

The Gulf Region



Late Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi laying the foundation stone of Indian Islamic Centre Building in Abu Dhabi in May 1981



Visit by the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora on 12-13 January 2001, to a worker's camp, in Muscat, Oman – 3000 Indian Workers



The Palace of His Majesty Sultan of Oman, Muscat, constructed by Shapoorji Pallonji & Co. Ltd.



The Indian High School, Dubai – the oldest and the largest school in the Gulf



Inside view of Gurudwara at Baghdad (Iraq)



Introduction

A few kilometres out of Dubai, the Burj Al Arab rises from the shifting sands of the Gulf region. The world's tallest all-suite hotel, its sail-like form towers 321 metres above a man-made island. This architectural wonder symbolises what can be achieved in the most inhospitable conditions, provided one has the financial means to source the latest technology and to attract the requisite skills and manpower. The Burj is also a monument to the economic miracle that has been taking place in this region over the last four decades.

- 3.2. In this chapter the High Level Committee examines the role that migrants from India have played in these stupendous developments, and the costs involved. The main characteristics that are commonly found in almost all the Gulf countries will be identified in the first section of this chapter. The present status of the Indian Diaspora in this region, and the problems encountered by it, are discussed in the next section. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the many demands and expectations of the Gulf-based Non-Resident Indians from their mother country.
- 3.3. The analysis contained in this chapter applies with equal validity to the prevailing conditions in Libya although, unlike the Gulf countries, it does not have a hereditary monarch as its Head of State. A similar situation prevailed in past years in Iraq as well. That country has not yet returned to normal after the Desert Storm operations of 1991.

Common Characteristics of the Gulf Countries

- 3.4. Hereditary monarchical regimes have traditionally administered all the Gulf countries. Even though some of them may have features such as an elected legislature (in Kuwait), or an Advisory Council (in Qatar), the executive and legislative powers invariably vest in the hereditary monarch in each of them. It is the Head of State who appoints Ministers and Advisory Council members. He can, therefore, presumably change them at his sovereign will.
- 3.5. The discovery of vast resources of oil and their exploitation since the late nineteen sixties is the basic and driving force that has been responsible for the phenomenal changes that have taken

place in most of these countries in the last four decades. Saudi Arabia, for instance, is credited with having 25% of the proven oil reserves of the world. Even tiny Oman has 10% of the same kind of wealth. Most of the other Gulf states have enough oil resources to keep their relatively small economies on the path to prosperity. On the other hand, Iraq and Libya have been blessed with considerable reserves of oil.

- 3.6. Where abundance of oil and natural gas is not the moving force, their absence has been compensated in other ways. Dubai, for instance, with little or no oil of its own, has adopted imaginative economic and financial policies such as the establishment of free trade and duty-free economic zones like the Jebel Ali Free Zone, the Cargo Village and its Airport Free Zone. With total exemption also of income and other taxes, Dubai has been able to achieve phenomenal economic development because of the impressive revenues earned by its citizens and the foreign nationals who have made their homes in this free enterprise emirate.
- 3.7. Foreign nationals are not permitted to own any business or immovable property in the Gulf countries. They are required to make a local citizen or entity a majority even if sleeping partner in their enterprises. This has facilitated the task of ensuring that the wealth generated in the region is very profitably invested in the development of world-class infrastructure. Five star hotels, as well as an abundance of duty-free shops and international festivals of all kinds, have led to the existence of an economic miracle throughout the Arabian peninsula.
- 3.8. Though the rulers are adherents of the 'Sunni' sect of Islam, there is a sizeable 'Shia' population in many countries of the region. Among the Gulf countries, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is foremost in adhering to a conservative, austere and doctrinaire form of Islam, referred to loosely as 'Wahabism'. The Saudi royal family has a special position as the 'Custodian of the two Holy Places' of *Makkah* and *Medinah*. With Islam as the state religion, the *shariat* is the basic law in all these countries and Arabic is the only official language. Adherents of other religions are not permitted to build their places of worship. However, group worship in private residences is not prohibited. The conservative social ethos of the Arab world has, however, not prevented the upwardly mobile younger generation from being infatuated by gadgets and artefacts of the industrialised western world.
- 3.9. The entire region is sparsely populated, Saudi Arabia and Iraq being the only Gulf countries with relatively large populations of almost 22 and 23 million, respectively. As for the others, the corresponding figures range from barely half a million to about two and a half. Consequently, with the frenetic development projects in hand, all the Gulf countries are short of manpower to keep their engines of growth in motion. This shortage is all the more endemic in the case of professionals like highly qualified doctors to man their well-equipped hospitals, as well as engineers, architects, chartered accountants, bankers, etc. There is also a tremendous dearth in these countries of highly skilled and even semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Such personnel are essential for the construction of the new housing, commercial and industrial structures now in progress, and for the implementation of numerous other infrastructure schemes.

