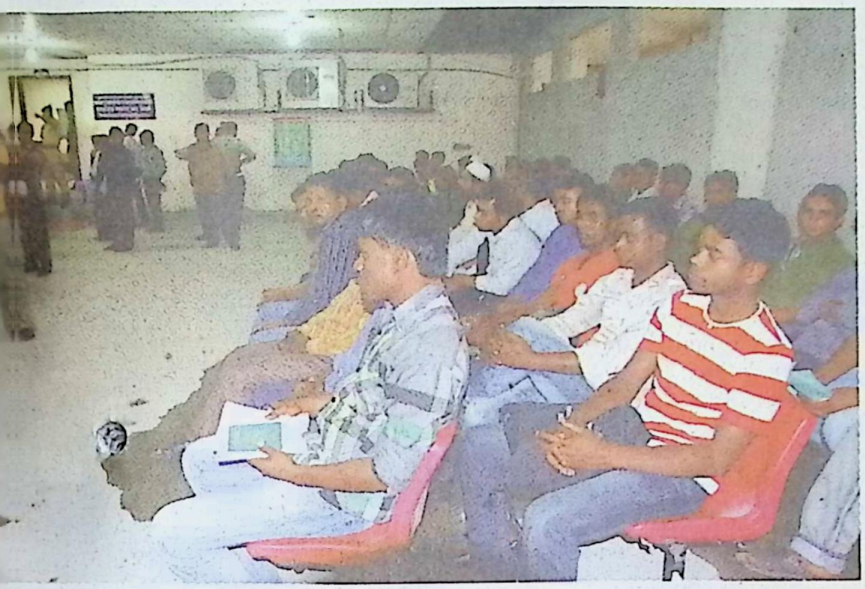


If migrant workers left with better skills their job prospects abroad would significantly improve.

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

The same migrant workers who have learnt how unpleasant and hard working one's life abroad can be, start telling their neighbours in the villages how successful and nice their time was.



Unscrupulous agents and middlemen have often left migrant workers jobless or in foreign prisons.

There are mainly three options for unskilled returned migrants, he says. Either they start a small business like a grocery or a garment shop, they go back abroad again or they start selling their dreams. The latter means working for one of the many migrant recruiting agencies – to perpetuate a vicious cycle.

The same migrant workers who have learnt how unpleasant and hard working one's life abroad can be, start telling their neighbours in the villages how successful and nice their time was. And the impressionable unskilled people are likely to believe any positive story about migration. In their euphoria, they forget about the risks such as high loans and cheating agencies.

And even then, a migration does not always guarantee a better life. According to the Bangladesh Households Remittances Survey 2009, over 70 percent of migrants paid between Tk 100,000 and Tk 300,000 to migrate, while average salaries ranged between Tk 5,000 to Tk 20,000 a month. This means the migrants often are forced to sell their lands and take on high interest loans to afford the cost of migration.

If they cannot stay abroad for several years, they do not come back with pockets full of money – but with huge debts. Twenty-four-year-old domestic worker Maksuda shares this bad experience, too. After being tortured and badly injured by her mistress in Lebanon, she managed to come back to Bangladesh after 14 months. But her situation has not improved, she says bitterly. "Now my husband blames me for the debts from the migration costs and beats me every day." Because her broken arm still has not healed, Maksuda can only work one-handed as a tailor. "As a disabled person I earn even less than before my departure," she says.

Sick at Home

Another crucial issue is the health of the returnees. The Bangladeshi workers destined for low-skilled jobs abroad are also at high risk of workplace injury. About 60 percent of the migrants experi-