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Bangladeshis among 24,400 abused in Qatar FIFA World Cup construction projects

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At least 24,400 migrant workers, mostly hired from Bangladesh, Nepal and India, were abused in 211 incidents linked to Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022 construction projects between 2016 and 2022, said a report of the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre on Friday.

The BHRRC reported that the vast majority of abuses encompassed non-payment of wages, frequent health and safety violations resulting in injuries and deaths, hazardous working conditions and curbs on freedom of expression and freedom of movement.

Qatar is one of the top destination countries for Bangladeshi migrant workers as 8,21,865 of them are employed in that country, accounting for 5.94 per cent of the total 1.3 crore migrants, said the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training.

According to the BMET, Bangladesh sent over 2,44,000 workers to Qatar in 2015 and 2016 alone and a significant number of them worked on World Cup projects.

In February 2021, the Guardian newspaper said that 6,500 migrant workers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka had died in Qatar since it has won the World Cup bid.

Qatar was declared to be the first Middle East country in 2010 to host the world's biggest football tournament.

Syed Saiful Haque, chair, WARBE Development Foundation, an NGO that works for the welfare of migrant workers, told New Age that the labour situation in Qatar was the worst at the beginning of the WC work when a huge number of incidents, including deadly ones, were reported there.

'Among the victims, Bangladeshi and Nepalese workers figured higher in number than others,' he said.

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After an intervention by the International Labour Organisation, the Qatari authority promised to ensure a decent working environment.

'Qatar should have kept its commitment,' he said.

He also blamed the middlemen system in labour migration for the abuses.

To host the football World Cup tournament, Qatar undertook many mega-structures, including stadiums, an airport, roads and a new metro.

It hired thousands of workers from various countries, mostly from South Asia and East Africa, for the projects.

The BHRRC said that despite tight control over the news media and relatively better facilities for the WC project workers than for the general workforce by the Qatari authorities, it recorded 211 cases of abuse.

The migrant rights organisation reported that it had tracked 20 cases of abuse linked to seven out of eight World Cup stadium projects and a further nine projects where specific World Cup work or stadium was not named.

The vast majority of abuses related to non-payment of wages, with workers in 20 of the 29 observed cases citing delayed, withheld or unpaid wages and end-of-service benefits.

Health and safety violations were also frequent, with injuries, deaths and hazardous or dangerous working conditions cited in eight cases.

Fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and freedom of movement, were curtailed in 13 cases.

Most of the workers subjected to abuse in the cases were from South Asia and East Africa.

'With the World Cup now only a few months away, FIFA has only a short window left to use its sway with the Qatari authorities and businesses to ensure the tournament leaves a positive legacy for workers' rights in the country. A priority should be ensuring the full and effective implementation of the labour

reforms and access to remedy for workers who have suffered abuses,' said BHRRC Gulf programme manager Isobel Archer.

According to the BHRRC report, Al Bayt Stadium was linked to six cases of reported worker abuse, Khalifa International Stadium to five cases, Al Janoub Stadium to four cases while Lusail Stadium, Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium and Education City Stadium each were linked to two cases of abuse.

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