

---

## **XIII. MEDIA SEGMENT**

---

## **Media Workshop**

In the Advisory Committee Meet held in January, 2020, it was underscored that:

- The compilation of a handbook for media persons which would provide them with a tool of ready reckoning, supplemented by specific and relevant laws and conventions, was necessary. The prominence of social and digital media and web portal should be taken into consideration in addition to the involvement graduate students and faculty of media study courses and departments at universities and academic institutes.
- It was stressed that conduct of workshops with journalists and media persons, story-telling by migrants and victims of forced migration, and narratives on migration and crime are important. Several themes were listed, for lecture series:

1. Lecture on the issue of coinage of terms that are used to describe refugees; contribution of refugees to the GDP of the host economy.
2. Photo exhibition and lecture on life in camps and how photographs and images have perspective-changing impacts
3. Historical and political significance of discourses and reporting on migrants.
4. Representation of 'aliens' and 'intruders' in the framing of national policies.
5. How acceptance and cultural assimilation develops in case of particular communities while xenophobia, racism, denial and fear, create threat for other communities.
6. Local, national and international press on critical reporting and bias in case of migrant reporting. Media ethics, social media and migration could also be themes for lectures.
7. Reporting on citizenship act, migration and impact of social media's representation on migration research, and impact of online platforms and social media in helping share experiences and fostering bonds.

## **Alterations**

Since the altered situation due to COVID-19, the following adjustments have been made:

1. A **media committee** was formed with Rajat Roy as the convener. Samata Biswas, Kusmika Ghosh and Utsa Sarmin are also part of the committee. It was tasked with organizing the grant, a media workshop in August and contracting one media person to curate a media handbook on migrant workers which will work as ready reckoned for reporters and editors alike.
2. **The Media workshop** will be organized virtually during the second week of October, 2020. Rajat Roy will draft a concept note by July 10, 2020 and organize a separate meeting to chalk out the details of media workshop. The media fellows who have been contracted will participate in this workshop. Additionally, Rajat Roy, as the convenor of the will try to organize a lecture on media.
3. The media handbook will be edited by Bharat Bhushan.



He is the editor of Catch News and has been the founding Editor of Mail Today, Executive Editor of the Hindustan Times, Editor of The Telegraph in Delhi, Editor of the Express News Service, Washington Correspondent of the Indian Express and an Assistant Editor with The Times of India.

4. A media workshop planning meeting was organized on April 3, 2020 with 13 people. The following deliberations were held:

**Attendees:**

Prof. Samir Kumar Das  
Mr. Rajat Roy  
Mr. Bharat Bhushan  
Mr. Subir Bhowmik  
Ms. Pamela Philipose  
Ms. Swati Bhattacharya  
Mr. Amal Sarkar  
Mr. Shoaib Daniyal  
Mr. Debashish Aich  
Ms. Ria De  
Mr. Samaresh Guchhait  
Ms. Kusumika Ghosh  
Ms. Utsa Sarmin

**Agenda:**

The pictures of thousands of Migrant Workers thronging bus terminus or rail station, squatting on roadsides or walking hundreds of miles to go back to their home has captured the attention of the Nation in the time of Corona Virus epidemic. Never before was the issue of Migration or Forced Migration was treated with such importance by print, electronic and digital media in India. The initial irritation over the movements of migrant Workers in the period of Lock Down has given way to a collective concern expressed and articulated in the media narrative that finally forced the Government (both Centre and the States) to take some steps to provide migrant workers with shelter, food and transportation to their home districts.

Calcutta Research Group (CRG) has been doing frontline research work on the issues of migration, forced migration, refugees, borders and boundaries, and statelessness and citizenship for more than two decades and feels the need to raise awareness among people about these issues particularly in times of crisis like the present one. With that goal in mind, CRG would like to organize a two-day Workshop of Media persons sometimes in August, 2020 (hopefully, things will be back to normal by then, though will things be normal again?).

