

Migrant workers who have had to come back often find themselves in huge debt and with no assets left to sell.

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says. Sharifa still suffers from headaches and is not able to walk like she used to before. But the family cannot afford further medical treatment. Sharifa has two jobs at the moment: she works as a cook and in her free time she sells saris and fabrics for salwar kameez. "I really don't know how we will pay back the loan of Tk 90,000," she says.

Go back again

If Sharifa could, she would go abroad again. "For an unskilled person like me, this is the only solution to paying back the loan," she says. The IOM-survey of Libya returnees draws the same conclusion: 61 percent of the returned migrants stated they want to go back abroad.

Shakirul Islam is not surprised by this result. "There is a lack of reintegration by the government and as a consequence a lack of prospect in the villages," he says. Even bad experiences abroad cannot stop the migrants to try their luck again, he adds.

Shakirul, too, would never stop anyone from remigrating. "Migration should always be a personal and free decision." But according to him, a decision should be made only by well-informed people. If all the migrants were aware of the risks such as injury and illness or exploitation and cheating by the agencies and employers, the reintegration of the migrants would become much easier.

Therefore, the government should not only provide the returning migrants with better reintegration support, but also raise awareness before the people make the decision to migrate, Islam says. "And if the migrant workers leave our country with some skills, they run less risks to be cheated abroad," he adds.

The government is working hard to improve the situation, the Minister of the Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, recently said at the inauguration of a migration project office of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). "We have learnt from our mistakes and we still are learning," he added. More than 30 skill training centres for migrants are under construction. In a few months, there will be more than 60 centres in the whole country, the Minister promised.

It is about time the government and society at large recognise the importance of taking care of those who contribute so much to our economy, whether they are going abroad or coming back home. ■