



A Newsletter on Refugee and Migratory Movements

**UDBASTU**  
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## National Workshop Calls for STREAMLINING THE LABOUR RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Migration has been the centre point of the Dhaka University based Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit's (RMMRU) activities. Knowledge gathered by RMMRU team over years through research on labour migration process culminated in the preparation of the *Strategy for Streamlining Labour Recruitment Process in Bangladesh*.

On 24 September 2001 a day-long workshop was organised for finalising the strategy by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of Bangladesh, in collaboration with Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) and the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit. Mr. Justice Latifur Rahman, Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government was due to be the Chief Guest of the Inaugural Session. However, he could not attend the programme but sent a message to the workshop. Distinguished advisors of the Caretaker Government, Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, Mr. M. Hafiz Uddin Khan, and Mr. Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury graced the workshop as Special Guests, while Advisor Ms. Rokia Afzal Rahman chaired the inaugural and concluding sessions. The workshop was divided into three working sessions and was attended by 200 participants.

In his inaugural message, Mr. Justice Latifur Rahman, Chief Advisor, Caretaker Government, recognised the central role of overseas employment in foreign exchange earning and reducing unemployment. He proposed a series of measures for the improvement of manpower export sector. Stating the worldwide general decline in demand for unskilled labour, he called for joint public-private endeavour in developing human resources and skilled manpower. He thanked the private recruiting agencies for their important role in overseas employment. He declared the workshop

open expressing his hope and confidence about its success.

Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, Advisor, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Civil Aviation and Tourism, held the view that migrant workers are the actual VIPs as they serve the country in different ways, putting up with various hardships in far-off lands. In return, instead of getting special treatment they are subjected to harassment from all quarters. They are treated with insensitivity by the Bangladeshi missions abroad. On the other hand, the public servants responsible for serving the migrants are constrained in many ways and that the foreign missions are not allocated enough funds required for providing necessary services to migrant workers. Foreign Ministry fails to get financial support from Finance Ministry due to bureaucratic red-tapism. He regretted that despite repeated calls from migrant workers and their organisations, the issue has not been addressed. He urged all concerned for bringing in positive changes that help the migrant workers.

Ms. Rokia Afzal Rahman, Advisor, Ministry of Labour and Employment, narrated her personal experiences about migrant workers. She traced back her personal motivation to three years back when she visited Saudi Arabia to perform *Umrah*. There she met some Bangladeshi migrant workers and was informed about their problems. Since then, until her becoming Advisor, she tried in various ways to mitigate the problems of migrant workers. Soon after her assumption of office of Advisor for Labour and Employment Ministry, she initiated the process of streamlining the labour recruitment process. She further thanked key figures of BAIRA, RMMRU, International Organization for Migration (IOM) and

International Labour Organization (ILO) for their cooperation in this effort.

Mr. M Sirajul Islam, Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment, stated that overseas employment is a major driving force of Bangladesh's economy. He told that the total number of persons sent overseas on employment from 1976 to July 2001 was 32,42,793 and an amount of US\$ 20,961,05 million or BDT 83,000 crore has been earned by this sector. He hoped that the workshop will significantly contribute in developing guidelines and suggest activities for efficient management of labour export.

Mr. Ghulam Mustafa, Secretary General, BAIRA, regretted that lack of due recognition of labour export sector despite its important role in the national economy. He expressed dissatisfaction for the low allocation for this sector in national budgets, five years plans and Annual Development Programme (ADPs). He opined that government allocation for labour export sector should reflect the actual contribution of the sector to national coffer.

### **Working Session I**

In the first working session titled *Recruitment Process of Overseas Employment*, Mr. Mosharraf Hossain, Director General, BMET, reiterated that his organisation has the prime responsibility in respect to labour migration as the 'protector of migrant workers'. He stressed on transparency and streamlining of the recruitment process as necessary pre-conditions for developing the manpower sector and identified some problems that have been created in their absence. As solution to these problems, he suggested measures for reforming labour migration that should cover issues such as cost, recruitment and emigration procedure, enlistment of workers, institutional facilities for outgoing migrant workers and remittance transfer.

Mr. Minhaz Uddin Khan of BAIRA informed that the huge gap that exists between demand and supply for overseas employment is creating opportunity of manipulation by the middlemen. He explained how the use of database could effectively stop unlawful and harmful interference of the middlemen. Besides, he called for employment oriented restructuring of the entire education system. He stressed that skill training should start from Class VIII. He also advocated for creation of a mechanism that ensures accountability for recruiting agents. Calling for a bigger role of BAIRA members in streamlining labour migration, he stated that as they are the ones that face and create problems, they will be better equipped to solve the problems.

Mr. Syed Saiful Haque, Vice Chairman, Welfare Association of Repatriated Bangladeshi Employees (WARBE), presented migrant's perspective on the strategy document. He revealed that migrant workers are exploited in many ways besides recruitment. He described the nature of exploitation in health check-up of labour migrants and proposed to bring diagnostic centres under some form of control. He also laid out ways to bring the intermediaries of recruiting agencies under institutional arrangement. He demanded that a complaint post box be set up that could only be accessed by the minister alone. This will ensure feeding in direct information for policy makers.

Dr. Shahdeen Malik of RMMRU drew attention of the limitation of 1982 Emigration Ordinance that bars victims of fraudulent practices in migration process from having direct access to the labour courts. He recommended a thorough scrutiny of the 1982 Ordinance and its replacement with a new right-based legislation. His second recommendation was establishment of a self-regulatory framework in manpower export sector. Following the Filipino example, he recommended advance gathering of information on upcoming projects in the labour receiving countries and developing necessary training of our labour force accordingly.

Mr. Lion Nazrul Islam of BAIRA pointed out some practical problems in recruiting through database. He stated that often there is very little time between demand for recruitment and supplying of workers. Identifying appropriate workers, judging their mental and physical preparedness, lack of ready cash in the hands of potential migrants, and risk of being blacklisted in case of delay or failure of meeting demand were some of the issues that are needed to be taken into account. According to him, abolishing the sub-agent system is impossible as people trust sub-agents as they are personally known faces of the locality rather than recruiting agents who are unfamiliar to them and live far away. So the purpose of database bypassing sub-agents will not work due to lack of trust in the relationship between migrant labour and recruiting agents. Establishing credibility of recruiting agents is a pre-condition for database. He further elaborated that of the 700 licensed recruiting agents, 400 are least active. Half of them are involved only in visa processing. He suggested the government for grading in its renewal of the licenses based on their performance.

