

**WORK CONDITION OF BANGLADESHI FACTORY WORKERS IN  
THE MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES**

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# SECTION I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Context

Globalisation and International migration of labour should go hand in hand. In recent years, one does witness growth of foreign workers. Most countries in present world are actively taking part either as receiver, sender or transit of labour movements. According to United Nations sources, the probable number of people who are currently living outside their country of origin stands 175 million (Abela 2003). Close to 80 percent of them are labour migrants. Increased international mobility of labour indicates increased employment opportunity in the global market. Migration has enabled a large section of people to attain productive, self-actualising and creative work in recent time. But again, for many others, it has been unsuccessful in ensuring acceptable quality of job. For them, migration has resulted in inhumane work conditions where basic labour rights of the workers are not respected.

Voluntary labour migration from Bangladesh is of two types, long-term and short-term. Since 1970s all kinds of restrictions have been imposed on long-term migration. However, short-term or temporary labour migration to the Middle East increased significantly from the same time.

Particularly from 1990s, short-term labour migration from Bangladesh has become an area of increasing investigation. Over the last five years, some important empirical researches have been conducted on such migration<sup>1</sup>. Although various aspects of temporary labour migration have been covered by those studies, none of them dealt with work condition in labour receiving countries. Therefore, the present study has tried to understand the work condition of Bangladeshi migrant workers in the Middle Eastern countries. Since it is difficult to generalise on all kinds of workers, it will focus on those who work in factories.

### 1.2 Objectives

The study has the following objectives:

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<sup>1</sup> Syed Refaat Ahmed, *Forlorn Migrants: An International Legal Regime for Undocumented Migrant Workers*, UPL, 2000; Tasneem Siddiqui, *Transcending Boundaries: Labour Migration of Women from Bangladesh*, UPL, 2001; INSTRAW and IOM, *Temporary Labour Migration of Women: Case Studies of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, 2000*; Tasneem Siddiqui edited *Beyond the Maze: Streamlining Labour Recruitment Process in Bangladesh*, RMMRU, 2002. Occasional Paper 3, *State, Migrant Workers and the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund* (in Bangla), RMMRU, 2001; Occasional Paper 5, *Bangladeshi Migrants in Saudi Labour Market*, by Mohammad Abdul Mannan, RMMRU 2000. Translation Series 2, *Rights and Dignity of Migrant Workers: A Campaigners' Handbook*, by Nurullah Azad et al, RMMRU, 2000. Tasneem Siddiqui and C R Abrar, *Contribution of Returnees: An Analytical Survey of Post Return Experience*, June 2000 UNDP and IOM ; Tasneem Siddiqui, *Migrant Workers' Remittances and Micro-finance in Bangladesh*, May 2001 ILO; Therese Blanchet, *Beyond the boundaries: A critical Look at Women Labour Migration* April 2002 USAID.

- To understand the nature of work that Bangladeshis are involved in different factories of the selected Middle Eastern countries.
- To find out terms and conditions of work including wage, overtime, bonus, working hours and holidays.
- To identify the nature of logistical arrangements like food and accommodation available to the workers.
- To make an analysis of extent of work line, temperature in workplace, floor wise distribution of workers, problems and/or privileges regarding sanitation and drinking water, and state of fire exit in the factories.
- To learn about the methods used by the management in fulfilling production targets. Whether coercion is involved in such process, what is the state of company code of conduct and what are the factory monitoring mechanisms?
- To find out the level of social protection provided to the workers regarding health.
- To discover the scope and/or level of trade union involvement in the labour receiving countries and mechanism of collective bargaining between factory workers and employers.
- To suggest policy measures that will ensure decent work for migrant workers in labour receiving countries.

### **1.3 Methodology**

This paper is mostly based on output from primary resources. It also relied on secondary information. The data collection from primary resources included questionnaire survey in one hand and interviewing of BMET, WARBE and BAIRA officials on the other. Secondary information regarding workers' rights in factories/establishments of selected Middle Eastern countries was gathered from electronically available resources.

Questionnaire survey was conducted on 100 returnee Bangladeshi migrant workers who were previously employed in different countries of Middle East. The fieldwork for questionnaire survey was conducted through WARBE, the largest migrant workers' association of Bangladesh. WARBE has its branches in different parts of Bangladesh. Areas with concentration of returnee migrant workers were selected on the basis of consultation with WARBE. These are Gazipur, Savar and Keraniganj of Dhaka region, Comilla, and Chittagong. The rationale of singling out these areas is two-fold: In the first place, these are among the migrant belts of Bangladesh. Secondly, the bulk of formal sector manufacturing establishments, that have employed many returnee factory workers, are located

there. For example, Savar is the home of the first Export Processing Zone (EPZ) of Bangladesh where a large section of returnee migrant workers are currently employed. Among the interviewees, 65 were male and 35 female. Persons who worked as migrant workers for at least two years were interviewed.

#### **1.4 Conceptual Framework**

The study is designed after 'Decent Work' framework of ILO. The overarching goal of ILO is to improve situation of human being in the world of work. In recent times, decent work has emerged as the core concept of ILO in achieving this goal (ILO, 1999, 2001). To ILO, decent work means productive work in which rights are protected and generates an adequate income, with adequate social protection. In other words, it refers to a situation that promotes opportunities for men and women to obtain decent and productive work in the condition of freedom, equality, security and human dignity. The concept of decent work stands on four pillars. These are access to employment, promotion of rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue.

*Employment* is generally seen as the means of sustaining life and of meeting basic human needs. But it is also an activity through which individuals affirm their own identity, receives satisfaction and makes fullest development of their potentials and skills, thereby making great contribution to common well-being. Therefore, employment is not to be seen only as access to any job, rather access to "full job of acceptable quality, productive in nature and freely chosen". All those who work have *rights at work*. Every worker enjoys certain rights irrespective of his or her type of employment, whether in organised or not, in formal or informal economy, at home, in community or in the voluntary sector. *Social protection* refers to protection from vulnerabilities and contingencies that take people out of work. This includes old age, sickness, unemployment and loss of livelihood. *Social dialogue* is a process through which employer and employee resolve their differences and ensure social equity. It is means by which rights are defended, employment promoted and work secured.

Decent work concept is relevant for all countries. However, depending on the stage of development decent work standards may vary between countries at any given time. Decent work is also gaining currency as development and poverty reduction goal. In the millennium summit of 2000 the UN Secretary General identified Decent Work for young people as one of the eight priority ways of attacking poverty (UN 2000). Pope John Paul II supported a call for global coalition for decent work. On behalf of the non-aligned movement, President Tom Mbeki of South Africa affirmed, "decent standard of living, adequate nutrition, health care, education and decent work for all are common goals for both the South and the North"<sup>2</sup>. The UNDP Human Development Report of 2000 identified freedom for decent work without exploitation as one of the seven types of basic freedoms. From the understanding of decent work this study attempts to analyse

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<sup>2</sup> Sighted in ILO 2001 page-12.

the nature of employment created through migration in case of Bangladeshi factory workers.

### **1.5 Structure of the Report**

The report is divided into twelve sections including the introduction and the conclusion. Section II provides a brief sketch of overall migration situation of Bangladesh. It provides information concerning number, extent, gender ratio and skill composition of Bangladeshi migrant workers. Section III presents different international human rights and labour rights regimes that the Middle Eastern countries under the study have signed and/or ratified. It also gives an idea about the terms and conditions set by the Government of Bangladesh with respect to labour export to the selected Middle Eastern countries. The survey findings are presented from section IV to section IX. Section IV provides personal and migration related basic information of the 100 interviewees. Section V elaborates terms and conditions of work of the interviewees. Section VI reveals work condition in factories/establishments employing the respondents. Section VII portrays the supervision of workers by respective factory/establishment management. Section VIII deals with the state of basic needs facilities available to the workers. Section IX investigates the extent of trade union activities allowed for the migrant workers. Section X summarises the major findings of the study and a range of policy recommendations that are required to ensure decent work for migrant workers.

## SECTION II

### LABOUR MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH

An introduction to the overall labour migration situation of Bangladesh is necessary for better understanding of the work condition of workers. The current section therefore attempts to depict the scenario of labour migration from Bangladesh in general. It begins with a short introduction to socio-economic backdrop of Bangladesh, followed by migration history of the land. The section then respectively presents main flow and determinants of migration, scale of migration, nature of migrants, remittance flow and importance of labour migration to national economy. It finally reflects on current trends in labour market conditions and entitlements of Bangladeshi workers abroad<sup>3</sup>.

#### 2.1 The Country Context

Bangladesh is a small deltaic country of South Asia with a total land area of 55,998 square miles. It contains the eighth largest population of the world. In 2001, its total population stood at 130 m. (GoB, 2001). Its population density is one of the highest, only surpassed by the city states of Singapore and Hong Kong. Natural disasters like flood, drought, and cyclone are regular features in the life of Bangladeshis, and so is political turmoil. Within a few years of independence, the country experienced authoritarian rule, first civilian in nature, followed by military control over the State. It is the hard working and politically conscious general masses of the country, who re-established democratic order through mass upsurge in 1991<sup>4</sup>.

Over the last two decades Bangladesh has experienced positive economic and social changes in different fields. Its average annual GDP growth rate has increased from 2.4 percent in the 1980s to 4.9 percent during the 1990s (MHHDC, 2001). In the late 1970s, 68 percent of the Bangladeshi population lived below the poverty line, the figure dropped to 44.7 percent in the second half of 1990s (MHHDC, 2001). Literacy rate has also seen positive growth. In 1981, national literacy rate was 23.8 percent. In 2001, it rose to 40.8 percent. The population growth rate has also registered a decline from 2.1 percent in the 1980s to 1.6 percent in the period 1995-2000 (MHHDC, 2001). Nonetheless, it still belongs to the group of least developed countries of the world. 25 million (19.23 percent of the total population) people live in extreme poverty. Incidence of poverty is greatest among women. In every respect ranging from health, education, nutrition, income, women constitute the poorest of the poor category.

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<sup>3</sup> This chapter is heavily drawn upon Siddiqui 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Bangladesh became independent through a nine-month liberation war in 1971. Within three years of independence the civilian regime, which gave leadership to the independence war, turned the multi-party parliamentary democracy into one-party presidential system. In 1975, the military took control of the state. Until 1990 except for a brief period of few months, the army ruled Bangladesh through a process of civilianisation of military rule. Following a popular upsurge, democracy was reestablished in 1991. Since then political power changed hand thrice through general elections that were held under the Non-party Caretaker Governments.

Bangladesh is one of the two unique countries of the world where life expectancy of women is lower than men. The sheer size of its population, the ratio of population to arable land, the overall level of economic development and increased number of women looking for avenues to earn a livelihood, provide ample reasons to hypothesise that various forms of population movements, both forced and voluntary, internal and cross border, will be experienced in Bangladesh.

## **2.2 Historical Development of International Migration**

Bangladesh has a long history of migration. The ancestors of the Sinhala population of Sri Lanka are believed to have migrated to the island centuries ago from the territory that now constitutes Bangladesh. The great Buddhist scholar and saint, Atish Dipankar, who carried the knowledge of construction of earth dam to the Chinese Emperor in the 10th century also hailed from Bengal. In the 18th century, when the British developed the tea industry in the North-east Bengal, they brought indentured labourers from different parts of India. Again due to colonial policies, when the jute and cotton industry of Bengal and the market for fine Maslin was destroyed, one witnessed a large-scale migration of people from this part to Assam.<sup>5</sup> People from East Bengal also migrated to Burma. Since the emergence of independent states in South Asia in 1947, gradual imposition of regulatory mechanism restricted movements of people among states.

Migration to the industrialised countries, particularly to the West was again connected to the country's colonial past. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, sailors originating from the Southeast part of East Bengal (Chittagong and Noakhali) found jobs in the British merchant navy that carried goods from Kolkata port to all over the world. A section of landless peasants from the northern Sylhet district who had no opportunities for work in their own locality was absorbed in the dockyards of Hooghly, near Kolkata. A section of them also joined the British merchant navy. Experts conclude that unlike the seamen of Chittagong and Noakhali, this group did not have much experience with the sea and jumped ships when opportunities arose and landed in a number of countries, including the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) (Alam, 1988; Ali, 1997; Carey and Shukur, 1985). These stowaways are considered pioneer migrants to the West. Migration to the West still continues. In some instances they migrate through work vouchers; in others, through changing of visa status from student to work and through family reunification. Most of these migrants have become long term residents, some took up citizenships of their countries of destination.

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, new opportunities for international migration emerged. With the rise in oil prices, the Middle Eastern countries went through a phase of major infrastructure development for which they needed large numbers of expatriate workers. Different categories of workers from Bangladesh joined the Middle Eastern labour market. Gradually, such

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<sup>5</sup> During this period 1 million Bengalis from different part of East Bengal (Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna and Mymensingh), migrated to Assam and introduced flood-plain agriculture there (Ahmed, 2000).

migration also expanded to the newly industrialised countries of South-East Asia. The nature of such migration was qualitatively different from that to the West. These migrants went on short-term employment, with specific job contracts and had to return home on completion of their contract period. This category constituted the bulk of the country's migrants.

### **2.3 Main Flow and Determinants**

Short term labour migration is the most common form of population movement from Bangladesh. Bangladesh exports contract labour mostly to the Middle Eastern and South East Asian countries. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Iraq, Libya, Bahrain, Iran, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Brunei are some of the major countries of destination. Saudi Arabia alone accounts for nearly one half of the total number of workers who migrated from Bangladesh. Malaysia used to be the second largest employer of Bangladeshi workers. However, since the financial crisis of 1997, Bangladeshis migrating to Malaysia dropped drastically (see Table 2.3.1). Now UAE has taken over its place. Among the western countries, UK and US are the two major countries of destination. Australia, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, New Zealand, Belgium, Netherlands, South Africa, Spain and Japan are also preferred countries for migration.

