Better care for migrants can ensure higher remittance earnings

Bangladesh is the sixth largest labour-sending country and the eighth in terms of remittance earned.

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After that meeting, it was decided that migrants would get Tk 107 per dollar, which was Tk 99.50 before. Apart from this, banks agreed not to charge any fee for collecting remittances. Besides, it was decided that sending any amount of remittance from abroad will not require any documentation.

These were positive decisions. But migrants also take other considerations into account when sending money. For example, they consider how quickly it can be sent to their families, how easy the process is, etc. And so, unless these issues are addressed, it will be difficult to prevent them from preferring the use of hundi.

Better care and services for migrant workers, along with some special incentives can increase remittances or even double it. So, the banks need to get closer to them or develop special digital services and products targeting migrants.

It needs to be asked what facilities do migrants get for sending remittances for 10-20 years. Do they get any pension schemes? Is there any One-Stop Centre for migrants to invest in Bangladesh? What benefits do their family members get? There are no satisfactory answers to these questions.

Many migrants and their family members are not within the reach of banking services. Though there are more than 10 million migrants abroad, many don't even have a bank account. The government can make it mandatory for them to open a bank account before leaving the country.

Banks here can promote the opening of two accounts, one for sending money to their families and the other to save for the migrants themselves. They can also introduce various saving schemes for migrants. The government can also introduce pension allowance for migrants, from which they can benefit once they return after 10-20 years.

The government can provide other benefits to migrants. For example, they can introduce a special admission quota in schools and colleges for their children, or give them medical incentives.

The government can also take more initiatives to honour and recognise migrant workers. In addition to that, the sending of skilled workers abroad should be prioritised. This should be prioritised after the Covid-19 pandemic and due to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which has drastically increased the demand for skilled workers. We also need to explore new markets, while not losing our focus on the old ones.

Overall, we must focus on ensuring good governance in the migration sector. The sector is still plagued by a number of problems. Before migration, migrants have to deal with recruiting agencies – some of which turn out to be fraudulent – intermediaries, inaccurate information regarding jobs, purchasing and selling of visas at high prices, the issue of obtaining government clearance, etc. But even that is not the end of it.

Once migrants reach their destinations, they often face harassment, exploitation, abuse, have to take on inhumane workloads, live in difficult conditions, and even risk their lives.

The government has indeed taken various positive initiatives in the field of migration, but there is still a long way to go. But before everything else, we must understand that migrants are not money-making machines; they are human beings, just like us. They deserve dignity and better care, which will ultimately help increase remittance for the country.

Bangladeshi migrant workers in Dubai.

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