

Challenges in National and Regional Migration Governance



The phenomenon of attempting to migrate from Bangladesh through maritime routes has been an issue of concern for a considerable period of time. Migrants are motivated by different reasons and come from different backgrounds and locations. While there are Rohingyas in this group, there are also Bangladeshi nationals wanting to migrate to improve the economic situation. It is difficult to categorize them distinctively as forced or voluntary migrants.

Therefore, the issue is labeled as multiple concepts like boat migration, mixed maritime migration, and irregular boat migration. While there might be disagreements over scholarly categorization, there is none over the magnitude of challenges the issue poses on national and regional migration governance. It also exposes the loopholes in the migration governance system at the national and regional levels.

Irregular migration has an unholy nexus with human trafficking networks. Bangladesh has made significant progress in prioritising the issue of human trafficking, a fact that has recently been acknowledged by US representatives in Bangladesh. It has established seven special tribunals, created anti-trafficking task forces, and devised the National Action Plan 2018-2022 for the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking.

However, Bangladesh still needs to make progress on the field to stop this grave abuse of human rights. In this regard, one of the foremost tasks is to duly implement the Human Trafficking Act 2012 and Migrants Act 2013. The low rate of conviction of traffickers under these laws discourages the victims from pursuing legal actions against them. Moreover, entrenched corruption across different agencies makes the path to seeking justice harder for the victims. The situation gets more complicated due to the presence of Rohingya people as trafficking victims. The prolonged Rohingya refugee crisis has added different dimensions to this issue, posing challenges to Bangladesh in curbing human trafficking.

Migrant labours are considered to be one of the most important pillars of the Bangladeshi economy. However, the traditional Bangladeshi labor market is shrinking due to the global economic distress plagued by pandemic and war. When the opportunity of legally going abroad decreases, the inclination towards following irregular paths increases. While the Government is stepping up diplomatic efforts to explore new labour markets, more initiatives have to be implemented to make the human resources more skilled so that they can be sent to different regions across the globe.

A preventive approach, rather than a reactive one, must be maintained across all the leading agencies. While the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment is the leading agency in this regard, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have important roles in curbing irregular migration. Therefore, an effective coordination mechanism is necessary, which will provide preventive solutions in addition to reactive ones in emergencies.

It is high time Bangladesh formed a task force to prevent irregular boat migration from the country. The involvement of office of the Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioners (RRRC) and international partners dealing with the Rohingya refugees have to be included in the proposed task force. Bangladesh has been hosting more than a million Rohingyas over several years, and the situation is getting complicated, causing multifaceted problems for the host country. The existence of smuggling and trafficking networks also poses a threat to the national security of the country. The unfolding of the Rohingya refugee crisis is increasingly being linked with the security aspects of the country. The issue of irregular migration exposed multiple problems in the management and hosting of these forcibly displaced people from Myanmar.

South Asia is commonly not known to be conducive to regional integration and political cooperation. On top of that, the migration governance challenges for mixed maritime migration in South Asia are numerous and complex. The lack of a coordinated policy framework for managing mixed migration flows in the region is one of the major challenges. Regional leaders still have the opportunity to work together on this. However, the initiative will still be voluntary

as there is no legally binding arrangement in this regard. Most of the countries in this region are not signatories to the refugee conventions, which provide them with the right to decline any plea for granting asylum. Despite not being a signatory, Bangladesh granted refuge to more than a million Rohingya people forcibly displaced from Myanmar. Without regional cooperation, this crisis will not be solved in the near future, and Bangladesh might have to bear the burden for several more years, which will deteriorate the issue of irregular migration in this region.

South Asia also has weak border management systems, which often result in irregular migration and smuggling of migrants, including refugees and asylum-seekers. Mixed migration flows often include vulnerable groups such as refugees, asylum seekers, and victims of trafficking, who face numerous protection concerns in the region. They often face challenges in accessing basic services, such as healthcare and education, due to limited resources and limited capacities of local governments. Many South Asian countries lack the necessary resources to manage mixed migration flows effectively, including essential personnel, infrastructure, and technology. This results in the tragic loss of human lives who aspired to migrate for a better future.

The complex regional dynamics of South Asia, including ongoing conflicts, political instability, and economic inequality, might exacerbate migration governance challenges. National initiatives cannot be implemented successfully without a certain level of regional cooperation. There are also difficulties in collecting and managing data on mixed migration flows, which makes it challenging to implement effective migration governance policies. Regional cooperation might be started from seemingly apolitical issues like data sharing, which can be transcended to political issues in the future.

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