Migration is a complex process. Colonial ties, lack of avenue to maintain a livelihood in their place of origin and access to that in destination points have resulted in migration of Bangladeshis to the west. Since the 1970s, due to structural constraints, the skilled and professionals of Bangladesh can choose to migrate to the west with relative ease. Majority of this group of migrants cite better educational opportunity for children, access to specialized job, wider opportunity to self-actualization, and better healthcare system in the country of migration, and political turmoil, violence, insecurity and corruption in the country of origin, as major reasons for their decisions to migrate (Mahmood 1998, Siddiqui 2003). Studies on short-term migration have identified distressed economic conditions, desire for further economic improvement, political consideration, information on job opportunities, operation of recruiting agents and social networks combinely produced migration. IOM INSTRAW (2000) and Siddiqui's (2001) work reveals some gender specific factors uniquely affecting short-term migration of women. Factors such as women's need to escape unhappy social situations including bad marriages, harassment, violence, lazy husbands made these women a socially disadvantaged group who saw migration primarily as a quest for independence and a means of realizing their self worth.

### **2.4 Scale of Migration**

BMET<sup>6</sup> data show that from 1976 to January 2002, the total number of Bangladeshis working abroad as short-term migrants stands at more than three million (Table 2.4.1). They indicate a yearly average flow (1991–2002) of around

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<sup>6</sup> BMET is the executing agency of the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment, which among other things maintains record of migrants.

226,000. There is steady increase in the flow of migration since 1976. But in the years of 1994, 2000 and 2001, declining trend had been witnessed. Since 2002 the number of short-term labour migrants is again on the rise.

## **2.5 Nature of Migrants**

BMET has classified short-term migrants to Middle East and South East Asia into four categories: professional, skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled. Doctors, engineers, teachers and nurses are considered professionals. Manufacturing or garments workers, drivers, computer operators and electricians are considered as skilled, while tailors and masons as semi-skilled. Housemaids, cleaners and menial labourers are considered unskilled workers. During the early years of short-term labour migration, the proportion of professional and skilled workers was higher than that of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. In recent times, however, semi-skilled and unskilled workers make up the majority of the migrants (Table 2.4.1).

BMET data also shows that Bangladeshi workers are predominantly men. From 1991 to 1999 altogether 2,082,270 persons have migrated overseas for employment. Among them only 13,544 were women (Table-2.5.1). This is less than 1 percent of the total labour flow from Bangladesh during that period. Data also indicates a downward trend in female migration. IOM INSTRAW, (2000) Siddiqui, (2001), however, show that the above figure do not represent the actual migration scenario of women from Bangladesh. Many women keep migrating for employment, but their whole migration process is undocumented. Almost all women of the unskilled and semi-skilled categories migrate unofficially primarily it is due to the policy of Bangladesh government, which bans unskilled female migration.

Database of BMET is also not segregated according to age and educational level. Different micro studies conducted in migrant prone areas have shown that most of the migrants were young (15 to 30 years of age) when they first migrated (Siddiqui and Abrar, 2000; Afsar, 2000; Murshid, 2000) and a substantial majority were either illiterate or possessed educational background from class one to SSC.

## **2.6 Flow of Remittance**

The Bangladesh Bank<sup>7</sup> documents remittance flows to Bangladesh from all over the world . It shows that the remittances sent by the overseas wage earners have grown over time. It has increased from a paltry figure of US\$ 23.71m in 1976 to US\$ 2617.92m in 2002 (Table2.3.1). Nonetheless, the yearly growth rate of remittance is much less than the growth rate of the total number of migrant workers. In 1991, the flow of migrants increased 41.72 percent, whereas remittances grew only 1.56 percent compared to the previous year. Similarly, in 1994, the number of people who migrated overseas grew at a rate of 23.79 percent whereas remittances grew only 14.31 percent during that time. In the

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<sup>7</sup> It is the central bank of the country.

year 1997 the number of migrants increased 79 percent compared to 1996 and remittance flow increased 12.52 percent. In case of 1998, growth in migrants was 29 percent while growth in remittances was 4.86 percent. Migrating abroad for work may not lead to immediate remittance as the initial expenditure in terms of settling down, purchase of goods for own use, may delay the process of remittance. However, even a two-year lag does not indicate a significant increase in remittance corresponding to the number of migrant workers. Nonetheless, throughout the last twenty five years, the remittance flows broadly indicate an average yearly increase of around 10 percent. The most important reason behind such gap in migrant and remittance flows is that in recent times Bangladesh has exported more unskilled and semi-skilled migrants whose wages are rather low compared to those of previous skilled and professional ones. Wage rates have also fallen drastically over the past decade (Siddiqui and Abrar, 2001). One half of the total remittance came from one country, i.e., Saudi Arabia. Over the years, the US has become the second largest remittance sending country, Kuwait and the UAE being the third and fourth.

### **2.7 Importance of Migration to the National Economy**

International migration plays a vital and indispensable role in the national economy of Bangladesh in two major ways. Firstly, it reduces unemployment. Secondly, migration results in remittance flows to the country, which serve as an important but inexpensive source of much needed foreign exchange.

Since the 1980s, although the growth of labour force has almost doubled the rate of population growth.<sup>8</sup> Mahmud (1998) and Afsar (2000) emphasise that continuous outflow of working age population and inflow of remittances played a major role in keeping the unemployment rate steady. Migration, therefore, eased the pressure of alternative employment creation on successive governments.

The remittances sent by Bangladeshi migrants have constituted a significant portion of the country's foreign exchange earnings. During the period of 1977-1978 to 1997-1998, annual average of contribution of remittances was 26.5 percent (Siddiqui and Abrar, 2001). This has been used in financing the import of capital goods and raw materials for industrial development. In the year 1998-1999, 22 percent of the official import bill was financed by remittances (Afsar, 2000; Murshid, 2000). The steady flow of remittances has resolved the foreign exchange constraints, improved the balance of payments, and helped increase the supply of national savings (Quibria 1988). Remittances also constituted a very important source of the country's development budget. In certain years in the 1990s remittances' contribution rose to more than 50 percent of the country's development budget. If remittances are compared with the flow of foreign aid, one finds that its proportion increased significantly over the latter in recent years.

The contribution of remittance to GDP has registered a major growth from a meagre 1 percent in 1977-1978 to 5.2 percent in 1982-83. During the 1990s the

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<sup>8</sup> In the latter half of 1990s the labour force grew at the rate of 4 percent whereas population growth rate was 1.6 percent.

ratio hovered around 4 percent. However if one takes into account the unofficial flow of remittances, its contribution to GDP would certainly be much higher. Murshid (2000) finds that an increase in remittance by Taka 1 would result in an increase in national income by Tk 3.33. The importance of remittances becomes very clear if one compares it with foreign exchange earnings from the readymade garments sector. Currently, garments manufacturing is treated as the highest foreign exchange earning sector of Bangladesh. However, if the cost of import of raw material is adjusted, then the net earning from migrant workers' remittances is higher than that of the garments sector. For this reason, Mahmud underscored that since 1980s contrary to the popular belief, remittances sent by the migrant workers played a much greater role in sustaining the economy of Bangladesh than the garments sector.<sup>9</sup>

## **2.8 Labour Market: Conditions and Entitlements**

Different government documents show that over the years labour market conditions in these countries have deteriorated, particularly in the Middle East. Recruitment of professional and skilled workers has decreased. More and more unskilled workers are migrating. Their migration costs have increased, while their wage rates have fallen sharply. During the early stages of migration to the Middle East the employers bore the costs of airfares and paid commissions to the recruiting agencies. Workers' working hours, weekly and annual leave were clearly stipulated in job contracts. They also paid return airfare for holidays (BMET, 2002). For unskilled workers food and lodging were included in the remuneration package. In recent years, the employers no longer pay commission to the recruiting agents; rather the latter buys visa from the employers at a high price. Airfares are now being borne by the workers, whereas wage rates have fallen. In Saudi Arabia, during the early 1990s the wage rate was 600-800 Rials, now that has fallen to 250-400 Rials (Rahim, 2002). In the case of Kuwait, the average migration cost varies from KD 500 to KD 700. The monthly salary currently ranges from KD 8 to KD 25. However, the food, lodging and medical is still on the employer (Salim Reza, 2002).

Gender discrimination exists both in the Middle East and Southeast Asian countries. In the Middle East, domestic workers do not come under national labour law. In some countries women are subjected to mandatory pregnancy and HIV/AIDS tests on annual basis. If the female worker is detected positive on either of the two counts, the employers do not take any responsibility and the workers are deported home.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

The section shows that the main labour receiving countries of Bangladesh are in the Middle East. Four different types of workers go to Middle Eastern countries. These are professional, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled. Women migrants

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in *Beyond the Maze* (2002), pp. 53. Speech delivered by Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud, former Advisor to the Interim Government in 1996, at a conference on 'Streamlining Labour Recruitment Process in Bangladesh for Employment Abroad', 24 September 2001.

mostly go through unofficial channel. The remittance sent by the migrant workers is the main source of the foreign exchange for the country. Labour market condition is in general deteriorating in the Middle Eastern countries.

## **SECTION III**

### **International and National Instruments**

There are a number of international and national instruments that offer rights and protections to Bangladeshi migrant workers. This chapter begins with identifying international instruments on migrant workers and elaborating their contents. This is followed by discussion on national instruments and agencies created by successive of Bangladeshi governments for ensuring protection to the migrant workers.

#### **3.1 International Instruments**

There are three international instruments of direct application for migrant workers. Two of them belong to International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the last one is of United Nation (UN).

##### **3.1.1 ILO Instruments**

ILO is the oldest organisation working on migrant workers internationally. The first meeting of the International Labour Conference in 1919 highlighted the issue of equality of treatment between nationals and migrant workers as well as coordination of migration policies between states on the one hand and between government, employers and workers' organizations on the other (ILO 2001). The flagship ILO instruments regarding migrant workers are the Migration for Employment Convention (Revised) 1949 (ILO Convention No. 97), the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (ILO Convention No. 143) and the Migrant Workers Recommendations (ILO Recommendations No. 151). The Convention No. 97 came into force in 1952 and the Convention No. 143 in the year 1978.

The ILO Convention No. 97 was aimed at facilitating transfer of surplus labour from one continent to another. It emphasises, inter alia, medical services, equal treatment in respect of remuneration and trade union membership, provision of free public employment services, and supervision of employers or private recruitment agencies (Siddiqui 2001).

Irregular migration and extra-legal employment became widespread at the beginning of 1970s. At this context, the ILO Convention No. 143 emerged as the first international instrument on irregular or undocumented migrant workers. Part I of the convention focuses on protecting undocumented migrants from all forms of abuse. Part II of the convention seeks to promote quality of opportunity and treatment of lawful migration with respect to employment and occupation (UN 1990).

Even though they critically contributed in preserving interests of migrant workers, the ILO instruments had some serious limitations. One such limitation was inability to recognise and act upon emerging realities of international migration

like women migrants. The most important conventions and recommendation on migrant workers (convention No. 97 and 143, and Recommendation 151) did not perceive women as principal migrants. In paragraph 15.3 of the Recommendation (86), a migrant worker's family is defined as "his wife and minor children". In other words, a typical migrant is taken as male alone while women are considered only as family members accompanying migrating males. Under this circumstance, an all-inclusive international instrument for migrant workers became call of the day (ILO 1999).

### **3.1.2 The 1990 UN Convention**

The 1990 UN International Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families (hereafter ICMR) is the most comprehensive international instrument on migrant workers. It ensures rights of both regular and irregular, male and female migrants. It upholds that migrants are both social and economic being. It only came into force in 2003.

The ICMR provides, for the first time, a universal definition of migrant workers, categories of migrant workers and members of their families. It states, "The term Migrant Worker refers to a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which he or she is not a national." It offers protection not only to those who are presently engaged in work, but also to those who are in the process of seeking foreign employment as well as those who have completed their overseas engagements. The definition of certain categories of migrant workers provided in the convention is applicable to all the regions of the world. It rejects all forms of discrimination against migrants in terms of race, colour, language, religion, nationality, age, economic position, marital status and birth.

The 1990 convention recognises the importance of women as migrant workers in their own rights. Reference is made throughout the convention to ensure full applicability of international human rights regimes to female as well as male migrant workers and members of their families. It also has a wider protection mandate that includes members of the families of migrant workers. This is very significant as it implies that migrant workers are not only economic entities but also social entities. It also emphasises on protection of human rights of undocumented and irregular migrant workers in a major way. The ICMR establishes international standards of treatment by elaborating particular human rights of workers and member of their families.

The convention defines the rights of migrant workers under two main heads: the human rights of the migrant workers their families (Part III) and other rights of migrant workers and members of their families (Part IV). Human rights are applicable to all migrant workers, irrespective of their documented or undocumented status. The other rights are applicable only to migrant workers

who are documented.<sup>10</sup> Under human rights it reiterated the same rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other international documents: basic freedoms<sup>11</sup> (Art. 12 and 13), right to due process<sup>12</sup> (Art. 16 and 20), right to privacy (Art.14 and 21), equality with nationals (Art. 25 and 27), right to trade union activities (Art. 26), transfer of earning (Art. 32), right to information (Art. 33) etc.

"Other Rights" for the documented migrants include right to be temporarily absent (Art. 38), freedom of movement (Art. 39), right to participate in politics, public affairs and decision making process (Art. 41 and 42), equality with nationals for access to educational, vocation and social services (Art. 43 and 45), right to reunification with family (Art. 44), tax and custom duty exemption (Art. 46 and 48) and right to choose remunerated activity (Art. 52).

Countries receiving migrant workers are generally skeptical of international regimes regarding migrant workers. Countries importing Bangladeshi labour are no exception. They have not ratified ILO and UN instruments on protection of migrant workers. But Middle Eastern countries covered under the study are in unique position. They have not even participated, let alone ratifying, in any of the aforementioned documents. Bangladesh also did not ratify any of the ILO convention. It signed International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICMW) in 1997 still shying away from ratifying it.

### **3.1.3 Other UN Instruments**

The above international instruments cannot influence treatment of migrant workers in the receiving countries that have not ratified them. In that context, for legal protection of migrant workers, one has to resort to other relevant international regimes. The UN International Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) is one of the most widely ratified UN human rights conventions.<sup>13</sup> Some of the labour receiving countries of Bangladesh have also become party to this convention. This convention may be used in binding them to 'outlaw' discrimination to the migrant workers on the basis of race, colour, descent and national or ethnic origin.

