

FOREIGN WORKERS WHO FLED LANGUISH AT KUWAIT BORDER

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Body

Hundreds of immigrant **workers** who **fled** from the fighting between Iraq and Iran are camped in the open at this **border** post, waiting for a way to get home.

These refugees are Pakistanis, Indians and Bangladeshis, mostly laborers who were part of the great migratory wave that brought thousands of **workers** from the subcontinent to the Middle East to work in the oilfields and at huge construction projects associated with oil.

None of the refugees have much money and most of them are illiterate. They dashed here, from nearby Basra in Iraq. A few managed to pack some clothes into cardboard suitcases.

AN-A transistor radio saved

Karam Singh, a bricklayer, was lucky enough to carry his transistor radio so he has become a popular man here. Another bricklayer, Prem Singh, lost his passport and identity papers when Iranian planes made rubble of his Basra home last week.

Abdali is about 80 miles from the city of **Kuwait**. There is no vegetation, only sand. Water has to be ferried from an oasis at nearby Rozteen. It was possible today to watch Iranian and Iraqi jets chasing one another in the brilliant blue sky. Occasionally, the ground would shake as a bomb fell across the **border** in Iraq. The sky last night sparkled with antiaircraft fire, mortars and tracers from warring planes. Few of the refugees in Abdali slept much last night.

They have seen their livelihood go up in flames. and some had friends among the 25 who died in the Iranian bombing raids in Basra.

A slain friend left behind

"How will I face my friend's family?" asked Sahdev Singh. "We left Punjab together two years ago. Now I am going back alone while my friend Hari lies dead."

"When will we go home?" asked Uday Jeet, a carpenter who was working on a jetty near Basra when Iranian planes struck. "Why is it that they have gone but not us?"

The "they" he was talking about are the 155 Americans, 250 Britons and hundreds of Japanese, South Koreans, Poles, Italians, Yugoslavs, West Germans and Frenchmen. They were technicians who worked in petrochemical plants and at construction sites in Basra and although they **fled** here too, they did not stay. Their governments or employers had arranged it so that most were aboard planes headed for home within hours of leaving Iraq.

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But for men like Karam Chand and Mohammed Ahmed there were no such arrangements. Their employers, Japanese and Indian subcontractors, do not even have representatives in Kuwait, so these refugees have no one to turn to for assistance.

Today, when Surbirjit Singh Chhatwal, the Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, visited the area, he was besieged by hundreds of men who pleaded for help in getting home.

Food and Blankets Supplied

"It is heart-breaking," Ambassador Chhatwal said, as he walked around the encampment. He had arrived with a physician, Dr. P.S. Sahni, and a man named Narinder Singh, a wealthy business executive in Kuwait who has brought food, blankets and essential supplies to the refugees over the last few days.

"It's the least that can be done for you," the tall Sikh said in Punjabi, the native language of the majority of the men. "I want to assure you that every effort is being made to get you home."

Nearly a thousand other Indians and Pakistanis left Kuwait early this morning for their homes, their passage paid for by relatives or employers. Most of them were men with more education and better jobs than those who are still at Abdali.

They have been assured by representatives of their respective governments that they will be able to get aboard planes for home over the next few days, but no specific date has been given and so some of the refugees, at least, are skeptical.

Graphic

Illustrations: Map of Kuwait

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