily true for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled wage workers. The evidence so far is only impressionistic and patchy. On the one hand, a report from North Yemen speaks of a large number of small construction firms which had been established on the basis of skills and finance acquired abroad.<sup>89</sup> On the other, a survey of returned Filipino migrants indicated that 76% would like to set up businesses which made no use of what they might have learned while working overseas.<sup>90</sup>

One of the main lessons to be learned from this type of research into the impact of migration is that it would be much more useful to see the whole movement abroad as a continuous process in which the effects of the first stages (in terms of the use made of remittances, the experience of returning workers etc.) modifies the local environment in such a way as to effect the pattern of behaviour of all subsequent migrants. This is the method chosen by Taylor when examining the economic and social changes produced by work abroad in an Egyptian village near Cairo.<sup>91</sup> Hence, in her account, the first wave of migration to Libya in the mid-1970s profoundly affected the local economy by raising the cost of agricultural labour, increasing the price of land and upsetting the previous pattern of wage differentials so that, for example, craftsmen and labourers now earned more than those who worked in a near-by factory who had, until then, been regarded as the local elite. This, in turn, had important consequences for the second wave of migrants to Saudi Arabia at the end of the decade, having much to do with who left for work abroad and how much they needed or intended to earn. On the basis of her research so far, Taylor's method seems to work particularly well for relatively small peasant communities where migration is best seen as a temporary withdrawal of labour by men who remain in close contact with their families by means of regular visits. But it could also be employed in other settings if the full consequences of migration are to be properly observed.

Even less is known about the social and political effects of sending large numbers of workers abroad. Clearly, migration is disruptive of family life and may harm both those who go and those who stay behind. In a larger sense it also has a major effect on social differentiation, widening the gap between families, between communities and between whole regions. But these are facile generalizations which still remain to be tested and examined on a detailed basis. There is, however, one subject which has received quite considerable attention and that is the change in the position of the migrants' wives. To begin with, it was too easily assumed that such wives automatically assumed larger responsibilities and a considerably increased work load. But subsequent investigation has shown that the impact depends very much on the stage a woman has reached in her reproductive cycle, whether she lives in a nuclear or extended family or not and, perhaps most important of all, whether she herself is able to have control over her husband's regular remittances. Depending upon these and other variables, some women have to work harder to make up for the loss of family labour while others use the money sent from abroad to emancipate themselves from agricultural activity altogether. The same is true about personal responsibility: some women experience no real change in their position within an extended family, others gain control over significant resources, and thus over their own lives.

Speculation about the political effect of migration has been equally general. Some writers, following the conventional wisdom to be found in the European literature on the subject, have argued that migration acts as an important safety-valve, removing the most active – and potentially the most dissident – young workers and heading off economic discontent by opening up the possibility of immediate financial reward. But others have noted that workers abroad often tend to compensate for their sense of inferiority by adopting either a fiercely nationalistic or religious stance, perhaps like many of the Turks in West Germany, sending back large sums of money in support of right-wing political parties or like some of

the Egyptians in the Gulf using their new wealth to construct mosques or to assist organization like the Muslim Brothers. Meanwhile, any intensification of political feeling must alarm authorities in the labour-importing countries, encouraging them not only to seek to improve their own security but also giving them a vested interest in supporting the peace and stability of the countries from which their workers come.

To turn now to the impact of labour migration on the economies of the oil-rich countries of the Gulf. Here the first, and far and away the most important point to make, is that without the employment of foreigners there would have been no way in which they could translate their huge revenues into higher living standards and improved services for their own citizens. It is also foreign labour which offers them their major hope of economic diversification through industrialization, thus reducing their dangerous long-term dependence on oil. Looked at in historical terms this was a deliberate act of policy: the rulers of all the Gulf states decided that, in their own interests and those of their subjects, the petrodollars should be spent as much as possible in their own states to improve their own quality of life. And, following Kuwait's example, the best way of bringing this about seemed to be to embark on a programme of infrastructural investment and then of developing certain welfare services until, in most cases, these have reached the level achieved in Western Europe and North America if measured in such general statistical terms as doctors per inhabitant or students in university.

What was not planned at all was a consistent and rational policy towards the use of the foreign labour which all these schemes so obviously required. This was partly due to the speed at which the money needed to be spent, partly to the inability of tiny bureaucracies to monitor the situation and partly to the contradictory nature of the pressures to which they were subject from their own population for which they were unable to develop an effective response. All the rulers could manage was a series of short-term expedients designed to try to limit their dependence, either by insisting on short-term contracts for specific jobs or by turning to Asia instead of the Arab world for migrant males who were supposed to work for a limited period and then leave. But in spite of the fact that these policies were neither well practised nor well controlled, they continued to provide seductive support for the comforting official myth that, at some time or other, most of the Arabs and Asians, having completed their tasks, would simply disappear. Meanwhile, government efforts to train their local population with the skills they needed to replace the foreigners, achieved little success in societies where it was made so easy to earn money in government service or by using a privileged position to benefit directly from the foreign presence. The use of foreigners also helped to preserve certain local customs such as that of keeping Gulf women at home, with no need for them to go out to work except for some pressing personal desire.

