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Demoralization-led migration in Bangladesh: A sense of insecurity-based decision-making model

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Abstract

Political hostility, unrest and flawed governance cause insecurity leading to demoralization, which triggers migration. There is a large body of literature on the determinants of international migration that highlights a range of factors to explain the direction and strength of migrant flows. For this research we interviewed 32 respondents who were a control group in a study conducted a decade ago. These respondents were determined not to migrate, but their migration decision was reversed over a period of 10 years. This article explores the relation between a sense of insecurity and the demoralization that influences migration decisions. It further investigates the causes that contributed to this change. As democracy shrinks, authoritarianism expands, implying that there is no accountability. This leads a country to widespread corruption, creating severe social injustices. People in general become demoralized and decide to migrate out. This article adds to the body of work by focusing on whether the migration decision is a response to widespread corruption, prevailing political conditions, violence, conflict, poor governance, an absence of rule of law and freedom or declining of democratic space in Bangladesh.

Keywords

demoralization, fear, freedom, human rights, migration, threat

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Introduction

The reasons for which people migrate determine the categories of migration. In the literature, the dominant categories are reluctant migrants, economic migrants, desperate and forced migrants and refugees. These various kinds of migration depend on the volume of people involved, the direction they move in, the time they spend in migrating and the nature of that migration. However, there have always been some people who are against the idea of migration. Some people tend to cling to their land purely from patriotism. There is evidence that some who were at one time reluctant to migrate change their mind later. Those who had never thought of migrating out, eventually actively plan to migrate. What might explain this change in intention? On various occasions, we met many returned migrants in Bangladesh of different skill categories and asked what made them return (Ullah, 2010, 2013, 2014). 'Heroism' was the primary motivation, according to them. To these migrants, heroism signifies an urge to return to their homeland and contribute to nation building. However, they regret their return and are looking for opportunities overseas for themselves or their children. They advise their children to keep an alternative for moving out anytime, if necessary. This means a drastic change from a position of 'against' to 'strong volition'. Of course, questions arise: what made them think of the drastic change? A reconnaissance among potential respondents revealed an interesting factor, which they describe as 'demoralization'. This sentiment was the major factor that influenced the change. Migration studies have generated a huge amount of literature, but discussion of the factors that lead to demoralization is conspicuous by its absence.

It is well established that refugees leave their own soil under duress when no option for survival is left to them or there is a possibility of persecution for a range of reasons (Ullah, 2007, 2009, 2014). In these cases, the driving forces are evident, known and precise. However, there are some factors that seem to be distantly related to migration but closely related to demoralization that make people decide to move out. Demoralization gradually creates a culture of fear and discomfort among citizens. This article looks into two different scenarios: migration decisions a decade ago (in 2009) and a decade later (in 2019). The second scenario depicts how potential migrants think about their migration possibilities today, and the first one depicts how they perceived migration 10 years ago. This article shows a change in migration decisions over the last decade. Why did they not want to migrate before but want to do so now? What has happened in a decade to make them change their minds so drastically? Earlier, they thought it was impossible to leave their roots, their family, friends, neighbours and relatives, and now moving out has become one of their main priorities.

Migration research has extensively analysed the classic push and pull factors of human mobility (Castles and Miller, 1998; Han, 2010; Lee, 1966; Massey et al., 2007). However, it has not taken the complex relationship between migration and internal political disorder or poor governance into account. Apart from a few exceptions, there is little reflection on the concept of security, which forms the basis of common assumptions about the relationship between migration and the feeling of insecurity in one's home country (Bank et al., 2017) leading to demoralization. Some scholars have attempted to connect this with an alarming drop in tolerance in domestic and international politics due to political rivalries and self-interest (Gibney et al., 1996; Williams and Pradhan, 2009).

The complexity of human migration is often reduced in public discourse, with simplistic connections being made between migration and political intolerance (Edmonston, 1992; Weiner, 1996; Zolberg et al., 1989). A common claim is that the root causes for current migration movements to

safer destinations lie at the meso level, i.e. people flee from a repressive authoritarian regime (Bank et al., 2017; Davenport et al., 2003; Moore and Shellman, 2004; Schmeidl, 1997).

Bangladesh has witnessed a range of political systems, including a one-party system, a military dictatorship, an electoral democracy and a caretaker government system. Owing to the lack of trust between the two largest political parties (the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)), the provision of a caretaker government system was introduced. It would be vested with executive power for three months, to perform routine governing tasks and mainly to hold free and fair elections to facilitate the transition of government. The BAL amended the provision of caretaker government and decided to hold elections under the ruling party by ruthlessly suppressing the opposition voice. This created political chaos, resulting in the boycott of the 10th national election by the major opposition parties. Since the election of 2014, the current government has effectively been trying to eliminate the opposition and to revive a single-party system (like BaKSAL)[1] (Institute for Human Rights & Business, 2014). There have been hints of a revival of BaKSAL, which has created discomfort among the people. Little is known about the interplay between individual migration decisions and domestic political discomfort, intolerance, poor governance and feelings of insecurity. Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, no government has been in power consecutively for more than two terms (five years constitute one term). This government has been in office uncontested and unchallenged for the longest time ever, which has made them overconfident, and this might have contributed to the authoritarian tendencies of the ruling political party leadership.

