

Orientation must for domestic workers coming to Saudi Arabia

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The domestic labour problems in Saudi Arabia could be greatly reduced if the manpower-exporting countries sent servants who were orientated before their departure, according to Nisha Varia, a senior researcher with the US-based Human Rights Watch (HRW), who concluded a three-week visit to the Kingdom recently.

Varia, who was part of the four-member team, concentrated her study on the problems faced by the female domestic workers in the Kingdom.

She met with the diplomats of the manpower-exporting countries, distressed housemaids, labour ministry officials, officials of the safe houses of foreign missions and concerned officials from government and nongovernmental organisations.

Without disclosing the names of the countries, Varia said it was said that some of these countries were sending domestic workers without proper orientation. 'Some of the maids who come here not only do not know how to handle the household electronic appliances but they also do not know what they are meant for. This can be the beginning of problems between the employer and the employee,' she said.

She added that in such a situation, the employer has the right to reject the employee and repatriate her to her home without harassing or detaining her without paying her monthly salary. 'The monthly salary of the maidservant is a must and her salary cannot be withheld on any ground 'that's her basic right',' she said, and stressed that these domestic servants should be informed of their rights before being sent to take up their jobs. Varia emphasised the need for a work contract between the maid and the employer, which would ensure her basic rights and also indicate the obligations and the rights of the employer toward his employee.

She said that of the labour-exporting countries, the Philippines had developed a durable system of dispatching well-trained domestic workers who can easily fit into Saudi homes due to their prior knowledge of their work environment in the Kingdom.

'They are given proper orientation before they are sent here. The Kingdom is home to a large number of foreign workers. It is in a strategic position to be an example to other countries by adjusting its system based on from its own experiences,' she said.

She added that it will take at least four months for her to prepare a report on the study and she hoped to present it to the Saudi government as soon as she completes it.

She thanked the Saudi authorities for their support and assistance that helped her carry out her assignment successfully in the Kingdom.