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Migrants can slip into poverty

Rights bodies warn of Covid-19 fallout

241

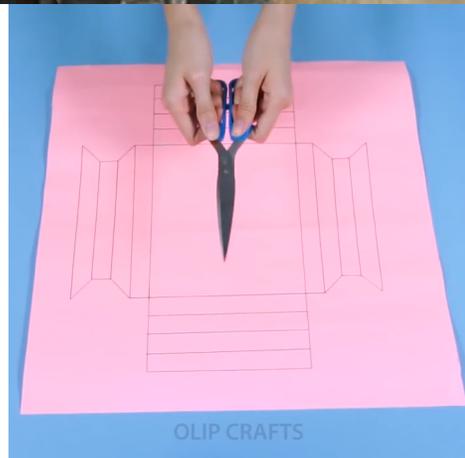
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Migrant workers deserve better care during this tir

Diplomatic Correspondent

Regional rights bodies across Asia and tl
repatriated home without compensatio
indebtedness and their families may sliq



They demanded a transitional justice mechanism to address the grievances and claims of the 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 call came at a time when millions of migrants are facing joblessness due to the ongoing lockdown in many countries to check the spread of coronavirus.

The issue is especially significant for Bangladesh as about one crore Bangladeshis work mostly in the Middle Eastern and the Southeast Asian countries. Bangladesh government has already started repatriating some migrants, but it urged the destination countries on several occasions not to terminate and send back the workers without compensating them with six months' salary. But there has been no response from the destination countries so far.

The statement said the Covid-19 pandemic has severely impacted the lives of millions of migrant workers in different countries as many of them have experienced job loss or non-payment of wages. Some of them were forced by employers to take unpaid leave or work at a reduced wage.

The regional bodies said countries of destination and origin have begun repatriation procedures of these workers without giving a thought to their predicament. Many countries have been portraying the repatriation to be inevitable.

"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.

There are additional challenges involved in the repatriation as some unscrupulous employers might take advantage of the mass repatriation and terminate their worker without appropriate compensation benefits, the statement said.

"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," it said.

Safeguards must be put in place to ensure that migrants can pursue their claims even after their return to the home countries, the statement said.

The states should ask 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.

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