

Thousands of workers' return to UAE in uncertainty

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Dhaka: Thousands of UAE-bound Bangladeshi expatriate workers are in despair over returning to the gulf country due to the lack of rapid PCR test facilities in Bangladesh airports.

About 20,000 Bangladeshi expatriate workers returned home over the last several months, sources at different recruiting agencies said. And now their return to the gulf country is uncertain as there is no equipment for rapid PCR test at Dhaka Airport.

After a three-month flight ban on Bangladesh over coronavirus concerns, the UAE on August 4 allowed to carry passengers from Bangladesh and six other countries.

However, the condition is that passengers with a negative report can enter the UAE by testing for Covid-19 in the rapid PCR method right before departure.

Sources at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) has said the initiative to buy a rapid PCR test machine is a "time consuming" matter.

On the other hand, a UAE-bound worker said, "We will lose our jobs if we cannot return to our workplaces in the UAE. If the problem is not solved quickly, visas of many expatriate workers will expire."

A group of the returnees raised the demand of PCR test machines at the country's airports at a news conference in Chattogram on September 1, claiming around 20,000 of the expatriates have been stranded due to the UAE's travel rules.

Yasin Chowdhury, the coordinator of a council of Bangladeshi expatriates in UAE, said they had launched a demonstration for the demand 17 days ago, but the relevant ministries could not take visible steps.

Thousands of visas have already expired as workers could not get to UAE for the lack of PCR test facilities at the country's airports. Yasin urged the government to discuss an extension of their visas with the UAE at the diplomatic level.

The workers said they will be forced to stage a movement if the government does not arrange rapid PCR tests facilities at the airports within a short time. Workers have already organised human chains in different districts in this regard.

They have also submitted memorandum to the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment has written to DGHS to arrange rapid PCR test facilities at airports.

At a programme on August 23, Minister Imran Ahmad said they have not received a reply from the DGHS.

A DGHS official said, "We have received a letter from the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare. But it is a time-consuming matter to complete all the process..."

The council of Bangladeshi expatriates in UAE announced a sit-in outside the National Press Club in Dhaka on September 6.