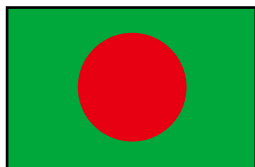


BANGLADESH



AMY Map by Boyet Rivera III

A. Total Stock (Number) of Migrants, as of June 2007

MIGRANTS ABROAD		
ESTIMATED STOCK: MIGRANTS OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY		
TOTAL		
a. By visa status	Documented migrant workers*	2,444,709****
	Emigrants/residents	-
	Undocumented migrants**	-
	Refugees	-
b. By sex	Male	-
	Female	-
c. Top destination countries	1. Saudi Arabia - 1,153,550	6. Bahrain - 80,895
	2. UAE - 383,879	7. Qatar - 54,698
	3. Kuwait - 238,865	8. Iraq - 33,171
	4. Malaysia - 192,699	9. Libya - 27,109
	5. Singapore - 128,776	10. Jordan - 11,090

MIGRANTS IN BANGLADESH		
ESTIMATED STOCK: MIGRANTS IN THE COUNTRY		
TOTAL		
a. By visa status	Documented migrant workers*	-
	Emigrants/residents	-
	Undocumented migrants**	-
	Refugees***	21,053
b. By sex	Male	-
	Female	-
c. Top countries of origin	1.	6.
	2.	7.
	3.	8.
	4.	9.
	5.	10.

* Non-resident, temporary, or contract workers.

** Includes illegal entrants, overstayed or "jumped" visas, trafficked/smuggled people

*** As defined by the government, or in accordance with the UN refugee convention.

**** Estimated stock based on official outflow statistics from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) from 1976 – June 2007, minus 50% estimated return rate as suggested by BMET.

B. Annual Socio-Economic Data and Migration Flow

Annual indicators	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000
Population (million; mid-year estimate)	144.319	141.3	138.4	133.38	131.50	
% Population living below poverty line	45.0	35.6	36.0			
Economic growth: real GDP (%)	5.2	5.3	4.4		6.0	5.9
Per capita GDP (US\$)			376		350	
Per capita GDP: purchasing power parity (US\$)	2,100	1,900	1,800	1,800	1,610	1,570
Inflation rate: CPI (%; annual ave.)	6.7	5.6	3.1		2.9	2.6
Exchange rate (Taka per US\$; annual ave.)	64.26	58.15	57.88	57.76	55.81	52.14
International reserves (US\$ billion; yearend)	3.45	2.64			1.31	1.52
Foreign direct investments: actual (US\$ million; yearend)						280.00
Foreign (total external) debt (US\$ billion; yearend)	21.250	18.6 Billion	16,500.000			15.609
Labor force (million)	66.6	64.2	64.1			
Women as % of labor force			43			
Number unemployed (millions)						
Unemployment rate (% of labor force)	2.5		40.0		35.0	
Underemployment rate (% labor force)						
Women unemployment rate (% of labor force)						
Average income: urban (Taka/month)						
Average income: women (US\$/month)						
Adult literacy rate (% of age 15 & above who can read/write)			43		40.6	
Net migration rate (net # of migrants per 1,000 popn)	(-0.69)	(0.71)		(0.75)	(0.76)	(0.77)
Annual outflow/deployment of MWs (thousand)						
% women in the annual outflow						
Annual inflow of MWs						
% women in the annual inflow						
Annual migrants' remittance (US\$ billion/yr)						1.90
Reported # of migrant deaths during the year (ave/yr)				1 per day		
HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate (adult PLHA as % of adult popn)	< 0.1				< 0.10	
# People living with HIV/AIDS (thousand)		13.0				
# AIDS deaths during the year (adults+children)		650				

Sources: CIA World Factbook, UN/WHO/UNDP statistical yearbooks/websites.

AMC Information Bank



Photo courtesy of WARBE

Although migrants' rights advocates are carrying out strong ratification campaigns, Bangladesh has not yet ratified the UN Migrant Workers' Convention.

