

# Migration governance

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HABIBUL HAQUE KHONDKER

IF the migrant population worldwide formed a state of their own, with more than 215 million people, or 3% of the world population, it would be the fifth largest country of the world. This hypothetical country would be placed between the fourth most populous country, Indonesia (235 million) and fifth largest country, Brazil (193 million).

Although there has been a significant growth in the number of migrant population in recent decades, earlier centuries saw more mobility of people in terms of percentage of total population. The last decade of the twentieth century as well as the present decade has been described as the "age of globalisation," the nineteenth century allowed easier migration flows.

Contrary to the perception, or imagination of a "borderless world," in the twentieth century the world has become more bordered than at any other time in the past. We live in a state-centered world. The contradiction of globalisation is best revealed in the free-flow of capital and restricted movement of labour. This has clearly led to rethink of migration governance.

Some of the recent trends in migration include a growing trend in South-South migration (migration between developing countries). South-South migration is larger than migration from the South to high-income countries in the North. Many of the countries in the South are both labour receiving as well as labour sending countries.

Rather than looking at migration in terms of "brain drain," the new concept that best describes the process is "brain in circulation."

One commentator remarked somewhat cynically, "brain drain is better than brain in the drain." In many developing countries professionals do not always get the support or opportunities they deserve for their further development and choose to migrate to greener pastures. Unlike in the past, migrants have become more flexible or foot-loose.

In the old paradigm, migrants left their homeland to settle down in a new home country. In the twenty-first century, migrant professionals have become the new nomads. Ong, a Berkeley anthropologist has coined the term, "flexible citizenship" to capture this new reality. A distinction has emerged between juridical citizenship and cultural citizenship. Individuals, like companies, are becoming multinational or bi-national and bi-cultural.

A new-cosmopolitanism is becoming the new trend in a globalized world. The new-nomads are at home everywhere, as much as they are homeless everywhere. The meaning of home has lost its salience. A simple question like "where are you from?" is now not-so simple to answer. Economic forces continue to dominate international migration. Both the working classes as well as the professionals are driven by the same economic motive. While for the professional class there are more choices, the working class is constrained by a raft of factors. Sometimes, the line that separates migrants from refugees or asylum seekers becomes blurred, especially when it comes to working class migrants. According to a recent report, refugees and asylum seekers made up 16.3 million, or 8%, of international migrants in 2010.

Migrants have become a valuable source of cash-flows. Worldwide remittance flows are estimated to have passed \$440 billion in 2010,



of which developing countries received \$325 billion. Even the global financial crisis of last two years did not dent it that much. Bangladesh has seen steady growth in remittance, reaching \$11 billion in 2010, which is expected to rise in 2011. This is no mean amount. It is 13% of Bangladesh's GDP. The remittance earning is six times the foreign aid Bangladesh receives and 12 times the foreign direct investment (FDI). Such glowing figures are both encouraging as well as worrying. Some of the top receiving countries for Bangladeshi labour, such as Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, along with Kuwait and Qatar, are now seriously discussing reducing dependence on foreign labour. In some countries like the United Arab Emirates foreigners constitute nearly 80% of the labour force. For Kuwait this figure is nearly 70% and for Qatar it is 86.5%. This demographic imbalance is increasingly dominating public discourses in the Arabian Gulf countries. Programs such as Saudisation, Qatarisation etc. are in place. Yet, the need for skilled workforce globally is likely to last.

In this climate, it is important for the labour-sending countries to devote more attention and resources to labour migration. In order to improve migration governance, Nasra Shah, an expert has suggested regulation, facilitation and protection as three key variables. To this list, I would add utilisation. The migrant workers, especially those who are returning or will return in the future, must be looked after.

Many of the migrants are conduits of ideas and skills. They often assist in knowledge and technology transfer. An unskilled worker returns home as a skilled construction worker or user of heavy construction equipments. Appropriate measures must be taken to utilise their skills by helping them find appropriate work. Here, the government and the private sector must work hand in hand. The recent achievements must be sustained and more resources should be deployed at skill-building and skill-utilisation of the labour force.

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# Tackling labour unrest

Though the interest of the entrepreneurs cannot be ignored by the government for the sake of economic growth, protection of rights and welfare of labour should also be equally attended to by it because labour is a vital factor of production. In fact labour, whether mechanical or manual, is vital for our economy. Our agricultural and other labours, be it in domestic field or abroad, have kept our growth moving. They have in fact saved us from global economic meltdown.

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

LAND, labour and capital are essential for industrialisation. Except labour (mainly unskilled), we are seriously short of the other two. Without adequate development of infrastructural facilities like power and communication modern industry cannot flourish. These need huge investment and time. For a country like Bangladesh, acquisition of adequate fund for building infrastructural facilities is extremely difficult. In addition, there are technical problems. We do not have any option, except giving adequate attention to solve the problems of our labour, considered as the cheapest in the world.