In the preliminary discussion that we held internally, we thought of several deliverables that could be the outcome of the Media-Workshop. These are:

1. CRG can offer three short term (two months) fellowships to aspiring journalists who would study/cover the issue of Migration and finally produce a report (Print/Video/Digital) in some media.
2. A project should be taken up to prepare a ready reckoner kind of handbook on media and migration and forced migration (that will include relevant laws and international accords), the outline of the handbook should be discussed in the workshop and the task of preparing such a handbook be assigned to suitable person/persons.
3. In the time of Digital Media, many small outfits and independent agencies are recording various facets of the life (including the lives of the migrants/refugees/stateless people. We may encourage one or two such outfits/individuals to produce some 3-4-minute documentaries with partial support from CRG.
4. Also, at least two theme lectures could be arranged for each of the day of the Workshop. The lectures should throw light on select critical aspects of the issue of migration and forced migration as well as media practices on the concerned issues..
5. We can engage an established photographer to curate an exhibition on the issue of Migration. The exhibition can be made a part of CRG's winter conference (23-28 November).

6. The media workshop will be held in late August 2020 with around 20 media practitioners as participants (six/seven participants from outside and rest from the city where it will be held).

Senior journalists, who will be taking part in the e-conference for the planning of the Media Workshop, are free to bring in other issues and suggestions regarding the proposed workshop.

**Minutes:**

1. The meeting started with CRG director Prof. Samir Kumar Das giving a brief outline of the agenda and the desired outcome of the meeting and a media workshop planned for August 2020. CRG wishes to achieve three main things from the workshop, one, publishing a ready reckoner on migration for journalists to refer to while covering stories of migrants; second, getting more inputs from media personalities on the situation of migrant workers due to the COVID 19 lockdown; third, offering fellowship to few journalists who would study/cover the issue of Migration and finally produce a report (Print/Video/Digital) in some media.
2. Swati Bhattacharya said that CRG has enough material to bring out the handbook/ready reckoner soon. It is important to make the handbook ready because journalists are increasingly covering stories on migrants, refugee, migration and the handbook will be a helpful guide for the journalists.
3. The suggestions by the media personalities on important issues that need coverage and the workshop are as follows:

**Bharat Bhushan** suggested that the workshop can be done in two parts. First part can be an introductory interaction where the focus of the conversation will be on why journalists need to be trained and sensitized on how to view or report stories regarding migrants so that they do not use the rhetoric or terms like “termites”. The second part will see how migrants are represented in media which can be done through textual analysis and a photography exhibition. Bharat Bhushan suggested bringing a Bangladeshi photographer for the exhibition whose details he will provide us later. He also mentioned other important aspects that the workshop can cover. First, analysing place-specific migration. For example, the migration pattern and coverage of the related issues will be different in different places. Second, understanding state pressure on migration report. Migration discourse in media is often controlled by the state which results in reports like blaming migrants for breaking lockdown. Third, why different migrants are treated differently. Why are Tibetans welcomed but Bangladeshis are not. The racial, religious, linguistic, and cultural politics behind this acceptance and

rejection need to be studied. Why Sikhs from Afghanistan are welcome who have less cultural similarities with Indians but not Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh? These are important questions. Fourth, how local and national media are covering migrant-related stories and what are the differences? For example, an Assamese reporter covering issues related to migration and refugees in Assam will have a different perspective than a non-local reporter. Fifth, social media as a migration research tool can be an important point of the study. For example, in the Rohingya camps, the refugees keep in touch with each other through social media. Studying social media will also give what migrants think of themselves and bring out the emotional cost of migrating. Sixth is the economic contribution of migrants. Due to the current crisis, it has become clearer that without cleaners, caregivers, cooks, workers, society will crumble. Hence the economic contribution of migrants can be a very important topic of study and can be a stand-alone module for the workshop.

**Subir Bhowmik** said that it is important to see the link between national politics and refugee issues. For example, the change in the political discourses in India affected the coverage of migration and the way migrants are seen. Regionalism should be factored into while talking about migrants, for example, the Assamese media see themselves as the force multiplier of the anti-migrant or anti-foreigner movement. He also suggested everyone take a look at the Sage handbook on media and migration. The thrust of the research according to him should be on the link between media, regionalism and national politics. Bharat Bhushan added that while studying regionalism, one also should focus on the political economy and localization of the journalists, for example, a journalist from Jammu and Kashmir will report keeping in mind the local sentiment of the population. Regarding the workshop, Subir Bhowmik said that there should a roundtable dialogue on sensitizing journalists, then it can go on specific studies and one of the most important outcomes should be the ready reckoning.

