

LABOUR RECRUITMENT TO MALAYSIA

# Time to break the never-ending cycle



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**M**ALAYSIA stopped hiring workers from Bangladesh in September 2018, alleging massive irregularities in the recruitment process via a syndicate of 10 recruiting agencies. After several meetings in the last three years, the two countries signed an MoU on December 19, 2021 to reopen the labour market. Surprisingly, it seems the same syndicate is controlling almost everything - again!

Such incidents are not new when it comes to migration to Malaysia. According to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), 23 Bangladeshis went to Malaysia for the first time in 1978, but workers started going regularly from 1992. Over the last 44 years, there used to be a different name for the recruitment process, but allegations of mismanagement, high migration costs, and corruption have been persistent. The Malaysian labour market was closed to Bangladeshi workers again and again.

The market was almost shut down from 1997 to 2005, and Malaysia introduced the calling visa system at the end of 2006. Then, in 2007 and 2008, 400,000 Bangladeshi workers went to Malaysia. Although the migration cost was fixed at Tk 84,000, Tk 2 to 3 lakh was taken from each applicant. The number of people who went to Malaysia was far beyond what was needed. As a result, many Bangladeshis did not get jobs and faced a crisis in a foreign land. Due to this, Malaysia stopped hiring workers from Bangladesh in 2009. Nearly half a million migrants became undocumented at that time.

After the labour market was closed for almost four years, the two countries became interested in sending workers via a government-to-government (G2G) process, bypassing private agencies, to solve the crisis. Despite strong opposition from the agencies, Bangladesh and Malaysia signed a G2G agreement on November 26, 2012. But Malaysian employers did not send many demands. On the other hand, several hundred thousands of Rohingyas and Bangladeshis went to Malaysia by sea, and mass graves were discovered on the Thai-Malaysian border, which was criticised worldwide.

Ultimately the G2G failed, and Malaysia declared to hire workers

through private agencies again. But this time, they adopted a syndicate of 10 agencies. There was corruption and massive ambiguity about the process in both the countries, and the monopolistic control of 10 recruiting agencies eventually led to the 2018 suspension by the Mahathir government.

are owned by three sitting MPs, and one is related to an influential minister. The rest also have powerful connections. There is an allegation that a Malaysian Dato of Bangladeshi origin, who has access to the corridors of power in Putrajaya, is the most influential person in this syndication process - whether now or in the past.

It's true that there is a huge demand for workers, but Malaysia is now under international pressure for its faulty recruitment system, and many of its top companies are facing challenges in hiring workers. Bangladesh could make use of this opportunity as no other country can provide a large number of workers. In addition, three prime ministers have been replaced in

ministry has not yet approved any medical centres.

It indicates that if the same syndicated system becomes active again, Bangladeshi workers will have to pay more, and it may lead to another market closure, causing substantial financial losses to the migrants. So, we should immediately develop a process where anyone who wants to go abroad would have to register in a digital platform, which would create a functional database. According to the Overseas Employment and Migrant Act, this should have been initiated in 2013.

We need to develop a system to make the whole recruitment process transparent, not just for Malaysia, but for all countries of employment. After the registration of potential migrant workers in the database, there should be a system using which employers from any country can place their demands. Then the agencies can hire workers according to their skills from the database.

On the other hand, those who are going abroad from Bangladesh are not very conscious, and they are desperate to go at any cost. This is risky behaviour. Before going abroad, everyone should calculate how much money they can earn and what their migration cost is. We must remember that the cost of migration from Bangladesh is the highest globally, and the workers' earnings are the lowest. According to a national survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, a Bangladeshi worker has to spend 17 months' worth of salary to go abroad, which is one kind of modern day slavery.

Considering the situation, both Bangladesh and Malaysia should remain resolute in promoting safe, fair, transparent and ethical recruitment, upholding the national laws and relevant international standards.

However, we also should be vocal about the employers' pay models for ethical recruitment. If there is a need for an employee, it is also the responsibility of the employers to bear the recruitment costs. Many Malaysian employers showed interest in such recruitment, but due to syndicates, it is not happening. If all the stakeholders want a solution, it is possible to achieve it; South Korea's EPS (Employment Permit System) is such an example.

But before everything, we have to answer the question: Is the syndicate more powerful than the state?



The process of recruiting Bangladeshi workers in jobs overseas must be transparent to protect these migrant workers' interest.

FILE PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

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After more than three years of closure, an MoU was signed to send our migrant workers to the Southeast Asian nation at the end of 2021. Most people were delighted about the Malaysian market reopening as it is an employment opportunity. However, the optimism was replaced by anxiety and scepticism when the syndicate issues re-emerged. In the letter sent to Bangladesh's Expatriate Welfare Minister Imran Ahmed on January 14 this year, Malaysian minister M Saravanan said that Malaysia wanted to recruit workers from Bangladesh through 25 agencies.

Referring to the ILO Charter and the Bangladesh Competition Act, 2012, Minister Imran Ahmed, in a letter dated January 16, 2022, responded to Saravanan saying that Bangladesh wanted an equal opportunity to ensure transparent, regular and safe migration of its citizens. But surprisingly, the Malaysian human resources minister stuck to his unfair demand. When he visited Dhaka in early June this year, he openly spoke in favour of the syndicate of 25 agencies.

