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Statement by the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh at the 46th Session of the Commission of Population and Development (CPD) on Item 4: general debate on national experience in population matters: new trends in migration – demographic aspects

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

This discussion at the Commission takes place at an important juncture when we would also see deepening discourse on migration also eventually within the context of post-2015 Development Agenda this Fall at the General Assembly. Having that in view, I would like to briefly share with you a few key features and perspectives of Bangladesh.

With a population of around 150 million, having the highest density, over the past four decades, we could make laudable accomplishments in population and development frontier: Population growth rate could be brought to current 1.37% and total fertility rate to 2.3.

As a manifestation of population and economic growth, our urban areas have been growing at 3.5% a year. The capital city, Dhaka, one of the second fastest growing mega cities, continues to grow at over 5 and half percent. Dhaka is estimated to be the fastest growing mega city up to 2025.

At present, urban population constitutes 29% of total population. Alternate scenarios suggest that by 2021, 37% people would be living in urban areas, which by 2031, would rise up to 46% of total population. That means, almost half of the people would be crowding urban space in less than two decades!

By now, Bangladesh has entered into the third phase of demographic transition - having shifted from a 'high mortality - high fertility' regime to a 'low mortality - low fertility' one. At the same time, the youth bulge that we have been experiencing, would make that by 20___ over half of the population would be between 15 to 24 age group. Hence, by 2030, labour force participation is estimated to be as high as 65%. Current demographic structure in Bangladesh suggests that our population will continue to grow due to the population momentum inherent in the young age structure, even if replacement level fertility is achieved by 2015. With alternate scenarios for Fertility Rate, Bangladesh population is expected to stabilize at around 230 million, by the end of next decade.

Mr. Chairman,

These are significant as Bangladesh currently stands as one of the 25 largest developing economies. Our current plans are steered towards developing the economy as a middle-income one by 2021.

As the CPD session is focussed on 'new trends in migration', let me reflect on how our changing population landscape relates to migration dynamics.

At present, Bangladesh has around eight million migrants across various parts of the world. A great majority of them – around with six and half million - are short-term migrant workers. They are particularly concentrated in the Middle-Eastern countries. Bangladesh has consequently declared overseas employment sector as a thrust sector; and Bangladesh Employment Strategy (2012) identifies securing jobs abroad as a key strategy.

Share of remittances in our national income has seen rapid growth over the past decade - rising from 4% of GDP in 2001 to 14% in 2012. Remittances that Bangladesh receives is actually six times of ODA received and twelve times of FDI received. We have seen that remittances also leave a noticeable pro-poor effect in Bangladesh - as 13% of remittance-receiving households were below poverty line compared to 34% for non-receiving households. Remittances also impact substantially on Per Capita GDP growth, on empowerment, particularly for women, entrepreneurship, networking.

At present, Bangladesh has around eight million migrants across various parts of the world. A great majority of them – around with six and half million - are short-term migrant workers. They are particularly concentrated in the Middle-Eastern countries. In securing a balance in the labour market, Bangladesh has declared 'overseas employment' sector as a thrust sector. Bangladesh Employment Strategy (2012) identifies securing jobs abroad as one of the principal strategies.

As an origin state, to simply put, our plank remains to ensure 'orderly, safe, dignified migration' in a responsible manner for each individual. On that score, for instance,

- Bangladesh has recently enacted a comprehensive national Anti-trafficking Act - with a view to checking human trafficking and strengthening regular migration.

- As a preventive and better management tool, we have introduced a smart card to all departing migrant workers with multiple functions.
- We are also conducting pre-departure orientation and skills enhancement programmes for the migrant workers.
- We have also established a specialized Migrants Welfare Bank.

All these efforts are to protect and empower the migrants.

Such being the larger scenario, as a key country of origin in global migrant workers' flow, and also the current Chair of the Colombo Process, let us flag certain issues that deserve attention:

First, overall protection of migrant workers within global migration governance. It is critical as more and more of women are joining the global migration flow. We believe, 'migrant protection' can best be secured as a 'functioning compact' between the sending states and the receiving states. It is important to value the multi-layered impacts of migration in both sending and receiving countries. Within such a 'compact', the measures taken by the origin countries need to be matched by deeper understanding of the operational aspects, appreciation of the migrants' role and urgency in addressing the issues by the stakeholders in the receiving states.

Second, within a 'compact', the measures taken by the origin countries should match with a deeper understanding of the operational aspects, appreciation of the migrants' role and urgency in addressing the issues by the stakeholders in the receiving states. As an origin country, Bangladesh is fully engaged in doing its part to protect the rights of the migrants in spite of constraints and limitations.

Third, at the receiving states end, migrants and migration needs to be de-mystified. People crossed borders for mutual benefit of the societies and economies. They would continue to do so in a globalizing world. What we would need is to project the beneficial aspects of migration at the receiving states, especially in the advanced economies. To that effect, the volume of interesting and innovative experiences we heard over the past two days, would need to be built upon for possible scaling up.

Fourth, under any circumstance, in a globalizing world, securitization of migration cannot be the answer to govern migration. Evidences increasingly demonstrate that the current border control approach needs to be replaced with a judicious migration governance.

Fifth, bulk of migration moves through private channels or networks. So, there is just no option but to make the private actors responsible – both at origin and destination ends. In Bangladesh, to improve the functioning, ensure accountability of the private sector, we have developed a code of conduct. To balance the market, we have also embarked on Government to Government arrangements for labour migration. In an effort towards responsible migration, Bangladesh Cabinet has recently amended the Migration and Overseas Employment Welfare Act. Obviously, these have not proved easy for the Government. We would surely need to learn how we can engage private sector most optimally yet responsibly. For instance, can we have a global – yet regionally accented – code of conduct for private sector actors in both sending and receiving sides?

Sixth, our recent experience attests the need for protection of migrant workers caught in crisis and emergencies. We could battle out the 2011 Libyan experience, with support from IOM. We then realized that provisions should be kept for rescuing migrant workers caught in crises and emergencies. IOM has come forward with a useful framework. We would need to reflect on how we can build on that, at a global scale.

Seventh, if migration is to be made beneficial for us all, attention also needs to be paid on scale and quality of skills, particularly of migrant workers. This should entail partnership between origin and destination states, in imparting skills – over a short as well as long term period. Perhaps, the innovative manner we all are addressing the issues in remittances, a similar approach in skills frontier would be needed. This is particularly important as we focus more and more on creating paths for short-term, circular migration.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
