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## GOOD GOVERNANCE IN LABOUR MIGRATION: STRENGTHENING THE DISTRICT EMPLOYMENT AND MANPOWER OFFICES (DEMO) FOR BETTER SERVICE

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### Abstract

*The entire migration processing of Bangladesh is centralized at the Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training (BMET) situated in Dhaka and, at the local level, it operates by District Employment and Manpower Offices (DEMO). This study aims to understand the role of these offices in governing labour migration in the Sylhet region and identify the areas to address to improve services. A mixed method approach was applied to conduct this study where both qualitative and quantitative methods used. Sylhet and Moulvi Bazar DEMOs are the core respondents (the areas under DEMO has been chosen in accordance with the density of labour migration). Beani Bazar and Moulvibazar Sadar were selected purposively. To collect qualitative data, interview schedules, formal meetings and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) has been conducted with the sampled DEMO. Using a structured questionnaire the sample size was 150 where 50 outgoing migrants, 50 returnees, and 50 migrants' family members were interviewed from Sylhet and Moulvibazar randomly, and two FGDs were conducted. The results showed that DEMO has several areas for improvement, such as a shortage of human resources and budget problems. The government of Bangladesh should take appropriate measures to enhance the*



*capacity of DEMOs including website development, introducing fingerprints services and pre-departure briefing by increasing posts, filling up existing positions, and bringing back those deputed elsewhere, and also ensure minimum staffing norms.*

*Keywords: Migration, Employment and Manpower Offices, DEMO, Service, Good Governance, Bangladesh*

## INTRODUCTION

Labour migration abroad is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh (Kamal et al., 2013). It has a long history, starting before the Second World War during the British colonial role (Schendel, 2020). The process and condition of migration from Bangladesh have changed over time. Although Bangladesh was conservative at the beginning, it later changed its position for development purposes. For various reasons, labour migration has been increasing day by day. Currently, remittance is the second largest earning source in Bangladesh, and this remittance is being sent by international migrant workers generally (Chowdhury & Chakraborty, 2021). Since the British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent, Bangladeshi workers started working in the European merchant ships, and many settled in the European countries permanently. Immediately after its independence, Bangladesh joined the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and its relationship with the Arab countries had become very healthy (Syfullah, 2015). From that point onward, the trend of labour migration off to the Middle Eastern countries headed to Saudi Arabia. These trends are still dominating the labour migration process. These were unskilled workers for specific jobs. The trend of skilled migration later started to take place. Moreover, over the years, labour migration started to increase dramatically. Currently, the country has migrant labour in almost all countries worldwide. Labour migrants from Bangladesh still have been able to manage to attract significant sectors of the job markets, and the Middle East has represented the highest number of Bangladeshi migrants.

Labour migration occurs in rural areas where the less educated but potential migrants reside. Up to 2021, 13312192 people have been off to overseas working in different destinations (BMET, 2023). Till 2021, the amount of remittance received was US\$ 241738.32 (BMET, 2023), considered the second highest earning after the garments sector. Since the establishment of the Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training (BMET) in 1976, data from BMET and other sources showed that the category of labour migrants was mostly semi-skilled. Labour migration is governed both centrally and locally in Bangladesh. Such migration occurs from rural areas, but the governing mechanism is, in most ways, out of reach of the local people. Only 42 district-level offices for migration governance are located in town areas. These offices do not have a

rural-level attachment, so they can rarely reach their entitled activities out of the centre. For this reason, an outgoing migrant is to go to Dhaka for their pre-departure briefing to enroll in fingerprint for overseas migration. Overseas job information is processed mainly in informal ways, which gets the unaware people connected with illegal intermediaries and results in higher costs in money and life. Sylhet stands second after Comilla, where labour migrations take place. To ensure good governance and provide better services to this massive number of labourers, it is essential to strengthen DEMOs in the Sylhet region.