Mr. Shahidullah of BAIRA provided certain reasons for the high cost of migration. Citing the example of Saudi Arabia, he explained that the lion's share of the money charged on migrant labour are spent as tax to Saudi authorities, ticket fare, airport tax, manpower tax, embarkation fee, sub-agent's fee and fees for contacts of main company abroad. At the end of the day, he claimed, a recruiting agent can barely make a profit of Tk 3,000-5,000. He also suggested change of the existing pre-dominantly non-vocational education system for lack of certified skilled labour in the country. He raised questions about the efficiency of the government sponsored recruiting agency, BOESL that had exported only 8,000 workers since its inception.

Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud of the University of Dhaka concluded the session advising manpower exporters to consider themselves as entrepreneurs like any other private sector of a market economy and abide by a regulatory framework. As track record of self-regulation is not satisfactory in our country, he suggested for a regulatory framework initiated and enforced by the government with representation from the private sector and concerned sections of the civil society. He expressed that we also have to be very cautious about and guard against too much regulation by the government. Tracing the change from 'temporary migration' in the 1980s to today's 'manpower export', Dr. Mahmud identified that migrant workers are considered more as commodity than human beings. He witnessed a reassertion of the human aspects of labour migration in the workshop. He expressed his surprise at the shortcomings of the legal arrangement to redress cases of cheating and exploitation in migration. Identifying manpower export as the highest net-profit earner for the national economy, he called for recognising labour export sector as an industry and facilitate it with the opportunities as that of the industrial sector. He forecast that in a few years remittance would play a much bigger role in dealing with our balance of payments problem. Pointing out that there is no data of returnee migrants, Dr. Mahmud termed it essential to develop manpower export into an industry. He concluded with a cautionary note that government's role in this sector should be constructive and supportive rather than arbitrary and restrictive.

### **Working Session II**

The second session on *Institutional Strengthening* was chaired by Professor Rehman Sobhan, Chair, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), and Mr. M. Hafiz Uddin Khan, Advisor, Ministry of Finance, Planning, Jute and Textile was the Special Guest. Mr. Hafizuddin Khan, underscored the need for regularising the flow

of remittance. He supported the idea of coordination between education policy and manpower export. He agreed that the Wage Earner's Welfare Fund (WEWF) was grossly mismanaged. He opined that the policy mechanism created for using of the fund itself has left a big scope for corruption. He further informed that a report on this matter has already been submitted. He also stressed on wider dissemination of knowledge about all methods of remittance transfer.

Mr. Masood Aziz, Director General, West Asia, Africa and Welfare, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, acknowledged that lack of sensitivity among diplomats coupled with some procedural arrangements hinders migrants' access to embassies. While Bangladesh earns US\$ 1 billion in remittance and US \$ 2 million in providing consular services, the respective Bangladesh missions have no say in spending that money. He informed that a new chancery building of Bangladesh embassy in Riyadh, equipped with recreational facilities for migrant workers could not be implemented due to fund constraints. He proposed that the money be sanctioned through presidential ordinance to avoid delay. He stated that job exploration is one of the major functions of our mission abroad. In the context of ageing of population in Germany and Japan, he advised that our missions in Berlin and Tokyo should be asked to report future job prospects for Bangladeshi migrants in those countries.

Mr. Anisur Rahman, President, Bangladesh Migrant Centre (BMC), expressed that returnee migrants can play a very important role in developing skills of future migrants. He argued that migrants from Bangladesh usually go abroad as unskilled but return with skills in advanced technology. Unfortunately, their skills are wasted after their return. He proposed for a mechanism for utilising returnee migrant workers in national development. He also demanded proper management and monitoring of Migrant Workers' Welfare Desk. He outlined two important roles of returnee migrants' associations: contributing in training of aspirant migrant workers, and acting as pressure groups within and outside the country. He claimed that granting right of association of Bangladeshi workers in South Korea is an outcome of BMC's initiative.

Dr. Syed Refaat Ahmed, lawyer and researcher on migrant issues, deliberated over institutional strengthening from legal perspective. He explained that institutional strengthening in terms of emigration of workers from Bangladesh essentially refer to a thorough overhaul of existing legal and institutional framework. What is needed here is greater state

supervision of workers' movement, specially at the pre-emigration stage, and responsibility of all states involved in migration process to have appropriate machinery for safeguarding rights and interests of migrant workers. He emphasised on effective bilateral or multilateral agreements between the states of origin and the states of employment and called for ensuring authorised employment, standard employment contracts, orderly repatriation, respecting fundamental human rights and dignity, unrestricted access to consular services, and rights to complain and get redress. Referring to relevant core international standards, Dr. Ahmed reminded that Bangladesh is yet to ratify a primary piece of comprehensive international legislation, the 1990 UN Convention on Migrant Workers. He also advocated replacing the 1982 Emigration Ordinance with a migrant rights-based legislation modeled after the UN Convention.

Mr. Mahabubur Rahman, student associate of RMMRU, noted that a migrant worker often put himself or herself in a vulnerable position by mortgaging land to finance overseas trip. He suggested that had they been allowed to mortgage their hands to banks, they would have received better deal and had faced least harassment.

Professor Rehman Sobhan, as the chair of the session, strongly supported training of Bangladeshi workers according to the needs of global market. He stated that increasing number of elderly people is creating need for specialised labour to look after them in Western Europe and East Asia. He suggested that measures be taken to develop this kind of labour by providing training on nursing the elderly. This will also ensure a diversification of our labour market. Professor Sobhan argued that Bangladesh can not act alone to ensure rights and dignity of migrant workers. Efforts should be coordinated and standardised in line with UN and ILO instruments and along with other labour sending and receiving countries. He observed that when lots of time and energy bring US\$ 1.5 billion of foreign aid each year, Bangladesh receives more than that amount as remittance with much less-organised effort. He regretted that we have failed to honour the labour migrants who really are the commercially important persons (CIPs) earning US\$ 2 billion each year for the country. He predicted that remittance earning moving up to US\$ 5-10 billion in the near future if we can utilise the existing opportunities of the global labour market. He suggested that every year from each *thana* of Bangladesh, on completion of school, 1,000 boys and girls can be provided institutionalised vocational training on the skills of demand in national and

international labour market. Thus, we will have 462,000 skilled workers each year from 462 *thanas*. This will create jobs and complement poverty alleviation. Professor Sobhan also spoke for successful reintegration of returnee migrants. He recommended for specific target oriented programmes for productive utilisation of their financial resources and skills. Thus, returnee migrants will become a major source of savings and investment.

### Working Session III

The topic of the third working session was *Media Campaign and Migrants' Interests* chaired by Mr. Matiur Rahman, Editor, *Prothom Alo*. In this session, Mr. Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, Advisor, Ministry of Information, Housing and Public Workers, Food, Forest and Environment, and Land, argued that holding of this workshop suggests that everything is not working smoothly in the manpower export sector. He stated that like 'jute' as 'golden fibre' of Bangladesh that earned a large amount of foreign exchange in the past, migrant workers are also earning huge foreign exchange. We should honour them by calling them 'men of gold'. He alleged that the condition of migrant workers is not improving at the rate of that of recruiting agents. He recommended that BAIRA should establish office at the district levels working as employment office to ensure direct contact between potential migrants and recruiting agencies. It will help to curb harassment by the middlemen. BAIRA can take initiative to disseminate information on recruiting agencies through state owned media at a concession rate. He strongly supported the idea of skill training of migrant workers. He viewed that migration process of skilled workers is likely to be more disciplined and orderly than unskilled workers.

