



There has been widespread allegations of human rights violations suffered by migrant workers during the construction of all eight FIFA World Cup 2022 stadiums in Qatar. FILE PHOTO: AFP

# Can we break the cycle of migrant exploitation?



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The announcement of official pardon for the 57 Bangladeshi migrants, who were handed out harsh prison sentences in the UAE for organising peaceful protests in solidarity with students back home, has brought about a general sense of relief. This is a definitive diplomatic win for the chief adviser, and has raised hopes of closer ties with an important trade partner at a crucial moment—in FY2023–24, \$3.65 billion was sent from the UAE to Bangladesh as remittance, making it the highest remittance-earning market for our workers.

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between 17 percent and 35 percent. In 2021, Abiron Begum became the only Bangladeshi woman to receive justice when a Saudi court convicted a family of three for her murder, but there are many more Abirons who have been forgotten. As long as the labour flows out and remittances flow in, there has been a silent consensus on turning a blind eye to rights abuses so far.

Far from supporting and protecting our migrants, many officials of the previous establishment seem to have played an active role in exploiting workers through labour syndicates instead. We have seen this most recently in the Malaysia recruitment chaos, where thousands of workers spent their life savings, yet never found employment. Currently, Bangladesh has the highest labour recruitment costs in South Asia, a large proportion of which is spent on bribes and illegal fees. These fraudulent practices are not only a crushing burden on ordinary workers, but it harms the economy by creating a trust deficit with host countries and limiting access to labour markets. In 2023, an average of 8,200 Bangladeshis were travelling to the UAE every month, whereas this year, the figure has dropped to 6,500 per month, reportedly due to employers' reluctance to take on workers who might ultimately fail to meet legal

brokers who work as go-betweens for them and agencies. Ensuring easy access to information is a necessity to protect workers, as is a particular authority, preferably separated from recruitment, where complaints can be lodged regarding such unscrupulous practices.

The recent events in the UAE have made it clear that workers' ability to organise and collectively bargain for their rights in destination countries are severely restricted. Given how vulnerable this makes them, it is shocking that over the past few decades, so little effort has been put into creating a proper bureaucratic infrastructure and setting up support systems that migrant workers can directly access. In contrast, if we are to look at the Philippines model for inspiration, we will find that their foreign consulates hold a resource centre for migrants, as well as a specific migrant workers office and social welfare attachés in host countries. We can definitely take a leaf out of their book in terms of building a migration management system, streamlining migration-related bureaucracy and investing in human capital, alongside updating labour laws to protect migrants.

We have also witnessed recently that a little bit of diplomacy can go a long way. It is time for us to realise that there is safety in numbers, and to collaborate with India, Pakistan and other South Asian countries with big migrant populations to put pressure on destination countries. One immediate push that is needed is health coverage for our workers. For too long they have been treated as dispensable, receiving little to no healthcare and being unceremoniously kicked out of their workplaces after falling ill. Oman has already set an

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requirements.

The interim government is now faced with the mammoth task of rescuing migrant workers from exploitation, both at home and abroad, while ensuring that their efforts do not have the adverse impact of reducing labour outflows instead. For this, the most urgent course of action is to bring back trust into the recruitment process by breaking up the labour syndicates. The chokehold of the powerful few can finally be loosened, with more players allowed into the market. It is also essential to make legal recourse available to migrants, both for righting historical wrongs and to ensure their protection in future interactions with recruiting agencies.

Unfortunately, corruption and mismanagement exist at every level, whether it's bribes for police clearance certificates, exaggerated fees for medical tests, or overpriced tickets from travel agencies. Workers rarely have clear information on these processes, and are at the mercy of sub-agents and

example by introducing a social insurance system for both nationals and migrant workers that covers sickness, and it is high time for us to raise our voices so that others follow suit.

If you're wondering whether such efforts will ultimately hamper migration, it must be clear by now that there is an obvious power imbalance between migrant importing and exporting nations that devalues our workers, especially if they are "unskilled." But if the July uprising has taught us anything, it is that power cannot be endlessly abused. Alongside dealing with the exploitation of workers within our own economy, we must also tackle global exploitative practices head-on, whether it is in the migrant labour sector or in the RMG industry. If the Qatar World Cup is an example to go by, Saudi Arabia will also rely heavily on migrant workers for construction if it is to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup. It is high time for host countries to come to the realisation that they need us as much as we need them too.