Considering the actual scenario of migration governance in Bangladesh, it demands that the governing system of the giant labour industry be reviewed. This research attempts to work on the system of governance, as in the era of digital governance, it is easy to get people access to services and information faster through e-governance. Therefore, it is essential to look into how the process can be made easier and accessible to the migrants willing to migrate, introducing the revitalized migration governance system in Bangladesh. The study attempts to find ways to improve and strengthen the DEMO functions, especially in the Sylhet region. It also aims to understand the role of these DEMOs in governing labour migration in the region mentioned and identify the areas to address to improve the services of these offices.

### **Background on BMET and DEMOs**

The entire migration process is centralized at the Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training (BMET) in Dhaka. It has become a challenge for the potential migrant to come to Dhaka already overburdened with his/her preparation to migrate to an unknown destination. However, the government needs more administrative involvement to facilitate migration from the grassroots. It has established several district-level offices to monitor labour migration from the district level. Bangladesh set up BMET in 1976, and now it has 42 district-level offices called District Employment and Manpower Offices (DEMOs). They are administrative wings of BMET authorized to monitor and promote safe labour migration from Bangladesh. These 42 DEMOs are responsible for monitoring migration from 64 districts. Thus, some DEMOs are assigned to manage more than one district.

The database entry of migrant workers through fingerprint taking is in full swing. Daily work is evident in every district-level office in the country. The BMET is encouraging the workers to go abroad with proper training, and at the same time, they also provide training. BMET is usually supposed to check the legality of the visa provided for the workers as well as other related information. However, the migrant workers are still not entirely under the arena of DEMOs, and an intermediate body mainly controls the sector. To meet the world's future challenges, many tasks are expected to be done by the government. Some more efforts and

changes can make the situation better, more effective, and world-class. The government must address this potential sector to make the services more accessible and reliable to migrant workers. BMET plays a vital role in the entire governing area. It has been said above that as labour migration occurs mainly from the grassroots, the government established some district-level offices called DEMO. Over DEMO's functioning, BMET issued a circular in 2010, which is seen as the Citizen Charter in every DEMO office nowadays.

These offices cannot govern migration processes better, because, among the 42, none have their proper establishment, physical infrastructure, technological support, and website for easy access to migration-related services. They need permanent infrastructure and adequate human resources. Thus, the specialized government mechanism for migration governance is still unrevealed. That is why there is a gap between the governing mechanism and how they should be governed, which has been created. Due to the lack of accountability and transparency, illegal recruiting agencies have been involved in the process, and migration governance has become fragile daily. Of all the activities, DEMOs are entitled to collect job information, information on the skill and number of the intending migrants, migration-related awareness campaigns, collection and publicity of job information, and others. Since 1976, the number of migrants and remittances has been increasing, but the related mechanisms for migration governance have been below as required. Moreover, the DEMO offices are located outside the migration-prone areas. For example, there are only two DEMO offices in the Sylhet division. One is in Sylhet city, and the other one is in Moulvibazar.

According to the BMET data (2023), in the Sylhet division, 93,727 migrants from Habiganj and 64,096 migrants from Sunamganj are working in different destinations, but DEMO Offices do not have any activities for migration governance at the local level. These offices still do not have websites for easy access to services for the migrants. Thus, from collecting job information to fingerprint enrolment, the migrants must go to Sylhet or Dhaka from their homes each time. Such a scenario is typical for the DEMOs functioning. Centralization of BMET and lack of DEMO's empowerment increased migration costs and burdened their ability. DEMO is directed to raise awareness of safe migration. Nevertheless, raising awareness in remote areas by DEMOs is rarely seen. DEMO offices are supposed to collect and disseminate overseas job information for the migrants, but this work is still missing on DEMO's end.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Shariat Ullah (2012) explained the major factors responsible for labour migration. Although there are some common factors for labour migration, it largely depends on the source country's situation. This empirical study showed that among many factors, cultural factors were

more important than any other reason for migrating to another country. He suggested that Bangladesh strengthen its institutional capacity to develop skilled manpower to foster immigration to developed countries. Arifuzzaman et al. (2015) showed that most of the migrants were mainly middle-aged, illiterate, and had no technical training and professional skills. They tried to identify where the migrants usually spend their remittances and found three sectors: consumption, savings, and investment. Most of them used their money to increase their living standard, and rarely could they save or have been able to invest.

