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Govt move sought to recover returned migrant workers' unpaid wages

Md Owasim Uddin Bhuyan || *BusinessInsider*

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EXPATRIATES RETURN HOME AMID COVID-19



Over **400,000** returned from April to Dec 2020 amid Covid-19



Mostly from Middle East countries including Saudi Arabia



Of the returnees, the majority are male and **12.5%** are female



Many of them returned with fully empty hands



"We can take examples from India and the Philippines how they are effectively trying to get the unpaid wages of their expatriates,"

Mahjabeen Khaleed

Secretary-general of the Parliamentary Caucus on Migration and Development

Hundreds of Bangladeshi migrant workers have become victims of wage theft as they were forced to come back home leaving their due wages and other properties amid Covid-19



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Hundreds of Bangladeshi migrant workers have become victims of wage theft as they were forced to come back home leaving their due wages and other properties amid Covid-19, migration experts observed.

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They suggested the government of Bangladesh take immediate steps to recover uncounted such unpaid wages of the expatriate workers.

It is possible to get the huge amount in remittance if it takes effective measures, they said.

“There were so many migrant workers who came back to home amid pandemic leaving their wages and other valuable properties in their work station countries,” said Syed Saiful Haque, migration expert and WARBE Development Foundation chairman.

“Our government should take up the wage theft issue in the bilateral meeting with destination countries alongside raising the issues at multi-national forums like Abu Dhabi Dialogue to recover the huge amounts of wages,” he told the Business Insider Bangladesh.

On global intervention, he suggested that the issues of wage theft could be presented at the upcoming International Labour Conference (ILC) where employers and other stakeholders will be present to help realise unpaid dues.

“There are a substantial number of Bangladeshis who invested their money at different joint businesses in the countries in partnership with local citizens but many of the migrants could not bring their portions during their departure. The government steps can help them to recover the money,” Saiful Haque said.

Another migration expert and Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP) chairman Shakirul Islam told the Business Insider Bangladesh that wage theft is the reason for huge losses of our migrant workers.

“Our government should immediately appoint legal experts at Bangladesh embassies in the destination countries to properly record the complaints of the wage theft and start the legal process to claim and realize the unpaid wages,” he said.

Over 400,000 Bangladeshi migrants returned home amid the Covid pandemic from April 2020 to December 2020, according to official data of the Bangladesh government.

Of them 350,000 were male and 50,000 were female migrant workers.

Many of the workers claimed they returned with fully empty-hand as employers did not pay their due wages or any employee benefits.

One such worker is Mehedi Hasan who migrated to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in January, 2007.

He was forced to leave his due salary of Tk144,000 while returning home in the pandemic.

Mehedi was suffered a lot for different other issues in the period in the country.

WARBE Development Foundation, an NGO committed to carrying out programs for the development and betterment of the migrant community, has so far collected about 80 such cases of wage thefts mostly in Middle East countries since August 2020.

Scrutinising the cases, it found that many of the Bangladeshi workers had been forced to return home from the Gulf countries mostly from Saudi Arabia with leaving their due wages and benefits.

A Bangladesh Parliamentary Caucus on Migration and Development has been working at grassroots, national, regional and global level to protect the rights of the migrant workers since March 2017.

Its Secretary-General Mahjabeen Khaleed said that the government should take the wage theft issue seriously because it is an important issue in this Covid time.

“We can take a good example from India and the Philippines that are dealing with the same issue and how they are trying to fixing the matter,” she said.

“Our missions abroad need to look into this wage theft issue,” Mahjabeen, also a former member of the Bangladesh

“Our missions should appoint lawyers and translators locally and the migrant workers should be made aware of the situations,” she said, adding that the recruiting agencies must assist migrant workers and the government to retrieve the unpaid wages.

Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) conducted a study in the mid of 2020 based on interviewing 50 male migrants who returned from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Malaysia because of the pandemic.

The returnee from Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar alleged that they had a good amount of unpaid dues ranging from Tk9,500 to Tk500,000, the study found.

When asked about the government’s move to realise the unpaid wages, Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment ministry’s secretary Dr Ahmed Munirus Saleheen said that the government was trying to get ground-level information about “wage theft” of the migrant workers.

“We are working with our diplomatic missions abroad on how to protect our migrant workers in the destination countries,” he said.

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