At least three of the 25 agencies

The Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM) has expressed concerns over the process and urged not to repeat the same mistakes that led to the closure of the Malaysian labour market before.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and Transparency International Malaysia (TIM) have jointly called for transparency in the recruitment process and urged the two governments to take all preventive measures against corruption in the recruitment process, including syndicated control, so that Bangladeshi workers' interests and that of their employers in Malaysia can be protected. Alas, no one listens!

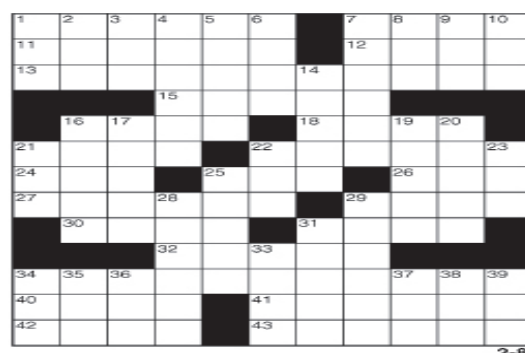
It is unfair that Malaysia is hiring workers from 13 other source countries, and none of them have syndicates like Bangladesh. Migration experts and most employers in Malaysia are also concerned about this and have asked the human resources minister to explain how the 25 agencies were selected. But his ministry didn't clarify on what basis the agencies were selected from the list of 1,520 agencies sent by Bangladesh.

Malaysia in the last two years due to political unrest. Syndication will definitely be an issue in the future.

Considering all this, Bangladesh can say no to syndicates, but agree to sending workers through a transparent process. The Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment has fixed Tk 78,990 as the migration cost to Malaysia from Bangladesh. But the ministry has asked not to pay anyone as the recruitment process has not been announced. Ignoring that, agencies have already started taking money and medical tests have been started, even though the

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Wanted poster promise
  - 7 DNA sample tool
  - 11 Singer Franklin
  - 12 Dorothy's dog
  - 13 Rich
  - 15 Composer Bruckner
  - 16 Finish last
  - 18 Workout units
  - 21 Lounge attire
  - 22 Diverse
  - 24 Rink makeup
  - 25 Beam of light
  - 26 Dissenter's vote
  - 27 Team symbol
  - 29 Christmas season
  - 30 Pencil part
  - 31 "Clumsy me!"
- DOWN**
- 32 Substantial member
  - 34 Wedding party
  - 19 Locker poster
  - 40 Fairy tale monster
  - 41 Send back
  - 42 Nasty
  - 43 Makes speeches
  - 1 Flock father
  - 2 Pitcher's stat
  - 3 Tie the knot
  - 4 Not nervous
  - 5 River of Provence
  - 6 Foolish
  - 7 Pothead
  - 8 Took the title
  - 9 Had supper
  - 10 Young fellow
  - 14 Feared eel
  - 16 From the area
  - 17 Past plump
  - 20 Elite Navy group
  - 21 Crater part
  - 22 Brewery tank
  - 23 Fabric color
  - 25 Cowboy contest
  - 28 New Jersey city
  - 29 Famed cellist
  - 31 Different
  - 33 Bushy do
  - 34 May honoree
  - 35 Wisdom bringer
  - 36 Nest egg acct.
  - 37 D.C. baseballer, for short
  - 38 Low digit
  - 39 Hwy's.



SATURDAY'S ANSWERS



BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



**SCIP Plastics Project**  
Sustainable Capacity Building to Reduce Irreversible Pollution by Plastics  
Funded by: Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, Germany  
Department of Civil Engineering  
Khulna University of Engineering & Technology (KUET)  
Khulna 9203, Bangladesh  
Job Opportunity/Circular (2nd Time)

Applications are invited from the eligible candidates of Bangladeshi citizens to fill the following posts to conduct the activities of a 32 months (1st April 2022 to 30 November 2024) research project entitled as "Sustainable Capacity Building to Reduce Irreversible Pollution by Plastics (SCIP Plastics Project)", funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, Germany. The Leading organization of this project is Bauhaus University Weimar, Germany with the partnership of KUET, KCC and CUET. Available posts are:

- (i) Project Engineer-8, (ii) Secretary-1 (Administrative) (Awareness Centre); (iii) Officer-1 (Awareness Centre) (iv) Junior Lab Attendant/staff-1 (Waste Lab); (v) Staff-1 (Project Office); (vi) Staff-1 (Board of Director), (vii) Staff-1 (Awareness Centre) and (viii) Driver-1.

Details of the SCIP plastics project as well as the available posts, minimum prescribed qualification and experiences of each post, number of posts, period of job and monthly salary are available in the designated link on KUET website (<https://kuet.ac.bd/scip>).

- 1. Application date: 26/07/2022 to 08/08/2022 (deadline: 08/08/2022 at 11:59pm).
- 2. Interested candidates are requested to submit their application only through KUET website (<https://kuet.ac.bd/scip>).
- 3. Online application is only acceptable. No application will be received by post/currier/in-person.
- 4. Only short listed candidates will be communicated based on the merits and experiences for in-person interview for the selection to recruit.
- 5. Any personal communication is considered as disqualification for any position of this project.
- 6. All the positions are full-time and fixed-term contractual. The positions (2nd circular) are valid only for the project period of August/September 2022 to November 2024.
- 7. Persons already in full-time job must have official clearance/leave from the employer before joining if selected.
- 8. No application fee is required. No TA/DA is admissible for in-person interview.

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