We are now the third largest exporter of readymade garments in the world, next to China and Turkey. Whereas workers in China get \$1.66 an hour, 56 cents in Pakistan, 51 cents in India, 44 cents in Indonesia, a worker from Bangladesh will earn a little over 12.5 cents an hour on the new pay scale that starts from Tk.3,000 (about \$ 40) a month.

Broadly speaking, Bangladesh garment sector accounts for 80% of the total share of exports and earned \$12.7 billion in 2008-09, about 14% of the country's GDP. Some analysts are of the opinion that RMG has more potential than any other sector to contribute to the reduction of poverty. Despite such a situation, the present working conditions and wages of workers are far from satisfactory. For industrial growth we agree that we need good profit from this sector, but certainly not by demolishing the vital agent, labour.

Needless to say that, for survival of Bangladesh industry, it has to focus its attention more closely on compliance with internationally recognised social, labour and environmental standards. There are many stakeholders. Dialogue is imperative. How many of these imperatives really work needs a close examination. Among all the stakeholders the government will have to develop compliance and create an industry with an enhanced global image and global recognition of performance.

Bangladesh is now facing increased pressure from international buyers for compliance with their code of conduct. On the other hand, big buyers are interested in continuing and expanding their business with Bangladesh if shorter lead time and standards of compliance can be met. The recent development of strong demand is due to offering of rate 10% below the Chinese garments.

Impressive rate of increase of garment export is certainly inspiring. However, increasing discontent among workers may force us to pay heavily because it may lead to strikes, violence, damage of property and even deaths. To ensure peaceful atmosphere in the garment sector let us not ignore issues like working environment, health and sanitation, security and other vital things like providing appointment letters or contract letters, identity cards and service books. It is time that the government pressurises the garment manufacturers to strictly comply with labour laws and ILO conventions.

Our jute sector is reemerging as a major earner of foreign exchange for the country. However, it has also been plagued with labour unrest. It is reported that due to indefinite strike by hundreds of workers in Daulatpur (Khulna) jute export through Mongla and Chittagong seaports is being hampered. The Jute Baling and Worker's Union started strike on November 29 for increase of their wages. At present, for working 14 to 16 hours, workers are paid only Tk.120 per diem.

Though the interest of the entrepreneurs cannot be ignored by the government for the sake of economic growth, protection of rights and welfare of labour should also be equally attended to by it because labour is a vital factor of production. In fact labour, whether mechanical or manual, is vital for our economy. Our agricultural and other labours, be it in domestic field or abroad, have kept our growth moving. They have in fact saved us from global economic meltdown.

In our zeal to encourage the entrepreneurs the government must not side with them. It must keep itself strictly neutral. Without a peaceful labour situation progress and prosperity of the country will be jeopardised. What is necessary is growth of mutual confidence and trust among the government, labour and manufacturers through clear appreciation of each other's interests.

Bangladesh has a bright future. This is possible if there is good governance, controlled corruption, reasonable level of political stability and development of infrastructural facilities. We need quicker industrial growth to absorb our surplus labour. With modernisation of economy we may need more skilled labour for improving the quality of our products to enable us to compete successfully internationally. Thus, closer attention is urgently needed for solving the problems.

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### Corrigendum

In the article "Tapping our own resources" printed yesterday, the word "because" was mistakenly written in place of "although" in the second-last paragraph. The error is regretted.

# A world without Europe

The European experiment of collective government is the most ambitious ever attempted. Its failure would lead many to dismiss the idea and refrain from trying something similar for a while. Losing this precious time in looking for ways to coordinate different nations is a luxury that we cannot afford at a time when too many global challenges require decisive and immediate multilateral action.

MOISES NAIM

PREDICTING Europe's growing international irrelevance has become as common as mocking the follies of Brussels.

In fact, the consensus is that within a few short decades, the weight of European economies in the world is bound to plummet to less than half of what it is today.

Moreover, in recent years, it has become increasingly difficult to find a decision made by the European Union that is worthy of applause.

Today's European project feels more like a jobs programme for the continent's professional middle class than an ideal that sparks hope and energises people.

The inability to effectively address the economic crisis is only a symptom of deeper problems. Why has Europe suffered the most painful and prolonged consequences of the global financial crash?

Now, the crisis in Ireland and its potential spread to other weak European economies fuels further pessimism. "My current best guess," writes Gideon Rachman in the

Financial Times, is that "the single currency will indeed eventually break up -- and that the euro's executioner will be Germany." His calculus is that successive financial crises and their respective bailouts will exhaust Germany's patience. Germany, he writes, might then feel released from its historic obligation to "build Europe."

The collapse of the European monetary system could be an insurmountable blow to European unity. That this would be bad for Europe is obvious.

Less obvious is that a world without an influential and integrated Europe is a world made worse for everyone. Europe irradiates values and standards that are as necessary as they are rare in today's world. The old continent's economic and political decline will diminish its positive influence on others.

