

Call to create Global fund under UN to rehabilitate returnee migrants

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM), a network of 16 leading migrant rights' organisations in Bangladesh has submitted a memorandum to the United Nations Secretary General highlighting the plight of the Bangladeshi migrants amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The memorandum to the UN headquarters in New York and other relevant departments has already been e-mailed.

Through the memorandum, the BCSM urged the Secretary General to appeal to the destination countries to refrain from sending back Bangladeshi migrant workers in irregular status. 'We are concerned that some destination countries are exerting pressure on the origin countries to take back the latter's nationals who have been deemed to be in irregular status and those in detention and/or in prison,' it said. BCSM urged the United Nations Secretary General to call upon international agencies such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and other development partners to create a global fund under the support of the United Nations to help the countries of origin in rehabilitating the returnee migrants.

The signatories to the Memorandum are: RMRRU, BASUG-Diaspora and Development, WARBE Development Foundation, Bangladeshi Ovhibashi Mohila Sramik Association, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Ain o Salish Kendra, IMA Research Foundation, International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions, Bangladesh Construction and Wood Workers Federation, Young Power in Social Action, Bangladesh



Ovibashi Adhikar Forum, BASTOB, Rights Jessore, Centre for Development Communications DEVCOM Ltd, Films 4 Peace Foundation and Change Makers.

70% of migrants returning to Bangladesh struggle to find employment

Nearly 70% of surveyed migrants, who returned to Bangladesh from abroad between February and June 2020, are unemployed, according to a study conducted on returnees in 12 districts of the country. The study findings are presented in the IOM report-"Rapid Assessment of Needs and Vulnerabilities of Internal and International Return Migrants in Bangladesh" - conducted under the EU-funded project 'Regional Evidence for Migration Analysis and Policy (REMAP)'.

According to the report, the returning migrants experienced reintegration challenges which included difficulties in securing employment, financial problems (lack of income and accumulating debt), and health-related issues. Unplanned, large-scale returns of unemployed migrant workers affect remittance-dependent communities across the country where each migrant worker supports three members of his/her household on average, the report said. The report released in coordination with the Government of Bangladesh listed findings from interviews with a total of 2,765 returning migrants, including 1,486 international-return migrants and 1,279 internal-return migrants.

The survey was conducted in May and July 2020 in 12 high migration-prone districts, seven of which share a border with India. Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to the impact of the Covid-19 crisis, and since March 2020, hundreds of thousands of international migrant workers were compelled to return to their home districts in Bangladesh due to limited access to income-generating activities, social services, healthcare systems and social support networks in the countries in which they were working prior to the outbreak of Covid-19.

At the time of the interviews, a total of 55 percent of the respondents who had returned from abroad had accumulated unpaid debt. Giorgi Gigauri, Chief of Mission of International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Bangladesh, said, "Migrant workers are some of the most vulnerable groups affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Bangladeshi migrant workers and their remittance-dependent communities are adversely impacted by the unprecedented global restrictions on mobility and the COVID-19-induced recession. IOM, as coordinator of the Bangladesh UN Network on Migration, is committed to contributing to the body of evidence on migration in/from Bangladesh." "This research will support Government-led efforts to develop evidence-based strategies to ensure sustainable reintegration for returning migrants. During this pandemic, research will support the development of responsive, migrant-centered approaches essential for the support and protection of vulnerable migrants. We should work together to reintegrate migrants into their communities." (Courtesy: Daily Star)

e-Symposium on 'Impact of COVID 19 on left-behind migrant households' held

Bangladesh Civil Society for the Migrants (BCSM), a network of organisations working on migration has recently completed a research on 'the Impact of Covid-19 on 200 International Migrant Households'. The study was conducted by 9 Bangladesh Civil Society for Migration (BCSM) members' organizations including BASUG- Diaspora and Development, under the leadership of Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui, founding chair of RMMRU. It covered 100 arbitrarily returned migrant workers and 100 migrant households in 21 districts in the country. To inform the policy makers BCSM and RMMRU jointly organised the e-Symposium titled, Build Back Better on 27 July 2020