BANGLADESH

This report was contributed by Dr. Chowdhury Abrar of RMMRU, with further information provided by Mr. Syed Saiful Haque of WARBE.

Political and Economic Update

Bangladesh has witnessed major tensions with periodic spates of violence between the ruling and opposition parties, boycotting of the parliament by the opposition, and a series of strikes. The rise of Islamic organizations has also added a new element to Bangladesh politics.

While Bangladesh politics have long been characterized as nationalistic, confrontational and violent, political violence escalated further throughout 2004 and 2005. Tensions between

Awami League and the BNP, combined with Islamic parties, has frequently boiled over into violence. In August 2004, 20 were killed in a grenade attack on a political rally of the Awami League in Dhaka, including the Women's Affairs Secretary, and in January 2005 another grenade attack killed the former Finance Minister, Shah Kibria, at a rally in northern Bangladesh.¹

Many are also killed by the police and other law enforcement agencies, including the controversial Rapid Action Battallion (RAB), formed in 2003 and said to be responsible for carrying out extrajudicial killings with impunity. According to Human Rights Watch, between January and October 2005, approximately 300 people were killed in such clashes with security forces.

The government outlawed two fringe Islamic organizations, as religious extremism appears to

be growing and may have been linked to a series of bomb attacks in August 2005.² On August 17, over 400 bombs exploded simultaneously in 63 of the country's 64 districts, all of them targeting government institutions.³

Corruption remains a problem, and appears to be firmly entrenched; Bangladesh has been ranked the most corrupt country in the world on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index for five consecutive years. Aid donors have continually urged the country to take stronger action against corruption, and an Independent Anti-Corruption Commission was established in late 2004, although its efficacy remains to be seen.⁴

Bangladesh's economy is strongly driven by its services sector, which accounts for half of the GDP. GDP growth has been fairly steady around 5%, posting a 5.3% gain in 2005. While this growth is a major achievement considering the fragile political environment and the natural disasters which have stricken the country, it is insufficient to bring the population out of poverty. Overall, the country remains poor and overpopulated: 45% of the population lives below the poverty line, and two-thirds of Bangladeshis are employed in agriculture, primarily subsistence-level. In November 2005, Bangladesh issued a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Despite this, the country still faces problems with population growth and gaps between men and women.

Per capita income levels are still quite low, with the GDP per capita at USD445, although the country has made progress in human development indicators. Major indicators such as average life expectancy and primary education enrolments have been steadily growing. Bangladesh has also made a great deal of progress in achieving its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), although a number of goals remain unmet. Bangladesh is currently ranked 139 out of 177 countries in UNDP's Human Development Indicators.

Over time, there has been steady growth of the manufacturing sector, led mainly by apparel

manufacturing, which drives Bangladesh's exports. Although concerns about the potential adverse impact of termination of the MFA – which would withdraw the quotas that Bangladesh used to enjoy, leading to speculation of massive retrenchment in the garment sector – proved to be ill-founded, the country's heavy reliance on a single industry remained a worry. Approximately 85% of Bangladesh's exports are garment industry, which is vulnerable to fluctuations and competition in the global economy. Women, in particular, are reliant on this industry, as women constitute 80% of the garment labour force. The shrinking of the public sector has led to weakening of the trade unions; that, too, is fractured along party political lines. All these factors have led to the general erosion of bargaining power for workers in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh maintained a healthy foreign currency reserve and a steady but less than expected flow of foreign direct investment. Analysts believe that political turmoil in the country contributed to potential investors shying away. The bureaucratic decision making process and corruption are two other factors that worry investors at home and abroad. The public banking sector is also impeding the country's economic development, with many state-owned banks heavily burdened by non-performing loans (NPLs), although the proportion of NPLs to total lending has been declining in recent years.⁵

Migration Update

With a huge labor surplus, Bangladesh is a major sending country of migrant workers. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait constitute the most important destinations of Bangladesh labor to the Gulf region, while Malaysia and Singapore are the major main destinations in East Asia. There are also large numbers of Bangladeshi workers in India and South Korea. The total stock of Bangladesh migrant workers abroad is reported to be 4,885,704.⁶