- 3.10. To meet these demographic and skills shortages, the region has had to import hundreds of thousands of personnel from many other countries. Until the Gulf crisis of 1990-91, there were a large number of Palestinians working in the region. But they have not been allowed to remain there since then. Workers, initially from Egypt, and then India, and from the other countries of the South Asian subcontinent, gladly replaced the Palestinians in increasing numbers.
- 3.11. High-grade professionals in various disciplines, both economic and technical, are in great demand in this region. They are offered very attractive emoluments. The presence of highly qualified Indian experts is valued as it helps the socio-economic development, which is the ambition of all the Gulf countries. These highly paid professionals are also usually fortunate enough to be permitted to take their families with them to the Gulf as their monthly emoluments are more than the variously prescribed minima. Yet they too are forced to send their children back to their home countries or anywhere else as soon as their kids complete their high school education. This is not because most of the Gulf countries do not have adequate facilities for higher education in the English medium. In some of the countries, the reason for this is that adult children are not permitted to continue residing with their parents.
- 3.12. As the Arab nationals prefer employment in well-paid government positions, they have ensured that they would have the assistance of qualified foreign technicians and experts to perform the tasks that they themselves ought to be doing. Consequently, the number of expatriate white-collar workers in public sector undertakings and even in government offices has assumed alarming proportions over the past decade. Attempts are, therefore, now being made by the Gulf countries to train their own people to replace expatriates. Many of the regional governments have decided to fix a ceiling, which is not easily adhered to, for the recruitment of such foreign nationals. At the same time, they have tried to diversify their sources of recruitment in order to ensure that no single country would be able to threaten their national security.
- 3.13. The Republic of Korea used to be a valuable source of supply of skilled workers during the early period of influx of foreign personnel into the Gulf. But it is no longer in this league owing to its own rapid economic development.
- 3.14. There are no ceilings for the recruitment of domestic help such as housemaids, gardeners, cooks, bearers and such other personnel. In fact, there has been an unfortunate mismatch between the large-scale unemployment of such workers in their home countries and the enormous demand for them in the Gulf. The result has been a tendency on the part of employers in some of the countries of the region to treat their domestic help with scant regard for their welfare. Many employees have complained of harsh and unfair treatment. Female employees working as governesses and housemaids are particularly vulnerable in some of the Gulf countries. The situation is further complicated by the fact that in most cases maids and other domestic help are not covered by the local labour laws.

- 3.15. There is a reluctance on the part of most citizens in the Gulf to undertake any semi-skilled, unskilled or menial jobs and a huge foreign workforce has had to be recruited to develop infrastructure and other development projects. There is a wide range of variation in the living conditions and amenities provided by the employers. Some of the less fortunate workers, particularly those who are semi-skilled or unskilled, are accommodated in crowded labour camps in small rooms with four to eight bunker beds. The facilities provided to them such as toilets and kitchens are inadequate and unsatisfactory. Generally, the living conditions and amenities provided by the large corporations are better than the facilities extended by small companies and individual employers. Many NGOs and Gulf returnees emphasise the need for improvement in both working and living conditions of the semi-skilled and unskilled labour.
- 3.16. While, as already noted, the highly paid foreign professionals are allowed to have their families with them, this privilege is not available to other, less privileged foreign workers in the various Gulf countries. Difficult conditions of work, inclement weather, inability to participate in any social or cultural activities, concern for their families back home, and a troublesome feeling of emotional deprivation, have sometimes led to serious cases of mental depression and even suicide.
- 3.17. Citizenship is almost universally not granted by the Gulf countries to foreign nationals. It is only in Oman that aliens are eligible for local citizenship after having resided in the country for 20 years. Exceptions to the general embargo are to be found in one or two countries, where local citizenship is sometimes granted to ethnic Arabs from another Gulf country. In some others, there are a small number of persons of foreign origin who have been granted local citizenship. These are usually the wives of native citizens. Unfortunately, these women can be rendered into 'stateless persons', unless they are themselves from another Arab country, in the event of their being divorced by their husbands.

