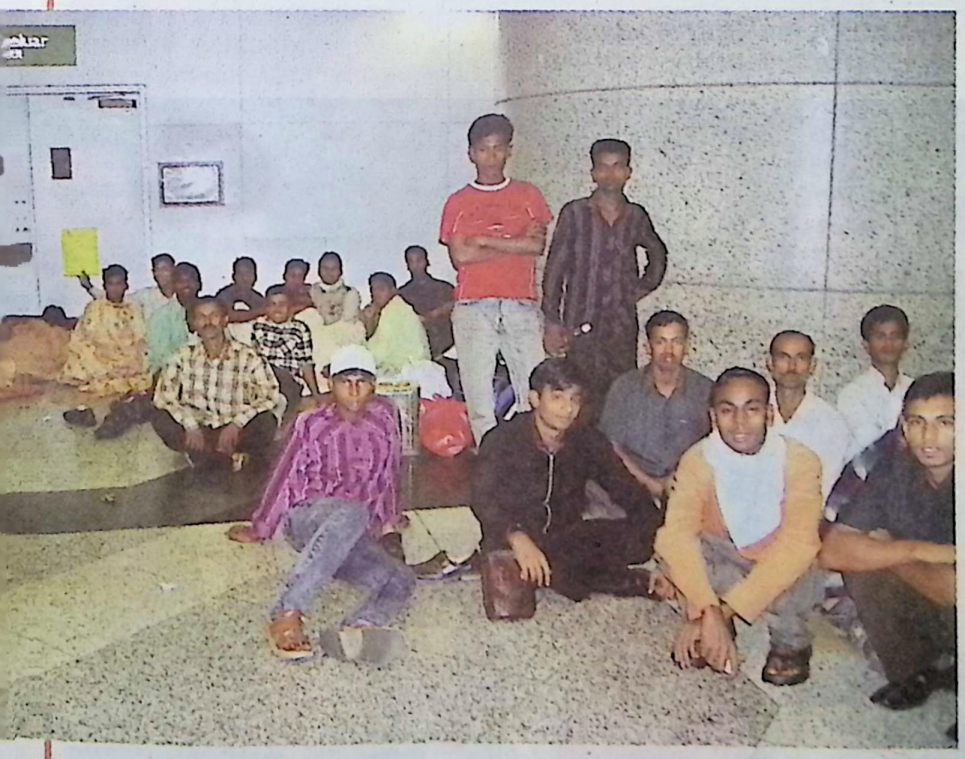
Stranded and Abandoned

A stop at Kuala Lumpur Airport should be a pleasant experience for most travellers as it is one of the most modern and glamorous airports of the world. But if you are a Bangladeshi traveller it maybe a not so pleasant experience since a familiar sight at the airport are the hordes of fellow Bangladeshis - all migrant workers- walking about with bewildered looks on their faces as they breathlessly await entry into Malaysia where they have been promised jobs. Of course many do get their desired jobs and are able to send their hard earned money back home to their families. But there are also many heartbreaking stories of these hapless young men who have had to scrounge and save enough money to pay agencies to come all the way to Kuala Lumpur, only to be told that their papers are not right and they cannot enter the country.

The latest incident involves 200 Bangladeshi workers some of whom have been stranded for weeks at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). They were discovered by a Bangladeshi public health expert, Dr. Muhammad Noor during his six-hour transit stopover at KLIA on his way back to Dhaka on August 31. Noor upon seeing so many Bangladeshis waiting at the airport, decided to find out why they were there. They told him that their local agents had not come to the airport to receive them and that they were told that the Bangladeshi agents had not make the appropriate payments to the Malaysian agents. But each of these men had paid around TK 2 to Tk 2.5 lakh to the Bangladeshi agencies, for a job in Malaysia. The recruiting agencies include: Morning Sun Enterprise, Shipu Overseas, Shikha Trade International, JR Aviation services and Sunrise International Limited. When the Daily Star correspondent who filed this story contacted Sunrise, an employee said that the agency had sent 37 workers on August 29 and the agency's Malaysian counterpart had picked all of them up on August 31st. But the other agencies could either not be reached or were unable to give any information on the matter.



Meanwhile, at the time the report was filed (September 3) the workers were spending their days in misery and uncertainty. Some of them told Noor that they had only drank water for the last two days, one worker said that the local agent of his group in KL had arranged for only one meal a day.

The story is far from being unique and there have been other occasions where Bangladeshi migrant workers have been left stranded at this airport, either because their papers had not been accepted or because their fingerprints did not match in the biometric security system.

It is a shame that even after so many years with so many Bangladeshis working in Malaysia and contributing significantly to our national economy, we have not been able to safeguard their interests. Apart from making sure that agencies do not cheat these men out of their precious savings, it is imperative that the governments of the two countries collaborate and make sure that such painful incidents do not happen. There should be officials, preferably Bangladeshi or Bangla-speaking who can be available for counselling when such mishaps occur. Going to a foreign land for the first time is daunting enough but being stranded at the airport and waiting in uncertainty is a trauma our hard-working workers should be spared of.