

# Chapter 4

## International Migration in Bangladesh: A Political Economic Overview



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### 4.1 Introduction

Bangladesh has become a familiar name in the discourse of migration. According to the International Organization of Migration (IOM), there are approximately seven million Bangladeshis currently living abroad. Scholars recognize migration as a survival strategy of families experiencing resource constraints and uncertain economic prospects (Afsar, 2003; Rashid, 2016; Siddiqi, 2003; Sikder et al., 2017), which is consistent with a long history of research on household coping strategies in the Global South, especially in the context of population growth, rural development, and social change in agrarian societies (Grigg, 1980; Guest, 1989; Wood, 1981). Since the mid-1970s, Bangladesh has been undergoing massive social changes characterized by rapid population growth and an increasing presence of development. As one of the most densely populated countries globally, rural households in Bangladesh cannot find agricultural employment for all members and consequently turn to informal economic activity and migration to the cities and towns (Afsar, 2003; Chaudhury & Curlin, 1975). The conditions in home communities to ‘push’ the migrants to move abroad and find employment continuously strengthened with the worsening of adverse impacts of climate change, further increasing outmigration (Bernzen et al., 2019; Carrico & Donato, 2019; Islam, 2018). This, perhaps, results in a preference among migration scholars to approach migration in Bangladesh from economic perspectives (Siddiqi, 2003). Although it is true that people migrate first and foremost due to hardship in maintaining a comfortable and secure life in their origin community and search of better opportunities elsewhere, their migration inevitably involves a range of socio-cultural and political factors that decisively shape their actual migratory practices. As such, we need to focus on the non-economic aspects for an adequate understanding of migration. Moving away

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from economic approaches, I present a brief account of the political economy of migration in Bangladesh, highlighting the state's role in shaping migration.

Migration scholars have recognized the importance of the state in affecting migration, which is understood from a political economic perspective. In his paper "The Political Economy of Migration in an era of Globalization", Douglas Massey conceptualizes political economy as "policies that govern the number, characteristics, and terms under which foreigners enter a country have become salient policy and political issues worldwide" (Massey, 2009, p.25). International migration involves crossing the border and entering another country to work and earn money. Thus, a migrant inevitably encounters the destination state at its border, which exercises sovereign authority over whom to allow in and whom to stop from entering (Zolberg, 1999). Hollifield (2004) observes that the destination state is becoming inherently interested in regulating migration as much as maintaining the security of the state and the wellbeing of its citizens. Recognizing such a role of the state at migration destination is not new, though. For instance, Michael Burawoy (1976) observed how the destination state would directly regulate migration in a way that resulted in family separation by allowing only the economically functioning males and defining their migration as temporary by requiring them to repatriate once their employment ended for whatever reason. Despite separating the migrants from their families – Burawoy notes – the state necessitated interdependence between the migrants and their families across the border in an interesting way: the families depended on the migrants' remittance for subsistence while the migrants needed to maintain their membership in the family to which they would return due to inability to settle permanently in the destination country. This shows that migration, as well as their remittances, are outcomes of the immigration policy of the destination state.

Contrary to the generalized idea of migration as an economic endeavor popularized by the neoclassical economic theories of migration whereby different combinations of push and pull factors shape migration, world-system scholars recognize the origin of migration in the social, economic, and political transformations due to the penetration of capitalist markets into not-capitalist societies (Sassen, 1988). Given that the state remains one of the most potent arbiters in the era of neoliberal globalization (Harvey, 2007), it is evident that the state continues to shape international migration. This role of the state was most explicit in the post-WW-II era labor recruitment programs in Europe and the US, whereby individual foreign workers were admitted legally for a certain period but had to return afterward (Abadan-Unat & Bilecen, 2020; Calavita, 1992). The state exercises its control over migration by various means. The destination states put in place extensive immigration and border control policies and practices that define the migrants as "permanent residents", who are allowed to settle in the country; "temporary worker" and short-term "visitor", who are allowed to stay for a certain period; or "undocumented" foreigners, who must evade the legal procedures upon entry (Castles, 2011; Munck, 2008; Neumayer, 2006). Another way for the states – particularly in the Middle East and East Asia – to shape migration is using immigration laws that attach migrants to a particular employer or job, house them in workers' colonies and restrict their labor market mobility, and prevent them from overstaying visa through frequent raids,

strict security checks and other measures (Khalaf, 2015; Seol & Skrentny, 2009; Shipper, 2002; Tseng & Wang, 2011).