**Bangladesh Civil Society
for Migrants**

BASUG's Deputy Director, Chowdhury Yar Mahub, who presented the findings about remittance flow of the study, said 61 percent of the families of migrant workers did not receive

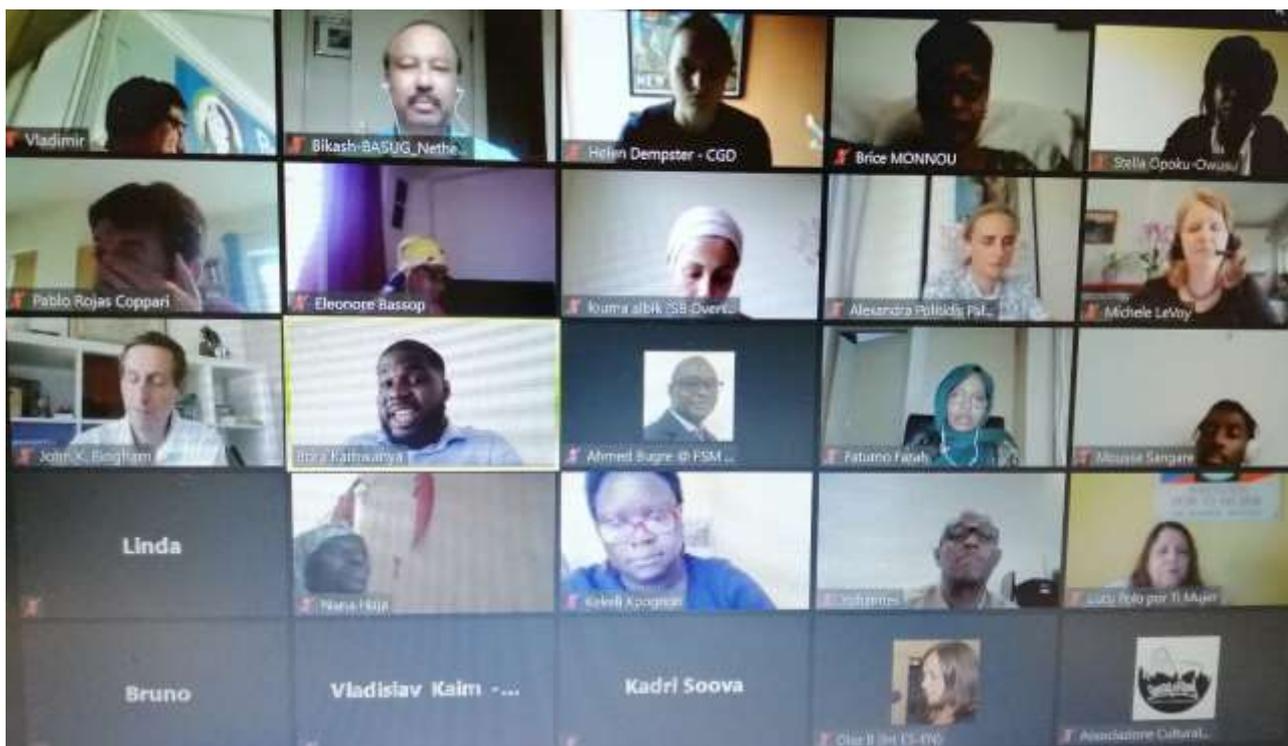
any remittance over the last three months. The amount of remittance the remaining 39 percent of the families received averaged Tk 30,000, down from Tk 47,000 per quarter in normal times, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a survey report of Bangladesh Civil Society for Migration.

Addressing the e-symposium as chief guest, Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad said challenges of returnee migrant workers amid the Covid-19 pandemic are "extraordinary" and that every labour-sending country including Bangladesh is facing the challenge. RMMRU chair Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui said the country received an increased volume of remittances over the last few months. But increase in remittance flow may not reflect that migrants are being able to cope with the coronavirus-induced situation. RMMRU Executive Director Prof CR Abrar moderated the programme. Lawmakers, officials, representative from the different NGOs among others attended the virtual programme.