Present Status of NRIs in the Gulf Countries

- 3.18. The Indian Diaspora in the Gulf consists entirely of 'Non Resident Indian citizens' (or NRIs). A conservative estimate of their present number in the Gulf region, based on figures supplied by the Ministry of Labour (Table 3.1) and by Indian missions in that area (Table 3.2) would be at least 3 million. Their numbers make impressive reading even in terms of their percentage of total population in the countries where they reside.

Statistics collected by the Ministry of External Affairs reveal that the 'socio-economic profile' of Indian migrants to the Gulf has been shifting in a positive direction since the late 1980s. There has been an upward flow of professionals and white-collar workers. Apart from highly qualified persons such as doctors, engineers and architects, bankers and chartered accountants, many white-collar workers are now working in government offices or public sector enterprises. Others are engaged in the gold, electronics, motor spare parts or textiles trade, in the construction industry, or in managing hotels and restaurants. Nevertheless, semi-skilled and unskilled workers

Table 3.1: Estimates of Indian Migrants in the Gulf Region, 1975-1999

Country	1975	1979	1983	1987	1991	1999
Bahrain	1,725	26,000	30,000	77,000	100,000	150,000
Iraq	7,500	20,000	50,000	350,000	NA	NA
Kuwait	32,105	65,000	115,000	100,000	88,000	200,000
Libya	1,100	10,000	40,000	25,000	12,000	20,000
Oman	38,500	60,000	100,000	184,000	220,000	450,000
Qatar	27,800	30,000	40,000	50,000	75,000	100,000
Saudi Arabia	34,500	100,000	270,000	380,000	600,000	1,200,000
U.A.E.	107,50	152,000	250,000	225,000	400,000	750,000
Others	NA	68,000	21,000	21,000	10,000	130,000
Total	266,255	501,000	916,000	1,096,000	1,505,000	3,000,000

Table 3.2: Percentage of NRIs in the total population of main Arab countries in Year 2000

Country	Population	No. of NRIs	% of population
Saudi Arabia	21,500,000	1,500,000	7
U.A.E.	2,800,000	900,000	32
Kuwait	2,200,000	287,600	13
Oman	2,200,000	340,000	15
Bahrain	643,000	130,000	20
Qatar	525,000	125,000	24

still account for about 70% of the Indian migrants; while white-collar workers are in the neighbourhood of 20%, and professionals have a 10% share of the total.

- 3.19. For the professionals and the white-collar workers, life in the Gulf is not exactly a bed of roses. This is because of the peculiar socio-economic profile of the countries of this region. Their contacts and interactions with the local people are limited and mostly of a formal and impersonal nature. But they have enough monetary compensation to induce them to stay on in the Gulf for as long as they can. They are naturally drawn to their compatriots of a similar social status or background. A large number of Indian associations are thus to be found throughout the region, which are based on commonalities such as place of origin, religion, language or profession. During its visits to various Gulf countries, the High Level Committee found that there are as many as a hundred such associations engaged in cultural and recreational activities in Kuwait and the UAE, while relatively smaller numbers exist in Saudi Arabia and Oman. The Indian Art Circle in Kuwait has even constructed an auditorium with a seating capacity of 1,200 persons, in which regular cultural programmes and seminars are organised, and sometimes also performances by invited Indian artists. Similar facilities are provided to the community by Indian diplomatic missions. It may be noted that the ICCR has no Cultural Centre in the Gulf countries.
- 3.20. The professional Indians and some of the white-collar workers are the only ones who qualify to have their families with them due to the high basic income norms set by the Gulf governments. To enjoy such a privilege in the UAE, for instance, the monthly earnings of an NRI must be no less than 4,000 Dirhams (currently equivalent to Rs.48,000), or Dirhams 3,000 plus accommodation. In Kuwait, the qualifying minimum is even higher, namely, Kuwaiti Dinars 400 or Rs.56,000 per month! As such salaries are not beyond the capacity of our professionals. They have taken the initiative of setting up a large number of schools throughout the region which follow the Indian curriculum and thus meet the educational needs of their children. There are no less than 38 such schools in the UAE, 15 in Oman, 9 in Kuwait and 7 in Saudi Arabia which are run and managed by Indian professionals.
- 3.21. As the Gulf region is not very far from India, these well-heeled NRIs are able to make frequent home visits to maintain regular contact with friends and relatives. Their usual complaint is of the rough treatment they receive at the hands of customs officials at the port of entry into India. With easy access to radio and satellite TV channels, they are also in close touch with political and economic developments in the country.
- 3.22. These NRIs pride themselves on their loyalty to Mother India. To substantiate this, they cite impressive figures of their ready response to occasional calamities faced by India, such as the Kargil incursions and the Gujarat earthquake, as also their readiness to invest in special bond issues like the recent India Millennium Deposit bonds. As to the latter, the Committee learned that local banks in the Gulf, as indeed elsewhere also, are not averse to giving loans to prospective purchasers of bonds, even up to 90% of their intended investment. This is done on condition that