Tasneem Siddiqui (2005) emphasized how globalization could be managed better to maximize the benefits and minimize economic and social costs. Sharma et al. (2015) showed various miseries, exploitation, and human rights cases of abuse of migrants at different points. They may be subject to untold exploitation and miseries during the migration process and even after reaching the countries they want to. They also put forward some ways to tackle those problems effectively, including the influential role-playing by the government and non-state actors. Non-state actors are the recruitment agencies and brokers in origin and destination countries. For the betterment of the migrants, the interventions on migration should be addressed by the respective governments at both the source and destination points. Juan Buchenau (2008) pointed out that the main constraints were the high cost of migration and, irregularities in the migration process, and an insufficient network to collect and deliver remittances. Although many steps have been taken to address these issues, extra efforts must be invested to improve the situation.

Cardona and Eriksen (2015), argued that for providing better service and ensuring good governance, the system should be based on competence and integrity in achieving the public interests and demands. They suggested few ways to follow to ensure good governance including separation of politics and administration, recruitment and promotion should be based on merit, there must be accountability, should have external control of legality, a salary system must be fixed by law, a managerial system to ensure common standards.

Muhammad Ali (2015) argued that good governance is the legitimate and effective method of gaining society's widely accepted goals and objectives. Graham et al. (2003) quoted Kofi Anan, 'Good governance is perhaps the most critical factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development. They mentioned five principles of good governance: legitimacy and voice, direction, performance, accountability, and fairness. Gisselquist (2012) noted that all crucial institutions and organizations agreed that promoting good governance is their top agenda. Although he said that good governance was an elusive objective, every institution or organization tries to ensure it in their institutions.

Khoda and Akram (2017) maintain that ensuring good governance in labour migration is a complex phenomenon as the stakeholders here are of wide ranges. On the other hand,

improper management in labour migration may cause serious harm and insecurity. Inappropriate management indirectly gives a leeway for migrant smuggling and human trafficking and even social unrest. Since the process of labour migration in Bangladesh is Dhaka centric, it leads to corruption and inviting unauthorized people/agents to get involved in the process. Strengthening DEMOs can reduce migration corruption and benefits the migrants.

Kaniz and others (2025) identified various problems in labour migration management in Bangladesh which showed a significantly decreasing trend of foreign remittances flow. They also offered a number of ways and means to improve and provide better services for labour migration including providing adequate relevant knowledge to the migrants, and providing cooperation from govt. officials.

Smith and Politowski (2008) demonstrated the positive link of good governance with organizational performance. They concluded that all organizations must exhibit good governance, whether private entities, public bodies, charities, or corporate bodies. Since the world is increasingly becoming complex and the stakeholders play a vital role, providing good governance and transparency is highly expected. Although many empirical studies dealt with migration and good governance separately, the papers that study the nexus between the two are scarce. This study is an attempt to link the two specified areas and tries to find a way to strengthen the DEMOs in ensuring good governance of labour migration from Bangladesh, particularly from the Sylhet region. Further, this study reveals the scope and opportunities of ensuring good governance through strengthening DEMOs.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is mixed-method research. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied in this study. There are forty-two District Employment Manpower Offices (DEMOs) around the country that follow the same circular (working instruction known as Citizen Charter in DEMO) issued by BMET. A purposive sampling technique has been observed for research convenience in selecting DEMOs. As the working procedure is almost the same in all DEMOs, sample size and location are chosen from significant migration-prone areas. In this regard, Sylhet and Moulvi Bazar DEMOs are the core respondents (the sites under DEMO have been selected following the density of labour migration). Sylhet stands second for migration to abroad after Comilla. Thus Sylhet has been selected purposively for the convenience of the researchers which saved time and money.