The consequences of all this have been much discussed in the Gulf, but still only in the most general terms. To begin with, the situation is still so new and, in world historical terms, so unusual for it to be grasped easily in its entirety, even within the compass of a small city state. Put briefly, there is a general tendency to regard dependence on foreign labour as a bad thing without anyone being able to demonstrate why, in fact, this should be so. As a rule the most powerful arguments are usually not those of the economist but of the moralist or of the person who wishes to see his own culture, his own language and his own community protected from invasion by foreigners. Only the Saudis, and perhaps also the Omanis, have the confidence based on their own numbers and their own sense of history to see the whole matter as a technical problem to be mastered and not as something approaching a national disaster. From this it follows that probably the second most important effect of the use of foreign labour has been to produce a sense of worry and confusion leading to what is tantamount to a paralysis of will.

In such novel circumstances it is probably best to try to begin again at the beginning. What we are dealing with is a unique process of economic and social change in which small, thinly populated desert states have suddenly been provided with the revenues to develop themselves using every kind of labour drawn from almost every corner of the world. The way this labour was used was then determined, first by the oil companies, second by the governments and, third, by a growing private sector based largely on construction, trade and the provision of financial and other services. Its



wage level seems to have been determined initially by the need to persuade Europeans and Arabs to come to work in a hot, harsh environment with few facilities, and then by a three-tiered hierarchy of rates for Europeans, Arabs and Asians which, very generally, reflected economic conditions in the major labour sending countries – Britain and America, Egypt and Jordan, and India and Pakistan. Only recently has this broken down into a much more specific set of different rates linked closely to the domestic levels to be found in a host of Asian states.

The next stage in the description is to give a brief outline of the type of economy which this combination of oil and foreign labour and ruling family policy has produced. To begin with, the Gulf economies contain few real assets apart from money and oil and, as a consequence, very little productive activity. Their only real advantage is the way in which oil as a raw material, and oil and gas as a source of cheap fuel, can be combined together to create both a petro-chemical industry and plants making energy-intensive products like aluminium. There is also a small extra advantage in that the Gulf states themselves are becoming quite a good market for each other's goods and services wherever these can be developed in a specialized way as in the case of Bahrain's off-shore banking facilities and some of its industrial products. Otherwise, apart from a bit of fishing and some agriculture in Saudi Arabia, Oman and the lower Gulf, the rest of the economy is dominated by the government sector and by public and private services in which labour is badly used and suffers from an extremely low productivity. Lastly, all the Gulf states contain a large foreign population which, for the most part, is prevented from investing its earnings locally in real estate or in the establishment of new business and therefore simply consumes what it does not remit. The market created by the foreigners is thus an important fact of life pulling in an increasing amount of imports which local nationals, on their own, would be very unlikely to buy.

This, then, is the type of economy which foreign labour has helped to create: there could have been no such development without it and it would be senseless to attempt some abstract calculation about how things might have turned out if Arab and Asian workers had not been so freely available. The only useful question to ask, as of now, is whether the historic connection between migrant labour and development can be brought to an end or at least reduced, in the future. To do this, however, means to imagine quite a different pattern of economic activity in which the productive sectors might remain but in which the amount and the quality of the services provided would have to be enormously reduced. The only other alternative is to consider the apparently magic trick of getting rid of the problem by turning all, or most, of the long-stay Arab workers – and perhaps some Asians as well – into citizens; but few local nationals would find this acceptable and no government is likely to propose it. There then remains a final possibility which is simply to do nothing to change the type of economy at all. There is, after all, no pressing economic need for such a change. Every Gulf state can still support most of its present activity out of present income, whether from oil revenues or overseas investments. This, it must be said, is the most likely outcome, given the way in which the oil states are governed and their economies currently run.

## 6: THE SITUATION IN THE GULF 1984-5

Between 1981 and 1983 the value of the oil exports of the six Gulf states dropped by a half, from nearly \$160 billion to just under \$80 billion. For a while, some of the financial consequences of this fall were cushioned by the large reserves which most of them had built up during the previous period of boom. But by 1984 there were increasing signs of recession such as reduced governmental expenditure, empty offices and apartment buildings, falling rents and declining wages and salaries for many nationals and foreigners alike. To make matters worse, many of the Gulf states were also suffering from the effects of the Iran/Iraq war in terms of loss of trade and the need to pay large subventions in support of the Iraqi war effort. The dramatic crash of the unofficial Kuwaiti stock exchange, the Suk al-Manakh in 1982, was yet another reason for a general reduction in local business confidence.