Mr. Farhad Mahmud, Managing Director, *Ekushey TV*, alleged that projection of migrants in the media is often misguided. Migrant workers and their recruiters are generally portrayed with a degree of insensitivity in television dramas. Awareness raising of general people about migrant workers should be preceded by sensitisation of the media personnel.

Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui of RMMRU expressed that a level of discipline can be established in the area of migration through proper dissemination of information. Information campaign should simultaneously take place at two stages; domestic and international. In order to raise awareness she proposed holding of television programmes, newspaper advertisements, and training of NGO workers.

However, she identified pre-departure orientation training for migrant workers as the most important aspect of information dissemination.

Mr. Titu D Gupta of United News of Bangladesh revealed that status of Bangladeshi migrants in host countries is partly decided by the coverage of Bangladesh events in the media of respective countries. He, therefore, called on overseas correspondents to emphasise positive achievements of Bangladesh in foreign media.

Mr. M A Mannan, Senior Vice President, Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd., suggested that besides community leaders and activities, journalists, print and electronic media personnel, grassroots level bank staff handling remittance and members of foreign missions should be rendered awareness raising training on migrant workers. Awareness campaign is also needed to discourage sending remittance through unofficial channel. Regular media campaign should be raised about the comparative advantage of sending money through banking channel. He claimed that education has a direct bearing on the productivity of workers. Over two hundred thousands Filipinos send much more remittance than 10-12 hundred thousand Bangladeshis from Saudi Arabia. The remittance sent by Bangladeshis is the lowest among all the foreign nationals in Saudi Arabia. He opined that vocational training should be made compulsory from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades in the school. We have to pay Tk 500 crore to Saudi Arabia annually due to lack of control over bad practices of some influential manpower exporters. The amount could be substantially lowered if they could be made accountable. Lastly, according to Mr. Mannan, the background of migrants should be considered in rendering pre-departure orientation. Overwhelmingly they come from the lower strata of the society – none has ever used commodes, most never used toothpaste, toothbrush, even trousers. But in overseas, our nation is evaluated through their performance. They are our actual ambassadors.

Mr. Anisur Rahman Khan of WARBE demanded sparing migrant workers from travel tax as they are going abroad for job, not for travelling. He also opposed putting uniform on migrant workers during their departure. Refuting charges by some BAIRA members that migrants return home before finishing contract due to home-sickness or other faults of their own, he argued that recruiting agents are the ones who should take the responsibility. He complained that the

welfare desk is located in departure lounge, not in the arrival lounge. He further pointed out that contract papers from Saudi Arabia are either in English or Arabic. These should be translated into Bangla.

Mr. S M Morshed of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) opined that the media should follow-up the state of detained migrant workers and concerned authorities should take initiative to secure their release. The upcoming World Migrants Day on 18 December should be substantially highlighted in the media as a suitable opportunity for awareness raising on migrants.

Mr. Mahfuz Anam, Editor, *The Daily Star*, classified interests of the migrant workers as follows: (a) employment (b) justified migration expenditure, (c) non-violation of the terms and conditions of employment, (d) safe and organised flow of remittances, and (e) an airport free of harassment. The duty of the press, he observed, in this regard is to report any exception in such cases and draw the attention of people and the government. He informed that lack of correspondents in migrant destinations of the Middle East leaves many cases of harassment unreported. Bridging the gap between the media and recruiting agencies and migrant workers is the way to solve this problem, he added.

The Chief Guest of the concluding session was Dr. Mohammad Farashuddin, Governor, Bangladesh Bank. Mr. Shengjie Li, Officer-in-Charge, ILO and Mr. Shahidul Haque, Acting Regional Representative, IOM were present as Special Guests. Dr. C R Abrar of RMMRU provided a summary of the workshop sessions and Mr. Mohammad Gulam Mostafa, BAIRA offered vote of thanks.

Dr. Mohammad Farashuddin stated that it is a general law that where labour is scarce and capital is ample, labour from other areas will flow to that direction. Similarly, capital will flow to the direction where it is scarce and labour is ample. He informed that our import is US\$ 8.5 billion and our export earning is around US\$ 6.5 billion. This gap of approximately US\$ 2 billion is covered by remittance. According to the estimates of Bangladesh Bank, the volume of remittance through official channel has risen to US\$ 1.9 billion from US\$ 1.3 billion. He informed that in the last three years our success in substantially reducing *hundi* has increased the flow of remittance. To save foreign currency in the pre-departure phase, a system of prepaid ticket or PTA can be introduced for

migrant workers. He also pointed out that Bangladeshis in UK and other developed countries send much less remittance than those in the Middle East and South East Asia. That means, while Bangladeshi gentlemen keep their earning in foreign banks, it is the hard working, not-so-rich migrants who send money home. He agreed that bank officials often harass remitters and their relatives. He informed that various steps have been taken to curb such harassment. He observed that *hundi* had made inroad because of weaknesses in the formal banking system. To encourage remitting through official channel, Dr. Farashuddin proposed for setting up a revolving fund from which the money would be invested in development projects that would be dedicated to the migrants. This will provide a sense of ownership and pride to the wage earners, and thus will help nation building.

Mr. Shengjie Li of ILO informed that labour migration is a central issue worldwide. There are some 5-7 million migrant workers in Asia, where abuse and exploitation are widespread. Besides, increasing migration pressure coupled with stronger control measures has contributed to growth of smuggling and trafficking of migrants. On the other hand, most Asian governments are yet to be equipped with appropriate machinery to deal with labour migration. He then described a series of ILO convention drawn up since 1949 in the interest of migrant workers. He concluded that ILO has three component activities in the field of labour migration: strengthening knowledge base, promoting ILO standards and cooperating to combat discrimination, abuse, exploitation and trafficking of migrants.

Mr. M Shahidul Haque of IOM informed that there are millions of migrant workers in the world now and the number will approach 150 million by 2050. The two primary goals of overseas employment are: maximisation of out-migration and protection of rights and welfare of migrant workers. To successfully meet these goals Bangladesh should put in place a national migration policy. He then described how IOM is currently assisting Bangladesh government in developing a labour migration policy.