There are several other UN instruments also that, while not directly referring to migrant workers, can still be used in ensuring their rights in receiving countries. These include: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966; the

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<sup>10</sup> Ryszard 1997 of course viewed this distinction between those migrants with legal status from those in an irregular situation as a compromise between protection of all migrants rights and the principle of state sovereignty.

<sup>11</sup> Freedom of thought, conscience and religion, right to hold and express opinion.

<sup>12</sup> Investigation, arrest and detention are to be carried out in accordance with the established procedure of the receiving country.

<sup>13</sup> As of December 1998 151 countries have ratified this Convention.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966; the International Convention Against Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979; the International Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatments or Punishment, 1984; and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

### **3.2 National instruments**

In order to manage and provide better protection to the migrants different measures have been undertaken by the government of Bangladesh. It has promulgated new ordinance, enacted statutory and regulatory orders, framed rules established a new ministry etc.

#### **3.2.1 The Emigration Ordinance, 1982**

In 1982 GoB promulgated an Emigration Ordinance. The new Ordinance is the key regulatory instrument in respect to migration. The Ordinance only allowed persons with valid travel documents to emigrate. A letter of appointment or work permit from a foreign employer or an employment or emigration visa from a foreign government is considered to be a valid document (Sec. 7/3/a). A person who is selected by a foreign employer through an organisation or a recruiting agent recognised by the government under an agreement between two governments will also be allowed to emigrate (Sec. 7/3/b). The Ordinance also empowers the government not to allow emigration of persons of a particular occupation, profession, vocation or qualification in the public interest (Sec. 8/1). Under the Ordinance, the government is authorised to grant licenses to individuals and companies who wish to be engaged in recruitment for overseas employment (Sec. 10). The Ordinance empowers the government to cancel and suspend licenses and forfeit security deposit if it is satisfied that the licensee's conduct has been improper or is in violation of the law or prescribed Code of Conduct. However, such actions could only be taken after the licensee was given an opportunity to explain his position (Sec.14/1). Illegal emigrations are punishable for a term of up to one-year imprisonment with a fine not exceeding Tk. 5000. It also contains provisions for penalising unlawful recruitment efforts (Sec. 20). Under the Ordinance, the recruiting agencies are prohibited to charge higher than the prescribed amount of fees for their services (Sec. 23). The Ordinance has provisions for penalising individuals who, in breach of contract with foreign employers, abandon their employment (Sec. 24).

#### **3.2.2 Statutory and Regulatory Orders**

On 11 April 1983, the Government by a notification<sup>14</sup> of the Labour and Manpower Ministry set up four Special Courts in each of the divisions of the country (Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi). Subsequently on 25 March 1985, by another Order<sup>15</sup>, the DG of BMET, Managers of Employment Exchanges and Assistant Directors of District Employment and Manpower Offices were authorised to lodge complaints to the Special Courts.

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<sup>14</sup> No. SRO 129-L/83/LMVIII/(11)83

<sup>15</sup> No. SRO. 146-1/L/LM/S-VII/M-17/83

### **3.2.3 Rules**

In December 2002 the current government framed three rules under the 1982 Ordinance. These are: Emigration Rules, Rules for Conduct and Licensing Recruiting Agencies, and Rules for Wage Earners' Welfare Fund.

### **3.2.4 Bilateral Agreements and MoU**

In the absence of ratification of international instruments by the receiving countries and Bangladesh, bilateral agreements or memorandum of understanding (MoU) are important instruments through which protection of rights of migrants can be ensured. Other important labour sending countries also laid great emphasis on signing such agreements with the labour receiving countries. Successive Bangladesh governments also sent high-level delegations to various labour receiving states to negotiate such agreements. Experiences in this regard show that there is a general reticence of the labour receiving countries to sign any bilateral agreement and memorandum of understanding that have legal bindings. In this context, the government of Bangladesh developed minimum set of standards for sending labour. When understanding is reached with any country for sending labour, Bangladesh government hands them over a set of standards with the implicit understanding that the receiving country will honour it. But this does not place the country concerned under any legal obligation.

In the past, Bangladesh had signed agreements with Iraq, Libya, Qatar and Malaysia on sending labour. In these instances the GoB handed over the expected minimum set of standard to governments of those countries. For the first time, the government of Bangladesh has signed a MoU with Malaysia in 2003. Under the MoU, Malaysia will take 50,000 workers over the next couple of years. Along with the number of workers to be taken over the stipulated period, the agreement also lays down rights at work, (i.e, wage scales, working and living conditions); level of social protection (i.e., provident fund, gratuity, medical care and compensation); and access to instruments of social dialogue (freedom of association) (Siddiqui 2004).

Following the Asian financial crisis, Malaysian government imposed a ban on receiving labour. After the financial crisis, it lifted the ban and began receiving labour from certain countries. Initially, Bangladesh did not figure in the list of countries that Malaysia announced to be the source of labour in the next five years. The new country included in the list was Nepal. Malaysia was too important a labour market for Bangladesh to loose. By undertaking major efforts at various tiers, Bangladesh finally succeeded to resume sending labour to Malaysia. The new terms stipulating higher wages were negotiated under which Malaysia began to take labour. However, it subjects them to certain stiff conditions that include ban on changing of jobs, marrying local women etc. The condition also obliges Bangladesh government to repatriate them if they are in breach of the contract.

### **3.2.5 Migration of Women**

In 1981, the then government imposed ban on migration of all categories of female workers other than the professionals through a circular. In 1987, the ban was replaced by imposition of restriction on migration of women of unskilled and semi-skilled categories. In 1997 again, a ban was imposed on all category of woman workers, including the professionals. It was again changed in the same year from ban to restriction and excluded the professionals from such restriction. In 2003, the current government has eased migration of unskilled and semi-skilled women who are more than 35 years of age. Those who are less than 35, are still not allowed to migrate on their own.

### **3.2.4 Managing Migration**

Labour recruitment from Bangladesh involves various ministries and agencies of government, private recruiting agents, their local and international intermediaries, potential migrants and their families.

#### **3.2.4.1 Ministries**

The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism are the four important ministries which deal with international labour migration. Until 2001, Ministry of Labour and Employment was in charge of international labour migration. The current government, in responding to the demand of the expatriate Bangladeshis and the migrant workers, created a new ministry in December 2001. The power of implementing the rules framed in 2002 under the Emigration Ordinance 1982 and accordingly, promoting, monitoring and regulating the migration sector are vested with the new ministry. The activities of the ministry concentrated in two broad areas. First is to create employment in overseas and the second is to solve problems of expatriates and ensure their welfare (GoB, 2003).

Role of foreign Missions are also extremely important in respect to migration. The functions that Bangladesh missions abroad currently perform regarding labour export are: (a) exploring potential labour market; (b) attestation of documents pertaining to recruitment; (c) providing consular service to Bangladeshi workers; and (d) ensuring welfare of migrant workers.

#### **3.2.4.2 Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET)**

BMET is the executing agency of Ministry Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment in respect to processing labour migration. BMET was created in 1976 by the government to ensure maximum benefit for labour export. Since the promulgation of the Emigration Ordinance of 1982, it has been working as the implementing agency of the Ordinance. Currently BMET is involved in all kinds of functions—control and regulation of recruiting agents, collection and analysis of labour market information, registration of job seekers for local and foreign employment, development and implementation of training programmes in light of

specific labour needs both in national and international labour market, materialisation of apprentice and in-plant programmes in the existing industries, organising pre-departure briefing sessions, and resolving legal disputes.

#### **3.2.4.3 Private Recruiting Agencies**

In the 1970s the government performed functions of recruitment. Since 1981, as part of private sector development, the private recruiting agents took over the task. The private agencies work under a license from the government. On their own initiative they collect information on demands and orders for foreign employment. After taking permission from the BMET, the agencies recruit workers as per specifications of the foreign employers and then process their cases for deployment. Over time, the recruiting agencies became organised under the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA). The association was formed in December 1984 with representatives of twenty-three recruiting agencies. In 2002, the association had a membership of around 700 agencies.

#### **3.2.4.4 Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited**

In 1984, the government also set up Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited (BOESL) as a limited company to take up direct recruitment role. Since its inception up to February 1999, BOESL recruited 8,900 workers. This constitutes 0.31 percent of the total number of those who went overseas though the official channel (Table 3).

#### **3.2.4.5 Individual Contract**

Almost 55 to 60 percent of recruitment is conducted through individual initiatives and social networks. Usually persons already deployed in the host countries arrange visas for their friends and relatives through their own contacts. Sometimes these visas are sold to the interested parties. The cost of migration and illicit practices are less when work visas are procured through individual migrants working abroad (Siddiqui 2002).

Now we have some idea about the agencies involved in managing migration. Following three sections will provide an assessment of short-term labour migrants from the perspective of four pillars of decent work.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

This section shows that Institutional arrangements to ensure right at work for the Bangladeshi workers are poor. Neither Bangladesh, nor her labour receiving countries has ratified the international instruments on the rights of migrant workers. Successive governments of Bangladesh found it difficult to sign memorandums of understanding with the receiving countries. At national level, various laws have been enunciated since 1976. But they have concentrated more on facilitating labour migration industry than preventing exploitation of migrant workers.

## SECTION IV

### BACKGROUND OF INTERVIEWEES

Rights at work, level of social protection and role of trade union as avenue of social dialogue have been identified in the first section among the core elements of decent work. One hundred returnee migrants were interviewed to develop an understanding of the above mentioned issues. Current section starts with general understanding of the background of interviewees. This will enable us to realise their motivations to work abroad in often challenging conditions. The study has collected two types of background information on the interviewees. The first one can be labelled as personal profile that includes information on their areas of residence, age, educational background, religion, marital status, and family size. Next comes migration related informations: number of times they migrated, last country of migration, number of years of migration, sources of information for going abroad, sources of visa and total expenses for migration.

#### 4.1 Source Areas

According to table 4.1.1, a towering 93 interviewees hailed from Dhaka region with only 1 from Chittagong and 6 from Comilla regions. The interviewees of Dhaka region were from among Gazipur, Savar and Keraniganj townships. It may be mentioned that the regions under the study are the most industrialised parts of the country. The bulk of formal sector manufacturing establishments, that employ many of the returnee migrants, are located there. There is even an EPZ in one area. So, these places have greater concentration of returnee factory workers.

Table 4.1.1 Source Areas of the Migrants

Region	Number
Dhaka	93
Chittagong	1
Comilla	6
Total	100

#### 4.2 Age Distribution

Table 4.2.1 deals with age of the interviewees. Three kinds of age have come under its purview. They are present age, age during first time of migration and age after last time of return.

Table 4.2.1 Age Distribution

Age Group	Present Age		Age at first time of migration		Age after last time of return	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
18-20		2	8	9	1	2
21-25	5	10	14	13	6	11

26-30	11	15	27	10	20	15
31-35	23	5	6	2	18	4
36-40	12	2	8	1	10	1
41-45	7	1	1		6	1
46-50	6		1		3	1
51-60	1				1	
Total	65	35	65	35	65	35

The highest 23 male interviewees currently belong to 31-35 year age group. The second and third largest groups are respectively 36-40 and 26-30 age groups. Only 1 interviewee belongs to the age group of 51-60. Among the 35 females, 15 interviewees are currently aged between 26-30 followed by 10 in 21-25 years age group. The 2 youngest female interviewees belong to the 18-20 years age group and the senior most is in the 41-45 years age group.

As big as 27 out of 65 male migrant workers were between 26-30 years of age when they first migrated. Eight interviewees migrated in tender ages of 18-20. Only 1 each migrated while they were respectively in 41-45 and 46-50 years age groups. The three main age groups among female interviewees during first migration are: 21-25 for 13, 26-30 for 10 and 18-20 for 9. For a relatively conservative country like Bangladesh, the number of females migrating at a very young age seems to be comparatively high.

About a third or 20 male migrants were in 26-30 years age group when they returned home for the last time. The two other remaining big groups are 18 in 31-35 years age group and 10 in 36-40 years age group. About a half or 15 female interviewees were between 26-30 years when they returned for the last time. The other major age group for females in this regard is 21-25 that includes 11 or most of the remaining female interviewees.

It was found from the field work that most of the interviewees were abroad during their 21 to 30 years. This is the prime of life while a person is most productive. It can, therefore, be said that most of those who migrated have already spent most important time of their life.

### 4.3 Educational Background

The table 4.3.1 reveals that most of the interviewees have some level of literacy. Over a third of the interviewees attended Class 1-5 and a fourth attended Class 6-10. Quite a few of them studied upto SSC, HSC and graduate levels. However, lack of education is considerably high as well. While 15% interviewees can only sign their names, 12% are illiterate. The number of illiterates is 6 on both side of the gender line. But there is no SSC, HSC or graduate among the female interviewees. The number of those having education upto primary level (1-5) is 20 among males and 14 among females. The female rate here is comparatively higher than the male. Those who received mid-level education (6-10) are 21

males and 4 females. The number of females who can only sign their names is much higher than their male counterparts.

Table 4.3.1 Educational Background

Educational Background	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Illiterate	6	6	12
1-5	20	14	34
6-10	21	4	25
SSC	8		8
HSC	2		2
BA/BSC/BCOM	4		4
Can sign	4	11	15
Total	65	35	100

#### 4.4 Religion

Table 4.4.1 suggests that people of only two faiths were found among the interviewees, with an overwhelming 97% professing Islam accompanied by a meager 3% Hindus. Among the Muslims (followers of Islam), 63 are male and 34 female. The Hindu interviewees are 2 male and 1 female. The representation of the minority community in the study is not proportional to their ratio of population<sup>16</sup>. One explanation for this could be, the social network that plays a major role in inducing migration favoured migration of Muslims. Another explanation could be preference for Muslim workers by the Muslim employers.

Table 4.4.1 Religion

Religion	Male	Female	Total
Islam	63	34	97
Hindu	2	1	3
Total	65	35	100

#### 4.5 Marital Status

According to table 4.5.1, 42 male workers out of 65 or 64.61% of them were married before migration. Among 35 female workers, 28 were married while they migrated. This is 80% of female respondents. At present, 57 male interviewees and 31 female interviewees are married. The numbers of unmarried males have considerably decreased from 23 before migration to 8 at present. There is only 1 instance of separation, a female migrant at present phase. It may be noted that while 30 workers including both male and female were unmarried before migration. But now, after migration, the number has come down to 11.

