



Refugees, Migrants and the Bangladesh State: The Conundrum of Liberal International Order

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Abstract

The end of the Cold War renewed optimism that states would embrace liberal principles for addressing the challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of people.¹ In reality, however, the 21st century beholds protracted political crises, violent conflicts, persistent poverty and deadly pandemics disrupting the lives of millions, mostly in the non-western countries of the world. While for a large section of these people at risk, migration appears to be a viable exit strategy; states frequently perceive foreign workers, refugees and travellers as threats to their sovereignty, development

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and national security.² Given liberalism's emphasis on individuals with equal rights, the Liberal International Order (LIO) emphasizes that countries should unquestionably accept refugees seeking shelter and that individuals should encounter few obstacles to moving from one nation-state to another for economic or other reasons.³ A contradictory relation between migration and statehood is imminent in the non-western countries' effort to ensure citizens' rights abroad and non-citizens' at home.

As a theory and practice Liberal International Order (LIO) gained its primacy after the Second World War.⁴ It was expected that the world would be full of nation states with where citizens would enjoy economic and political freedoms. At the core of the theory was an international law and institution-based system of cooperation and coordination.⁵ After the fall of the Soviet Union, however, question arises on whether LIO exists. Some said it is 'the end of history'⁶, while others see it as 'a clash of civilization'.⁷ Others were sceptical about the existence of the order itself in the age of globalization where 'governmentality' is increasingly coexisting with 'domestic-international' paradigm.⁸ Realist scholars claimed that it is mostly the realist Western order that was transformed into LIO in the post-cold war era. Prominent realist scholar of International Relations explained the purpose and the nature of the new LIO as follows:

Creating a liberal international order involved three main tasks. First, it was essential to expand the membership in the institutions that made up the Western order, as well as erect new institutions where necessary. In other words, it was important to build a web of international institutions with universal membership that wielded great influence over the behavior of the member states. Second, it was imperative to create an open and inclusive international economy that maximized free trade and fostered unfettered capital markets. This hyperglobalized world economy was intended to be much more ambitious in scope than the economic

order that prevailed in the West during the Cold War. Third, it was crucial to vigorously spread liberal democracy around the world...These three tasks, of course, are directly tied to the principal liberal theories of peace: liberal institutionalism, economic interdependence theory, and democratic peace theory.⁹

The paper examines the ways in which Bangladesh's integration in LIO influences its attitudes to the refugees and migrants. The aim of the paper is to understand how Bangladesh's attitude and policies toward its migrant workers abroad and the Rohingya refugees at home are influenced by its membership in the LIO.

The topic is relevant and interesting on several grounds. First, Bangladesh is simultaneously a labour sending and refugee hosting country. Each year an average 700,000 Bangladeshis pursue labour migration to different countries of the Gulf and Southeast Asia for short-term employment purposes. Since 2017, the country has been hosting nearly one million Rohingya refugees who arrived from the neighbouring Arakan state of Myanmar.¹⁰ It would be pertinent to see how and why Bangladesh—being a 'developing' and 'small' state—strikes a balance between its statehood and responsibilities in terms of sending its citizens abroad for employment and receiving Rohingya refugees into its territory. The paradoxes and disjuncture between LIO agenda of creating the liberal and flourished state on the one hand and securing people's life and livelihood on the other comprise the main theme of the paper.

Second, there is a wealth of writing on the evolution, existence and transformation of LIO, but how a state in the Global South translates liberal principles into state practices are seldom interrogated. Recent scholarships pay considerable attention to liberalism's relationship to the rise of populism and how successful spread of liberal principles abroad paradoxically undermines liberalism at home.¹¹ In contrast, this paper investigates the convergence and divergence of state's domestic

agenda, norms and policies with its commitment to and entanglement with the international order by taking two forms of migratory movements – refugees and labour migrants as cases that implicates ‘national security’ and ‘national economy’ respectively.

Third, as the country celebrates its 50 years of statehood, it is timely to understand the challenges and the ways forward. An obvious manifestation of LIO is found in the integration of Bangladesh into the global economic system as a ‘development surprise’.¹² The economic implications of the neoliberal development paradoxes have been examined in terms of agriculture, energy, gender, minorities and politics.¹³ This paper attempts to elaborate the search by focusing on the paradoxes in liberal actions and ideas in dealing with migrants and refugees.