Despite considerable attention to the role of the destination states in shaping migration, the role of state in the origin country remains relatively understudied. With the growing interest in migrants' remittances, a small number of scholars recently explored the origin state's direct participation in promoting migration to maximize foreign currency earning. For instance, Rodriguez (2010) recognizes what she calls "migrant citizenship" by which the Philippines state reconfigures nationalism by drawing migrants into the rhetoric of filial piety, thereby encouraging them to send remittances. Besides, Guevarra (2010) argues that the Philippines state works with a gendered and racialized moral economy, which bases the ideal behavior of migrant workers on remittances. Iskander (2010) looks at development policy more explicit in recognizing the state's role in migration and remittances. By adopting what she calls "interpretative engagement", the state of Morocco and Mexico formulate policies that channel remittances for investment in community development and enhance the migrants' efforts to improve the lives of their families and communities, and more broadly, their nation. These studies establish the role of the origin state in shaping migrants' employment abroad and sending remittances home, thereby demonstrating the need to move beyond the individualistic perception of migration inherent in the dominant economic approaches to a political economic approach migration.

This chapter explores the role of the origin state by looking at migration in Bangladesh. What follows is a brief historical account of migration in Bangladesh going back to the British colonial era to adequately understand how the state has been involved in migration in this region well before Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation state. Then, it presents an introduction to various types of migration from Bangladesh to different destination countries, the causes, and consequences of those migrations to recognize the role of the state in shaping migration contours.

## 4.2 Migration History in Bangladesh

Perhaps because of the inherent methodological nationalism in migration studies (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002), discussions of migration in Bangladesh often begin with the birth of the country in 1971 as an independent nation state. This is problematic as Bangladeshis have had mobilities within and across the national borders for centuries.<sup>1</sup> As Alexander et al. (2015) observe, there are two characteristics of migration studies in South Asia: first, a preoccupation with the diaspora overseas labor historians and sociologists looking at indenture labor, the establishment of

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<sup>1</sup> Bangladeshis are ethnically from the Bengali people, living in both Bangladesh as well as Indian States of West Bengal, Tripura and parts of Assam.

South Asian diasporic communities, and more recently, anthropologists exploring cultural globalization; and secondly, the development of an idea about “the progressive ‘sedentarization’ and territorialization’ of South Asia in the colonial period”, which offers “a picture of a society in which internal migration had become rare and agrarian colonization an exceptional activity” (p.3). After identifying limitations in the conventional approaches to studying migration in South Asia, they argue that the study of migration in Bangladesh must begin with “the widespread mobility in the eastern India before the partition of 1947”.

The pre-1947 partition migration can be seen as a continuation of larger migratory flows originated under the colonial world order whereby the colonial empires would mobilize – first, thousands of migrants from the European countries to settle in the so-called New World (e.g., North America, and Australia) (Bauman, 2011), and secondly, indentured laborer to work in the plantations in the colonized regions around the world (Connolly, 2018). Except for a small piece of land in the central part of Bengal, including Kolkata and Dhaka, accessible through navigation, the large portion of the Bengal delta was extremely difficult to move around due to being crisscrossed by hundreds of rivers, long rainy season, widespread piracy due to an absence of an effective central administration. While the Moghuls have been credited for the economic prosperity in Bengal brought about through agricultural expansion and establishing trade with Delhi and the outer world, it was concentrated only in the central zone leaving much of the delta unconnected and isolated. Such was the case until the mid-nineteenth century. As James Taylor (1840)<sup>2</sup> wrote in his travelogue, people could travel between Dhaka and Kolkata, the two most important cities of the British colonial Bengal, for only half the year, which involved twenty-two ‘stages’ and twenty changes of the ferry. That is, travel within the Bengal was dangerous and prohibitively expensive. The transfer of power to rule India from the East India Company to the British empire in 1857 initiated an internal transformation of the British Raj.

