### A. Total Stock (Number) of Migrants (as of 2004 unless indicated otherwise)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Bahrain</th>
<th>Kuwait</th>
<th>Oman</th>
<th>Qatar</th>
<th>Saudi Arabia</th>
<th>U.A.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated stock: Migrants in the Country</td>
<td>235,108</td>
<td>1,291,354</td>
<td>577,293</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5,576,076</td>
<td>1,060,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. By visa status: Documented migrant workers*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emigrants/residents</td>
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<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented migrants**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refugees***</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. By sex: Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Major countries of origin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nepal (as of 2003)</td>
<td>4,277</td>
<td>4,798</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>93,279</td>
<td>108,700</td>
<td>44,337</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippines (stock as of 2004)</td>
<td>36,718</td>
<td>91,789</td>
<td>20,461</td>
<td>58,358</td>
<td>994,377</td>
<td>205,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka (stock as of 2004)</td>
<td>15,454</td>
<td>138,555</td>
<td>14,657</td>
<td>80,496</td>
<td>259,928</td>
<td>116,469</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Migrants Abroad</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. By visa status: Documented migrant workers*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emigrants/residents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Undocumented migrants**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refugees***</td>
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<td>b. By sex: Male</td>
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<td>c. Major destination countries</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-resident, temporary, or contract workers
** Includes illegal entrants, overstayed or “jumped” visa, trafficked/smuggled people
*** As defined by the government, or in accordance with the UN refugee convention

### B. Socio-Economic Data and Migration Flow (as of 2004 unless indicated otherwise)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
<th>Bahrain</th>
<th>Kuwait</th>
<th>Oman</th>
<th>Qatar</th>
<th>Saudi Arabia</th>
<th>U.A.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (million, mid-year estimate)</td>
<td>677,886</td>
<td>2,257,549</td>
<td>2,903,165</td>
<td>840,290</td>
<td>25,795,938</td>
<td>2,532,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population living under poverty line</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic growth: real GDP (%)</td>
<td>(3.6)/03</td>
<td>(4.4)/03</td>
<td>(3.3)/03</td>
<td>(8.5)/03</td>
<td>(4.7)/03</td>
<td>(5.2)/03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita GDP: purchasing power parity (USD)</td>
<td>(17,100)/03</td>
<td>(18,100)/03</td>
<td>(13,400)/03</td>
<td>(21,500)/03</td>
<td>(11,800)/03</td>
<td>(23,200)/03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation rate: CPI (%; annual ave.)</td>
<td>(0.4)/03</td>
<td>(1.2)/03</td>
<td>(0.3)/03</td>
<td>(2.0)/03</td>
<td>(1)/03</td>
<td>(3.2)/03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange rate: (per USD; annual ave.)</td>
<td>0.38 (03)</td>
<td>0.3 (03)</td>
<td>0.38 (03)</td>
<td>3.64 (03)</td>
<td>3.75 (03)</td>
<td>3.67 (03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International reserves (USD million; yearend)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign direct investment: actual (USD million; yearend)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor force (million)</td>
<td>0.295</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.92/02</td>
<td>0.28/03</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women as% of labor force</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate (% of labor force)</td>
<td>15 (98)</td>
<td>7 (62)</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>2.7 (01)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.4 (01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average income: urban</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy rate (% of age 15 &amp; above who can read/write)</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net migration rate (net # of migrants per 1,000 population)</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>14.18</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>16.29</td>
<td>-2.71</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual outflow/deployment of MWs</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of women in the annual outflow</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual inflow of MWs</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>% women in the annual inflow</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual migrants’ remittance (USD billion/yr)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate (adult PLHA as % of adult population)</td>
<td>(0.30)/01</td>
<td>(0.12)/01</td>
<td>(0.10)/01</td>
<td>(0.09)/01</td>
<td>(0.01)/01</td>
<td>(0.18)/01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># People living with HIV/AIDS (thousands)</td>
<td>less than 1,000/01</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>(1,300)/01</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># AIDS deaths during the year (adults + children)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Political and Economic Update

The period of 2003 to 2004 saw many Gulf countries taking steps towards a more inclusive political system for female citizens. Many countries appointed their government’s first female minister in this period of time, while Kuwait took concrete action towards securing women’s suffrage and allowing women to run for ministerial positions.

Strides towards a Gulf Countries Union, modeled upon the European Union (EU), continue to be taken, with the possibility of a unified GCC identification card being raised. Citizens of the six member states would be allowed to freely cross borders with such a card.

Bahrain

The past two years have been witness to numerous political activities in Bahrain. In January of 2003, approximately 1,000 protestors gathered to demonstrate against the possibility of an invasion of Iraq. Like other countries in the area, Bahrain offered asylum to Saddam Hussein in March 2003 in an attempt to avert armed conflict. Bahrain’s asylum offer came mere hours before the expiry of the US ultimatum for Hussein to leave Iraq or face invasion.

In October 2003, Bahrain opened the doors of its real estate market to foreign investors. Select parts of the small nation were deemed as open to realty investments from foreigners. Unlike many neighboring nations, Bahrain has few oil reserves, and has consequently had to find alternative methods that will help it remain financially successful.

Following the example of ID card implementation in areas such as Singapore and Hong Kong, Bahrain was one of a few countries to
January
(2) More than 40 people are arrested following riots in Bahrain on New Year's Eve. It is suspected that the riots are due to tensions between local residents and tourists.

(13) Saudi Arabian government calls for reforms at home and in other Arab countries. These include rejecting illegal aggression against other Arab countries.

(17) Hundreds march against a possible US invasion of Iraq in Bahrain

(22) Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah conducts a high-profile visit to a slum in Riyadh, thereafter ordering action against poverty in the country.

(27) Delegation from the international NGO Human Rights Watch visits Saudi Arabia officially for the first time, meeting the interior minister as part of their tour.

February
(3) Saudi Arabian government says it plans to halve the foreign population in the country within 10 years.

(11) 14 pilgrims killed in Saudi Arabia during ceremonies for the Hajj.

(24) Saudi Arabian government allows the formation of a journalists’ association.

March
Plans to cut back on foreign work force in order to ‘Saudi-ize’ the Saudi Arabian economy are implemented.

US invades Iraq, sending events in the region into turmoil. Foreign workers flee Kuwait during the invasion.

April
(16) Torrential rain in Oman kills at least 14 people.

(24) The US military agrees to pull out almost all its troops from Saudi Arabia.

(30) Saudi Arabia’s King Fahd reshuffles his cabinet, but reformers say little has changed.

May
(15) UK military aircraft leave Saudi bases as part of regional redeployment of forces.

(12) Multiple bombings in Saudi Arabia kill at least 34 people.

June
(15) Seven are killed during gun battles in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, between police and suspected militants.

(17) Saudi Arabia approves a stock exchange as part of plans to expand its financial sector.

June
(4) Israeli leaders and Palestinian officials meet with US President George Bush in Jordan.

(4) Qatar’s position as the “new focal point for US military deployment in the region” is confirmed as US President George Bush arrives on a major official visit in the midst of the US invasion of Iraq.