In this atmosphere there was renewed attention to the question of control over foreign labour. Apart from a general concern about security, heightened after the bomb attacks on the American

embassy and other Kuwaiti targets in December 1983, there was also a feeling in some official quarters that the recession might be put to good use to cut down some of the extravagances and inefficiencies which had been encouraged to flourish during the boom. The result was a further tightening of migration procedures, the rejection of many more applications for work permits and, in most states, an intensification of police sweeps against any foreigners found without proper papers. According to one source Abu Dhabi deported 4500 illegal immigrants in the second half of 1983 while, according to another, Kuwait was deporting 200 a month in early 1984.<sup>92</sup> Kuwait followed this up in April 1984 by a ban on the recruitment of foreigners for many categories of government posts. Another sign of the times was Qatar's policy of attempting to rationalize the use of labour in the public service and to persuade departments to shed unnecessary employees, both local and foreign. Government initiatives to rationalize their labour policies and to root out illegal immigrants have been announced with great regularity since the late 1970's. But this time the drive behind them is certainly more sustained.

What was the total effect of such measures is difficult to calculate. Such evidence as there is points both ways. On the one hand, there are newspaper stories of an increasing exodus of migrant labour – said to be running at the rate of 60,000 a month in Saudi Arabia in early 1985 – and of the increasing difficulty experienced by certain Arab workers in finding Gulf jobs.<sup>93</sup> On the other, there is also evidence that local pressure to be allowed to import labour is still very strong and that, in some states, the ban on the employment of foreign nationals in certain parts of the government service has simply led some public enterprises to put out more of their work to private contractors – who themselves rely heavily on finding their workers abroad.<sup>94</sup> But without proper statistics relating to the total movement of foreign labour in and out of the Gulf it is impossible to come to any firm conclusion about changes in the balance as a whole.

What is increasingly clear is that the situation is beginning to worry both the migrants themselves as well as disturb their own governments back home. Many of those presently in employment in the Gulf have had to accept reductions in wages, more frequent encounters with the police and the closing of many of the unofficial channels by which they might have hoped to bring their wives and children to join them, for example the end of the Kuwaiti black market in family visas.<sup>95</sup> They also face the prospect of having to bargain much more fiercely over conditions of service if they want to be allowed to stay on for a second or third term. In addition, many governments are either charging, or are planning to charge, more money for many of the heavily subsidized services like electricity or commodities like petrol and flour. Meanwhile, the labour sending countries, looking anxiously for any evidence of a falling off in remittances, become less willing to enforce minimum wage regulations in the interests of making their labour more competitive. This is something with which national construction companies, already under increasing pressure to cut costs if they are to obtain new contracts, are only too happy to play along. Another sign of the same pressures is the willingness of South Korean construction firms to employ more nationals from low wage countries in South Asia who, already in 1979, could be employed at perhaps half the cost of their Korean equivalent.<sup>96</sup>

The country in which the effects of the fall in oil revenues has been most closely studied is Saudi Arabia, for it is there that the sheer size of its projects and the millions of jobs it provides for migrants far exceed that of anywhere else. Saudi revenues from its oil exports were cut by over a half between 1981 and 1983 and certainly fell again in 1984.<sup>97</sup> Against this, government expenditures, cushioned by reserves which still stand at over \$100 billion, have only fallen from SR287.7 million (\$79.1 billion) in 1981/2 to SR212.9 million (\$59.2 billion) in 1984/5.<sup>98</sup> However, even a drop of this size has been enough to lead to a significant reduction in the value of government contracts, particularly in the construction sector which has also suffered from the sudden cancellation of several huge projects and a delay in payments affecting many others. This was especially noticeable towards the end of the financial year 1983/4 when the Minister of Finance had to cope with a sudden shortfall in revenue below budgetary expectations. According to figures in the *Middle East Economic Digest*, the value of new contracts peaked in 1982 while actual expenditures were at their highest in early 1983. All this had an obvious knock-on effect towards the Saudi private sector which was heavily

dependent on government contracts and which has experienced a marked increase in the number of bankruptcies over the last two years.

