

NRB expertise and skills must be tapped aggressively

There is a need for an online network

AN OPEN DIALOGUE



ABDULLAH SHIBLI

NON-RESIDENT Bangladeshis (NRB) have played an important role in the economic growth of the motherland. Whether it is the remittances we are talking about or the "diaspora network" that facilitates technology transfer, NRBs have increasingly energised our economy as well. Nonetheless, compared with what other countries such as China, India and the Philippines have reaped in terms of the globalisation dividend, Bangladesh still has a long way to go. The NRBs on the one hand, and the public and private sector on the other, have a lot of work to do if we want to pull our country out of the "transition to middle-income" status and propel it into a robust and autonomous growth path.

Let me first take up an issue that I mentioned above, i.e., the contribution of the NRBs to our foreign exchange coffers. Defying all expectations, Bangladeshis working abroad have increased the volume of money they send home during the Covid-19 crisis. Even as late as June 2020, in the thick of the Covid-19 pandemic, the World Economic Forum forewarned of a looming remittance crisis; but Bangladeshis working abroad bucked the trend. While the amount of money migrant workers send home globally is projected to decrease by 14 percent by 2021, according to the World Bank, Bangladesh reportedly witnessed a "whopping" 53.5 percent year on year increase in remittance flows during the July-September period in 2020. Buoyed by these news, the government has outlined a plan to raise USD 150 billion through remittances in the next five years.

Who are these Bangladeshis? According to the information of Bangladesh's Wage Earners' Welfare Board, around 1.2 crore Bangladeshis workers reside abroad, and they are spread out all over the globe. The National Board of Revenue (NBR) categorises a Non-resident Bangladeshis (NRB) as a Bangladesh citizen living abroad with valid status. This could either be as a foreign country's permanent resident or with a valid work permit. However, this definition still leaves out those who are living abroad without a "valid status" and make

contributions to our economic well-being. While Saudi Arabia and UAE were the first and second "countries of origin" in terms of remittances for Bangladesh, over the last seven months, the US has taken the second spot, overtaking the UAE. And needless to mention that many of the Bangladeshis living in the US do not have any legal status. The flow of remittances has helped us to reduce poverty, overcome food insecurity, support balance of payments, and boost our economic growth.

The question is, how else do the NRBs contribute to the development of Bangladesh besides providing remittance? We can identify three additional areas: investment, networking, and knowledge transfer. Migrants engage in direct and portfolio investments, or through the establishment of new ventures in their homelands. Much has been written in professional journals and the media about the impact of the "diaspora" on their home countries. Many countries, both developed and developing, have successfully tapped into their respective diaspora to enhance the growth and development in their respective home economies.

Looking into the future, we can see the wisdom of the statement made by Yevgeny Kuznetsov more than a decade ago. "Expatriates do not need to be investors or make financial contributions to have an impact on their home countries. They can serve as "bridges" by providing access to markets, sources of investment, and expertise. Influential members of diasporas can shape public debate, articulate reform plans, and help implement reforms and new projects. Policy expertise and managerial and marketing knowledge are the most significant resources of diaspora networks."

Increasingly, even the entry-level jobs they take in factory production or the healthcare sector in host countries demand and teach problem-solving skills that blur the line between management and labour. Whether these new skills can be redeployed back home is an open question, but the changing nature of migrants' work suggests the possibility that these "birds of passage", traditionally in transit between a native land that cannot support them and a rich country that remains alien, may one day form distinctive, medium-skill diaspora networks that complement the diasporas of managers and entrepreneurs.