Alexander et al. (2015) note that a massive improvement in transportation systems involving the introduction of railways, steamships, and roads set the foundation for mass movements of people in and out of Eastern India, including Bengal. By the mid-twentieth century, Bengal was integrated with other parts of the British colonial empire in India and beyond. This was also when tea, jute and coal – three important commodities of the emerging industrial world system – were found in Bengal and its surrounding regions. This created a unique occasion for private capital to exploit natural resources and cheap labor in the region by investing in tea plantation, jute cultivation and processing and coal extraction. The government also found opportunities of increasing tax-income and consolidating imperial rule for the British colonial administration. These industries and transportation networks eventually connected Bengal with parts of northern Madras, the Central Provinces, Orissa, Eastern United Provinces, and Bihar, with Assam and Burma to the east and

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<sup>2</sup>James Taylor, *A Sketch of the Topography and Statistics of Dacca, Calcutta, 1840*, in Roy, “‘Where is Bengal?’”, p. 128.

Nepal to the north. By the early twentieth century, the whole Eastern Part of British India was transformed into a vast, interconnected zonal labor market in which Bengal emerged as “an exceptionally intense zone of mobility” (Alexander et al., 2015, p.11).

In this historical context, we find how the British empire laid the foundation of contemporary migration in Bangladesh. The tea plantations, jute mills, and coal industries attracted thousands of migrant workers from the neighboring provinces. The local labor force was available only during the seasonal breaks in agriculture, encouraging the employers to turn to the workers coming in Bengal from outside, called *pardesis* (outsiders). The extreme exploitative working conditions in the tea gardens, jute mills, and mining sectors also would dissuade local agriculturalists from seeking employment in these sectors, allowing for in-migration. One noticeable emigration from Bengal involved the people from Sylhet (eastern part of Bengal), who would find jobs in the steamships at Kolkata dockyard commuting between Kolkata and various port cities in the British colonial empire around the world (Bald, 2013; Gardner, 1995).

While the penetration of capital in the Bengal region and subsequent migration is well-known, the role of the late-colonial state in promoting migration out of Bengal is less explored. As the British Raj continued to consolidate in India and annexed parts of the Eastern hill tracts and lower-Burma, the colonial administration grew exponentially. Many educated Bengalis took jobs at various levels of the colonial administration, which would often involve relocating to their workstations in faraway places from one’s ancestral home. Famous Bengali novelist Sharat Chandra Chatterjee once took an office job and relocated to Rangoon.<sup>3</sup> He eloquently described in his writings about a Bengali professional community in Burma. The practice of getting some education and finding service jobs in various levels of public administration became so common that the educated faction among the Bengalese became well-known for their unwillingness to work in the farm or factory and preference for office works, which came to be called “*babu-culture*” with a negative connotation (Dutta, 2021). In fact, the trend gained such momentum that:

Landed families would send sons to nearby towns and cities to attend Higher English schools and colleges. This pattern of movement by the educated between the ancestral village and the urban centres was so common that it became ingrained in the Bengali language: as Nirad Chaudhuri’s autobiography recalls, the term ‘*basha*’ was given to the digs in the town, with the more emotive term ‘*bari*’ reserved for the ancestral village home. (Alexander et al., 2015, p.16).

So, there were two major trends in terms of migration in and out of British Bengal: one involved the immigration of workers from surrounding provinces into the jute industry, coal mines, and tea gardens, who gradually settled in certain parts of the Bengal delta over a few generations, and the other was an exodus of Bengalis who took jobs in government services in other parts of British India and beyond. This is why Alexander et al. (2015) argue that society in Bengal under the British role went

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<sup>3</sup>the capital of Burma under the British colonial rule.

through simultaneous processes of stabilization (followed by integration) of working communities and large flows (i.e., mobility) of migrants.

