

## Embassies to look after women workers

Dhaka, Nov 24 (bdnews24.com)--Labour and employment minister Mosharraf Hossain has said the government will appoint an officer to missions in Middle Eastern countries to look after the problems of Bangladeshi women workers.

As much as 85 percent of Bangladeshi women workers in the Middle East are subjected to physical torture, while 20 percent of them are sexually abused, according to a report.

They face particular difficulties with physical harassment, said the report by Obhibashi Kormi Unnoyon Programme (OKUP), supported by UNDP, on women workers abroad.

"The officers will be immediately appointed to those Arab countries where there are most Banglaeshi workers," the minister told reporters on Tuesday after the report was published.

They will oversee problems faced by those women, including physical and sexual harassments, he added.

The minister said the government was planning to introduce insurance policy for them for risks.

"The government, with cooperation of other human labour-exporting countries of the world, is trying to establish a benchmark to ensure the security and minimum facilities for the women workers in a foreign country."

A committee of human labour-exporting countries is already working on it, Hossain added.

Some one lakh women are working abroad, most of them in different countries in the Middle East, said the OKUP report on HIV/AIDS risk of Bangladeshi women working abroad.

It said 20 percent get involved in different relationships and become sexually exploited at one point. Illegal migrant workers are more prone to exploitation than those are legal, said the report.

It added that illegal migrant workers are more vulnerable for HIV/AIDS infection as they do not have adequate awareness. The report did not include any data or statistics about HIV/AIDS-infected illegal women migrant workers though.

The report also focused on the daily problems that a woman worker faces, for example, less payment, not getting leave, forced overtime and not getting enough food.

Recommendations were made for the government to launch more awareness campaign and stop illegal immigration of the female workers to help tackle the risk of HIV/AIDS infection and other health issues.

Acting labour and employment secretary Ilias Ahmed, UNDP country director Stefan Priesner and OKUP chairman Shakil-ul-Islam were present at the programme.

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## [UNDP report reveals women migrants' ordeal in Arab states](#)

FE Report

A large number of Bangladeshi women migrants, who work as domestic helps in the Arab countries, face

physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their employers, a report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said Tuesday.

"These poor women workers ultimately lose their jobs and are deported, when they are found HIV-positive in mandatory health tests," the report mentioned. The report was based on a study on 'HIV vulnerabilities faced by women migrants: from Bangladesh to the Arab States,' jointly conducted by the Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Programme (OKUP) and the UNDP. UNDP Country Director Stefan Priesner formally launched the report at a city seminar in presence of Minister for Manpower, Employment and Expatriates' Welfare Engr. Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, who was the chief guest.

The minister in his address said the government is very concerned about the growing cases of exploitation and mistreatment of women migrants by their employers. "We are in a process to deploy women officials in host countries to ensure maximum safety and protection of the women migrant workers," the minister said. To improve workplace safety and financial security, Mr Hossain said the government is building a platform for closer negotiations between the host countries and the countries of origin.

The UNDP study report was conducted on the basis of person-to-person interviews of 250 women migrants, who were undocumented migrants and faced vulnerable situations such as sexual abuse and deportation on the ground of testing HIV-positive. The Arab states are the primary destinations for many migrant workers from Asia including Bangladesh. The host countries covered by the study are Bahrain, Lebanon and the UAE.

The UNDP country director said the economic gains generated by the migrant workers are enormous, reaching almost 9.4 per cent of Bangladesh's GDP in 2007.

## The Daily Star

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# Women migrant workers vulnerable to AIDS

## Says UNDP study

### Staff Correspondent

Bangladeshi migrants working in different Arab countries are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS as 20 percent of them are abused sexually in their workplaces, according to a report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The report titled 'HIV vulnerabilities faced by women migrants: from Bangladesh to Arab states' also revealed that 85 percent of women workers are abused physically.

The findings of the study conducted by UNDP and Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Programme (OKUP) on 247 women were presented at a programme at a city hotel yesterday.

The study also revealed that only nine percent of women workers received pre-departure training. So, they know little about their workplaces, problems they might face there and where to seek help. They also have little knowledge on HIV/AIDS.

