

Dhaka, Riyadh seal labour recruitment pact

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Online Desk : In a landmark move set to reshape one of the world's most vital migration corridors, Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia have signed their first-ever comprehensive agreement on the general recruitment of Bangladeshi workers. The deal was inked in Riyadh on Monday by Bangladesh's Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Adviser Dr Asif Nazrul and Saudi Arabia's Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, Engineer Ahmed bin Sulaiman Al-Razi. Marking a historic milestone in the 50-year diplomatic relationship between the two nations, the agreement formalises what has long been an informal but massive labour flow. Saudi Arabia is Bangladesh's single largest overseas job market, hosting over 2.2 million expatriate workers – yet until now, no overarching framework governed general recruitment.

Only two limited pacts existed: one on domestic worker recruitment (2015) and another on skills verification (2022). The new accord is expected to significantly boost the deployment of skilled and semi-skilled Bangladeshi workers across diverse sectors—from construction and healthcare to engineering and hospitality while strengthening legal safeguards for both employees and employers. During a bilateral meeting ahead of the signing, Adviser Asif Nazrul raised key concerns affecting Bangladeshi workers, including the enforcement of standard employment contracts, timely renewal of Iqama (residency permits) by employers, and expedited issuance of exit visas for those wishing to return home. Minister Al-Razi responded by instructing relevant Saudi authorities to address these issues promptly and urged Bangladesh to collaborate in ensuring safe, legal, and ethical migration practices.

Both sides also held productive talks on expanding cooperation in skills training, certification, and pre-departure orientation, aiming to better align Bangladeshi labour with Saudi market demands under the Kingdom's Vision 2030 economic transformation plan. The signing ceremony was attended by Bangladesh's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Md Delwar Hossain, Deputy Head of Mission SM Nazmul Hasan, Labour Counsellor Muhammad Rezae Rabbi, and senior officials from both governments. Analysts say the agreement could not only enhance worker protections but also unlock new opportunities in a market that accounts for nearly 30% of Bangladesh's annual \$21 billion in remittance inflows making it a strategic win for Dhaka's manpower export economy.