The post-1947 partition migration is primarily understood in terms of the movement of the Hindus and the Muslims from their ancestral homes to India and Pakistan respectively (Bharadwaj et al., 2008; Roy, 2013). This was due to the widespread communal violence inflicted upon millions of ordinary people between the Hindus and the Muslims fighting for their separate independent countries out of British India (Zamindar, 2013). The ongoing internal migration within the British province of Bengal – now divided into the Indian state of West Bengal and the Pakistani province of East Pakistan – also changed along religious line whereby the Muslims from Indian territories moved in East Pakistan/Bengal (Bangladesh since 1971) and Hindus moved out of East Pakistan (i.e., Bengal) into India (i.e., West Bengal and beyond).

### 4.3 Migration in Contemporary Bangladesh

As noted above, Bangladesh has earned its name as a major source country of international migration and one of the top ten recipient countries of migrants' remittances. The literature on Bangladeshi migration has also grown considerably in recent years. Based on a review of the works, we can differentiate among four broad types of migration from Bangladesh in terms of their composition and migration destination:

First, the Bangladeshi diaspora is represented overwhelmingly by migrants from the North-Eastern region of Sylhet to the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia (Gardner, 1995, 2002; Kibria, 2011; Rozario & Gow, 2003; Siddiqui, 2004). The origin of this migration dates back to the British colonial era when young single male migrants from Sylhet would travel to find jobs on British steamships at Kolkata dockyard and sojourned to faraway seaports in the British colonial empire. Before the labor migration to the Oil-rich Arabian Gulf countries, this was the primary flow of Bangladeshi international migration (Adams, 1987; Choudhury, 1993; Gardner & Sukur, 1994; Gardner, 1995).

Secondly, the type of migration that familiarizes Bangladesh in the academic and policy discourses is the short-term labor migration from Bangladesh to the oil-producing Middle East and newly industrializing countries in the South-East Asian region. The majority of these temporary migrants are male workers who would go abroad for short periods and return after their employment contract ends. Among the destinations of these migrants, Saudi Arabia hosts the largest number, followed by the UAE; the other destinations are Malaysia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Libya, Singapore, and South Korea. Being a Muslim-majority country, Bangladesh has restricted migration by women (Belanger & Rahman, 2013; Oishi, 2005). As a consequence, only about 150,000 women left Bangladesh as temporary migrant workers from 1991 to 2010. Recently, Bangladesh has reformed its migration policy to encourage women's migration, with the result of a six-fold increase in the

number of women migrant workers, from 19,094 in 2007 to 121,925 in 2017 (BMET, 2018). Scholars recognize the source of this migration in rapidly growing labor demand in the destination countries: the rise of oil price in the wake of the oil crisis of 1973 and the development of mega-infrastructure projects in the Middle Eastern countries, and industrial agriculture (particularly palm and rubber gardens in Malaysia) and construction and industrial sectors in Singapore. Much like the Bracero program between the US and Mexico and the Gastarbeiter (guest worker) program between Germany and Turkey, governments of these destination countries took institutionalized recruitment initiatives to bring cheap labor from Bangladesh to satisfy the labor demand.

Thirdly, there is another type of migration from Bangladesh to neighboring countries, particularly to India. Given the organic nature of the borders between India and Bangladesh, this migration often involves unauthorized border-crossing and is considered ‘illegal’ by India, which results in severe diplomatic disputes and tension between the governments of both countries (Samaddar, 1999; Chatterji, 1999; Rahman and van Schendel, 2003; Ramachandran, 2003). The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) reports that in 2013, India was home to 3.2 million Bangladeshi residents who had migrated into the country and settled there. Not surprisingly, the Bangladesh government officially protested the report within 3 days of its publication, calling it “a carbon-copy of Indian media that had been claiming so over the past several years.” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh admitted that some ten million Bangladeshis had crossed the border during the country’s liberation war in 1971 but maintained that they had returned after 9 months. These migrants typically include people from poor rural areas in Bangladesh, who travel to India searching for casual works in large Indian cities, such as Mumbai, Delhi or Kolkata, and some find work in low-paid industrial and mining sectors (Gardner, 2012; Hussain, 2013).