Speakers at the programme said that most women workers are unskilled or semi-skilled worker and receive minimal salary. The domestic workers in Bahrain and Dubai are paid just about \$100 a month.

They stressed the need for pre-departure training, voluntary counselling and testing of HIV/ AIDS.

They also called for collaboration among the Bangladesh embassy or consulate office, support organisations, migrant workers' associations and medical testing centres in the recipient countries to help women workers.

Training for embassy or consulate staff on how to deal with HIV issues of migrant workers is also important, they added.

Labour Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain said that around one lakh women are working abroad and that the government is planning to open a women labour wing in the embassies in different countries, especially in Arab countries.

"Women officers would be recruited in embassies soon to deal with the issues like HIV/AIDS and others," he said.

"The economic gains generated by migrant workers are enormous, making up almost 9.4 percent of GDP in Bangladesh in 2007," said Stefan Priesner, UNDP Country Director.

"It is, therefore, critical that good working conditions and support are provided to migrant workers throughout the migration cycle," he added.

Dr Salil Panakadan, UNAIDS country coordinator, Caitlin Wiesen, UNDP HIV team leader and regional programme coordinator, and Shakirul Islam, lead Researcher and chairman of OKUP, also spoke.

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## Woman staff likely at missions abroad

 STAFF REPORTER

The government is considering deploying a woman staff each at Bangladesh missions abroad hosting large number of women migrant workers to look after their interests.

Labour and Employment Minister Engineer Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain yesterday hinted at the government initiative while talking to reporters after launching a report on 'HIV vulnerabilities faced by women migrants' in the city.

The minister further said the government would hold talks with the respective governments to ensure that the female expatriate workers did not face any harassment abroad.

Mosharraf Hossain also informed that around one lakh Bangladeshi women were residing in different countries as workers while the number was increasing rapidly.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Programme (OKUP) jointly conducted the study that reveals many of the Bangladeshi female migrants work as domestic workers in the Arab states face physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their employers.

"Subject to mandatory testing, they are deported when they test positive for HIV," it also said.

The study report is an eye-opener and the matter will have to be looked into seriously as it's a problem, the minister said in his speech.

He said earlier most of the Bangladeshi migrant woman workers used to be trafficked abroad or sent illegally by brokers and many of them faced various vulnerabilities.

The participating countries in the study are Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka as countries of origin while Bahrain, Lebanon and the UAE as host countries.

Regional Programme Coordinator of UNDP based in Colombo Caitlin Wiesen and Shakirul Islam, chairman of OKUP, presented the study report.

The study report shows 85 percent of Bangladeshi migrant woman workers are subjected to physical abuse while 20 percent sexually abused abroad.

The findings were based on almost 250 interviews that include female migrant workers who experienced undocumented migration and faced vulnerable situations such as sexual abuse and

deportation on grounds of testing HIV-positive.

It says that 60 per cent migration took place through private channels while 40 percent through government channel.

It also found out that migrants tested for HIV before departure constitute 100 per cent.

There are 65 lakh Bangladeshi migrants working abroad of which one lakh are women, the function was told.

The report recommended promoting interregional dialogue and coordination for protection of the rights, health and wellbeing of woman migrant workers, developing effective holistic mechanism for the return and reintegration of migrant workers, including proper referral to HIV counselling and testing, treatment, care and support services that uphold standard of confidentiality.

Secretary in charge of the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare Elias Ahmed, UNDP country director Stefan Priesner and UNAIDS country coordinator Dr Salil Panakadan also spoke at the function.

## **The New Nation**

Bangladesh's Independent News Source

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### **Women workers in ME being abused**

Majority of Bangladeshi females who work as domestic aides in the Middle Eastern countries face physical and sexual abuses at the hands of their employers.

Subject to mandatory scrutiny they are deported when they test positive for HIV, UNDP study report revealed at a hotel yesterday.

Engineer Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Minister for Labour and Employment, Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment was present as the chief guest at function on "HIV vulnerabilities faced by woman migrants: from Bangladesh to the Arab states".

Caitlin Wiesen, Regional Programme Coordinator of UNDP in Colombo and Shakirul Islam, chairman of OKUP presented the report. The findings showed 85 per cent of Bangladeshi migrant woman workers are subjected to physical abuse while 20 per cent sexually abused.