(17) First elections in six years are held in Jordan. The winners are subsequently announced as loyalists to King Abdullah.

July
(5) Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani of Qatar accepts the resignation of his third son Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, naming his younger son Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani as the new heir apparent.

(11) Mecca police chief Saeed bin Abdullah al-Qahtani is named as the new head of the national public security department.

(13) Qatar Petroleum signs a deal with US oil company ConocoPhillips to double exports of natural gas to the United States.

(13) Kuwait’s Emir Shaikh Jabir al-Sabah separates the roles of crown prince and prime minister for the first time, effectively removing his brother Sheikh Saad al-Sabah, the crown prince and foreign minister, from the post.

(31) Jordan’s King Abdullah offers asylum to Saddam Hussein’s daughters Rana and Raghad and their nine children.

August
(4) The newly elected Jordanian parliament throws out new laws that would allow women to initiate divorce proceedings, while simultaneously instituting more severe punishment for so-called “honor crimes”.

(8) Saudi Arabia frees seven western men that had been held for terrorist bombings. The five Britons, one Canadian, and one Belgian were accused of a series of Riyadh-area bombings in 2000 and 2001. Two of the
men had been sentenced to death before their sudden release. Some of the freed prisoners, who all left the kingdom immediately upon their release, would go on to make allegations of torture in the Saudi prisons.

(15) Amnesty International expresses concern over 200 prisoners in Bahrain who are on hunger strike in protest of prison conditions and treatment or prisoners.

(15) A Saudi diplomat is expelled from the United Kingdom. It is alleged the Saudi national bribed a British police officer for information on British residents of Middle Eastern origin.

(27) The US military vacates its last Saudi air base. 200 staff remain at the base to prepare it for handover to Saudi officials after a decade of US use.

(31) Saudi Arabia signs a trade deal with the European Union, in a step towards entering the WTO.

September
(7) Jordan’s parliament rejects a proposal from senate to impose harsher penalties on family members who commit “honor killings” against their female relatives. Two days later, three brothers hack their two sisters to death in an honor killing, raising the toll of honor killings in Jordan to 12 in the year 2003.

(15) More than 200 prisoners and security guards are injured or killed in a fire at Saudi Arabia’s largest prison.

(7) Jordan lifts a bank freeze against Hamas activists and five charities associated with the Palestinian resistance movement.

October
(12) Saudi Arabia signs a USD 2 billion gas deal with a group led by oil companies Royal Dutch/Shell and TotalFinaElf to explore oil in the south of the kingdom.

(13) Saudi Arabia announces its first-ever polls, to be held in 2004, to elect members of municipal councils. Five days later, an election for the year 2006 is announced, which will elect members of the King’s advisory Shuya Council.

(15) Police open fire at a demonstration outside a human rights conference in Riyadh. A total of 154 demonstrators are jailed, although Prince Nayef later issued a statement that the entire protest was limited to 150 people.

(16) Qatar signs a USD12 billion deal with ExxonMobil to export Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to the United States. Royal Dutch/Shell simultaneously announces plans to build an unprecedented plant in Qatar for converting natural gas to liquid.

(20) An Iraqi intelligence officer is sentenced to three years in Bahrain after facing charges of espionage and responsibility for a bombing near a US navy base in Bahrain.

(20) Jordan’s Prime Minister, Ali Abu Al-Raghib, resigns. King Abd Allah appoints his royal court chief Faisal al-Fayiz, to fill the position.

(23) Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Health announces that the kingdom has 6,700 confirmed cases of AIDS.

November
(11) Heavy rains leave 12 dead in the Saudi holy city of Makka.

(14) Hundreds more US troops are to be deployed to Qatar, the base of operations for the US-led invasion of Iraq.

(30) King Fahd of Saudi Arabia gives more authority to the advisory Shura Council in a tentative step towards political reform. The new legislative powers make it easier for the council, which consists of hand-selected and appointment members, to suggest new laws for the King’s approval.

December
(12) Kuwaiti officials intercepted three letter bombs addressed to journalists after a fourth exploded and injured a newspaper editor’s secretary. It is thought that the letters were sent by Islamic extremists in order to frighten outspoken opponents of fundamentalism.

(15) American troops were attacked by unknown people outside of Kuwait City, mere hours after the news of Saddam Hussein’s capture in Iraq. Four US soldiers were injured.

(21) Saudi Arabia signs seven bilateral agreements which will pave the way towards its entry into the WTO.

(24) Saudi Arabia refuses to waive Iraq’s debts, which total more than USD100 billion, while a US-led interim government is in power. Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal stated that Saudi Arabia would discuss the dismissal of any debts only after Iraq had an independently-appointed government in power.

2004
January
(3) The remains of eight POWs buried in a mass grave in Iraq were confirmed to be from Kuwait. The men had been taken
prisoner during the 1990-1991 occupation of Kuwait by Iraq.

(10) Qatar hosts the US-Islamic world forum, an event designed to bridge gaps between western and Islamic cultures. The Emir uses the opening address to urge action on the deteriorating situation in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

(12) Japanese oil company JGC signs a USD 1.6 billion contract for a gas processing plant in Qatar.

(13) Saudi Arabia announces it has found 300 explosive belts and nearly 24 tons of explosives in its ongoing search for terror suspects over the last six months. The number of suspects in custody as a result of these raids is estimated to be in the hundreds.

(13) Kuwait passes a law allowing foreign banks to do business in the country.

(15) Lawyers belonging to the Jordan Bar Association (JBA) call for the immediate release of Saddam Hussein and for the US and UK to face war crime charges instead.

(16) Saudi Arabia’s first Human Rights body, the National Human Rights Association, receives official royal blessing. The group guides itself according to principles laid out in the Koran and Sharia law, and says it will focus on women’s rights.

(19) Jordan’s King Abd Allah meets with Ariel Sharon in Israel to discuss the possibility of a mass exodus of Palestinians into Jordan as a response to the West Bank wall being erected by Israel.

(21) The “Saudization” of jewelry shops in Saudi Arabia begins.

(22) Kuwait’s Foreign Minister Shaikh Muhammad says that Kuwait may ignore some of Iraq’s debts, but will hold Iraq to the billions of dollars in reparations owed as a result of the 1990-1992 occupation.

(26) Bechtel wins a USD5 billion contract to build Qatar’s new airport in Doha. The airport is an ambitious project designed to help transform Qatar into the gateway to the Middle East.

(29) Sixteen Saudi nationals have their diplomatic passports revoked by the US government and are asked to leave the country. The US government claims that the individuals in question were not employed by the Saudi embassy as they had claimed to be.

February

(1) 251 people are tragically killed and 240 injured in a stampede during the “Stoning of Satan” ritual, part of the haj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. Islamic belief dictates that pilgrims who die while participating in hajj automatically enter heaven. Government officials responded to the tragedy by calling for the holy sites to be upgraded to facilitate safety. Saudi Arabia’s profits from 2004’s hajj were 5.2 billion riyals.

(7) Bahrain announces plans for a “smart” ID card to be introduced by June of 2004.

