

Number of 'illegals' likely to reach 600,000 in UAE

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A top official of the Ministry of Labour (MoL) has cautioned that the number of illegal worker is estimated to reach 600,000 by 2010 if the proposed National Inspection Authority (NIA) is not established soon by the government.

Obaid Rashid Al Zahmi, MoL Assistant Under-Secretary, told Khaleej Times yesterday, "We need a strong inspection body in the country. During the second general amnesty in 2003 we found out there were about 150,000 illegal workers in the UAE. This figure more than doubled to about 350,000 by 2007. However, about 300,000 of these illegal expatriate workers benefited from the general amnesty earlier this year."

Only the presence of a strong inspection authority, he added, can end this phenomenon in the UAE labour market, said Al Zahmi.

The proposed NIA, he explained, may undertake the main role of carrying out country-wide inspections in cooperation with the municipalities and the economy departments in the emirates.

"According to a detailed study prepared by MoL, the NIA will primarily focus on three major areas: Firstly, to apply and implement the labour law and relevant ministerial decisions; Secondly, to create the public awareness so necessary in this context among workers, sponsors, as well as employers. Thirdly, how best to supervise inspections of labour accommodation and address occupational health and worker safety issues," he explained.