GFMD Regional Consultation Meetings held: *Migrants and Refugees are part of the solution to the crises, including recovery from the economic crisis*

As part of the program proposed by the UAE as the Chair of the 2020 Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), a series of on-line GFMD Regional consultations took place until first week of July 2020. The consultation meetings held in collaboration with different Regional Consultative Processes (RCPs) brought together senior government officials and regional representatives from the three GFMD mechanisms such as Civil Society, Mayors and the Private sector.

The regional consultation meetings focused on the three of the 6 themes selected by the 2020 GFMD Chair. The 3 themes are: 1) The Governance of Labour Migration in the Context of Changing Employment Landscapes; 2) Skilling Migrants for Employment; and 3) Fostering Partnerships to Realise Migration-Related Goals in the Sustainable Development Agenda. The GFMD Europe Constulative webinars took place on 2nd, 7th and 10th July 2020. BASUG took part in all the webinars.



Reporting back-John K Bingham, a key figure in the whole GFMD process since the start in 2007

writes: GFMD finished its 6 regional consultations, each on line, each 3 sessions x 2 hours, and each with somewhere between 80 and 120 participants. States had the greatest number, but not so active except in the separate theme on Technology. That is, across most of the themes, there was stronger participation from civil society and quite constructively, mayors or their representatives and business. What most stood out to me was repeated emphasis on "four R's and an I", almost in this order: fixing (1) recruitment ;(2) regular pathways-- notably including regularization pathways; (3) recognition of skills and contributions, including but not limited to "essential workers"; (4) protection of rights of migrants, in particular vulnerable migrants-- including refugees, and for portability of skills, earnings, pensions + property; and (5) inclusion, in access to public services, justice-- and policy-making at all levels. Improving data was also a constant.

Participants said that cooperation among States and stakeholders on matters involving migrants and migration was always important, but now even more to overcome these crises. One participant after another further emphasized that migrants and refugees are part of the solution to the crises, including recovery from the economic crisis. And that the whole world is looking for solutions. In these directions, participants pointed directly to the GFMD for action and partnerships that will simultaneously address gaps in migrant protection and work to restore public health, jobs, communities and economies. **The next (13th) GFMD is scheduled to take place in Dubai, UAE on 11-15 January 2021.**

GLAC web meeting on ‘Cross Cultural Networks’ held

Global Leadership Academy (GLAC) Regional, European & MENA Cluster organized a webinar on “Cross-cultural Networks: Challenges and Relevance of Leadership with Imagination” on 17 July 2020. This is a part of the regular bi-weekly meeting organized by GLAC with support from the German development organization, GIZ.



Shakeel Ahmad, a political economist and Director at the Asia Study Center in Pakistan was the guest speaker while BASUG Chairman, Bikash Chowdhury

Barua facilitated the meeting. Shakil spoke on how we unlock the fullest potential of cross-cultural networks and improve cross-cultural communication and collaboration. Participants from different stakeholders including Astrid Niehaus of GLAC, Jose Galvez, Director of Global Academy on Migration and Development (GAMD) took part in the discussion.

Concern over Malaysian government’s harassment of migrant workers and newsmen

Twenty-one civil society organisations including BASUG working on migration and development recently expressed grave concern over the Malaysian government's ‘harassment of journalists and migrant workers’. The harassment began following the broadcast of an investigative documentary by television channel, Al Jazeera about the maltreatment of the migrant workers in Malaysia, the civil society organisations said in a joint statement.

They said summoning journalists and the reported manhunt for a Bangladeshi migrant worker, Raihan Kabir (25) interviewed by Al Jazeera for the documentary "is a blatant attempt to muzzle the freedom of the Press which tantamounts to human rights abuse" by the Malaysian authorities. "We call on the Malaysian government not to harass the journalists and expatriates, and instead investigate and take action against those who have been treating the migrants unjustly," read the statement. The Civil Society Organisation also urged the Bangladesh High Mission in Malaysia, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, along with international organisations in Dhaka, to take necessary action in this regard.

