

A Sketch of Pakistan (3): Overseas workers and Dubai syndrome

Pakistan's GDP per capita is a little over US\$400, and monthly salaries of untrained labourers range from 1,000 to 3,000 rupees (approximately 3,000-9,000 yen). Due to such low income levels in the country, the material wealth of the oil producing countries in the Middle East, combined with their geographical proximity, attracts many emigrant workers from Pakistan. It is possible for them to earn ten times more in the oil-rich countries than in their home country. Since there is a general labour shortage in the Middle East due to small populations and the local Arabs dislike of hard, dirty work at oil wells, farms, and road or house construction sites, Pakistani workers willingly and easily can take over such work. As a result there is a well-established relationship of labour demand and supply between Pakistan and the Middle East.

A glance at a world map reveals how geographically close Pakistan and the Middle East (the Arabian Peninsular) are to each other. In fact the distance from Karachi to Dubai (UAE) and the distance from Karachi to Islamabad (Pakistan's capital city) are almost the same. As in Pakistan, Islam is the dominant religion in the Middle East. Indeed there are so many Indian and Pakistani workers in the Middle East that in terms of linguistic population, Hindi and Urdu speakers (the spoken forms of these two languages are almost identical) are the majority in this region. In this sense, Pakistani workers find little culture shock and it is easier for them to work in the Middle East than in other countries such as Japan. (This, however, may not be the most logical conclusion if one observes and compares the very different ways Arab and Japanese employers treat foreign workers).

Although the peak period has passed, money earned and sent back home by overseas workers still contributes significantly to Pakistan's economy. However, the overseas work of the Pakistani does not have solely positive effects. Negative aspects to this situation are known as 'Dubai syndrome'. Dubai represents a popular destination among Pakistanis for overseas work. In order to go abroad and work, normally people have to resort to grave debts and pay high commissions to agents, which makes the workers psychologically insecure. Even if a man manages to secure work overseas, his family left behind starts experiencing problems such as divisions within the family during the absence of the head of the household. Another problem is that families sometimes indulge in overspending as a result of their increase in income. On their return to Pakistan, overseas workers find their families in such disappointing situations, and they themselves have become accustomed to such a high-income lifestyle by now that they end up having great difficulties in readjusting themselves to Pakistani society...

Recently my business brought me to both the labour-supplier, Pakistan, and the labour recipient, UAE, with only a very short interval of time in-between. UAE's currency is called the Dirham (DH), and DH1 is approximately 30 yen. In Pakistan, 1 rupee is about 3yen. That is to say DH10 is more or less equivalent to 100 rupees. 300 yen in Pakistan, i.e. 100 rupees, is a significant amount, but in UAE, DH10 quickly disappears. This simply means that there is a huge gap in commodity prices between these two countries. One can easily understand how, after becoming accustomed to high levels of income and expenditure while working abroad, the gap in lifestyles felt on returning home could be disturbing. It depends on each individual how badly he misses what he used to enjoy once but can enjoy no longer, but it is a sad fact of human nature that many realize the importance of something only when it is lost.



**Fruit store
in
Pakistan**



**Pakistani
workers in
UAE**



**View of a
local city**



**View of
Abu Dhabi**