## **Summary and Recommendations from the Floor**

### ***Recruitment Process of Overseas Employment***

- ❑ Recruiting agents should consider themselves as entrepreneurs, emerging into a responsible private sector.
- ❑ BAIRA should transform into a self-regulatory body, develop and execute a code of conduct for its members.
- ❑ In consultation with all stakeholders, the government should develop a monitoring mechanism to bring recruiting agents under accountability.
- ❑ Licenses should be issued on the basis of some definite criteria and should be renewed only after satisfactory performance.
- ❑ The government should regulate activities of the middlemen.
- ❑ Individually procured visas should be monitored.
- ❑ A database of potential migrants should be established at the disposal of all recruiting agents.
- ❑ Recruiting agents should compulsorily declare the names of their sub-agents at different places, issue them photo-identity card, and make their list available to police stations, TNOs and Union Council offices.
- ❑ All migration related transactions should compulsorily take place through banks.
- ❑ The government should monitor activities of diagnostic centers.
- ❑ Cost of migration should be directed to employers rather than the employees.

### ***Institutional Strengthening***

- ❑ Effective cooperation between different bodies of the government should take place in order to curb undocumented migration.
- ❑ Migrants' database should be accessible from airport so that airport officials can identify the un-enlisted individuals attempting to go overseas on employment without valid authorisation, so that they can be identified and penalised.
- ❑ Accountability of immigration officials should be ensured.
- ❑ Clearance stamp/seal on the passport should include names and designation of the duty officer so that he can be traced back in case of clearing illegal migrants.
- ❑ A system of search for potential labour market should be undertaken engaging Foreign and Labour Ministry and experts.
- ❑ Embassy staff should be sensitised about migrants' needs and those serving migrants should be adequately trained.

- ❑ Embassy staff should regularly visit work places and living quarters of migrant workers and develop periodic reports.
- ❑ The foreign missions in the major labour receiving countries should be well-equipped and well staffed.
- ❑ All expenditure from the WEFW should be stopped immediately; an independent inquiry should be instituted to investigate spending of the fund so far and new policy guidelines for using the fund be framed.
- ❑ Ministry of Foreign Affairs should develop programmes to access growing labour markets in Germany and Japan.
- ❑ As a major priority, education sector should be overhauled with emphasis on vocational education.
- ❑ The curricula of vocational and technical training institutes should take into account the changing labour needed both of Bangladesh and of growing economies.
- ❑ Training should be made available on language and culture of host countries.
- ❑ Pre-departure orientation of migrant workers should be comprehensive.
- ❑ The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) should formulate a comprehensive policy on migrant workers in the light of Filipino law regarding migrant workers.
- ❑ Immediately a thorough revision of 1982 Emigration Ordinance be instituted taking into account the changed circumstances and framing of necessary regulations for its effective implementations should be undertaken.
- ❑ GoB should immediately ratify the UN Convention on migrant workers.
- ❑ A meeting of labour sending countries of the region should be convened and a minimum set of

standards in the spirit of UN Convention should be agreed upon.

- ❑ Amendments of existing laws be made to ensure direct access to courts by victims of fraudulent practices.

#### ***Media Campaign and Migrants' Interests***

- ❑ Immediate action should be taken for rescinding of ban on migration of unskilled women and launching information campaign to enable potential women migrants to take informed decision about migration.
- ❑ A sub-committee composed of various stakeholders should be formed to investigate the cases of migrant workers who have been subjected to harassment by the recruiting agencies.
- ❑ GoB should act immediately to bring back stranded Bangladeshis in indifferent countries.
- ❑ GoB should provide legal support to the migrants who are arbitrarily dismissed or arrested, and or unable to bear own legal costs. Civil society bodies should establish contacts with their counterparts in receiving countries and encourage them to provide legal support.
- ❑ The government should ensure that Bangladeshi migrant workers are not deported without the opportunity to go through the legal process in the destination countries.

#### **Reporter:**

*K N M Hossainul Haque*

### **Seminar Urges for PROPER AND HUMANE SOLUTION OF PROBLEMS OF DWELLERS OF SLUMS AND BROTHELS**

Speakers at a discussion session underscored the need for a more active involvement of civil society in addressing the problems of the poor, evicted from slums and brothels in 1999. They expressed their deep concern over the existing condition of the evicted and urged for proper and humane solution of their problems. The discussants also viewed that there should be comprehensive, right-based participatory approach in addressing the problems created by the eviction.

Professor Nazrul Islam of Centre for Urban Studies, stated that development of slums in the urban areas is inevitable due to a wide range of natural calamities like riverbank erosion, floods, cyclones and droughts. Unable to find sources to maintain their livelihood in the rural areas, the affected people come to the urban slums. He stated that no government in Bangladesh made any effort to provide them with sustainable support. Dr. Islam was speaking as the chair of a discussion session organised to mark launching of two

publications on *Slum and Brothel Evictions: Role of the State and Civil Society* by Young Researchers' Forum of RMMRU, held at the auditorium of The British Council yesterday. The keynote papers were presented by Mahbubur Rahman and Afroja Khanam, students of Department of Political Science. Earlier, the coordinator of the Unit, Dr. C R Abrar introduced the two publications of the Young Researchers' Forum.

Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies emphasised the need to explore new methodologies to meet new challenges of social science research, while Mr. M M Sunnah expressed his disappointment at the silence of the civil society at the

time of eviction of slums and brothels. Ms. Hajera, a representative from the Tanbazar brothel, urged that the evictees should be treated as human beings. She stressed the need for a sustainable and appropriate rehabilitation scheme that would fulfill the needs of the target group.

More than fifty students and teachers from different departments of arts, social science and law faculties of the university, representatives of the victims and civil society and international organisations participated in the programme.

**Reporter:**

*Shahzada M Akram*

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## **Book Launching Ceremony of TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES**

Speakers at a discussion session underscored the need for a comprehensive labour migration policy with regard to female labour migration from Bangladesh. The discussants stated that there exists a major contradiction between state policy and ground realities of female migration, and successive governments in Bangladesh have pursued a policy of either restricting or placing a ban on migration of certain categories of women, which have resulted in irregular migration and trafficking. They argued that it is about time that the state, non-government and other civil society organisations respect women's decision to migrate and play a facilitating role. The discussion took place on the occasion of a publication launching ceremony of the book titled *Transcending Boundaries: Labour Migration of Women from Bangladesh* by Tasneem Siddiqui, and published by the University Press Ltd. The programme was held today at CIRDAP Auditorium.

Mr. M Shahidul Haque, Acting Representative of International Organization for Migration, Dhaka, stressed the need for compilation of a database of female migrants, protection of rights of this group, and sensitising different sectors regarding specific situation of migrant women. He hoped that the book will add to the available information in the field and help in developing a comprehensive 'Plan of Action' to strengthen labour migration process in Bangladesh.