The investigative documentary titled "Locked Up in Malaysia's Lockdown" was broadcast on July 3 as part of Al Jazeera's "101 East" documentary series. It showed that the Malaysian government was discriminating



against migrants during the Movement Control Order enforced due to the coronavirus pandemic, read the statement. "We note with deep concern that six media workers of Al Jazeera were called to Malaysia Central Police Headquarters on July 10 for questioning. They are also being investigated for alleged defamation and sedition by Malaysian police. We stand by various international journalists' organisations who have also condemned this incident," the CSOs said.

The CSOs are: RMRRU, BASUG, WARBE Development Foundation, Brac, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program, Bangladesh Nari Sramik Kendro, IID Migration Policy Unit, Human Rights Support Society, Bangladeshi Ovhibashi Mohila Sramik Association, INAFI Bangladesh, Karmojibi Nari, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha, Devcom, IMA, Awaj Foundation, Rights Jashore, BILS, Bastob, Film for Peace Foundation, and Migration News.



New book on Bengali settlement in the UK

By- Ansar Ahmed Ullah, Country Coordinator, BASUG UK

Migration of Bengalis from South Asia to the outside world started with taking up jobs as *lascars* (sailors) in the British East India Company's ships which carried precious goods from the Indian subcontinent, such as spice, tea and cotton. In addition, from the second half of the nineteenth century, Bengali educated and wealthy gentlemen began travelling to England mainly to pursue higher education. Most of the students were men but a few Bengali women including Kadambini Ganguly (1861-1923) from Jessore travelled to Scotland to study medicine. She then went on to work as a doctor, campaign for women's rights and gave birth to eight children. When a magazine slandered her by calling her a "whore" she sued for damages and the editor was thrown into prison.



Bengali *lascars* who had migrated earlier, their goal was not to settle permanently in England but to return to their native country. Majority of the *lascars* came from the province of Bengal, now Bangladesh, and in particular from the region of Sylhet, Chittagong, Noakhali and Comilla. They began settling sparsely in the UK from the 1930s-1940s, a pattern of which became widespread during 1950s-1960s. Some Bengalis married English women and in a charming passage, the book records their wives' names, including Ms. Mohammed, Ms. Peeroo, Calcutta Louisa and Lascar Sally.

To feed their hunger for spice, canteens were established. Bengali chefs produced dishes such as *macher jhal*. In 1937, an Indian tourist made a list of 16 Indian restaurants across

Britain and the book's author reckons there were more than 70 Indian restaurants and another 50 Indian cafés in London by 1946. Catering remains the principal business venture of the Bengali community in the UK. There are now over eight thousand Indian restaurants in the UK and at least 90% of them are owned by Bengalis. The sector employs as many as one hundred thousand workers and its yearly revenue is more than four billion pounds.

Today, the descendants of these Bengali settlers are identified as British Bengalis. They have taken themselves to new heights through their success in all major sectors, be it in the mainstream education or careers, business or politics. Bengali doctors have found employment within the NHS. Barristers and accountants have started their own businesses and some entrepreneurs have made fortunes through textiles, catering and trading. The community is thriving in all aspects of life, as well as maintaining their rich Bengali cultural identity.

Faruque Ahmed has conducted extensive research on the UK Bengali community for almost three decades and has authored his latest book 'Bengali Settlement in Britain' with a history of about 400 years of migration of Bengalis to the UK. For his book he collected many untold or forgotten stories of Bengali settlers. The book will not only fascinate the history readers but will also thrill the general readers. It will assist the future generation in searching for their roots and heritage too.

'Bengali Settlement in Britain' is published by the Dhaka based University Press Limited (UPL) is currently available in Kindle edition from Amazon. The book will soon be published in print form and in Bengali.