Useful information about the future level of Saudi economic activity is provided both in the budget for the financial year 1985/6 which began in March 1985 and the targets contained in the 4th Five Year Plan which runs from 1985 to 1990. According to the new budget, expenditure is to be further reduced to SR200 billion (\$55.6 billion), although some commentators doubt whether there will be sufficient oil revenues to support even this. It is also important to note that the cuts in public expenditure which the budget anticipates are not evenly distributed across all sectors, with education and public health (where large numbers of foreign nationals are employed) being required to suffer the least. Turning to the new Five Year Plan, this assumes that expenditures will remain at their present level – some SR200 billion a year – until 1990, half of which is supposed to be allocated to development projects. It further assumes a growth in GNP of 4% a year, and a fall in construction expenditure of only 2.8% a year. Perhaps because of this, it expresses the hope that the numbers of unskilled foreign labourers in the country can be reduced by half a million by 1990.<sup>99</sup> One other document which gives some clue to governmental expectations is the new Kuwaiti Five Year Plan which speaks of achieving a 'balance' in the total of the local and foreign populations by its last year.<sup>100</sup> However, even if this unlikely target were to be reached, it would still leave the state with a large migrant majority in its labour force.

It is against this background that it is possible to come to a tentative judgement about the one serious attempt to project the demand for foreign labour in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE for the period 1985-90, that by the World Bank economist Naiem Sherbiny.<sup>101</sup> On the basis of what he calls a 'medium growth' scenario for the non-oil sector in these three states, he calculates that they will require still more foreign labour in the second half of the 1980s than they did in the first, and almost as much as they imported in the boom years 1975-80 (Table 6). The assumptions on which he bases these calculations are as follows:

1. The drop in construction employment in the 1980s will be somewhat compensated for by an expansion in the labour needed to operate and maintain the buildings already put up, although with a 'different skill mix' requiring a more highly trained work force.
2. An increase in private sector activity coupled with a resistance from business and commercial interests to any reduction in the labour flow, particularly if there is a sharp slow-down in general economic growth.
3. An increase in the employment of domestic servants which, according to his calculations, make up some 20% of the migrant labour force.
4. The financial cushion provided by foreign reserves and income generated from foreign investments.

To simplify his argument a little, Sherbiny's calculations seem to be based on three basic propositions: that the real price of oil will remain steady over the 1980s, that Gulf governments will continue with their present economic policies and that the present movement of labour out of construction into services – both public and private – will continue. Of these it is the first which is the most difficult to predict. At the time of writing it is clear that the present fall in the price of oil has still some way to go before it bottoms out. As far as future demand for oil is concerned, there are discouraging estimates about the continued expansion of the world economy and the ability of Western Europe and Japan to make up for any shortfall in the American economic performance over the next few years; while on the supply side OPEC is unlikely to be able to reduce its production any further and will also have to face the possibility that Iraq will soon want to pump out a great deal more oil once its fields are properly connected to the Saudi pipeline system. In these circumstances it may be some years before the price revives sufficiently for Gulf oil to begin to assume its old importance, even though most analysts predict that this will surely happen some time in the early 1990s.

Sherbiny's second and third propositions are easier to support. Both the Saudi and the Kuwaiti plans testify to the fact that the government's plan to continue their present economic policies in the second half of the 1980s. There is also good evidence of the move from construction to services and of the fact that the latter

will have to have just as high a foreign component as the former. In the case of Kuwait, for instance, a five-year study of new foreign workers (1978-1983) shows that while 41% of them came to work in the commercial and hotel sectors only 26% were employed in construction.<sup>102</sup> Other reports testify to the continuing demand for foreign migrants, particularly in the provision of health care and education. In 1981, for example, less than 10% of the doctors in Saudi Arabia were Saudi nationals and only 20% of the technicians and paramedics; in 1982 only 15% of the Kuwaiti public sector doctors were Kuwaiti.<sup>103</sup> Even if oil revenues continue to tumble and the future demand for extra foreign labour is very much less than Sherbiny's estimate, the existence of the significant structural changes he outlines will still necessitate the employment of several million workers from abroad.

## 7: THE FUTURE – TWO LARGE QUESTIONS AND A FEW POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Any study of the future of migrant labour in the Gulf must start with two large questions: what will be the size and composition of the foreign labour force over the next five or ten years? And under what conditions will it serve? Sherbiny's answer to the first of these questions (already mentioned in the preceding section) is that given a certain set of assumptions about the future price of oil, about government policy and about the changing structure of the economy, the three major labour importing states of the Gulf – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates – will require a net addition of about a million new workers by 1990. He also argues that, at least in certain areas, these workers will have to have a higher degree of skill than their predecessors.