For the quantitative study, simple random sampling has been drawn to collect data from the demand side. This study used a survey method with a closed-ended questionnaire to collect quantitative data. We collected data from 150 respondents from two districts. 85 samples from

Borodesh and Mathura villages of Beani Bazar Upazilla under Sylhet district and 65 samples from Durlovpur and Khalishpur villages of Moulvi Bazar Sadar Upazila. As we knew that the number of migrants was higher in Beani Bazar than in Moulvi Bazar sadar upazila, we collected more data from Beani Bazar proportionately. In Beani Bazar, the number of migrants is approximately 20% of the total migrant population of the district, and in Beani Bazar, the number of migrants is approximately 15% of their population. Out of 150 respondents 50 were outgoing migrants, 50 were returnees, and 50 were migrants' family members. Along with interviews, one Focused Group Discussion (FGD) in each selected area was conducted, where migrants and their family members, local-level community leaders, civil society members, representatives from DEMOs, and recruiting agencies attended.

A survey is administered to a randomly chosen sample of potential migrant workers, returnees, and assistance users who visit DEMO offices. To guarantee representativeness, the sample size is calculated using a standard confidence interval (95%) and margin of error (5%). Perceptions and experiences pertaining to service delivery is quantified to the questionnaires' closed-ended items.

To reduce response bias and guarantee consistency, data is collected in-person by qualified enumerators. For analysis, all replies are coded and input into statistical programmes STATA. Governance performance indicators are summarized using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, and means. Relationships between governance strategies and service results can be found using inferential methods like regression analysis and correlation. In addition to offering evidence-based ideas for enhancing good governance in labour migration management, the quantitative approach guarantees objective monitoring of DEMO success.

## RESULTS OF THE STUDY

One of the significant tasks of DEMOs is the job seekers' registration. However, local people are not aware of the activities of DEMOs. People are less aware of DEMOs where there is no office, although DEMO or DC (Deputy Commissioner) officials are entitled to promote safe migration in those areas. Registration of returnee migrants is also not evident at the grassroots level. During its inception, DEMO officials are entrusted with registering potential labour workers through a survey at the grassroots. Over time, this activity has become less known to the officers. Nowadays, DEMO officials only conduct surveys when instructed for a particular purpose. All DEMOs need to be appropriately updated with information on overseas jobs. They need to have an updated list of training programmes in demand in the international market. Under this section, DEMO officials are not entrusted with any specific activity related to

counseling migrants. The root cause of such a lower rate of women's migration in terms of men is the lack of awareness, literacy, superstitious beliefs, and conservativeness among the guardians and the masses. Therefore, many of the workforces have been missing the development process and their contribution to the countries' development. In this situation, DEMO should undertake several field-level interventions to promote female labour migration from the government to utilize the massive workforce of women. However, most DEMOs cannot send female workers due to lack of human resources and awareness among local people. In many places, DEMO officials face harassment and have to seek support from local authorities to introduce activities of DEMOs concerning sending females from a particular locality.

One of the regular activities of DEMO officials is nominee management. They conduct field visits and inquiries into matters to ensure nominees are at the grassroots. Recently, the government of Bangladesh has taken the initiative to promote female migration from Bangladesh. BMET has issued a circular instructing DEMO official to collect a minimum number of potential female migrants from their respective areas. They must arrange coordination meetings with DC and other service providers to manage these migrants. However, DEMO officials are less visible in the welfare of returnee migrants and in supporting remittance management. DEMOs do not have any specific tasks to address these two duties. Most of the development programmes' target is only providing logistical support, not building the capacity of the offices. The overseas job advertisement needs to be visible in the activities of DEMOs. They also need more information on advertised jobs.

Table 1: The services available in Sylhet DEMO

List of activities	Giving service	Respondents' satisfaction %
Online visa checking	yes	60
Online registration and fingerprint	yes	70
Smart card issue	no	0
NOC for migrant's family members	no	0
Distribution of updated recent agency list	Yes	40
Allowance of medical and accident compensation	Yes	10
Dead body repatriation	Yes	10
Scholarship for migrant's children	No	0
Information of migration	Yes	10
Online complaint management	No	0
Inquiries for prosecution	Yes	0
Arbitration and reconciliation	Yes	30

## DISCUSSION

### Centralization of power

According to the officials (DEMO), significant tasks vested in them are highly centralized. The findings of this research show that DEMO's primary functions are providing death compensation, nominee identification, burial costs, and mitigating migration-related disputes. In the above mentioned cases, DEMO prepares a report, visiting the field and sends it to the BMET for approval. Moreover, the money for compensation for burial is kept in BMET. In this situation, the DEMO needs two phases to pass to accomplish such tasks.