Finally, a final type of migration from Bangladesh is primarily towards Southern European countries. Originating in the wake of the first Gulf War, and increasing significantly in the last few decades to countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Cyprus, this migration includes young, middleclass, urbanized and educated (Knights, 1996; Zeitlyn, 2006; Mapril, 2007; Mapril, 2014; Morad & Puppa, 2019). In recent years, this migration flow came to world news media as a few hundreds of Bangladeshis migrated to European countries through clandestine processes. For instance, on May 5, 2017, the Independent published a report that Bangladeshis constituted the highest number among the refugees on boats to Europe. On November 25, 2012, BBC News reported that dozens of Bangladeshis and Burmese Rohingya Muslim refugees died every year trying to migrate to Malaysia by boat illegally. Another news report mentioned the arrest of 9 Bangladeshis who attempted to cross the Greece-Bulgaria border illegally.

Conventionally, we see migration as an economic strategy of the migrants and their families whereby they aim for access to additional income and better economic opportunities for their families. But studies have increasingly been recognizing how the state at migrants’ destinations involve in managing international migration with its policies and practices that decisively shape migration and the experiences of

people moving across borders. Although somewhat implicit, the typology of contemporary migration from Bangladesh also alludes to an active role of the destination states by highlighting their capacity to regulate migration. We, however, are yet to see an adequate understanding of the role of Bangladesh – if any – in shaping migration.

The Bangladesh government sees international migration positively. For migrant remittances contribute more than 6% of its annual GDP and constitute the second-largest source of earning foreign currencies after the export of readymade garments. The steadily expanding mechanisms of migration governance in Bangladesh – for instance, the establishment of a new ministry of expatriate welfare and several other departments within the government dedicated to serving migrants – testify to this idea of the state's kin interest in migration like some other origin countries of international migration (such as the Philippines) in the Global South that actively participates in promoting migration.

#### 4.4 The Role of the State in Migration in Bangladesh

The active role of the state in migration in Bangladesh has been well-recognized now. But how does it shape the actual practices of migration? Ketty Gardner (1995) presents a vivid picture of how the state's policies affect actual practices of migration in the district of Sylhet: Gardner observed that it was the relatively affluent families that sent their sons to work on the British ships, and that many of these men ended up settling permanently in England. She noticed that the households in Sylhet were independent farmers and liable to pay the tax directly to the colonial administration, unlike those in other regions of Bengal, where farmers were tenants to the local Zamindars. In the face of increasing fragmentation of land and increasing tax burdens, these households would require additional income from outside their local and regional economy. Thus, they would invest substantial amounts of money in sending their young sons to work on the British ships and eventually migrate to England—sons who, in turn, would send remittance home. Finding this the most viable way to maintain and enhance social status in the village, most households adopted international migration as one of their primary coping strategies and for generations continued to send family members to England.<sup>4</sup> Similar socioeconomic processes can be observed during the post-liberation years of the 1970s, gaining momentum in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

During the second half of the 1970s, a new pattern of international migration emerged with the government actively engaging with the governments in the oil-rich Middle East countries. Although there had been a large migrant population from India and Pakistan in the Middle East, it included only a few Bangladeshis,

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<sup>4</sup>Gary Hamilton (1978) observed similar role of falling social structure in China, which – Hamilton argued – encouraged the upper- and upper-middleclass families to send their sons to the United States during the California Gold Rush.



who entered the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) as pilgrims and overstayed by taking employment. Their reputation for hard work, discipline, and productivity attracted the attention of Arab employers (WB, 1981), who began to send delegations to Bangladesh looking for more workers. Noticing this as a potential source of foreign income, the government of newly independent Bangladesh took steps to encourage and facilitate the migration of workers to the Middle East. The widespread malpractices in the private recruitment of migrant workers for Middle Eastern countries made the government realize a need for regulation.