Prof. Firdous Azim, University of Dhaka, identified that the issue of female migration needs to be

approached from a rights angle, emphasising both women's right to work and their freedom of movement. She laid emphasis on continuing to work on both national and international fronts in order to make laws that would ensure that women work in all spheres in safety and security.

Dr. Syed Refaat Ahmed, lawyer and researcher, expressed the need to ratify the *1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families* which will lead to the emergence of an effective international legal regime for migrant workers.

Prof. A K Azad Chowdhury, Vice Chancellor, University of Dhaka, presided over the session. In his speech, Prof. Chowdhury appreciated the role of RMMRU with regard to studies and advocacy work on labour migration and underscored the need for a national consensus on labour migration policy. Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmed, University Press Ltd., also spoke on the occasion.

The programme was participated by academics, researchers, lawyers, national and international NGO and civil society activists, journalists, representatives from migrant workers associations, and government officials.

**Reporter:**

*Shahzada M Akram*

### Comparative Study on COPING MECHANISM OF WOMEN IN STRESS SITUATIONS AMONG CHAKMA IDPS AND ROHINGYA REFUGEES

#### Introduction

The last few decades witnessed important advancement in dealing with the issue of psychosocial aspects of women in distress situations. Refugee women represent the overwhelming majority of refugee caseloads in almost every refugee situation. Bangladesh has experienced Rohingya refugee influx in 1978 and again in 1991-92. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other agencies came forward and took various steps on refugee management and repatriation. At present there are approximately 21,000 Rohingyas living at two camps in Cox's Bazar.

Another type of victim of forced migration are the Chakma Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in three districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). A large number of ethnic Chakmas were dislocated in 1961 following the construction of a hydroelectric project in Kaptai. The second stage of displacement of the same population began in the early 1980s following armed encounters between security forces and armed wing of the tribal people called *Shanti Bahini*. A large number of Chakmas crossed the border while the remaining became dispersed and took shelter elsewhere for the fear of persecution.

There is a general dearth of information and research on specific problems of women under the refugee or IDP situations in Bangladesh. However, researchers identified that hardships and deprivation emanated from constant humiliation, social isolation or poverty related to loss of livelihood sources and protracted unemployment. All these can undermine the coping resources of woman as well as capacity of the community to support them. It was also found that a prolonged adverse situation may cause increase in competence and resourcefulness. This study on the vulnerability and coping mechanism of Chakma IDP women and Rohingya refugee women was initiated to identify various types of coping measures that can be supported, bearing in mind the emotional cost as well as the material loss they had to go through. The study is being conducted by Syeda Rozana Rashid, Research Associate of RMMRU, with the support of Bangladesh Freedom Foundation under a fellowship of the project titled *Forum on Women in Security and International Affairs*.

Refugee women are considered the most vulnerable section of the society. Sexual violence and exploitation were frequent experiences for most of the female refugees at different stages. Being member of a high risk group they also faced human rights violation in the form of forced labour, extortion by the members of law enforcing agencies, rape, abduction, restriction of movements and so on. In Bangladesh, various studies prove that a good number of Rohingya refugees had been abused by BDR, police and law enforcing agencies during their flight. They even could not seek justice for not having the legal status. Camp situations were rarely model of democratic systems and they became more complex because the way programmes of refugee management were implemented. One of the most unattended issues is providing them with adequate healthcare, medicare and sanitation facilities whose absence could virtually immobilise a woman or adolescent girl. Besides these, burdens of child rearing and domestic tasks for the uneducated women as household heads were also problematic for them. One could not ignore the mental insecurity that these women suffered and the psychological stress that they are faced with while coping with a totally different environment.

The overwhelming majority of the internally displaced of Chakma population were women. In most instances of development induced displacement women experience increase of workload, loss of kitchen farming, impoverishment and are left both defenseless and without resources in an adverse setting. Instances of displaced women being raped were common and at times, they found no recourse but to resort to prostitution to feed themselves and their dependents. They also experienced adverse effect on health and nutrition. These economic and social consequences are coupled with political and ethnic problems of identity and assimilation.

#### Field Survey in the CHT and Rohingya Refugee Camps

The field visit was divided into two parts. The first part of the visit was conducted in Rangamati and Khagrachari during June – July 2001. A four-member research team visited Rangamati proper, Natun Banabihar, Shubhalong, Khagrachari proper and Panchari and interviewed 50 women headed

households from Chakma settlements. The study tried to incorporate housewives as well as working women, married, unmarried women and widows to cover different sources of vulnerability and resilience.

The second part of the fieldwork was conducted in August 2001. The team visited both Kutupalong and Nayapara camps and interviewed more than 50 Rohingya refugee women. Apart from them, government, international NGOs and UNHCR officials located in Cox's Bazar were also interviewed. Detailed discussion also took place with camp-in-charges, employees and officers of international NGOs such as Concern and MSF (Holland) about their perception of women refugees.

### **Field Findings**

Women from both men and women headed households were interviewed during the survey in the refugee camps. It was found from these discussions that they fled Burma in the face of persecution and extortion of the Burmese military that included forced labour, killing, destruction of home, paddy field etc. In some cases, there were evidences of sexual abuse and physical torture to both males and females. During flight, most of the women interviewed had to go a long way by boat or motor vehicle. A large number of the interviewees stated that they came on foot by crossing high mountains. Many of these women and their children suffered from lack of food, money, shelter, and disease.

Camp life was not free from vulnerability. Polygamy is rampant for both men and women in the camps. In cases of absence of husbands due to death, absconding or arrest, women that are good looking become victims of sexual abuse, rape and other types of exploitation. They were found anxious about their lost family members and for those who can not enter the camp for lack of registration. The interviewees complained about inadequacy of the ration delivered, beating and maltreatment of the camp authority, and sexual abuse. A sense of insecurity was found among some respondents, specially those who have unmarried daughters.

The stories of Chakma IDP women were no less painful. The interviewees identified construction of the Kaptai Dam and later operations of security forces that was engaged in a prolonged conflict with *Shanti Bahini* as the principal causes of displacement. The Chakma IDP families faced tremendous loss in economic terms as well as social terms as they were forced to disperse but later managed to reunite. The psychosocial wellbeing of the IDP women were

affected adversely by the development and conflict induced displacements. There were a number of cases where women had to flee home in one cloth without husband with a nominal amount of food and money. They spent days and nights in the forest and every moment they feared death. It took a long time for them to resettle themselves elsewhere. As they lost arable lands they had to find out alternative sources of income for survival. Women who took over as heads of the households sometimes in presence of their husbands, became engaged in income-generating activities like kitchen gardening, maintaining nursery, wine brewing, raising poultry and dairy etc.

### **Coping Mechanism**

It was found from the field work that the Chakma women were more laborious, more conscious and more educated than their Rohingya counterpart. Many of them were teachers in primary and high schools. Economic independence and complementary role provided them with a sense of empowerment that helped them cope with the vulnerable situation relatively better than the Rohingya refugees.