the accruing income would be appropriately shared between both the parties involved. On the other hand, some of the persons that the Committee met in the Gulf countries openly admitted that they were not particularly interested in remitting their savings to India. They were under the impression that they could only park their funds in the rupee accounts of Indian banks. They were not willing to do this as the exchange rate of the Indian rupee had been constantly on the decline. It was clarified to them that deposits in an FCNR Account permit NRIs to maintain their deposits in India in various designated foreign currencies and with full rights of repatriation after one year. In any case, it appeared to the Committee that the impressive figures of the annual inward remittances to India from the Gulf are mostly the hard-earned savings effected by our unskilled and semi-skilled labour. For it is the latter who have no other place in which to keep their money, besides the fact that their families back home need every rupee that can be saved.

- 3.23. The living and working condition of the unskilled and semi-skilled Indian workers in the Gulf leaves much to be desired. A majority of these NRIs are young males. More than half their number have invariably gone from Kerala, while the remaining persons have mostly been from Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Over 60% of them have had little formal education. On arrival in their country of destination in the Gulf, they are usually fed and housed in barrack-like tenements and engaged as labour on construction projects. Most of them are unmarried. As recruitment normally takes place for fixed periods and for specific employment, there is a lot of turnover of these migrants, though many of them have been known to have gone back to the region after a while, with fresh job contracts.
- 3.24. An emigration permit issued by the Ministry of Labour is mandatory before unskilled or semi-skilled labourers are allowed to leave the country. However, possibly due to the large numbers involved, the detailed procedures that were being followed in the initial period of migration of such persons to the Gulf were discontinued some years ago. The Ministry of Labour is averse to our consular officers in the countries of emigration involving themselves in scrutinising the genuineness of job contracts on offer, or to satisfy themselves of the *bona fides* of the prospective employers before the grant of the mandatory permission to emigrate. This has only compounded the problems of these emigrants. There are many unfortunate cases of recruiting agents duping illiterate job seekers, often in collusion with the prospective employers. As per prevalent practice, the employee is required to hand over his travel document to the employer on his arrival. The document is kept in the custody of the employer, enabling him to exercise undue hold over the employee and to ignore or alter the terms of employment. This is possible due to the fact that no change of jobs is permitted without local official sanction and this is normally given only with the approval of the employer. Nor can a Gulf employee return home without a similarly obtained exit permit of the local government. The Committee was informed that there were some cases of bogus 'employers' in the Gulf countries who import labour with the sole purpose of hawking them to others at an attractive fee!