**Shoaib Daniyal** suggested a more in-depth reading of the interstate migrants which is increasing in recent years. With inter-state borders being closed due to COVID 19, an unprecedented crisis is unfolding in front of us. One reason to study inter-state migration is to also study the nativistic politics of all the stakeholders. Another topic for study suggested by him is the Bengali Muslim migration, especially from states like Maldah and Murshidabad. Migration from these districts in West Bengal has increased exponentially and given the NRC context, the Bengali migrants, especially settled in Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon areas are scared. The third project which can be undertaken according to Shoaib Daniyal is to look at the current pattern of migration from Bangladesh. Indians have very little knowledge

about the migration pattern from Bangladesh and the right-wing people are using this as an issue. Hence, the more nuanced conversation around this is needed.

**Pamela Philipose** suggested to do a distinction between transnational migration and local migration and to understand the dynamics of both the processes. Bringing Bharat Bhushan's point about social media, she said it is important to see how social media tools have been used for intra-network community building but also used to target migrants. She said that migration will be an important issue for BJP and will continue to be politicized. It began with the Vajpayee government and will continue to be a critical issue. Hence, along with abovementioned suggestions, she said that it is important to talk about dimension of cross-border development. It is also important to talk about the rush to go home. Why home is so important for the migrants? A rigorous study of what is happening now is of utmost importance and due to the current global and national scenario with coronavirus and a right-wing government in power, the chance to do such study has presented itself. She also suggested providing scholarships or funds to local journalists. Sometimes they do want to cover stories but do not have the editorial support. CRG can bridge that gap.

**Swati Bhattacharjee** said the studied should focus on the gender aspect in migration. The rate of women's migration has increased and not only due to marriage. Many migrated women are working as tailors and other forms of labour which often keeps them at home while the men in their families go out for work. Their piecemeal price is decreasing and often their labour and migration do not come out in the media. Labour has stopped being a beat for some time now and it is important to focus on migratory labour. Also in many cases in Maldah and Murshidabad, a large section of women are left behind when their husbands migrate to different states and cities in search for work which results in a shift in the family structure which can also be an important point of the study. Regarding the workshop, she suggested two different modules for the workshop, one for desk people and another for correspondents. The desk/editorial part of the workshop can have mid to senior-level participants.

**Amal Sarkar** said that the workshop should have local correspondents as participants. Local journalists are in close contact with the people in the ground. So their contribution and sensitization become very important as they can talk about the ground reality. For example, a person from Berhampur, working in Berhampur will be better situated to talk about the situation in the city. Even a correspondent from Berhampur working in Kolkata will be better when it comes to cover local news but the vice versa

will not be as effective. CRG can select some serious local correspondents who will be given assignments for 2-3 months so they can cover from districts. There are local journalists who seriously want to work but do not have the funds and CRG can help regarding that. He also suggested involving students of journalism and mass communication in some way in the workshop to prepare them for the future.

**Debashish Aich** pointed out that hardly any district administration has complete data of migrants. How many migrated to which states, which company they are working for, their labour contractors- these are all important record which administrations should have. Amal Sarkar said that there are government agencies to register that data but that is never done and media also never raises the question which is much needed.

**Ria De** emphasized the importance of social media and how the migrants are using social media. There has been a shift where migrants' their culture, their communication are all documented on social media. She also suggested more rural centric journalism.

4. Apart from the above suggestions, Prof. Das highlighted the works CRG has done previously. For example, a media reader on North East is already available which needs to be publicized and a book published by CRG called "Eroded Lives" on migration, flood and the families of Murshidabad.
5. It was decided that the minute of the meeting will be circulated among the participants and then another meeting will be held to come up with a proper plan for the workshop.



## **Media Grants**

In keeping with the points listed above, CRG has chosen 4 journalists to work on a short-term grant. The advertisement was circulated widely and the details of the grants are as the following:

### **Advertisement**

Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (Calcutta Research Group) is offering short term media grants to reporters, journalists, and media practitioners for investigative studies on migrant workers in the backdrop of COVID 19. Applicants may submit their proposals on various related themes, such as: existing central or state policies on migrant labour; the economy of migrant labour; gender, caste, minority status, and other fault lines in the protection of migrants, the phenomenon of return of the migrants back home after the declaration of the countrywide lockdown, migrants as carriers of a disease, visibility and invisibility of the migrants, data inadequacy on migrant labour, and finally, migrants and public health. Each grant will carry a total amount of Rs. 30,000/- (Rupees thirty thousand) only. Four selected candidates will be given grants. The selected candidates will be paid on submission of their reports/articles/media analysis. Candidates are expected to have experience in reporting, writing, or editing for print and/or digital media. Reports in the form of photo-essays will be also accepted. Candidates with relevant experience and demonstrable interest in covering migrant-related stories will be preferred. The investigative or analysis pieces will be of around 4-5000 words. The grant period will be for three months. Selected candidates will have to submit their reports/writings to the Calcutta Research Group by 31 August, which will have the right to publish these reports. Selected candidates will also be encouraged to publish short reports or analysis pieces on the basis of their work in any reputable journal, magazine, newspaper, or web-portal.