<sup>16</sup> Religionwise distribution of Bangladesh population is as follows: 88.3% Muslims, 10.5% Hindus, 0.6% Buddhists and 0.3% Christians (GoB 1999).

Table 4.5.1 Marital Status

Marital Status	Before Migration		Present	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Married	42	28	57	31
Unmarried	23	7	8	3
Separated				1
Total	65	35	65	35

It was observed in the field work that husbands encouraged their spouses to migrate. Many female interviewees stated that before marriage, it was unthinkable for them to even think of migrating. But after marriage, when there was opportunity to migrate, their life partners helped them in availing that.

#### 4.6 Number of Family Members

The average size of family of interviewees is 6.05 according to table 1.9. The highest 15 members was found in Dhaka city and the lowest 2 members were found both in Gazipur and Keraniganj areas of Dhaka region. Family size is defined here as persons who share meal from the same kitchen.

Table 4.6.1 Family Members

Mean	6.05
Minimum	2.00
Maximum	15.00

#### 4.7 Frequency of Migration

According to table 4.7.1, most migrants have migrated once in their lifetime. The number of those who migrated 1 time is 33 among males and 26 among females. A fourth of interviewees have migrated twice of whom 19 male and 6 female. There are also instances of migrating 3 and 4 times. Only 1 male worker has migrated 5 times.

Table 4.7.1 Number of Times Migrated

Times	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
1.00	33	26	59
2.00	19	6	25
3.00	9	3	12
4.00	3		3
5.00	1		1
Total	65	35	100

#### 4.8 Last Country of Destination

According to table 4.8.1, Saudi Arabia was the last country of destination for migration to 40 interviewees with UAE to 20 interviewees and Kuwait to 16 interviewees. The other two destinations are Qatar and Bahrain respectively for 10 and 9 interviewees. The remainder went to other countries: Jordan, Oman and Lebanon. Most of the male interviewees went to Saudi Arabia and Qatar. UAE and Kuwait are the destinations of most female interviewees.

Table 4.8.1 Last Country of Destination

Country	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Saudi Arabia	38	2	40
UAE	6	14	20
Kuwait	7	9	16
Qatar	10		10
Bahrain	2	7	9
Others	2	3	5
Total	65	35	100

#### 4.9 Duration of Stay Overseas

The table 4.9.1 shows that average years spent in migration is 6.05 years with minimum 2 years to maximum 15 years.

Table 4.9.1 Duration of Stay Overseas

Mean	6.05
Min.	2.00
Max.	15.00

#### 4.10 Total Expenses of Migration

As per table 4.10.1 the cumulated expenses of 100 interviewees for migration is Tk. 76,15,050, an average Tk. 76,150 per person. The total amount spent by males is Tk. 54,41,750 and that spent by females is Tk. 21,73,300. The average expense of a male migrant worker is Tk. 83,719.23. The female average expense is Tk. 62094.28.

Table 4.10.1 Total Expenses for Migration

	Male	Female	Total
Mean	83719.2308	62094.2857	76150.5000
Min.	12600.00	32500.00	12600.00
Max.	272000.00	103200.00	272000.00
Total	5441750.00	2173300.00	7615050.00

#### 4.11 Sources of Information

Table 4.11.1 identify three main sources of information on going abroad namely *dalals* (Sub-agents) for 27, relatives living abroad for 25 and local relatives for 23. A majority of 21 males received such information from relatives living abroad and lowest 2 males received those informations from family. Among females, a half of 17 received those information from *dalals* and lowest 1 came to know that from advertisement.

Table 4.11.1 Source of Information on Going Abroad

Sources	Male	Female	Total
Family	2		2
Relative (Local)	16	7	23
Relative (International)	21	4	25
Recruiting Agent	13	1	14
<i>Dalal</i> (Sub-agent)	10	17	27
Workplace (Local and International)	3	5	8
Job Advertisement		1	1
Total	65	35	100

Many female migrant workers received information regarding migration from their own workplace. Most of the female interviewees of the study are garment workers. It so happened that while one or few garment workers migrated to Middle East, they became the source of both inspiration and information for others.

#### 4.12 Sources of Visa Procurement

According to table 4.12.1, the three main sources of visa procurement are as follows: recruiting agents for 43, local *dalals* for 25 and friends/relatives living abroad for 19 interviewees. Most of the male and female respondents got visa from recruiting agents. The numbers are 20 among males and 23 among females. The numbers of males and females who got visa from local *dalals* are respectively 13 and 12. The other sources of visa procurement are government of receiving country, employer's delegation, family member, local employer and, local relative and friend. The interviewees have either purchased or received visa from those sources.

Table 4.12.1 Sources of Visa Procurement

Sources	Male	Female	Total
Recruiting Agent	20	23	43
Travel Agent	5		5
Local <i>Dalal</i>	13	12	25
Expatriate Friend/Relative	17	2	19
Former Employer in Bangladesh	3		3
Others	7		7
Total	65	35	100

#### 4.13 Conclusion

This section gives a brief idea about personal and migration backgrounds of the factory workers. It is noted that most of them go abroad at the height of their working age and spend their prime productive years there. Bulk of the respondents has some formal education. Migrants are predominantly Muslim. Most of them were married during their first migration. Their average family size is little higher than national average. Frequency of their migration is also quite high as considerable number of people migrated more than once. Saudi Arabia is the most popular migration destination in the Middle East. On an average, each person has overseas working experience of over six years. Cost of migration is relatively less for women in compare to men. Men have spent more than Tk. 75,000 for migration with females spending around three-fourth of males. Sources of information on going abroad and that of visa procurement are diverse spanning both in and out of social network.

## SECTION V

### RIGHTS AT WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION IN THE FACTORIES OF MIDDLE EAST

To analyse rights of the workers and social protection measures operational in case of the Bangladeshi migrant workers in the Middle East, it is imperative to know their terms and conditions of work. This section discusses wage structure, over time, bonus, working hours and leave of those workers. Health care is an important indicator in respect to social protection.

#### 5.1 Wage Structure

The table 5.1.1 reveals that there was disparity between basic wages of workers in different Middle Eastern countries. The basic wage refers to monthly wage that does not include overtime payment, conveyance, medical fees and festival bonus. The average basic monthly wage of the interviewees is BDT 9,259. It ranges from highest 35,000 Taka to lowest 3,780 Taka. In the following table, average monthly wage of male and female workers is discussed.

Table 5.1.1 Wage Structure (Amount in Taka)

		Saudi Arabia	UAE*	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others
Mean	M.	10873.16	6721.67	19122.86	5978.90	9500.00	22500.00
	F.	5425.00	5803.85	6861.67		5678.57	5900.00
Min.	M.	4500.00	5500.00	12800.00	4400.00	6500.00	10000.00
	F.	5250.00	4000.00	3780.00		3950.00	4800.00
Max.	M.	25500.00	9100.00	25000.00	8250.00	12500.00	35000.00
	F.	5600.00	9000.00	13125.00		9000.00	6500.00
Total	M.	413180.00	40330.00	133860.00	59789.00	19000.00	45000.00
	F.	10850.00	75450.00	61755.00		39750.00	17700.00

\*In UAE, 1 female garment worker did not get her wage. Due to her absence for illness, her employer had cut her total wage.

M. - Male; F. - Female; Min. - Minimum; Max. - Maximum.

The 40 workers who went to Saudi Arabia enjoyed average monthly wage of 8,149 Taka. Only two of them were female while the rest were male. Both the female were garment workers while the male were in a variety of skilled and semi-skilled jobs. The females were respectively helper and operator in garments. The males were mostly welders, wall painters, carpenters, lab technicians and goldsmiths. There is difference between the average monthly wage of male and female migrants in Saudi Arabia. It is Tk. 4,500 for male and Tk. 5,200 for female. The highest monthly wage found among emigrants to Saudi Arabia is 25,500 Taka. The worker who used to receive that wage was a lab technician of a water treatment plant. He was recruited from Bangladesh by

Saudi government. Therefore, he used to get other benefits and facilities according to government regulation.

In case of UAE, all the 20 interviewees were employed in Abu Dhabi. So, little difference is noticed in their wage structure. Except one, all of them worked in garment factories and the male-female ratio among them is 14:5. The average basic monthly wage is Tk. 6,721 among males and Tk. 5,803 among females. The lowest basic monthly wage paid to a male worker is Tk. 5,500 and that to a female worker is Tk. 4,000. There is one female worker who didn't get her wage despite working for a year. Most female garment workers informed that they receive less than they expected during emigration. The factories where the females were employed as helper, operator, ironer and seamstress had no male co-worker but a factory supervisor.

Kuwait was the destination of 16 interviewees, 10 of whom are female. All of them were employed as garment workers. The average basic monthly wage for Kuwait is Tk. 19,122 and Tk. 6,861 respectively for males and females. The lowest basic monthly wage is Tk. 3,780 for males and Tk. 12,800 for females. Kuwait thus presents a sharp gender divide with respect to wage structure. The highest paid among migrants from Kuwait is a male whose wage was Tk. 25,000. He was a worker in a food processing factory for 9 years. It was during the second or last spell of his working abroad.

The number of employees who went to Qatar is 10. All of them are male and were employed in garment factories as operators or supervisors. Their average monthly basic wage was Tk. 5,978 with highest Tk. 8,250 and lowest Tk. 4,400.

A total of 9 interviewees migrated to Bahrain with 2 male and 7 female. All of them were in garment industry. The average monthly basic wage is Tk. 9,500 for males and Tk. 5,678 for females. The highest wage among males and females is respectively, Tk. 12,500 and Tk. 9,000.

The remaining 5 interviewees went to Jordan and Oman. The average monthly basic wage of this group is Tk. 22,500 among male workers and Tk. 5,900 among female workers. The highest wage of Tk. 35,000 was earned by a male garments worker who worked in Jordan for 10 years.

Discussion above reveals that the monthly wage rate varies among countries of Middle East as well as along gender line. But, it is noteworthy that the lowest wage rate is roughly same in all the countries. The lowest wage was mostly in garments work. While workers in other factories are comparatively better paid, garment workers are generally underpaid. Some garments owners are of Middle Eastern origin. Nonetheless, some of the garment owners who employed Bangladeshi workers were of Indians, Pakistanis and Sri Lankan origin. Most of them owned sub-contract firms. Wage rate was found to be lower in these factories. Sub-contract firms employed 23 percent of the interviewees. In case of



Total	Yes	16	10	3	9	3	3	44
	No	24	10	13	1	6	2	56
								100

Mfg. - Manufacturing

One can see two types of problems have surfaced regarding payment of wage. Firstly, a worker's basic wage would not start before two to three months of joining work on an average. The range of such delay spans from highest 180 days to lowest 10 days. In that case, every worker has to serve a factory without payment for some time. Secondly, wage of one month is paid in the middle of next month or later instead of the first week. Table 5.2.2 shows that the 44 workers are paid monthly wage 47 days after due date on an average.

Table 5.2.2 Number of Days Delayed

	Days
Mean	47.07
Min.	10.00
Max.	180.00

### 5.3 Legal Minimum Wage

According to Table 5.3.1, only 18 interviewees were aware of the legal minimum monthly wage set by the government of their country of employment. However, they gathered that information through others. A worker of jewelry factory of Saudi Arabia reported that his monthly wage was supposed to be Tk. 9440 according to government regulation. Violation of payment of legal wage was also alleged by a lab technician of a Saudi water treatment plant. He said, papers he had to sign for receiving wage mentioned his wage as 3,000 Saudi Rial or Tk. 36,000. But he used to be paid 950 Rial or Tk. 11,400, less than one-third of the actual amount. Again, one worker each from a manufacturing and a garment factory claimed that their wage is Tk. 38,000 and Tk. 8,000 respectively in line with Saudi law. Breach of legal wage is prevalent in other Middle Eastern countries as well. Two garment workers from UAE reported to have heard from people that their actual wage should have been Tk. 9,600 and Tk. 8,000 respectively as per government regulation. Again, one employee each of a packaging factory and a garments in Kuwait informed that their wage was supposed to be Tk. 23,310 and Tk. 8,000 respectively under law of that country.

Table 5.3.1 Legal Minimum Wage

Gender	Yes/ No	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Male	Yes	6	2	4	1	1	2	16
	No	32	4	3	9	1		49
Female	Yes			1		1		2
	No	2	14	8		6	3	33
Total	Yes	6	2	5	1	2	2	18
	No	34	18	11	9	7	3	82

Only 2 interviewees claimed to have knowledge of any change by concerned government in the minimum wage rate during the last year of their stay. The two were employed respectively in Oman and Saudi Arabia.

#### 5.4 Working Hours

International labour instruments provide 8 working hours for workers in each work day. But it is 10 in the Middle Eastern countries under the study. However, working hours of Bangladeshi workers often stretched beyond this limit.

#### 5.5 Overtime

Table 5.4.1 conveys that doing overtime was compulsory for 59% interviewees. In case of Saudi Arabia, the duration of overtime is 3-5 hours daily on an average for 14 workers and 6-8 hours daily on an average for 4 workers. Strikingly, all the 20 interviewees from UAE have reported working overtime. The daily average period of overtime was 3-5 hours for 15 workers and 6-8 hours for 5 workers. It should be noted, 19 of them were in garment factory and 14 of them were female.

Table 5.5.1 Overtime

Hours	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
3-5	14	15	8	3	2	2	44
6-8	4	5	1	5			15
Total	8	20	9	8	2	2	59

Although overtime is mandatory, its duration depends on pressure of work. In some instances, interviewees did not receive extra payment for overtime. If workers failed to fulfill their target within stipulated time, they had to do overtime to finish the work. In their cases, overtimes were not paid. Again, leave for sickness was often reason to slash overtime payments.

#### 5.6 Bonus

Table 5.5.1 discloses that 24 interviewees had received annual bonus. Twenty of them were males and 4 were females. Country wise, 13 of them were employed in Saudi Arabia alone. Among the males, only one interviewee, the lab technician from Saudi Arabia, regularly used to receive annual bonus as per law. Yet again, that bonus was not in cognisance with international regulation. According to company law, bonus is a share of a firm's annual profit that is distributed among workers. But no interviewee informed of any such bonus. Rather, in Middle East, bonus is given during Eid. So, they are festival bonus instead of general bonus. The interviewees considered the amount of extra money given to them by their employers during Eid as bonus. Such payments have been included in the study as bonus.

