

# Migrant workers in Greece face abuses

**STAR REPORT**

Around 12,000 Bangladeshis working in the strawberry farms in Greece are facing various forms of labour abuses, including low wages, long working hours and sub-standard living conditions with little amenities.

The employers, who earn huge profits out of the cheap migrant labour, also threaten them of deportation as they are undocumented in Greece, the country which the workers consider a transit point to other European countries.

"We earn huge profits for farmers who treat us worse than animals. We want people to learn how we live a rough life in Barangas [small shanties built for workers]," a group of 25 Bangladeshi farm workers in Nea Manolada, a village of southwestern Greece, said in a statement.

Reena Kukreja, assistant Professor of Global Development Studies at the Queen's University in Ontario, wrote an article based on her research on the migrant workers. It was published in The Conversation, an Australia-based news magazine, yesterday.

"Look how they live in comfort --

all due to our hard work. What do we get in return? Discarded plastic sheets as our roof," a Bangladeshi migrant in his early 20s told the researcher when she visited them in last summer in Nea Manolada.

"Strawberry farmers give the migrants long work hours, high targeted outputs and depressed wages. The conditions of work can be described as forced or unfree labour. Withholding of wages is a common practice here and tie the workers to the farmers," writes Kukreja.

In 2013, protests by Bangladeshi workers against delayed wages led to Greek farmers shooting at them. Later, the workers won a landmark human rights case, and Greece was forced to pay more than US\$648,000 to 42 of them.

According to the article, each growing season of strawberry, from October to May, as many as 12,000 undocumented Bangladeshi migrants work in the farms in Greece, the 10th biggest exporter of strawberries in the world.

The workers are forced to rent unused farmland and build highly inflammable makeshift shacks called

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A bus carrying 40 picnickers flipped on its side on Chattogram-Rangamati road in the hill district's Manikchhari area yesterday morning after its driver lost control. Police said the accident left 16 bus passengers injured. They received primary treatment at Rangamati General Hospital. PHOTO: STAR

# Sinking into the depths of despair

*Rickshaw-van puller father devastated as his Buet student son held in Abrar murder case*

**MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA**

In a remote village of Joypurhat, Atiqul Islam drives a rickshaw van to make ends meet. A father of three, it was always difficult for him and his wife Nazma Begum to get by on the meagre income. But the family was close to a dream come true.

Their eldest son, a student of the Bangladesh University and Engineering and Technology (Buet), would soon take on the family responsibility.

"We practically starved for days on end just to make sure that our son gets a good education," said the middle-aged rickshaw-puller.

He had thought his days of hardship would be over soon. "My son would graduate in two years and get a job and then look after the family," he said.

"I could never spend a penny for private tuition, and yet my son managed to ace all his exams and get into Buet. He really made me proud. I could stand with my head held high anywhere."

Atiqul's dream has fallen apart. His son Akash Hossain is among those arrested for murdering Abrar Fahad, a second-year student of Buet.

The poor man said it feels like the sky has crashed down upon him. "I had thought my son would take the burden off my tired, old shoulders. But now it seems I have to take even more burden for him."

With anguish, he said that if the charges are proven, his son must be punished. "And I will tell myself that somewhere I must have gone wrong

in his upbringing."

His wife Nazma Begum said, "That other kid who was killed, was my son too. The only thing I ask is that such a brutal incident does not happen again."

Nazma said she had talked to Akash on Sunday evening. But in the early morning of Tuesday, Akash's grandfather called her and told that violence broke out at Buet.

Nazma phoned her son and queried about his involvement. "My son said he was not involved with the incident and that he is innocent."

Akash's grandfather came to Atiqul's house by the time, and then they come to Gazipur where Akash's maternal uncle lives.

Akash came to Gazipur and he was arrested there, said Atiqul. "We are very poor and never engaged in politics. We do not understand politics, and my son was also not involved with politics."

Md Jahurul Islam, chairman of Dogachhi Union Parishad, said Atiqul's family is very poor, and they have no bad reputation in the area.