After the signing of the peace treaty the government permitted NGO activities in CHT. Thus, BRAC, *Proshika* and other local NGOs were working in the region and providing micro-credits, vocational training etc. The study found that women taking loan from these projects were very serious and regular about repayment of loans. They invested the money for poultry, buying of seeds, small business and even for education of their children. The study, however, did not find any beneficiary among the IDPs from any government initiative taken for the IDP women. The study also found that some of the Chakma women appeared as good negotiators during the period of distress. Lack or absence of polygamy in the society also helped them maintain their valued status in the society.

Contrary to the Chakma IDP women, the coping ability of Rohingya refugee women were affected by their inferior position imposed by the male members. They use Islam as an instrument to undermine women's position in the society. Nonetheless, in some instances the vulnerability due to distressed situation contributed to better empowerment of these women. They realised that they had to live with adverse circumstances. 60% of the interviewees were identified as heads of household and were forced to play the role due to absence of their husband or other male members. They collected rations, arranged treatment for their children and even for negotiating with camp authorities when needs arose, in contrast to their earlier

assigned gender role within the family. The study also found their growing concern and ability to protect their young daughters, or other unmarried female members from any kind of abuse and violence. Recently UNHCR started some participatory programmes directed to women. There were also women centres in every camp for vocational training, awareness campaign and community participation. These programmes had been able to augment the level of consciousness among the young Rohingya refugee women about their rights and contributed to their empowerment.

The Rohingya refugee women were found to be too much dependent on fate. Also they were enjoying fundamental needs of day to day life without any

labour. As a result they appeared to be less interested to work after enjoying the same life style for over a decade.

During the course of interview various problems were faced. Among those, language barrier, inaccessibility in many areas of CHT, general lack of consciousness among the women, tendency of maintaining secrecy about domestic and sexual violence and involvement of family members in politics are worth mentioning. However, the field work provided an excellent opportunity to listen to those who are the most marginalised among the marginal.

**Reporter:**

*Syeda Rozana Rashid*

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## **Young Researchers' Forum Study on MALE PERCEPTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Violence against women is a pervasive phenomenon in Bangladesh. Gender specific violence against women continues to breach their physical and psychological integrity although the degree, nature and form vary according to socio-economic and cultural status. Many of these forms of violence are often not recognised; rather such acts are often legitimised under the guise of custom, tradition and religion. While the issue has been one of the focal points of human rights activists and lawyers, efforts at gauging the common people's viewpoint on this matter, particularly those of the male population, which is regarded as the chief perpetrator of violence against women, has been negligible. In order to get a holistic picture of the problem, it is necessary to explore how men perceive the situation.

During the month of August 2001, a team of Young Researchers' Forum of RMMRU was involved in a research project on *Male Perception on Violence against Women*, under the supervision of Dr. Sumaiya Khair, of the Department of Law, Dhaka University. The study was undertaken by the Unit as part of the Gender and Governance Project under Higher Education Link Programme with The British Council, Dhaka. A similar study was simultaneously conducted by the Department of Sociology, University of Rajshahi. The British Council organised a workshop on the findings of the two studies in November 2001.

The objectives of the study were to identify male perception on different aspects of violence meted at women, raise awareness in general and particularly amongst the male population about various dimensions of violence, and disseminate information on the issue amongst different sectors of the population in order to

effect change. The target group of the study was males ranging from the age of 16 to 30 and from five groups i.e., students, young professionals, doctors, government officials and males from low income groups. Domestic violence, sexual harassment and child abuse were identified as central issues, and the team developed a questionnaire covering the issues. Interviewees were asked regarding the family structure, role of female members played within the family, whether they were involved in economic activities, whether their freedom of movement, dressing and regular jobs within the household were duly recognised, whether they were familiar with the issue of domestic violence and sexual harassment, their idea about different kinds of violent activities and their response, and their level of consciousness regarding child abuse. They were also asked whether they were well informed regarding the law on violence against women and children and how media could play a role in addressing this issue.

From the interviews it was revealed that most of the families they belonged to were headed by fathers. Almost half of them reported that female members of their families did not participate in economic activities, and important decisions were jointly taken by both father and mother or husband and wife. Domestic works done by female members were acknowledged by many and some identified it as important in socio-economic terms. A good number of the respondents viewed that women should have limited freedom and a few alluded to the limits set by religion. More than 80% of the respondents felt that women were not safe outside their homes and reasons given were

deteriorating social values and absence of law and order.

Most of the respondents admitted that they knew what was meant by child abuse. Almost half of them said that they knew of someone who was guilty of perpetrating child abuse. Some reported that they tried to protest during such acts and a few could not due to personal reasons. Most of them identified uncontrolled emotions, uncontrollable children, poverty and lack of knowledge. Most of them viewed that child sexual abuse in the long run could have a negative impact on the mental development of children. Almost half of the respondents felt that parents could indeed play a significant role in preventing their children from being abused by taking care of their wards. Some felt that development of a sound rapport between children and parents was essential for this purpose.

Most of the respondents said that they knew what sexual harassment was although a few of them perceived rape and other serious kinds of violence as sexual harassment. Most of them identified acts of molestation, pushing and jostling, passing comments, whistling and teasing as acts of sexual harassment. A large number of them stated that they knew about the prevalence of such acts and knew the perpetrators personally. Many of them identified male perversion as a primary factor for such acts while some thought it to be the result of natural instinct of males. Almost half of them opined that women were largely responsible

for inviting acts of harassment through provocative and indecent dressing.

Most of the respondents stated that they knew what domestic violence meant although many of them identified acts like rape and acid throwing as domestic violence. Only some respondents felt that domestic violence violates women's human rights. Lack of awareness and knowledge, male perversion, depreciating moral values and uncontrolled anger were identified by the respondents as causes of such acts. Almost half of them personally knew women who suffered such acts of violence. While many condemned the practice of marital rape, a few perceived that a husband has every right over his wife and that he could enforce her complying with his demands all the times. With regard to women's reactions, only a few thought that they should protest, and fewer thought they should go for divorce.

It was revealed from the interviews that most of the respondents had either very little or no idea about relevant laws against gender specific violence and the penalties. Most of them thought the existing laws were not effective in combating violence against women and children. A large number of them thought that the media could play a significant role in creating awareness and preventing gender specific violence.

**Reporter:**  
*Shahzada M Akram*

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## **Young Researchers' Forum Study on CROSS BORDER POPULATION MOVEMENTS AND SMUGGLING**

Smuggling is one of the major problems in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has 4,719 km border area with India and Myanmar. According to Indian government every year goods worth Tk 7,000 crore is smuggled from India to Bangladesh. This has an adverse impact on our balance of trade with India. Moreover, this also has impact on our social structure. A large number of people have been engaged in smuggling on the border areas and cross-border movement.