TABLE 1: FLOW OF MIGRATION BY COUNTRY OF EMPLOYMENT

Year	K.S.A.	Kuwait	U.A.E.	Qatar	Libya	Bahrain	Oman
2000	144618	594	34034	1433	1010	4637	5258
2001	137248	5341	16252	223	450	4371	4561
2002	163269	15769	25462	552	1574	5421	3854
2003	162131	26722	37246	94	2855	7482	4029
2004	139031	41108	47012	1268	606	9194	4435
2005	80425	47029	61978	2114	972	10716	4827

Note: Includes selected Asian countries only, see http://www.bmet.org.bd/Flow_Migration.htm for full table.

Source: BMET

There has been an overt dominance of unskilled and semi-skilled labor. In 2004, out of a total of 272,958 workers who migrated abroad for employment, 122,252 were unskilled workers. An overwhelming bulk of 187,194 workers migrated through their own social network, while the recruitment industry processed 85,458 cases. The country earned USD3.5 billion as remittances in 2004, a figure that crossed the USD4 billion mark in 2005, making it the most important net foreign exchange earning sector.

Despite the fact that labor migration in its current form began in the mid-1970s and the principal government organization dealing with labor migration, the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), was established in 1976, pre-departure preparation remains insufficient. Pre-departure issues continue to undermine the interests of outbound migrant workers, particularly lack of information about the migration process as well as the rights and conditions in the receiving country. Due to lack of sources of credible information, informal agents continue to be principal sources of information to prospective migrants. This often results in failed migration or exploitation, leading to further impoverishment of migrant households. As the migration arrangements continue to remain largely informal, there is

very little opportunity for bringing agents who cheat workers to justice. Moreover, legal aid services are almost non-existent. There is also a major gap in streamlining the recruitment industry, which wields major influence on the centers of power. A good number of agencies are owned and patronized by persons involved in policy making. When cases of misdemeanour are reported, the registered recruiting agencies generally plead innocence. However, there is a widespread belief that a large portion of these agencies has their separate travel companies that facilitate irregular migration. Sending workers abroad without proper documentation, delaying the migration process even after full payment of fees, harassing migrants with unnecessary medical tests, and other activities are just a few pre-departure issues which need to be addressed.

While working abroad, Bangladeshi migrants face well-documented problems that arise from their vulnerability, including: seizure of personal documents on arrival; substituting the original contract with a revised contract with less favourable conditions; working in jobs other than the one originally contracted; non-payment, delayed payment or underpayment of wages; deduction of money on various pretexts that were not agreed upon; lack of access to adequate health services, lack of access to legal

	Malaysia	S.Korea	Singapore	Brunei	Jordan	Other	Misc.	Remittance USD (millions)
	17237	990	11095	1420		89		1954.95
	4921	1561	9615	2958		1192		2071.03
	85	28	6856	154	1829	204		2847.79
	28	3771	5304	980	2128	211		3177.63
	224	215	6948	1802	6022	3424	8582	3561.45
	2911	223	9651	191	9101	5148	12240	4249.87

redress; verbal or physical abuse; and lack of access to redress mechanisms including consular services.

Upon the migrant workers' return, there are few programs available to assist in their return and reintegration. The absence of proper policies and counselling services in this regard can make the returnees feel like foreigners in their own country. Prolonged absence from home contributes to the loss of pre-existing social networks that makes their reintegration process even more difficult. Often their savings are subjected to demands by relatives and friends, depleting their resources. Migrants who acquire skills abroad can also find it difficult to market such skills due to the absence of effective resources, markets and information.