Table 5.6.1 Bonus

Gender	Yes/No	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Male	Yes	12	1	2	2			17
	No	26	5	5	8	2	2	48
Female	Yes	1	1	5				7
	No	1	13	4		7	3	28
Total	Yes	13	2	7	2			24
	No	27	18	9	8	9	5	76

### 5.7 Work Days and Off Days

Table 5.6.1 shows that only 2 interviewees had to work 5 days a week and 69 interviewees had 6 work days. But 29 interviewees had to routinely work each day of a week.

Table 5.7.1 Work Days in a Week

Working Days	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
5 Days a week	M.	1						1
	F.			1				1
6 Days a week	M.	28	5	5	9	2	1	50
	F.	2	7	5		4	1	19
7 Days a week	M.	9	1	2	1		1	14
	F.		7	3		3	2	15

Now let's review the work days scenario country wise. Among 40 interviewees from Saudi Arabia, 30 had to work 6 days a week. The rest 9 had to work all 7 days of each week. Only 1 had 5 work days. The last person was the foreman of a large Saudi printing press. It is revealed that all the interviewees employed in food processing, packaging, plastic and other manufacturing factories, and in construction sector had to work all round the week.

Of the 20 interviewees from UAE, 8 had 7 work days a week. All of them belonged to garments sector. The rest 12 had to work 6 days a week.

About a third or 5 of the 16 interviewees from Kuwait had to work 7 days a week. They are garment workers. Those who had 6 work days are 10. Only 1 had 5 working days.

The instance of 7 work days a week is 1 in Qatar, 3 in Bahrain and 5 in the other countries together. Again, the number of workers having 6 work days a week are 9 in Qatar, 6 in Bahrain and 2 in remaining countries.

The study found Friday as the main weekly holiday in the countries of Middle East. The reason is religious. Due to Muslim predominance in the region Friday is considered as sacred and therefore celebrated as weekly holiday. Obviously,

this is the off day for most Bangladeshi workers as well. Table 5.7.1 shows that 69 of 100 workers interviewed had Friday as off day. But there are exceptions also. Garment workers had to work in Fridays although it was designated as weekly holiday. They had day off in only one Friday a month. But as those interviewees answered positive to the question about weekly off day, they are also included in the current measurement. Again, Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday were mentioned by 4 workers respectively as weekly off day.

### 5.8 Work in Holidays

Work in holiday has differed with countries of employment. Four categories of responses have emerged in this regard. In the first place, some interviewees did not have to work at all in holidays. Secondly, some workers had to work in holidays at times. It was voluntary and would be paid as overtime. Lastly, some workers were compelled to work in holidays by their employers. Overtime payment for those days was at the mercy of employers.

In accordance with Table 5.8.1, 9% interviewees never had to work in holidays. Fifty-nine percent had voluntarily or occasionally worked in holidays as it was not a regular provision. The remaining 32% had to work in holidays on a regular basis. The later includes those who had one holiday a month.

Table 5.8.1 Work in Holiday

Work in Holiday	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
No work regularly	M.	5		1		1		7
	F.		1			1		2
Voluntarily /occasionally worked	M.	24	6	4	9	1	1	45
	F.	2	5	3		3	1	14
Have to work regularly	M.	9		2	1		1	13
	F.		8	6		3	2	19

### 5.9 Extra Wage for Work in Holidays

Out of 91 workers who worked in holidays, 45 received extra wage. Their sectors of employment included garments, manufacturing, construction material, packaging, plastic, leather, welding, and, tiles and fittings. The remaining 44 workers were not given any extra wage for work in holidays.

The proportion of extra wage to regular wage was diverse. Five interviewees received double of their basic wage for work in holidays. It was half of the total wage for 13 others. Twenty-one workers were given extra wage equal to basic wage. Rest of them were paid very nominal amount.

### 5.10 Food

According to table 5.10.1, food expenses of 50% interviewees were borne by employers and 49% interviewees had to eat on their own. Only in case of 1 worker, food expenses were partially provided by company and the rest by own self.

Table 5.10.1 Food (Country Wise)

Food Arrangement Responsibility	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Employer	M.	9	5		9		2	25
	F.		13	4		5	3	26
Self	M.	29	1	7	1	2		40
	F.	2	1	4		2		8
Employer & Self	M.							
	F.			1				1

Majority of workers from Saudi Arabia, 31 had to afford their food expenses themselves. The employers provided food expenses of the other 9. The arrangement of providing or not providing food expenses did not depend upon type of factory. Most firms of all the concerned sectors didn't offer the facility while few others of the same sectors did.

Food expenses of most workers from UAE, 18 were borne by employers while 2 had to bear it themselves. All those fortunate were employed in garments. The other two were in furniture plant and garments respectively. The factory of this female garment worker used to serve food of the country where majority of employees came from. As most of the workers were Sri Lankans in this case, the food used to be served was Sri Lankan which were impossible for her to eat. So she had to buy food from outside. After working in this circumstance for a year, she returned home.

In Kuwait, food expenses of only a fourth of 16 interviewees were borne by employers. They were all garment workers. The remaining ones, who had eat on their own, were in garment, furniture, food processing, manufacturing, packaging and welding factories.

In Qatar 9 out of 10 interviewees were supported by respective firms for food with only 1 eating on his own. All are garment workers. In Bahrain, 5 depended on companies for food and 4 were self-dependent. Same was the case with remaining 5 workers of garments in other countries.

Table 5.10.2 Food (Factory Wise)

Responsibility of Food Arrangement		Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Garments	Emp.		18	4	9	5	5	
	Self	3	1	3	1	4		
	Emp. & Self			1				
Furniture	Emp.	1						
	Self	7	1	1				
	Emp. & Self							
Food Processing	Emp.	2						
	Self	3		4				
	Emp. & Self							
Mfg.	Emp.							
	Self	5		1				
	Emp. & Self							
Packaging	Emp.	1						
	Self	1		1				
	Emp. & Self							
Plastic	Emp.							
	Self	2						
	Emp. & Self							
Leather Processing & Tannery	Emp.	2						
	Self	1						
	Emp. & Self							
Others	Emp.	3						
	Self	9		1				
	Emp. & Self							

Emp. - Employer

### **5.11 Accommodation**

A staggering 93% of interviewees lived in free residential facilities provided by companies. The sizes of rooms provided by companies were 10X12', 13X14', 10X25' and 10X10'. A group of 8-10 people had to live in each room.

Only 4 interviewees from Saudi Arabia, working in manufacturing and furniture factories, had to live on their own. Those who were employed in manufacturing had to pay Tk. 6200 on average for rent of accommodation. This was Tk. 3000 on average for furniture workers.

In Kuwait, only 3 of the 16 had to live on their own. They were employed respectively in food processing, manufacturing and furniture plants. For all the remaining workers in UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and other countries, free residential arrangement provided by company was available.

### **5.12 Social Protection**

Social protection stands for certain assurance against vulnerabilities when persons are out of work. Such assurances have been termed as social protection. This includes protection of income during old age to maintain subsistence and during sudden loss of livelihood due to closure of organizations or retrenchment, and protection against loss of income due to sickness, accidents and death. Assurance of treatment during sickness and following accidents are also part of social protection package. Access to health care is an important part of social protection system.

#### **5.12.1 Health Service**

Health care provided to the workers varies from one receiving country to another. In Saudi Arabia, the necessary primary health care services are available in the major cities, under the government policy entitled "health for all", irrespective of the workers' legal status (Mannan 2001). In the UAE and Bahrain as well migrants can receive services from the general hospitals. However, the costs of medicine and tests have to be borne by the migrants themselves. Some companies and factories have their own authorised medical service providers. Workers go through annual medical check up. In other cases, the employers bear the costs of medical service if workers' supervisors recommend so.

#### **5.12.2 Health Check-up**

Twenty five percent interviewees who were female had to go through rigorous health check up prior to emigration. Although female workers are entitled to maternity leave, this is not relevant for Middle Eastern countries under the study. Because pregnant women are not entitled to factory work in those countries. Bangladeshi female workers had to regularly face health check-up to clarify if there is any trace of pregnancy or HIV/AIDS. In UAE, few Bangladeshi garment workers were found pregnant and were sent back to country within 2-3 months.

According to table 5.12.2.1, 77% of workers could take sickness leave. The remaining could not. Only 8 workers in Saudi Arabia employed in furniture, manufacturing, construction, plastic, leather processing and, press and printing industries were not granted sick leave. Same happened to 5 garment workers from UAE. Such refusals in other countries are 2 each in Kuwait and Bahrain and 6 in Qatar. All of them were garment employees.

Table 5.12.2.1: Sick Leave (Sex Wise)

Received sick leave		Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Yes	M.	30	5	7	4	2	2	50
	F.	2	10	7		5	3	27
No	M.	8	1		6			15
	F.		4	2		2		8

Table 5.12.2.2: Sick Leave (Factory Wise)

Received sick leave		Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Garments	Yes	2	14	6	4	7	5	38
	No	1	5	2	6	2		16
Furniture	Yes	7		1				8
	No	1						1
Food Processing	Yes	5		4				9
	No							
Mfg.	Yes	4		1				5
	No	1						1
Packaging	Yes	2		1				3
	No							
Plastic	Yes		1					1
	No	2						2
Leather Processing & Tannery	Yes	2						2
	No	1						1
Others	Yes	10		1				11
	No	2						2

Refusal to allow sick leave have mostly happened to garment workers. The reason is usually excessive workload in garments according to the interviewees. The authorities and supervisors of concerned garments tended to deemphasise appeal for sick leave in frenzy of getting work done. So, workers had to essentially appear in work despite sickness. Again, in some cases, supervisors compelled sick employees to work. Although some supervisors would allow sick

workers to leave after half day out of sympathy. But while receiving or losing wage depended on work presence, workers came to work even when they were sick without insistence despite the hardship.

### 5.12.3 Slashing of Benefits for taking Sick Leave

According to table 8.3.1, 56 interviewees reported that employers came on their benefits for absence due to sickness. These included slashing daily wage, counting absent despite granting leave, reducing overtime etc.

Table 5.12.3.1: Slashing of Benefits for taking Sick Leave (Country Wise)

Slashing of benefits		Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Yes	M.	18	2	3	10		2	33
	F.	2	11	3		3	2	21
No	M.	20	4	4		2		30
	F.		3	6		4	1	14

### 5.13 Conclusion

This section gives an idea about wage rate of factory workers in Middle Eastern countries. Wage varies according to country as well as gender. More than half of the interviewees experienced regular payment. Payment of a section of the factory workers started 3 months after joining work and the rest experienced delayed payment of wage on regular basis. Overtime was mandatory for a big number of them. Around one fourth interviewees received bonus. Most workers have to work in holidays either occasionally or regularly. However, about half of them receive extra payment for work in holidays. These factory workers were found to have three types of food arrangement. They are, food provided by the employers, food arranged by the workers and, food partially arranged by the workers and partially by the employers. But in almost every case, accommodation is provided by the employer. Free access to public health service is available to Bangladeshi migrant workers in most of the countries. Sometimes, factories arrange for health service of employees. Women are frequently tested for pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. Although there is provision for sick leave, it was not allowed to some workers. Most interviewees alleged that employers slashed their benefits for taking sick leave.

## SECTION VI

### FACTORY CONDITIONS

This section gives an idea about conditions of factories where the migrants were working. It looks into types of factories, number of work lines in those factories, level of temperature and existence of safety method such as fire exit in side the factory.

#### 6.1 Occupation

The table 6.1.1 shows that 54% interviewees were garment workers in different countries of Middle East. Other sectors that have more than 5 interviewees are furniture plant (9), food processing factory (9) and manufacturing company (6). There are 3 workers each from construction, packaging, plastic and leather processing industries. There are also 2 workers each from welding and, press and printing industries. Sanitary and tiles plant, steel mill, glass factory, jewelry factory and water treatment plant have their share in the study with only 1 worker each.

Table 6.1.1 Occupation

Occupation (Sector wise)	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
<b>Garments</b>								
Machine operator	M.		3		9			12
	F.	1	5	1		5		12
Sewing worker	M.						1	1
	F.		5	4		1	3	13
Helper	M.	1	1				1	3
	F.	1	2	2		1		6
Others	M.		1		1	1		3
	F.		2	1				3
<b>Furniture</b>								
Carpenter	M.	6		1				7
	F.							
Others	M.	2						2
	F.							
<b>Food Processing</b>								
Unskilled worker	M.	5		3				8
	F.			1				1
<b>Mfg.</b>								
Skilled worker	M.	3		1				4
	F.							
Unskilled	M.	1						1

worker	F.							
<b>Packaging</b>								
Unskilled worker	M.	2		1				3
	F.							
<b>Plastic</b>								
Skilled worker	M.	2						2
	F.							
Unskilled worker	M.		1					1
	F.							
<b>Leather Processing &amp; Tannery</b>								
Skilled worker	M.	2						2
	F.							
Unskilled worker	M.	1						1
	F.							
<b>Others</b>								
Skilled worker	M.	10		1				11
	F.							
Unskilled worker	M.	2						2
	F.							

The male-female ratio in 40 workers from Saudi Arabia is 38:2. There are 8 male workers who were carpenter, painter and operator in furniture plants. Except 1 painter and 1 woodcutting machine operator the remaining 6 are carpenter. The names of their employers are as follows: Jajira Furniture House, Riyadh; Al Jagjug Factory (Fty.), Jeddah; Al Arabia Furniture Fty., Sanaiya, Riyadh; Al Bawani Furniture Fty., Riyadh; Al Saira Furniture Fty., Riyadh etc.

There are 5 workers from other manufacturing factories, 4 of them skilled and 1 helper. The skilled ones were respectively worker of Thai aluminium plant, leathman of workshop, helper of automobile assembly plant and welder of water pump spares manufacturing factory. Some of their employing firms are Cutter & Fitter; Al Razi Aluminium Fty., Riyadh; Al Glani Fty., Riyadh; Al Saleh Company (Cpy.), Riyadh; Ducktile Fitting Fty. etc.

