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FILIPINOS IN GULF LOOK TO DUTERTE

DOHA: With more than a million Filipino workers spread across Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar, it is small wonder that President Rodrigo Duterte has undertaken a week-long tour of the Gulf. The migrants have been drawn to the region by a combination of factors—drug crime and corruption back home, and the job opportunities and wages on offer in the Gulf. Duterte's deadly war on drugs may have brought him notoriety in the West, but it has earned him the admiration of many Filipino expatriates anxious for change at home.

"I would happily say I'm a 'DDS', a Duterte Diehard Supporter," Harry Ramos, a senior mechanical engineer based in Doha for 12 years said. "His platform of government is simple, and he's got the political will to do it." Duterte's populist agenda went down well with the Filipino diaspora in Qatar, where he received almost 80 percent of the expatriate votes cast in last year's presidential election.

Ramos, 58, speaks happily about how Filipinos returning home no longer have to bribe officials to get through customs, thanks to Duterte's crackdown. Life though has turned sour for some in the Gulf, especially in Saudi Arabia where 760,000 Filipinos live, and



RIYADH: Members of the Filipino community react as they attend Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's meeting in the Saudi capital. Duterte is on a three-day visit to meet Saudi leaders for investment, trade and support for overseas Filipino workers in the Kingdom. (Right) Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud (right) and Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte review the honor guards in the capital Riyadh. — AFP



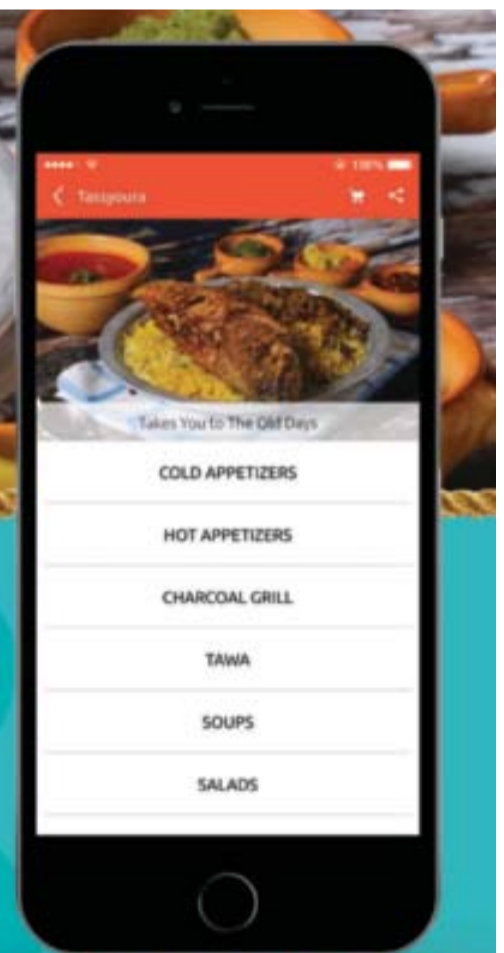
they will be looking to the president to defend their interests in his talks with the region's leaders. A collapse in oil revenues since 2014 has prompted subsidy cuts and delays in major projects.

More than 5,000 Filipino workers were

repatriated from Saudi Arabia last year and most are still waiting to be paid. Duterte held talks with Saudi King Salman on Tuesday and was in Bahrain for talks yesterday. Today, he flies into Qatar. "He will discuss with these leaders matters relevant to the welfare and

dignity of the Filipinos living in their countries, as well as explore avenues of economic and political cooperation," Philippine Assistant Foreign Secretary Hjayceelyn Quintana said.

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