

Telangana workers return from 'captivity' in Saudi

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HYDERABAD: Sanegaram Balaraju of Gosampally village in Siddipet heaved a sigh of relief on landing at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Shamshabad on Monday. "My nightmare has ended. I am happy to be back home," Balaraju said.

Balaraju was among eight Telangana workers who were rescued after being held captive by their employer in Saudi Arabia. "We were denied food for one month. We had no basic necessities," Balaraju told TOI.

Thirteen workers were rescued by the Indian Embassy in Saudi Arabia after external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj took up their issue. The workers had all faced problems with the company they worked for. One of them brought it to the notice of NRI affairs minister KT Rama Rao, who immediately sought the help of Sushma Swaraj. While five workers reached the country on April 9, the rest returned on Monday.

Borragala Chandrashekhara of Jagtial said they had been facing problems with their company for two years. They were being paid less salary than promises, and when they raised the issue with the company, they were subjected to more harassment.

"We were employed at Al-Hasa, and when we asked for the agreed wages and went to the labour court, we were packed off to a far-off place near the Kuwait border and kept there," Chandrashekhara said.

The eight workers who returned to the city on Monday were Borragala Chandrashekhara of Jagtial, Sura Ramulu of Raghavapet

in Jagtial, Teku Raju of Gosampally in Khanapoor, Mangali Narusaiah of Bheemgal, Vishwanath Pawar of Nandiwada in Nizamabad, Sanghepu Komuraiah of Yellampet in Kamareddy, Thota Lingam of Bibipet in Kamareddy and Sanegaram Balaraju of Gosampally in Siddipet.

Migrant rights activist Bheem Reddy Mandha said that officials of the Telangana government gave each worker Rs 400 upon landing at the airport. The GAD (NRI) department provided them transport to the Jubilee bus station, from where they could head to their villages.

The workers will also need to be rehabilitated. "I used to drive a tractor to earn my livelihood. I had one acre of land on which I could cultivate nothing. With the employer in Saudi not paying our salaries for several months, I have to think how I can manage to survive," Balaraju said.