A range of factors shape the motivations for migration; however, it was not widely known that political suffocation could create such a condition that people desperately try to escape from. The feeling of insecurity is a dynamic phenomenon, which can (and does) continuously change with respect to its form, intensity, geographical reach, nature and the number of actors involved. Migration can occur as people respond to 'push factors' linked to conflict, poverty, insecurity, fear, political repression, climate change, state fragility and civil war (Kamal, 2019; Sisk, 2017). In order to deal with and to operationalize such complexity, we unpack how the sense of insecurity has developed in Bangladesh (Bank et al., 2017; Ullah, 2016, 2018; Ullah and Azizuddin, 2018) (Figure 1).

The correlation between political climate, poor governance and migration has been established in a good number of empirical researches (Alesina and Perotti, 1996; Mayda et al., 2018). Of course, there is historical evidence of politics-migration dynamics as well of politics instigating migration. We argue that migration studies and issues of insecurity generated by political disorder in particular should be put into a meaningful academic debate in order to gain comprehensive insights about the migration decision and insecurity nexus. We argue that those who did not think of migrating just a decade ago have changed their intention to migrate due to the decline in the quality of governance in their country.

Objectives and methodology

This article intends to explore the factors that emerged over the last decade in Bangladesh that have influenced the migration decisions of many who never thought of migrating (Figure 2).

We conducted a research in 2009 on what motivates people to migrate and what does not. In that research we had a control group of 47 (made up of middle-class and upper-class people between the ages of 24 and 45, irrespective of political affiliation) who did not want to migrate for a range of factors. About 80% of respondents have bachelor's degrees, 15% have master's degrees and 5% have PhDs. About 62% work in the private sector, 31% in the public sector and 7% are

businesspeople. We did not ask about their political beliefs/inclinations. After 10 years, we had come into contact with a few of them and came to know that they had changed their migration decisions. This fresh information motivated us to explore why they had changed their minds. We were able to trace 32 of them. During the time between our interviews in 2018 and 2019, respondents were living in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh and migration timeline

Drivers such as economic, natural and human disasters and human rights violations commonly create different forms of migration. Extremely adverse conditions such as war and severe human rights violations create refugees and asylum seekers. Contemporary migration flows feature all types: voluntary and involuntary migration, temporary and permanent labour migration, as well as refugee and family reunion migration (Abel and Sander, 2014). However, there are some conditions created directly or indirectly by governments that demoralize people and push them to leave their country (Dauvergne, 2008; Kamal, 2019).

Bangladesh has undergone several waves of migration since its independence (Table 1). The ups and downs in the political system, socioeconomic landscape, social transformations, economic conditions and natural climatic situation since the liberation war in 1971 created conditions that contributed directly or indirectly to the migration scenario that we have today.

Demoralization-led migration decisions

We propose an analytical framework that encompasses the interdependence of the dynamics between human migration and the sense of insecurity leading to demoralization. We suggest examining how fear, threat and poor governance create a condition of discomfort leading people to demoralization. We analyse who is exercising the threat, insecurity and fear that can lead people to decide to leave their home country. It could be state actors, non-state actors or both, although this might be difficult to differentiate (*Economist*, 2014; Hirt, 2016). All the different reasons for migration out of threat, insecurity and fear require different responses, either to address root causes of migration or to formulate policies of protection and assistance. It is important to analyse the moment at which people decide to migrate. Do they leave their homes when the insecurity reaches a certain level? Do different groups of people have different migration thresholds?

This article does not address issues of forced or voluntary migration. It presents the distinct issue of changes in migration decisions due to demoralization, which has not received sufficient or appropriate theoretical treatment in the literature. The vast body of literature on migration has advanced significantly in the last few decades. However, both theoretical and empirical studies are still largely focused on mainstream migration and refugee issues. This approach functionally disregards the individual circumstances, experiences and perceptions of insecurity. Insecurity is often conceptualized as one homogenous event that disrupts physical safety as well as economic, social and psychological wellbeing (Williams and Pradhan, 2009).

A political regime, whether authoritarian or democratic, must ensure the wellbeing of its citizens. Less democratic regimes are accompanied by more restrictive civil and political rights for their citizens, which boosts the willingness of the citizens to migrate (Adserà et al., 2016; Burgess, 2012; Sirkeci et al., 2019). In this circumstance, as time passes, citizens tend to think that their comfort zone is shrinking at home. They change their decision when they are left with no space, and are pushed into a suffocating situation.

Table 1. Timeline: Migration and the role of government.