There are 3 respondents who were iron grill painter and mechanic of building block machine in construction industry. The employers are B. C. Building Grill Manufacturing Cpy. and Sanaiya Building Material Manufacturing Plant, both in Riyadh. The 2 interviewees of plastic industry were respectively plastic products painter and plant supervisor in Bufiya Fty., Riyadh. The 3 workers of leather processing sub-sector were worker, operator and supervisor respectively. Al Shahid Leather Fty. of Riyadh is the respective employer. The numbers of interviewees from food processing plants of items like chocolate, ice cream and

bread are 5. The companies they worked for are Al-Iman Modern Bakery, Riyadh; Riyadh Chocolate Fty., Riyadh; Pepsi Cola Booksun, Jeddah etc. Among the remaining workers in Saudi Arabia, those employed in steel, melamine and, sanitary and tiles plants were machine operators. The 2 from press and printing were foreman and worker respectively. The 1 in water treatment plant was lab technician and the 1 in jewelry plant was gold polisher. The employee of glass factory was mere worker. The 2 female respondents were respectively helper and machine operator in garment factory. There was also 1 male garment worker who was a operator. The employers of the aforementioned workers are Escop Cpy., Buraidah; Al Said Melamine Fty., Mecca; Al Sabah Tiles Fty., Riyadh; Al Idris Glass Fty., Riyadh; Al Tarafi Fashions, Dammam etc.

We know that the respondents from UAE are all garment workers but 1 in plastic factory. Among the 14 garment workers out of the total 19, 2 are helpers, 5 operators, 2 ironers and 5 sewing workers. There was 1 helper, 3 operators and 1 supervisor among the 5 male garment workers. The companies where they worked are Bhara Garment Fty., Sharjah; Atlas Garments, Sharjah; Jucachim Ltd., Free Zone; K. C. Garments, Sharjah; Sharjah Fashions, Sharjah; Al Jahrani Fashions, Sharjah etc. The lone plastic factory worker from UAE was a male working as helper in Link Mipple East Company.

Occupation wise distribution of 16 interviewees from Kuwait are: 8 in garments, 4 in food processing factories and 1 each in manufacturing, furniture, packaging and welding companies. All the 8 in garments were female with 4 sewing workers, 2 helpers, 1 operator and 1 in packing. There are 3 males and 1 female among the 4 in food processing factories. The firms that employed them include Green Saloon Sweet Company, Al Faisal Bakery and Sweets, and Al Jahra Confectionary, Ferdaus. The remaining workers are all male and were employed in the following firms: Andes Company, Soloria and Al Mahmid Fty, Sabahia.

All the 10 interviewees of Qatar are male garment workers with 9 helpers and 1 supervisor. The garments they belonged to are Ana Salam Garments, Al Sanaiya; Al Capital Readymade Garments, Al Sanaiya; Al Salam Readymade Garments, Al Sanaiya; Salam Garments, Sanaiya Industrial Area etc.

All of 9 interviewees of Bahrain are garment workers. Among them 7 female and 2 male. There are 5 operators, 1 helper and 1 sewing worker among the females. The 2 males are respectively ironer and sewing worker. City Garments Ltd., Manama; Ahmed Jawad Fashion, Musaiyla; Voyager Garments Ltd., Manama etc. are some of the employers of Bahrain.

The 5 remaining respondents who were employed in other countries were also in garments. Of the 3 females among them, all sewing workers, 1 was in Oman and 2 were in Jordan. The 2 males, one each from Oman and Jordan were respectively sewing worker and helper.

The study suggests that employment opportunity for the interviewees was highest in garments sector. But it was also available in other sectors in considerable proportion. Non-garment employment options were mostly prevalent in Saudi Arabia where Bangladeshi workers were found to be in different types of jobs. Simultaneously, scope of garments work is very limited in the country. Kuwait is another country presenting multiple job options including garments. For rest of the Middle Eastern countries, garments were by and large the area of employment for Bangladeshi workers. The facts that all but 1 female migrant worker was in garments unveil the opportunities for Bangladeshi women in garment factories of Middle East.

## 6.2 Work Line

Work line is vital to working condition of any factory. Experiences of interviewees in Middle East tell of diverse features of work lines. As we see in Table 6.2.1, the average of work lines reported by the 100 factory workers is 6.96. The range trails from highest 50 to lowest 1. The average of work line is 8 in Saudi Arabia with 50 as the highest and 2 as the lowest number. The UAE's average is 4.78 from lowest 1 to highest 10. The Kuwaiti average is 10.66 with highest 50 and lowest 3. The work line average is 4.7 in Qatar where 9 is highest and 3 is lowest. The average of Bahrain is 5.78. The highest and lowest are respectively 10 and 1. The cumulated average of other Middle Eastern countries is 8.16. The highest and lowest numbers of work line are 20 and 2 respectively.

Table 6.2.1 Work Lines of 100 Interviewees

	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Mean	8	4.78	10.66	4.7	5.78	8.16	6.96
Min.	2	1	3	3	1	2	1
Max.	50	10	50	9	10	20	50

Table 6.2.2 shows that in Saudi Arabia, number of work lines was 10 in the garment factory and 50 in the packaging factory. The average number of work lines in other factories are as follows: 18.33 in food processing; 3 in furniture; 3.4 in manufacturing; 5 in glass; 4 each in construction, plastic, welding, 3 each in press and printing, and melamine; 7 in steel, and 8 in leather processing.

The average work line is 5 in UAE garments and 50 in the plastic factory under the study. In Kuwait, average work lines are 8 for garments, 5 for food processing plants, 50 for manufacturing concerns, 35 each for packaging firms and welding factories. The average number of work lines in garments of Qatar is 4. The work line average in Bahrain garments is 5. For the remaining countries, cumulative average of plant work lines is 8.

Only 15 garment workers reported that some work lines of their factories were engaged in producing foreign products. In case of Saudi Arabia, 1 garment worker stated that there were 5 work lines in his firm that used to manufacture

foreign brands. About UAE, 2 interviewees reported 4 and 1 interviewee reported 6 of such work lines in respective factories. All the 10 interviewees of Qatar reported work line of foreign products in their workplaces. The number they mentioned are 3, 4 and 5 respectively. We come to know about 3 such work lines in Jordan from 1 interviewee and only 1 of that kind in Bahrain from another interviewee.

Table 6.2.2 Work Line (Factory Wise Mean Estimate)

Type of Factory	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others
Garments	10.00	5.00	8.00	4.00	5.00	8.00
Furniture	3.00		5.00			
Food Processing	18.33		5.00			
Mfg.	3.40		50.00			
Packaging	50.00		35.00			
Plastic	4.00	50.00				
Leather Processing & Tannery	8.00					
Others	3.55		35.00			

### 6.3 Temperature in the Work Place

We see in table 6.3.1 that 45 out of 100 factory workers complained of intolerable heat in their factories. The remaining 55 didn't have this problem. It is well known, the weather of Middle East is too hot at day and cold at night. Therefore, it is very hard for someone who is not used to such condition to work there. Work temperature is particularly crucial for Bangladeshi workers as they are from moderate climate region (neither too hot nor too cold).

Table 6.3.2 shows that a total of 22 interviewees from Saudi Arabia alleged intolerable heat in factory premises. They were mainly employed in garments, manufacturing and furniture plants. As reported by a carpenter of a Saudi furniture plant, although factories were equipped with air-conditioner (AC), they sometimes stayed out of order.

9 respondents of UAE experienced uncomfortable heat in factories. They are all female garment workers. The reason was same as Saudi Arabia, non-working AC. Few felt that the ACs were outdated and should have been replaced by employers.

The problem of heat in workplace is relevant for 4 workers from Kuwait. All of them were in garments factory exception 1 in manufacturing. 1 female garment worker stated that their factory was centrally air-conditioned. But it would be put off sometime after they started working and they would continue working in

extreme hot. Once they began shouting, it would be restarted. This was to happen every now and then.

Extreme heat in factory premises was reported by all 10 interviewees from Qatar. Among them, 1 interviewee reported that there was no AC in his factory. The interviewees from Bahrain, Jordan and Oman did not report such problem as their factories had sufficient and active air-conditioning facility.

Table 6.3.1 Factory/Work Temperature (Sex Wise)

Intolerable Temperature	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Yes	M.	20	2	1	10			33
	F.	2	7	3				12
No	M.	18	4	6		2	2	32
	F.		7	6		7	3	23
Total	M.	38	6	7	10	9	5	65
	F.	2	14	9				35

Table 6.3.2 Factory/Work Temperature (Factory Type Wise)

Intolerable Temperature		Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Garments	Yes	3	9	3	10			25
	No		10	5		9	5	29
Furniture	Yes	6						6
	No	2		1				3
Food Processing	Yes	2						2
	No	3		4				7
Mfg.	Yes	2		1				3
	No	2		1				3
Packaging	Yes							
	No	2	1	1				4
Plastic	Yes	1						1
	No	1						1
Leather Processing & Tannery	Yes	1						1
	No	2						2
Others	Yes	7						7
	No	6						6

#### 6.4 Number of Workers per Floor

According to Table 6.4.1, there are average 205.83 workers for each floor in factories where the respondents worked in Middle Eastern countries. The highest was 600 workers and lowest 1 worker.

Table 6.4.1 Number of Workers per Floor

	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Mean	59	236	213	436	121	170	205.83
Min.	1	30	8	300	35	10	1.00
Max.	250	500	500	600	500	400	600.00

In Saudi Arabia, the highest number of workers that used to work in each floor is 1000 in a manufacturing plant while the lowest is just 1 in a jewelry factory. The highest number of workers per floor is 250 in construction and leather processing plants. The UAE average of workers in garment factories is 245 per floor. The highest and lowest numbers for the country are 500 and 30 respectively. With respect to Kuwait, the highest number of workers for each floor is 500 in a garment factory with the lowest 40 in a packaging plant. The average rate for the country is 328. The average for garments of Qatar is 463 with the highest 600 and the lowest 300. While the average workers per floor is 121 for garments of Bahrain, 500 is the highest and 35 is the lowest. The cumulated average of the remaining countries is 170. The highest and the lowest are respectively 400 and 10 in this regard.

Table 6.4.2 Number of Workers per Floor (Factory type wise)

Type of Factory		Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others
Garments	Mean	52	245	328	463	121	170
	Min.	12	30	80	300	35	10
	Max.	85	500	500	600	500	400
Furniture	Mean	48		60			
	Min.	8		60			
	Max.	120		60			
Food Processing	Mean	88		98			
	Min.	11		8			
	Max.	200		250			
Mfg.	Mean	26		250			
	Min.	8		250			
	Max.	59		250			
Packaging	Mean	87		40			
	Min.	25		40			
	Max.	150		40			
Plastic	Mean	32	50				
	Min.	4	50				
	Max.	60	50				
Leather Processing & Tannery	Mean	90					
	Min.	10					
	Max.	250					

Others	Mean	51.78					
	Min.	1					
	Max.	250					

### 6.5 Toilet Facilities

76 interviewees found toilet facilities in their factories satisfactory. 24% of the interviewees had problems with respect to toilet facilities (Table 6.5.1). The problems are as follows: lesser number of toilets than necessary, irregular supply of water, dirtiness and heated water due to extreme hot.

Table 6.5.1 Toilet Facilities (Sex Wise)

Unavailability of Toilets	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Yes	M.	10	1	1	5			17
	F.	1	5	1				7
No	M.	28	5	6	5	2	2	48
	F.	1	9	8		7	3	28
Total	M.	38	6	7	10	9	5	65
	F.	2	14	9				35

Table 6.5.2 shows that in Saudi Arabia, 11 of 40 interviewees reported problems regarding toilet facilities. They were employed in wide range of business concerns: garments, furniture, manufacturing, construction, plastic, and, press and printing. The worker of the Thai aluminium reported that as his factory had no toilet, he had to use the toilet of the mosque beside. Another interviewee who was employee of a cigarette factory had to use toilet of his residence, as there was none in workplace. Allegation of irregular supply of water in toilet was commonplace for Saudi Arabia.

Among the interviewees from UAE, 6 garment workers had problems with toilet facilities. It was alleged by 1 female worker that due to dissent of supervisor she and her co-workers could not always use toilet despite necessity. Because of such restricted access to toilet, another female worker developed kidney difficulties that forced her to come back home. Besides, the number of toilets was often not proportionate to the number of workers. For example, in the plant of 1 interviewee, there had been only 2 toilets at a floor of around 250 workers.

In Kuwait, 2 workers, one each from garment and manufacturing plants had problems with toilet. The manufacturing worker said their toilet often lacked water supply while they also had to clean their toilet on their own.

Half of the 10 interviewees from Qatar claimed to have no problem with toilet. Among the rest 2 said they had to use toilet of residence, as the number of toilets was lesser to the number of workers in the plant premises.

Table 6.5.2 Toilet Facilities (Factory Wise)

Unavailability of Toilets		Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Garments	Yes	1	6	1	5			13
	No	2	13	7	5	9	5	41
Furniture	Yes	4						4
	No	4		1				5
Food Processing	Yes							
	No	5		4				9
Mfg.	Yes	2		1				3
	No	3						3
Packaging	Yes							
	No	2		1				3
Plastic	Yes	1						1
	No	1	1					2
Leather Processing & Tannery	Yes							
	No	3						3
Others	Yes	3						3
	No	9		1				10

### 6.6 Sources of Drinking Water

The classification of sources of drinking water of the respondents is as follows in the table 21: supply water for 57%, filtered water for 31%, well for 1% and others for the remaining 11%.

Table 6.6.1 Sources of Drinking Water (Sex Wise)

Sources of Drinking Water	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Supply Water	M.	21	4	4	9	1	1	40
	F.		9	4		4		17
Filtered Water	M.	9	1	3	1	1	1	16
	F.	1	4	4		3	3	15
Well	M.	1						1
	F.							
Others	M.	7	1					8
	F.	1	1	1				3

The sources of drinking water for workers in Saudi Arabia is like this: supply water for 21, filtered water for 10, well water for 1 and others for 8. The other sources include bottled water to be bought from shop. The sources for UAE are supply water for 13, filtered water for 5 and others for 2. For 16 interviewees from

Kuwait, it was supply water for half, filtered water for 7 and other for 1. In Qatar, 9 drank supply water and 1 drank filtered water. Among the 9 Bahrain, 5 drank from supply water and 4 drank filtered water. Filtered water and supply water were respective drinking water sources for 5 and 1 from other countries.