# Preserving our future by saving our forests



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With the recent fall of an authoritarian regime and an interim government in place, the expectations and demands of people in Bangladesh are skyrocketing, and there is a desire to take full advantage of new opportunities and possibilities. In a similar vein, conservationists and natural resource management professionals expect the management of forests and other resources to be more effective now, protecting the long-term interests of the country and its population.

Previous regimes were more concerned about success stories in all sectors, with fabricated success carefully covering unattended challenges. Political interference was widespread in institutional decision-making, leading to wastage of public resources, ignorance of expert opinions, and forsaking of participation and stakeholder consultation. Against this backdrop, the Forest Department and other related agencies gradually drifted far from their due course.

The interim government may weigh on several issues that I believe are crucial for transforming the public forest management system into a more transparent and accountable one.

One such issue is data tampering and the misrepresentation of facts. It has been customary, over the past decade, to present exaggerated scenarios in terms of achievement. For instance, the data regarding national forest cover, which was shown to be around 12.6 percent, while it is in reality around 8.6 percent. These have immense bearing on our national forest coverage targets, and the targets against the relevant SDGs, policy, plans, and strategies, as the distorted data places us on an impractical trajectory.

Therefore, the scholarly demand is to correct the course through updating Bangladesh's actual forest cover data, and reconsider various national targets accordingly.

Most of the forest and relevant laws in practice are from the British regime, and devoid of any consideration of the people. Moreover, parts of the reserved forests are declared as Protected Areas to fulfil international obligations, which further limits accessibility and the rights of the people. It has never been a practice of the Forest Department to arrange public consultation while declaring public forests as Protected Areas. At present, 52 percent of the Sundarbans forest (including the waterways) has been declared as

Protected Areas with harsher usage regulations. This often makes the lives of forest-dependent locals miserable, and ultimately results in exacerbated illegal practices.

The rights of local communities should be ensured by revising the boundaries of declared Protected Areas and subsequent declarations. Alongside the Protected Areas management plan, a mandatory management requirement for each Protected Area should be prepared for real action to fill the missing gaps.

Another area of concern is the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), an underutilised hidden gem for forest restoration and carbon conservation. Despite the widespread deforestation (522,158 ha) and forest degradation (146,210 ha) in the CHT region, efforts are not being taken to restore

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it at scale because of the conflicting land management responsibilities of the various departments. Some part of the CHT forest land is managed by the Forest Department, termed as reserved forests, while most of it is under the management of the deputy commissioners representing the land ministry, often termed as unclassified state forests. The latter has no mandate to prevent forest degradation or restoration; therefore, the lands are undergoing further degradation due to massive expansion of agriculture and horticultural crops. The Forest Department, on the other hand, has no functional ties or programmes under the administrative structures created in light of the 1997 CHT Accord.

However, appropriate community-based forest conservation programmes could increase forest cover by eliminating

conflicting land uses and create further opportunities to foster employment in the hills, generate timber and non-timber products, secure livelihoods and thus reduce landslide, soil erosion and siltation, improve watersheds, regulate local climate, and achieve both national REDD+ and Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets. Furthermore, it is possible to earn a considerable amount of foreign currencies from the voluntary or regulatory carbon markets through emission reduction by carbon conservation in the forests.

Unfortunately in the forestry sector, we see exclusionary, vested interest-led and often politically biased, inefficient and even unnecessarily planned and implemented development programmes. Some salient examples include the installation of non-profitable and useless ropeway in the name of Sheikh Russel Aviary and Ecopark in Rangunia, the establishment of a safari park at Lathitila forest and numerous ecoparks. Some of these initiatives have caused irreparable harm to forests and wildlife and enabled embezzlement and wastage of public money.

To ensure resourceful forest conservation activities, the Forest Department has drafted a forest policy and a forestry master plan using huge debt investment; it has been awaiting approval for eight years. These forest policy and forestry master plan should be discussed, approved and implemented immediately before these become obsolete.

