A serpentine queue at the international departure terminal with individuals carrying a backpack behind their back, one hand difficultly gripping a medium sized hand bag and the other hand holds a see through plastic folder containing passport, work permit and other documents. The arrival terminal, adjacent to the departure receives scores of returning migrant labors pushing their heavy plastic wrapped suitcases. The rather unlucky ones, at least three in a day, arrive dead in a coffin pushed by two trollies in a parallel. The narration above is not a fiction, but the most common citing at the only international airport of Nepal in Kathmandu.

The estimation of exact number of Nepalese migrant labors is a difficult number to establish. The official figures shows that a total of 2,723,587 labor permits were issued by the Department of Labor and Employment from 2008/09 through 2014/15, [1] and this number excludes migrant workers to Korea and India together with workers using other informal channels for foreign employment. The national census survey of 2011 also suggests that nearly 71 per cent of the total absent population (1,921,494) cited private and institutional jobs abroad as the reasons for leaving. [2]

The migrant labors are more concentrated in Malaysia and the middle-east countries with 33.3 per cent of permit issued for employment in Malaysia, followed by Qatar (19 per cent), Saudi Arabia (18.9 per cent), United Arab Emirates (9.8 per cent), Kuwait (2.5 per cent), Bahrain (0.9 per cent) and Oman (0.6 per cent). [1].

The current trend of foreign labor migration from Nepal has been attributed to the falling of wages, high cost of living, war in 2003. Most of the death of workers is reported to be during their sleep, following a hard day’s work, often amid hostile working conditions, this mysterious death of Nepalese migrant workers has been termed as Sudden Unexplained Nocturnal Death Syndrome and an international consortium is launching an investigation into these deaths. [8]

The available database although incomplete but gives an overview of the situation of workers and hardship they have faced and this is alarming. The coining of a medical terminology for death occurring in Nepalese migrant labors also establishes concerns over risks and adversities faced by the workers. The increasing number of death and serious health risks associated with working on hostile conditions of extreme temperature, poor dietary habits and minimal living conditions have developed as a non-compensating issues and safeguarding worker’s interest has to be established. The economy generated by migrant labors is the backbone of national economy and the government should have to lay efforts in protecting health and rights of these workers.

References