Bangladesh economy grew 5.24% in FY20 amid pandemic

Bangladesh has reported 5.24% GDP growth in FY 2019-20 with the coronavirus pandemic ravaging the economy for at least a third of the financial year. The size of the GDP stood past Tk 27.96 trillion while per capita GNI surged to \$2,064 from \$1,909 the previous fiscal year. After the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, or BBS, published the latest data on 10 August, Bangladesh Planning Minister MA Mannan expressed satisfaction calling the GDP growth 'promising'. 'We had to go through different adversities. Almost everything was closed for four months from March to June. I would say that a 5.24% growth even after these hurdles is a very good growth,' he was quoted by bdnews24.com as saying. He thanked the people for 'fending off the adversities and keeping the wheels of the economy rolling'.



"The World Bank and IMF forecast that our GDP growth would be below 2.0 per cent. But we have achieved a respectable growth proving them wrong," the minister said. "I think many big countries will not be able to achieve this much growth," he added. Ziauddin Ahmed, the director of national accounting at BBS, said the figures published on Monday were from initial data and the final ones will be published within two months.

With the economy almost fully reopened, the government has kept the annual GDP growth target for 2020-21 fiscal year unchanged at 8.2 per cent. The economy grew by a record 8.15 percent in FY 2018-19. Bangladesh's gross domestic product would grow by 4.5 per cent in fiscal year 2020 and 7.5 per cent in fiscal year 2021, the Asian Development Bank said in June. The World Bank in an April forecast the worst economic slump in Bangladesh in 40 years. It said the country's economy might post a growth between 2.0 per cent and 3.0 per cent in fiscal 2020, followed by 1.2 per cent to 2.9 per cent in fiscal 2021. The International Monetary Fund in June almost halved its GDP growth forecast for Bangladesh in 2019-20 to 3.8 per cent, about 3.5 percentage points less than the projection the IMF had forecast before the pandemic had begun.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue also forecast that Bangladesh would not be able to post more than 2.5 per cent GDP growth in the fiscal year that ended on June 30. The government had revised the target down to 5.2 per cent from 8.2 per cent after the coronavirus crisis had begun. Researcher Zaid Bakht believes 5.24 per cent GDP growth is "nothing unusual" despite the pandemic. **"Because agricultural production was good. Remittances sent by the expatriates shattered records," noted the director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.** (Courtesy: The Financial Express).

Civil Society demands immediate release of 255 detained Migrant workers in Bangladesh jails

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migration (BCSM) on 20 August 2020 demanded unconditional and immediate release of some 255 Bangladeshi migrant workers who were languishing in Bangladesh jail upon their return home from abroad.

In a press release, BCSM said that recently 255 Bangladeshi labour migrants were arrested and sent to Kashimpur jail upon their return from the Middle East serving mandatory quarantine period at Diabari, Uttara, for two weeks. Initially the competent court ordered for submission of the investigation report within 10 days, but later it was extended twice in response to police request.

Media reports citing Bangladesh missions in the concerned states, inform that most of the detainees were charged for 'being undocumented' and for petty narcotic offences in the destination countries and received royal pardon after having served half of the punishment or more. 'Some of them served punishment for not abiding by the telecom rules; presumably for illegally selling talk times which is a common practice in Bangladesh and is not considered as an offence. None of them were brought back under any extradition arrangement.'

BCSM said that police stated these migrants were arrested as they have "tarnished the image of the country



abroad". They were charged under section 54 of Code of Criminal Procedure on apprehension that if they are released and get dispersed they may commit crimes, including murder, robbery, terrorism and sabotage. Police sources also say they may be charged for committing "anti-government and anti-state"

activities, including violent acts. 'The police have not clarified the motive of the detainees. Moreover, it is completely unlawful to arrest or detain someone for an offence that is yet to be committed.' The press release issued by BCSM noted that the families of the detainees have little information other than their loved ones are in Kashimpur jail. It has also been reported in the media that there are instances of the families being harassed by the investigating officers and even being subjected to extortion. The families are in all sorts of uncertainty and expressing deep concern in this regard.

The signatories to the demand include: RMMRU, WARBE Development Foundation, BRAC, Bangladeshi Ovhbashi Mohila Sramik Association (BOMSA), Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), BASUG-Diaspora and Development, Obhibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP), Human Rights Support Society (HRSS), IMA Research Foundation, International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions (INAFI) Bangladesh, Bangladesh Construction and Wood Workers Federation (BCWWF), Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), Bangladesh Ovibashi Adhikar Forum (BOAF), BASTOB, Rights Jessore, Center for Development Communications DEVCOM Ltd, Films 4 Peace Foundation, Change Makers.