(10) Kuwait orders a probe into whether officials benefited from a deal with Halliburton to provide oil to US military services stationed in the Gulf.

(14) Former Chechen President Salim Khan Yandarbiyev is killed in a car bombing in Doha, Qatar. Qatar passes its first anti-terrorism bill three days later. Two Russians are later arrested in Qatar and charged with the crime. Russia in turn arrests two Qatar nationals.

(15) Jordan charges four men with plotting to commit attacks against Americans in Jordan.

(19) Qatar reaches a deal with Moscow to exchange prisoners. Two Russian security agents were arrested in February for the death of former Chechen president Salim Khan Yandarbiyev. Russia retaliated by arresting two Qatar nationals.

(21) After pressure from overseas allies, Saudi Arabia releases seven of thirteen jailed dissidents, mostly lawyers, writers, and scholars who criticized the kingdom’s oppressive government.
2003 - June 2004

(23) Qatar unveils the world’s largest Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) processing plant.

(23) Saudi passports issued before 2002 are declared invalid. Government officials dismissed claims that the move was linked to the fact that Saudi nationals were involved in the September 2001 terror attacks in New York, saying instead that the government is moving towards electronically readable passports in order to eliminate forgery.

April

(3) The appointed Shura (consultative) Council of Saudi Arabia adopts a series of recommendations to promote freedom of expression in an effort to improve both local media and the kingdom’s image overseas. The council aims to reduce the information ministry’s interference in media and to end outright the practice of banning certain journalists from being published. The Shura Council’s recommendations are passed on to the King, who may decide to act or not act upon them.

(10) Two cars packed with explosives are found in Jordan. It is thought they were to be used to attack US interests in the Kingdom.

(11) Qatar scraps plans to exchange the Russian prisoners held over the assassination of a former Chechen president for two Qataris held in Russia. Instead, the trial of the two Russians begins in Doha.

(14) It is reported that a plotted coup failed in Jordan after the discovery of five trucks from Syria with 17.5 tons of explosives. It is not thought that the Syrian government was involved. King Abd Allah estimates the casualties could have been in the thousands, and that the plotters had wanted to topple Jordan’s government.

(22) A blast levels a Saudi security forces building in Riyadh, wounding at least 113 and possibly killing eight, including an 11-year-old girl. The building, which also houses the state television and information ministries, was attacked when an unknown person drove into it in a car packed with explosives.

(25) In a groundbreaking decision, Kuwait allows a post-operative transsexual to legally change her gender from male to female.

May

(16) Kuwait approves a draft law giving women the right to vote and run in parliamentary elections.

(20) Qatar’s emir signs a new law allowing workers to join trade unions and go on strike. The law will take effect in six months.

(21) Violence erupts at an anti-American protest in Bahrain when police shoot rubber bullets and spray tear gas in order to dispel the crowds. King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa later condemned the police brutality, defending Bahraini’s right to peacefully protest.

(22) OPEC declines to support a proposal from Saudi Arabia to address the rising cost of oil by increasing production to 2 million barrels per day.

(27) Bahrain signs a free trade agreement with the United States which is hoped to be the model for similar agreements between the US and other Gulf States.

(31) A dramatic hostage crisis in Saudi Arabia ended with the deaths of 22 people in a foreign housing complex.

June

(6) King Fahd led the Saudi parliament towards the groundbreaking decision to allow women to obtain commercial licenses. Previous restrictions had meant that women were allowed few career choices, and businesses had to be held in the name of a male relative.

(20) Saudi security forces in Riyadh kill a man who is later confirmed to be the leader of the national cell of Al-Qaeda. Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, and two other men who were also killed, were believed to be partly responsible for the beheading of a US engineer a few days earlier.

(23) Saudi Arabia offers amnesty to resistant fighters and those associated with Al-Qaeda who hand themselves over to authorities within a month.

(27) A Kuwaiti MP submits a bill proposing numerous rights and privileges to be bestowed upon the thousands of stateless Arabs who live in Kuwait. Called “bidoon” (Arabic for “without”), many such people have no right to education, medical care, or official documentation.

(30) The two Russians accused of the Doha murder of a former Chechnyan president are found guilty and sentenced to 25 years in jail, the Qatari equivalent of a life sentence.

Sources:
announce the implementation of a compulsory “smart” ID card scheme for all citizens. The scheme was announced in February 2004, but no launch date was given.

In April 2004, Bahrain’s first female government minister was appointed: Dr. Nada Haffadh was appointed Health Minister by King Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. The following month, a tentative trade agreement was reached with the United States, building on previous trade agreements with Israel and Jordan and providing what was estimated to be a blueprint for American business in the other Gulf States. Bahrain had already enjoyed commerce with the US, exporting USD378 million worth of goods to the US, and importing USD509 million from the US, in the year 2003.

In June 2004, protestors took to the street in outrage over the possibility of amnesty for a well-known torturer. Former police colonel Adil Jasim Flifil was well known for torturing suspects during anti-government uprisings from 1994 through 1999. A decree issued by King Hamad in October 2003 may prevent the case from being heard, as amnesty has been granted in concern to matters taking place before 2001.

Kuwait
For the past five years, Kuwait’s finance minister has projected a deficit, but instead ended up with a surplus due to inflated oil prices. Oil production in the country accounts for up to 90% of GDP. In January 2004 a deficit was again predicted for the 2004/2005 fiscal year, at an amount expected to total USD9.5 billion. A deficit of USD7.8 billion was projected for the 2003/2004 financial year, although a USD6.71 billion surplus had already been recorded by the end of the first three quarters of December 2003.

The unemployment rate is 8% among Kuwait’s 900,000 citizens. It has been suggested that the current standards for job placement with the Civil Service Commission (CSC) are too strict: those without university degrees or equivalents must be 25 years old and married. Despite these strict requirements, MP Abdul Wahab Al Haroun still voiced his dissatisfaction with Kuwait’s reliance on foreign labor: “Kuwait should not be the center providing job avenues for Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, and Filipinos whilst its citizens are jobless.” 94.3% of the native work force is employed in public sector jobs.

Kuwait’s proximity to Iraq meant severe political and economic upheaval in the event of U.S.-led invasion. As the threat of an invasion grew imminent, the presence of warring elements became unmistakable.

In June 2003, the first parliamentary elections since the 1990s were held in Kuwait. Only around 15% of the country’s citizens were eligible to vote, and it is estimated that only 40% of this eligible group actually cast their votes. Shortly after the elections, the Crown Prince gave the role of Prime Minister to his brother, the former Foreign Minister. This is the first instance in the history of Kuwait that the ruling monarch was not also Prime Minister. The new Prime Minister, Sheikh Sabh, is known for having a pro-globalization and pro-privatization agenda.

At the time of the elections, women’s activists staged a simultaneous mock election to draw attention to the issue of women’s suffrage and demonstrate the desire of Kuwaiti women to be part of an inclusive political process. The sustained campaign of suffrage activism began to pay off in May 2004, when a bill outlining women’s suffrage and right to run as ministers was approved by the council of ministers, clearing the way for suffrage to be considered by parliament.