The oil market has weakened considerably since Sherbiny made his calculations and his conclusion now looks rather too optimistic. Probably the only way it can come true is for there to be a rapid recovery of oil prices and a high dollar towards the end of the 1980s. Nevertheless, even if the present demand for labour slackens, the Gulf states will still find themselves with three groups of migrant workers for whom they will have to devise appropriate policies. These are: a large pool of permanent labour (dominated by Indians and Pakistanis and, in the case of Saudi Arabia by Egyptians and Yemenis); a rotating force of workers who come for short periods to fill existing posts in government and the private sector; and a small number of new arrivals needed to fill whatever new posts the level of economic activity allows. If present trends continue, a small proportion of the posts will be filled under officially negotiated labour agreements, while the rest will go to Arabs and Asians according to skills, language requirements and the dictates of an increasingly competitive labour market. Governments could have an important influence over the type of labour recruited as far as skills, origin, and period of contract are concerned but only if they choose to exercise it in a systematic and coherent fashion.

The second question is more complicated. As far as the labour sending countries are concerned the Arabs are likely to continue to play little role in either the recruitment or the employment of their nationals. But it will be open to them to attempt to follow Jordan's lead in signing bilateral agreements with their labour-importing neighbours, appointing Labour Attachés to their embassies and seeking to extend their own social security schemes (in Jordan's case on a voluntary basis) to their workers abroad. Far and away the most important labour exporter is Egypt which, until now, has made almost no effort to look after the interests of its workers in the oil states in spite of all the harsh treatment many of them have received. The Asian labour senders, on the other hand, will try to build on the institutional and legal framework already established, with the majority of them (and all the larger ones) trying to ensure that their departing workers leave with a proper contract detailing the exact conditions of their employment, and that labour recruiters besides being efficiently organized accept responsibility for those they send to the Gulf. The present state of the initiatives already undertaken is outlined in Table 7; although it always has to be remembered that the way these are actually implemented often leaves a great deal to be desired. One obvious loophole in most arrangements is the failure to exercise proper control over the private recruiters. Here there may be something to be learned from an idea being floated in the Philippines to the effect that the large

number of officially recognized agencies should be reduced to just a few very big ones on the grounds that their operations would then be easier to monitor, that cooperation between a few agencies is better than competition between many and that, in this way, workers' interests might be better protected.

Where the Asian labour exporters have signally failed to make any significant impact so far is to extend safeguards past the recruitment process to the protection of their workers in the Gulf itself. But such an activity will become even more necessary in the future for, although the number of construction workers in camps may decline, the pressures towards lower wages for longer hours will certainly intensify in the immediate future as the recession continues. One method which might be extended is that introduced by Pakistan in 1982 with its scheme for low cost insurance for migrants, purchased before they leave for the Gulf, to provide cover against sudden job loss or death while abroad. Another is the creation of a special organization like the Overseas Pakistan Foundation specifically to look after the interests of migrant workers abroad. Meanwhile (according to one press report) a more radical scheme is being contemplated by the Indian government with the aim of rationalizing the terms of its workers' contracts within the terms of the Gulf labour laws, perhaps with the assistance of local governments to make sure that contractual obligations are properly upheld. This would be supplemented by a compulsory insurance scheme, paid for by an increase in the levy on departing migrants to cover the expenses caused by job loss or sudden death.<sup>104</sup>

Certainly, however, the major role in looking after the interests of the migrants themselves will have to be played by the G.C.C. countries themselves. A major step in this direction would be the recognition that the problem was a permanent one and not something which would somehow solve itself in time. This is certainly the lesson of the migration of Turkish workers to Western Germany. Although it was supposed at the outset that there would be a rotation of short-term Turkish labour which did not put down roots in the host country, it was soon discovered that many workers were bringing their families with them with the obvious intention of staying for a considerable period of time. This forced a radical change of policy, causing the Germans to pay serious attention to the long-term interests of the workers and leading, first to the negotiation of a series of social security arrangements covering illness, work-related accidents, unemployment, retirement and so on and then, in 1973, to the introduction of new policy guidelines designed to ensure that any new incoming workers were properly housed and properly treated by their employers. In the case of the Gulf, the recognition of the permanent nature of much of the foreign labour force is probably the only way of forcing local governments to face the question of how best to integrate the long-stay workers into their own societies. Workers who actually want to remain permanently in the Gulf could argue that this would probably not present quite as many problems as in West Germany on account of similarities in language and culture. But, on European evidence, there will also be a large category of long-stay workers who want neither total integration nor to return home until they have achieved certain specific targets such as education of their children or qualification for a retirement pension. Policies towards workers of this type who anticipate many years of residence before eventual return are much more difficult to devise and there is no doubt that they will present just as many problems in the Gulf.