A research initiative has been undertaken by the RMMRU to study this aspect of population movements along the border areas of Bangladesh. Mohammed Jalauddin Sikder, and Arifur Rahman, Student Associates of Young Researchers' Forum of RMMRU, under the supervision of Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui, visited border areas of Chouddagram of Comilla and Kashba and Akhaura of Brahmanbaria.

They interviewed a total 100 persons involved in smuggling, 50 from each place. The objective of the study was to identify the socio-economic factors of smuggling, its impact in the community as well as in the concerned households and extent of cross border movements in those areas. The field surveys were done in September and October 2001. The findings of this study will be presented at a seminar in the coming months.

Comilla and Brahmanbaria are two districts having long border with India on the eastern part of Bangladesh. Every year a large amount of goods are smuggled into Bangladesh through these routes. In these two districts many poor people, both males and females, are engaged in smuggling. They have been involved in this trade for many reasons. Unemployment problem is one the main reasons for the youth to engage in smuggling. Some of them had

technical skills but had no job. Secondly, most of these people were landless. They have to bear family expenses and for some females, they have no earning members. Thirdly, some young people felt it as a good and easy source of income, and indeed some felt addicted to it. When hard cash came in hand, they were more inspired. Fourthly, female members involved in this profession were either widows, divorced, or abandoned by their husbands. They were to maintain big families but did not have any other source of income. Fifthly, it was revealed that in Comilla, most of the smugglers were returnee migrant workers. They borrowed money in order to go abroad but were cheated and returned. Therefore, they had to repay the loan and found this profession to be the easiest way to do so. Sixthly some young people in Comilla were addicted to drugs. They became involved in smuggling in order to maintain the costs involved in getting drugs.

Most of the smugglers had either very little or no capital. They borrowed money from moneylenders on 10% interest rate. Most interestingly, women had another good source of capital, being members of some micro-credit organisations and using the money in this trade. Some male smugglers used their wives in getting such credit from the NGOs. Later they repaid the loan.

It was found during the field survey that goods were smuggled from both sides. Goods such as phencydyl, beer, wine, sugar, onion, kerosene, garlic, powder milk, cosmetics, lentil were smuggled into Bangladesh from India. From Bangladesh different kinds of fish, egg, plastic items, soap, confectionery and leather items were smuggled into India. Among items smuggled into Bangladesh different kinds of alcohol and drugs had the most adverse impacts. Most of the smugglers were interested to carry these items because these items had high demand in the country among the addicted youth. Moreover, smuggling these items bring in good profit. One female smuggler could cross the border carrying 60-65 bottles of phencydyl at a time. Young smugglers take in more than 1,000 bottles per month and these are later distributed to Comilla, Dhaka and other cities. Children aged between 15 to 18 years are often employed in this exercise with a lump sum amount of Tk 100 a day.

A large amount of fish were smuggled to India through the border area of Brahmanbaria. In this district there were a number of big fisheries project supported by the government from where fish were collected and smuggled. The safest time for smuggling was at night, at dawn and during winter season, and religious festivals such as Eid. It was revealed that during

tensions in border areas, cases of smuggling go down due to tight security. So, persons involved in smuggling faced problems during these periods since they had to depend on the earning to maintain their families. Therefore, smugglers as well as linesmen from both sides had significant stakes in reduction of border tensions. Goods were usually carried by bicycles or in bags into Bangladesh, and after that distributed by train and bus routes. The train stations like Akhaura and Kashba, which are situated a few miles from Indian border, were used as the main routes, with officials of the railway often involved in the process.

Many people were found to cross the border in search of jobs. In Comilla, large numbers of people come from India in the morning and go back in the evening. Most of these people are *Santals*. They were usually engaged in saloons, hotels and restaurants, tree cutting, and agricultural works. They were employed with wages lower than that of a Bangladeshi labourer. A labourer from India got Tk 80 per day while a Bangladeshi labourer were paid Tk 100. As a result a number of Bangladeshi labourers become unemployed that compel them to be involved in smuggling. Moreover, Indian labourers were more hard working. Bangladeshi skilled labourers such as masons, painters, and electricians had great demand in India as there was a significant lack of skilled workers in that part.

The average profit made by each individual smuggler was around Tk 3,500 – 4,000 irrespective of sex. Although smugglers earned large amount of money from smuggling, they could hardly save since most of them had to maintain big families. Secondly, they had to pay a group of people called 'linesman' for smooth transfer of goods. Usually the linemen operate in collaboration with members of security forces. For instance, they were to be paid Tk 1 for each bottle of phencydyl. In Comilla, different smuggling routes are controlled by these linesmen who usually are local hoodlums. Thirdly, most of the smugglers take loans either from money lenders or NGOs with interest. Therefore, a large amount went into repayment. As a result only few smugglers were able to accumulate a good amount for better future. It was revealed from the female smugglers that since they were paying the linesmen they believed that smuggling was legal and authorised.

**Reporter:**

*Mohammed Jalaluddin Sikder*

## PUBLICATIONS

*International Refugee Law: A Reader*, B S Chimni (ed.), Sage Publications New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London 2000, pp. 613, Rs 695.00 ISBN 0-7619-9362-2 (US-Hb) 81-7036-853-7 (India-Hb)

Ensuring the humane and rights based treatment of refugees in an increasingly restrictive environment is among the most pressing problems facing the international community today. The subject of international refugee law has, as a consequence, acquired global importance. This unique reader, edited by one of the most respected and astute refugee scholars, constitutes a comprehensive introduction to international refugee law from an interdisciplinary and third world perspective. It provides not only a detailed analysis of the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees but covers regional conventions and declarations as well other issues of topical importance.

The book is divided into eight chapters following a comprehensive introduction. The first four deal respectively with the definition of 'refugee'; the law of asylum; the rights and duties of refugees; and the mandate and functions of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the primary international agency concerned with the protection and assistance of asylum seekers. The next three chapters explore the root causes of refugee flows and the law of state responsibility; durable solutions to the global refugee problem; and the international law of internally displaced persons. The concluding chapter deals with the legal status of refugees in India. Each chapter starts with an introduction which identifies the key issues and themes dealt with in the chapter, and the specific readings that address them.

B S Chimni is Professor of International Law at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and a member of editorial boards of *Journal of Refugee Studies* and *Journal of International Refugee Law*.

