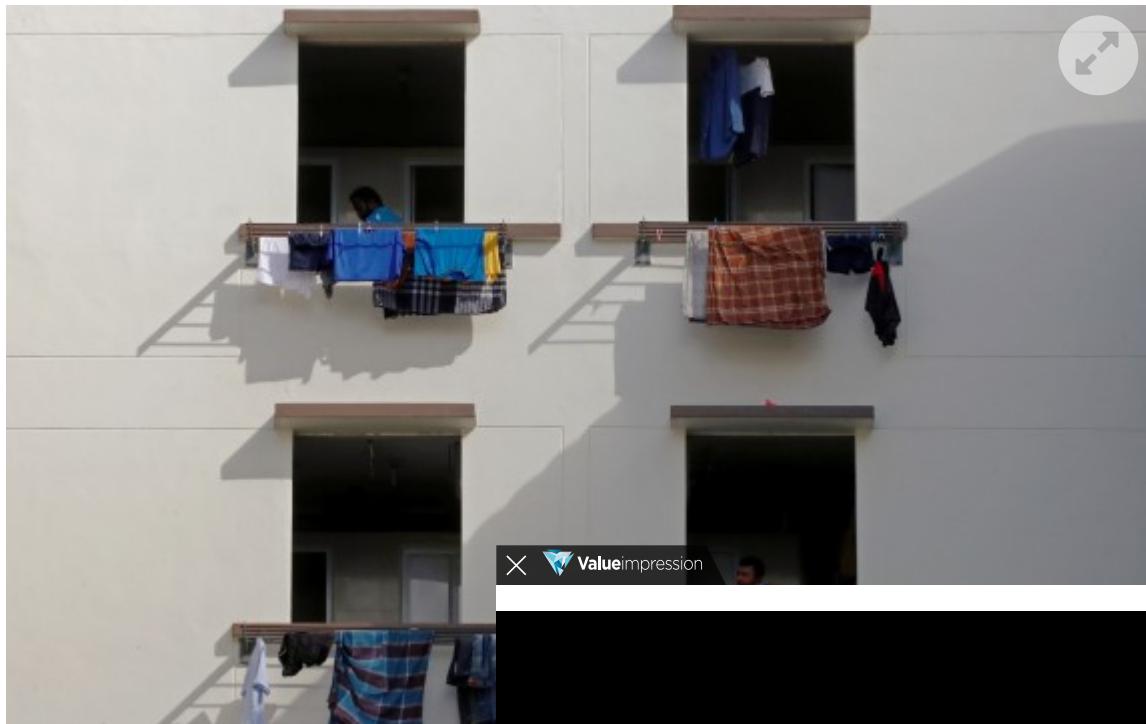


Home » Country

07:35 PM, June 01, 2020 / LAST MODIFIED: 08:00 PM, June 01, 2020

Covid-19 fallout: Rights bodies worried repatriated migrants may slip into poverty



FILE PHOTO: FILE PHOTO: Migrant workers hang laundry outside their dormitory during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in Singapore May 20, 2020. REUTERS/Edgar Su



Star Online Report

Rights bodies across Asia and Middle East fear migrants will face debt bondage and their families will slip into poverty if millions are repatriated without compensation during the coronavirus pandemic.

They demanded a transitional justice mechanism to address grievances, claims and labour disputes of repatriated workers who have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic.

Migrant Forum in Asia, Lawyers Beyond Borders Network, Cross Regional Centre for Migrants and Refugees, South Asia Trade Union Council, and Solidarity Center made the call in a statement yesterday.

The issue is significant for Bangladesh because about one crore Bangladeshis work mostly in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Bangladesh government has already started repatriating some migrants, but urged the countries not to send them without compensation worth six months-salary if they are to be terminated from the job. There has been no progress in the matter yet.

The statement said Covid-19 pandemic has severely impacted millions of migrant workers, many have experienced job loss or non-payment of wages, forced by employers to take unpaid leave or reduced wages or have been confined in poor living conditions.

The regional bodies said countries have begun repatriating workers without giving thought to their predicament.

"Millions will be repatriated to situations of debt bondage as they will be forced to pay off recruitment fees and costs, despite returning empty handed," the statement said.

Under the above conditions, repatriation poses additional challenges because without proper controls, employers might take advantage of mass repatriation programs to terminate and return workers who have not been paid their due compensation, wages and benefits, it said.

It said states will become complicit if millions of workers return without their earned wages or workplace grievances being heard.

"This is a gross violation of labour rights on a large scale. Wage theft will account for millions of dollars to the detriment of workers and the benefit of businesses and employers who will be exempted from any accountability, even if states and banks extend a helpline to reestablish themselves and adjust to the new normal."

The regional bodies demanded a transitional justice mechanism for the migrants who have lost their jobs. The mechanism needs to guarantee that all repatriated workers with legitimate claims are able to access justice and some kind of compensation, it said.

Safeguards must be put in place to ensure that migrants are able to pursue their cases post return, the statement said.

"Access to legal advice and support, facilitating power of attorney procedures, and easing requirements for in-person testimony and court appearance or appearance in front of a tribunal/grievance mechanism are paramount," the rights bodies said.

The states should require employers and businesses to keep all employment records, including payroll, employee lists, and hours worked and allow workers to take copies of their records with them.

"The millions who are and will be repatriated will impact the development trajectory of families for whom a single migrant worker is a source of hope for a better future for generations to come.

"If [the wage issues are] unaddressed at this time, we run the risk of forever delinking the patterns that connect migration to development, as the stories of the lives of migrant workers will bear witness to this mass injustice for years to come."

Stay updated on the go with The Daily Star Android & iOS News App. [Click here](#) to download it for your device.

The Daily Star Breaking news alert on your phone

Grameenphone:

Type **START** <space> **BR** and send SMS it to **22222**

Robi:

Type **START** <space> **BR** and send SMS it to **2222**

Banglalink:

Type **START** <space> **BR** and send SMS it to **2225**

Find more information on SMS subscription

LEAVE YOUR COMMENTS [COMMENT POLICY](#)

TOP NEWS

Thousands of beds for Covid-19 patients lying empty

Dr Senjuti Saha appointed member of WHO's Polio Transition Independent Monitoring Board

70,000 people marooned as new flash floods hit Lalmonirhat

Flood situation worsens in Sunamganj, Sylhet

3 brothers of Cumilla local councilor held over sand trader murder

Bangladeshi youth shot dead inside Indian territory

[VIEW MORE](#)

MORE FROM COUNTRY



Human hauler driver killed in Bagerhat road crash

LATEST FROM STAR LIVE



[WATCH] One woman's initiative to feed thousands in Bangladesh



Manobik Haat for the small businesses lost to Covid-19