The article is organised as follows. First, the paradoxes of liberalism are discussed. The second section portrays Bangladesh’s journey to liberal pathways as an independent state. How refugees and labour migrants have become integral part of the formation of Bangladesh state is laid out in this section. The fourth section analyses the liberal contradictions and challenges faced by Bangladesh in dealing with refugees and migrants. The conclusion provides a brief summary of arguments.

The Paradox of Liberalism: ‘Liberal State’ versus Individual Rights

Scholars argue that LIO fundamentally involves contradictions. Cerny in particular observes that

Liberalism inherently involves a profound paradox that has shaped its trajectory in the modern world over more than two centuries and is ever more relevant in a new century of what has come to be called globalisation. Understanding this paradox is ever more relevant in an international political economy

dominated by financial crises, austerity and the shrinking of the welfare state – not to mention the challenges of multiculturalism, democratisation, the changing face of the use of force and violence, and the proliferation of transnational governance processes and webs of power.¹⁴

Originated in the Enlightenment thoughts and values of individualism, liberty, rights and the rule of law, the fundamental ideational ground of liberalism paradoxically contains the roots of both personal autonomy and shared sociality which often vehemently oppose each other.¹⁵ It involves a problematic process of navigating between the concepts of the individual as the basic unit of human rights on the one hand and their roots in the society on the other hand. Liberalism therefore presupposes that a dynamic interaction at the socio-political level brought by economic growth can make the cohesions possible.¹⁶

At the state level, the contradictions are played out through complex processes of political conflict, coalition-building, institution building and economic struggle whereas at the international level it is manifested in the clashes between labour and capital, cultures, and traditions.¹⁷ In the domestic context, modern nation-states are expected to strike a balance between individual rights and the public interest as ‘common good’ which is one of the driving force behind liberal democracy.¹⁸ Similarly, capitalism entails government regulation and intervention as the key social function along with welfare and promotion of national identity and human rights. Consequently, modern nation-states practice alternative national varieties of liberalism at the domestic level.¹⁹

Notwithstanding the centrality of ‘State’ in LIO, one must recognise that liberalism as a principle is not inherently state-centric. Its root in autonomous personhood has made non-state groups formed by individuals as important as the State. This is precisely how refugees, migrants and stateless people have

drawn renewed attention in liberalism. In this case -sovereign states- despite their prioritised and dominant status are to make 'credible commitment' to address the issues of non-state actors.²⁰ This paper attempts to see the process in the context of migrants and refugees in Bangladesh.

'Competitive State' versus Individual Rights

The evolution of neoliberalism within LIO has created another set of paradoxes for states. It has made every state a 'Competitive State' which tends to integrate the domestic economy with the rapidly changing world economy.²¹ 'The complex interdependence' manifested in the linkages and networks compel states to make credible interstate commitments on cross-cutting issues in an interactive process.²² The liberal paradox in economics thus lies in the relationship between markets and accumulative but decentralised individual decisions to buy and sell commodities.²³ In this process, the state often loses its capacity to intervene and control its own economy. This is of huge significance in analysing Bangladesh's integration into the international labour market as a sending country.

The elements of 'wellbeing' and 'rights' create yet another set of contradictions in LIO. Whereas wellbeing is essentially an economic agenda, the extent to which it is available for citizens and non-citizens depends on the political willingness of the state concerned. Similarly, while 'rights' is about the political decision of entitlement, it is often directly proportional to economic status and capability.²⁴ As a result, economic and political inequality sustain domestically and internationally. The paper relies on this concept in examining the case of Bangladeshi migrant workers.