Two major tragedies involving Bangladeshi workers received widespread media coverage during the reporting period. In March 2005 16 Bangladeshi workers perished in the Mediterranean Sea while attempting to enter Europe through irregular channels. Within



Photo courtesy of WARBE

Bangladeshi migrant workers remain vulnerable to exploitation and abuse overseas; these demonstrators urge increased awareness and protection.

months, another group of Bangladeshi workers was rescued from the Sahara desert where they were abandoned by recruiting agencies who had promised them jobs in Italy. In separate incidents, groups of prospective Bangladeshi migrants were rescued from the Bay of Bengal while being illegally shipped to Greece and other European countries. These incidents triggered a major clampdown on agencies engaged in irregular migration and in discouraging migration of people looking for a “free visa”. The Association

Bangladesh Significant Events July 2004 - December 2005

2004

July

Between 2 June and 13 July, 177 people, including 40 children, 76 men and 61 women, are rescued from traffickers by Bangladeshi Rifles officers near border areas.

Monsoon floods leave 40 of 64 districts under water, 20 million people homeless, and more than two hundred dead.

August

(21) Seven or eight explosions go off as former prime minister Sheikh Hasina was addressing a crowd of 20,000 during an Awami League party rally in Dhaka; nineteen people are killed, hundreds injured, and more than 200 people are arrested in the riots that ensued.

(21) Al Islam, recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize and Bangladesh's representative in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), is arrested by Rapid Action Battalion military officers. ICBL is a NGO registered with the Bangladeshi government. No reason was given for his arrest.

September

(16) A dam collapses on Gumti river in Comilla district, flooding more than 100 villages. 50,000 people are evacuated from their homes.

October

(20) A Dhaka court gives death sentences to three former junior military officers accused of murdering four of President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's aides in a prison in 1975.

November

About 15,000 Muslims from Burma flee to Bangladesh to escape possible military persecution. Bangladesh security forces heighten along the borders.

A law enacted in February to establish an

"Independent Anti-Corruption Commission" came into effect in November with the creation of an Anti-Corruption Commission and the dissolution of the former Bureau of Anti-Corruption.

2005

January

(28) A grenade attack during a Awami League rally in Habiganj District kills former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria and four others; the League calls for two days of protests, which led to riots and clashes between police and protesters.

March

(20) Two northern districts were hit by a 100km/h tornado, killing at least 54 people and injuring more than 500. The tornado also damaged crops, disrupted electricity, and left several thousand people homeless.

April

(11) A building in Dhaka housing the Spectrum Sweater Industries Ltd and Shahriar Fabrics collapses, killing at least twenty-three people and trapping 350.

(16) Twenty-two people, a majority of them from the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party, were sentenced to death for the murder of Ahsan Ullah Master of the Awami League last May; this is the largest number sentenced to death in a single case, lawyers say.

May

(21) During a nationwide strike called by the Awami League to protest the murder of one of its leaders, Khorshed Alam, at least twenty people are injured in clashes with police, and fifty more have been detained.

(19) The third river disaster in a week drowns 30 passengers; the total number of people killed this week in the three river accidents has risen to 150.

August

Between 31 July and 8 August, eleven people are sentenced to jail terms in separate cases of trafficking. Five of them are sentenced to life in prison.

(10) 400 explosions take place in 58 of Bangladesh's 64 districts in front of government offices and in the vicinity of journalists' gathering locations, killing at least two people and injuring at least one hundred others. The group Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh claims responsibility for the bombings.

(19) The Bangladesh Bank and Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) introduce the "Bangladesh-UK Remittance Partnership Project," a program that would lower costs of overseas remittance transfers.

September

(10) In response to the pressure of rising oil prices, the government enforces the new five-day work week for civil servants.

October

(20) Five people are killed in a police clash during a demonstration organized in protest of police inaction to prevent a raid at a jewelry shop.

(23) Mizanur Raman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party is killed during a bomb attack in Khula.

(26) Bangladeshi reporter of the Samakal Daily, Sumi Khan, receives a courage in journalism award from the International Women's Media Foundation.

November

(14) Two judges are killed in a bomb attack in Jhalalkati on their way to court; there has been a series of killings targeting lawyers, journalists, and politicians in recent months.