"Akash is a very good and polite boy. Even I helped him during his admission to Buet. We are shocked and surprised at his arrest. The whole area is saddened," said Jahurul, also general secretary of Joypurhat Sadar Upazila Awami League.

He said their only demand is that the perpetrators must be punished but no innocent people should be victimised.

Born in 1998, Akash passed SSC examination from Dogachhi High School in 2014 with golden GPA-5 and HSC from Joypurhat Government College in 2016 with the top grade.

# HRW slates Abrar killing

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Room 2011, known among students as the "torture cell" run by activists of Chhatra League, pro-ruling Awami League student body. A few hours later, he was found dead.

The BCL assistant secretary at the university told the media that the group interrogated Fahad about his involvement with Chhatra Shibir, pro-Jamaat-e-Islami student body. They claimed to have found "evidence" of Fahad's ties to Shibir after looking through his Facebook account and confiscating his cell phone.

CCTV footage shows students carrying Fahad's limp body from Room 2011 in the middle of the night.

Dhaka Medical College Hospital Forensics reported that he died of internal haemorrhaging from numerous blows to his body.

Police told the media that they found cricket stumps in room 2011, which they suspect were used to beat Fahad to death.

"This deadly incident is not surprising. The Awami League

government has long refused to hold Chhatra League supporters accountable for acts of violence and intimidation. There are complaints of extortion, threatening false allegations, violent attacks around elections, and even acting as vigilante law enforcers during the 2018 student protests," said Adams, adding, "Bangladesh should not be a Room 2011."

Meanwhile, Switzerland has expressed deep sadness over the tragic death of Abrar.

"Switzerland strongly stands by every person's right to life and freedom of expression," Swiss embassy in Bangladesh said in a recent Facebook post.

"Those who encroach on these fundamental tenets of human rights need to be held accountable within the framework of international principles of criminal justice and human rights."

Earlier, Germany, France, the UN and the UK also expressed concern over the death and called for an end to impunity.

# Demand for change

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Anisur went into hiding after the ongoing crackdown on illegal casinos began on September 18, organisation sources said.

On October 6, Jubo League expelled its Dhaka South Jubo League President



Kazi Anisur Rahman

alleged involvement in anti-social activities and breaching discipline of the organisation.

Rab members arrested the two from Cumilla on the same day.

Earlier, the organisation expelled its Dhaka South unit Organising Secretary Khaled Mahmud Bhuiyan, who was arrested for running an illegal casino, for breaching the organisation's discipline and his involvement in anti-social activities.

# Political activities banned at Buet

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posts, which seemed critical of some recent deals with India.

**THE MEETING**

Yesterday's meeting started at Buet auditorium around 5:30pm. At the beginning, VC Prof Saiful, deans of different faculties and the students observed a minute of silence in Abrar's memory.

Shortly after that, Prof Saiful started reading out the 10-point demand raised by the agitating students.

On banning organisation-based politics on the campus, he said, "I, with the authority vested in me, announce that all political organisations and their activities are now banned at Buet."

On the demand for the maximum punishment for Abrar's killers, he said he already discussed the matter with government high-ups and that they promised all sorts of assistance in this regard.

About the demand for expelling all the murder accused from the university, the VC said they expelled students on many occasions in the past, but the students returned to classes with stay orders from court.

"Based on that experience, we have formed a committee to investigate Abrar murder. We've suspended the 19 accused and will take further action based on the probe report. The committee will submit its report within 10 days," he said.

Reading out the demand for providing compensations to Abrar's family and helping it run the legal battle, he said the university

authorities would extend support to the family.

On stopping ragging on the campus, he said a website would be launched for making complaints. The university's Directorate of Students' Welfare (DSW) would directly receive the complaints, he said.

He assured that ragging would stop at Buet.

The VC then said the university authorities would soon install CCTV cameras on both sides of the wings of the dormitories.

Speaking on the other demands, Prof Saiful said they would write to the government so that the trial of the Abrar murder case is held at a speedy trial tribunal.

About the allegation of his failure to take prompt action after the brutal murder, he admitted having some "lackings" on his part. "I had some lackings. As a father figure, I apologise to you," he said.