Women’s rights in Kuwait had already taken a small step forward in January 2003 with the introduction of a women’s trading floor in the Kuwaiti stock exchange. Previously, women who wished to invest in shares could only do so through the telephone to a stockbroker, or through a male relative. This new trading floor established a more direct involvement for Kuwaiti women in personal investments and in their country’s trade.

A year later in January 2004, the first “rebuild Iraq” fair opened in Kuwait, perhaps a bit preemptively, as military operations were still ongoing in Iraq. Iran sent 130 firms to the fair, and host Kuwait sent 119.

Oman
Oman’s first female minister was appointed in March 2003. Sheikha Aisha bin Khalfan bin Jameel al-Sayabiyah, 30 years old, was made head of the National Authority for Industrial Craftsmanship. Among her duties is the preservation and promotion
of the indigenous crafts of Oman’s culture. The October 2003 election, however, was generally disappointing for female politicians and their supporters. Two female incumbents were re-elected to the advisory council, but no new women were elected. After the election, the sultan appointed more women to the council, bringing the total number up to eight by November 2003.

The election was in fact a general disappointment overall, despite being touted as historically significant. Previously, a handpicked selection of 25% of Omani citizens were the only legally sanctioned voters. This election marked the first time that all Omani citizens aged 25 or older enjoyed the right to vote, raising the percentage of eligible voters from roughly 7.5% to 50% of the population of Oman. Despite these changes, however, it is estimated that only 30% of those eligible to vote actually did. This apathy is thought to spring from the fact that elected councilors are only allowed to advise the sultan on issues concerning education, health, and service, and not the more pressing issues of war and foreign policy.

In November 2003, the sultanate claimed that its standard of living was on the rise. Data from the Economy Minister showed a 3.1% rise in the average per capita income. Oman’s government embarked on a five-year plan in 2000, the same year it joined the WTO, to reduce the economy’s dependence on both oil and migrant laborers. An ongoing program of “Omanization” is therefore in effect. Oman’s economy is shifting from that of oil and gas to agricultural and fishery exports.

Qatar
2003 saw Qatar’s government striking numerous deals with multinationals to exploit its natural gas reserves, the third largest in the world. In late 2003, Qatar made multi-million deals with ConocoPhillips, Shell, and Exxon-Mobil, and unveiled plans to create the world’s largest plant for converting gas to liquid fuel. In 2004, Qatar also made a historic gas-processing deal with Japan’s JGC Corporation.

In August 2003, the emir replaced his heir apparent. Without giving a specific reason for his actions, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani accepted the resignation of his third son, Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, and appointed his fourth son, Sheikh Tamim as the new crown prince.

In January 2004, the city of Doha hosted the second annual US-Islamic World Forum to discuss the gaps between Islamic and American culture, and address the ongoing conflicts in Israel and Palestine. Shortly after, Qatar assured an American representative that it would forgive the bulk of Iraq’s debt. A representative of the UAE shortly followed suit.

In February 2004, the death of former Chechen President Salim Khan Yandarbiyev in a car bombing in Doha prompted Qatar to pass its first “anti-terror” law. The law stipulated life in prison or execution for people found guilty of “founding, organising or managing a group or organisation to commit a terror act.” Other provisions of the law detailed punishments for those aiding and abetting a terrorist group. The law granted clemency for conspirators who told authorities of a plot before it was carried through.

Yandarbiyev’s death sparked a diplomatic conflict with Russia when two Russian nationals were arrested in Qatar and charged with his murder. Shortly thereafter, two Qatari nationals were arrested in Russia. Although tentative agreements were reached for the respective authorities of each country to release the other’s nationals, it was only Russia who released the Qatari in March, three weeks after their arrest. The Russians were put on trial in Doha and on 30 June 2004, were found guilty and sentenced to 25 years each.

In May 2004 it was announced that the government of Qatar would allow workers to join unions and participate in strike actions starting November 2004. This would make Qatar the third Arab Gulf State to legalize such labor rights.

In June, leaders from both Qatar and Saudi Arabia met with Kuwait’s Prime Minister Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in an attempt to heal a rift between the former two countries. Saudi officials took offense to a 2002 Al-Jazeera television program (broadcast from Qatar) in which members of a discussion group criticized the Saudi royal family.

Saudi Arabia
As the country with the largest oil reserves in the world, Saudi Arabia continues to rely heavily on the resource to fuel its economy, with exports accounting for up to 90% of its GDP, according to the Economist.
On May 12, 2003, an explosion ripped through three housing compounds in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The work of an armed extremist group, the explosion killed 90 people and injured 194. Although the housing compound seemed to be targeted for being the residence of numerous expatriate professionals, the tragedy also claimed the lives of three Filipino migrant workers and injured two Sri Lankans. Such tragic events are often severe reminders of the large numbers of migrant workers who are “invisible” to media coverage of conflicts until they are injured or killed. Indeed, the numbers of migrant deaths and testimonials from conflict areas reveal the systematic use of migrant labor for “3-D” work.

Many migrant workers are in fact living and working directly in conflict zones. For many, the job opportunities provided by situations such as military occupation, for example, seem more important than their personal safety. Afghanistan is a prime example. Migrant workers from many countries have flocked to the area, knowing that rebuilding will bring new jobs. However, many fail to take into account the very real threat of violence involved.

In June 2004, 11 workers from China were killed by insurgents while constructing a road in northern Afghanistan. According to Al-Jazeera, there are “hundreds” of Chinese construction workers in Afghanistan, including at least 120 in the town of Kunduz, near the site of the attack. Despite the attack, the Chinese government declared it would not remove Chinese nationals from Afghanistan.

Following the US invasion and occupation, Iraq too became a popular destination for Asian migrant workers. Many US military bases subcontracted their driving, cooking, or construction jobs to migrant workers from India, the Philippines, Nepal, and other countries. The reduced salaries — and security — of migrant workers in comparison to Americans performing similar functions in Iraq testifies to the institutionalized racism that places migrant workers in the role of “cheaper labor” performing the same tasks. The San Francisco Chronicle, for example, revealed that while an American truck driver in Iraq may earn up to USD10,000 per month and be accompanied by armed security guards in an armored vehicle, an Indian driver may earn USD500 and receive little to no protection. According to an analyst of the private security industry: “There are different calculations made about security, which means different levels of protection, white-collar versus blue-collar, Western versus non-Western… These may be decisions about whether people live or die, but they are still business decisions.”

In May 2004, the story of two brothers from India who ended up in exploitative conditions on a US military base in Iraq provided a particularly telling example of the disturbing issues surrounding migrant work and subcontracting. According to The San Francisco Chronicle, the Abdul Aziz brothers, who believed they would be working as butchers in Kuwait, were instead driven into Iraq, where they washed dishes and cleaned toilets on an American base for less than half the salary they were originally promised. Their passports, and those of their Filipino, Sri Lankan, and Indian co-workers, were seized and held by their employing agency.

