

## Saudi promises help, free passage to jobless

Special Correspondent

Minister of State for External Affairs Gen (Retired) V K Singh on Wednesday announced that the government of Saudi Arabia has promised free passage and humanitarian support to Indian workers affected by widespread lay-offs.

Gen. Singh, who was sent by the Indian government to Saudi Arabia for “assessment” at the behest of External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, said the issue was limited to one company that has violated Saudi laws, even as reports suggest that the first batch of Indians could return from the Gulf state by this weekend.

‘It was brought out that the problem is because of one company which has not provided the humanitarian facilities as per the law of the land. The Government of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has taken serious note of this lapse and has taken immediate action to ensure all camps where Indian workers were staying are provided facilities like medical, food, hygiene and sanitation,’ said Gen. Singh after his meeting with Dr. Mufrej Al Haqbani, Saudi Minister of Labour and Social Development.

### Scale of the problem

The announcement indicates the government believes that the scale of the problem is less than what it had earlier announced. On July 30, Ms. Swaraj had announced: “The number of Indian workers facing food crisis in Saudi Arabia is over 10,000. It is not 800 as is being reported”.

The MEA had on Tuesday announced that the total number of affected workers was 7,700. However, Gen. Singh is yet to indicate the exact number of affected Indians in the crisis. The meeting between Dr. Haqbani and Gen. Singh focussed on multiple options to solve the problem of unemployment the workers faced.