Detailed application, a statement of purpose of 500-750 words explaining the selected theme or story for investigation along with one previously published investigative or analysis piece may be sent by email by 23 May 2020 to [forcedmigrationdesk@mcrg.ac.in](mailto:forcedmigrationdesk@mcrg.ac.in) and [subhashree@mcrg.ac.in](mailto:subhashree@mcrg.ac.in). Applicants should send their resume, cover letter, statement of purpose, and example of work in one file (PDF). The text of the sample piece along with the link has to be attached with the application. Applicants are requested to consult the Calcutta Research Group website [www.mcrg.ac.in](http://www.mcrg.ac.in) for information on the institution. Any enquiry on this will be welcome.

**MEDIA GRANTS**

**REPORTING  
THE MIGRANTS  
IN THE TIME OF  
AN EPIDEMIC**

**Calcutta  
Research Group**

Application deadline: 23  
May 2020



@MahanirbanCalcuttaResearchGroup



forcedmigrationdesk@gmail.  
com



@MCRG\_CRG



www.mcrg.ac.in

## **Selection of candidates**

14 people applied for the media grant. Due to the tropical cyclone Amphan that swept through West Bengal and Odisha on May 21 and its subsequent internet connectivity issues, the selection process was delayed.

A selection committee was formed for this comprising of Mainak De, Rajat Roy, Ranabir Samaddar and Samir Kumar Das. It met on 7<sup>th</sup> June, 2020 and the deliberations unfolded in the following manner:

1. All 14 candidates were evaluated on the basis of their
  - Proposal and objectives of work
  - Academic qualifications
  - Experience, and
  - Geographical location.
2. CRG maintained its stance on extending opportunities to those with exceptional calibre.
3. An excel sheet with names, locations, brief work proposals and other details was circulated for reference during the evaluation, in addition to the individual Curriculum Vitae, Proposal and other requisite documents.
4. Two lists were made after thorough discussion and evaluation on the criteria mentioned above: 3 candidates were chosen to be kept in the waiting list should anyone from the first list have to decline CRG's offer.
5. Based on the committee's evaluation, the 4 selected candidates are:
  - Sidharth Yadav (Madhya Pradesh)
  - Geetika Mishra (Maharashtra)
  - Amit Sengupta (Delhi)
  - Swati Bhattacharjee and Abhijnan Sarkar (Kolkata)
6. Those put on the waitlist, in the order of merit are:
  1. Debashish Aich (Malda)
  2. Ratna (Delhi)
  3. Ria De (Kolkata)

The four chosen candidates were contracted in the end of June. Siddharth Yadav, citing personal reasons could not accept CRG's offer, and hence the final list stands at:

## 1. Amit Sengupta



He is the Executive Editor, Hardnews, south Asian partner of le monde diplomatique, Paris. Hnfp.in. A journalist and columnist, Amit has written/and writing for several media organizations including Outlook, Tribune, DailyO, Hindu Businessline, National Herald, DW, Samyantar (Hindi) The Hindu Businessline, Newsrupt (Malayalam portal in Kochi, earlier Southlive), Hardnews, The Diplomat, Washington, Tortoisemedia, London, The Polis Project, New York, LokMarg, among others. TV commentator with Swaraj Express. Recently edited a book on education in contemporary India with essays and testimonies by eminent academics, citizens and students: Indian Campuses Under Siege – Knowledge, Resistance, Liberation.

### **Story Idea:**

**SUBJECT: FORCED MIGRATION AND DALITS: A CASE STUDY OF DELHI, NOIDA AND WESTERN UTTAR PRADESH**

As a journalist I have been on the ground covering the forced migrations of tens of thousands of unorganized migrant workers from Delhi, especially to the Hindi heartland. The infinite injustice which they have suffered needs more intensive, graphic and meticulous documentation. Therefore, this project will focus on their daily struggle, occupational hazards, the political economy and sociology of their everyday life, the idea of 'free labour', working class and trade union rights, and their identity and social existence in a neo-liberal democracy.