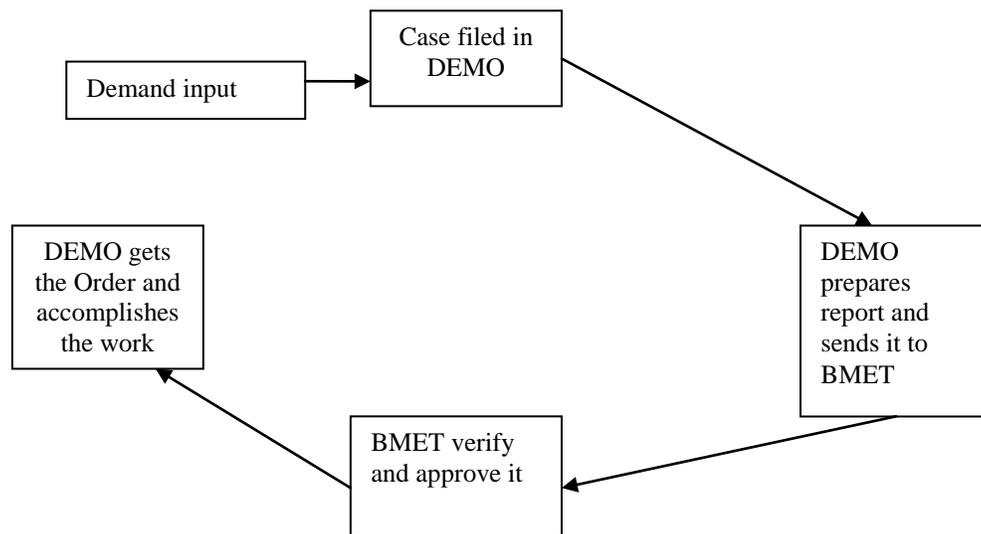


Figure: 1 Step of working of DEMO and the BMET

The diagram shows the hierarchical working steps of the DEMO and the BMET. As DEMO works at the root level, people file their cases of demand in DEMO first. DEMO processes the files and sends it to BMET to verify in order to get approval from the BMET. And after approval from the BMET, DEMOs receives orders to accomplish the tasks. In such a system, the working motion becomes slow, and people get the results after a long wait. Therefore, the result is time killing, the sufferings of the affected people, and thus decreased working capability of the officials.

### Lack of promotion for DEMO officials

There needs to be a system for the promotion of DEMO officials. It will make them enthusiastic and encourages them to perform better. In all kinds of government services, promotion for the employees is an everyday phenomenon. DEMO is a government institution

with no system for the further promotion of ADs (Assistant Director appointed at the beginning). The procedure for promoting ADs is a must because they are experienced from the grassroots level, and utilizing their experiences to streamline migration processes quite successful.

### **No Arrangement for Pre-Departure Briefing at District Level**

DEMO is not entitled to arrange a pre-departure briefing for the outgoing migrants. The pre-departure briefing is a learning process through which migrants can learn about the destination country's values, norms, rules, regulations, and culture. As most labourers are unskilled and illiterate, the briefing is necessary to adjust to an unknown country's environment.

Table 2: Pre-departure Briefing

District	No (%)
Sylhet	100
Sunamganj	100
Habiganj	100
Moulvibazar	100

### **Lack of Coordination with Different Stakeholders**

A common claim of DEMO officials is that there needs to be more friendship in coordination between BMET and DEMO. From providing burial expenses to welfare activities, DEMO officials are stubborn step by step. They remain as non-cooperative mood. The bill, for example, that can be passed in a day is delayed, making them wait for days and months.