Years	Status	Facilitators/ intermediaries	Major destinations	Major factors*
1971–1973	Refugees, IDPs	Self, International organizations, Networks	India, Pakistan	Liberation war and post-war crisis
1974–1976	IDPs, Forced Migration, Refugees, Economic	Self, Networks International Organizations, Governments	India, Middle East & other countries	Famine and post-famine crisis
1977–1980	Economic, Students	Government, Self, Agents	Middle East, South East Asia	Economic, Better future, Studies
1981–1990	Economic, Highly skilled, Temporary, Students	Government, self, Agents, Networks	Middle East, South East Asia, East Asia, Europe, North America	Economic, Choice,** Studies, Pilgrimage
1991–2006	Economic, Highly skilled, Desperate, Temporary, Students	Brokers, Agents Networks, Self, Government	Southeast Asia, Middle East, East Asia, North America & Europe	Desperate, Economic, Political, Umrah/ pilgrimage, Studies
2007–2015	Economic, Highly skilled, Political asylum, Temporary, Students, Female/DH, Business	Brokers, Agents Networks, Self, Government	Middle East, South East & East Asia, North America, Europe & Africa	Desperate, Economic, Political suppression, Umrah/pilgrimage, Choice, Studies
2015–2019	FDH, Silent migrants, Political asylum, Highly & low skilled	Self, Brokers/ agents, Network, Government	SEA, ME, Resettlement countries, (Canada, Australia, USA, EU)	Threat & fear, Economic, Political repression

* Factors contributed to the status; ** deliberate decision.
Sources: Ullah, 2017; modified from Ullah and Chattoraj, 2018.

We think that the insecurity, fear and threat-based decision model is the most common and dominant tool for explaining the kind of migration this article deals with. This model argues that potential migrants base their decision to migrate on a perceived threat to their personal security. When this perceived threat increases beyond an acceptable level, they become demoralized and tend to migrate (Davenport et al., 2003; Moore and Shellman, 2004; Ullah, 2010). Recent empirical studies have found strong support for the theory that there is a variety of generalized violence and threats that cause large increases in migration out of the afflicted area, including civil war, genocide, politicide (a kind of political repression) and human rights violations (Apodaca, 1998; Davenport et al., 2003; Gibney et al., 1996; Melander and Oberg, 2006; Moore and Shellman, 2004; Schmeidl, 1997; Weiner, 1996). The hypothesis is that those who change their mind have sufficient justification, implying there is strong and consistent evidence that people flee from insecurity (Clark, 1989; Edmonston, 1992; Stanley, 1987; Zolberg et al., 1989).

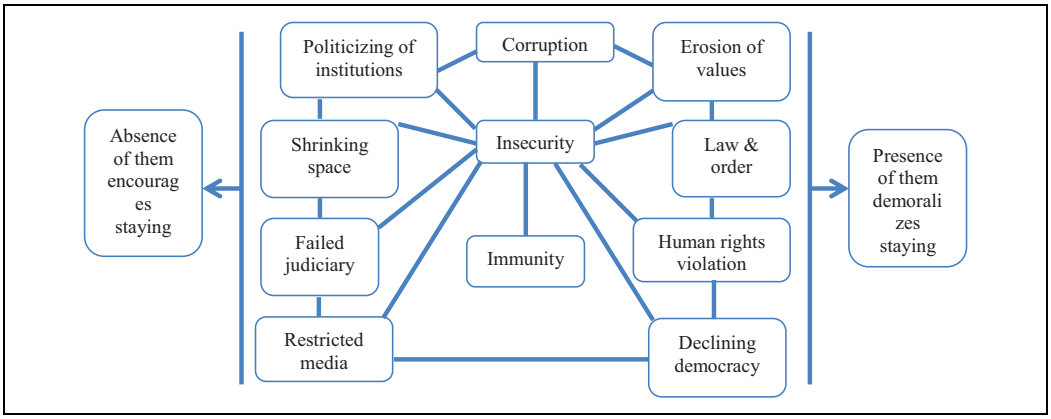

Figure 1. Dynamics of the sense of insecurity. Source: Authors.

Demoralization is powerful enough to change long-held ideas. Many respondents mentioned the fact that the Bangladeshi government disgracefully overthrew Nobel Peace Prize winner and microfinance pioneer Muhammad Yunus from his Grameen Bank without a justifiable reason. They mentioned that Yunus had brought prestige to the country but the government had disgraced him. Most respondents pointed to the fact that money plunderers enjoy immunity but the Nobel laureate had to go through this disgraceful experience. They added that the education minister had made a morally distasteful remark to government officials that shocked them. He had stated: '. . . but I have a request to you. Take bribes, but keep it within a tolerable limit' (Ahmed, 2018). How is corruption related to demoralization? In recent years, global concerns about corruption have intensified. Corruption has a debilitating effect on a country's economy and political system, and on people's trust and confidence in the government. A comment from one respondent was echoed by others: 'when a minister encourages acceptance of bribes we completely lose trust in the government and bureaucracy'.

Two respondents talked grudgingly about the toxic politics, and referred to a globally known photographer who was arrested and tortured after speaking in an interview about his incarceration, freedom of expression, activism, politics, custodial torture and plans to work on prison reform. Amnesty termed him 'a prisoner of conscience', meaning he was detained simply for peacefully expressing his views (*Dhaka Tribune*, 2019).

