

Bahrain 'safest in the Gulf'

● Manila relaxes unrest-linked travel restrictions

BAHRAIN has been listed among the safest countries in the Gulf by the Philippines government – despite continuing to impose a ban on tourists travelling here.

Restrictions were imposed by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) in Manila amid safety concerns during the height of last year's unrest.

The government lowered its crisis level alert following the lifting of the State of National Safety, but the ban has remained in place.

This is despite Bahrain now being declared a safe destination for overseas workers by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA).

By SANDEEP SINGH GREWAL

It was included on a list of 32 countries found to be compliant with standards on the protection of the rights of foreign workers, which have bilateral agreement or arrangement with the government on the protection of the rights of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and are a signatory or have ratified multilateral labour conventions.

Some of the other "safe" countries include Algeria, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Botswana, China, Iran, Sri Lanka, Syria, Swaziland, Yemen, South Africa, Argentina, the US, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, France and Canada.

Philippines Embassy officials in Bahrain welcomed the new move, saying it reaffirmed that Bahrain was safe for OFWs.

"This is certainly a good sign that shows Bahrain has its labour policy in place and is now listed among other countries that are safe for Filipino workers," he said.

The official stated each country was reviewed by POEA based on the prevailing situation and reports sent to them by embassies.

However, he said the ban on Filipino tourists visiting Bahrain would continue because of the restrictions imposed by the DFA based on safety concerns during the height of last year's unrest.

"Filipinos with new job contracts in Bahrain and returning workers with valid work visas or residence permits can travel to Bahrain," said the official.

"In addition, individuals can get visit visas only for blood relations."

The official said Bahrain continued to be rated under alert level one by the DFA, where Filipinos are urged to actively monitor developments in the country.

"This alert level has actually resulted in a decline in the number of undocumented

workers since last year because of the ban on tourists visiting Bahrain in place and the pre-departure inspections of Filipinos," he said.

The official said the tight screening of Filipinos leaving the country was necessary to prevent human trafficking and illegal recruitment.

"Even cases of human trafficking have come down because of the DFA alert one," he added.

More than 45,000 Filipinos live in Bahrain.

A ban on all travel here was imposed by the POEA

in February last year and Philippines tightened its emigration rules as a result of the unrest in which four Asians were killed and a Filipina was attacked.

It was partially lifted on July 5 last year following a recommendation by the embassy that the situation had returned to normal.

Only Filipinos with job contracts, existing workers returning from holiday and parents and children of Filipino residents can presently travel to Bahrain.

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■ The K Hotel in Juffair yesterday launched its pool party in the presence of more than 30 guests. The monthly event will feature live band and raffle prizes. Above, hotel general manager Volker Mandlow, third from right, human resources manager Abbas Mohammed Rahimi, second from right, and marketing and communications manager Ayla Ginete De Leon, right, with guests at the launch. Right, the hotel's music band performs.



■ More than 30 people yesterday attended an orientation workshop on communication skills and activities of the Indian Chartered Accountants Bahrain Toastmasters Club held at the Al Namal building in Salmaniya. The event, Toastmasters 101, was organised in co-operation with Area 76 Toastmasters and was attended by members. New Toastmasters were briefed on jargons, public speaking and other topics. Above, members attend the orientation session yesterday. Right, Toastmaster Ranauq Desai speaking during the event.



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