



Institutional strengthening of the office of Labour Attaches: Kuala Lumpur field work

RMMRU coordinator CR Abrar reports on some of the preliminary findings of RMMRU's fieldwork in Malaysia.

In 2008 and 2009 Malaysia became the single largest destination for Bangladeshi workers. The flow ebbed substantially in subsequent years because their recruitment was poorly regulated and managed. Many were unfairly treated by employers and in other instances were cheated by the recruiters. Protection of workers became a major cause for concern both for the Bangladesh government as well as civil society organizations.

Right: CR Abrar and Tasneem Siddiqui meet with the Ambassador in Kuala Lumpur



RMMRU selected Kuala Lumpur to be one of its field sites for the Migrating out of Poverty RPC study on Institutionalization of the Office of Labour Attaches as the Bangladesh mission there has a major role in extending protection and welfare measures to the workers and also in bringing their concerns to the Malaysian authorities. Unfortunately, despite the Bangladesh government's best intentions, the Mission has been constrained by bureaucratic practice, lack of motivation and training, and resources. RMMRU's study will identify recommendations to strengthen the Embassy's role.

The field work for the study entailed a three-member RMMRU team interviewing fifty Bangladeshi migrant workers in the manufacturing, plantation and services sectors in Kuala Lumpur and adjoining areas to gain insights into the nature of what the workers needed from their Embassy. The team also met Bangladesh's Ambassador to Malaysia, the Labour Attache and other staff members who deal with labour migration as well as Malaysian employers, recruiters and civil society activists.

The workers wanted the Embassy to be more proactive in dealing with Malaysian manpower and immigration authorities, employers and recruiters. They demanded prompt services on consular

matters and access to drinking water and toilet facilities in the embassy premises. Other demands included the installation of a 24-hour hotline and legal assistance. Workers in irregular status, taking advantage of the amnesty granted by the authorities, wanted the Embassy to ensure that their regularization process went ahead unhindered.

The importance of the Embassy taking a pro-active role has been highlighted as a result of Malaysia's crackdown on migrant workers since 20 January 2014 when the general amnesty to regularize the status of workers in the country without official permits expired. A significant number of those affected are Bangladeshi migrant workers, many of whom have paid fees to sham recruiters, believing that they are using legal migration channels, only to find that they have been tricked.

Abrar is quoted in press reports on the situation of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia. See [New Age Xtra 31 January 2014](#) and Monitor Global Outlook January 27 2014. [N.B. new visitors may access the latter a couple of times at <<http://monitorfrontiermarkets.com/news-story/malaysia-crackdown-snares-bangladeshi-workers/>> however permanent access requires a paid subscription.]

The other field site of RMMRU's Institutional strengthening of the office of labour attaches project is Doha, Qatar. The project is due for completion in June 2014 and will result in a working paper and policy brief.



CR Abrar and Selim Reza interview Bangladeshi migrant workers in Kuala Lumpur



CR Abrar and Tasneem Siddiqui interview the Labour Attache in Kuala Lumpur