The question of short-stay workers raises quite a different set of problems. Here it would seem that the only effective measures would be to abandon the *kafeel* system of individual sponsorship and to deal with breaches in the labour laws by the ordinary bureaucratic processes to be found in almost every other state in the world. This would at once free the foreign workers from the threat of some of the worst kind of abuses associated with the surrender of passports and the fact that employers hold the power to have their workers deported for almost any offence, real or imagined. It would also make it very much easier for local governments to control the import of labour without being subject to a great deal of the present special pleading by would-be sponsors

who only wish to make money out of foreign migrants, not to put them into properly sanctioned employment. A second step which would also have beneficial consequences would be the introduction of a minimum wage law governing most jobs. This would help to improve the condition of the foreign workers while, at the same time, forcing employers to think twice about importing unnecessary staff – or perhaps to try to find local personnel instead. It is likely that it would be very acceptable to the two legal workers' organizations, the Kuwaiti Trade Union Organization and the General Committee of Bahraini workers, both of which are unhappy about the poor conditions faced by many foreign workers and yet worried that these same foreign workers may accept such low wages that they pose a threat to their own members' standard of living.

However, suggestions of this type may well seem too Utopian in present political conditions and, for the time being, a more practical policy would probably be to introduce forms of intra-governmental cooperation between labour senders and labour receivers. For the Arabs this would almost certainly have to take the form of bilateral negotiations covering such questions as contracts, conditions of work and control of illegal movements. This is because recent historical experience has shown that the multilateral approach has not worked well, with general agreements like the Inter-Arab Agreement on the Migration of Labour of 1975 either not being ratified by most of the importing countries or their provisions almost totally ignored.

Cooperation between the Gulf states and the Asian labour sending countries has been even slower to develop. Apart from a few bilateral agreements the only other international initiative has been the joint Tripartite Inter-Regional Round Table on International Migration held in Thailand in September 1984, sponsored by ILO, and attended by representatives from 13 countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand from Asia and Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia for the Middle East) as well as five workers' organizations and four employers' groups. Given the novelty of the whole idea and the fact that the participants only met for a few days there was little time for the two sides to do more than acquaint themselves with some of the others' problems. But some of the recommendations are certainly worth following up, notably the need to standardize occupational classifications in workers' contracts – a frequent cause of misunderstanding – and to improve the procedure by which migrant workers who are legally expected to make social security payments while in a country like Saudi Arabia are able to have all, or part, of their contributions reimbursed before returning home. No less important was the agreement to hold another round table meeting soon.

For over a decade the vast influx of Arab and Asian migrant labour into the oil-rich Gulf states has been largely unplanned, unregulated and unexamined. This is something in which labour importers and labour exporters alike have shared a complicity of silence. For there now to be effective intervention by the states involved requires: first, a mutual recognition of the size of the problem and, second, an appreciation that it can only be solved successfully by joint cooperation. There is a need for international organizations to try to promote such an understanding, but it seems more likely that the major initiative will have to come from the larger states most directly involved. At the same time, it is essential to have more – and deeper – research into all aspects of the situation. This would have the double advantage of encouraging states to collect more data, while helping to create a more general interest in the human problem as well as awareness of the huge variety of different types of movements involved. Labour migration to the Gulf shares some of the characteristics of the move of East European and Mediterranean peasants into the cities of Western Europe and North America before the First World War and after World War II. But it is more various than this and even more difficult to bring to a satisfactory conclusion. Meanwhile, its effects will continue to influence events in Asia and the Middle East for very many years to come.

## APPENDIX

**Table 1: Estimates of the numbers of Arab migrant workers in Saudi Arabia and in the G.C.C. states in the early 1980s**

Country of origin	At work in Saudi Arabia	Total in 6 G.C.C. states
Egypt	800,000	1,150,000
Yemen, YAR (North)	325,000	336,145
Jordan/Palestine	140,000	227,850
Yemen, PDRY (South)	65,000	83,845
Syria	24,600	67,150
Sudan	55,600	65,470
Lebanon	33,200	54,850
Iraq	3,250	44,760
Oman	10,000	33,450
Somalia	8,300	12,200
Tunisia/Morocco	500	920
	1,456,500	2,076,640

**Source:**

(All except for Egypt) J. S. Birks and C. A. Sinclair, 'The socio-economic determinants of intra-regional migration' in U.N.E.C.W.A., *International Migration in the Arab World*, II (Beirut 1982), Appendix A, Table 1.

(Egypt) Figures from Minister of State for Emigration in V. Lavy, 'The economic embargo of Egypt by the Arab states: myth and reality' *Middle East Journal*, 38,3 (Summer 1984), p 430-31.

**Table 2: Estimates of the number of Asian migrant workers in Saudi Arabia and in all the G.C.C. states in the early 1980s**

Country of origin	At work in Saudi Arabia	Total in 6 G.C.C. states
India	NK	800,000
Pakistan	1,200,000	1,700,000-2,300,000*
Bangladesh	57,834	178,824**
Sri Lanka	NK	50,000
Philippines	253,080	342,310
Korea (South)	102,305	171,040
Thailand	NK	159,000
Indonesia	20,000	20,000
Turkey	40,000	250,000*

\* G.C.C. plus Libya and Iraq

\*\* All migrants abroad.

