



Remittance Festival and Shonar Manush Award The Aims and Objectives

Migrants and the remittances sent by them are integral part of the economy of Bangladesh. Since the 1970s more than 65 lakhs Bangladeshis have migrated to the Gulf, the South East Asian and other countries of the world as contract migrant workers. Their income sustains millions of households and Bangladesh receives much needed foreign exchange. In 2008, they have remitted US\$9.2 billion. This is two times higher than the net earnings of the readymade garments sector of that year, nine times more than the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and five times more than the foreign aid received by the country. Despite widening trade deficit and relatively low flow of FDI, for the last five consecutive years the country's balance of payments remained in surplus. This has happened because of increased inflow of remittances. The global recession of 2008 affected the current account balances of all the South Asian countries, except Bangladesh, again due to continuous flow of remittances. Migrants, who have placed the country on such a strong foothold, should be treated as the freedom fighters of today. They are the golden sons and daughters of the country; it is our responsibility to honour them.

Over the last fourteen years the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) of the University of Dhaka has been working at different national and international arenas to promote good governance in migration. It has more than 40 basic research on migration and development. RMMRU initiated many of the research that were conducted on migration experiences of the region by the South Asian experts. In 2006, the government of Bangladesh enacted an 'Overseas Employment Policy'; RMMRU had the honour of preparing the primary draft. RMMRU played a proactive role in all events initiated by United Nations Global Forum on Migration and Development. Currently in partnership with seven NGOs, RMMRU is working in four migration intensity districts of Bangladesh (Dhaka, Tangail, Chittagong and Comilla) to make processing of migration and transfer of remittances safe by forming Migrants Rights Protection Committees at the grass-roots. It is also running nationwide two thematic media campaigns on migration. In last three years RMMRU has trained more than 800 local level public and private bank officials on better management of remittances and developed a video training kit for bankers. Holding of Upazilla level remittance fairs is an important innovation of RMMRU in promoting good governance in remittance transfer and utilisation. Through festivity of fairs, RMMRU has been successful in connecting the migrant workers, their families, bank officials, DEMO officers of Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) and Migrants' Rights Protection Committees with each other. Such connectivity among users and service providers are absolutely essential for encouraging flow of remittances through formal channels and for their productive use.

To highlight the contribution of the remitters and remittance users in the national economy and also to encourage the service providers, there is a great need to formally honouring them. It is in this context RMMRU is hosting a mega **Remittance Utshab** at the 'Hall of Fame' auditorium of the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre on 10 August 2009. At this festival RMMRU will honour migrant workers and their families, and grassroots level officials with awards. Bank officials, recruiting agency representatives and Union Parishad members will be honoured with *Shonar Manush Sheba award*. Migrant families will be awarded with *Shera Remittance Baboharkari award* for productive utilisation of remittances. Most importantly, a returnee migrant will be bestowed the *Shonar Manush award* for establishing successful enterprise with remittances.

RMMRU has chosen the term 'shonar manush' in 2004. No other title can be more appropriate to honour the golden sons and daughters of the golden Bengal! Migrants Rights Protection Committee members, left behind families, members of the migrants, returnee migrants, grassroots level bank officials, DEMO officials of BMET and other personalities and organisations will participate in the fair. Reflecting our rich cultural heritage, the Remittance Utshab will feature *kobir lorai* of grassroots *shobhab kobis* (duel of grassroots natural poets) highlighting information on migration and remittances. Members of Migrants Rights Protection Committees will recite *punthis*. Famous *gonoshongeet* singer Fakir Alamgir will also perform in the programme.

The Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment, Bangladesh Bank, BMET, Department for International Development (DFID), Manusher Jonno Foundation and many other government and private banks and exchange houses have extended their support to RMMRU in this endeavour.