Table 3: Level of Coordination

Institutions	Cooperation
With BMET	Yes
With Embassy (labour attaché)	No
With Ministry	No
With NGOs	Yes

### **Training up of DEMO Officials**

There is no training institution under BMET for DEMO officials. Due to the lack of training and instruction, they cannot provide proper services to the migrants. For this, illegal intermediaries (unauthorized) take the opportunity to climb up on the whole migration process.

### Authority of Deputy Commissioner (DC) over the DEMO

DEMO officials should have the consent of the DC to take decisions or any initiative. In encouraging women migration, some DEMOs have faced barriers from the DCs. They argued that DC does not allow them to process female migration. The lack of coordination between the DC office and DEMO is a barrier to ensuring women's migration and good governance in this sector.

### Welfare Desk (Prohashi Kallyan Desk) and DEMO Office

Prohashi Kallyan Desk (PKD) was established during the Second Gulf War to meet the challenges in the migration sector. Gradually, it has expanded at every district level. The function of the PKD is to perform welfare-related tasks for migrants, which differ slightly from DEMO. DEMO officials argued that DEMO could perform the functions of PKD if it were empowered and provided necessary logistic support. Some of the DEMO officials think it is an extravagance of the government.

### Manpower in DEMO

According to the rules, there would be five officials in every DEMO. But in the findings of RMMRU (Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit), it has been seen that some DEMO runs with 2/3 officials and some run with 15. Such an imbalance in manpower distribution leads to improper service to the migrants.

Table 4: Current Scenario of Manpower

	Sylhet	Moulvibazar	Sunamganj	Habiganj
MSO (Manpower Survey Officer)	1	0	No DEMO	No DEMO
Other staff	3	2	0	0

### Budget and DEMO

As far as we know, DEMO is an older institution for migration in Bangladesh. The government's budget and other logistic support have slowly increased for DEMO offices. DEMO faces conflicting conditions when necessary support does not match the rapidly growing labour migration. The current budget for DEMOs is BDT 78.8 million. This budget is not adequate for running 42 DEMOs. The minimum budgetary allocation for the DEMOs is required BDT 250 million for a fiscal year.

### **Job Advertisements are not Provided at DEMO Offices**

Many of the DEMO officials argued that job advertisements, both local and international, are not provided in DEMO. As most of them possess no computer or internet service, it has become difficult for them to collect such advertisements on their own. DEMO, as a result, cannot provide job advertisements to the people. It benefits some recruiting agencies and unauthorized people by attracting people through job advertisements. In this way, DEMO becomes dysfunctional for local people.

### **Lack of Adequate Professional Knowledge of DEMO Officials**

One of the functions of DEMO is to check the visas. This task requires experience and professional training. DEMO officials are not provided with such professional training to identify the visas bought by intending migrants. Because of the lack of guidance and expertise, there are several cases of migrants being deceived by illegal recruiting agencies and intermediaries.

### **Internal Problem of DEMOs**

#### ***Infrastructural Problem***

An infrastructural problem is assumed to be another barrier to DEMO's activities. Lack of logistic support, communication problems, absence of permanent buildings, etc., are the fundamental obstacles for DEMO. Because there is a lack of permanent establishments, DEMOs must pay a hefty amount yearly. Moreover, one DEMO covers more than one district. In this circumstance, they face communication problems. Due to the lack of other logistic support, DEMO cannot provide its service in remote areas. There is no permanent building for DEMO. Office houses are rented. The difficulty is that they cannot rent a home in developed regions due to high costs. As a result, the places they get on rent are most of the time devoid of internet connection and other modern amenities. It decreases the sound working environment. Moreover, some districts have high costs for everything. In this case, they must suffer from budget constraints due to the fixed and ample money supply.

Table 5: Infrastructural Scenario

	<b>Sylhet</b>	<b>Moulvibazar</b>	<b>Sunamganj</b>	<b>Habiganj</b>
Physical infrastructure	Rented	Rented	No DEMO	No DEMO
Human infrastructure	3	2	0	0

### **Communication Problem**

Communication is mentioned as a severe problem in DEMO's functioning. It has been repeatedly noted that one DEMO covers several districts. They have to go mile after mile to accomplish their duties. There are some backward places with no transport or roadways but water. For four to five people, it is a difficult task for them to manage such situations.