Shortly thereafter, in July 2004, The Washington Post reported the story of the brothers’ co-worker, Dharmapalan Ajayakumar, who also believed he was originally destined for Kuwait. According to Ajayakumar, also from India, workers’ basic rights and comforts were ignored. While soldiers at the camp drank bottled water, the workers were given tap water with chlorine tablets, drunk from used bottles which had been picked out of servicemen’s trash.

Intelligence Unit (EIU) of London. Gas is also proving to be a lucrative natural resource, with proven reserves of 224 trillion cubic feet in the kingdom. In June 2003, Saudi Arabia granted a historic exploration deal to Royal Dutch/Shell and Total to further develop gas trade. The Saudi Arabian government also signed bilateral agreements with the European Union in August 2003, in what was seen as a bid to be looked upon favorably for future induction into the WTO.

In terms of the local economic environment, it was announced in June that Saudi women would be able to apply for business licenses in their own names. Previously, a woman wishing to open a business had to do so through a male relative. Officials claimed that such steps towards a more inclusive society would “help battle terrorism”. The moves were also aimed at lowering the unemployment rate, which was officially put at 10%, but was actually estimated to be around 20%. In September 2003, the government also announced plans to privatize water and power resources in up to 21 separate projects.

Saudi Arabia also earned USD1.38 billion from
Areas of Conflict

Workers slept in sweltering heat in tents at night and had to work twelve- to sixteen-hour days. Most insulting of all, Hindu and Muslim workers were told to both handle and eat beef and pork.

The American base on which the Abdul Aziz brothers worked had contracted to Kellogg, Brown & Root (KBR), a subsidiary of the Halliburton corporation. Gulf Catering, the company that placed the Abdul Aziz brothers, was a “second-tier” contractor — that is, KBR contracted services to Gulf Catering through a third company. The Abdul Aziz brothers ended up in Iraq when the India-based broker who took their deposit and deployed them to Kuwait actually placed them with Gulf Catering. In all, Indian workers were employed via five different levels of subcontractors and employment agents.

When faced with armed insurgencies, as in the case inside Iraq and Afghanistan, occupying forces often claim that they prefer to hire migrant workers to ensure that insurgents from among the local population will not infiltrate and sabotage operations. Yet these claims of security concerns do not seem to hold up to scrutiny given the non-transparent, unaccountable, and largely invisible process by which migrant workers are hired and placed. It seems clear that the main motivation for hiring migrant workers is the opportunity for greater exploitation, underpayment, and greater control over labor, facilitated by racism.

This is certainly one of the stronger motivational factors in Israel, where 300,000 migrant workers from mostly Eastern European and Asian countries are favored for the “3-D” jobs as an alternative to hiring Palestinians. However, with unemployment amongst Israelis rising, a campaign to expel undocumented foreign workers from Israel has picked up momentum. Israel’s Finance Minister Benyamin Nettanyahu coldly summed up the situation: “It is not true there are no jobs. There are 300,000. They just need to be vacated for Israelis.”

In 2003, a repatriation campaign targeted Israel’s migrant workers, of whom 65% are estimated to be undocumented. Shortly after the September 10 “deadline”, arrests began. In 2004, Al-Jazeera reported the story of Melinda, a Filipina single mother whose work as a maid in Israel was the sole source of income supporting her four children. Having worked for the same family for seven years, Melinda was confident that her employers were telling the truth when they said they would renew her visa. Instead, the morning her visa expired, police burst into her bedroom, dragged her out of bed, and arrested her for deportation. The police had been tipped off by Melinda’s employer, who owed her USD4,000 in back wages, plus unpaid overtime. This is just one story resulting from the wave of anti-migrant sentiment, which has seen official bodies encouraging Israelis to report migrants to a hotline. As a result, a culture of fear and seclusion has sprung up in Israel’s once-lively migrant communities.

Migrant workers are called “foreign” workers, because one cannot be legally considered a “migrant” in Israel without being Jewish. As a result, many long-term foreign residents have no hope of ever making Israel a permanent home. Children of migrant workers, who have been born and raised in Israel and have a thorough understanding of and respect for the religious culture, are denied the right to be citizens of the only home they have ever known. Many whose migrant parents hail from two different countries have no official citizenship and don’t know where they would go were Israel to deport them.

foreign pilgrims attending 2004’s hajj. However, a tragic hajj stampede in February 2004 left 251 pilgrims dead and as many injured.

Politically, developments occurred amidst the continuing complex geopolitical context of Saudi Arabia. The country’s governing family, the House of Saud, has long been a favored ally to western elite interests as a result of its strategic position in the world, and has also faced heavy criticism from human rights groups for its record towards its own citizens. Torture, arbitrary arrests, the denial of basic human rights, women’s rights, and workers’ rights have all been cited by human rights groups, and has led to the governing family being increasingly challenged by the country’s own population.

In March 2003, Saudi Arabia’s first human rights organization received the official royal blessing, granting it legitimacy in the eyes of the Saudi government. The National Human Rights Association has 41 members and hopes to bring reform to the kingdom.

Nonetheless, the Kingdom continues to keep a tight rein on human rights protesters and dissidents. Shortly after the official sanction of the first human
rights organization, 13 activists were arrested for circulating a petition calling for a constitutional monarchy. In September 2003, dissident Abd al-Aziz al-Tayyar was arrested at his home minutes after conducting a telephone interview with the Al-Jazeera network. Al-Tayyar criticized the suppression of citizens by the kingdom shortly before he was taken to al-Hair political prison in Riyadh.

In October 2003, police opened fire upon protestors demanding reforms outside the first human rights conference to be held in the kingdom, eventually arresting 271 people. Further protests days later led to around 50 more arrests. In December 2003, 36 participants in the protests, members of a London-based organized opposition group known as the Movement for Islamic Reform (MIRA), were sentenced to 55 days in prison for their part in the demonstrations. The relatively light sentences handed out to the dissidents, however, surprised many observers, including the group’s own members, and were seen as a sign that the Saudi governing elite could no longer rely on suppressing peaceful resistance to their rule.

The initial arrests occurred one day after the kingdom announced it would hold its first ever elections, in a bid to show it was serious about allowing political reform. It was later announced that the promised elections, to decide members of the advisory council, would be held in three years’ time, and that women would not be allowed to run for seats. This was unsatisfactory to many both in the kingdom and abroad, as in December, the UN criticized the state of Saudi Arabia’s policies, calling for democracy. Tiny and tentative moves away from absolute monarchy were made in November 2003, when some marginally increased powers were given to Saudi Arabia’s (unelected) Shura council by monarch King Fahd.

Aside from political opposition, a wave of armed attacks by anti-government groups in mid-late 2003, including the bombing of a housing compound for Arab expatriates which led to 17 people being killed,
aimed to topple the ruling family. The attacks led the government to launch a draconian crackdown against “suspected militants”, but anti-government violence continued despite these measures. In October 2003 a list of the “most wanted” militant suspects was printed publicly, and cash rewards were even offered for information leading to the arrest of militants. The attacks and subsequent government repression killed and injured many in the country.

