

WHAT THE PAPERS SAY

A WEEKLY ROUND UP OF ARTICLES ABOUT EMPLOYMENT, THE LABOUR MARKET, SKILLS TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

THIS WEEK IN THE BANGLADESH ENGLISH PRESS...

... the ups and downs of migrant workers and their remittances are reported. The UK Minister of State for International Development visits Bangladesh. And we run through some of the issues for women in the work place including the conditions of domestic workers.

MORE WOMEN ABROAD

More women from Bangladesh are going abroad for work. Since January over 56,000 women have found jobs in the Middle East this year. That's about 18 per cent of the total number of people finding jobs overseas. The United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Oman, and Qatar account for most of the positions taken up by women.

In general remittances from migrant workers are on the up. In the last financial year over US\$ 15 billion was remitted with 60 per cent of this coming from the Middle East.

WOMEN AT WORK

In its health section, The Daily Star says more needs to be done to support mothers at work. Working women struggle to follow advice on breast feeding because work places lack suitable facilities. Many work places do provide a crèche. But supervisors should not discourage women from using them. And many women could still learn the practices required to breastfeed while at work.

A SPACE FOR WOMEN IN RURAL MARKETS

The Financial Express proposes "Bou Bazaars." Once a week rural market places would be given over to women farmers and entrepreneurs to sell their goods.

DOMESTIC WORKERS

The Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies and Oxfam GB led a discussion on domestic workers and the informal sector. There are about 1.4 million domestic workers, mostly women, above the age of 15. And overall the informal sector accounts for 89 per cent of employment.

So Bangladesh should ratify ILO Convention 189 and implement Bangladesh's Domestic Worker Protection Act.

These steps would cover working hours, the way domestic workers are paid, and protection from abuse and violence. This would effectively bring domestic workers into the formal sector.

NO CONSPIRACY THEORY SAYS UK MINISTER

The UK Minister of State for International Development visited Bangladesh last week. Mr Swayne said that Bangladesh should go beyond producing T-shirts. The country could export more value-added clothes by training garments workers.

The Minister said western countries were not conspiring against Bangladesh. He was referring to sentiment within the country that Bangladesh is being kept out of a key preferential trade agreement for political reasons. Although an adviser to the Prime Minister does not feel the same way.

The USA suspended Bangladesh from the General System of Preferences following the Rana Plaza and Tasreen Fashion incidents. This week the High Court banned for six months the screening of a film about a survivor of the Rana Plaza collapse. The film-makers had not deleted scenes previously ruled cruel or violent.

JOBS CREATED IN ECONOMIC ZONES

The executive chairman of Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority expects to create 10 million jobs. These will be located in 100 zones set up over the next 15 years.

The chairman points to Viet Nam as a model. Different zones will be licensed to private sector business to operate. And Japan, India and China will have at least one dedicated zone in different parts of the country.

Automobile and pharmaceutical plants are will join garments factories in the zones as Bangladesh diversifies its exports. There may also be zones for specific sectors such as software development.

MIGRANT LABOUR: CURRENT DIFFICULTIES AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Two weeks ago we discussed the Daily Star's three-part series on migrant workers in Malaysia. The paper continued its coverage this week with a number of articles.

We read about the effects of the economic slow down on Bangladeshi workers. The falling Malaysian currency, new taxes, and reduced overtime opportunities mean less money sent home. One commentator felt this did not bode well for the proposed arrangements for migration to Malaysia.

On that topic the paper also raised concerns about brokers buying Malaysian visas. The Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur says there is no scope for this kind of business under future arrangements.

Another article reports more optimistically about opportunities in the Japanese construction sector suggesting Japan is looking for eight million construction workers. Bangladeshi workers could meet much of this demand.