**Source:**

(All G.C.C. except Pakistan and Turkey): L. Demery and others in F. Arnold and N.M. Shaw, 'Asian Labor Migration to the Middle East', *International Migration Review*, 18,2 (Summer 1984, Table 1.)

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(Turkey), *Turkey 1981 Almanac*.

**Table 3: Estimates of Population and Labour in the Arab Gulf States and Ratio of Citizens to Migrants c1980**

State	Population	Citizens	%	Expatriates	%	Citizens	Workers			Total
							%	Expatriates	%	
Kuwait	1,355,827	562,065	41.5	793,762	58.5	109,170	22.4	378,710	77.6	487,875
Qatar	200,000	52,200	26	147,800	74	10,341	20.6	39,800	79.4	50,141
Arab Emirates	557,887	96,630	17.5	460,257	82.5	55,162	17.5	260,049	82.5	315,211
Bahrain	358,857	242,596	67.6	116,261	32.4	98,764	67.5	47,553	32.5	146,317
Saudi Arabia	7,235,000	5,100,675	70.5	2,134,325	29.5	1,262,393	39.3	1,981,810	60.7	3,208,203
Oman	900,000	635,000	70.6	265,000	29.4	116,500	45.7	137,200	54.3	253,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,707,571</b>	<b>6,055,166</b>	<b>62.4</b>	<b>3,652,405</b>	<b>37.6</b>	<b>1,535,830</b>	<b>36.2</b>	<b>2,707,922</b>	<b>69.8</b>	<b>4,243,752</b>

**Sources:**

(All but Oman) Fiasal Al-Salem and Ahmed Dhaher, *al-camala fi duwal al-khalij al-cArabi*. (Kuwait: Dhat al-Silasil nd), Table 1.

(Oman), Sultanate of Oman, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, *Abhath wa-dirasat nadwa al-istikhdam al-amthal al-qawa al-camala al-wataniya* (np, nd - Introduction 1984), Tables 1 and 3.



**Table 4: Estimates of Arab and other foreign migrant workers and the total non-national population in five G.C.C. countries (C1980)**

	Migrant workers		Non-national population Total
	Arabs	Others	
Kuwait	239,100	129,600	368,700
Bahrain	19,600	65,900	85,500
Qatar	21,400	77,400	98,800
U.A.E.	98,100	375,800	473,900
Oman	9,200	127,500	136,700
	329,900	765,700	1,158,600
			2,135,000

Source:

Sultanate of Oman, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, *Abhath wa-dirasat nadwa al-istikhidam al-amthal al-qawa al-camala al-wataniya* (np, nd - Introduction 1984), Tables 1 and 3.

**Table 5: Value of migrant remittances through official channels compared with total export earnings and GDP, 1982\***

	Remittances	Alternative estimate	Merchandise exports	GDP	GDP/capita
	\$ million	\$ million	\$ million	\$ million	\$
<b>Arabs</b>					
Egypt	2,074	3,400	3,120	26,400	690
Jordan	1,084		753	3,500	1,690
Sudan	131		499	9,290	NK
Syria	140		2,026	15,240**	NK
Yemen (PDRY)	411**		580	630	NK
Yemen (YAR)	1,118		44	3,210	NK
<b>Asia</b>					
Bangladesh	329		769	3,170	140
India	2,293**		8,446	29,550	260
Pakistan	2,580		2,403	3,500	380
Sri Lanka	290		1,105	1,500	320
Indonesia	NK		22,294	90,160	580
Korea (South)	126**	1,600	21,853	68,420	1,910
Malaysia	5		11,789	25,870	1,860
Philippines	240	800	5,010	39,850	820
Thailand	616		6,945	36,790	790
Turkey	2,187		5,685	49,980	1,370

\* In almost all cases except Turkey the overwhelming proportion of total remittances comes from the Middle East.

\*\* 1981.

Source:

(All except 'alternative estimates') *World Bank Development Report 1984*.

('Alternative estimates') Egypt, *International Herald Tribune*, 11 January 1985. Korea and Philippines, Astrid Bracher, 'Migrant workers in the Gulf', *Middle East Review 1984* (Saffron Waldon: World of Information 1984), pp 39-41.

**Table 6: Sherbiny's estimate of incremental flows of migrant labour to three Gulf states 1980 -1990 (in thousands)**

	Actual		Projected	
	1970-75	1975-80	1980-85	1985-90
Kuwait	37	163	124	164
U.A.E.	168	251	120	109
Saudi Arabia	349	679	633	680
<b>Total</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>1,093</b>	<b>877</b>	<b>953</b>

Source:

N.A. Sherbiny, 'Expatriate labor in Arab oil-producing countries' *Finance and Development*, 21,4 (December 1984), p 37.