Some respondents said that during a crisis, citizens look up to the intellectuals who take a firm stand and play an unbiased and important role in dealing with the crisis. However, respondents mentioned that 'so-called intellectuals have become sycophants of the ruling party and have sold their conscience to the regime in power'. When asked for examples to illustrate its relevance to their being demoralized, they referred to money laundering, destruction of the electoral system and other irregularities as a crisis. The respondents asked, 'have you seen any of the so-called intellectuals talking about it? They are not talking about it lest the government does not like it'. Due to shrinking space for real intellectuals, a group of sycophants and bogus people surfaced. This is a serious indication of the erosion of values. Most respondents were furious about the issue of exam paper leakages that has become a regular phenomenon in public examinations in recent years in Bangladesh (*Daily Observer*, 2014). Educationists and experts warn that it has destroyed the education system (Hasnat,2018). Respondents further added that the government's continuous

denial of the issue was even more telling. Respondents asked the researchers, 'Still you want us to hold on to our previous motivation?'. Also, Bangladesh is among those performing worst in the world on the Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index (CRII), ranking 148 out of 157 countries (Oxfam, 2018).

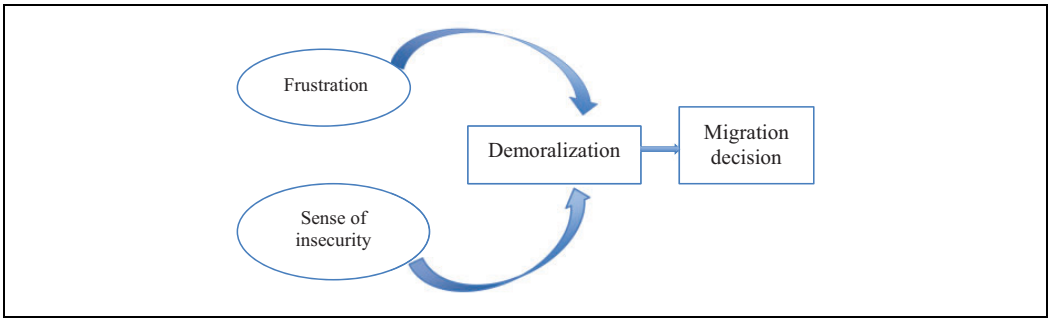

Figure 2. Demoralization-migration decision nexus.

The migration-demoralization nexus

The drivers of migration can be viewed from two perspectives: direct and indirect. Direct drivers are, for example, state persecution through harassment, discrimination and torture of people who disagree with the government, poverty, civil war, river erosion etc.

Indirect drivers are a lack of political liberties and rights, and endemic corruption that encourages migrants to seek greater freedoms. As the political environment turns hostile and the tolerance level declines, the economic situation is likely to worsen but governments use media to propagate the idea that the economy is thriving. A decade ago, factors like price hikes, frequent blackouts and corruption were not so influential in the decision making process. Now, however, along with all this, factors like insecurity, threats to life, corruption and human rights erosion have emerged as powerful drivers influencing decisions.

Conceptually, demoralization is a form of psychological distress caused by failure to cope with hopelessness, helplessness and a loss of meaning and purpose (Kissane et al., 2001). Therefore, it is an existential distress (Yalom, 1980) and conflict that a person cannot cope with due to scarcity of resources (Robinson et al., 2016). As a result, it takes the form of psychological suffering such as anxiety, depression, sadness and anger (Robinson et al., 2016). At some point, a demoralized person suffers a give-up–given up syndrome, leading to a sense of loss meaning and purpose in life in the current situation.

From 1975 to 2010, over one-third of the 144 countries classified by the World Bank as lower- or middle-income had experienced transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule (Marshall and Jaggers, 2011). There are counter arguments that many developing countries joined the third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991), which began in southern Europe in the mid-1970s and spread to Latin America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe over the next few decades.

The political landscape in Bangladesh has been marked by strong bipartisanism and deep-rooted rivalry between the two major parties that have vast organizational structures and are deeply entrenched into Bangladeshi society. However, deep fault-lines between the two major blocks (the BAL and BNP) have led to an environment of toxic political enmity. In just one month (October

2018), at least 38 people died in Bangladesh due to organized violence; 20 of them were political activists either killed during clashes or in targeted attacks (Pollman, 2018). Some respondents said that the rivalries between the two parties have pushed the country towards an authoritarian system.

People migrate as a precautionary measure, to avoid the possibility of future danger. They migrate as a reactionary behaviour, in response to a worsening economy and increasing constraints on their livelihoods. During 2010–2012, about 13,800 political violence and other non-violent events (battles, remote violence, violence against civilians, and demonstrations) took place in Bangladesh (Pollman, 2018). Political instability decreases the sense of security and authority at all levels on which people depend, creating a sense of anomy and anarchy (Bundervoet and Verwimp, 2005; Collier, 1999; Collier and Gunning, 1995; Mack, 2005). Research has shown that during past conflicts, commodity prices increased and livelihoods were threatened (Gebre, 2002; Justino, 2006; Mack, 2005; Verpoorten, 2005), which eventually increases migration.