Consequently, the government of Bangladesh established the Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training (BMET). It formulated laws and policies to regulate and license the private recruiters, provided other necessary services to them, and occasionally sent delegations to Middle Eastern countries in search of employment opportunities for Bangladeshi workers. Since its beginning, the BMET has facilitated the temporary migration of Bangladeshis to the Middle East and Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia, side by side with private recruiters. From 1976 to 2020, 32.11% of migrants went to Saudi Arabia and 18.09% to the United Arab Emirates. More than 25% went to four other Gulf countries combined: Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Malaysia and Singapore hosted another 14% (BMET, 2021).<sup>5</sup>

While the government has increasingly stepped in to facilitate overseas employment, its current share of labor migrants is only about 2%. About one-third (35%) are hired through private recruiters. In 2017, a total of 100,525 workers went abroad through official processing by the BMET, which covers all migrants who are actively recruited, either privately or by government bodies. The overwhelming bulk (63%) of foreign employment is procured by the migrants themselves and their families (International Organization for Migration, 2019). It is important to note that these numbers do not include thousands of other Bangladeshis who migrate to developed countries in North America, Europe, and Australia through family-sponsored immigration, higher education, and undocumented border-crossings. Thus, while the official narratives about migration in Bangladesh recognize the active participation of the government and commercial recruiters, international migration in Bangladesh is still a matter of the migrants and their families. So, it is obvious that the Bangladesh government plays its role in facilitating migration through a number of legal frameworks and supporting institutional infrastructures.

## 4.5 Legal and Institutional Mechanisms for Migration Management

The active participation of the state in managing migration in Bangladesh long precedes the birth of the country in its colonial past. The British colonial administration first introduced the Emigration Act of 1922, which the government of

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<sup>5</sup> Source: <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction> (accessed on 4 May 4, 2021).

Bangladesh amended its Emigration Ordinance of 1982. The government introduced a number of additional laws, including the Recruiting Agents Code of Conduct and License Rules of 2002, the Overseas Employment Policy of 2006, the Sixth Five Year Plan of 2011, the Overseas Employment and Migrants' Act of 2013, which was amended in the Overseas Employment Policy and Rule in 2016 and 2017.

## 4.6 Laws

Intending to reduce irregular flows and increase the scope of regular migration, the Bangladesh government formulated the Overseas Employment Policy of 2006, which supported the aspiring migrants to choose standard employment and protect their welfare. The scope of this law extends to safeguard the rights of and safety for migrant workers while abroad and their families in Bangladesh. As evident in its aims, this law paid particular attention to prevent malpractices in the recruitment process by strengthening institutional infrastructure and personnel, who would effectively enforce the law. The actual practices of implementing this law involved educating the aspiring migrants with necessary information and training so that they can become competitive in the global labor market. The government, however, has so far failed to come up with a comprehensive action plan towards fully implementing this law. Instead, particular sections of the law would be enacted on an ad hoc basis with minimal monitoring or evaluation. Consequently, the government revised and formalized this law into the Overseas Employment and Migrants' Act, 2013.

A closer look at the Overseas Employment and Migrants' Act of 2013 reveals that the law primarily targeted the private recruiters in Bangladesh, who are infamous for adopting varieties of profiteering malpractices (Afsar, 2009; Deshingkar et al., 2019; Rahman, 2012). Notably, several sections of this law defined recruiting policies and practices with enforceable punishments if violated. For instance, section 9 specified a list of professional background and paper works necessary for anyone planning to enter the migrant recruiting business and apply for a license. By making the license mandatory for this business, this section effectively outlawed all intermediaries and sub-agents. This section also allowed the government to charge a license fee to the applicant to issue a recruitment agent license, thereby creating a source of tax income for the government. Section 10 of this act made it necessary for a recruiting agency to have at least 60% capital ownership by a Bangladeshi citizen living in the country. Section 11 made this ownership non-transferable and valid only for 3 years after which it must be renewed. Section 13 elaborated the reasons for potential cancellation or suspension of the license, while sections 14 permitted the recruiting agents to open branch offices should they want to expand their business. Section 15 defined the responsibilities of recruiting agents to ensure safe migration and protection of the workers' interests. Finally, a

