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RMMRU Study Finds Bangladeshi Migrants Forcedly Returned Amid COVID-19

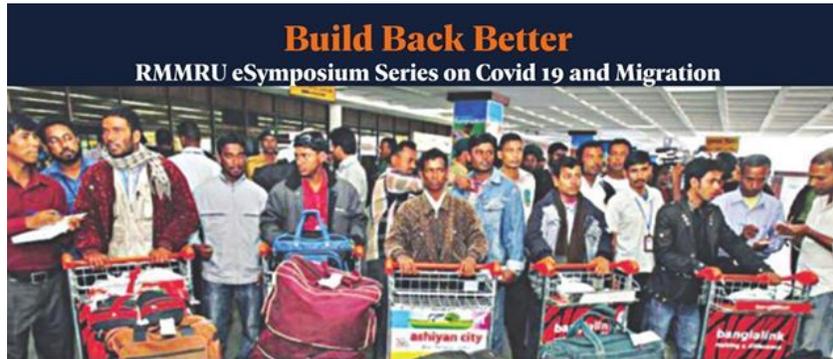
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The other face of globalization
**Arbitrary return of Bangladeshi migrants
and their unpaid dues**

Presenter



Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui
Founding Chair,
RMMRU

Amid COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladeshi migrant workers have been forcedly sent back home by some destination countries, according to findings of a study done by Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit.

The returnee migrants of Bangladesh have been deprived of getting due wages at the host countries, said the RMMRU revealed on Monday

About 75 per cent of the returnee migrant workers said that they were picked up from public places, detained in jails and forcibly returned, according to the findings presented by RMMRU founding chair Dr Tasneem Siddiqui.

She made the PowerPoint presentation at a webinar on 'Other Face of Globalization: Arbitrary Return of Bangladeshi Migrants and their unpaid dues' hosted by RMMRU. It was attended by government's top officials, civil society leaders, global migration experts and rights activists.

The study was done with in-depth interview of 50 migrants who returned in last three months under RMMRU-SEEM project on emergency return supported by Manusher Jonno Foundation.

The migrants returned from UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Malaysia and they were originally from the districts of Tangail, Munshiganj, Cumilla, Chattogram, Narshingdi, Dinajpur, Barisal, Jhalkathi, Kishoreganj, Meherpur, Natore, Narail, Feni, Madaripur, Chadpur and Jashore.

'None of those who have been arbitrarily sent back were in detention before. They were picked up from stores and roads.

They were arrested during Covid 19,' the RMMRU study found.

'It also implies that the claim by countries of destination that personal safety of those in detention led them to repatriate them does not appear to be valid. '

Treatment at jail

On average the interviewees were detained/jailed for 20 days. Most of them narrated dehumanizing treatment as they were subjected to beating. '2-3 three people had sharing a bed. Inadequate and low quality food were provided. '

'Most had to stay in one pair of clothes for days. Toilet and shower facilities were extremely inadequate. In one instance a diabetic person did not receive medication.'

Those who returned from Malaysia and those who returned on leave faced no major problems.

The experiences of those who have been forcibly returned have gone through trauma and been subjected to mistreatment.

These migrants were shifted from detention centre/jails to airport. Hence they could not bring back their belongings (money and other items) that remained in the camps/dormitories.

Payment due

26% of the returnees do not have any outstanding payment due.

74% had left behind a significant amount of resource in destination countries while returned.

A substantial majority of that was unpaid wages. In addition cases were reported in which migrant lost money as they gave loans to friends from other countries, paid for visa renewal and were to theft by law enforcers.

On average the affected migrants lost Tk. 175,000 (Minimum Tk.9500 and maximum Tk. 5,00,000).

Atiq, 55 who returned from UAE informed that he had been working in a steel factory for 14 years and as part of his payment procedure he used to get an small amount per month and after a while the owners used to clear all dues. 'I have an outstanding amount of around Taka 5,00,000 including last two months wages.'

'My visa will expire in June. I have given 3000 dirhams (Tk. 70,000) to a Pakistani friend for renewing my visa. As I was picked up suddenly I could not contact him,' said Belal, 41 who returned from Saudi Arabia.

'One of my camp mates from India had sudden financial need at home. He borrowed an equivalent of Taka 25,000 from me. There is no way I will get that money again,' said Shobuj, 24 who backed from Qatar.

The RMMRU study recommended for international community that only 1990 UN Migrant Worker Convention could ensures protection of migrants in any situation.

'Unfortunately, this rights based document has been pushed to the back. The crisis situation reveals that the civil society organizations and countries of origin should do more for advocacy for ratification. MICIC, 2016 recommendations should be promoted as the guiding document in dealing with migrants in emergency situations.'

It recommended for Bangladesh that registration process following due diligence should be conducted by Bangladesh missions before workers are repatriated.

'If any unpaid wages and other benefits remain pending then the missions can take power of attorney from the migrants and pursue settlement of claims subsequently'.

To follow up on the GoB's call to OIC for ensuring 6 month salary GoB may consider mobilising other sending states to back such a position.

GoB has to develop a guideline for ensuring under which condition return should take place.

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