

Prioritising our female migrant workers



Maksud Begum when she was taken to Bangladesh Embassy in Beirut around three months ago.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



NAHELA NOWSHIN

January 16. From being abandoned by the family she was working for to being neglected and maltreated by officials of the Bangladesh embassy in Lebanon, the 35-year-old migrant worker's desperate pleas to repatriate her to Bangladesh fell on deaf ears and her life was eventually cut short.

Not even a month has passed since Maksud's heartbreaking story came to light and we are faced with yet another tale of a female migrant's unspeakable ordeal in Malaysia. 20-year-old Bithi (not her real name) left for Malaysia 12 days ago, only to be targeted by a human trafficking gang and sexually abused over 20 times in four days by eight men. Bithi fled the traffickers and with the help of Ain o Salish Kendra and Tenaganita, a Malaysian human rights organisation, was able to return to Bangladesh on Monday morning.

These are only a few of countless cases of the horrific abuse and torture faced by Bangladeshi female workers abroad. Despite more and more women participating in the labour force overseas and bringing in huge sums of remittances, our female migrants largely remain vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Whereas countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, India, Indonesia, Philippines and Ethiopia have vehemently denounced abuse faced by their workers abroad and have taken steps to protect their rights, Bangladesh remains an outlier in the region in terms of ensuring the rights of her migrant workers.

In 2015, Indonesia announced a permanent ban on sending women as domestic help to the Middle East after reports of widespread abuse and the execution of two

Indonesian maids in Saudi Arabia. But around 900 Indonesian women went to the UAE last year after the Indonesian embassy in Abu Dhabi introduced a pilot system of 'outsourced model' in mid-2016 in which men and women can only be recruited through recruitment companies authorised by the embassy for seven categories of work. Conditions imposed by Indonesia include AED 1,200 minimum salary, eight-hour working time daily, and the right to approach the labour court in the event of a dispute.

migrant workers like Maksud and Bithi is caused by this very lack of clear mechanisms of recruitment and a failure to delineate our conditions to ensure our workers' safety as the country-of-origin before we send our workers abroad. In fact, their exploitation starts right here at home, where recruitment agencies openly flout laws charging workers way beyond government-set limits, costing them an arm and a leg. For instance, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment fixed the cost at Tk 165,000 for a worker to go to Saudi Arabia but jobseekers end up paying as much as an exorbitant Tk 1,000,000.

For our female migrant workers, whose primary motivation to go abroad is due to economic purposes, full economic emancipation is rarely achieved given the often inhumane conditions they are forced to work in—from being denied salaries to having their passports confiscated to being verbally and sexually abused.

Given the huge demand for low skilled female workers, particularly in the Middle East where there is a huge demand for domestic workers, it is high time that the government prioritises people over remittance and recognises the leverage that it has and capitalises on it by bargaining for increased wages, insurance, working hours, etc., following in the footsteps of countries like Indonesia, India and Philippines. The recruitment of low skilled workers for overseas jobs by private agencies, which are rarely strictly monitored, needs to be replaced by official agencies authorised by the government. Furthermore, the low skilled nature of our female workforce abroad—women hailing from rural backgrounds with little to no education—makes it all the more necessary for the Bangladesh government to put in place stringent restrictions and conditions upon receiving countries compelling them to respect our workers' rights.

The dehumanising plight of women migrant workers like Maksud and Bithi is caused by this very lack of clear mechanisms of recruitment and a failure to delineate our conditions to ensure our workers' safety as the country-of-origin before we send our workers abroad.

India has also ordered that recruitment of all female workers who hold Emigration Clearance Required (ECR) category passports be done by seven official agencies only. In August of last year, the government of India banned recruitment by private agents for overseas jobs under ECR category. The Philippines recently negotiated a minimum salary of AED 1,500 for workers going to the UAE as housemaids, lifting a ban that they had imposed in 2014.

The dehumanising plight of women

Achieving a global adaptation goal for climate change

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

ONE of the important aspects of the historic Paris Agreement on Climate Change achieved at the 21st conference of Parties (COP21) of the United Nations

Framework Convention on Climate Change in December 2015 was the inclusion of a global goal for adaptation. This was mirrored on the previously agreed global goal for mitigation, which was to keep the global long term temperature below 2 degrees and aspire to keep it below 1.5 degrees.

However, while the tracking of emissions of greenhouse gases from different countries and sources is relatively easy to measure and then add up to see what the global emissions are every year, there is no such indicator for adaptation and so one will have to be developed.

There is one aspect of a global adaptation goal that is relatively easy to deceive and then measure, namely the amount of global funding going towards adaptation. Under the Paris Agreement, the developed countries pledged to provide USD 100 billion a year starting from 2020 onwards through the newly created Green Climate Fund (GCF). The board of the GCF have also made a decision that half their funds will go to adaptation and half to mitigation. Thus, one global adaptation goal is already in place, namely USD 50 billion US a year from



Facing rising seas, Bangladesh confronts the worst consequences of climate change.

PHOTO: STAR

2020 delivered to developing countries to help them adapt to climate change.

One major problem is that every adaptation action takes place in a specific location of the world and no two places are exactly the same. Hence what might work in one place may or not work in another.