Table 6: Mode and Problems of Communication

<b>Mode</b>	<b>Sylhet</b>	<b>Sunamganj</b>	<b>Habiganj</b>	<b>Moulvibazar</b>
Transportation	No	No DEMO	No DEMO	No
Office bearer	No	No DEMO	No DEMO	No
Call centre	No	No DEMO	No DEMO	No

### **Lack of Logistic Support**

There are a few offices that have online facilities. A large number of DEMOs need online service opportunities. They have no connection with Bangladeshi missions abroad. That is why they are not updated on the number and situation of migrants and job advertisements abroad.

### **Fingerprint System at DEMO**

Outgoing migrants come to Dhaka for their fingerprints from the periphery levels of the country. It leads the migrants to difficulty accomplishing this process as most do not know about it. Though the government has initiated the introduction of a fingerprint system in all DEMO offices rather than in the center, the process is going very slowly. Only some of the DEMO offices have been entitled to run the operation.

### **Human Resource Problem**

One of the significant problems that DEMO faces is its human resources. There are four people (on average) in every office. These persons have to perform several tasks—legal issues, social issues, death-related issues and their management, and so on. Moreover, most DEMOs have to maintain more than one district. In this situation, it is challenging for a few to manage such things in a general area. Because of the shortage of human resources, as DEMO officials said, they need to provide adequate service to the people.

### **Registration of the Aspirant Migrants**

Registration of potential migrants at the district level became mandatory in 1996 to stop hoodwinking in labour migration. Due to the compulsory registration system, people migrate

through government functionaries. Here, the government used to bear any entrant's risk and challenge of migration. Migrants were promised to provide support at the central (BMET) and district level (DEMO) in this system. But gradually, this system was relaxed, and BAIRA (Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies) was entitled to perform this function. Providing authority to private agencies to remove the fraudulence is a question of DEMO officials. Moreover, the candidates registered in DEMO offices need to get a chance to migrate faster. Those who register through BAIRA migrate faster than those who do it through DEMO. Candidates have written through DEMO for years but have not received any information or a chance to relocate. This results in the reduction of faith of the migrants in DEMO.

### **Demand Side (Recipient Side)**

This study has collected detailed information on migrant households in rural areas in the Sylhet region of Bangladesh. A structured questionnaire has been designed to accomplish the study, including migrant profile information. The definition of migration included in the questionnaire is anyone within the household who has migrated within the country or abroad during the last five years. The data variables (migrant-related information) collected are age, gender, education, occupational skills, name of district, duration of stay, and amount of remittances during the last 12 months.

It has been observed that among the migrated persons, about 20% migrated from one district to another within the country, and about 80% migrated abroad. The majority of the migrated persons overseas were male, about 90%. More than 85% of migrants were unskilled or semi-skilled and have been assigned mainly to construction, agricultural, and service sectors like restaurant and cleaning. The proportion of female migrants within the country was higher than that of male migrants. Most migrants can just read and write, and the highest level of education was 12 classes completed years of schooling.

It has been observed that the highest percentage of migrants was in the age group of 25–40, which holds irrespective of male or female. The second largest age group reported was in the 41-50 age bracket. The female migrants were mainly house servants at home and abroad. The migrants got job information at the destination through friends, relatives, and human traffickers. In the case of complaints, they mainly go to the offices of agents who serve as agents, and they hardly get any genuine assistance.

Data collected from the respondents reveals that, on average, migrants spent Tk. 50000 per person for getting a visa while they intend to go abroad. Although they had to spend more money than they mentioned for this purpose, many were unwilling to disclose it. After getting visas, many (almost 70%) of migrated people could check their visa authenticity through official

channels. A few others checked them with the help of their relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

The most important aspect is that every aspirant has to undergo fingerprinting. Only 40% of migrants performed their fingerprints in the Sylhet office. The rest went to Dhaka to complete it either because they did not know that it could have been done in Sylhet or felt it was reliable to do it in Dhaka. Before departing to the destination country, they must have a smart card carrying all the required information. Regarding smart card collection, respondents received a similar type of answer. Around 60% of respondents collected their smart cards from the BMET office in Dhaka, and the rest collected from the DEMO local office.