- 3.25. Among the hardships suffered by our migrant labour are the following:
- (a) Employment agreements are sometimes ignored on arrival of labour in the Gulf and skilled workers are forced to work as unskilled persons.
 - (b) Employers sponsoring visas for labour sometimes do not receive them on arrival and leave them to fend for themselves.
 - (c) Several months of work may have to be devoted initially to the settlement of debts incurred in meeting the fee extorted from them by their recruiting agents in India.
 - (d) Salaries are often not paid when due; sometimes not paid at all for several months towards the end of the contractual period, resulting in workers being repatriated without full payment of their dues.
 - (e) Work permit fees (*iqama*) are deducted from their meagre salaries.
 - (f) Work hours are usually much longer than the generally recognised 8-hour workday.
 - (g) The employees often do not receive their legitimate overtime dues.
 - (h) Transportation arrangements of group of labourers from their camps to their worksites are often unsatisfactory.
 - (i) Medical facilities are inadequate and, in some cases, almost non-existent.
 - (j) Though a return passage to India after two years in the Gulf is expected to be a standard clause in job contracts, leave is often refused or postponed indefinitely.
 - (k) The mandate of the Labour Courts appears to be restrictive and it does not cover domestic help. The recourse to them is somewhat difficult and not within easy reach of an ordinary worker. Complaints in this regard were brought to the attention of the Committee. It is fortunate that some of our offices in the Gulf, like the Consulate General in Dubai, have been able to establish a regular consultation procedure with the local Labour Ministry officials. This has apparently helped in resolving many labour complaints.
 - (l) Naïve, vulnerable and gullible migrants have sometimes had to encounter dangers of a serious character. According to a report in *India Today* of 9 March 2001, as many as 24 persons from Kerala had been publicly beheaded last year on charges of narcotic smuggling, an offence that attracts execution under local laws.
 - (m) There have been cases of Indian women who were recruited as cooks or housemaids and were driven to desperation because of the ill treatment and molestation that they were subjected to. It appears that unscrupulous agents had managed to send them out under false pretences.

- (n) Young girls are 'given away in marriage' possibly for a price to unknown persons from the Gulf.
 - (o) There are few recreational opportunities for the labour class of our migrants. Concern for their families left behind in India, difficult living and working conditions, insecurity of jobs has often led to depression and melancholia, resulting in suicide in extreme cases. Shepherds and agricultural workers have to work in remote areas with minimal or no contact with the outside world. This often results in serious psychological problems.
 - (p) Workers who want to return to India on completion of their contracts, or due to an unforeseen emergency like sickness or death in the family often find that exit formalities are inordinately delayed.
 - (q) On their return to India, illiterate workers, often with little or no knowledge of the facilities available to them under the Baggage Rules, are often harassed and exploited by the Customs authorities at Indian airports.
- 3.26. During its visit to Kuwait, the Committee found that our Embassy in that capital city had to set up a shelter for distressed women. It had done so with the willing and generous cooperation and financial support of local Indians. These unfortunate women had managed to escape from their employers as they could no longer put up with the harsh treatment that had been meted out to them. They were awaiting repatriation to India as soon as the Embassy was able to obtain exit permits for them, as well as financial contributions from local NRIs to meet the cost of air travel.
- 3.27. Out of a total of 294,000 Indian residents in Kuwait, about 113,000 of them are domestic servants and, of them, about 49,000 are housemaids. In view of the serious problems faced by housemaids, the Government of India had suspended their emigration to Kuwait in June 1999. The Committee learned that this had created some disaffection in Kerala due to the serious unemployment problems in the state. Government is working on lifting the ban and finalising modalities to ensure the welfare of maids.
- 3.28. In a note submitted to the Committee by our Embassy in Saudi Arabia, it was suggested that it is easy to be negative about the treatment of our labour in that country. The Saudi system had changed for the better over the years and employers were now much more sensitive to the needs of their workers, and that allowance must also be made for the fact that living and working conditions in Saudi Arabia are uniquely onerous and irksome. The note went on to state that in 1999 only 1,276 labour complaints had been received by our missions in Jeddah and Riyadh; and that that was a mere 0.08% of the total Indian population in the country. Similarly, only 163 maidservants had complained of ill treatment during the same period, which was a minuscule 1.6% of the 10,000 housemaids in the Kingdom.

Demands and Expectations of the Diaspora

3.29. Owing to paucity of time and of budgetary allocations, the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora was not able to visit all of the Gulf countries where NRIs are to be found. Accordingly, we decided to target only four of them, which either account for the largest number of our expatriates, or where local circumstances deserve special consideration. The countries selected by us for on-the-spot study were Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The innumerable problems and difficulties faced by Indian labour in the Gulf have been enumerated in the previous section of this chapter. What follows are the consequential demands, expectations and aspirations that were voiced to the HLC by various groups of representative Indians. It is the conviction of the Committee that the many complaints and solutions that were presented to it deserve careful consideration and early response as they represent urgent pleas for help and relief from our nationals. Our conclusions and recommendations on them would be found in a subsequent chapter of this report.

