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Telangana: Migrant workers lose Gulf jobs in pandemic, stare at bleak future

While the gulf migrants were grappling with the issue of wage theft at the hands of the employers, the Government of India in September 2020 came up with circulars reducing the minimum referral wages (MRW) for Indian emigrants to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

Written by [Rahul V Pisharody](#) | Hyderabad | January 7, 2021 12:47:33 pm

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In the last couple of months, Parkipandla's organisation has been on a 'Gulf Bharosa Yatra,' visiting gulf returnees to offer help and support.

As scores of Indian migrant workers got stuck in the Gulf when the [coronavirus pandemic](#) broke out early last year, forty-four-year-old Mamda Ashok considered himself lucky. For 12 years, Ashok, who hails from Telangana's Nirmal district, had been working in Kuwait. It was just before the pandemic-induced lockdown came into effect that he was sanctioned a three-month holiday from the car wash station where he worked.

Come February 26, Ashok will complete a year being out of employment. He did not receive months of pending salary and end-of-service benefits. Like Ashok, over 20,000 migrant workers from across Telangana have lost their jobs in the Gulf owing to the pandemic and face an uncertain future, says Swadesh Parkipandla, president of Pravasi Mitra Labour Union.

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Ashok, who now lives with his wife back home, said: "I have studied only till class 4. The only reason why I worked for so many years in the Gulf, despite the hardships, was the money. Though I was earning only around Rs 12,000 a month, the fact remains that I am yet to pay up Rs 2 lakh out of the Rs 7 lakh loan I took to go there."

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He is now certain of not wanting to head back to Kuwait for two reasons. One, he does not have the money to travel and two, he is not sure if he would make enough money if he went back.

Forty-year-old Ashok, who had been working in Kuwait, will complete a year of unemployment in



“These days I am eking out a living doing whatever work comes my way. to stay back here. There is no point going back now. Things are different added. Ashok is a daily wagger now and earns Rs 200 on days he work.

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In the last couple of months, Parkipandla’s organisation has been on a ‘Gulf Bharosa Yatra,’ visiting [gulf returnees](#) like Ashok to offer help and support.

The activists have been collecting details from them for a consolidated database and holding awareness campaigns at the village level. “Gulf migrants who do blue collar jobs cannot be compared to Indian expatriates living in the US or Europe. The state cannot have a blanket NRI policy for all. We are saying that all those migrants who were repatriated during the pandemic should be given their salary arrears, and end of service benefits such as bonus, PF, and gratuity, etc,” he said.

The Telangana Gulf Workers Joint Action Committee, an umbrella organisation of different unions, has been urging the Central and State governments to support them by providing legal aid in foreign labour courts to fight against what is called ‘Wage Theft’.

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Mandha Bheem Reddy, the president of Emigrants Welfare Forum (EWF), explained that ‘Justice for Wage Theft’ is an international campaign which took shape after many Asian and south-Asian migrants returned home empty-handed during the pandemic while losing employment and livelihood in different countries.

He pointed out that their employers have taken undue advantage of the situation and not paid the pending salaries and end of service benefits.

“As part of the campaign we are collecting all details from those who have returned in a hurry. We will file claims on their behalf in labour courts in destination



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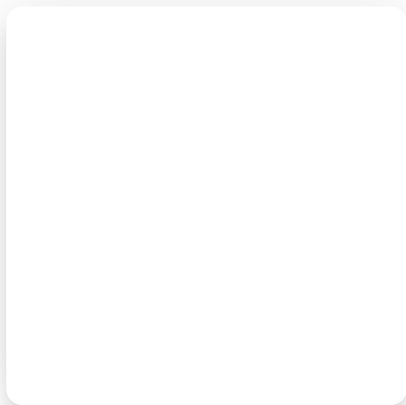
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Meanwhile, as the gulf migrants were grappling with the issue of wage theft, the Government of India in September 2020 came up with circulars reducing the minimum referral wages (MRW) for Indian emigrants to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

“Surprisingly, the responses from the government are not aiming to protect the welfare of Indian migrants. Instead, the recent decisions such the reduction in minimum referral wages of Indian migrants in GCC countries by 30 to 50 percent shatter the dreams of millions of Indian workers,” he said.

The circulars from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated that MRW in Qatar is fixed at USD 200 and in Kuwait is fixed at USD 245 for work visa holders and USD 196 for domestic sector workers.



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A similar circular in the same month stated that MRW in Bahrain, Oman, and UAE is fixed at USD 200. In Saudi Arabia, the MRW is fixed at USD 324. “It is a clear case of exploitation. The government is extracting benefits from our workers without extending any welfare mechanism that enhances the migration experience,” Reddy added.



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