### 6.7 Emergency Fire Exit

Table 6.7.1 shows that 93 of the respondents stated that their factories had emergency fire exit. 7 respondents who answered in the negative worked in leather processing, plastic factories other than garments. 52 out of total 54 respondents who worked in garments mentioned about having fire exist in their factory premises. Interestingly 31 out of total 93 respondent also mentioned that the emergency fire exist was not always open or different unnecessary materials remaining on the way.

Table 6.7.1 Emergency Fire Exit (Sex Wise)

Existence of emergency fire exit	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Yes	M.	33	5	7	9	2	2	58
	F.	2	14	9		7	3	35
No	M.	5	1		1			7
	F.							

Table 6.7.2 Emergency Fire Exit (Factory Wise)

Existence of emergency fire exit		Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Garments	Yes	3	18	8	9	9	5	52
	No		1		1			2
Furniture	Yes	8		1				9
	No							
Food Processing	Yes	5		4				9
	No							
Mfg.	Yes	4		1				5
	No	1						1
Packaging	Yes	2		1				3
	No							
Plastic	Yes	1	1					2
	No	1						1
Leather Processing & Tannery	Yes	2						2
	No	1						1
Others	Yes	10		1				11
	No	2						2

Table 6.7.3 Hindrance in the way Fire Exit (Sex Wise)

Open Door of Fire Exit	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Yes	M.	33	5	6	9	1	2	56
	F.	2	13	7		7	2	31
No	M.			1		1		2
	F.		1	2			1	4
N/A	M.	5	1		1			7
	F.							

### 6.8 Conclusion

This section gave an idea about nature of factories where Bangladeshi migrants are working. More than half of them were in garments factory, the rest was fragmented in furniture factory, food processing, leather processing, plastic factory and other manufacturing factories. Some of them were skilled workers some others were termed as helpers or unskilled. Those who worked in garments, manufacturing on an average had experienced 8 work lines. Almost half the respondent experienced excessive heat in their factories. In the garments factories, average number of people working in one floor was 230. Almost all interviewees experienced adequate toilet facilities. A few of course had faced problem. Existence of emergency fire exist in the factory was also a common experience for significant majority. Nun the less one third observed obstacles were there in the way towards reaching the emergency fire exist.

## SECTION VII

### SUPERVISION OF WORKERS BY MANAGEMENT

In the absence of proper mechanisms for social dialogue among the employer and worker, compliance to certain conditions set by the buyers has become an alternative mechanism of ensuring labour standard in recent time. This section looks into different mechanisms of communication among workers, employers and buyers.

#### 7.1 Targets

Target is an essential part of factory production. All factories have work targets. Initially the question about target was meant only for garment workers. But later it was found that workers of other factories also had targets. However, while the target for garment workers used to be hour based, it was not so for other workers. According to table 7.1.1, 66% of our interviewees had set work targets to achieve in their factories.

Table 7.1.1 Targets (Sex Wise)

Targets given	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Yes	M.	15	4	1	10	1	2	33
	F.	2	13	9		6	3	33
No	M.	23	2	6		1		32
	F.		1			1		2

Table 7.1.2 shows that among the workers from Saudi Arabia, 17 claimed to have set work targets out of total 40. Out of total 17 respondents, 3 each worked in furniture and food processing plants, 2 each in garment, manufacturing and packaging factories and 1 each in construction, leather processing, steel, press and printing, and water treatment concerns. The work target of the lab technician of water treatment plant was like this: mixing a certain amount of medicine with certain litres of water over a day.

In UAE, 17 interviewees had work targets. They were all garment workers having hour based targets. Failure of fulfilling targets would have cost them penalty like cut overtime or working extra hour. The number of workers having work targets is 10 for Kuwait. Of them, 8 were in garments, 1 in food processing and 1 in manufacturing concerns. All the 10 garment workers in Qatar had hour based work targets. From Bahrain, 7 workers reported to have work targets. All the remaining 5 from other countries, who were garment workers, also had targets.

Table 7.1.2 Targets (Factory Wise)

Targets given		Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Garments	Yes	2	17	8	10	7	5	49
	No	1	2			2		5
Furniture	Yes	3						3
	No	5		1				6
Food Processing	Yes	3		1				4
	No	2		3				5
Mfg.	Yes	2		1				3
	No	3						3
Packaging	Yes	2						2
	No			1				1
Plastic	Yes							
	No	2	1					3
Leather Processing & Tannery	Yes	1						1
	No	2						2
Others	Yes	4						4
	No	8		1				9

The table 7.1.3 reveals that failure in meeting targets may result in penalty for workers. But this was the case only in garments. While 54% interviewees were garments employees, 49 of them reported of facing penalty in failing to reach targets on time. In Saudi Arabia, 3 interviewees said if they failed to meet targets, they had to work extra time in same wage. The same used to happen for 1 worker in UAE. But the penalty for unmet target was slashed wage for the other 14 in the same country. The cases of working extra time in same wage as penalty for unmet targets in other countries is as follows: 8 in Kuwait, 9 in Qatar, 6 in Bahrain and 3 in the remaining countries. Again, instances of slashed wage as method of penalty for unfulfilled targets in other countries is 1 each from Qatar and Bahrain. Failure to meet target used to cost 1 worker from Bahrain a part of basic wage.

Table 7.1.3 Consequences of Failed Targets (Garment Factories)

Consequences of Failed Targets	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Reduced Wage	M.		3		1			4
	F.		13			2		15
Has to work long time till target fulfilled	M.	1	1		9	1		12
	F.	2		8		5	3	18

N/A	M.		1			1	2	4
	F.		1					1

The incident of facing penalty for failed target had been quite frequent among our interviewees. Table 7.1.4 shows, majority of 27 reported of facing penalty often for failed target. They are closely followed by 14 workers who had to face such penalty all the time. The 6 others had to suffer such penalty suddenly while only 2 workers experienced no bad situation in facing such penalty.

Table 7.1.4 Number of Occasions Consequences arose for Failed Targets (Garment Factories)

Number of occasions	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
All times	M.				7			7
	F.	1	3	2		1		7
Often	M.	1	2		3	1		7
	F.		8	3		6	3	20
Suddenly	M.		2					2
	F.	1	1	2				4
No bad situation	M.						1	1
	F.		1					1
N/A	M.		1			1	1	3
	F.		1	1				2

Table 7.1.5 show us that the average of extra working hours as penalty of failed target is 2.17 hours. It ranges from as high as 10 hours to as low as 1 hour.

Table 7.1.5 Extra Hours Worked for Failed Targets

	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others
Mean	2	2	2	3	2	2
Min.	2	1	1	2	2	2
Max.	3	4	3	10	4	2

## 7.2 Verbal, Physical Abuse and Punishment

Towering 70% factory workers mentioned that the experienced verbal abused by supervisors and others of authorities. Only 6% reported physical abuse. The incidents of verbal abuse are high in case of garments. Here's the story of 1 female garment worker from UAE. Most of her coworkers, who were Sri Lankans, were very abusive. They would start abusing for any break of work. The supervisor, another Sri Lankan, was the same type. Although she could not understand their words, gestures and tones were not unfamiliar. Had she went to take rest at her dormitory for feeling sick, her Sri Lankan supervisor would force her back to work. The supervisor often threatened of sending back to Bangladesh. But there are pleasant experiences as well. A garment worker from

Saudi Arabia praised her employer a lot. He was not only well-mannered himself but also refrained others from misbehaving with them. He also used to take them to shopping once a week. But this arrangement stopped ever since a Bangladeshi female garment worker escaped from market during one such tour.

### 7.3 Code of Conduct

As reported in table 7.3.1, employers had briefed 85% workers about company rules and regulations when they joined work. They rest had no idea about the same when they started job.

Table 7.3.1: Knowledge of Company Rule

Knowledge of Company Rule	Sex	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Yes	M.	32	5	6	10	6	2	61
	F.	2	12	6		2	2	24
No	M.	6	1	1		1		9
	F.		2	3			1	6

Some of the buyers of the employing garments of the respondents included big brand owners like Adidas. As per table 7.3.2, change in working environment due to order of famous buyers like Adidas were reported by 10 garment workers. The changes were as follows: increase level of cleanliness, arrange special uniform like headscarf and shirt, improve toilet facility and timely pay wages.

Table 7.3.2 Change in Work Environment due to compliance to buyers (Garment Factories)

Change in Work Environment	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Yes			3	4	1	2	10
No	3	12	4		4	2	25
N/A		7	1	6	4	1	19

Sharing written rules with workers was not common. Only 8 workers received written rules and regulations from their employers. 1 of them who received who received rules in Saudi Arabia, 4 from UAE, 2 from Kuwait and 1 from Bahrain (Table 7.3.3).

Table 7.3.3 Giving out of Written Rules (Garment Factories)

Written rules given	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Yes	1	4	2		1		8
No				5	5	2	12
N/A	2	15	6	5	3	3	34

#### 7.4 Monitoring

Monitoring of factories was mainly relevant for garment workers. In table 7.4.1, 50 garment workers reported that their factories were monitored by the buyers at least 2-3 times or more every month. While 2 workers didn't ever saw any buyer to monitor their workplaces, the remaining 2 had no idea about any such matter. Therefore, one can see monitoring plays an important role.

Table 7.4.1 Factory Monitoring by Buyers (Garment Factories)

Factory Monitoring by Buyers	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
No monitoring			1		1		2
Do not know		2					2
Over 2/3 times a month	3	17	7	10	8	5	50

28 workers reported that the monitoring teams included both local and foreign members. The teams were mainly formed of foreigners according to 21 respondents. Only 3 talked of monitoring teams solely made up of local people (Table 7.4.2).

Table 7.4.2 Member Composition of Monitoring Teams (Garment Factories)

Member Composition of Monitoring Teams	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Locals		2				1	3
Foreigners	1	10	3	3	1	3	21
Locals & Foreigners	2	5	5	7	8	1	28
N/A		2					2

According to table 7.4.3, a huge 40 workers said that monitoring teams didn't question them about working environment of factories. Only 12 workers were asked in this regard by monitors.

Table 7.4.3 Questioned by Monitors (Garment Factories)

Questioned by Monitors	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others	Total
Yes	1	3	3	2		3	12
No	2	14	5	8	9	2	40
N/A		2					

Visit of monitoring teams resulted changes in factories twice: prior to monitoring and during monitoring. Prior to arrival of monitoring teams, factory authorities

would arrange special uniforms for workers and clean factory premises. Besides workers would be advised to refrain from talking during monitoring and answer positive if asked anything about the factory. During monitoring, workers used to work on quietly. Many workers said, buyers used to ask them about factory's working environment at times. They answered to those queries. Some of course failed to answer for being unable to speak English. In such scenarios, they would speak through the supervisor or the representative of the employer.

### **7.5 Conclusion**

This section highlighted method of supervision by the employers, monitoring mechanism of the buyers. A major mechanism of supervision used by the employers is setting targets. It is the workers responsibility to reach those targets. One third of the workers experienced reduced wage if they failed to reach the target. One fifth had to work longer hours. However, around two third of the workers experienced verbal abuse at different times. Supervisors are mostly from other labour sending countries. Some of them quite abusive. Many on the contrary also experienced good behavior from employer and supervisors. Majority of the workers received verbal briefing of company rules. Only a few however had written instructions. It was found that buyer's also monitor if the factory is abiding by the compliance that they have set. However, supervisors or employers present when the employers enquired directly to the workers. Language and accent of the employers created some barrier in communication.

## SECTION VIII

### SOCIAL DIALOGUE

#### 8.1 Trade Union

Trade unions are membership-based organisations. They can legitimately represent those who are their members. The scope for trade union activism is limited in majority of the Bangladeshi labour receiving countries of the Middle East and elsewhere. Trade union is absent in Saudi Arabia. The other countries have trade unions. But migrant workers are not allowed to become members of those organisations. Therefore, obviously, none of the interviewees of the present study reported to have been member of trade union.

#### 8.2 Migrants' Association at Destination

In most of the labour receiving countries migrants have organised themselves into different associations. There is a wide range of associations. Most of the associations are formed by the Bangladeshi communities residing in a particular geographical location of a receiving country (state, district and city).<sup>17</sup> Associations are also formed on the basis of district, thana, union and village of the origin of migrants.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes associations are also formed by different professional groups,<sup>19</sup> However, this trend is not visible among the labour migrants.

Associations organise cultural programmes and observe various national days of Bangladesh. They also provide various kinds of support services to the community members like finding suitable accommodation for new comers, introducing them to markets that carry Bangladeshi food and other products etc. These services give the migrants a sense of belonging to a larger Bangladeshi entity. Social interaction among Bangladeshis do help sharing of work experiences and learning from each other about do's and don'ts and cultural sensitivities of the countries concerned. The Siddiqui and Abrar (2001) study found that the migrants gain access to easy methods to send remittances through the social networks.

#### 8.3 Migrants' Association in Bangladesh

A section of returnee migrants have formed organizations. Over the last few years three such organizations have emerged: the Welfare Association of Returnee Bangladeshi Employees (WARBE), the Bangladesh Migrant Centre (BMC) and Bangladesh Women Migrants' Association (BWMA). WARBE was

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<sup>17</sup> Bangladesh Society of the UAE.

<sup>18</sup> Chittagong Samity of Sharjah, Patia Samity of Dubai.

<sup>19</sup> Association of Bangladesh Engineers in Saudi Arabia

formed in 1997. The association strives to become the spokesperson of the migrant workers, particularly with regard to realising their rights. Since its inception, WARBE has played an important role in drawing public opinion to the migrant workers' contribution and plight. It has also consistently demanded for bringing about transparency in the use of Wage Earners' Welfare Fund. It has also demanded inclusion of representatives of returnee workers in the management of the fund.