We know about Europe's current repudiation of war, the legacy of its two terrible conflicts in the 20th century. And we also know how scornfully European pacifism is treated by those who confuse aversion to war with weakness or worse. But a world with a continent that prefers to make mistakes trying to avoid war is better than a world where trigger-happy super-powers don't mind being mistaken when they decide to wage "pre-emptive wars."

If a government in Asia, Africa or Latin America starts violating human rights, "disappearing" political opponents and imprisoning journalists, who do you want with a strong voice in the international community? The Chinese Communist Party? Putin's Russia? Or Europe?

While for the last decade or so the United States has passively tolerated a massive redistribution of wealth from its poorest to its wealthiest citizens and while Russia and China celebrate a new oligarchy who accumulates unimaginable riches, Europe still has a huge aversion to inequality.

Which do you prefer: a world in which 5% of

the population accumulates 95% of wealth and the rest remain poor and excluded, or a world dominated by a vast, growing and politically powerful middle class? Europe still strives to achieve this second scenario.

The European welfare system is overly generous and many countries can no longer afford it. But a model in which millions of people lack health care or are condemned to poverty a few months after losing a job or upon becoming old and infirm may be equally unsustainable in the long run.

The European development aid to poorer countries is often inefficient, but Europe's commitment to humanitarian causes internationally has few peers. While religious extremism is thriving and dividing nations and societies everywhere, Europe's of tolerance to secularism and tolerance of all religions continues to be deeply rooted in what used to be the richest breeding ground of religious wars.

Globalisation is rapidly expanding problems whose solutions require coordinated responses from several countries working together.

The European experiment of collective government is the most ambitious ever attempted. Its failure would lead many to dismiss the idea and refrain from trying something similar for a while. Losing this precious time in looking for ways to coordinate different nations is a luxury that we cannot afford at a time when too many global challenges require decisive and immediate multilateral action.

I do not know if the ambitious project of European integration will survive the enormous obstacles it currently faces. But I do know that if it fails, the entire world will pay the consequences.

Moises Naim, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, served as Venezuela's minister of trade and industry in the early 1990s. ©2010 The New York Times. (Distributed by The New York Times Syndicate.)



## IN MEMORIAM

# An unsung Bangladeshi journalist

SYED NAQUIB MUSLIM

JAWADUR Rahman, one of the most experienced professionals in national journalism, passed away about a year ago at the age of 73.

Jawad was a dedicated journalist. He began working for the then The Pakistan Observer in the sixties and continued there until 2000. He resigned because of internal politics, and joined The Independent and later CCDP, a non-government development agency. Freedom to think and freedom to write were matters of deep concern to Jawad. He was taciturn and camera-shy throughout his professional life. Jawad had remarkable skill at writing English and editing. Although his job was to select and edit letters and articles, he used to write on topics of popular interest. His articles were rich in messages the young generation needed.

Throughout his life he struggled to search for the meaning of life-and-death. In his essays, he looked for meaning, and ensured it

in each sentence. In an article entitled "When is a sentence meaningful?", Jawad wrote: "The meaning of the sentence is in the mechanical arrangement of a few words could not ensure a meaningful sentence. The writer or the speaker must have the right attitude to convey the message to the audience."

Jawad's attitude towards life was totally Jawad as well as optimistic. To him, life survived on love. As a student of philosophy and of Schopenhauer, with whom he felt notionally aligned, he stated: "Love is the fountain of life." He disliked Nietzsche's concept of love and marriage. In an article, "Of love and nature," Jawad wrote: "If the person falls in love there must be certain factors that bring the two souls together."

Whenever I visited his office, I found him with a cigarette fixed between his lips preparing materials for the editorial page. He would work indefatigably without annoyance or boredom. Although he was affiliated with a political party, he never allowed his occupa-

tion to be tainted with a political hue.

The last time I met him was a few months before his death, when he came to my residence for a nationality certificate.

Two years before his death, Jawad developed lung cancer, compounded by respiratory complications. When the physician gave this bad news to him he did not panic, but smiled to show that he was not surprised. He accepted the challenge to fight the disease and continued battling against the disease until he breathed his last on December 17, 2009. Doctors had predicted his end within six months of the diagnosis, but he succeeded in living for more than 2 years by exercising indomitable fortitude and willpower.

Jawadur Rahman fought not only against a fatal disease but also against life itself. He did not find around him enough people to sympathise with him in profession or in society.

A man of high professional integrity, Jawad will remain as an icon and a role model to the

existing and emerging journalists of this country. Although it is no more possible for us to exchange greetings with him, his thoughts, ideas, beliefs and values mirrored in his writings will resound in the hearts of newspaper readers for long. Jawad has taught us how to embrace death with a smile. We wish we could pronounce like Leo Tolstoy, who saw the face of his dead son and muttered: "There is no death."



Jawadur Rahman

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