performance-based grading system for the classification of recruitment agents by the government in collaboration with the IOM has been added to assess the recruiting agents' conduct.

The law has so far been limited in achieving the stipulated level of regulation over the recruiting agents, particularly to the strong opposition of the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) – the national association of the recruiting agents.

## 4.7 Five Year Plans

Another area to look for the Bangladesh government's role in migration is its 5-year national development plans, particularly the Sixth Five Year Plan (published in 2011). This critical policy paper emphasized increasing the skills of the migrant workers. Given that the stock of Bangladeshi migrant workers was overwhelmingly in unskilled sectors, the government planned to enhance their skill level so that the migrants could find better-paying jobs and earn higher, which would significantly increase the remittances inflow to the country. Specifically, the goal of the new strategy is to expand overseas employment of skilled labor from 35% to 50% of the overseas workforce. In the following Seventh Five Year Plan (published in 2016), migration was included in the set of primary goals to reach foreign employment in the service sectors. While the goals in this policy paper were ambitious, there was hardly any clear pathway to achieve those devised by the government so far.

## 4.8 Migration Diplomacy

The Bangladesh government has been particularly active and considerably successful in migration diplomacy. The country is an active member of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and hosted the ninth GFMD Summit in 2016. Bangladesh is also a member of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Council.

The government of Bangladesh uses two major diplomatic instruments to facilitate migration stipulating the terms and conditions under which Bangladeshi migrant workers are employed in a country of destination: bilateral agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoU). As of 2019, Bangladesh has signed two bilateral labor agreements (BLAs) with Qatar and Kuwait and MoUs with the following: Cambodia, Bahrain, Brunei Darussalam, the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Maldives, Malaysia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Singapore, the Republic of Korea and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, it has signed a memorandum of

## **4.9 Cooperation (MoC) with Japan in 2018**

Besides engaging with the governments of the destination countries of Bangladeshi migration, the government actively seeks cooperation from the diaspora and civil society organizations (CSO) within the country. The Ministry of Finance organized an international convention in early 2018, bringing together senior officials and experts from various departments to engage diasporas through what it calls a “PIE” approach (P for philanthropy, I for investment, and E for expert affiliation). Many Bangladeshi diaspora associations – already active in destination countries conducting socio-cultural activities and supporting Bangladeshi migrants abroad – had been invited. The Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) regularly engages the CSOs in national consultation processes on migration and development affairs.

## **4.10 Migration Governance Abroad**

Bangladesh government has established an extensive network of the Labor Welfare Wing of diplomatic missions abroad to monitor the protection of rights and interests of Bangladeshi migrants. Currently, there are 29 Labor Welfare Wings in 26 countries among the destinations of Bangladeshi migrants. These offices assess the authenticity of recruiting contracts abroad, scrutinize applications for a work visa before the migrants embarking on the flights, ensuring security in the workplace, including adequate insurance to cover job hazards, and so forth.

## **4.11 Financial Services for the Migrants**

To facilitate migration for the poor, the Bangladesh government has established a specialized bank named the Probashi Kallyan Bank (PKB). This bank provides collateral-free loans to migrant workers, provides loan facilities to returnees to begin income-generating activities, facilitates easier remittance transfers, and encourages Bangladeshi wage earners abroad to invest in the country. In addition, the government has enacted the Wage Earners’ Welfare Board Act (WEWB Act) in 2018, which extended welfare services to migrant workers abroad and their dependents. Moreover, the government and Central Bank actively promote formal remittance schemes through a Wage Earners Remittance Scheme introduced in 1974. The government included cash incentives on remittances in the annual budget since the 2019–20 financial year to encourage financial inflows.