**Table 7: Specific measures undertaken by Asian governments to regulate the labour migration of their nationals**

Countries	Bangladesh	India	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Indonesia	Rep. of Korea	Malaysia	Philippines	Thailand
<b>Recruitment and placement</b>									
Emigration clearance to leave country	×	×	×					×	
Ban/restriction on direct hiring		×	×			×		×	
Minimum standards for work contracts	×	×	×	×	×			×	×
Licensing/regulation of private recruiters	×	×	×	×	×		×	×	×
Operation of recruitment agency by State	×	×	×		×	×		×	×
Security bond requirement	×	×	×	×			×	×	×
Ban/limit recruitment fee charged to worker	×	×	×	×				×	×
Contribution to Welfare Fund			×					×	
Restriction on passport issue						×		×	
Regulation of job advertising	×		×	×					
Trade test requirement	×					×			
Compulsory use national employment service									
Restriction on selected occupations	×					×		×	
'No objection certificate' requirement	×		×						
Compulsory service in country before departure	×							×	
Ban on female domestic workers	×		×						
Specification of transport carrier			×						
Periodic inspection recruitment establishment	×		×					×	
Pre-departure briefing			×	×				×	
Restriction on country of employment						×			
Renewal of contract clearance			×					×	
<b>Market development</b>									
Labour Attaché programme	×		×	×		×		×	×
Negotiation of supply agreements	×		×					×	
Advertising and promotion								×	
Guarantee financing national contractors					×	×		×	
State-subsidized skill training	×		×		×	×			
<b>Settlement of claims/disputes</b>									
Conciliation/adjudication machinery at work-site or on return						×		×	
Labour Attaché assistance	×		×	×		×		×	×
Special courts			×						
Fund to cover unpaid claims	×	×	×				×	×	×
<b>Repatriation of earnings</b>									
Requirement to remit percentage of salary	×					×		×	
Foreign-currency deposits	×	×	×	×				×	×
Incentives to remit:									
– Duty-free import privilege	×								
– Foreign currency denominated bonds	×								
– Tax exemption	×	×	×	×	×			×	×
<b>Welfare programme</b>									
Low-cost group insurance for migrant workers			×			×			
Legal aid to overseas workers in distress			×					×	
Repatriation assistance			×					×	×
Social welfare services for migrants' families			×					×	
Housing programme			×						
Education facilities			×						
Health and medical facilities			×						

Source:

M. Arbella, *Overseas employment administration: a review of policies and procedures* (1984), quoted in Z. Zar *Recruitment practices and working and living conditions of Asian migrant workers in the Middle East: Problems and possible solutions*, ILO Working Paper (ILO, Geneva, May 1984), p 10.

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### Abbreviations

AEP OR ARTEP	The Asian Employment Programme
AT	<i>Arab Times</i> (Kuwait)
ASQ	<i>Arab Studies Quarterly</i> (Shrewsbury, Mass.)
AUC	The American University at Cairo
BRISMES	British Society for Middle Eastern Studies
DC	<i>Development and Change</i> (German Foundation for International Development, Bonn)
EDCC	<i>Economic Development and Cultural Change</i> (Chicago)
FT	<i>Financial Times</i> (London)
IHT	<i>International Herald Tribune</i>
ILMS	Institute of Labor and Manpower Studies, Manila
ILO	International Labour Office, Geneva
ILR	<i>International Labour Review</i> , (ILO, Geneva)
IME	International Migration for Employment, ILO, Geneva
IMR	<i>International Migration Review</i> (New York)
JSAMES	<i>Journal of South Asian and Middle East Studies</i> (Villanova University, Pennsylvania)
ME	<i>Middle East</i> (London)
MEES	<i>Middle East Economic Survey</i> (Nicosia)
MEJ	<i>Middle East Journal</i> (Washington)
MER	<i>Middle East Review</i> (Great Chesterford, Essex)
MERIP	<i>Middle East Research and Information Project Reports</i> (Washington)
MES	<i>Middle Eastern Studies</i> (London)
PDR	<i>Population and Development Review</i> (New York)
PTOW	<i>Pakistan Times, Overseas Weekly</i> (Lahore)
RSS	Royal Scientific Society, Jordan
TIRRTonIM	Tripartite Inter-regional Round Table on International Migration, Bangkok, 17-20 Sept. 1984
TWQ	<i>Third World Quarterly</i> (London)
UNECWA	United Nations Economic Commission for West Asia (Beirut, then Baghdad)
WSJ	<i>Wall Street Journal</i> (New York)

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