The attacks against the Saudi government were admittedly spurred by and found increased support after the US invasion of Iraq, particularly during such periods as March 2003, when it became clear that Saudi Arabia was allowing the US military to use two airports located in the north of the country, and that joint exercises were being conducted by Saudi and US troops. After initial justifications by government officials, such cooperation was eventually halted, and US troops were moved out of Saudi Arabia.

In May, allegations of torture in the US military base and detention center in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba surfaced after Saudi nationals being held there were released. Following Egypt’s lead, the Saudi Arabian government also decided not to attend June’s G8 summit in the US in response to the US’ policies in the Middle East.

UAE
The United Arab Emirates also appointed its first female minister during this time. Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi was appointed Minister of Economy and Planning during a February 2004 cabinet restructuring. President H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan combined two or three ministries into one larger ministry in several instances. For example, the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources was merged with the Ministry of Electricity and Water to become the Ministry of Energy. Further ministries were given additional responsibilities and authority. The Ministry of State of Supreme Council Affairs now handles GCC affairs as well.

It was estimated that the UAE’s economy grew by 8% in real terms in 2004. The UAE’s economy received the unprecedented amount of USD30 billion in oil revenues, yet oil is estimated to account for only one-third or less of the UAE’s GDP. Investment in Dubai’s real estate is more than 20% of GDP. Because Abu Dhabi holds 90% of the UAE’s oil reserves, the other six emirates have been forced to pursue different economic policies and growth strategies. Trade, light manufacturing, and transportation are all thriving industries. Jebel Ali, the UAE’s main port, offers “free zones” which guarantee 100% foreign ownership and exemption from local taxes, tariffs, and regulations. Jebel Ali hosts more than 2,200 foreign companies.

Migration Update
One major issue present in 2002-2003 was how Gulf States residents, including migrant workers, would be affected by the war in Iraq. Many receiving countries in the Gulf implemented evacuation plans, and several sending countries announced intentions and concrete protocols to repatriate nationals working in the Gulf.

While many residents and citizens of Gulf States had good reason to be fearful of terrorist attacks or the possibility of fleeing from war, some found themselves quite literally in the center of the action. Migrant workers desperate for livelihoods began to trickle in to Iraq and Afghanistan, some coerced by poverty, and some the victims of deception (see box story on migrants in conflict areas, p.136).

While the economies of the Gulf region offer attractive incentives to migrant workers, the fact remains that severe human rights abuses against migrant workers occur on a regular basis. Joe Stork, the director of Human Rights Watch for the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENA), said “Peoples in this region have yet to enjoy their political and civil rights... from [a] human rights perspective, there is a lot of work to do in this region... the problem of migrant workers is a serious problem in this region; the issue of domestic workers especially.”

Bahrain
Bahrain, the smallest of the Gulf States, boasts a population of around 650,000. Of this number, it is estimated by the BBC that 250,000 are migrants. Foreigners comprise up to 62% of the workforce.

In May 2003, Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) established the Migrant Workers Group. The group, set up with government approval, was created out of the desire to protect the rights and interests of migrant workers. Calls to the BCHR hotline from
migrant workers seeking help at this point were mostly concerning the issue of underpayment or late payment. Some migrants, however, claimed that they had not been allowed to return home, in some cases for as long as ten years.

As in many other Gulf States, domestic workers in Bahrain are not protected by labor laws because it is difficult to determine their working and non-working hours. BCHR has requested that the government provide equal protection to domestic workers under Bahraini labor laws. BCHR’s demands were summed up in this statement: “The contract should clearly define rights and duties of all parties, especially migrant women, and they should be aware of the living and working conditions. Modifications in the contract should be agreed upon by all parties or should be considered a crime, punishable by law. Complain of harassment from women should be seriously taken on by the government, without negligence.”

Happily, the government has responded in kind. At a BCHR conference in June 2003, vague but hopeful promises that domestic workers would soon be covered under Bahraini labor law were made by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Dr. Majeed Al-Alawai. Concurrently, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, the Assistant Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, made a public statement that abusing migrant workers “is unacceptable to Bahrain and its people,” and falls under the category of trafficking in persons. An awareness campaign, including television ads, was launched at this time in an attempt to curb the abuse of domestic workers.

Kuwait
Kuwait’s proximity to Iraq, and the recent memories of its invasion by Iraq, created a situation fraught with both fear and tension for the estimated 1.5 million migrant workers in Kuwait.

In February 2003, Filipino President Gloria Arroyo paid a visit to Kuwait to reassure the 60,000 Filipino migrant workers there that they would be fully protected and supported by their government in the case of war. Many Filipino workers declared their intentions to stay despite the looming threat of neighboring war. In March, Saudi Arabia offered to help evacuate up to half of the resident Filipino migrants out of Kuwait. The Saudi embassy in Kuwait was prepared to grant emergency transit visas to those wishing to depart Kuwait through Saudi border towns. At this time, the Philippine government also set up evacuation centers in both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The Saudi government also agreed to extend the offer of six-month emergency transit visa to the estimated 160,000 Sri Lankan migrants in Kuwait.

The Indian government denied that many of the 311,000 Indian migrant workers in Kuwait were fleeing from the possibility of an invasion in Iraq. Air India, however, added more flights in the runup to the US-led invasion of Iraq. Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan all vowed to evacuate nationals from Kuwait in the case of war.

In the same period of time (March 2003), several Sri Lankan workers who had been affected by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 finally received compensation for their troubles. The amount of roughly USD3,000 was awarded to each complainant by the United Nations Compensation Commission. The stories of their experiences during the 1990 invasion of Kuwait raised fears for migrant workers currently in Kuwait and emphasized the relevance of war to migrant workers. Some of the Sri Lankan workers told of fleeing in the night, taking refuge in the desert without enough food or water, and having their money stolen from them. Others claimed that while the compensation from the UN was welcome, they had lost much more than that in the invasion. Some had put all their savings from years of working abroad into Kuwaiti banks, losing everything in the Iraqi invasion.

In November 2003, Al-Jazeera publicized shocking allegations of rape issued by Filipinas living and working in Kuwait. One incident concerned nine teenage boys who allegedly kidnapped and gang-raped a Filipina. Three unidentified suspects were also accused of abducting two Filipinas from Kuwait City and raping them. Appalling charges were also brought against three police officers who were accused of raping a Filipina who had come to the police station seeking help after running away from her employer.

A huge victory for domestic workers occurred in May 2004 when Kuwait’s lawmakers convened to draft new laws specifically designed to protect these workers. Previous laws had omitted domestic workers because of the nature of their employment. The new laws would guarantee a minimum wage, a weekly rest-day, working hours,
and the payment of overtime.

**Oman**
The Omanization of the work force continued, with the goal of all cashiers, drivers, security officers, and retail and grocery workers being Omani by the end of 2003. A further quota of tourist restaurants being Omanized by 2007 was announced.

Two firms were taken to court by large groups of migrant employees, mostly Indians, for non-payment of wages in 2003. A lawyer representing some of the workers in one case said that the company had asked unpaid employees to return to work, because the company needed to fill orders in order to earn the money to pay arrears. Because the workers refused to return to work without their backpay, it was expected that the court case could drag on as long as 46 months.

