



NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON IRREGULAR MIGRATION TO MALAYSIA

Hassan Imam, Programme Head, Migration Programme, BRAC & Keynote speaker

We are very concerned with the rise of irregular migration to Malaysia. Previously, migrants used to go to Thailand and from there through forest they trespassed into Malaysia.

According to UNHCR, more than 0.3 million migrants were trafficked to Malaysia through the sea route in the last three years. In the first few months of this year, 25,000 migrant workers have been trafficked and more than 7,000 of them are Bangladeshis.

We urge for an immediate response to protect those who make the treacherous maritime journey, frequently without basic amenities like food and water. There are many pregnant women and children among these unfortunate migrants, commonly victims of torture and harassment.

Sarawat Binte Islam, Programme Manager-Rights, Manusher Jonno Foundation

Members of National Alliance for Migrants' Rights, Bangladesh (NAMR, B) have launched various initiatives to address irregular migration. In the Bangkok conference, NAMR, B sent a joint statement, suggesting possible solutions to the issue.

Stina Ljungdel, Country Representative, UNHCR In the Bangkok meeting, we made a 10-point plan with 10 recommendations clustered in three headlines. First, countries in the region need to come to a regional agreement, considering the sea journey, rescue and disembarkation of the sea-stuck people.

Receiving countries also have major responsibilities. If it was impossible to work illegally in Malaysia then no one would spend USD 2000 to go there. Why is migration regularised in Malaysia? It is clear that destination countries have built up incredible wealth using illegal immigrants because they are cheap labour and there is no liability of ensuring labour rights for them.

One of the major achievements of the Bangkok summit is the commitment to establish task forces to create a comprehensive solution to this unfortunate phenomenon. We still have to push each country to actually go ahead and establish national task forces.

Syed Saiful Haque, Chairman, WARBE Development Foundation

Migration should be a choice not a compulsion, and the government has to create work opportunities for people within the country. 2.5 million people have registered to migrate, and the government has been able to send very few abroad. Those remaining should be trained and employed in local industries.

Shirajul Haque, Survivor of trafficking, Ukiya Upazila, Cox's Bazaar

A dealer informed me that I could go to Malaysia and work there in exchange for BDT 80,000. First, I went to Myanmar from Teknaf in 2012 and spent a night there. 133 people were loaded on a boat at 8pm. The food provisions we had taken with us would last us ten days.

Nurun Nabar, wife of missing victim Asbrafal I did not agree with my husband's decision to go abroad illegally. Our family members were also opposing him. The middleman promised him a free journey to Thailand. So, he boarded a small boat on March 23. And after that I never got a chance to talk to my husband.

Shahjahan Khan, father of missing victim Shawkat, Madaripur

My son went to Cox's bazaar without letting us know and



Recently, National Alliance for Migrants' Rights, Bangladesh (NAMR, B) organised a national consultation on "Irregular Migration to Malaysia". The following is the summary of discussion held at the programme. - Editor

against illegal trafficking under the law, in some places like Narsingdi, the law enforcement agencies do not accept such cases. Thus, the government needs to ensure that their work does not end with the formation of laws.

Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman, Sadia International

If any recruiting agency is associated with illegal trafficking then he should be sentenced with capital punishment.

The government, along with different stakeholders, needs to discuss with the government of Myanmar how we can lower the cost of migration for the people and form policies, accordingly.

Chanchala Mondal, Executive Director, Shapla Mobila Sangstha (SMS), Faridpur

Women are being sent abroad for illegal sex trade as tourists in a legal manner. They earn over Tk 1 lakh per month but get around Tk 50,000. When I spoke to them, they said that they go through recruiting agencies.

Sakul Millat Morsbed, Executive Director, SHISUK These crimes are being committed due to a lapse in the government's judgement. While other countries like Sri Lanka and Philippines have decided to freeze the process of sending workers to the Middle East, our government is holding registration processes to send people to these countries.