Later, the students started asking questions to the VC, the deans and DSW Director Mizanur Rahman about implementation of all the demands.

At that time, the issue of Monday's entrance exam came for discussion. The DSW director requested the students not to obstruct the tests. Admission Test Committee Chief and Electrical & Electronic Engineering Faculty Dean Pran Kanai Saha made the same request.

The meeting ended at that point and the students went to the university's Shaheed Minar area, where they held a press briefing. Speaking there, they

said their protests would continue until all their demands were met.

Since Abrar was murdered, Buet Alumni Association and Teachers' Association have been demanding the removal of the VC for his "failure to ensure security" on the campus.

Prof Saiful also faced the protesters' wrath when he went to the campus about 38 hours after the killing. The demonstrators also besieged his office for over four hours.

On Thursday, the protesters gave him until 2:00pm yesterday to clarifying his stance on the demands.

He called the meeting yesterday to discuss the demands.

**FIFTH DAY OF DEMO**

Earlier in the morning, the agitating students resumed the demonstration for the fifth straight day. Carrying banners and placards, several hundred Buet students brought out a procession on the campus, demanding justice for Abrar.

They chanted slogans calling for the maximum punishment for the killers.

Talking to reporters around 11:00am, one of the protesters said, "We've not seen any visible steps in implementing our demands."

The agitating students also drew graffiti and performed a street play depicting Abrar murder.

Speaking at the press briefing after the meeting with the VC, Mahmudur Rahman Sayem, a student of the electrical and electronic engineering department, said they believed five of their demands could be implemented

in a short time.

He said they will not foil Monday's exams if the authorities meet the demands immediately.

"We made the decision at the request of the vice chancellor and the examinees," he said.

The five demands include issuance of notices on expulsion of all the charge-sheeted accused, compensation to Abrar's family, eviction of outsiders from halls and sealing of offices of all political organisations at the dormitories.

**ARRESTEE CONFESSES; TWO MORE HELD**

Mefahul Hamed Zion, a student of naval architecture and marine engineering, and also sports secretary of the Buet unit, yesterday confessed to his links to Abrar killing, said police.

On Thursday, another accused Ifthi Mosharrar Shakal confessed that he along with other Chhatra League leaders had beat up Abrar.

Detectives yesterday arrested two more accused -- Majedul Islam, 21, a student of materials and metallurgical engineering, and Shamim Billah, 20, a student of naval architecture and marine engineering -- in Sylhet and Satkhira.

Meanwhile, arrested Buet BCL leader Amit Saha and Buet student Hossain Mohammad Toha were placed on five-day remand each yesterday in connection with the murder.

A Dhaka court also sent to jail Abrar's roommate Mizanur Rahman Mizan, who was arrested recently in connection with the murder.

# Horrific accounts of cruelty

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At one stage, Anik went out of the room. He returned there within 20 minutes, and again beat up Abrar indiscriminately.

Zion then slapped Abrar and hit him with a stump in his knee.

After recording the confessional statement of Zion, Metropolitan Magistrate Sarafuzzaman Ansary ordered the authorities to send him to Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj.

Abrar's father filed the murder case against 19 Buet students and several other unnamed ones with Chalkbazar Police Station on October 7.

**TWO MORE ARRESTED**

Meanwhile, detectives yesterday arrested accused Majedul Islam from Sylhet and Shamem Billah from Bhowra land port in Satkhira.

With them, 18 students, including 14 FIR-named accused, have so far been arrested in connection with the murder.

Majedul is a student of materials and metallurgical engineering and Shamem Billah of naval architecture and marine engineering.

Besides, two other accused Amit Saha and Hossain Mohammad Toha were placed on five-day remand each

by a Dhaka court yesterday.

Amit is a student civil engineering and also the deputy law secretary of Buet Chhatra League, and Toha is a student of mechanical engineering.

Shakal, a student of biomedical engineering, in his confessional statement said he took part in the beating.

He told the court that Abrar was taken to room-2011 of Sher-e-Bangla Hall sometimes after 8:00pm on October 6. His two mobile phones and a laptop were also taken there. Buet BCL deputy office secretary Mustaba Rafid and mechanical engineering student Khandakar Tabakharul Islam Tanvir checked the mobile phones.