Bangladesh's Inclusion in LIO

Bangladesh's inclusion in the LIO was indispensable on two grounds. First, it would help the country to manage interstate

relations in a highly interdependent world. Second, it would allow her to engage in enormous amounts of economic activity. Soon after its independence in 1971, Bangladesh started to build the 'nation' and the 'state' in pursuant to the development in the international system.²⁵ Born amidst the politics of Cold War and decolonization, Bangladesh's inclusion in the liberal international order was marked by 'openness, sovereign equality, respect for human rights, democratic accountability, widely shared economic opportunity, and the muting of great power rivalry, as well as collective efforts to keep the peace, promote the rule of law, and sustain an array of international institutions tailored to solving and managing common global problems.'- which also constitute the basic principles of LIO.²⁶ The country formally joined the United Nations as its 136th member state in September 1974. A moderate foreign policy has been pursued since then taking regional cooperation, bilateralism, multilateralism, and the 'look east' policy with emphasis on economic diplomacy as key principles.²⁷ The active participation of the country in the international legal system was also manifested in its being party to more than 14 international laws, protocol and conventions.²⁸ Bangladesh is one of the largest contributors to the United Nations peacekeeping operations. In September 2021, around 6000 Bangladeshi peacekeepers were deployed in five countries.²⁹ As a spokesperson of the Global South, Bangladesh has made considerable progress in advocating for the G77 countries in global issues on wide ranging issues including climate change, migration and poverty reduction.

Performing the Responsibility to 'Others'

Bangladesh witnessed one of the world's largest refugee flows in 2017–18, when more than 700,000 Rohingya men, women and children crossed the Bangladesh–Myanmar border to escape military crackdown, human rights abuse and atrocities by the Myanmar security forces. As of September 2021, Bangladesh was hosting 890,276 Rohingya refugees in the south-eastern regions of Ukhiya, Teknaf and Cox's Bazar.³⁰ While Bangladesh's

response to the plight of the Rohingyas proved its generosity, respect towards human rights and state responsibilities, it challenges were too high to mitigate due to the protracted nature of the displacement. Bangladesh followed multifaceted diplomatic efforts to find a permanent solution to the crisis. Bangladesh and Myanmar signed the repatriation deal on 23 November 2017. It started bilateral diplomacy to persuade the Myanmar Government to repatriate the Rohingyas. In January 2018, Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a document on “Physical Arrangement”, which stipulated that the repatriation would be completed preferably within two years from the start of the process.³¹ But repatriation attempts failed twice in November 2018 and August 2019 - clearly amid Rohingyas' "lack of trust" in the Myanmar government.³² Myanmar deferred the repatriation deal in the excuse of lack of physical and local arrangements for a number of times. Finally, with the military government's takeover on 1 February 2021, the situation in Myanmar went into complete uncertainty. Though the military government declared its willingness to continue repatriation, the issue now depends to a large extent on the reaction and responses of the international community to the on-going fiasco in Myanmar.³³

Bangladesh has tried in all possible means to use its resources and membership in LIO to resolve the crisis irrespective of the results achieved. To find justice and a solution, Bangladesh attempted to put diplomatic pressure on Myanmar through China.³⁴ It took the issue to different international forums such as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). The issue was raised to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and International Court of Justice (ICJ) to indict Burmese authorities for the crimes against humanity and genocidal intent.³⁵ Bangladesh also left the window open for bilateral discussion. The long-awaited working committee meeting on Rohingya repatriation between Bangladesh and Myanmar became

uncertain after military junta took over power in Myanmar.³⁶ More recently, Bangladesh has abstained from voting on a United Nations General Assembly resolution on Myanmar, as “it did not contain strong language in relation to the Rohingya crisis, specially the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of displaced people back home to Rakhine.”³⁷

The Neo-liberal Economy and Labour Migration

An indispensable element of Bangladesh’s integration into ILO is its neo-liberal economic policy manifested in the export of readymade garments and manpower in the international labour market. Labour migration that started as a personal endeavour of individuals in the 1970s has become a priority sector for government and a large source of foreign currency for the state by the 1990s. At present more than 13 million Bangladeshis are employed in foreign countries mostly as unskilled and semiskilled workers.³⁸ In 2020 the remittances from foreign workers employment crossed US\$20 billion.³⁹ The development story of Bangladesh represents a successful turn from being a ‘basket’ case with improvements in various indices and measures of the international development regime, more particularly the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁴⁰

At the domestic level the State has significantly improved in setting up institutions, rules and regulations to promote safe and orderly migration through better management of migration, market promotion, standardise recruitment process, awareness raising, skills development, social protection and reintegration of returnees.⁴¹ In a bid to ensure that men and women are better protected in migration, the Bangladesh state has over the past decade, taken a number of initiatives including compulsory insurance, skilling and reskilling of returnees through upgrading the skills development programmes, compulsory training for female domestic workers and pre-departure orientation for men and women, complaint websites and call centres at home and abroad.⁴² Institutional capacity building has been done in the form

of Internationally Recognised Standards (ISO) certification, digitalization of service delivery, training of public and private service providers including labour attaché, recruitment agency and so on.⁴³ The recent 8th Five Year Plan (2021-25) sets a ten-point agenda for migrant workers' overseas employment and well-being.⁴⁴

The Wage Earners Welfare Fund (WEWF) was established in 1990 under the Emigration Ordinance of 1982 to ensure the welfare of migrant workers and the members of their families. More recently, the country has formed the Wage Earners Welfare Board (WEWB) as a statutory entity to implement the *Wage Earners Welfare Board Act 2018*.⁴⁵ The board adheres to the international convention and global legal framework that Bangladesh has ratified in order to defend the rights of all migrant workers and their families by offering financial, legal, and technological assistance.

At the international level, Bangladesh deals with migrant issues through bilateral meetings with representatives of selected countries of destination to promote increased access to overseas employment under protected conditions, including for the women migrant workers.⁴⁶ It is a signatory to the 1990 UN convention on Migrant Workers and thus claims migrants' rights in various UN and regional forums such as Colombo Process and Abu Dhabi Dialogue. Bangladesh's global leadership role in shaping the Global Compact on Migration (GCM) has been recognized internationally and it has been identified as one of the 18 'Champion' countries of GCM.⁴⁷ Bangladesh also welcomed the formation of the UN Migration System aimed at ensuring effective, timely and coordinated support to Member States to establish the rights and wellbeing of migrants and their communities at destination, origin, and transit.

The Liberal Conundrum: Responsibility versus Burden Sharing

Although Bangladesh has set commendable instances of admitting refugees from Myanmar, its response to Rohingya refugee issues contains several contradictory features.

First, differential principles governed by domestic and international politics and justified through nationalist ideologies have asserted the superiority of citizens over foreign populations in Bangladesh. Closing or opening borders for the Rohingya refugees had two opposite ramifications for the country in terms of national security and human security concerns respectively. Whereas during the 1970s and 1990s Bangladesh had a welcoming approach, in 2012 it showed repugnance, again in 2017 it went for a tolerant approach.⁴⁸ It involved satisfying local political agenda and the public sentiments which is why the decisions varied across regimes and position of the country in the international arena. While in late 1970s, the newly independent country admitted refugees without much consideration to repatriation, the latest admission decisions since 2012 are clearly aligned to the States' commitment to development and the support required from the international community for graduation to a Middle Income Country. The outstanding economic growth does not automatically raise a country's brand value as a nation. Bangladesh's failure to deal with the persecuted Rohingyas could have tarnished its image for not being able to uphold its obligation to customary international law. Bangladesh thus often claims that it has accepted Rohingyas on humanitarian grounds.⁴⁹

Second, there are inherent tensions between nationalism and liberalism, especially in the context of a host state's refugee policy.⁵⁰ Refugee policies of Bangladesh alike often clash with nationalism over key issues of sovereignty and national identity. The 2017 Rohingya influx has resulted in a perceptible shift of the local people from 'unconditional solidarity' to antipathy. The

anti-refugee sentiment is clearly rooted in the host communities' unequal access to humanitarian aid and uneven distribution of resource opportunities created through substantial humanitarian operations.⁵¹ The host community often see itself as victims of economic instability in the region created by wage fall and price hike.⁵² The stalemate over repatriation of Rohingyas has increased their grievances against refugees even further.