Demands and Expectations Pertaining to Migrant Labour

3.30. NRIs of this category expect the Government of India to evolve imaginative policies to safeguard their interests, including the following:

- (a) Effective measures should be instituted by the Ministry of Labour to prevent malpractices by recruiting agents in India. There are many unscrupulous ones among them who exploit the prospective innocent emigrants and extract hefty sums from them as a fee for obtaining the necessary visas and work permits for them. They tempt them with exaggerated and sometimes even false promises of attractive jobs on offer. Very often this is done in collusion with counterparts in the Gulf countries.
- (b) State governments should set up appropriate agencies, even at the district level, to advise prospective Indian workers about their rights and obligations. Such agencies should devise means to ensure that they are not exploited by recruiting agencies in India and by prospective foreign employers. Counselling should be given by such agencies about the dangers of even getting inadvertently used as drug peddlers, as this can attract capital punishment.
- (c) The earlier practice should be revived of requiring our Missions in the Gulf countries to satisfy themselves of the genuineness of jobs on offer and the reliability of the parties offering them. A certified copy of each job contract should be kept in the custody of the relevant Mission. This would enable it to satisfy itself of the fulfilment or otherwise of the contractual obligations.
- (d) Government should negotiate a 'Standard Labour Export Agreement' with all the Gulf countries prescribing such things as a minimum wage, free housing, medicare, a weekly day off, a limit on daily working hours, overtime allowance rates, return air tickets and compensation for on-the-job death or injury.

- (e) The practice of employers taking into their custody the passports of their employees immediately on their arrival should be discontinued. This practice renders our workers helpless. An alternative system which meets the requirements of the local laws should also be explored.
- (f) The consular officers in our Missions in the Gulf countries should pay frequent visits to the labour camps to acquaint themselves with the difficulties faced by the Indian workers.
- (g) The officer dealing with Community Welfare in each Indian Mission should hold periodic meetings with his opposite number in the host country's Labour Ministry to resolve problems as they arise, without entailing recourse to the Labour Courts.
- (h) The tenure of employment is uncertain in the Gulf countries. Our workers should therefore be given financial assistance and otherwise assisted in their resettlement through training and/or alternative employment, in the event of their services being summarily terminated and their being compelled to return to India.
- (i) Employers in the Gulf countries sometimes refuse to comply with the normal system of financing the return fare of their labour to India at the termination of their contractual period. On the other hand, the prospective Indian emigrant has to deposit with the Protector of Emigrants a sum equivalent to the cost of repatriation to India. This amount should be transferred to the relevant Indian Mission, so that it can be utilised in the event that an employer reneges on his responsibility.
- (j) Gulf returnees usually face considerable harassment from the Customs authorities at their port of entry into India. Remedial action should be taken to stop this.
- (k) Airport Users Fees are levied on Indians going to the Gulf or returning from there, while no such fees are charged to domestic travellers at the same airports (Calicut, Cochin and Trivandrum). Other international airports in India do not charge any user fee. There is no reason for such discriminatory treatment.
- (l) The airfares that are charged by Air India and Indian Airlines for a journey from the Gulf to airports in Kerala and other destinations in South India should be rationalised. There is no reason why a flight from Dubai to anywhere in South India should cost far more than a flight from Dubai to Delhi. The distance in the latter case is about 50% more than the former!
- (m) Indian women are being recruited to work in the Gulf as cooks, housemaids, governesses for children, etc. As local labour laws do not apply to domestic help, they often end up becoming victims of physical violence, molestation, and even sexual abuse. Government should devise measures to protect Indian women from such humiliation.

Demands and Expectations of White Collar Workers and Professionals

3.31. The preceding section of this paper has been devoted to a consideration of only the demands and expectations of the labouring class among the NRIs in the Gulf. In this section, the materially different aspirations of our white-collar workers and professionals in this region will be examined. Their aspirations are obviously very different from those of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers. They can be considered under two different categories. On the one hand, these NRIs would like the Government of India to iron out the many difficulties that they have been facing - which are really a result of their socio-economic situation in the Gulf being far superior to what our labourers have had to endure. On the other hand, they have been raising a number of ambitious demands which, in their opinion, India should accede to because of the special services they claim to be rendering for their mother country. What follows is a list of their main expectations, some of which are also shared by persons who are still in India, but are hoping to join their ranks when they can.

