

The Janitorial Companies... Why?

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I have been so elated by the insistence of the Minister of Labor not to budge on the SR200 fee per month on every foreign employee at establishments whose Saudi employees comprise less than 50% of their total manpower. This resolution is the right start-up alarm to draw the attention of businessmen and, for that matter, business swindlers who exploit foreign manpower in violation of the Islamic law, the state instructions and the counseling of the Rev. Mufti.

The businessmen rebelled as one man in the face of the Minister of Labor and his resolution. It may be true that the majority of the sector disagrees with the application of this resolution on the janitorial companies on account that no Saudi national will entertain cleaning assignments. What harm is there if those firms pay or contribute to the Human Resources Fund which helps and trains our young men in other establishment which are attempting to nationalize their jobs. Any company or bidder can cancel their contract with the respective governmental entity following the notice period stipulated in the contract, and subsequently the governmental entity can re-call for bidding and go ahead until the project

is completed. But when contractors call for compensations, threaten of closure, abstain from bidding for new contracts, and announce that they will invest out of the Kingdom, it is their choice.

I felt so sorry that the Minister of Labor retracted his resolve and exempted the janitorial companies of the SR200 fee. Why these companies were exempted? Because they had refused the resolution and when their laborers' residence permits were due for renewal and as the contractors were calling for exemption from the fee they informed their laborers that they would not renew their residence permits owing to the new fees. When a foreigner fails to renew his residence permit he cannot remit his wage to his country. It is for certain that the laborers spread the word to abstain from working. I have a hunch that the mayoralties and even the governorates complained and therefore the exemption was passed. As the door is open for exemptions, the Ministry should put off the fee and restudy the issue with the Chambers' Council. Despite the fact that it will have to pay more for the next contracts, the Ministry of Finance should have supported the resolution of fees, that is if not even compensate the contractors of the current projects in lieu of the said fee.

The Ministry of Labor should haven not allowed the laborers to go on strike for residence permits non-renewal. The laborer will not stop working as long as their wages are paid to them and their residence permits are renewed. The two ministries should have agreed upon deducting these fees from the contractors' monthly payments, including

janitorial companies which refused to pay the fees following the renewal of the residence permits of their manpower.

The janitorial companies in Makkah, the Glorifies city, and other cities as well, deserve my congratulations for the success of their plan at obliging the Ministry of Labor to exempt them from the fees. But the beads are going to roll out of its string from now onwards. Why the janitorial companies only are exempted? There are companies or rather activities at which no national manpower accept, or exist, or willing or capable of performing them or at least not with the adequate numbers. However, my regret did not continue as the Minister of Labor announced that no exemption will be extended to any entity and that his ministry will take all necessary actions to implement projects without any impediment or exception. The idea of the fees, regardless of the amount, is a good idea. It provides an opportunity for the private sector to contribute in the Human Resources Fund. Those who pursue nationalization can benefit of the accumulated amounts and those who do not will continue to pay the fees.

However, the Ministry of Labor, as well as other ministries, must be considerate about the correction of illegal residents and giving them a tolerance period of six months, and the Ministry of Labor should allow and facilitate the change of foreigners professions and to give the real names of jobs or to match jobs with the certificate held by the foreigner,

and to desist from insistence of the visa job description. We also must correct the situation of those born in the Kingdom by non-Saudi nationals. We must benefit of them because they will not leave their place of birth, and they had no choice in that, let aside the fact that they know nowhere other than the Kingdom and its culture. On top of that, the Kingdom had spent huge amounts on educating them, on a par with the Saudi student at the pre-university stages.

There are assortments of reforms which are necessary for nationalization of jobs and for rectifying the labor law to be in the interest of the employee and the employer at the same time. If the SR200-fee is to be reviewed it should not reach the limit that impinges on the Human Resources Fund or cripples its capability to cover the new obligations of job Saudization.