

URGENT ACTION

300 RETURNING MIGRANT WORKERS ARRESTED

The arbitrary arrest and detention of 81 Bangladeshi migrant workers in September after they arrived in Bangladesh from Vietnam having been trafficked brings to a total of more than 300 Bangladeshi workers arrested and detained upon their return from various countries since May 2020. Detained for “tarnishing the image of the country” by allegedly engaging in criminal activities, no credible evidence concerning their alleged crimes has yet been provided in any case. Their arrest and detention violate Bangladesh’s obligations under international human rights law including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. They must be freed immediately unless they are promptly charged with recognizable offence.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Mr. Asaduzzaman Khan, MP

Minister

Ministry of Home Affairs

Bangladesh Secretariat

Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh

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Honourable Minister,

I am writing to express my concern about the arbitrary arrest and continued detention of Bangladeshi migrant workers **Mohammad Shahin Alam and Taijuddin together with approximately 300 other Bangladeshi workers** who have returned home between May and August 2020. The arrest and detention of these workers in the absence of any credible evidence of any criminal activity committed on Bangladeshi territory violates Bangladesh’s commitment to international human rights law including Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which prohibits arbitrary arrest or detention and protects everyone’s right to liberty.

Mohammad Shahin Alam was imprisoned in Bahrain for not having a valid work visa. He is one of at least 219 migrant workers currently detained in Bangladesh who were imprisoned in Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain for such offences. The respective governments commuted their terms, and then deported them. I also find it particularly distressing to learn that Taijuddin and 80 other Bangladeshi migrants, who were victims of human trafficking, were also arrested after they returned from Vietnam on 18 August 2020. Taijuddin’s wife was expecting him to return to home on 1 September after staying in quarantine for two weeks but he was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail on the same day.

Dhaka’s magistrate court has granted police request to detain the workers in jail until the police can determine their offence without specifying any particular charge or evidence against them. This is not only a clear violation of their human rights but fails to acknowledge that migrant workers are the lifeblood of Bangladesh’s economy which has earned \$18.2 billion in remittances in the fiscal year 2019-20.

I urge your government to:

Either immediately charge each of the workers with a recognizable criminal offence under Bangladeshi law whilst ensuring the necessary due process or release them in line with your government’s obligations under international human rights law.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Bangladesh authorities sent more than 300 returning migrants to jail between in phases between July and September under section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure which allows the police to arrest someone on the basis of having “reasonable suspicion” that they may be involved in an act of offence outside Bangladesh.

On 5 July 2020 Bangladesh’s police sent to jail 219 Bangladeshi workers who had returned from Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain since May. According to the police application made to a metropolitan magistrate court in Dhaka on 4 July, the returnees – 141 workers from Kuwait, 39 from Bahrain and 39 from Qatar – were in jails of those countries for committing “various offences”, which were not specified. The workers were deported to Bangladesh after the authorities in those countries commuted their sentences.

One such case was that of Mohammad Shahin Alam, 25, whose visa expired three months after arriving in Bahrain in 2016. However, he continued to work there as a pipefitter to pay back his father’s debts that he had incurred in sending Mohammad Shahin Alam to Bahrain. In 2020, Shahin began exploring the possibility of renewing his visa, in the hope of finding a better paying job. As a result, he was sent to jail for staying and working in the country without a valid visa. After serving 21 days in jail in Bahrain, he returned to Bangladesh on 25 June. He called his father on 5 July to say that he was being released from a quarantine facility. However, five minutes later, he again called to say that there were a lot of policemen outside his premise. Approximately eight days later, he called his father to tell him he had been sent to Kashimpur jail in Gazipur. Mohammad Shahin Alam’s father does not know why his son is being kept in jail.

Bangladesh’s police told the metropolitan magistrate court that the 219 migrant workers had “tarnished the image of Bangladesh” by engaging in criminal activities abroad and that they should be detained for as long as an investigation continued against them to determine their offence. However, in so doing the police did not offer any specific evidence and grounds for their arrest and continued detention in Bangladesh. The Dhaka court however, granted the police request to keep the workers in jail.

Separately, on 1 September, Bangladeshi authorities sent to jail 81 Bangladeshi migrant workers who had returned to the country from Vietnam on 18 August after they were exploited by recruitment brokers. They had each paid between approximately USD \$4700 and \$5900 to brokers on the promise of factory jobs, said Md. Alamgir, one of the returnees to a local newspaper. Instead they found themselves in temporary jobs that lasted less than one month for some of the migrants with a payment of less than USD \$83 per month.

Taijuddin, 35, was one of these workers who went to Vietnam on 25 December 2019 with a promise of a job at a furniture factory and a salary of about USD \$306 (BDT 26,000) per month. After spending months without enough food and money and not able to send any remittance home, Taijuddin, returned to Bangladesh on 18 August. Taijuddin’s wife quoted him saying “We have arrived, but they will keep us in quarantine for 14 days and then they will let us go,”. However, instead of returning home, the authorities sent him to the Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj on 1 September. Taijuddin’s wife, who now has her husband in jail for the foreseeable future, is in increasing debt, as she struggles to pay both the living expenses for her family and her son’s school costs.

Many Bangladeshis become victims of human trafficking in the hope of finding a well-paying job abroad, particularly in the Gulf countries. They are exploited by traffickers who promise them steady jobs and good money only to be subsequently exploited by employers for less pay, more work or threatened with jail terms for illegal stays [See: Amnesty International, [COVID-19 makes Gulf countries’ abuse of migrant workers impossible to ignore](#), 30 April 2020].

Rights activists in Bangladesh have said that by arresting the workers, who have served their sentences in the foreign land or been through traumatic experience after they were exploited by human traffickers, it is the Bangladesh government itself which is tarnishing the image of the country.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [English/Bangla]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 27 October 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: [Mohammad Shahin Alam (he/him) and Taijuddin (he/him)]