**Saudi Arabia**
In October 2003, it was announced that Saudi Arabia had 6,700 confirmed cases of AIDS, of which only 1,509 were Saudi nationals. In 2003, Saudi Arabia relaxed a 15-year ban on recruiting laborers from Bangladesh. Bangladeshis, along with Indians and Pakistanis, now make up the largest numbers of the foreign community in Saudi Arabia. The Indian community in Saudi Arabia is the largest outside India. Large amounts of migrants from Egypt, Sudan, the Philippines, and Indonesia can also be found in the kingdom. 71% of workers in Saudi Arabia are non-Saudi, according to the ILO.

Like many Gulf States, however, Saudi Arabia is actively campaigning to reduce dependence on a non-local workforce. In February 2003, the Saudi government announced plans to put a 20% cap on foreign migrant workers and their dependants. To achieve this, an active program of Saudization is in place in the kingdom. The government is aiming to reduce the number of foreign taxi drivers to 50% by the end of 2003 and 20% by the end of 2004, down from 90% at the time of scheme’s initial implementation in January 2003. In March, jewellery and gold shops were Saudized, with an estimated 20,000 jobs being taken from foreign nationals to provide jobs for Saudis. A draft bill was approved at this time to give Saudis the sole right to engage in the wholesale and retail industry.

A pivotal moment in the struggle for migrants’ rights in Saudi Arabia came with the publication of a

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Although funds transfers are readily available for migrant workers, many still use the hundi system to remit money.
report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in 2004. Titled “Bad Dreams: Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Workers in Saudi Arabia”, the report outlined through numerous interviews and case studies the rampant abuse of migrants’ human rights in Saudi Arabia. The title referred to a statement made by a former migrant worker from the Philippines, who described his experience in Saudi Arabia like “a bad dream”. By highlighting the ban on slavery enacted in the kingdom in 1962, HRW created a running metaphor which compared migrant work in Saudi Arabia to enslavement. Because Saudi Arabia has long been off-limits to human rights groups, the report was compiled mostly from interviews with repatriated migrant workers or their families.

The findings of the HRW report read like a laundry list of every conceivable human rights abuse at every stage of the migration process. In the country of origin, many migrants had to take out crippling loans, or sell property, in order to pay the broker fees to go abroad. Many justified this temporary setback, convinced they would soon earn back the money working abroad. They would be given a job title and a reasonable wage by a recruiter, and sign a contract in their home country. Upon arrival in Saudi Arabia, however, migrants could often expect to have passports immediately confiscated, and to be told abruptly and unapologetically that they would be performing drastically different duties at severely reduced wages—sometimes half or less than what was originally promised. Migrants reported that they were forced to sign new contracts in Arabic, which they couldn’t read. Often they were placed in a job contrary to what their iqama (work permit) allowed them to do. Some were fooled into buying “free visas” from agents in their home countries, which they believed could allow them to work in any occupation, when in fact the kingdom does not issue or recognize such visas.

One Indian man recalled being sent to the remote desert to act as a shepherd when he had expected to be a driver in a metropolitan area. Another migrant would bring him food and water every other day. The winter nights were so cold that his drinking water froze; the heat in summer so intense that his body hair was singed off.

Once on-site, many migrants reported the all too common litany of insults: underpayment, delayed payment, inadequate accommodations, inadequate food or water, and physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse. Many female migrant workers working as domestic workers, beauticians, or seamstresses reported quite literally being imprisoned in their place of work, locked in for years at a time. Some were not even given basic necessities such as food, and because they were locked in, had to find sympathetic people (such as male co-workers) to buy supplies for them. Most former migrant workers interviewed had come back home from working in Saudi Arabia with little, if any, money to show from all their time abroad.

Some of the more shocking revelations from the report described Saudi Arabia’s judicial system and its policy of capital punishment. According to the report, deportation jails are overcrowded and filthy. Prisoners fought for a fair share of the insufficient amount of food supplied to them, and many spent weeks in the same clothing. Many had to sleep on the floor without blankets, and toilet and shower facilities were pitifully inadequate and unsanitary. Random violence could be expected from jailers. There were reports of being held without charges, or of confessions extracted through torture. Female migrants in particular could be jailed for “witchcraft” or for having an “illegal” pregnancy, even if that pregnancy was a result of rape or sexual assault.

Most disturbing, however, was the fact that some migrants were sentenced to death but did not know the outcomes of their trials until they were brought to execution. Staff from the consulates or embassies of the migrants’ home countries were rarely informed of death sentences concerning their nationals, and consequently, family members of the condemned prisoners rarely knew of the sentences either. Family members interviewed by HRW recall receiving letters informing them that their loved one had been executed weeks or months earlier. One case concerned a 27-year-old mother of two who was patiently waiting for her husband to return home to India from Saudi Arabia. Her family could not find the words to tell her he had been accused of heroin smuggling and beheaded four years prior.

UAE
In 2003 it was estimated that migrant workers accounted for 75% of the 2.8 million population of
the UAE, and that migrant workers accounted for 98% of the private sector workforce. Respective embassies of sending countries estimate that there are 800,000 Indians, 300,000 Bangladeshis, and 160,000 Sri Lankans working in the UAE. Other migrants come from other Asian countries, African countries, and Arab countries. Emiratization is increasingly becoming a likely phenomenon, although specific timelines and proposed sectors have not yet been announced.

In January of 2003, the UAE granted a four-month amnesty to all illegal workers, the first since 1996. Undocumented migrants had the option of leaving the UAE without the fear of the fines normally charged from overstayers (USD27 for every day over stayed). During the amnesty, irregular workers were instead barred from the UAE for a year, unless they could afford to pay their fines, in which case they could re-enter sooner. So many people took advantage of the amnesty that a one-month extension was added, creating an additional grace period until the end of May 2003. A second grace period was granted on 3 June 2003, until the end of June. 100,000 undocumented migrants were estimated to have left the UAE, one-third of the number projected by authorities at the start of the amnesty in January.

Overall, the situation for migrant workers in the UAE is fairly strict, but improving. The labor law does not cover government employees, agricultural workers, and domestic workers. This creates enormous opportunity for unscrupulous people to exploit and abuse migrant workers in these fields. For example, workers’ jobs are not protected if they remove themselves from a workplace which they consider to be unsafe (although the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs can force an employer to reinstate workers who are fired for refusing to work in unsafe conditions). Migrant workers can be blacklisted by employers for “non-fulfilment” of contract, and will similarly be punished for seeking to transfer their sponsorship to another employer. Migrants blacklisted in this way can be banned from the UAE workforce for six months. Those exempt are highly skilled professionals, those with master’s or doctorate degrees, and women who are sponsored by their husbands to live and work in the UAE; consequently, few of the migrants performing the “3-D” work discussed in this report qualify for exemption.
Through late 2003 and early 2004, the regulations concerning the six-month “waiting period” for an employment visa transfer went through several evolutions in rapid succession. As a result, *Gulf News* reported that many migrant workers unwittingly broke the law out of confusion over the many changes in visa transfer rules. Finally, in May 2004, it was proposed that the waiting time to change an employment visa be reduced to just 30 days.