Communal violence contributes to a considerable share of violent events in Bangladesh, which demoralizes people. As a result, huge number of Hindus left Bangladesh, mainly for India. According to Abul Barakat (2016), about 11.3 million Hindus left Bangladesh due to communal violence, religious persecution and discrimination from 1964 to 2013. We believe, however, that this is an exaggerated estimate. The Minority Rights Group International (2018) puts this estimate as 8.1 million (Barakat, 2016). The exodus mostly took place during rule by non-democratic governments after independence (Barakat, 2016). The democratic landscape around the world today is influenced by many complex dynamics such as economic growth and inequality, conflict, innovation and new technologies, geopolitical power shifts, migration and climate change (Ercan and Gagnon, 2014; Grugel and Bishop, 2014). Many democracies face challenges like decreasing and changing forms of political engagement (McCaffrie and Akram, 2014), low levels of trust in political institutions (Dalton, 2004; Van Der Meer, 2017), dissatisfaction with the performance of democracy (Norris, 2011; Stoker, 2006), support for populist movements (Mudde, 2016) and undemocratic forms of government (Norris, 2011). The country is undergoing a political monopoly, with internal feuds among leaders and activists of the ruling party looming large (*Dhaka Tribune*, 2018). Since the 10th national election in 2014, Bangladesh has seen a weak democratic order, as political participation and space for inclusive politics has significantly shrunk. Most respondents agreed that Bangladesh crossed the threshold of illiberal democracy to enter the domain of 'authoritarian rule' under Indian tutelage (Hashmi, 2017). The 2017 democracy index reflects this reality.

The respondents were unwilling to accept Indian domination over sovereign Bangladesh. It was painful for them to hear the Prime Minister saying that Bangladesh wants no return from India for what it has given, and that India will never forget what the Prime Minister has given to India (UNB, 2018). Since independence in 1971, the growing influence and power of India, which wants to turn the country into a subservient entity, devoid of freedom and democracy, is the biggest security threat for Bangladesh (Drong, 2016; Hashmi, 2017). One respondent said they had fought for the country's independence for building a dignified nation, not a subservient one.

Bangladesh's score on the Democracy Index fell to its lowest in a decade in 2017 (*Dhaka Tribune*, 2018), ranking 92nd out of 165 countries, its worst ever performance since the index was introduced in 2006. The score for civil liberties dropped from 6.76 in 2006 to 5.29 in 2017, causing concern among rights activists.[2] This implies that the respondents' concerns hold true. The latest update is that Bangladesh is no longer a democracy. Many respondents concur with the *Economist* (2012) that the internal strife has turned into a crisis, which threatens the life of about 170 million Bangladeshis who suffer under one of the worst governments in the world since the leaders have no

interest in their fate (*Economist*, 2012). More painful and shameful is the fact that some people in the government claim that autocracy is a badge of honour for Bangladesh (Mirza, 2019; Paul et al., 2018). This means that the self-proclaimed authoritarianism has in fact broken the hearts of many patriots.

Respondents worry about the shrinking space for freedom of speech in Bangladesh, and the National Human Rights Commission concurs with this (*Daily Star*, 2015). Bangladesh already suffers poor standards of freedom, but a new set of laws (known as the Digital Security Act 2018) enables the government to suppress political dissent by brutal means. The new law allows the government to search and detain any person and seize computers and handheld devices on mere suspicion, without any court-issued warrants, on charges that may land someone up to 14 years in jail for simple expression of views on a digital platform that the authorities may deem defamatory or subversive. Many respondents mentioned the controversial Section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act. They think this Act further downgrades Bangladesh's human rights and democratic standards. Respondents irrespective of age and political affiliation thought that the lack of space to express discontent creates a sense of insecurity which makes people want to migrate.

Many respondents connected demoralization with the government's direct intervention in the latest election in 2018. Fake votes were cast in 82% of the total constituencies and ballot boxes were stuffed on the night before Election Day in 66% of the total constituencies (TIB, 2019). Ahead of the election, the government blocked 54 online news portals (*Dhaka Tribune*, 2019), and during the election internet services were shut down (*Al Jazeera*, 2018).

Some respondents pointed to the shocking information shared by the Home Minister in parliament on 17 February 2019 that in three years (from 2014 to 2017), a total of 17,389 women and children had been raped in the country. The total number of victims was 17,389, of which 13,861 were women and 3528 were children (*BDNews24*, 2018). The respondents added that they had not heard any updates on whether the perpetrators had been brought to justice. Just in the month of January 2019, there were 51 rapes, 22 gang rapes and five killings after rapes (*Dhaka Tribune*, 2019). In just three months in 2019, 1200 people were killed in road accidents (*World Bank*, 2019).

Most of the respondents (21) were seriously annoyed with the propaganda that Bangladesh is becoming a middle-income country. They accordingly pointed to the fact that half of the world's poor live in just five countries and Bangladesh is one of them (*World Bank*, 2019). Of the world's 736 million extreme poor in 2015, 368 million lived in just five countries (in descending order): India, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Bangladesh (Mirza, 2019; World Bank, 2019).

