



A dignified welcome

Dhaka airport finally opens lounges dedicated to migrant workers and their families

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PHOTO:
PALASH KHAN

RASHIDUL HASAN and JAMIL MAHMUD

A quiet revolution is underway at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) in Dhaka. For years, Bangladeshi migrant workers -- one of the main pillars of the nation's economy -- endured long hours of discomfort and humiliation at the airport, often standing for hours in overcrowded spaces with nowhere to rest before boarding their flights. Their families, who came from far-flung districts to bid farewell, shared similar hardships. But now, a wave of change has swept through the country's busiest airport. Two newly inaugurated facilities -- the Waiting Lounge and the Probashi Lounge -- are transforming the travel experience for migrant workers and their loved ones, offering them the comfort, respect, and dignity they deserve.

Both the facilities are the first of their kind at the Dhaka airport.

Waiting Lounge: No more standing around

Rozina Begum recalls her first trip to HSIA two years ago when her husband was flying to Saudi Arabia. "There was no proper place to sit, let alone rest. I stood outside the departure gate for two hours, waiting for him to go through the formalities," she shared. Like Rozina, many families of migrant workers faced similar ordeals, loitering around the airport in heat or rain, with no access to basic amenities.

But when Rozina returned to the airport recently to see off her son heading to Saudi Arabia, she was greeted by a vastly improved

their wait.

Abul Kashem, supervisor of the café, said his team works round the clock in three shifts at the café to serve "our honourable migrant workers and their families". He said traditional meals like biryani and rice will be added to the menu soon, providing more affordable food options for visitors.

Additionally, efforts are underway to further enhance the lounge's facilities based on feedback from users.

For Anisur Rahman, who came from Brahmanbaria to see off his son, the lounge was a lifesaver. "We arrived seven hours before the flight. Without this space, the wait would have been unbearable. Here, I

volunteers to help the migrant workers at the airport.

Voices of Gratitude

The changes at HSIA have been met with widespread appreciation from the migrant community.

Monirul Islam, who has been working in Malaysia for five years, was visibly moved by the facilities. "Earlier, we were treated like orphans at the airport--no one cared about us. Now, everyone here treats us with respect, calling us 'sir.' It's such an honour," he said, expressing his gratitude to the interim government.

Nazrul Islam, another migrant worker, echoed these sentiments. "This



could rest, eat, and even take a shower," he said.

Migrant worker Md Sumon, who has been in Oman for 17 years and usually comes home every two years, said he had no idea about the new facilities before arriving at the airport. When he reached the arrival area volunteers told him about the waiting room and guided him and his family members there.

"The changes are assuring. The place is relatively hustle-free, secured and comfortable for spending some hours with family members before boarding the plane," he said.

Probashi Lounge: An exclusive area for migrant workers

Inside the departure terminal, another facility--the Probashi Lounge--caters exclusively to migrant workers. Sponsored by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), this lounge was inaugurated by the chief adviser on November 11. Accessible only after completing immigration formalities, it offers outbound workers a comfortable space to relax before their flights.

The lounge features 144 comfortable chairs, charging stations for electronic devices, and free Wi-Fi. There are also three large monitors inside the lounge to display flight information and other important messages to the migrant workers.

A subsidised café serves affordable meals and snacks, with items sourced from the Bangladesh Air Force bakery.

For workers like Humayun Kabir, who was waiting for his flight to Malaysia, the lounge was a welcome surprise. "The food prices here are reasonable, and the Wi-Fi allows me to stay connected with my family. It's a great way to pass the time before boarding," he said.

IOM is also sponsoring nearly 100

is the first time I've felt recognised for my contributions. The facilities here make me proud to be a remittance earner for my country," he said.

For many workers this correspondent talked to, it's a sign that their sacrifices are being acknowledged. "We work hard to support our families and the nation. These changes show that the government values our efforts," said Anwar Hossain, who was waiting in the Probashi Lounge for his flight to Saudi Arabia.

Building a Better Future

As Bangladesh continues to rely on remittances to stabilise its economy, it is only fitting that those driving this lifeline are given the respect they deserve. The Waiting Lounge and Probashi Lounge are a promising start to treating our overseas heroes right.

While these facilities bring much-needed comfort and pride to people like Rozina Begum, their late introduction highlights the long-standing neglect that the migrant workers faced. And a lot is yet to be done to make their stay overseas and travelling hassle-free.

Kamrul Islam, Executive Director of HSIA, agreed and said, for years, these "nation builders" were overlooked, their needs ignored in the very spaces they frequented most.

"We want to ensure that our migrant workers feel respected and valued. These lounges are just the beginning. Our goal is to make their travel experience as smooth and comfortable as possible," he said, emphasising the airport authority's commitment to honouring these workers.

And for workers like Md Sumon, these changes are meaningful. "This lounge is a symbol of respect. It's a reminder that we matter to the country we work so hard for," he said adding that the lounges mark a step in the right direction.



The Impact of Remittance Warriors

Remittances remain a lifeline for Bangladesh's economy, contributing around 6-7 percent to GDP, according to financial reports. In FY24, remittance inflows reached \$23.91 billion, a 10.66 percent increase from the previous year, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

The trend continues upward, offering relief amid external payment pressures and declining foreign reserves. In October, remittances rose 21.31 percent year-on-year to \$2.39 billion, following sharp jumps of 40 percent in August and 80 percent in September. From July to October, inflows totaled \$8.93 billion, up 30 percent from \$6.87 billion during the same period in FY24.

Meanwhile, in FY24, 11.42 lakh Bangladeshis went abroad for work, slightly surpassing FY23's 11.37 lakh, according to Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) data. Currently, over 1.49 crore Bangladeshi migrants work in 176 countries, contributing significantly to the nation's economic resilience.



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a migrant worker

environment. A spacious waiting lounge on the first floor of the airport's multi-level car park now caters specifically to families like hers. "It's so much better now. There are seats, a prayer room, and even a small play area for children. It feels good," Rozina said with a smile.

The Waiting Lounge, inaugurated on November 14 by Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus who called the migrant workers "nation-builders", was developed through a collaboration between the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) and the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism. Located on the first floor of the airport's multi-level car park area, it offers a clean, quiet space for families to wait while their loved ones navigate the airport's departure procedures.

The lounge provides ample seating areas for visitors. Separate prayer rooms for men and women ensure a space for spiritual needs, while a baby-care room and breastfeeding facilities cater to parents with young children. A reasonably priced cafeteria serves snacks and refreshments, ensuring that migrant workers and their families do not have to pay extra during