Third, being a peaceful country, Bangladesh saw the 'export of political conflict'⁵³ in the form of refugees whereas Myanmar State cancelled the citizenship of Rohingyas on the ground of ethnic identity and history. Myanmar thus prioritised citizenship politics over human rights, domestic over international law and despite multilateralism refused to cooperate with the international community. Bangladesh as a 'country of asylum' is explicitly trapped with the liberal principles of responsibility to individuals and their human rights. From realists' point of view, it is a clear case of liberal order's tendency to privilege international institutions over domestic considerations, as well as LIO's deep commitments to porous borders which often create toxic political effects inside the liberal states themselves.⁵⁴

Finally, inclusion in the neoliberal order is embedded in the economic and political liberalism that allows western style economic development, democratic political practices as well as adherence to human rights and justice.⁵⁵ Bangladesh state is compelled to admit its membership and cognisance to a host of international laws that upholds the rights of people including refugees. Though it had not acceded to the 1951 convention on refugee and its 1967 protocol, provisions such as non-refoulement, non-discrimination and some other human rights issues are covered in the national and international laws adopted by the state. Bangladesh has ratified a number of international instruments including International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). It has ratified the

1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment which holds, among others clauses, the provision of non-refoulement. On the one hand, breaching these laws is tantamount to breaching international norms which it has been a party through its membership in the United Nations in the first place. On the other hand, as these laws are binding upon Bangladesh by virtue of ratification, the repercussions of violating these laws can be enormous. This may lead to diplomatic pressure, economic sanction or even failure to receive fairer deals in international aid, trade and investment.

Meeting its commitments to humanitarian principles associated with refugees has its own challenges. At the domestic level it has to do away with potential sources of conflict and discontentment at the public level. The public sentiments and domestic politics rarely leave a room for Bangladesh to offer local integration of the refugees. The risk in letting refugees in and settle in the south-eastern region has national security implications too as there are observable rise in the incidences of drug, arms and human trafficking from the area.⁵⁶ Time and again the country spelled out its position while the international community pressed for implementing refugee rights. Consequently, Bangladesh has to rely on several simultaneous strategies to maintain stability between national and global commitments. In doing so, it capitalizes on resources embedded in its membership to LIO in a number of ways. First, taking the advantage of the absence of an individualised process of refugee recognition, Bangladesh has recognised newly arrived Rohingyas as Forcefully Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs) which essentially helps the country to avoid its legal obligation to 'refugees'.⁵⁷ Second, the Rohingya issue has been taken to the table on multilateral discussion forums to mount international pressure on Myanmar to grant citizenship to Rohingyas and return them to their home. Third, Bangladesh leveraged its membership in the International Judiciary System to fight a legal battle and find justice for Rohingyas. Above all, the country leaves the door open for dialogues with Myanmar Junta with or without regional powers mediation.

Neo-liberal Development versus Rights of Migrants

Paradoxes also exist in relation to ensuring the rights of migrants abroad, while neo-liberal development mandates for labour migration. For a neo-liberal state, market is both an end and means of social wellbeing. LIO with its exclusive focus on free market, free trade, 'efficient' allocation of resources and 'deterritorialization' of national economy has transformed the very nature of the state.⁵⁸ Bangladesh has become a 'Competitive State', implicating a shift of 'welfarism' to 'marketization/commoditization' of the society and the people whereas the logic of profit and competition determines economic prosperity.⁵⁹ The state has yet to control the exorbitant cost of migration and high recruitment fees typically covered by the migrants, most of whom become indebted to raise the funds, mortgaging their land, selling property, taking high-interest loans, or borrowing from relatives.⁶⁰ Some migrants do not earn enough to recover their migration costs during their entire period abroad. Neither the welfare regime nor the social protection frameworks attend to the plight of migrants, which is deeply embedded in the lack of institutional, social and political understandings of the needs of migrants' welfare provision.

Second, the country is overly committed to the strength of global governance of migration which has also become a fundamental issue on the international agenda. In contrast to other transnational issues such as trade and finance, the creation of a UN institutional framework for the governance of migration remains a complex matter.⁶¹ Inherent contradiction of the system lies in the 'sovereign independence' of the countries to decide their participation in the governance. While Bangladesh has ratified the 1990 UN Convention on Migrant Workers, most migrant-receiving countries exemplify the inherent complexity and limitations of this endeavour. Migrant sending countries' enthusiasm in the global and regional forums is rarely reciprocated by the migrant receiving states. Conversely, the reliance of Bangladesh and other countries of origin on the

virtues of international institutions led them to delegate more and more authority to international institutions that is far away from establishing global governance in migration.⁶² In spite of having bilateral agreements (BLA), Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Government to Government (G2G) agreements with a number of Gulf and Southeast Asian countries of destinations (CoDs), Bangladesh rarely affords to take the issues of migrants' rights in the country at the bilateral discussion table.