Riaz Hamidullah, new Ambassador of Bangladesh in Netherlands

Mr. M Riaz Hamidullah is the new ambassador of Bangladesh in the Netherlands. He has replaced Mr. Sheikh Mohammed Belal who had served as ambassador from March 2014 to February 2020 and has now joined the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC) in Amsterdam as its Managing Director. Riaz Hamidullah is the 9th ambassador of Bangladesh in the Netherlands. He took over as the ambassador-designate on 6 July 2020 and presented the credentials to the King of the Netherlands, Willem-Alexander at an official ceremony on 15 July 2020.



Before Netherlands, Riaz M Hamidullah served as the High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Sri Lanka during the period August 2016 – July 2020. He shepherded Bangladesh’s engagement in a range of multilateral processes like Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. In his assignments abroad, he first served at the Bangladesh Permanent Mission to UN in New York (1999-2003). Later, as a mid-career political officer in Bangladesh Mission in New Delhi, India (2003-05). In 2012, he served as Director-General in charge of Europe and EU Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh. During that

period, he led Bangladesh’s economic engagements with a number of European countries and Bangladesh’s entry in ASEM process. Riaz Hamidullah has special interests in migration and development issues and was one of the key actors in making the 2016 Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in Dhaka a success, which was opened by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina as the chief guest. It may be mentioned here that BASUG is one of the members of the International Steering Committee of the Civil Society Days of GFMD and plays an active role in the whole process of GFMD. While talking to BASUG at a ceremony at his official residence in Wassenaar recently, the new ambassador said that he would love to have discussion to know more about the possibilities of working here which will benefit Bangladesh.

GAMD-GLAC joint Webinar on “impact of Covid 19 on Migration held

The Global Leadership Academy (GLAC) and the Global Academy on Migration and Development (GAMD) jointly organized a web conference on ‘the Impact of Covid 19 on Migration and Development’ on May 15 2020. The key speakers were: Mai Dizon-Anonuevo, Executive Director of GAMD, Philippines, Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Director of GAMD, Netherlands, Efrain Jimenez, Director, GAMD, Mexico and



Paul Asquith of AFFORD, UK. Participants discussed among others on the impact of Covid 19 on the situation of the migrants; challenges and assistance they are being provided; impact of the pandemic on migration and development initiatives and post Covid 19 scenario.

It may be mentioned here that the Global Leadership Academy (GLAC) is a global program that offers spaces for change and decision makers around the world to enter into deep dialogue and upon up for innovation. It may be mentioned here

that the GAMD was one of the initiatives that developed from the Migration Laboratory, an initiative of GIZ and GLAC supported by German Federal Ministry of Cooperation. The web meeting was participated among others by John K Bingham, Anne Keijnburg, Jose Galvez, Fresca Syafitri, Saleem Samad, Marvi Dela Cruz, Riza Sevilla. Gaurav Sharma from India facilitated the program.



Photo above: Board meeting of BASUG discussed Covid-19 situation and the future course of action of the organisation. It was participated by BASUG Germany President Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin, AHM Abdul Hai, Project Coordinator, Riazul Islam, Sr. Project Officer, Md. Khurshid Hasan Sajib, senior researcher and Anas Ansar, senior researcher, University of Bonn and Chairman of BASUG, Bikash Chowdhury Barua.



Photo above: A web conference on the prevailing situation due to Covid-19 was held recently. The speakers were: celebrated actor from Bangladesh Fazlur Rahman Babu, singer from Kolkata Tapas Sinha, BASUG Chairman Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Chairman, Spain-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce Rashal Hawlader, Artist in Guinness Book of Record R A Kajol, Denmark and Journalist Zakir Hossain Sumon, Italy. It was facilitated by Hasina Akhter, UK.

“Together we can make this world a better place to live”