

New Saudi scheme brings cheer to migrant workers

- [Abdul Latheef Naha](#)

A support scheme for the Nitaqat ('Saudi-sation' of the workforce), introduced by Saudi Arabia this week, is expected to benefit a large number of Indian expatriates facing retrenchment. Particularly relieved are many Keralites whose jobs in shops and companies had been under threat.

According to the new support scheme, business establishments in yellow and red categories can continue to employ the expatriates after paying a special monthly fee. "The fee, instead of appointing Saudis, is a great option," said Mohammed Ashraf, who coordinates Keralites in Saudi Arabia's Dhamam.

Severe restrictions

The tightening of expatriate labour and employment laws in Saudi Arabia as part of reducing unemployment in the Kingdom has affected thousands of Indians. The restrictions were such that 40 per cent of the employees in companies and shops had to be Saudi nationals.

As per the support scheme, an employer will have to pay a fee of 3,600 Saudi Arabian Riyal (SAR) for avoiding the appointment of a Saudi citizen. However, the higher the number of Saudis to be appointed, the more the fee to be paid to the government. For every second Saudi national not appointed, the company will have to pay SAR 4,200. The fee will be SAR 4,800 for every third Saudi citizen. And, for the fourth, the fee will jump to SAR 9,000.

"The support scheme will be particularly beneficial to small business establishments which need to appoint a handful of Arabs. By paying this monthly fee, they can continue with the existing expatriate employees," said Mohammed Kutty, a Keralite who manages a chain of restaurants in Saudi Arabia.

Allaying fears

The support scheme has come at a time when there were fears among Indians about a possible forced retirement at 60. Although Labour Ministry sources denied the rumours of sending back expatriates who turned 60, as part of improving the employment rate of Saudis, the general policy of the Kingdom continues to be in favour of reducing the number of expatriates.

Figures released by the Saudi authorities indicated that the country had faced 5.6 per cent unemployment at the beginning of this year. Many Indians, mostly Keralites, lost their jobs in the mobile communication sector when the government imposed 50 per cent Saudisation early this year.

Businesses in Saudi Arabia can continue to employ expatriates after paying a special fee to government