## 4.12 COVID19 Responses of the State

The COVID-19 pandemic had the most devastating impact on international migration. It directly impacted 13 million Bangladeshi migrant workers and 30 million dependents by intensifying numerous socio-economic crises such as joblessness, consumption of reserve funds by family members, and shrinking of the country's remittance inflow (Karim et al., 2020). According to the World Bank estimate, total remittances by migrant workers from Bangladesh would fall to \$14 billion for 2020 – around a 25% decrease from the previous year. As an attempt to ease the financial strain the COVID19 incurred on the migrants and their families, Bangladesh government offered incentives to encourage expatriate workers to send their money through legal channels (Aneja & Islam, 2020).

Given the active role the state has been playing in facilitating international migration and the importance of migration to national economy and society in Bangladesh, policy experts suggested that the government designs and implements well-coordinated public–private migrant workers' inclusive policies and creating a supportive environment for the returnee migrant workers to overcome this crisis (Chowdhury & Chakraborty, 2021). These recommendations included initiating dialogues and negotiation with the employing countries to protect the jobs and workers' rights to restore the employment and remittances during and after the pandemic, facilitate the expansion of the labor market across borders, and harness the valuable remittances for the overall welfare of the country.

The actual responses of Bangladesh government, however, were far short of what experts suggested to deal with the impacts of COVID19 pandemic on migrants and their dependents. While the government offered a total of \$100 billion in incentives to recuperate the economy, only about \$200 million (one-twentieth) was allocated for the migrants (Kumar & Pinky, 2021). Besides, the government could do little to negotiate with the destination country governments regarding job restoration and return of the migrants. Still, migrants managed to go back abroad, and the inflow of remittances began to increase (\$1092.96 million in April 2020 and \$2598.21 million in July 2020), which resulted in the ever highest foreign exchange reserve (\$38 billion) in Bangladesh according to the Bangladesh Bank Website.

## 4.13 Conclusion

Migration is generally seen as an individual's economic endeavor aimed at improving the livelihood of their families and themselves. A larger share of scholarship attention to migration is also oriented towards the financial consequences of migration evident in migration and development discourse. Another popular approach to migration is transnationalism, which celebrates the positive outcomes of migration for the individuals, their families, and communities in both the origin and

destination countries. While the state at migrants' destination receives increasing scholarly attention, the migration origin remains largely understudied. As this chapter shows, the origin state plays a vital role in migration. This is particularly true about poor origin countries in the Global South like Bangladesh, which depend on the remittance migrants send home from abroad. Thus, a cost-benefit analysis in studying individual's migration may be effectively applied to understand the state's role in the origin country. A Political economic analysis of the destination state has already produced necessary knowledge about how the governments in migration destinations (such as the USA and European countries) shape immigration by considering various economic and policy issues and negotiating these with the capitalists and the domestic working class. This has benefited in recognizing multiple problems and issues that allow for adequate policy responses to improve the experiences of the migrants. A similar exercise in understanding the role of the origin state may also offer important insights that would possibly help improve the migrants' experiences with adequate support from the state.

Bangladesh has developed several policy instruments, including laws, acts, and migration diplomacy with the states in the destinations of Bangladeshi migrants. Looking at each of those allows for assessing their success and challenges in achieving stated policy outcomes. The Bangladesh government's interest in promoting migration is clearly understood from its active participation in managing migration. The effectiveness of its policy instruments varies considerably with migration diplomacy, migration governance abroad and provisions for financial supports to the migrants shows promising outcomes while the acts targeting to improve recruiting system being stalled due to the opposition from organized pressure of the recruiters. Further studies are needed to adequately understand the state's role, which will potentially help formulate necessary measures to protect the migrants' rights and improve the overall positive impact of migration both for the migrants and their communities in the origin.

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