Abu Morsbed Chowdhury, Chief Executive Director, PHALS

It is difficult for law enforcement agencies to protect the huge coastal belt of Cox's Bazaar on their own. Thus, we would request for a multi-sectoral approach as well as include NBR in the migration process.

We also need to ensure a way to track sea vessels or issue ID cards to the fishermen and boatmen of every coastal area.

Quazi Sobel Rana, Executive Director, Development for Disadvantaged People, DDP

We had conducted a survey last November in Sirajganj where we learnt that around 4,500 people travelled to Malaysia from Sirajganj via trawlers. They have been missing for around six months. After this incident, representatives from law enforcement agencies contacted me.

We have received information recently that 14 people from Belkuchi Upazila, along with many others, are trapped in a jungle in Thailand under the control of brokers. They haven't yet been found by the Thai police. We would request IOM and other concerned authorities to ensure their safe return to the country.

Mohammad Harun Al Rashid, Regional Coordinator, CARAM Asia

Coordination amongst the ministries as well as the civil society is a huge issue. The civil society needs to think politically. When someone influential like the Prime Minister or politicians make insensitive remarks, the civil society needs to work together to strictly ensure that they retract their statements.

We in Bangladesh think that Malaysia is a developed country and that living standards there will be better, but that's not the case. Where people from other countries are not ready to send their people to Malaysia, why is our government intent on doing so?

We also need to address the issue of corruption in our future discussions.

Asif Saleh, Senior Director, Strategy, Communication and Employment and Empowerment, BRAC and BRAC International and Moderator of the session

The business of human trafficking is worth USD100 million per year, just in the Bengal Sea. It's a very sophisticated business as they operate in places where there is little awareness regarding human trafficking. They target families that are not extremely poor and have the ability to pay at least USD2000.

While productive discussions were held at the regional meeting in Bangkok, however after the media attention wanes, these discussions are forgotten. A ten-point action plan has been planned. Regional responsibility was one of the core elements in the action plan along with identifying the main reasons behind the illegal trafficking.

In short, we'll have to view this issue in a holistic manner. Destination countries also have a responsibility to play. They may say many positive things but in reality, these countries are also benefiting from illegal migration, as they are able to employ labourers at a very cheap price and thus, exploit them.

There are some good signs, though. Qatar has recently committed around USD 50 million and it's good that countries like this are committed to fighting illegal migration but stronger steps need to be taken.

Emergency response

- 1. Fund for survivors and returnees. 2. Full implementation of Human Trafficking Act 2012 and National Plan of Action on trafficking. 3. Regular follow up of government initiatives to curb trafficking. 4. Identifying traffickers and publish their list. 5. Establishing shelter homes and crisis management centres. 6. Develop a database of traffickers and victims. 7. Include human trafficking as an issue into agenda. 8. Combine vigilance and monitoring cell in Cox's Bazaar. 9. Special force of police to stop human trafficking.

Prevention

- 1. Strengthening Coast Guard. 2. Engaging local government in countering trafficking. 3. Reviving counter trafficking committees and strengthening them. 4. Regular transfer of local police officers in the Cox's Bazaar area. 5. Enhancing legal procedure of migration. 6. Looking for new labour markets around the world by the government. 7. Strengthening Human Trafficking Monitoring Cells in every police station. 8. Combining mass campaigns of NGOs, local government and law enforcers in areas that are prone to human trafficking. 9. Including victims of human trafficking as part of the campaign. 10. Exhibiting documentary films on the inhumane side of human trafficking. 11. Making private banks a part of this campaign as foreign remittance enters the country through these banks. 12. The government should understand that not all the victims get on the boats willingly. In many cases, they are either kidnapped or forced to migrate illegally. The

PARTICIPANTS



once there, he informed us that he was getting on a boat for Malaysia with three of his cousins. Now it's been over three months but there is still no news of him. I can only request that the government and the concerned authority rescue my son.

Mokabbir Hossain, Director of Admin and Finance, BMET

There are two parts that need to be covered in addressing irregular maritime migration: enforcement and awareness. The stories that we have heard today are mostly due to a lack of awareness. The government has taken a number of initiatives to combat this issue. We are looking at general awareness building, as well as specific awareness programmes that target people from particular areas where illegal migration is at its highest.