The BMC is the only organisation of Bangladeshi migrant workers that is operational both in Bangladesh as well as in a receiving country, the Republic of Korea. It was established in the Korean industrial city of Ansan. It provides support to the Bangladeshi migrant workers in Korea. BMC has close association with the Joint Committee of Migrant Workers in Korea (JCMK) and the Ansan Migrant Shelter. The Centre has been successful in facilitating recruitment of returnee migrants from Korea with the Korean companies operating in Export Processing Zones of Bangladesh.

BWMA is organizing the female migrant workers of Tongi, Gazipur and Dhaka city. It involved in a campaign for lifting the restriction from migration of unskilled women below age of 35. Recently, the Government of Bangladesh has develop a new code of conduct for recruiting agencies who would like to send unskilled female migrants. This can be seen as a success of migrant associations and civil society groups in the area of policy change.

#### **8.4 Conclusion**

Discussion above shows that the scope for Bangladeshi migrants to join trade unions in the receiving countries is limited. This means the mechanisms for social dialogue are almost non-existent. In most of the countries migrants have developed their own associations. These associations provide effective service with regard to settling down in new socio-cultural milieu of the host countries. They also become an important source of information for the migrants and to some extent fulfill the cultural and social needs of the migrants. The returnee migrants associations that are operating in Bangladesh have been playing an important role with regard to rights of the migrant workers. They are very much focused on rights issues. With their first hand knowledge, they can provide very effective service to the out going workers and the returnees. They need support to build their institutional capacity.

## SECTION IX

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A large number of Bangladeshis migrate abroad each year as temporary workers. Substantial majority of them work in the low skilled end of the overseas job spectrum. This study particularly looks in to the job condition of Bangladeshi migrants who work in different factories in Middle East.

#### 9.1 Conclusion

The study showed that since 1976 till today, around 3.5 million people have migrated overseas. Almost all of them are men. Women migrant constitute less than 1% of the total migrant population. It was also understood that this does not reflect the true picture about the extent of female migration. It is due to government restriction women migrate through unofficial channel. Broader national statistics on labour migration also show that half of the Bangladeshi migrants go to single country that is Saudi Arabia. Other Middle Eastern countries where Bangladeshis are currently migrating are UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar etc.

Over the years, remittance sent by the migrants has become the highest foreign exchange earning sector of the country. In the year 2003, Bangladesh received more than 3 billion US dollars as remittance. This is much higher than the net earnings from export of garments sector. Remittance is more than the amount of foreign aid received by Bangladesh in the same year.

The government of Bangladesh realized the important role that migrants are playing in the national economy. Due to such realization a separate ministry has been established by the current government in 2001. Currently the government is framing a national policy for the migrants. Three rules have also been framed under the 1982 Emigration Ordinance.

Immigration of labour is an integral part of globalization and Bangladesh and its receiving countries immensely benefit from it. Yet labour market condition is deteriorating. Wage is falling down, work permits has to be bought by the workers which is increasing the cost of migration sharply. Airtickets are no longer provided employers. Workers are experiencing different types of discriminations. International instruments are there but receiving countries are not party to them. Bangladesh has developed various national instruments but they are more towards regulation rather than ensuring rights of workers.

Under the above mentioned backdrop, 100 factory workers were interviewed to get a clearer understanding about their work condition. The findings of the survey show that 60% of those who worked in the factories represent less educated background. Middle Eastern labour market is mostly for Bangladeshi Muslims.

Seventy percent of them were married before they migrated. About 40% of them migrated more than once. They mostly migrated to Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait. On an average, they stayed around 6 years. Average cost for the male to migrate was Tk. 83,719 and for female Tk. 62,094.

Interviewees belonged to both skilled and semi-skilled factory workers. Their basic wage varied according to skill. Wage rate also varied on the basis of country and sex. Wage rate of female workers was almost half compared to the male workers. More than half the interviewees experienced regular payment of wage. Accommodation of workers mostly was arranged by the employers. However, nature of accommodation in most cases was poor. Three types of food arrangement was found in case of these factory workers. Food provided by the employers, food arranged by the workers and, food partially arranged by the workers and partially by the employers.

The study also looked into the condition of factories. Half of the workers experienced excessive heat in their workplace. On an average there were 8 work lines in these garment factories. Emergency fire exit was there in almost all factories. However, one-third of the interviewees stated various unused materials were dumped on the way of the emergency fire exit.

In majority cases, targets were set by the employers and they were supervised regularly to reach those targets. Reduction in wage was one of the important mechanism by which they ensured achievement of those targets. A section of the workers highlighted their experience of congenial work environment but two-third of them experienced verbal abuses. Workers received an orientation on factory conducts but only a few received written instructions. In order to ensure better work condition, buyers also imposed certain compliances.

Scope of Bangladeshi workers to join trade union was found to be very limited. Trade Union is not allowed in Saudi Arabia. In other receiving countries, trade unions were operating but they were not open for migrant workers. There are however, migrants' associations in the host countries which organize cultural programmes and often provide support services to the workers. A section of returnee migrants have also formed organizations in Bangladesh. They play a vital role in highlighting the plight of migrants in the receiving countries. So far, no institutional support has been provided to these organizations by ILO, IOM or the Government of Bangladesh.

## **9.2 Recommendations**

This study identified some of the deficits of decent work conditions faced by Bangladeshi factory workers in the receiving countries. Offsetting those shortcomings is a difficult proposition as current labour market has become buyers' market. Not the less some steps can be taken to convince the authorities of receiving countries that productivity of better protected work force is much more

than the unprotected ones. To ensure work place rights and social protections of the workers following measures can be taken.

- Neither Bangladesh nor its major labour receiving countries have ratified the UN and ILO conventions on rights of migrants. Bilateral agreements or MOU are not in place with most of the countries. It is in the interest of a major labour sending country such as Bangladesh to ratify the UN and ILO conventions on migration.
- Before embarking on short-term contract migration, migrant workers should receive pre-departure orientation training. Information about the destination country, work condition, rights and duties under the legal regime of the country concerned and under international law should be disseminated through such training. The government may consider not providing such training itself, but encouraging selected specialized agencies, NGOs, and migrant support groups to impart residential, pre-departure orientation training in different migration-prone areas. Women migrants may be specially trained to handle sexual exploitation at work and reach out to avenues for redress.
- The role of foreign missions in labour-receiving countries could be redefined. Protection of the rights of migrant workers should be a priority concern. The government should consider establishing a migrant workers' resource center (MWRC) in major receiving countries, within the premise and under the administrative jurisdiction of Bangladesh missions. These foreign missions could also look into harassment cases, including those involving non payment of wages to Bangladeshi workers.
- Advocacy work can be organised with the governments of receiving countries. Diplomatic briefs on state of workers in the concerned countries can be prepared highlighting the positive developments and future challenges. Bangladesh missions abroad can invite relevant government functionaries of the receiving countries in social gatherings where migrants are also present.
- Handouts on health services, HIV/AIDS and DHS can be prepared in Bangla and disseminated through the missions and various associations of migrant workers in destination countries.
- ILO or IOM may consider hosting common migrant resource center in major labour concentration areas of the receiving countries. This center will be able to provide similar services to migrants from different countries.
- The current practice of forcible repatriation of migrants in contracting diseases such as HIV/AIDS, is contrary to workers rights. Social protection

measures for HIV/AIDS victims, specially when such diseases are contacted in foreign country need to be formulated.

- Bangladeshi trade unions should be familiarized with migrants' rights issues. In this respect, complementary linkage should be established between trade unions and migrant workers' associations. Trade unions also should be encouraged to develop link with the trade unions of the receiving countries. A pilot project can be initiated in this regard.
- Government of Bangladesh or other relevant national and international agencies need to allocate resources to strengthen the institutional capacity of migrants' association in the receiving countries as well as associations of returnee migrants. Network can be established between the two to provide support to current migrants and returnee migrants.

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## Annex 1

Table 2.3.1: Migration by Country of Employment and Flow of Remittance (1976- Sep 2003)

Year	K.S.A	Kuwait	U.A.E	Qatar	Iraq	Libya	Bahrain	Oman	Malaysia	Korea	S.Pore	Others	Total	Remittance	
														Million US	Creore Tk.
1976	217	643	1989	1221	587	173	335	113				809	6087	23.71	35.85
1977	1379	1315	5819	2262	1238	718	870	1492				632	15725	82.79	125.16
1978	3212	2243	7512	1303	1454	2394	762	2877	23			1029	22809	106.9	165.59
1997	6476	2298	5069	1383	2363	1969	827	3777			110	223	24495	172.06	266.95
1980	8695	3687	4847	1455	1927	2976	1351	4745	3		385	2	30073	301.33	492.95
1981	13384	5464	6418	2268	13153	4162	1392	7352			1083	1111	55787	304.88	620.74
1982	16294	7244	6863	6252	12898	2071	2037	8248			331	524	62762	490.77	1176.84
1983	12928	10283	6615	7556	4932	2209	2473	11110	23		178	913	59220	627.51	1568.76
1984	20399	5627	5185	2726	4701	3386	2300	10448			718	1224	56714	500	1265.49
1985	37133	7384	8336	4751	5051	1514	2965	9218			792	550	77694	500	1419.61
1986	27235	10286	8790	4847	4728	3111	2597	6255	530		25	254	68658	576.2	1752.85
1987	39292	9559	9953	5889	3847	2271	2055	440				711	74017	747.6	2313.94
1988	27622	6524	13437	7390	4191	2759	3268	2219	2			709	68121	763.9	2423.59
1989	39949	12404	15184	8462	2573	1609	4830	15429	401		229	654	101724	757.85	2446
1990	57486	5957	8307	7672	2700	471	4563	13980	1385		776	517	103814	781.54	2691.63
1991	75656	28574	8583	3772		1124	3480	23087	1628		642	585	147131	769.3	2818.65
1992	93132	34377	12975	3251		1617	5804	25825	10537		313	293	188124	901.97	3513.26
1993	106387	26407	15810	2441		1800	5396	15866	67938		1739	724	244508	1009.09	3986.97
1994	91385	14912	15051	624		1864	4233	6470	47826	1558	391	2012	186326	1153.54	4629.63
1995	84009	17492	14686	71		1106	3004	20949	35174	3315	3762	3975	187543	1201.52	4838.31
1996	72734	21042	23812	112		1966	3759	8691	66631	2759	5304	4904	211714	1355.34	5685.3
1997	106534	21126	54719	1873		1934	5010	5985	2844	889	27401		231077	1525.03	6709.15
1998	158715	25444	38796	6806		1254	7014	4779	551	578	21728	2762	267667	1599.24	7513.23
1999	185739	22400	32344	5611		1744	4639	4045		1501	9596	563	268182	1806.63	8882.74
2000	144618	594	34034	1433		1010	4637	5258	17237	990	11095	1780	222686	1954.95	10199.12
2001	137248	5341	16252	223		450	4371	4561	4921	1561	9615	4422	188965	2071.03	11590.79

2002	163254	15767	25438	552		1575	5370	3927	85	28	6870	2390	225256	2847.79	16484.53
2003	124018	14626	28846	82		2376	5118	2971	7	172	4065	3242	185523	2333.08	13550.06
Total	1855130	339020	435670	92288	66343	51613	94460	230117	257746	13351	107148	39516	3582402	27265.55	119167.7

Source: Prepared from BMET and Bangladesh Bank data 2003

**Table 2.4.2.: Yearwise Total No. of People Officially Migrated and their Skill Composition**

Year	Professional	Skilled	Semi-Skilled	Un-Skilled	Total
1976	568	1,775	543	3,201	6,087
1977	1,766	6,447	490	7,022	15,725
1978	3,455	8,190	1,050	10,114	22,809
1979	3,494	7,005	1,685	12,311	24,495
1980	1,983	12,209	2,343	13,538	30,073
1981	3,892	22,432	2,449	27,014	55,787
1982	3,898	20,611	3,272	34,981	62,762
1983	1,822	18,939	5,098	33,361	59,220
1984	2,642	17,183	5,484	31,405	56,714
1985	2,568	28,225	7,823	39,078	77,694
1986	2,210	26,294	9,265	30,889	68,658
1987	2,223	23,839	9,619	38,336	74,017
1988	2,670	25,286	10,890	29,356	68,121
1989	5,325	38,820	17,659	39,920	101,724
1990	6,004	35,613	20,792	41,405	103,814
1991	9,024	46,887	32,605	58,615	147,131
1992	11,375	50,689	30,977	95,083	188,124
1993	11,112	71,662	66,168	95,566	244,508
1994	8,390	61,040	46,519	70,377	186,326
1995	6,352	59,907	32,055	89,229	187,543
1996	3,188	64,301	34,689	109,536	211,714
1997	3,797	65,211	43,558	118,511	231,077
1998	9,574	74,718	51,590	131,785	267,667
1999	8,045	98,449	44,947	116,741	268,182
2000	10669	99606	26461	85950	222686
2001	5940	42742	30702	109581	188965
2002	14450	56265	36025	118516	225256
2003 (Jan-Sep)	11290	54782	22141	97310	185523
Total	157726	1139127	596818	1688731	3582402

Note: 150000 Bangladeshi workers legalised in Malaysia during 1997

Source: Prepared from BMET data 2003.

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**Table 2.4.1.1: Number of Bangladeshi Immigrants in Industrialised Countries**

Country	Number of Bangladeshi Immigrant
UK	500,000
USA	500,000
Italy	70,000
Canada	35,000
Japan	22,000
Australia	15,000
Greece	11,000
Spain	7,000
Germany	5,000
South Africa	4,000

France	3,500
Netherlands	2,500
Belgium	2,000
Switzerland	1,400
Total	1,178,400

Note: Educated guess made by government officials of Bangladesh who have first hand experience with the immigrant community.

Source: Siddiqui 2004

**Table 2.5.1 Number and Percentage of Women Migrants in Comparison to Total Flow (1991-2003)**

Year	Women Migrants		Total Number Male and Female
	Number	% of Total	
1991-1995	9308	0.98	953632
1996	1567	0.74	211714
1997	1762	0.76	231077
1998	939	0.35	267667
1999	366	0.14	268182
2000	454	0.20	222686
2001	659	0.35	188965
2002	1217	0.54	225256
2003(Jan-Jul)	1240	0.67	185523
Total	17512	0.64	2754693

Source: Prepared from manually consolidated figures provided by BMET