(24) A one-day strike is called by 14 opposition parties, including the Awami League, accusing the government of failing to control the rise of militants, and requesting the ruling party to resign.

(24) It is announced that the government has lifted its ban on deploying non-professional female workers overseas for a trial period of 6 months, while strict conditions are enforced for recruiting agencies.

(25) Lawmaker Abu Hena is expelled for his statement during a *BBC* interview that the Bangladesh government had a hand in the rise of the outlawed militant group Jamaatul-Mujahedeen Bangladesh.

(29) Two bombs attacks, both near courthouses, kill seven people and injures at least fifty. Police describes this as the country's first suicide bombing.

December

(12) Purportedly to prevent future bomb attacks, a new law allows police to tap phone calls.

Sources: BBC News, Human Rights Watch, Scalabrini Asian Migration News, BurmaNet News, www.cleanclothes.org, ACHR Weekly Review, UPI Asia Online



Migrants groups join together to observe the 2003 entry into force of the UN Migrant Workers Convention.

of Travel Agencies in Bangladesh alleged that there are about 200 unlicensed travel agencies engaged in such malpractice.

Also in 2005, an agreement was reached under which Malaysia agreed to take back Bangladeshi workers who returned to Bangladesh under a general amnesty.

Responses

Government

The Bangladesh government has begun to draft new policy with regard to overseas employment. The current legislation regulating migration in Bangladesh, the 1982 Emigration Ordinance, is essentially regulatory in nature and does not take into account the human rights concerns of migrant workers. Both RMMRU and WARBE served in the technical committee that was set up by the government.

IGOs

Among international agencies, the IOM has been most active in undertaking training programs and organizing seminars and discussion sessions. Although the bulk of its work focuses on trafficking issues, it takes an active interest in labor migration, and has engaged in collaborative relationships with other stakeholders through the Bangladesh Migration Development Forum.

NGOs

WARBE, an MFA member, is the most active migrant support organization in promoting the cause of migrant workers. It has organized several rounds of discussion sessions, dialogues and rallies to promote migrants interests, including: protesting migrants' rights violations abroad, urging ratification of the 1990 UN Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their



Photo courtesy of WARBE

Training and awareness-raising of the realities of working overseas remains an important function of migrants' rights advocates.

Families (MWC), and developing innovative migrant credit mobilization schemes.

Under the project "Support on Safe Migration, Reintegration and Livelihood Options" WARBE organized 13 migrants' areas at the grassroots level and registered 3,000 migrant households. Livelihood options training for female returnee migrants and migrants' family members was another part of the project; throughout 2005, 180 women benefited from WARBE skill development trainings. The organization provided pre-departure orientations for departing migrant workers. WARBE also organized a discussion meeting on the topic "Women Migration and its Impact" for International Women's Day, with the participation of women migrant workers from different NGOs, migrant organizations, grassroots groups and local UP representatives, and other members of civil society.

WARBE celebrated the International

Migrants Day on 18 December 2005 by organizing a mass rally including migrant workers' associations, returnee migrant workers from the grassroots level along with their family members, as well as representatives from national and international NGOs. At the occasion, WARBE submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, highlighting the importance of ratifying the MWC, along with other demands including welfare-oriented national labor migration policy and legislation.

RMMRU, another MFA member, conducted a number of research, training and advocacy programs during the reporting period. It coordinated a multi-country collaboration study entitled, "Migration: A Non-traditional Issue in South Asian Security Discourse" with the support of Ford Foundation. In this collaboration, nine studies were conducted, focusing on irregular migration within and from

STORY OF A DOMESTIC MIGRANT WORKER IN SAUDI ARABIA

Saleha Begum worked in a garment factory, while her husband was a bus ticket counterman. Despite the dual incomes, their salaries were still not enough to sustain the basic needs of their family, so Saleha decided to migrate. She went to a middleman, who helped her get a visa and a job as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia. The migration costs amounted to BGT60,000, so she was forced to sell some of her personal possessions, and also had to borrow money – at high interest rates – to pay the fees.