*Transcending Boundaries: Labour Migration of Women from Bangladesh*, Tasneem Siddiqui, University Press Limited, Dhaka 2001, pp. 228, Tk 400.00, ISBN 984 05 1593 4

A large number of Bangladeshi women have responded positively to the global demand of female labour and joined the labour markets of Middle East and South East Asian countries. This book is an attempt to understand the nature, scale and scope of female migration from this country. It identifies the major determinants and consequences of such migration through an analysis of economic and social costs and benefits derived from it. The book finds that there exists a major contradiction between state policy and ground realities of female migration. Successive governments in Bangladesh have pursued a policy of either restricting or placing a ban on migration on certain categories of women. However, such policies could hardly stem the flow of female labour from taking employment beyond the national boundary. On the contrary, they have contributed to irregular migration, and to a large extent, made potential women migrants vulnerable to trafficking. The civil society organisations have also failed to appreciate women's motivation to migrate and provide demand driven services to them. The author argues that it is about time that the State, non-government and other civil society organisations respect women's decision to migrate and play a facilitating role.

Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui is Associate Professor in Political Science at the University of Dhaka. She is an Executive Committee member of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit.

*Borderline: Australia's Treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, Peter Mares, UNSW Press, Sydney 2001, pp. 219, ISBN 0 86840 746 1

Over the past two years the arrival of 'boat people' on the Australian coast has re-ignited fears of a massive influx of refugees and asylum seekers. The response of the Australian government has helped to generate unease in the community, obscuring many of the real issues that arise when people seek sanctuary within Australia's borders. In this provocative book Mares opens

up the legal, moral and political questions posed by Australia's treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. He visits Woomera, site of Australia's biggest and newest immigration detention centre, talks to refugees, their lawyers, detention centre staff and the Australian immigration minister, and reports in detail on cases which pose significant questions about the direction of Australian policy. Drawing on a wide range of official and non-official sources Mares paints a compelling and disturbing picture of Australian policy in action. This book makes a major contribution to the debate on Australia's approach to refugees.

Peter Mares is presenter of the regional current affairs programme *Asia-Pacific*, broadcast on Radio Australia and Radio National. In 1995 he won the NSW Law Society Golden Quill Award for Excellence in Legal Reporting for a story on Australia's treatment of asylum seekers.

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*Eviction of Brothels: Role of the State and Civil Society* (in Bangla), Young Researchers' Forum, by RMMRU, Occasional Paper Series 6, July 2001, pp. 44, Tk 20.00

On 24 July 1999, sex workers in Tanbazar and Nimtoli at Narayanganj were forcibly evicted by the law enforcing agencies and later, some of them were taken to a vagrant centre. Most of them escaped and spread to other parts of the town and in Dhaka. A number of women rights organisations filed a writ petition against the eviction that took place without any prior notice, and in March 2000, a judgement was issued from the court recognising prostitution as legal and eviction of the sex workers an illegal act.

This is the first publication of the Young Researchers' Forum in the Occasional Paper Series of RMMRU. This study was initiated with presentation at a monthly meeting of the Unit in December 1999 by Afroja Khanam, student associate of RMMRU. Later a seminar was organised on the issue of slum and brothel evictions and their legal aspects, where a number of representatives from NGO and human rights organisations discussed the issue. The publication includes a theme paper on impacts of brothel evictions, a chronology of events, interviews of a victim, a concerned lawyer, officials of an NGO involved, women rights group and a representative of the civil society. Selected sections of the judgement of the High Court has also been incorporated.

The study team comprised of students from the departments of International Relations, Political Science and Peace and Conflict Studies of the University of Dhaka.

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*Eviction of Slums: Role of the State and Civil Society* (in Bangla), Young Researchers' Forum, by RMMRU, Occasional Paper Series 7, July 2001, pp. 42, Tk 20.00

Slums in the urban areas of Bangladesh are largely the outcome of internal displacement along with poverty in rural areas. A large number of people in Dhaka city lives in slums. Eviction of slums has been a policy of the government in combating crimes. In this context, in August 1999, more than 10,000 slum houses were forcibly evicted with the help of police in Dhaka. Consequently, thousands of families became homeless. A number of human rights organisations filed a writ petition against such activity and the court gave the judgement in August 1999 stating evictions as illegal as every human being has the right to life that included proper shelter. The event of eviction, its impact and responses from different segments of the society are the subject of this paper.

This is the second publication of the Young Researchers' Forum of RMMRU. This study was initiated with a presentation by Mahbubur Rahman, student associate of RMMRU at a monthly meeting of the Unit. Following the seminar, a group of student associates of the Unit became engaged on the issue. The publication includes a theme paper on slum evictions in the context of internal displacement in Bangladesh, a chronology of events, interviews of a victim, a concerned lawyer, representatives of an NGO involved and a representative of the civil society. Selected sections of the judgement of the High Court has also been incorporated.

The study team comprised of students from the departments of International Relations, Political Science and Peace and Conflict Studies of the University of Dhaka.

**Workshop:** A national workshop on *Strategy for Streamlining Labour Recruitment Process in Bangladesh for Employment Overseas* was jointly organised by Ministry of Labour and Employment, BMET, BAIRA and RMMRU, at CIRDAP Auditorium on 24 September 2001. This workshop was a follow-up of the strategy paper on *Streamlining Labour Recruitment Process in Bangladesh* that was undertaken by Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui and Dr. C R Abrar. The study was commissioned by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of Bangladesh. Advisors of the caretaker government, officials from Labour Ministry and BMET, representatives from BAIRA, WARBE, academics and economists, bankers, and representatives from MFIs and migrant workers' associations participated in the programme.

**Seminar:** A seminar on *Slum and Brothel Evictions: Role of the State and Civil Society* was organised at The British Council Auditorium, on 6 August 2001. Over 70 students and faculty members of Social Sciences participated in the programme. Prof. Nazrul Islam of Centre for Urban Studies was the Chief Guest.

**Publications:** Occasional Paper 6 titled *Brothel Eviction: Role of the State and Civil Society* by Young Researchers' Forum of RMMRU was published in July 2001.

Occasional Paper 7 titled *Slum Eviction: Role of the State and Civil Society* by Young Researchers' Forum was published in July 2001.

Issue 17, July – September 2001 of the Unit newsletter, *Udbastu* (the Uprooted) was published in September 2001.

**Monthly Meeting:** In the monthly meeting held in July, a paper on *Ganges Water Sharing: Present Situation* was presented by Arifur Rahman, postgraduate student, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, and Student Associate, RMMRU.

**Field Work:** Two field surveys were conducted in the CHT and Cox's Bazar under a study on *Coping Mechanism of Women in Stress Situations among Chakma IDPs and Rohingya Refugees*, conducted by Syeda Rozana Rashid, Research Associate, RMMRU.

A team of Young Researchers' Forum of RMMRU conducted a field survey of a study on *Male Perception on Violence against Women* in August and September. The survey was conducted in Dhaka City.

Another field survey was conducted in the border areas of Comilla and Brahmanbaria under a study on *Smuggling and Cross Border Population Movements*, conducted by Md. Jalaluddin Sikder, postgraduate student, Department of International Relations, and Student Associate, RMMRU.

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