Five respondents expressed serious frustration with the money laundering cases revealed by Swiss Banks, Global Financial Integrity (GFI) and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). In the last 10 years, about US$84 billion (6 lakh crore taka) was laundered (GFI, 2018). This is equivalent to 13 years' fiscal budget during the 1980s and 1990s in Bangladesh. The Planning Minister said this will not affect the Bangladesh economy (*Daily Asian Age*, 2018; *Kaler Kantho*, 2019). The total deposit by Bangladeshi citizens into various Swiss banks totalled Tk5566 crore (US$661,489,156) in 2016, and Tk4417 in 2015 (GFI, 2018; Kallol, 2017). Most respondents explained this trend in their own ways: ' . . . does this mean that people from ruling party do not feel safe in the country? Therefore, for making their future secured, they launder money elsewhere'. Most respondents asserted that this demoralizes them and pushes them to leave the country.

Most said that due to the flawed governance, the illegal transfer of money from Bangladesh to other countries is rising exponentially. The money launderers are too influential to be brought to

justice, implying that the rule of law is not functioning. Most agreed that the rule of law is selectively applied to a few only. Eleven of the respondents expressed their deep frustration regarding the silence of the government about the money launderers after the issue unfolded in the Panama Papers and the Paradise Papers. Bangladesh's state-owned and private banks are currently bogged down with nearly 89 crore taka (about US$12 billion) defaulted loans. If written-off loans are included, the sum reaches 1 lakh 20 thousand crore taka (US$16 billion) (GFI, 2018; Shah, 2018). However, the Finance Minister has started giving immunity to loan defaulters (*Bangladesh Protidin*, 2019b).

One respondent reacted as follows:

> . . . as we have heard about the looting of the curb market, we are really disappointed by the devastating news that only a handful of people close to the ruling party artificially created a crisis and chunked away about US$20 billion, leaving about 3 million investors broke.

Another four respondents pointed to a recent frustrating step of the government to exempt S. Alam Group (a controversial company; *Daily Star*, 2018) taka 3117.87 crore of taxes in February 2019 alone (*New Nation*, 2019). In just 25 days in April 2019, US$2,739,905,360 (BDT 230,000,000,000) was taken away by illegal syndicate from the curb market in Bangladesh (*Bangladesh Protidin*, 2019a).

Two respondents expressed their concerns about the fact that bank looters are given immunity, e.g.: '. . . I am not sure why money [TK500 crore] for the environment fund was deposited in Farmers Bank [owned by a controversial leader of the ruling party]'. The government claims total ignorance of the whereabouts of the money. Nine respondents appeared shocked at the Bangladesh Bank (central bank of Bangladesh) robbery that took place in February 2016, when there were 35 fraudulent instructions to withdraw close to US$1 billion from the bank (Das and Spicer, 2016). According to them, the central bank is the symbol of the financial sovereignty of Bangladesh. Most surprising was that this news was kept secret from citizens, who found out about it from a Philippines newspaper. Respondents said, 'we never saw any good news in the past years that might help us decide differently. One after another bad news comes out'. Again in 2018, customs intelligence found that gold weighing about 1000 kilograms kept in Bangladesh Bank's vault has been adulterated (Noman, 2018).

Some respondents said that the government has equated the concept of development with building some flyovers in the capital city and elsewhere. They added that the government has aggressively ventured into flyover constructions primarily to make money illegally from those projects. When asked why do they think this, they replied that the cost of construction in Bangladesh is the highest in the world, but with the cheapest labour and the poorest quality of construction (*Daily Star*, 2018; *Independent*, 2017; Mirza, 2019). Four respondents talked about the government-sponsored looting of state resources, giving examples of how 1 lakh 44 thousand 644 tons of coal disappeared from the Barapukuria coal mine (*Asian Age*, 2018) and no satisfactory answer was given to citizens.

Some respondents expressed their frustration about the bankrupt financial system and the immunity given to influential people evidently involved in high profile corruption. They gave the example of a fourth-class employee in the Health Ministry on a monthly salary of just US$300 who nevertheless was able to purchase a house in Sydney, Australia worth more than $US200,000. Their wealth statement submitted to the ACC (Anti-Corruption Commission) shows that they were worth Tk12 crore (*Daily Star*, 2019a). Respondents said that the total system is corrupt, hence

people can become immune even after committing large-scale corruption. The respondents also brought up the story of a member of the subordinate staff at Rajuk (Capital City Development Corporation) who became the owner of properties worth millions of dollars, and pointed out that this reveals the unscrupulous manner in which a government employee abused his position to amass an enormous amount of wealth illegally (*Daily Star*, 2019c).

Some respondents also raised the issue of the reverse migration (incoming rather than outgoing) of Indians (illegally and illegally) to Bangladesh. The unabated influx of migrants, especially from India and Myanmar (mostly Rohingya refugees; Ullah and Chattoraj, 2018), is an impending disaster for the Bangladesh job market. One of the reasons why migration in Bangladesh has gained so much prominence is that it is a powerful strategy to ease unemployment problems. The uncontrolled influx from India may place Bangladeshis in deep frustration, as currently about 47% graduates are unemployed (Hassan, 2017; Husain, 2015). Bangladesh stands fifth among the top 15 nations sending remittances to India, amounting to about US$4 billion per year, and almost an equal amount, if not more, is sent through *hundi* and other illegal channels (*Prothom Alo*, 2018).

