

## 20,000 Indians returning to India from Saudi thanks to the amnesty scheme

Thousands of undocumented overseas Indian workers in Saudi Arabia are flying home

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Thousands of

*Saudi Arabia. Photo: Reuters*

undocumented overseas Indian workers in Saudi Arabia are flying home, as the Saudi government announced a 90-day amnesty period for all residence violators. Stranded Indian, who travelled there illegally and those who overstayed their visas, including a large number from Tamil Nadu, are ready to return to India.

The 90 days grace period began on April 29. During this period expats will be allowed to leave the Kingdom without paying any fines or facing any penalties linked to violating Saudi residency law, labour system and border security in the Kingdom. While they are facilitating the exit process, the applicants have to pay the flight cost.

All concerned agencies and departments were instructed by Prince Mohammad, who is also Saudi Arabia's Interior Minister, to ease the departure of all foreigners who wished to leave, Gulf News reported.

Mansoor Al Turki, the spokesperson for the interior ministry, told the media that any foreigner who was breaking the residency and work laws and regulations would be able to leave the kingdom without paying any fines or being subject to legal action.

### **Indians relieved to return home**

According to a report in TOI, Anil Nautiyal, counsellor (community welfare) at the Indian embassy in Riyadh said, 20321 Indian nationals had applied till Monday evening to return home under the amnesty scheme.

Around 1,500 blue collar workers from Tamil Nadu are among those who are using the amnesty to come back to the country. Most of the other workers who are availing of the scheme are from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Nautiyal said the Saudi Arabian government had set up an exclusive centre in Riyadh for Indian nationals who want to exit the country. The Indian embassy had appealed to all Indians staying in Saudi Arabia illegally to take advantage of the amnesty that, unlike a similar offer in 2013 that was restricted to Riyadh and Jeddah, is available in 21 locations across the kingdom, he said.

"The majority of applications we received were from blue collar workers wanting to return to India," Nautiyal said. "The numbers are fewer than during the 2103 amnesty period but many families who overstayed now want to use the scheme to return."

"Volunteers are assisting embassy officials through the entire process," he said. "We have put up tents in the embassy and consulate for the Indians who have applied to fly back to India."

### **Open window for violators to return to Saudi**

Mansoor Al Turki clarified, that violators will also be able to return later to work legally in Saudi Arabia since he would not go through the fingerprinting process usually applied to deportees who would not be allowed back into the kingdom.

They will be able to return to the Kingdom on the condition of pursuing legal methods to gain entry.

### **How is this move of Saudi Arabia kingdom different from 2013's?**

In 2013, a similar campaign took place to legalize the status of undocumented workers in the Kingdom. Back then, a three-month amnesty was announced in April 2013 before late King Abdullah extended the grace period to November 2013.

The current initiative is different from the one in 2013 in two important ways. First, this time the violators of local laws can leave for their home country without any penalty. Second, there is option for those repatriated to become expatriates in the kingdom again.