Since almost 93 per cent of the work force in India is in the informal sector with virtually no rights, and almost half of them are Dalits and women, this study will focus on Dalits, especially in the metropolis of Delhi, the special economic zone of elite and industrial Noida, and certain flourishing towns and rural areas in western UP in the vicinity of Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur and Meerut.

Delhi: Almost 60 per cent of the working population in the capital of India comprise workers, mostly from UP and Bihar. They also constitute the vote bank of the Aam Aadmi Party, since significant work has been done in the educational and health sector by the AAP government in Delhi for the poor. The study will focus on the demographic and sociological shifts in two areas: Northeast Delhi which witnessed organized killings of mostly

Muslims in recent times, and Trilokpuri in East Delhi, which had witnessed the massacre of Sikhs in 1984.

I have reported on both these riots as a journalist, and have also worked in the relief camps. The study will also focus on the fabric of social harmony, the cultural paradigms of migration, and the bitter fissures which have been created after the killings.

Noida: Hidden within super expressways and residential areas of the rich, there is a small ghetto called the Harijan Basti (Ambedkar Vihar) in Noida. As a chief minister, Mayawati had created this enclave for the Dalits. Currently, the 'basti' is a typical urban village, with a mix of people from the cow belt, and significantly, a huge population of Bengalis who work as domestic servants, pull rickshaws, sell vegetables, fish and chicken, and also have 'exclusive' shops selling Bengali delicacies, including 'mishti doi', Jharna ghee and Bengali sweets. Most of the Bengalis have arrived from Malda and have community relationships. Others are Indian citizens with roots in Bangladesh, or part of their family reside in that country. Interestingly, most of the Bengalis are from the Scheduled Castes. One of the biggest festivals they celebrate is a three day collective celebration of the cult of Chaitanya, with dance and musical troupes from Bengal performing till the wee hours of the morning.

Western UP: This prosperous green revolution belt has always been a secular and pluralist terrain, with the population of the dominant agricultural communities among the Jats and Muslims, along with landless Dalits, living in harmony. Before the 2014 elections, riots were social engineered here, in a political zone where the BJP never had any electoral presence, this being a belt ruled by the Charan Singh phenomena. However, the BJP won heavily after it succeeded in isolating the Muslims amidst killings and communal polarization, including the fake propaganda of 'love jihad'. The state of Dalits, post the 2014 election and the communal fissures, will be the key area of study, and their economic and social relations with the other communities in a changed political scenario. This is also the area of a rising Bhim Army and Dalit assertion, especially in the area of education. I have reported on this area since many years, and this is also the area where I spent my childhood.

In conclusion, the study will take three different points of geographical reference to understand the phenomena of migration with Dalits in perspective, focusing also on women and the aspiring young, who are not ready to be oppressed any more by the dominant castes, or the upper caste bureaucracy and police. This will therefore also enter the political unconscious of aspirations of the subaltern castes.

## 2. Swati Bhattacharjee and Abhijnan Sarkar



**Swati Bhattacharjee** is the Senior Assistant Editor, Edit Pages, Ananda Bazar Patrika. She was Fulbright Fellow 2010-2011 at ALJ Poverty Action Lab, MIT.



**Abhijnan Sarkar** is an independent documentary maker.

### **Story Idea:**

Title: Where do Migrant Labour Live? A Survey in Kolkata

The Problem: The norm of “social distancing” following Covid-19 has brought to focus the poor housing conditions of migrant labour. It soon became apparent that migrant workers living in crowded, unhygienic slums, or on pavements, had little hope of saving themselves from the coronavirus. Studies have shown that slum populations have a significant effect on influenza transmission in urban areas. Improper specification of slums in large urban regions results in underestimation of infections in the entire population and hence may lead to misguided interventions by policy planners. (1) Hence we see widespread anxiety, even resistance, to migrant workers returning home.

The Background: Policy makers are well aware of the poor housing options of the migrant labour. A report by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (2) has noted the lack of affordable rental accommodation for migrant labour, which pushed labour to live in slums, illegal settlements, godowns, under flyovers, on the sides of railways, and so on. They have little or no access to safe drinking water and toilets. The government has announced several plans to alleviate the problem, such as construction of affordable rental houses for migrant workers under the PM

Awas Yojana. (3) However, as the recent exodus of migrant labour for their homes even in the middle of a lockdown has shown, an overwhelming majority of workers are forced to live in subhuman conditions.