Independent judiciary is crucial in a democracy to overcome all external pressures so that citizens can have confidence that their cases will be decided in accordance with the law. However, Global Integrity found that judicial independence, fairness and citizens' access to justice is weak in Bangladesh (it scored 69 out of 100; Global Integrity, 2010). An overwhelming majority of respondents expressed their deep concern over the disgraceful attack by the government on the sitting Chief Justice of Bangladesh and the way in which he was forced to leave the country and take refuge in the USA. They mentioned that if this can happen to a Chief Justice, then what about 'us' – the general people? After his exile in the USA, the former Chief Justice published a book that details the background to the treatment accorded to him by the government and its interferences in judicial decision-making instigations for false imprisonment of opponents. He wrote: 'I realized that it was nothing but systematic and organized state terrorism . . . and their treatment was so cruel that it could be compared with none other than the Gestapo force of Hitler' (Sinha, 2018: 518). The judiciary was made subservient to the government and lost its autonomy and independence. Thus the citizens have lost the last resort for justice. In order to clamp down on the opposition and remain in office unchallenged, the government orchestrates these acts tactically.

Some respondents pointed out that Dhaka tops the list of the most stressed cities in Asia. Five respondents added that Bangladesh is at the top of the list of the most air-polluted country in the world (Salim, 2019). Some respondents asked, 'see how unsafe we are?'. They referred to the sad incident that took place on 24 April 2013. On that date, the eight-story Rana Plaza building collapsed, killing more than 1100 people and injuring thousands of others. It was the deadliest disaster in the garment industry. Earlier, a fire broke out in the Tazreen Fashions garment factory. Exits were closed, which meant that the women and men working inside were trapped and could only escape by jumping from upper floor windows. About 113 workers died; many more were injured. Justice was only half done (Clean Clothes Kampagne, 2016). Many found this fire strikingly similar to the one that razed a chemical warehouse in Nimtoli in Old Dhaka (Molla, 2019), which claimed 124 lives nearly nine years ago. On 21 February 2019, a fast-moving fire swept through Chakbazar, Dhaka, killing at least 78 people (BBC, 2019a), and about 25 people were killed in a huge blaze in a high-rise building in Banani, Dhaka on 28 March 2019 (BBC, 2019b).

Most respondents expressed deep anxiety over the cases of extrajudicial killing and disappearances. The disappearance of about 544 people in the last 10 years has created profound fear among citizens. During 2014–2018 about 310 people disappeared (ASK, 2018), while Adhikar says about 435 disappeared during 2009–2018. In the first 10 months of 2017, 50 people disappeared (*Dhaka*

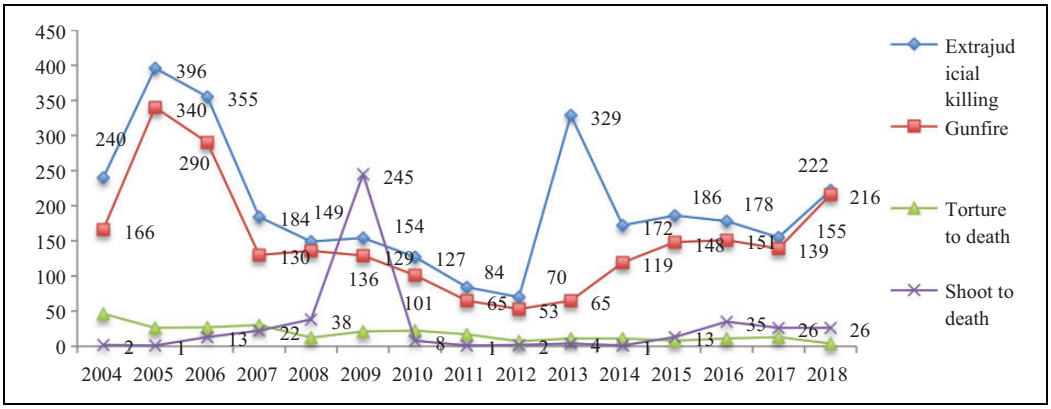

Figure 3. 'Crossfire' and 'Torture to death from 2004–2018'. * January to August. Sources: Khon, 2011; Odhikar, 2018; Ullah and Sagor, 2018.

Tribune, 2019). A number of respondents appeared reluctant to talk about enforced disappearances and it is lamentable that the government does not take any responsibility for these incidences (*Dhaka Tribune*, 2019).

Most respondents were horrified by the statistics on extrajudicial killing. At least 240 extra-judicial killings occurred in 2004; 396 in 2005; 355 in 2006; 184 in 2007; 149 in 2008; and 154 in 2009 (ALRC, 2010; ASK, 2010). In 2016 alone, about 543 were killed (ASK, 2016). During the first year of the ruling party (2009), 229 people were killed in crossfire. Odhikar and others put the number of extra-judicial killings by law enforcers at at least 154 for the same period (ASK, 2011; Odhikar, 2012). Some respondents think that the ruling party's fresh drive to kill so-called terrorists (jongi) is nothing but a way to drum up support from other countries for this government as it suffers from a crisis of legitimacy (Figure 3).