- (a) It is difficult for aspiring emigrants based outside Delhi to have their professional degrees and other certificates attested by the Home or HRD Ministries in Delhi. Without such attestation they are unable to secure suitable employment in the Gulf which would be commensurate with their actual academic qualifications. Provision should, therefore, be made for such certification to be given to them in their state capitals or in district headquarters.
- (b) The age limit for recruitment to government jobs should be relaxed for young professionals who have to return from service in the Gulf for reasons beyond their control.
- (c) Many NRIs experience problems in retaining possession of their properties in India because of illegal occupation by squatters. Practical measures should be devised to overcome such problems.
- (d) Separate evaluation centres should be set up for the CBSE examination taken by children in the Indian schools in the Gulf.
- (e) The teaching of Hindi should be promoted in these schools by reducing its course content. The Social Studies syllabus should also be streamlined to make it more relevant.
- (f) Information of facilities available in India for higher education should be disseminated on the internet.
- (g) Admission to professional colleges in India should be facilitated for the children of Gulf residents. In many states they are denied admission as they fail to satisfy the domicile requirement. Their permanent address in India as shown in their passports should be regarded as their place of domicile in India.

- (h) There are few or no facilities for higher education for children in the Gulf countries where their parents reside. Universities in the western world are far too expensive. At present they are required to pay an exorbitantly high capitation fee, and that too in foreign exchange, by Indian colleges that agree to give them admission. This is not fair to the children and corrective measures should be taken to end this practice, especially as the earnings of Gulf-based NRIs are modest compared to their counterparts in the developed countries.
- (i) As institutions like the IITs, IIMs and engineering colleges in India hold joint competitive entrance examinations, arrangements should be made to hold such tests at one or two centres in the Indian missions in the Gulf. It would otherwise be difficult for an aspiring student to come to India to take such tests.
- (j) To overcome the current problems of higher education for NRI children, proposals had apparently been made by some Indians in Dubai and Oman for permission to finance the establishment of professional colleges in India. Institutions of this kind would be primarily, though not solely, for the benefit of NRI children. Such proposals should be favourably considered.
- (k) The UAE authorities should be persuaded to permit the establishment in their territory of higher educational institutions affiliated to Indian universities.

General Demands and Expectations Affecting All NRIs in the Gulf

3.32. (1) Consular:

- (a) All consular work in Indians missions should be simplified and also computerised in order to provide efficient and instantaneous services.
- (b) Consular rules and procedures should be simplified and faster responses obtained from the passport authorities in India.
- (c) The *tatkal scheme* for expeditious processing of consular services should be applied to NRIs in the Gulf without charging higher fees as they do not have ready access to their passports. Their travel documents are retained by their employers and only returned to them at the end of their employment contracts.
- (d) There should be a similar reduction of all consular fees for the labour working in the Gulf.

3.33. (2) Economic:

- (a) Financial instruments such as the IMD Bonds should become an annual feature to facilitate regular inflows of NRI funds. Half of such inflows should be devoted to the implementation of capital-intensive infrastructure projects.
- (b) NRI should be associated with the implementation of such projects. They should also be associated in the building of social infrastructure projects like hospitals and schools.

- (c) Bank frauds should be prevented in respect of FCNR and NRE accounts maintained by NRIs in Indian banks as deposits sometimes disappear without due authorisation!
- (d) In appreciation of the large inward remittance of NRIs and their investment in special bond issues, they should be given special preferential treatment like duty free import of machinery for the setting up of industries, and also for trading in equities such as shares and debentures.

3.34. (3) Political:

- (a) NRIs from all over the world should be permitted to exercise their franchise in Indian elections, both for Parliament and for the various state legislatures.
 - (b) In addition, they should be represented in the Rajya Sabha where two seats should be reserved for them. The President of India should nominate eminent NRI persons to these seats on the advice of the Prime Minister.
- 3.35. The catalogue of demands of the Gulf NRIs is rather long, but it contains many that are eminently reasonable. The HLC's responses to them are contained in the chapter entitled 'Conclusions and Recommendations'.

○