

Qatar considers scrapping sponsorship system

Qatar is seriously considering doing away with its controversial sponsorship system, its prime minister said

- By Habib Toumi, Bahrain Bureau Chief
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Manama: Qatar is seriously considering doing away with its controversial sponsorship system, its prime minister said on Thursday.

Bahrain and Kuwait are the only other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to cancel a system that the Bahraini labour minister has likened to modern-day slavery.

Under the system, foreigners cannot enter or leave the country, or take up or switch jobs, unless they get the approval of their sponsor.

Local and international rights groups have repeatedly and harshly criticised the system that is widely supported by powerful business communities in the GCC states.

"The government is now seriously looking into the sponsorship system, and in light of the latest developments, the issue requires some legal and other measures," Shaikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabor Al Thani told reporters in Doha. "The government is studying very carefully the issue to ensure that the rights of Qatari citizens, employees and those who come to work in Qatar are all preserved. There is a crucial need to ensure there is balance between all rights," he said.

Speaking at the launch of the new headquarters of the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), Shaikh Hamad said that several important changes have occurred in the sponsorship system in the last two years." They are part of the procedures to scrap the system, but the whole process takes some time and cannot happen overnight."

Shaikh Hamad, who is also his country's foreign minister, said that it was highly significant for Qatar to "look after its domestic affairs".

"There is no doubt about the politicisation of numerous issues for specific purposes, so there is a need to promote awareness among citizens and foreign residents," he told Qatar News Agency (QNA).