Third, there is no straightforward way in which Bangladesh's commitment to LIO has translated into migrants' welfare and rights. The country has some welfare activities at home. These include returning the dead bodies of the migrants from destination, compensation to the migrants and their families in case of death or injury at work, education grant for migrants' children and loan for returnee reintegration. But these are mostly financed by the migrants through their compulsory subscription to the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund. Women domestic workers of Bangladesh in the Gulf are common victims of physical and verbal abuse, sub-standard living and working conditions.⁶³ With the surge of COVID-19 cases, the life and livelihood of Bangladeshi migrants in the Gulf were stuck in limbo.⁶⁴ As of April 2021, a total of 2,729 expatriate Bangladeshis died of coronavirus in 23 countries, including the Gulf States, whereas Saudi Arabia alone saw the death of 1,228 Bangladeshis from coronavirus infection.⁶⁵ Women employed in semi-skilled work in the Gulf were already vulnerable to abuse and indecent work conditions amidst the pandemic, they became doubly vulnerable to infection as they were forced to continue working and could not seek medical assistance.⁶⁶ Around 50,000 female migrant workers returned from 21 countries during the pandemic.⁶⁷ The pandemic pushed relatively unprotected workers to underemployment and unemployment, leaving a series of impacts such as sudden income loss, reduced consumption of essential items and products and gradual impoverishment.⁶⁸ As macroeconomic conditions worsen in the Middle East, many Bangladeshi

migrants were laid off arbitrarily, illegally, and at short notice.⁶⁹ Thousands of workers who have lost their jobs have been left without social assistance or other sources of income, and many were unable to return home due to a variety of obligations and constraints.⁷⁰ According to a survey conducted by International Organization for Migration (IOM), almost 70% of migrants who were repatriated from abroad between February and June 2020 remained unemployed.⁷¹ Another study of returnee migrants found that 86 per cent of returnees received no assistance after returning to Bangladesh.⁷² There is no mechanism for Bangladesh to deal with the receiving countries regarding the above issues as well as wage theft, detention and deportation of workers.

Fourth, the inclusion in LIO disproportionately increases the liability of the state and the people of not crossing the international borders. As public or private insurances, credit markets or governmental programmes rarely exist for ordinary citizens in most developing countries including Bangladesh, people find migration as a risk-minimising strategy.⁷³ An important feature of labour migration during the pandemic was the rise in irregular migration. Despite lockdown, travel ban and border closure, labour migration through irregular pathways increased significantly, especially to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. The IOM and EU estimate that around 4,510 irregular Bangladeshi nationals arrived by sea and by land in Italy, Malta, Spain or Greece in 2020.⁷⁴ The year 2021, saw a further surge in irregular migration from Bangladesh. Between January and May 2021 the total number of 'illegal crossings' on the central Mediterranean route more than doubled to over 15,700, and Bangladeshis were among the top two nationalities using this route.⁷⁵ This shows that the burden of responsibility and risks are unevenly distributed among the developing countries which are also the major suppliers of migrant workers in the international labour market.

Bangladesh also has a high stake of keeping its record of human trafficking, human smuggling and irregular migration low given

its commitment to LIO. In doing so, it has accepted specific obligations at the international level to combat human smuggling, trafficking such as the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution. The *Overseas Employment and Migrants Act (OEMA) 2013* and *Overseas Employment Policy 2016* – two main legal instruments for migration governance emphasize, among other things, to combat human trafficking under the guise of labour migration. OEMA mentions about the punitive actions against persons who send migrants through unauthorised job advertisements or irregular channels. The country has adopted the *Prevention and Suppression on Human Trafficking Act (PSHTA) 2012*. The GoB has attended the Bali Process in 2017 and highlights the business-government partnership to combat people smuggling, human trafficking and transnational crimes. It hosted the 7th meeting of the Budapest process working group conference in Dhaka to explore cross-cutting issues such as regular migration, migrant integration, and the prevention of illegal migration and human trafficking.

