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## Bangladesh should raise voice to realise unpaid dues of its migrant workers

*Experts and advocacy groups say*

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Representational image of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia. File Photo: Reuters

**Bangladesh, being a major labour-exporting country, should raise its voice to realise the unpaid dues of the country's migrant workers, many of whom have been repatriated arbitrarily in wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, migration experts and advocacy groups said today.**

A global campaign called "wage theft" has been taking shape for quite some time, they said during a webinar, suggesting Bangladesh to have comprehensive documentation on migrant workers' grievances.

Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) organised the webinar on "The other face of globalisation: Arbitrary return of Bangladeshi migrants and their unpaid dues".

The webinar was the first of a series of similar events, said organisers.

Migration expert Prof CR Abrar said civil societies across Asia vehemently started raising their voice against the "wage theft" campaign.

"We need to be part of it," he said, terming the unpaid dues of migrant workers as "lost remittance".

William Gois, coordinator of the Migrant Forum in Asia, a regional civil society group, said it is unfortunate that the states were not documenting the learnings of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As countries of origin begin the repatriation processes, it is important that they document grievances of the repatriated migrant workers, he said.

RMMRU Chair Prof Tasneem Siddiqui said recently they, along with Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), had interviewed 50 migrants who returned from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Malaysia because of the pandemic.

Those who returned from Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar alleged that they had unpaid dues ranging from Tk 9,500 to Tk 5 lakh, she said, presenting the outcome of the survey.

Prof Tasneem said 39 out of the 50 respondents said they were picked up by police during the pandemic and later repatriated.

Five migrants returned voluntarily, while three others returned on leave and three with help from their employers, she said.

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Rights activist Aroma Dutta, also a lawmaker from the reserved seat of the parliament, said a formal letter from the ministries concerned should be issued regarding workers' unpaid wages, especially addressing "lost remittance" and a previous proposal of six months' wage for terminated workers.

Ahmed Munirus Saleheen, secretary to the expatriates' welfare ministry, said repatriation of migrant workers during Covid-19 pandemic is a global phenomenon.

Many workers travel with "free visa" for their jobs overseas. As a result, it becomes difficult to realise compensation for such workers, he added.

Every migrant worker deserves due respect and honour because the country's economy largely depends on their hard-earned remittance, said MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam.

She stressed the need for sending higher skilled workers overseas to avoid exploitation.

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