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# Desperate migrants taken for a ride by unscrupulous contractors

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## They are left in the lurch unpaid after being taken to faraway places for work

Mahabal Haq, a migrant from West Bengal, along with four others had gone from Perumbavoor to Kanjikuzhi in Idukki for construction work lured by the prospects of higher pay.

The work has been long over but they are yet to get their wages to the tune of ₹53,250.

Another migrant Hasibul along with nine others based in Pookattupady was hired for an assortment of jobs across Ernakulam district but were likewise left unpaid their collective wages of ₹50,315. “Now the contractors who engaged us are not even attending our phone calls,” rued Hasibul helplessly.

Similarly, Paseedha, a Bihari migrant from Kakkanad, and friends were allegedly cheated by the contractor who scooted without paying the ₹49,882 he owed them.

Desperate migrants looking to supplement their income to compensate for their loss of livelihood during the lockdown and to feed their impoverished families back home are being taken for a ride by unscrupulous contractors and sub-contractors.

“They are often taken to faraway places in districts other than Ernakulam and are then left in the lurch unpaid. Some contractors thereafter never even pick their phone calls and there have been even instances in which poor migrants were threatened for asking their

rightful dues. Since there are no work-related documents and being in alien surroundings with little knowledge about the contractor, migrants are hardly in a position to press their case,” said George Mathew, coordinator, Progressive Workers Organisation.

The organisation has petitioned the collector about the plight of migrants and it has in turn been forwarded to the District Police Chief (Ernakulam Rural) for action. The petition among other things demanded registration of police cases against unscrupulous contractors before going on to allege unholy nexus between contractors and the police helping the former go scot-free.

Abu Mundattu, a Muvattupuzha-based government contractor, said that such cheating mostly happens in cases where there is a middleman, sometimes a migrant himself, between the migrant worker and the employer. “In such cases, the payment is usually received by the agent who in turn takes his cut before handing the rest to the worker. It also happens that he usurps the entire wages,” he said.

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