Bangladeshi diaspora comes in different

shapes and sizes, and a government agency dedicated to NRB affairs would be well-advised to consider these angles in proposing future policy actions. A "one size fits all" policy or programme will not be able to take full advantage of the remittance pool or talent, and a sizeable magnitude will remain untapped. For example, during my recent discussion, Rezaul Haque, a senior manager at Intel Corporation mentioned that many of his fellow NRBs, as well as tech giants,

Migration Policy Institute recommend that "governments can certainly do more to remove obstacles and create opportunities for diasporas to engage in economic development. Specific actions include identifying goals, mapping diaspora location and skills, fostering a relationship of trust with the diaspora, maintaining sophisticated means of communication with the diaspora, and ultimately encouraging diaspora contributions to national development."

different countries. Migrants are also more likely to know the regulatory environment in both countries, which are crucial for establishing bilateral business transactions. With the help of the Chinese diaspora, China has won the race to become the world's factory. In a similar vein, with the help of the Indian diaspora, India could become the world's technology lab. Capital from diaspora investment and entrepreneurship has also played an important role in industrialised countries, such as Israel, Ireland, and Italy, furthering economic growth and innovation.

What is also missing, however, is a way to inform the NRBs and a way for them to stay connected to the research, educational, and governmental systems in Bangladesh. Given the reservations that the expatriate communities have about the existing economic system (since its very inefficiencies were prime reasons for emigrating), the formulation of any network method to enable the transfer of knowledge should be a first step.

One idea that has been implemented in other countries is the creation of a professional network on the internet. The creation of an electronic database along the lines of LinkedIn for Bangladeshis can be a platform for NRBs from various backgrounds, such as STEM experts, SME owners, and skilled professionals. The goal of the network would be to provide a registry of highly skilled Bangladeshis who live and work abroad; a global map and network of NRB scientists, professionals, and entrepreneurs; and updated information on opportunities in Bangladesh.

The most important factor that we need to keep in mind is that NRBs have a lack of information about how they can help Bangladesh and how to connect with other Bangladeshis with similar professional interests. Whether or not an expatriate intends to physically return soon, there is an immediate need for a virtual return of knowledge and experience as well as interconnectivity with Bangladesh. The defining characteristic of networks of expatriate professionals, also known as "diaspora networks", is that they pertain to talent—be it technical, managerial, or creative.

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A mural celebrating the Bangladeshi community in Detroit, painted by artist Victor "Marka27" Quinonez as part of the OneHamtramck mural project titled "Bangladesh: Coming to America."

PHOTO: COLLECTED

are keenly interested in partnership with government entities.

Secondly, an NRB's decision to save and remit is to a considerable degree driven by a rational process where he/she weighs the choices he/she faces with his/her earnings, and the opportunities for investment in both the host country and Bangladesh. While NRBs receive some savings/investment benefits offered by Bangladesh Bank, including Non-Resident Foreign Currency Deposit, Wage Earners' Development Bond, Non-Resident Investor's Taka Account, etc, there is a need for these to be streamlined.

Kathleen Newland and Sonia Plaza of

Migrants and diasporas are, to some extent, "unexploited capital".

Our government and the various ministries and departments, including the Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment and Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) need to review their programmes to draw in the expertise of NRBs.

I will not dwell on the strengths that migrant entrepreneurs and technologists bring to the table. Migrants can reduce the transaction costs by assisting businesses in navigating informal trade barriers and overcoming the communication and language barriers typical of two natives from two

BOOK REVIEW

Rivers and sustainable development

A compelling argument on protecting rivers for environmental and social justice



DARRYL KNUDSEN

As the executive director of International Rivers, I highly recommend *Rivers and Sustainable Development*:

Alternative Approaches and their Implications by Professor S Nazrul Islam (2020). Whether you are just getting started on your journey to becoming a river activist or you are already an expert in water policy and sustainable development, this book will widen your knowledge and better equip you in the fight of our lifetime.

disrupt a river's flow—something he dubs the "Commercial and Cordon policy approach" prioritises commercial gains while ignoring the long-term negative ecological, and ultimately human, consequences of doing so.

Islam's purpose is to support countries to make informed policy decisions about river management, many of which can be counterintuitive. I particularly appreciate his acknowledgment of the important role civil society organisations and grassroots movements must play in setting the policy agenda if it is to be fair, equitable, and successful.