As for registration, when one decides to go abroad for employment opportunities, they can register their database and we release this to a number of countries, and the authorities there select the candidates applicable to work there.

Shabeen Anam, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation

This is a human tragedy for all of us and each of us should take responsibility for this tragedy. It's unfortunate and shameful that after 42 years of independence, graves of our people are being found in jungles outside of our country. Illegal migration is not a new phenomenon, rather this has been going for some time now but due to media attention there is uproar regarding this issue.

If we talk about awareness, several NGOs, including BRAC and Manusher Jonno Foundation, work on this issue to ensure safe migration. One will not hear of such risky migration in the areas where NGOs carry out their awareness programmes. Thus, the government needs to scale up their awareness building activities.

We should be able to prevent undocumented migration of Bangladeshi citizens by addressing a few core issues. A theory is that impoverished people don't generally use these channels to migrate. Those with a little money to pay the middlemen and arrange the trip are the ones embarking on this dangerous journey.

There is also a need for accountability for the massive registration process involved in going to countries like Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. We want to know how the huge amount of money collected from registration fees is being used. There are some people who were prepared to leave the country legally, but have had to resort to illegal migration due to the difficult process.

It's also shocking that despite a large number of law enforcement agencies like the police, BCB, etc, authorities

are unaware of such illegal migration. Thus, there is a need for accountability from the concerned authorities as well. A single solution is not enough to prevent this crime.

Chandan Chowdhury, Songsbotaque, Chittagong

We need to look at this issue regionally, nationally and globally. When we look at the regional aspect, we can make use of chairman or members of Union Parishad who know the brokers well. They will thus be able to identify the brokers and bring them to justice.

We also need concentrated and complementary efforts from every organisation concerned with this issue.

Zillur Rahman, Director Programs, SHISUK

Cases have been filed ever since the first reports of illegal migration came to the fore in 2013. However, these cases were uninvestigated, barring the routine inquiry regarding the accused person's place of origin. The government could look at these cases that could help them identify the criminals involved in this crime.

Anowar Hossain, Executive Director, Somaj Unnoy Karjocrom (SUK), Sirajganj

A quick-response plan is extremely important to rescue people stuck in those areas or on boats. We need to increase the number of TCCs and give these people training in different sectors to ensure that they don't resort to illegal migration.

Asma Khatun, Senior Project Coordinator, IOM

With help from the government, IOM has housed the survivors of illegal human trafficking who were rescued. IOM has also provided immediate help, health check-ups, as well as helped the rescued victims to return to their homes. A new group of 150 people will soon be landing in Bangladesh, and we are working to provide them with adequate assistance.

Sbariful Islam Hasan, Senior Reporter, Prothom Alo

Over 1500 cases were filed after a law against human trafficking was passed in 2012. 7,500 people were arrested in this regard. But nothing happened. We need to ask the law enforcement agencies as to why these cases have not been resolved even now.

Belal Hossain Biplob, Reporter, The Daily Star

The Superintendent of Police and District Commissioner are not even aware of the Human Trafficking Prevention Committee that exists in every district of the country. How can you generate awareness amidst the general public when the leaders themselves are not aware or have adequate knowledge? The government needs to have the sensitivity to realise that it needs to put a stop to these activities by identifying the criminals and bringing them under the law.

Syed Mabbub Elabi, Chairman, Ovbashi Karmi Kallyan Foundation (OKKAF)

The migration process in Malaysia has unfortunately broken down completely and for that I hold the government responsible because despite 14 lakh people registering for legal migration, we haven't even been able to send 8,000 people and the brokers took advantage of this fact.

We need to focus on quality and skilled migration instead of focusing on quantity of migration.

Omar Faruque Chowdhury, Executive Director, Ovbashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP)

One agenda should be to investigate money transfer in those areas through banks and other financial channels.

There are reports that even though people try to file cases