

Migrants' Plea to the Hon'ble Prime Minister

Open Letter of 16 Migrant Rights Organisations

Hon'ble Prime Minister,

You are providing leadership to the nation with all sincerity at this critical moment of COVID-19 pandemic. You have announced a package of Tk 72 thousand crore to support the export oriented industries and for the payment of wages to workers. In order to protect agriculture, you have created a Tk 5000 crore fund. You have also announced Tk 100 crore insurance scheme for the health workers. Like all the above groups, migrants working in the Gulf, South-East Asian countries, Europe and America are also your sons and daughters. They have followed your 31 point directives, your message on Pahela Baishakh and announcements on incentive packages. Migrants are anxiously waiting for your words about them. We, the 16 organisations, are conveying the plight and expectations of the migrants to you.

Migrants working under 'free visa', irregular migrants, small entrepreneurs, service sector employees in the Middle East as well as a large section of those working in Europe are now mostly jobless and without income. Under current condition for their own safety employers are conscious about the health of women domestic workers. This has placed them in a little bit better situation compare to others. But in the absence of remittance, like the children of male migrants female migrants' children also face food insecurity. Who is there to console them? Migrants are pleading to you for creating a fund for distressed migrants and their left-behind family members.

The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment as well as Wage Earners' Welfare Board have disbursed funds for assisting the migrants both in European as well as in Middle-Eastern countries. The ministry has also announced creation of a Tk 200 crore fund. We appreciate this initiative. Hon'ble Prime Minister, to provide for the vulnerable section of the 1 crore migrants and their family members, it will require a much larger fund. We appeal to you to create a fund for the migrants from government exchequer, not depending on the fund that has been created by the migrants themselves.

Some of the steps undertaken to reduce the spread of coronavirus have unwittingly created a negative mindset against the migrants. In cases, they are not allowed to stay in their villages. Some face harassment in accessing medical services. Some were attacked or faced extortion. In some localities, burials of deceased migrants were resisted. In order to overcome this negativity, they look forward to your compassionate statement and strict directive to the administration to treat migrants with dignity.

A number of labour receiving countries have initiated programmes for deportation of irregular migrants. We strongly protest this move. Under international law, it is incumbent on labour receiving countries to provide protection to all migrants irrespective of their status. We urge you to place this issue in various multilateral forum including United Nations, Global Forum on Migration and Development, Colombo Process and Abu Dhabi Dialogue.

Each year your migrant children known as *Shonar Manush* remit USD 18 billion. In future, actions will be required to keep remittance flows stable. Experts predict in post pandemic world scope for new employment will be reduced and many current migrants will lose their jobs and return home. As people

will be desperate for jobs international trafficking networks and human smugglers may take advantage of this situation by preying on them. Alternative employments have to be created for them. Reconstruction of health sector in various countries after Corona is over will create new job markets. In order to access those job markets changes are required in the education policy. Health related courses should be made compulsory in all public and private universities.

Hon'ble Prime Minister, through this letter, we tried to bring forward the migrants' agenda among many other important policy issues that you are dealing with in facing the crisis. We earnestly request you to: (a) create a fund for the distressed migrants and left-behind members of their families; (b) Increase the incentive to stop the downward trend in remittance flow; (c) gear up the administration and make it accountable to reduce the scope of trafficking in post corona virus situation; (d) bring change in education policy to capture the future labour market; (e) forcefully present the concerns of all migrants in various multilateral forums when opportunity will arise; and no less importantly, (f) take initiative to create a positive mindset about the migrants and ensure they are treated with dignity. We, the following 16 civil society organizations, pledge our wholehearted support to you in this regard.

Yours faithfully-

On Behalf of BCSM Secretariat



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