Likewise, intelligent collection data also showed that more than 50% of respondents collected the NOC (No Objection Certificate) from Dhaka, and less than half of them got it from Sylhet local office. It is almost similar to those who accomplished their fingerprint from Dhaka, i.e., those who went for the fingerprint to Dhaka; they also collected their NOC from Dhaka. There is a provision that every migrant is entitled to have medical allowances during their illness. However, rarely did they receive medical assistance during their illness. The researcher found only one respondent who received a medical allowance during his illness.

It is a disgrace that most respondents did not go through proper counseling before deciding to go abroad. They were merely motivated by their families' desires and friends' pushing, and essentially, they did not find suitable jobs in Bangladesh. This is why many of them, without knowing proper descriptions of their jobs, salaries, and other facilities, had been deceived, and in some cases, they had to come back home. Data also showed that migrants hardly participated in any awareness campaign before departing their destination country.

It has been mentioned that along with interviews of migrants, aspirants, and returnees, two Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) have been conducted. FGDs revealed that similar data had been found through personal interviews, including that they mainly get job information from their relatives, friends, families, and acquaintances. Everyone spent a different amount of money on getting a visa; it varied from person to person, ranging from Tk. 20,000 to Tk. 80000. More than half of them preferred going to Dhaka for fingerprinting, collecting smart cards, and having NOC. FGDs also showed that no one availed of medical allowances during their illness. They needed to gain awareness, participate in any awareness campaign, or know their job descriptions. Whenever they face any problem abroad, they mainly go to their agents rather than visiting the embassies or High commissions.

## CONCLUSION

The District Employment and Manpower Offices are the last resort for the grassroots people from where labour migration occurs. The government of Bangladesh has taken significant steps to develop various services for migrants and their families. It has established a ministry to manage labour migration and ensure the welfare of migrants' workers. The Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) is responsible for the government creating options for overseas employment, addressing and resolving the problems of expatriates, and ensuring the welfare of the migrant population. The Ministry is also responsible for regulating and monitoring the labour migration process through existing legislation. The Ministry manages its responsibilities through its national and grassroots agencies. Four other ministries play significant role in international labour migration from Bangladesh, i.e., Ministries of Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Civil Aviation and Tourism. The Bangladesh foreign missions are entrusted with looking for new labour markets for Bangladeshi workers. The government has also established a specialized bank, Prabashi Kallyan Bank (PKB), to support migrants with accessible and low-interest loan facilities for migration and remittance utilization. Along with such initiatives, the government should emphasize strengthening the DEMO offices to serve the migrants better. The government can take the following initiatives to improve the functioning and governance of DEMO.

Build permanent infrastructure, construct the same building in which PKD, DEMO, PKB, and TTC (Technical Training. Centres) would exist, mandate registration in the direct labour migration system from TTCs, ensure adequate and necessary manpower to DEMO, provide training to DEMO officials and training modules for DEMO them, and introduce a promotion system for DEMO officials. Apart from the suggestions mentioned above, it is essential to ensure that aspirants go to Government Offices other than going to *dalals* (unauthorized or intermediaries) for any assistance or information related to migration. It is also important to introduce or make aspirants participate in awareness campaigns so they are acquainted with the jobs and environment they will face in their destination country before departing their home country and thus won't become unhappy if any untoward situation they face. The government should take special care of medical allowances during migrants' illnesses, and the High Commissions abroad should be more friendly and cooperative with their needs. In short, the government of Bangladesh should take appropriate measures to enhance the capacity of DEMOs including website development, introducing fingerprints services and pre-departure briefing by increasing posts, filling up existing positions, and bringing back those deputed elsewhere, and also ensure minimum staffing norms.

## DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing of this manuscript.

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