

Imagine a world without Filipinos

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MUHAMMAD Al-Maghrabi became handicapped and shut down his flower and gifts shop business in Jeddah after his Filipino workers insisted on leaving and returning home. He says: "When they left, I felt as if I had lost my arms. I was so sad that I lost my appetite."

Al-Maghrabi then flew to Manila to look for two other Filipino workers to replace the ones who had left. Previously, he had tried workers of different nationalities but they did not impress him. "There is no comparison between Filipinos and others," he says. "Whenever I see Filipinos working in the Kingdom, I wonder what our life would be without them."

Saudi Arabia has the largest number of Filipino workers — 1,019,577 — outside the Philippines. In 2006 alone, the Kingdom recruited more than 223,000 workers from the Philippines and their numbers are still increasing. Filipinos not only play an important and effective role in the Kingdom, they also perform different jobs in countries across the world, including working as sailors. They are known for their professionalism and the quality of their work.

Nobody here can think of a life without Filipinos, who make up around 20 percent of the world's seafarers. There are 1.2 million Filipino sailors.

So if Filipinos decided one day to stop working or go on strike for any reason, who

would transport oil, food and heavy equipment across the world? We can only imagine the disaster that would happen.

What makes Filipinos unique is their ability to speak very good English and the technical training they receive in the early stages of their education. There are several specialized training institutes in the Philippines, including those specializing in engineering and road maintenance. This training background makes them highly competent in these vital areas.

We have to remember that we are very much dependent on the Filipinos around us. We could die a slow death if they chose to leave us.

When speaking about the Philippines, we should not forget Filipino nurses. They are some 23 percent of the world's total number of nurses. The Philippines is home to over 190 accredited nursing colleges and institutes, from which some 9,000 nurses graduate each year. Many of them work abroad in countries such as the US, the UK, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Singapore.

Cathy Ann, a 35-year-old Filipino nurse who has been working in the Kingdom for the last five years and before that in Singapore, said she does not feel homesick abroad

because "I am surrounded by my compatriots everywhere." Ann thinks that early training allows Filipinos to excel in nursing and other vocations. She started learning this profession at the age of four as her aunt, a nurse, used to take her to hospital and ask her to watch the work. "She used to kiss me whenever I learned a new thing. At the age of 11, I could do a lot. I began doing things like measuring my grandfather's blood pressure and giving my mother her insulin injections," she said.

This type of early education system is lacking in the Kingdom. Many of our children reach the university stage without learning anything except boredom.

The Philippines, which you can barely see on the map, is a very effective country thanks to its people. It has the ability to influence the entire world economy.

We should pay respect to Filipino workers, not only by employing them but also by learning from their valuable experiences.

We should learn and educate our children on how to operate and maintain ships and oil tankers, as well as planning and nursing and how to achieve perfection in our work. This is a must so that we do not become like Muhammad Al-Maghrabi who lost his interest and appetite when Filipino workers left his flower shop.

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