This book is eminently readable, keeping the research accessible to increase participation in river policy worldwide. Islam



This work is a welcome addition to the ever-growing evidence base that can be used to fight against the inequitable impacts of rapid ecological degradation, human rights abuses, and climate injustice at large.

Rivers and Sustainable Development (2020) goes hand in hand with our work at International Rivers. Most recently, this work echoes our latest report and online global call *Rivers for Recovery*. Like the book, we make the case that protecting rivers for environmental and social justice is the necessary path in a Covid-19 recovery. At International Rivers, we work to uplift river communities, specifically Indigenous peoples, to support their own ecologically minded river governance. Thus, as the book makes clear, understanding the synergies between human rights, social justice and environmental sustainability is both essential and critically important.

Darryl Knudsen is Executive Director at International Rivers, an international organisation focusing on protecting rivers and human rights.

Professor Islam's book provides a timely and compelling case that the best way to manage rivers in line with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is to allow rivers to flow naturally without the restraints of artificial barriers such as levees, or embankments, something he calls the "Ecological and Open policy approach."

Professor Islam's book provides a timely and compelling case that the best way to manage rivers in line with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is to allow rivers to flow naturally without the restraints of artificial barriers such as levees, or embankments, something he calls the "Ecological and Open policy approach." He argues that the widespread practice of using industrial and artificial developments to divert, block, or

impressively weaves a varying range of case studies to illustrate the implications of both the Ecological and Commercial river policy approaches. Together, these case studies demonstrate how ecologically centred policy agendas promote true economic, social, and environmental sustainability and are thus instrumental in achieving the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.



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বাংলাদেশ মুক্তিযোদ্ধা কল্যাণ ট্রাস্টের বিভিন্ন মামলা/মোকদ্দমা পরিচালনার জন্য প্যানেল আইনজীবী নিয়োগের নিমিত্ত বাংলাদেশের স্থায়ী নাগরিকদের নিকট হতে দরখাস্ত আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে। আগ্রহী ও যোগ্যতা সম্পন্ন প্রার্থীদেরকে তাদের জীবন বৃত্তান্ত ও প্রয়োজনীয় সনদপত্রের সত্যায়িত ফটোকপি, সদ্যতোলা পাসপোর্ট সাইজের ছবিসহ আগামী ১১/০৪/২০২১ খ্রিঃ তারিখের অফিস সময়ের মধ্যে সচিব, বাংলাদেশ মুক্তিযোদ্ধা কল্যাণ ট্রাস্ট, স্বাধীনতা ভবন, ৮৮ মতিঝিল বাণিজ্যিক এলাকা, ঢাকা-এর নিকট আবেদন করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো। উল্লেখ্য বীর মুক্তিযোদ্ধা/বীর মুক্তিযোদ্ধার সন্তানকে এই নিয়োগে অগ্রাধিকার দেয়া হবে। তবে মুক্তিযোদ্ধার প্রমাণ স্বরূপ অবশ্যই মুক্তিযুদ্ধ বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়ের সনদপত্র ও গেজেট আবেদনের সাথে সংযুক্ত করতে হবে।

যোগ্যতা ও অভিজ্ঞতা :

- ১। আগ্রহী প্রার্থীকে অবশ্যই বাংলাদেশ বার কাউন্সিলের সনদসহ সদস্য পদ থাকতে হবে।
- ২। দেওয়ানি ও ফৌজদারি/শ্রম বিষয়ক মামলা পরিচালনার ক্ষেত্রে কম পক্ষে ১০(দশ) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।
- ৩। জমিজমা সংক্রান্ত বিষয়/চুক্তিপত্র/অংশিদারী চুক্তিপত্র/ডেভেলাপারের সাথে সম্পাদিত চুক্তিপত্র/আমোক্তারনামার ড্রাফটিং-এ পারদর্শী হতে হবে।

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