Even more concerningly, the Forest Department does not have the capacity to prevent encroachment. Even though enormous lands—104,000 hectares—have already been encroached, the field-level staff are still putting their life at risk to prevent encroachment and hill-cutting, resulting in physical assaults and even death of forest personnel in the recent past.

Shockingly, the Government and Local Authority Lands and Buildings (Recovery of Possession) Ordinance, 1970 currently in use did not retain the legal power of divisional forest officers for eviction, which was in the earlier ordinance. After sending the list to the deputy commissioners, the Forest Department must wait for the eviction orders and the appointment of magistrates. By the time all approvals are obtained, the forest is already encroached upon and destroyed. Actions for evictions, if ever, are taken from the office of the deputy commissioner. However, these are often purely populist, bowing down to the wishes of political leadership.

If forests and wildlife habitats are to exist, necessary legal power needs to be given to stop encroachment and protect them. The misuse of forests cannot go on any further. People should stand up for forests, for only then will forests survive—and so will people.

of due process in terms of the sentencing, as well as a glaring lack of support from relevant ministries and officials in Bangladesh prior to the chief adviser's intervention, point towards a worrying status quo for migrants. It is clear that, working in precarious conditions under repressive regimes with little knowledge of their rights (and limits to it), our workers are on paper celebrated for their role in propping up the economy, but in reality, they are isolated, ignored, and left to fend for themselves.

Nothing makes this stark reality more obvious than the huge number of migrant workers that continue to return home in body bags and coffins. Last year, a record 4,552 Bangladeshi workers died abroad, with a majority of these deaths occurring in Gulf states. Almost all of them were chalked up to "natural causes," despite rights groups arguing that unsafe working conditions, including lack of protections against extreme heat, are a major driver behind these untimely deaths.

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Date: 08/09/2024

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This is an online Tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline/ Hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-tender, please register on e-GP system portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>). For more details, please contract support desk contract numbers.  
e-Tender are invited in e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Dr. S. M. Hasibul Islam, Director, Mugda Medical College Hospital, Dhaka for the Procurement of;

Tender Id	Name of Goods	Tender/Propo sal Publication Date & Time	Tender/Propo sal Last Selling Date & Time	Tender/Proposal Closing/ Opening Date & Time
1012858	Procurement of Medical & Surgical Equipments for the F.Y 2024-2025 at Mugda Medical College Hospital, Dhaka.	11-Sep-2024 12:00	09-Oct-2024 16:00	10-Oct-2024 12:00
1012859	Procurement of Computer Accessories for the F.Y 2024-2025 at Mugda Medical College Hospital, Dhaka.	11-Sep-2024 12:00	09-Oct-2024 16:00	10-Oct-2024 12:00
1012860	Procurement of Computer Consumable for the F.Y 2024-2025 at Mugda Medical College Hospital, Dhaka.	11-Sep-2024 12:00	09-Oct-2024 16:00	10-Oct-2024 12:00
1012861	Procurement of Others Stationary for the F.Y 2024-2025 at Mugda Medical College Hospital, Dhaka.	11-Sep-2024 12:00	09-Oct-2024 16:00	10-Oct-2024 12:00
1012863	Procurement of Cleaning Items for the F.Y 2024-2025 at Mugda Medical College Hospital, Dhaka.	11-Sep-2024 12:00	09-Oct-2024 16:00	10-Oct-2024 12:00
1012864	Procurement of Printing & Binding for the F.Y 2024-2025 at Mugda Medical College Hospital, Dhaka.	11-Sep-2024 12:00	09-Oct-2024 16:00	10-Oct-2024 12:00
1012866	Procurement of MSR Medicine (Non EDCL) for the F.Y 2024-2025 at Mugda Medical College Hospital, Dhaka.	11-Sep-2024 12:00	09-Oct-2024 16:00	10-Oct-2024 12:00
1012868	Procurement of Chemical Reagent for the F.Y 2024-2025 at Mugda Medical College Hospital, Dhaka.	11-Sep-2024 12:00	09-Oct-2024 16:00	10-Oct-2024 12:00

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(Dr. S. M. Hasibul Islam)  
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