

Leaving home for good

Tahmina Sadiq, 34, stepped into her ninth year as a Bangladeshi expatriate in the United States. Although Sadiq is a Bangladeshi by birth and spent most of her life in Dhaka, she says she battles debilitating food borne illnesses on her annual or biennial visits to her home city.

"But my sufferings are nothing compared to what my daughter, who was born in Minnesota, experiences during our holidays in Bangladesh," she said.

Sadiq's 4-year-old child was ill most of the time during her 2014 trip to Dhaka.

"Although her foods were prepared at home with extra care, her drinking water as well as her bath water carefully boiled and filtered, most of the things she consumed ended in the toilet bowl," Sadiq said. "By the time we caught our flight back in the U.S., she was feeble, skinny and cranky from her two-week battle with the flux," she added.

Sadiq said that upon their return to the U.S., their daughter begged them to never take her to Bangladesh again.

Bangladeshi expatriates living in different corners of the world cannot and do not want to return to their home country for various reasons. For instance, expatriates like Sadiq, who have already started raising children, find it especially difficult to imagine moving back to Bangladesh, even if they sometimes wish to.

Above anything else, what most parents worry about is their children's health and well-being. Also, second-generation immigrants do not want to leave the life they are used to living and settle in their parents' home country. Many older children even refuse to visit Bangladesh on a vacation.

Shafiqul Haque, 48, a resident of Texas, moved back to Bangladesh with his family

in 2010 after spending more than a decade in the U.S. However, he had to return a year later, because his teenage son was experiencing a difficult time adjusting to life in Dhaka. The boy, who called America his home, could not adapt to his new surroundings; he also always missed his school and friends 'back home.'

Bangladeshis mostly migrate to foreign countries to avail better opportunities and superior quality of life. Ammarah Akhtar, 32, has called Sydney her home since 2008. When asked why she never thinks of going back, Akhtar said, "Australia has given me so much more than what Bangladesh gave me in terms of career and quality of life. Here, we can afford a house of our own, two cars and a few vacations a year. On top of everything, my child gets a world-class education. She can also breathe in clean air and eat unadulterated food!"

"My parents are no more, which is another reason why I do not think of going back to Bangladesh," she said, after a small pause.

Young men and women who leave Bangladesh in their adolescence often consider themselves products of the countries they moved to as young adults.

Yaser Sattar, 35, works as a Business Unit Controller at HARMAN International in Greater Detroit Area. Sattar came to the U.S. for college education soon after completing his Ordinary Levels in 1999. When asked why he chose to establish his career in the U.S., Sattar said: "At the macro level, the quality of life in America is much better than it is in Bangladesh. I never worked in Bangladesh, and because I came to the U.S. at a young age, I consider myself a product of the American system and part of the

corporate culture that I admire and understand very well."

"In the U.S., you rise in your career with your merit, which makes working in this country a rewarding experience," he said.

Mohammad Amin, 35, works as a credit risk analyst at America's largest bank. Like Sattar, Amin also moved to the U.S. at a young age, a year after he finished his HSC exam. When asked why he decided on settling in America, Amin said, "Moving back to Bangladesh is not easy, because the country does not offer lucrative opportunities for people of all professions. For example, in Bangladesh, I can never find a job similar to what I do here, because our country's financial sector has not reached that level yet."

"I could probably land a job at a bank, but it will not be nearly as enriching, challenging and rewarding as my current job in America," he added.

People like Amin, who think they cannot make optimum use of their skills in Bangladesh, choose to settle in countries that value their special knowledge and expertise.

Each year, thousands of Bangladeshis settle in developed countries as immigrants, especially in countries like Canada and Australia, which still accept economic migrants, also known as high-profile skilled workers. Although thousands of Bangladeshis leave the country for work every year, those who leave the country as immigrants generally leave the country never to return.

Sanzida Urmi, 35, migrated to Canada with her husband last year. Urmi, who had a successful career at the largest telecommunications services provider in Bangladesh,

left her family and home country to live in Toronto, Canada after careful consideration. She cited the country's declining security, failing law and order system, rising extremism, rampant medical malpractices, extortion, pollution, traffic congestion and contaminated food as reasons for her decision to immigrate to Canada.

"I thought we deserved a better life. The current Bangladesh is not in a state where you want to raise a family," Urmi said. She and her husband plan on bringing their immediate family members to Canada as soon as they can.

Every year, Bangladesh is losing highly trained and talented individuals, people who migrate to other countries to ensure a safe and healthy life for themselves and their families. It is not that they do not love Bangladesh. The remittances sent by these expatriates add to the country's foreign-exchange reserves. And many are willing to contribute to the country's growth in any way that they can, but when it comes to the subject of returning to Bangladesh permanently, they say they are not sure, not right now at least.

In a world that is more global and where people are more mobile than ever before, incidents of 'brain drain' will continue to occur, or even increase with time, unless better job opportunities are created, law and order situation is fixed, corruption is curbed, a merit-based corporate culture is instated, and the overall quality of life of general people is improved.

By Wara Karim

Identities of some of the interviewees have been changed on their request.

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