



THE ROLE OF DIASPORA in the economic development of Bangladesh

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In recent years, the diaspora community has emerged as a pivotal force in shaping the economic landscape of Bangladesh, their contributions marked by a blend of remittances, investments, and intellectual exchanges that bolster the country's march towards sustainable development. With an estimated 13 million Bangladeshis residing abroad, spanning across

The Bangladeshi diaspora stands as a powerful testament to the human spirit and its capacity to bridge geographical divides. With its vast economic contributions and potential for further engagement, the Bangladeshi diaspora stands as a cornerstone of the nation's development.

162 countries, the diaspora stands as the sixth-largest migrant group globally, their influence echoing across the financial and social spheres of Bangladesh.

HISTORY OF THE BANGLADESHI DIASPORA

The roots of the Bangladeshi diaspora can be traced back to

the British Raj, a period where mobility was tightly controlled. Yet, even amidst strict regulations and discriminatory policies, seeds of migration were sown. Notably, lascars from Sylhet, renowned for their seafaring skills, served on British ships, forging connections and establishing small communities in port cities like London and Liverpool. These early pioneers, though limited in number, laid the groundwork for future generations and ignited a spirit of exploration within Bangladeshi communities.

The discovery of oil in the Middle East during the 1970s marked a turning point. With booming economies and an insatiable demand for labour, countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates opened their doors, welcoming eager Bangladeshi workers. This "golden age" of migration witnessed a surge of primarily unskilled and semi-skilled individuals seeking better economic opportunities. Remittances sent back home became a crucial lifeline for the newly independent Bangladesh, fueling its fledgling economy and transforming the lives of countless families.

By the 1980s, migration patterns began to diversify. Skilled professionals, equipped with newfound educational

opportunities and driven by aspirations for higher living standards, started setting their sights on Western nations like the UK, the US, and Canada. This period also saw an increase in migration to Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia and Singapore, where burgeoning economies offered attractive prospects for skilled Bangladeshi workers. The diaspora was no longer a singular phenomenon concentrated in the Middle East; it had blossomed into a multifaceted community spread across the globe.

THE DIASPORA PROPELLING DEVELOPMENT

As Bangladesh's economy developed, internal and external migration patterns continued to evolve. While remittance flows remain vital, concerns about "brain drain" have emerged. With skilled professionals increasingly migrating permanently for better career prospects, the potential impact on Bangladesh's long-term development cannot be ignored.

Development, fundamentally, is propelled by the transfer of knowledge, technology, and investment, where the diaspora communities, with their advantageous global presence, are uniquely positioned to play a decisive role. The experiences of countries like China and India

illustrate the transformative impact diaspora engagement can have on a nation's economic development, leveraging their knowledge, experience, and investments to foster indigenous growth.

Remittances from the diaspora have long been the lifeblood of Bangladesh's economy, providing a crucial source of foreign currency. Despite the global economic turmoil induced by the Covid-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions, in 2022, the World Bank reported that Bangladesh received a staggering \$22.1 billion in remittances, constituting 8.3% of the GDP – a remarkable feat and the highest remittance-to-GDP ratio in South Asia. These inflows directly impact millions of families, improving living standards, financing education, and boosting local economies. Research by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) suggests that 70% of remittance recipients use the funds for essential needs, while a significant portion is invested in agriculture, small businesses, and housing, driving local entrepreneurship and job creation.

This financial infusion has

not only elevated the country's foreign currency reserves past \$46 billion but also played a significant role in stabilising the balance of payment and enhancing the nation's credit rating.

The strategic deployment of these funds ranges from household support to significant investments in the local economy, reshaping the rural and urban economic landscapes alike. The diaspora's financial contributions have catalysed the growth of various sectors, including agriculture, education, and healthcare, thereby uplifting the standard of living and fostering a more vibrant, inclusive economy.

For instance, my family was part of the 1990s' second wave of Bangladeshi migration to the UK, originating from Bishwanath in Sylhet. Over the years, they've consistently sent remittances back to our village, providing crucial assistance for educational fees, healthcare expenses, and emergency support during the frequent floods in Eastern Bangladesh. This personal experience has deeply influenced my career path too.

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