The rule of law upholds the principles of democracy and protects citizens from tyranny by ensuring that no one circumvents the law and criminals are strictly punished. Eight respondents were disappointed to know that Bangladesh was placed in the 102nd position among 113 countries in the (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2017–2018 (World Justice Project, 2019). In the South Asian region, Bangladesh has ranked fourth among six countries, the others being Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Regionally, South Asia's top performer in the index is Nepal, which has 58th place (*Daily Star*, 2018). Given the overall score, the 2017 index classified Bangladesh as a hybrid regime, a category of the countries that score between four and six on the index.[3]

Conclusions

Migrations have shaped many countries and societies politically, socially and economically. Systematic knowledge of migration insecurity, especially insecurity emanating from domestic politics, governance and the law and order situation nexus, is scarce. So far, the central questions of whether and under what conditions migration interacts with a sense of insecurity remain largely unanswered. While the number of empirical studies is fast increasing in the context of the ongoing political crisis in the field of migration, a considerable conceptual deficit remains. There is little

overlap between the different disciplines engaging with human mobility either. This requires us to ask a variety of questions in order to go beyond the traditional understanding of the complex phenomenon of migration. It is important to take into account that people who flee (and those who do not) are not just passive victims, but also active agents of decision-making.

The vast body of literature on migration drivers reveals the factors that directly influence migration decision. For example, people move from one place to another in order to escape extreme poverty. This migration is directly caused by economic reasons. This article demonstrated that there are some visible and invisible factors that create a sense of insecurity and discomfort leading to demoralization, which pushes people to migrate. Invisible factors such as corruption, limited freedom, declining democracy and erosion of values contribute to demoralization. This has been endorsed by many researches as well. Recently, attention has been brought to the question of how corruption could act as a driving force for migration. Looking at the top 10 countries of origin for migrants, it is notable that they all share very high levels of corruption (Merkle et al., 2017). A range of research confirms that higher levels of corruption in a country increase the likelihood of labour migration. Highly skilled migrants are likely to leave countries with higher levels of corruption (Cooray and Schneider, 2015). Another study confirms that corruption is a direct push factor for migration (Poprawe, 2015). Corruption drives people to lower corruption countries (Lapshyna, 2014).

This research shows that those who hated the thought of leaving their own country now deliberately make the decision to leave the country. The tendency is manifested in the UNHCR's statement that, in the last five years (2014–2019), the number of Bangladeshis seeking asylum in other countries doubled to 160,737 as compared to 2010–2014 (Faruq, 2019). Respondents added that today people feel proud to breach the law. This speaks to the drastic erosion of values. Respondents feel demoralized when they see MPs, ministers, the Prime Minister and the President frequently visit foreign countries for their health checks.

There is no alternative to giving freedom back to citizens. Corrupt practices may impede the success of development initiatives, which are aimed at addressing migration pressures. Therefore, corruption issues should be embedded in the migration-development discourse. Discourse on migration in democracies fails to acknowledge that most contemporary states are the product of earlier waves of migration (Castles et al., 2014; Okeowo, 2016; Williamson, 2006). Under the disguise of democracy, the ruling party in Bangladesh operates extreme repressive acts, generating an environment of fear among the population at large. Thus, the topic of migration raises challenging normative questions about the legitimacy of state power, the boundaries of political membership and justice within and across state borders (Song, 2018). Government may be successful in silencing the people but the country pays a high cost, i.e. losing highly skilled people. Some respondents sarcastically said that Malaysia, Canada and India could all be recognized as small districts of Bangladesh because of the astounding number of Bangladeshi choosing these countries as their second homes.

We do not claim that governance is solely responsible for the syndrome of demoralization. There might be other factors. But it was clear from the conversations with respondents that the governance system is the primary reason. In the changing global migration trend, we examined what the change looks like in a major sending country like Bangladesh. We are sure it is not the case in Bangladesh only; the same pattern may well be taking place elsewhere. India, for example, has witnessed the second largest millionaire outflow globally after China, with 7000 high net worth individuals changing their domicile in 2017 alone (*Economic Times*, 2018). The comeback of the

far-right-wing nationalist party to power in India will put more than 200 million religious minorities in danger (Gupta, 2019), and many of them may decide to leave the country.

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Notes

1. A political platform was introduced in 24 February 1975 under which all political parties and newspapers (except four obedient ones) were banned.
2. The score for civil liberties is calculated from a set of indicators including freedom of the press, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, the right to protest, the independence of the judiciary, state repression, the right to Internet access, religious freedom and the right to justice and equality before the law (*Dhaka Tribune*, 2018).
3. Countries where substantial irregularities are recorded during elections, where governments repress opposition parties and their candidates and where weaknesses prevail in political culture, the functioning of administration and political participation are included in this category (*Daily Star*, 2019b).

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