

Human Trafficking: A Key Security Challenge for Bangladesh

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Synopsis

Human trafficking is one of the most prominent soft security issues of the 21st century. In simple terms, it is the practice of illegally transporting human beings from one place to another in order to achieve ulterior exploitative motives and a severe violation of human rights. 21 million people are subjected to forced labor all across the world which included the trafficked people. Approximately 71% of human trafficking victims were women and girls while one-third of these victims were children. Bangladesh was in Tier 2 category from 2011 to 2017 and it deteriorated to the category of Tier 2 Watch List according to 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report published by United States Department of State.

A Closer Look at Human Trafficking

Human trafficking involves certain factors, of which the aspiration to go abroad is an often exploited aspect by perpetrators. This dreamy feeling is often exploited by the perpetrators. Socioeconomic conditions also play a huge role for those who want to move from one place to another. People move with the hope of a better lifestyle. The concept of human trafficking exists both within a nation and abroad. Human traffickers try their best to take control of those people who are transported into the new region with false hopes. Traffickers earn huge profits and they are hard to trace. Most vulnerable people are those who suffer from poor economic condition. Potential victims are made to believe that their quality of lives will improve once they move to the new place. They want to improve their economic condition at any cost so they fall into the trap set by the traffickers.

Women and children also become certain targets of the traffickers. Children are often sold by their parents, and for little amount of money. Women fall prey to the traffickers as they do not get the required respect in the existing society. Traffickers see women as soft and crucial targets. Women and girls are also compelled to work in the sex industry. Traditional malpractices against women and girls also urge them to move to a new region.

Refugee camps are also easy targets for traffickers. Refugees are often not allowed to work in the host country. They have to live in unbearable conditions. They easily believe traffickers and hence are vulnerable targets to the severe human rights violation. Traffickers take them to a new place through a delusion such as provision of desired jobs.

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There are many ways in which human trafficking occurs. Victims are deceived in several ways. Romance and relationship is the easiest way to get into the minds of the victims. Traffickers act as a lover boy in most cases to deceive the victims in a convenient manner. Job advertisements always grab the attention of those who are either unemployed or working on a very low sum of income. Studying abroad is also another phenomenon which can set the trap perfectly as most people desire to obtain better educational opportunities. Victims are also kidnapped or recruited through people who were previously involved in the modern slavery industry.

The Case for Bangladesh

From January 2013 to June 2018, there were 5,367 males, 1,138 females and 535 children were trafficked. Number of people arrested during the same period stand at 6,106 while the number of convictions were equivalent to 25. Approximately 6% of global human trafficking victims originate from South Asia, especially from Bangladesh and India. Conviction rate of 0.4% makes Bangladesh a lucrative country for trafficked. According to UNODC 2016 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, the number of convicted people stood at 10 to 15 in Bangladesh while the number of convictions was 50 to 80 in Nepal.

Law enforcement agencies rescued victims from Dhaka, Narayanganj, Chittagong and many parts of Bangladesh. Human traffickers were arrested from various parts of the country. Fake passports were recovered from a certain group that was involved in trafficking women to Dubai, Malaysia and Singapore. Traffickers also have a route through Chittagong where they try to transport people to Libya with the false promise of better jobs. First task is to travel to Dubai by air from Chittagong and then travel to Egypt by road in order to finally reach Libya. Several travel agencies are also involved found in human trafficking cases. Suspects were imprisoned and travel agencies were fined.

In light of the deaths of migrants while planning to go to Italy from Libya through the Mediterranean Sea, trafficking has become a major concern. Accounts have also been found that Bangladeshi women were sold in the sex industry of Saudi Arabia while they were supposed to work as a domestic worker. Approximately 300,000 female workers went to Saudi Arabia since 1999 with the hope of a better lifestyle. Many of these people were exploited in various forms. There are also instances that many Bangladeshi female workers chose to put an end to their lives rather than leading sorrowful lives. Saudi Arabia is a lucrative country where both men and women are trafficked. India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan are also lucrative human trafficking destinations. Migrants are forced to work in USA. Continentally Bangladeshi migrants are trafficked in Middle East, Southern Africa, East Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Europe.

Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act was introduced in 2012 and the rules were later formulated in 2017. National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking 2018-2022 was launched with the aim to combat human traffickers and build a better socioeconomic safety net while putting emphasis on capacity building

measures. Awareness building measures were aimed at the vulnerable groups of people so that they are safe from the jaws of human traffickers.

Ministry of Home Affairs also had Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to identify the human trafficking victims as soon as possible. The government of Bangladesh also pledged to ratify the Palermo Protocol in order to protect the citizens from trans-boundary crimes such as trafficking. It is a major step for Bangladesh in the form of an international legal instrument to fight the human trafficking acts. Ratification of Palermo Protocol will allow Bangladesh to execute integrated anti-trafficking efforts. Bangladesh and Malaysia signed an agreement in 2016 to create a legal immigration route to save the citizens from the plots of human traffickers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Bangladesh acts as a transit and destination for human trafficking victims. Dreams of Bangladeshi migrants are transformed into nightmares by the human traffickers. Integrated actions from all stakeholders can keep these dreams alive. These dreams must live on for Bangladesh as the nation thrives on the hard-earned remittances sent by the migrants who work tirelessly.

The authority must set up fast track courts in order to punish the perpetrators with immediate effect. People are trafficked by air, sea, and road and rail so these processes need to be identified by the government agencies. People must be made aware of the key indicators of human trafficking. Citizens must file complaints with the nearest law enforcement agency to make them aware of the suspects. There must be specialised centres built abroad to provide immediate services to the trafficking victims. Adequate information regarding vacancy of any company abroad should be verified by the potential Bangladeshi migrants.

Government should shut down fraudulent travel agencies and create a database of credible travel agencies. The stakeholders of the communities must be engaged in anti-trafficking acts. There must be proper communication between local government agencies and the central government agencies to destroy the fraudulent attempts of human traffickers. Nongovernmental organisations also need to step up their approaches to combat human trafficking. Teachers in schools must educate the children about various concepts of human trafficking. Religious preachers in the local areas can also raise awareness about the acts of human traffickers. There must be proper rehabilitation of the human trafficking survivors. Medical practitioners can provide services to the victims at low or no cost. Lawyers must help the victims to fight their cases to ensure justice. Therefore, human trafficking in Bangladesh can be tackled with proper steps from all the stakeholders.