Muntasir al Jemmy of the same department checked the laptop.

In his statement, Shakal also said when they were checking Abrar's devices (mobile and laptop), Mehadi Hasan Robein and Zion came to the room. Robein asked them to press Abrar to know the names of those involved with Shibir at Buet. At that time, Robein slapped Abrar several times.

He told the court that there was no cricket stump in the room where Abrar was beaten up. Someone brought

stumps from outside.

Shamsul Arefin alias Rafath, a second-year student of mechanical engineering department, gave him a stump and he hit Abrar four to five times with it. The stump broke.

At one stage, Robein contacted Buet BCL General Secretary Mehedi Hasan Rasel over the phone.

Shakal also told the court that he went to the canteen to have dinner around 10:30pm. He found Abrar was very sick and lying on the floor when he returned to the room around 20 minutes later.

He scolded Abrar and forced him to stand up and slapped him several times. Then Muzahidur, a third-year student of electrical and electronics engineering department, started whipping him with a skipping rope. Shakal again hit Abrar in his legs and knees with a cricket stump. At that time, Tabakharul slapped him.

Around 11:00pm, Anik again entered the room and hit Abrar around 100 times with stumps. Everybody in the room was frightened seeing the way Anik beat him up. Anik left the room around midnight.

As Abrar complained of breathing problem, Shakal put a pillow under

his head. Minutes later, Abrar started vomiting. As Shakal informed Anik of the matter over the phone, Anik told him to give Abrar a bath and rub ointment in the wounds. Abrar vomited again. Then Robein said he was "feigning".

Abrar was then taken to room 2005. Amit sent a text to continue torturing Abrar to get information.

Knowing about Abrar's bad condition, Amit asked them to drive him away from the hall. After that, Robein and Anik came to the room. Seeing Abrar, they said he was all right and left the room.

Shakal said as Abrar vomited again, Robein asked them to bring him downstairs to hand him over to police. Some students tried to take him to the ground floor. As they failed, he was carried to the staircases between the second and the ground floors.

Then Abrar said he was feeling very bad.

Rasel talked to policemen at the hall gate.

Ismail and Monir called for an ambulance. As the ambulance was late, Tamim brought in the doctor of Buet medical centre on a motorcycle. The physician checked Abrar's pulse and declared him dead, said Shakal.

# US aviation authority blasted over redesign of 737 MAX aircraft

**AFP, Washington**

US aviation regulators were yesterday slammed for allowing design changes to Boeing's 737 MAX aircraft that have been implicated in two crashes causing the deaths of more than 300 people.

The Federal Aviation Administration failed to stick to its own rules, followed out-of-date procedures and lacked the manpower and expertise to properly oversee the alterations, a panel of worldwide experts found.

The Joint Authorities Technical Review (JATR) was put together in March after a 737 MAX run by Ethiopian Airlines crashed killing all 157 onboard.

That came after the same make of jet flown by Lion Air plunged into the ocean off Indonesia in

October, with the loss of 189 people, in similar circumstances.

The tragedies led to the airliner being grounded and a step-up in oversight of Boeing from the FAA and international regulators.

But the FAA came in for harsh criticism from the JATR, which said there was "an inadequate number of FAA specialists" in place to oversee a new design of the 737 MAX and they "had inadequate awareness" of the system implicated in the crashes.

It said officials oversaw design changes "in a way that failed to achieve the full safety benefit."

Their damning 69-page report also found that Boeing had put pressure on some of its staff who

had FAA authority to pass the updated designs.

The JATR panel included members of the FAA as well as Nasa and other regulators from around the world.

In response to the report, FAA Administrator Steven Dickson said: "Today's unprecedented US safety record was built on the willingness of aviation professionals to embrace hard lessons and to seek continuous improvement."

"We welcome this scrutiny and are confident that our openness to these efforts will further bolster aviation safety worldwide. The accidents in Indonesia and Ethiopia are a somber reminder that the FAA and our international regulatory partners must strive to constantly strengthen aviation safety,"