The findings were based on almost 250 interviews that include female migrant workers who experienced undocumented migration and faced vulnerable situations such as sexual abuse and deportation on grounds of testing HIV-positive.

About 60 per cent migration took place through private channels while 40 per cent through government channels. Migrants tested for HIV before departure constitutes 100 per cent. There are 65 lakh Bangladeshi migrants working abroad of which one lakh are women, the function was told.

Engineer Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain expressed his dismay over the UNDP revelation. He said the study report was an eye-opener and the matter will be looked into seriously as it is considered as a big problem.

"Initially we will appoint an officer in Bangladesh missions in countries where maximum Bangladeshi female workers are employed to deal with their problems," he said.

He, however, said that earlier most of the Bangladeshi woman workers used to be trafficked abroad or sent illegally by brokers and many of them faced various vulnerabilities.

He said Bangladeshi overseas workers who go through government channels are imparted three weeks' training to equip them with the know-how to face various challenges, including preventive measures to various diseases, legal

help and overcoming cultural shocks.

The recommendations in the study report include promoting interregional dialogue and coordination for protection of the rights, health and well being of woman migrant workers, developing effective holistic mechanism for the return and reintegration of migrant workers, including proper referral to HIV counseling and testing, treatment, care and support services that uphold standard of confidentiality.

Recommendations for countries of origin include advocacy for bilateral or multilateral agreements with host countries to standardise contracts and conditions of work for migrant workers. The recommendations also include designing and augmentation of effective HIV awareness and prevention programmes during the pre-departure orientation, ensuring safe and informed migration and advocating better social acceptance of migrant woman workers.

Elias Amed, acting secretary of the Expatriate Welfare Ministry and Stefan Priesner, Country Director of UNDP and Dr Salil Panakadan, UNAIDS Country Coordinator, among others, were present.



Dhaka, Wednesday, November 25, 2009

## ***Separate cells for female expat workers on the cards***

### ***News Report***

The government is considering setting up separate cells at different Bangladesh missions abroad to look after female expatriate workers' interest.

"The government will take initiative to assist female expatriate workers abroad through Bangladesh missions," said Labour and Employment Minister Engineer Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain. The minister was addressing a study report launching ceremony as the chief guest at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel in the city on Tuesday.

He said the government will hold talks with the respective governments to ensure that the female expatriate workers do not face any harassment abroad.

The minister said around 65 lakh Bangladeshi migrants are working abroad of which one-lakh are women as workers while the number is increasing rapidly. Majority of them are employed as domestic workers. The UNDP and Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Programme (OKUP) jointly revealed the findings of the report titled "HIV vulnerabilities faced by women migrants: From Bangladesh to the Arab States".

Regional Programme Coordinator of the UNDP based in Colombo Caitlin Wiesen and chairman of the OKUP Shakirul Islam presented the report.

Workers from Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, who lived in Bahrain, Lebanon and the UAE have participated in the study.

The report showed 85 per cent of Bangladeshi migrant female workers are subjected to physical abuse, while 20 per cent are sexually abused abroad.

Representatives from the two organisations interviewed 250 migrant workers who experienced undocumented migration and faced vulnerable situations such as sexual abuse and deportation on grounds of testing HIV-positive.

Replying to a question, Mosharraf said primarily an officer will be appointed in Bangladesh missions in

countries hosting maximum Bangladeshi female workers for dealing with the women workers" problem. He said earlier most of the Bangladeshi migrant female workers used to be trafficked abroad or sent illegally by brokers and many of them faced various vulnerabilities.

The minister said Bangladeshi overseas workers who go through government channel are imparted three weeks" training to equip them with the know-how to face various challenges, including preventive measure to various diseases, legal

help, overcoming cultural shocks and so on. "As a result, the risk of vulnerability is less."

The recommendations in the study report were made in three phases, for both countries of origin and host countries, because female workers are being abused abroad as domestic help.

Secretary in charge of the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare Elias Ahmed, UNDP country director Stefan Priesner and UNAIDS country coordinator Dr Salil Panakadan also spoke at the function.