

Boost remittances by ensuring migrant rights and welfare

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Bangladesh received record remittances in 2024. Migrant workers and non-resident Bangladeshis sent a record \$26.9 billion in remittances in the past year, providing relief to the country's dollar reserves, particularly in the face of multiple financial and political challenges, including external payment pressures amid dwindling foreign exchange reserves.

Although Bangladeshi migrants suspended sending remittances in July in solidarity with the students' movement against discrimination, they later sent more, and remittances grew by 23 percent compared to 2023.

This positive trend continues in 2025, with expatriate Bangladeshis sending over \$1.68 billion during the first 25 days of January. Despite these record-breaking remittance inflows in 2024 and previous years, the government has not taken any significant steps to ensure the rights or welfare of migrants. Instead, they

frequently endure significant hardships throughout the migration process—both at home and abroad.

THE SUFFERING OF MIGRANT WORKERS

Most recently, the country witnessed the suffering of 18,000 aspiring migrant workers who could not fly to Malaysia before the May 31 deadline in 2024 due to mismanagement by recruiting agencies and government authorities. Eight months later, these individuals have neither received refunds nor been able to travel. Recently, they protested in Dhaka and formed a human chain to demand justice.

Such issues do not occur only in Malaysia. The entire migration process is riddled with challenges, from obtaining a passport to securing a job offer, dealing with recruiting agencies, undergoing medical checks, and paying exorbitant ticket prices.

In fact, the migration cost from Bangladesh is among the highest in the



▲
Remittance
earners waiting in
line, completing
immigration
formalities before
boarding flights.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

world, while the earnings remain the lowest. Although the government has fixed the migration cost to 14 countries at a maximum of Tk 1.66 lakh, job seekers often pay three to six times higher due to visa trading, syndicates, and intermediaries at every stage.

However, despite these barriers, Bangladeshis remain determined to go abroad. But facing all the obstacles at home, when they finally reach their destinations, many are exploited once again: low or unpaid wages, inhumane workloads in high temperatures, poor living conditions, lack of health services, workplace accidents, and even death.

In 2024, the arrival of deceased Bangladeshi migrants from abroad increased to a record high, with 4,813 corpses received by the authorities. This figure is 261 more than the 4,552 corpses received in 2023, according to statistics

from the Wage Earners' Welfare Board (WEWB).

According to the WEWB, Bangladesh has received more than 55,000 corpses of migrant workers since 1993. In the last 15 years, one million migrants have been deported empty-handed. According to airport sources, nearly 90,000 have returned this year alone, with half deported from Saudi Arabia.

It is also a common allegation from migrant workers that Bangladeshi missions in destination countries often fail to provide adequate support during crises, leaving migrants feeling neglected.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF MIGRANTS

Despite such suffering, a record 1,305,856 Bangladeshis went abroad for overseas employment in 2023, while 1,011,856 people went in 2024.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

- » The World Bank reports that Bangladesh ranks as the sixth-largest labour-sending country and the seventh-largest recipient of remittances.
- » The entire migration process is riddled with challenges, from obtaining a passport to securing a job offer, dealing with recruiting agencies, undergoing medical checks, and paying exorbitant ticket prices.
- » To combat 'hundi' and encourage legal remittance transfers, the government and the central bank should prioritise faster, safer, and more affordable legal channels.
- » During the pre-departure stage, migrants should open two bank accounts—one for savings and another for their families' expenses—to enhance remittance management and utilisation.
- » We should focus on sending skilled workers, as a large portion of Bangladeshi migrants are unskilled and cannot send as much remittance.

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