The other major problem is the lack of a common metric for measuring adaptation accords scales or across countries. With mitigation, where a molecule of carbon dioxide emitted in USA, China or Bangladesh has exactly

the same impact on global temperatures, and so we can add up all the emissions from around the world and get a global total. With adaptation there are no such indicators or metrics that could be added up across scales and countries.

However, even if it is methodologically difficult to develop and agree on a method of measuring the effectiveness of adaptation, it should not be impossible to find some proxy indicators that are good enough for global aggregation and global

comparisons.

One such metric is to look at national level policies, plans and actions, where we can establish which countries have developed plans and policies to address adaptation. Then we can also look at how much of the policies and plans have been put into action on the ground.

Then there is another aspect to evaluate how effective those adaptation actions actually are and what indicators should be used to measure effectiveness.

One of the aspects of adaptation, which might be an asset, is that it is a learning-by-doing process of generating knowledge. Hence rather than approaching it from a purely theoretical level we should be approaching it from how to learn from experience on the ground.

Under such circumstances, Bangladesh has already invested in hundreds of adaptation actions from community to urban to sectoral and even national scales. Hence by capturing the lessons from all these adaptation actions Bangladesh has the golden opportunity to become a world leader in developing the methodology to first agree on the global goal on adaptation and then develop the measuring, verification and reporting (MVR) systems that will be needed.

There are already a number of groups, including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as well as university based academics around the world, that are setting up research efforts to come up with an adaptation goal and MRV system. The International Centre for Climate Change and Development is involved in some of these as are other research centres in Bangladesh.

Thus by investing in knowledge capture and experiential learning from adaptation actions at different scales and stakeholders in Bangladesh, our researchers should be able to contribute significantly towards the development of the global adaptation goal and its MRV system.

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Bangladesh has the golden opportunity to become a world leader in developing the methodology to first agree on the global goal on adaptation and then develop the measuring, verification and reporting systems that will be needed.

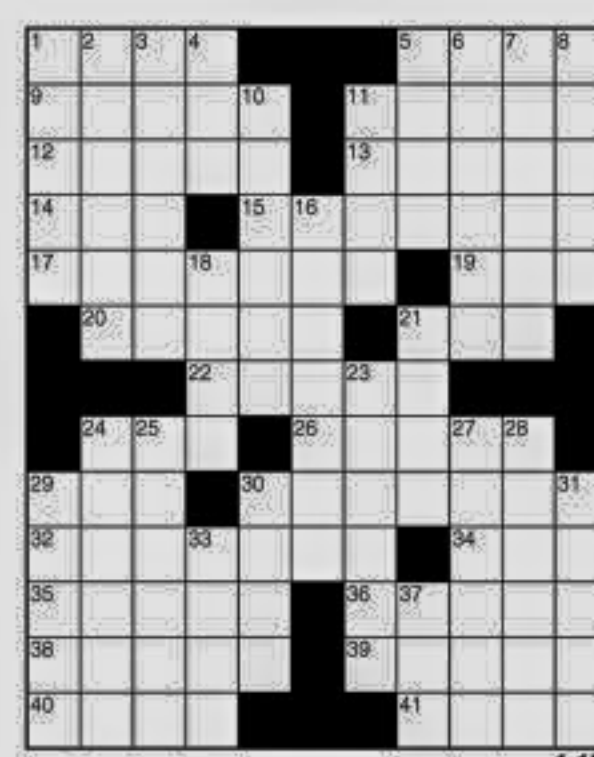
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Perp pursuers
- 5 Punt
- 9 From the country
- 11 Italian seaport
- 12 City on the Mohawk River
- 13 Happen again
- 14 Spreading tree
- 15 Like most prom goes
- 17 Rife
- 19- Jacinto
- 20 Market direction.
- 21 That lady
- 22 Cat's quarry
- 24 Overly
- 26 Bus units
- 29 Moral no-no
- 30 Cuts canines
- 32 Vacillates
- 34 Grammys category
- 35 Peripheral device
- 36 Unaided
- 38 Swearer's words
- 39 Recoil in pain
- 40 Look for
- 41 Title paper

DOWN

- 1 Vinegar bottle
- 2 Factory store
- 3 ABC book
- 4 Bodily pouch
- 5 Acute
- 6 As a precaution
- 7 Tawny cat
- 8 Singer Carpenter
- 10 Tel-emundo viewer
- 11 Golfer Norman
- 16 Product's final consumer
- 18 Office note
- 21 Warm up
- 23 Vacillate
- 24 Color, in a way
- 25 Nervous
- 27 Royal roost
- 28 Spooky gathering
- 29 Rough guesses
- 30 Look after
- 31 Velocity
- 33 Captured
- 37 Topper



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

G A S H E S O P E N
A L K A L I N O V A
S E I Z E T H E D A Y
I N S E T
L A N A A W E S
R U N G P R O N T O
E N D C A T J A R
P A R C E L M O R E
R E E L C A Y S
L E D O N
L I V E B Y N I G H T
A V E R E C L A I R
S E X Y S H A M M Y

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott



QUOTABLE Quote



RABINDRANATH TAGORE

BENGLI POLYMATH WHO RESHAPED BENGLI LITERATURE AND MUSIC

I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.