

Housing needs urgent attention, say JEF participants

JEDDAH: KHALIL HANWARE ARAB NEWS STAFF

Participants of the Jeddah Economic Forum (JEF), which ended yesterday after a three-day run, generally felt that the annual event was “interesting and highly informative.”

“Although the forum’s theme was housing, what’s strange is that a rich country like Saudi Arabia should face the housing problem, as was indicated by some speakers,” one of them said when asked to give his reaction to the forum’s three-day deliberations held at the Jeddah Hilton. “Instead, the Kingdom with its ever-growing population should focus more on urban development,” he remarked. Adnan H. Mandoura, secretary-general of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI), which organized the forum, said: “This year’s forum tackled important issues as usual. The housing issue is something that needs to be solved in the interest of citizens,” he said, referring to the forum’s central theme. “Speakers discussed the housing issue from different perspectives and we learned a lot from their experiences. I hope we will benefit from the discussion and succeed in finding a lasting solution to the problem.”

Asya Al-Ashaikh, founder and CEO of Tamkeen, said: “The fact that this year’s forum focused on housing shows the importance given to the problem. The discussion showed a collective acknowledgement from every corner that the issue needs to be tackled as early as possible.”

Djordjija Petkoshi of Takamul, the national project for corporate social responsibility (CSR), said: “The forum was very impressive. Housing is a global problem. Saudi Arabia is really trying to come out with a strategy to tackle this problem in a more holistic way.”

Antonious Hanna, deputy general manager of Cooperative Insurance Consultancy based in Jeddah, who was attending the forum for the third year in a row, said: “It’s a good opportunity to see overseas speakers at the forum, whose expertise in various fields could benefit the Kingdom. All countries in the world are facing the housing problem, including Arab countries, because of their rising population. I believe that without proper government planning it will be difficult for any country to tackle the housing problem. The forum discussion shows the intent and seriousness of the Kingdom to find a long-term solution to meet the requirements of the people.”

Tawfik Alwan, managing partner, Emesus, said the forum tackled housing, one of the most important issues. It’s a good step. However, he said: “I believe the shortage of housing could turn into crisis if the problem is not solved in all its urgency. I am happy that many businessmen, institutions, and government agencies came together during the forum to discuss the issue.”