Kolkata gets 2.2 lakh migrant labour, from other states and from Bengal's districts. Our previous field work (4) showed that menial labour from who have worked in Kolkata's Burrabazar for decades continue to live in pavements. Migrant workers are possibly a significant part of Kolkata's pavement dwellers. In the clothes industry of Metiaburz, we found seven to eight workers crammed in 8 ft by 10 ft rooms, with a single bulb and a fan running on a "hooked" wire.

The Research Proposal: This study proposes to examine the dwelling conditions of migrant labour in Kolkata. It will take certain sections of industry which typically use migrant labour, such as clothing and tailoring industry, construction, food processing, small manufacturing and so on, which typically survive on seasonal or round-the-year supply of migrant labour. It will then see what arrangements are being made for the living quarters by employers, municipalities and by labour themselves.

We will look at the policy documents by Union government, state government, municipalities and international aid organisations like DFID, USAID and so on to see what was visualised for meeting housing needs, and what is the reality on ground. We will look at existing research on accommodations for migrant labour.

Research Questions:

What are the predominant types of dwelling accommodations for migrant workers living in Kolkata?

What kind of access do migrant workers have to basic amenities like drinking water, toilet and sanitation?

What kind of rent do migrant workers pay, and to whom?

What kind of plans have been proposed in the recent past for proper accommodation of migrant workers in Kolkata? What were the major hurdles in the implementation of these plans? What conditions will have to be fulfilled for providing affordable rental homes to migrant workers?

Our study will be limited to the geographical area of greater Kolkata. We will use the methods of interview and focus groups. We will gather data from migrant workers, employers, councillors, municipality and urban development officers. We will also talk to organisations working with migrant labours.

### 3. Geetika Mishra



Geetika Mishra is the Project lead at 101Reporters. She is a young professional with a demonstrated history of working in the social impact sector and the news and media industry. Areas of interest include Political Science, Public Policy, International Relations, Women Affairs and Volunteering with Nonprofits. She holds a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Political Science degree from Delhi University.

#### **Story Idea:**

An extended lockdown (in its 60th day on May 23) to contain the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak has resulted in a catastrophic situation for migrant labourers in India. Excessive reportage and analysis so far reflects upon the central government's insufficient contingency plan that has failed to protect the migrant labourers.

The central government as well as the state governments have announced various measures to support these workers. The measures announced stand on numerous faultlines restricting the availability of relief packages to a limited number. My report will focus on the implementation and implications of the same in addition to labour compliance rules and the major acts included in the labour law compliance rules. For eg, the Building and Other Construction Worker (BOCW) Act of 1996 aims to levy a cess on the cost of construction incurred by the employers and use that money for the welfare of construction workers who are registered under the Act. As of April 2020, the reported data suggested that a majority of the construction workers hailing from north and central Indian states were not registered under the Act, hence, unable to avail any benefits from the centre-declared Rs.32,000 crore BOCW fund.

The following key points will be covered in the report:

#### 1. Relaxation of Labour Laws in States & its implications -

The governments of Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Haryana have issued notifications maximising the weekly working hours from 48 hours to 72 hours for certain factories. On the other hand, the Madhya Pradesh government has put into effect an 'ordinance' that



exempts establishments with less than 100 workers from not obliging to the Madhya Pradesh Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1961.

This act is crucial for the regulation of the conditions of the workers. The ordinance further allows the state government to let off other institutions from the Madhya Pradesh Shram Kalyan Nidhi Adhiniyam, 1982. Shram Kalyan Nidhi Adhiniyam provides a constitution pertaining to the welfare funds of the labour force.

The UP government's ordinance has also struck out labour laws related to social security, industrial dispute resolution, trade unions and strikes, which severely undermine the condition of labourers at present.

While the provisions of labour laws relating to women and children continue to remain in force, the absence of a holistic and effective social security system exposes them to excessive vulnerability. The provisions of Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 under the pandemic situation has not been addressed by any of the state authorities.

2. Payment of Wages Act, 1936 /Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970 /

Minimum Wages Act 1948 / Factories Act 1948 -

The Payment of Wages Act, 1936 and the Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970 provide that the contractor or employer is liable to pay a minimum wage to 'all persons employed by him' though migrant workers stranded across the country state otherwise. Gram Vaani has captured audio interviews on the plight of the migrant workers who refuse the receipt of any payment since the lockdown and are surviving without any source of income or savings.

