

URGENT ACTION

BANGLADESH DETAINS MORE MIGRANT WORKERS

Bangladeshi authorities detained 32 more returning migrant workers after they were deported from Syria, taking the total number of such arbitrary arrests to at least 370 since 4 July 2020. The 32 workers were arrested in Syria while trying to reach Italy and other European countries. They returned to Bangladesh on 13 September 2020 after Syrian government commuted their jail terms. In Bangladesh, the authorities detained them for “tarnishing the image of the country” by allegedly engaging in criminal activities, while no credible evidence concerning their alleged crimes has yet been provided in any case. Their arrest and detention violate Bangladesh’s obligations under international human rights law including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. They must be freed immediately unless they are promptly charged with recognizable offence.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Mr. Asaduzzaman Khan, MP

Minister

Ministry of Home Affairs

Bangladesh Secretariat

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Honourable Minister Khan,

*I am gravely concerned by the repeated arrests of returning migrant workers in Bangladesh. The arbitrary detention of **32 returning migrant workers** from Syria on 28 September 2020 takes the number of such detention of migrant workers from countries including Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Vietnam to at least 370 since July this year.*

In each case, the police accused them of “tarnishing the image of the country” by engaging in criminal activities abroad. Dhaka’s magistrate court has granted police request to detain the workers until the police can determine their offence, even without requiring any specific allegation or evidence against them.

The arrest and detention of these workers in the absence of any credible evidence of any criminal activity committed on Bangladeshi territory violate Bangladesh’s commitment to international human rights law including Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which prohibits arbitrary arrest or detention and protects everyone’s right to liberty.

This is not only a clear violation of their human rights but fails to acknowledge that migrant workers are the lifeblood of Bangladesh’s economy which has earned \$18.2 billion in remittances in the fiscal year 2019-20. Such ill-treatment of these workers is an injustice to their hard work and labour and tarnishes your own government’s image in the eyes of the international community.

I urge your government to:

Either immediately charge each of the workers with a recognizable criminal offence under Bangladeshi law whilst ensuring the necessary due process or release them in line with your government’s obligations under international human rights law.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Bangladeshi authorities have sent to jail at least 370 returning migrant workers since 4 July 2020. The latest victims of this arbitrary detention include 32 Bangladeshi workers who were sent to jail on 28 September. The workers were arrested in Syria while attempting to migrate to Italy, Greece and other European countries through recruitment brokers. The Syrian government commuted their jail terms due to the COVID-19 pandemic and sent them to Lebanon. They arrived in Bangladesh on 13 September, stayed in quarantine for two weeks. Afterwards the police sent them to jail.

Amnesty International has obtained copies of gravely concerning police requests to Dhaka's magistrate court seeking detention of the workers until they can determine their offence. The police stated that the workers have "tarnished the image of the country" by allegedly engaging criminal activities abroad and could engage in crimes within Bangladesh in future. It is even more distressing that Dhaka's magistrate court has granted such requests without any specific allegation against the individuals, in violation of international human rights law including the Article 9 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

This arrest of the 32 workers follows a disturbing trend since 4 July 2020, when the police sought detention of 219 Bangladeshi workers – 141 from Kuwait, 39 from Bahrain and 39 from Qatar – on the same ground. On 21 July, the police sought detention of another 36 returning migrant workers from Qatar citing that they could engage in robbery, family conflicts or terrorism if they are released. On 1 September, the police sent another [81 returning migrant workers from Vietnam](#) and 2 others from Qatar to jail on similar grounds and charges.

All the workers were sent to jail under section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which allows the police to arrest someone on the basis of having "reasonable suspicion" that they may be involved in an act of offence outside Bangladesh.

Shahin, 28, had worked in Lebanon as a tailor for four years. His father Liton Borhania, 50, told Amnesty International that he paid nearly \$6,000 (BDT 500,000) to recruitment brokers to facilitate Shahin's travel to Lebanon in February 2015. Since then Shahin, the eldest five brothers and one sister, has been supporting his family with household expenditures and his younger siblings' educational expenses.

Many Bangladeshis become victims of human trafficking in the hope of finding a well-paying job abroad, particularly in the Gulf countries. They are exploited by traffickers who promise them steady jobs and good money only to be subsequently exploited by employers for less pay, more work or threatened with jail terms for illegal stays [[See: Amnesty International, COVID-19 makes Gulf countries' abuse of migrant workers impossible to ignore, 30 April 2020](#)].

Rights activists in Bangladesh have said that by arresting the workers, who have served their sentences in the foreign land or been through traumatic experience after they were exploited by human traffickers, it is the Bangladesh government itself which is tarnishing the image of the country.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [English]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: [25 November 2020]

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: [<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/3010/2020/en/>]