Saleha left for Saudi Arabia in January 2005. When she arrived in Saudi Arabia, however, nobody came to meet her; the middleman had cheated her, taking her money without fulfilling her promises. Saleha was alone, and didn't know where to go. Hoping that somebody would come, she stayed at the airport for a day and a half, until finally the local police came and arrested her. She spent seven days in jail. Because she could not speak Arabic, Saleha was not able to explain why she was at the airport. On the seventh day of her detention, however, the police finally called a Bangladeshi woman to translate. Saleha was released, and the Bangladeshi woman helped her get a job.

Saleha started her job as domestic worker for a Saudi family. Only one week later, however, this family sold her to another family and changed her name, calling her Khadija. The first month with her new employers went without any problems. She received proper accommodations and food, and was able to send her first month's salary to her family with the help of the employer.

After the first month, her situation changed radically. Her employer's wife began

to beat her physically, and put a great deal of pressure on her psychologically. Worse, her employer's brother-in-law attempted to rape her, threatening that she would face a lot of problems if she didn't comply; her employer's wife seemed to be aware of the man's intentions but did nothing. Saleha Begum was terrified, constantly afraid of being left alone with the man, but couldn't complain to anybody. Due to the ongoing mistreatment and pressure, she weakened, and quickly became sick.

One day, without any explanation, the employer's wife sent her back to Bangladesh by force, purchasing Saleha's airline ticket and dropping her off at the airport. Saleha had received only her first month's pay; after working for three months in Saudi Arabia, she returned to Bangladesh with only 50 Dirhams.

She is still suffering from psychological trauma, feels sick and cannot work as she could before. Her family has to pay back the money borrowed to send her to Saudi Arabia, and are even more poverty stricken than before. In spite of mistreatment and psychological trauma she suffered, however, she is still ready to leave again to work overseas if she could somehow get the money and the opportunity as she has found no other solutions for her and her family's livelihood.

Story contributed by WARBE



Photo courtesy of RMMRU

Speakers at a workshop on “Children’s Migration for Livelihood: the Bangladesh Case” at Dhaka on 17 December 2005, organized by RMMRU.

South Asia. The studies were ongoing throughout 2005. RMMRU also acted as the secretariat of the South Asia Migration Resource Network (SAMReN), as follow up to the DFID-RMMRU Conference on Migration and Pro-Poor Policy Choices held in Dhaka in March 2003.

SAMReN is a web-based partnership of academics and activists that awards fellowships for research to young academics, develops a documentation center on migration, and organizes workshops such as in November 2005 on Migration, Globalization, Security and Development, in which 23 young professionals and 22 resource persons from both the developing and developed world participated. SAMREN is also part of the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty, based at the



Photo courtesy of WARBE

Representatives from WARBE discuss migration issues with the Minister of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment of Bangladesh.

University of Sussex. Under this initiative, RMMRU conducted research on migration of nurses from Bangladesh, child migration for labor, internal migration and remittances, and migration experiences of garment workers of Dhaka. Fellowships for young researchers and training sessions were also offered under



Photo courtesy of WARBE

This conference is one of many activities organized by migrants' rights advocates in celebration of International Migrants' Day.

the scheme.

Apart from this, RMMRU organized meetings for ratification of the MWC under the APMRN framework, and hosted a series of talks and dialogues on migration issues. It is also actively engaged in advocacy work, posting newspaper articles and building rapport with policy makers and civil society through organizing the Safe Migration Forum. In addition, RMMRU has published a number of books and monographs, and organized an International Workshop on Return Migration of Highly Skilled in March 2005 in Dhaka.

There has been little engagement of the trade unions in Bangladesh on migration issues. Trade unions in the country are generally apathetic to the issues, and it was only the BATU-SAARC that commissioned a study on labor migration from South Asia. The findings of the study were presented at a workshop in Colombo in 2005.

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