Laws similarly changed for migrants who entered the UAE on a visit visa and found work while in the UAE. Previously, many migrants exiting and re-entering the UAE in order to validate new work visas make return trips to Iran’s Kish Island. Some were abandoned there by sponsors and languished in a bureaucratic limbo. However, following a tragic airliner crash in which many migrants re-entering from Kish Island were killed, the process of applying for and validating a work visa became less complex. In February 2004, policies were changed so that migrants who had found work while in the UAE on a visitor’s visa would not have to leave and re-enter the country in order to validate their working visa.

Overall, the legislation concerning migrants’ rights in the UAE has made several improvements over the time period in question. In July 2003, the practice of a UAE national “sharing” an employee with another national was outlawed. Those employing workers who they have not sponsored will be fined AED10,000 (USD2,723), and those who are caught sharing or borrowing a domestic worker will be fined AED50,000 (USD13,614). Migrant workers who are in the employ of someone other than their sponsor will be deported and banned from re-entry for one year. Following numerous strikes and marches from unpaid construction workers employed at different, unrelated firms, the Labor Ministry enforced an August 2003 decision that construction and maintenance firms employing 50 or more people would be subject to regular audits to prove that employees were being paid. The law previously applied only to firms employing 200 or more. The Labor Ministry announced in September 2003 that it would enforce ILO standards for workers’ accommodation. A law proposed in December 2003 aimed to make it clear that the responsibility of paying a recruitment fee was solely that of the employer. The government also outlawed the widespread confiscation of migrants’ passports by employers. There were reports that the Ministry of Labor, in conjunction with the police department, took action against employers that continued to flout the law after receiving complaints from migrant workers.

In 2004, steps were made towards granting more coverage to domestic workers, as it was declared their contracts would soon be legally binding documents to which employers would be held. In May of that year, a proposal was submitted to the president to increase workers’ rights, in an aim to control the growing problem of under- or non-payment, visa-switching, and environmental hazards. Finally, in June 2004, a new ruling outlined the sliding scale of bank guarantees that firms of various sizes would be forced to ensure for each worker. Companies employing more than 1,000 workers must pay AED3,000 (USD817) for every new employee, plus a bank guarantee of AED500,000 (USD136,140) for all workers. Medium sized companies of 101 to 1,000 workers must pay AED300,000 (USD81,684) for all workers, and small companies of 1 to 100 employees must pay a AED3,000 (USD817) bank guarantee for each worker.

The government showed a willingness to enforce labor laws as well, blacklisting 549 companies in July 2003 for labor law violations which took place in the previous six months. The companies were blocked from applying for work permits and sponsorship transfers for migrant workers. 176 of the companies were shortly reinstated after rectifying their abuses.

Legislative improvements aside, health care in the UAE remains inaccessible to most migrants as a result of prohibitive costs and increased bureaucracy. On 1 August 2003, health service fees for those without a health card increased. It was vowed by medical professionals that those unable to pay the new rates would be denied further medical care. The rate change applied to ongoing care as well, so that women who fell pregnant before the rate increase was announced would still pay higher rates for pre-natal care and delivery occurring on or after 1 August. Further making healthcare a luxury for migrant workers was the May 2004 announcement that all non-resident workers, regardless of whether or not they held a health card, would be required to pay the new fees for medical services. New fees ranged from AED30 (USD8.17) for an HIV/AIDS test to AED
2,500 (USD680) for a delivery in a shared room, and upwards. A Pakistani worker interviewed by Gulf News echoed the feelings of migrant workers in the UAE: “Most [migrant workers] in Dubai earn about Dh4,000 [USD1,089], and it is already so difficult to meet living expenses. How could we afford such high medical costs?”

Some of the sending countries of migrants have taken steps to ensure better representation and protection of their nationals in the UAE. Nepal announced in November 2003 that it would open a mission in the UAE after repeated requests since 1995 from Nepalese migrants. Sri Lanka began requiring employers of Sri Lankan nationals to provide insurance covering occupational injuries and, in cases of death, repatriation and familial compensation. Employers must submit insurance details before they can sign a work contract. In addition, Sri Lankans working in the UAE’s garment industry are also made to register their contracts with the UAE’s Sri Lankan missions as a safeguard against sudden factory closures.

The families of migrant workers stationed in many receiving countries often go many years without seeing the workers, as legislation and costs are prohibitive. The situation for migrant workers in the UAE is no exception. It is possible for workers to sponsor family members to live in the UAE, but the requirements are strict enough that most migrant workers are unable to do it. A minimum salary of AED3,924 (USD1,068) is required. If the employer supplies accommodation or a housing allowance, the minimum salary is lowered to AED2,941 (USD800). Since only a male worker’s salary can count towards the required minimum salary, a married couple whose combined earnings meet the minimum are still ineligible to bring children or other family members to the UAE if the man’s income is less than the required minimum.

Migrants, women and children in particular, suffer from continued trafficking into the area. Young, non-citizen boys are trafficked mainly for use as camel jockeys. Young boys used as camel jockeys face serious dangers from falling from the camels, or from malnutrition as they are underfed to keep their weight low. While the problem of child trafficking continues to persist, the government of the UAE has taken concrete measures towards ensuring that camel jockeys are at least 15 years of age and meet minimum weight requirements, and that they are in the UAE legally. The Pakistani Embassy in Abu Dhabi estimates that 125 Pakistani boys who were trafficked for use as camel jockeys were repatriated during 2003, while the Bangladeshi Consulate estimates between 120 and 150 Bangladeshi boys repatriated.

In October 2003, the death of a 14-year-old Somali girl working as a domestic worker highlighted another face of child trafficking. The girl suffered burns over 85% of her body after a cooking gas cylinder exploded in her employer’s residence, later dying in hospital after a two-month long coma. Five months after her death, her employer was fined AED10,000 (USD2,723) — but only for hiring the girl from another employer without changing her visa first.

Women trafficked into the area are mostly promised jobs as domestic servants before being forced into prostitution to “repay” the fees of their trafficking. In June 2004, the remains of three male Pakistani migrants were found in a mountainous border region. Two died of starvation while the third died of gunshot wounds. It is suspected that all men were victims of traffickers. “Free” visas continue to be a problem to migrant workers, who often pay exorbitant sums to traffickers only to find themselves with an illegal visa. Late in 2003, Dubai’s police department created an Anti-Trafficking in Persons department to address and combat the problem.

Approximately 85% of prisoners in Abu Dhabi’s six prisons are foreigners. Reports of conditions in the jail sound promising: men are separated from women, juveniles from adults, pre-trial detainees from convicts, and political or security prisoners are kept separate. NGOs are allowed to pay visits to jails, but in 2003 no such visits occurred.

References:
2. Al Jazeera Online, 2003-2004
3. BBC Online, 2003-2004
4. Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC)
Endnotes


8Salama, Samir, “Large firms must pay Dh 3,000 for every worker employed,” Gulf News, 10 June 2004.