

# 'Easy Exit' scheme for illegal residents in Bahrain

Bahrain's 'Easy Exit' scheme offers opportunity for illegal residents to go home without paying fines

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Manama: Foreigners staying illegally in Bahrain have been given a grace period to leave the country without paying their accumulated fines and penalties, the interior ministry has said.

The "Easy Exit" opportunity covering all expatriates who did not renew their residence permits and wanted to go home voluntarily, started on Tuesday, Shaikh Ahmad Bin Eisa Al Khalifa, the assistant undersecretary for nationality, passports and residence, said.

"I call upon all expatriate workers staying illegally to benefit from this scheme by approaching the Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) and by arranging with their embassies to rectify their status and leave the Kingdom voluntarily," Shaikh Ahmad said. "All the other illegal expatriates who entered the kingdom on visit visas should approach the General Directorate for Nationality, Passports and Residence to benefit from this pardon."

However, Shaikh Ahmad stressed that the exceptional pardon was not an amnesty and that it was limited to the waiving of the fines and penalties accumulated for overstaying in the country.

Ali Radhi, LMRA chief executive officer, said that a stringent inspection campaign targeting mainly street vendors would be launched after the pardon period.

"I call upon employers and business owners to cooperate with the campaign to regulate the labour market by not dealing with illegal expatriate workers in the kingdom and to encourage illegal workers to avail this pardon opportunity," he said.

Slightly more than 50 per cent of Bahrain's 1,050,000 people are foreigners, but there is no official figure about the number of those staying illegally in the country.