Fifth, at the national level where remittances repatriated by migrants only serve to ease foreign exchange reserve and exchange constraints faced by the state; they do not guarantee the self-sustaining economic growth of the country.⁷⁶ Thus, rather than experiencing an inevitable move towards development through labour export, Bangladesh, in reality, is trapped by its precarious position within the global economy. As people's dependence on low-wage jobs in the Gulf and other countries is on the rise, so is that of Bangladesh on the capital-rich countries.⁷⁷ Consequently, a disparity between sending and receiving societies in terms of wealth, income, power and growth is perpetuated which is an inherent contradiction of neo-liberal economy.⁷⁸ This often epitomizes a growing separation between the state and citizens, between the migrants and the policy makers and state's increasing embeddedness in the market as well as the commodification of uncharted territories of economic activities.⁷⁹

Last but not least, liberalism is an individualistic ideology that places great weight on the concept of inalienable rights of individuals to choose his or her preferred life and livelihood.⁸⁰ It contradicts with the nationalist perspectives that the world is divided into discrete nation states in the face of threats from the 'other' and deters migrants to 'preserve' the culture that constitutes the core elements of nationalism. This universalistic and transnational perspective of migration thus stands in marked contrast to the profound particularism of nationalism. Liberal principles thus not only create a disjuncture and discontent between interests at the domestic and international but also that of the state and the individual.

Conclusion

The paper has analysed the refugee policy and labour migration policy in an attempt to review how Bangladesh has meandered through the LIO path with a host of contradictions and liabilities. The case confirmed that states in the contemporary world are largely guided and influenced by liberal principles of individual freedom and rights, the rule of law, private property and the political participation of the population. These domestic liberal principles are also extended into the international sphere in terms of adherence of states to the principles of universal human rights, international laws and membership to 'international system' and international institutions. It is through the observance of these domestic and international principles that the nation-state perpetuates a LIO which is vital for the existence of the states also. The paper demonstrates the high scales and forms in which LIO creates burden on Bangladesh to adhere to the international norms and principles while backlashes on domestic grounds create countervailing forces leaving impact on the people on the margins. Refugees and migrants are among the communities in Bangladesh largely affected by liberal paradoxes characterised by fundamental and endogenous tensions between individual rights, welfare and politico-economic imperatives.

The paper demonstrated the crucial ways in which the integration in LIO often poses a dilemma for states to find a durable solution to the refugees. On a number of occasions Bangladesh had to admit and repatriate the Rohingya refugees although the 2017 influx was a litmus test to trading a balance between its obligations to the citizens and refugees. While admitting refugees goes well with the liberal principles of humanitarianism and states accrue international credit for that, at the domestic level populist backlashes do create conditions for refugee repatriation which is scantily supported by the international community. The case exemplifies how liberal principles are differently accentuated and translated for the refugee producing and refugee hosting countries. As shown in the paper, Bangladesh has to mix and match several strategies to resolve the puzzles around refugees through the practice of bilateralism, multilateral diplomacy and legal courses.

Migrant workers explicate yet another set of liberal paradoxes where the state faces a difficult choice of blending 'welfare' and 'rights' to 'economic development'. Whereas remittances are often bagged at the cost of migrants' precarious condition in the global economy, inherent weaknesses and lack of protection leave workers to manage their risk and protection by clinging to the low-paid jobs abroad. The paper offers a critical account of how Bangladesh arrived at seemingly unexpected moments of adopting an inclusive, formalised and win-win labour arrangement for the migrants. To manage the tensions and fragmenting dynamics between its winners and losers, Bangladesh has taken migrant issues to global and regional forums, yet accrued little benefit for migrants due to commitment deficits of the receiving countries. To keep pace with the changing global economy on the one hand and mitigate the global uncertainties resulting from breaches of liberal principles on the other, both Bangladesh and its migrants are thus trapped within the LIO in unequal terms.

In a broader canvas, the paper depicts a conundrum of liberal global order that connects domestic and the international

spheres. In doing so, it projects the murkier side of LIO to be resolved in the domestic sphere as a precondition for realising its promises in the international sphere.

Notes

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