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Sunday, 17 May 2020, revoked its previous directory to authorities of States/UTs to ensure the payment of due wages to workers. 'Workers' in this regard refers to regular, casual and contractual employees who form the unorganised workforce.

The governments of Gujarat, UP and Madhya Pradesh have also not specified the provision of overtime payment which violates the rights of workers under the Factories Act and the Minimum Wages Act.

The report will further navigate the accessibility of migrant workers to the public health system in the wake of the pandemic. And conclude with a brief analysis.

#### 4. Debashis Aich



Debashis Aich has been working for more than three decades in various media outlets. Currently, he is working as an independent journalist and member of the Editorial Team of an online bi-lingual news portal *GroundXero* ([www.groundxero.in](http://www.groundxero.in)). He has 19 years of experience as a journalist in mainstream television and print media (1995 to 2014).

##### **Story Idea:**

It has been now been more than a month and a half since India is under a lockdown. Across the country, restrictions on mobility and suspension of work, to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus, have distressed countless people. Amongst them, the plight of the migrant labourers has caught our attention in significant ways. Disturbing images of thousands of stranded migrant labourerstrying to escape to their native homes from cities like Mumbai, Surat, Chennai, Gurgoanetc have forced us to take notice of this 'invisible' multitude.

In towns and cities across the country, the migrants live in cramped, congested and unventilated dwellings, which often lack basic sanitation facilities or running water. This negates any possibility of social distancing or preventive measures like regular hand washing. Predominantly residing in rented accommodations, the migrant workers and their families are at the mercy of the landlords who threaten eviction when they were unable to pay rent. Themigrant workers seldom possess sufficient savings to withstand weeks or months, without paid work. Their precarious condition in alien lands is further exacerbated by the meagerness of relief measures undertaken by the state governments and the companies they were employed with. Linking relief with the possession of ration cards has only intensified the difficulties in accessing the near negligible relief.

Consequently, the migrant working masses in the towns and cities, without income and food, trapped in unhygienic and unhealthy dwellings, have been rendered only more susceptible to an infection of COVID-19.

Taking such factors together, it would not be a stretch to deem the lockdown as not only unsuitable to the migrant workers, but also

particularly dangerous for them, from a material perspective as well as in terms of health. Consequently, it made them desperate to escape to their native states, at times even risking their lives.

Migration from West Bengal has increased manifold during the past one decade. According to 2011 Census, there were about 454 million migrant labourers in India. This had risen by 139 million from 315 million in 2001 and by 220 million in 1991. In other words, the numbers have doubled between 1991 and 2011. Data from the NSS sample survey (NSS) in 2007-08 reveals, about 28.3% of workers in India are migrants. There is no statewise figure of migrant labourers available. There is also no data available on migrants from Bengal in public domain.

We rarely engage in public debates or discussions related to migrant labour in our social and political discussions. Recently, they have caught our imagination precisely because they came to represent the face of a catastrophe. They become important to political parties, once in every five years, at the time of a general or Panchayat election.

In media, migrants attract headlines only during drop in percentage of male voters in some rural constituency; dearth of agricultural labourers in rice-bowl districts of the state; or natural disasters like Aila in Sundarban or floods in host state, like the one in Kerala in 2019; witch hunting in the name of illegal Bangladeshis in the slums of Bengaluru, Pune or Delhi. One can keep on adding to these instances. Through such news, we come to know about their existence and become aware that Bengali speaking migrant labourers are spread all over the country, from Kashmir to Kerala.

The mass exodus of migrant workers triggered by Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown brought their existence to our notice. Ramjeet, a migrant labourer, rightly said, during his journey on foot to Gorakhpur from Delhi, "May be when Modiji decided to do this [lockdown] nobody told him about us. May be he doesn't know about us."

Against this background, I want to focus on the phenomenon of migrant workers leaving the cities and returning back to their places of origin, focusing on migrants workers from two districts of West Bengal – Bankura and Malda. The attempt will be to try to understand what made them migrate in the first place and what factors and circumstances compelled them to come back. Is this reverse migration just a temporary phenomena or there is something more to it.

Resource persons/organisations to be interviewed

1. Bangla SanskritiManch.
2. Migrant Labour Solidarity Network.
3. wbtrackmigrants.
4. Gana-TadarakiUdyog.
5. Social scientists, Labour leaders and concerned government officers.
6. Individual volunteers working with above-mentioned organizations