

## **HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND HUMAN SECURITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: A CASE STUDY OF BANGLADESHI FOREIGN WORKERS IN MALAYSIA**

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### **ABSTRAK**

**Background and Purpose:** In the modern globalisation epoch, security threats no longer concern the state's hostilities, military operation, or nuclear proliferation. It involves non-traditional menaces like human trafficking, which is believed to escalate quickly. The goal of this research is to identify human trafficking activities and to reveal the experiences of victims in the Southeast Asia region, particularly in Malaysia.

**Methodology:** This study used a qualitative method through a case study approach. It involved an in-depth interview session with five primary informants (represented as Cases 1 to 5) who were the victims of human trafficking from Bangladesh, a government officer from related agency, two local academicians and a representative of Bangladesh foreign workers' vending system company.

**Findings:** The study discovered that human trafficking crimes produce detrimental effects on the survival of the victims, especially on the economic and individual security aspect. Their wages are not fully paid and their freedom to socialize is restricted.

**Contribution:** This study calls for policy formulation and policy implementation to protect the interest and security of people despite their citizenship which is considered the most trustworthy, relevant and universal approach in rectifying these illegal activities within Southeast Asia region especially in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Bangladesh, labour migration, human security, human trafficking.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the current age of technology and globalisation, security threats are no longer about the regional crisis, states hostilities, nuclear proliferation and civil war. The threats emerge from non-military action such as transnational crimes, natural disasters, climate change, starvation, irregular migration, the influence of harmful social culture, and contagious disease (Anthony, 2016). Among these non-traditional security threats, human trafficking evolves quickly where natural disasters and military crisis lead to people displacement and refugees, who are especially predisposed to this atrocious crime. Human trafficking is a global security threat that affects nearly every corner of the world and is also associated to various crimes, including money laundering, the use of fake travel documents and cybercrime (Interpol, 2019). According to Article 3, paragraph (a) of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, which Southeast Asia countries are signatory, human trafficking is defined by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as:

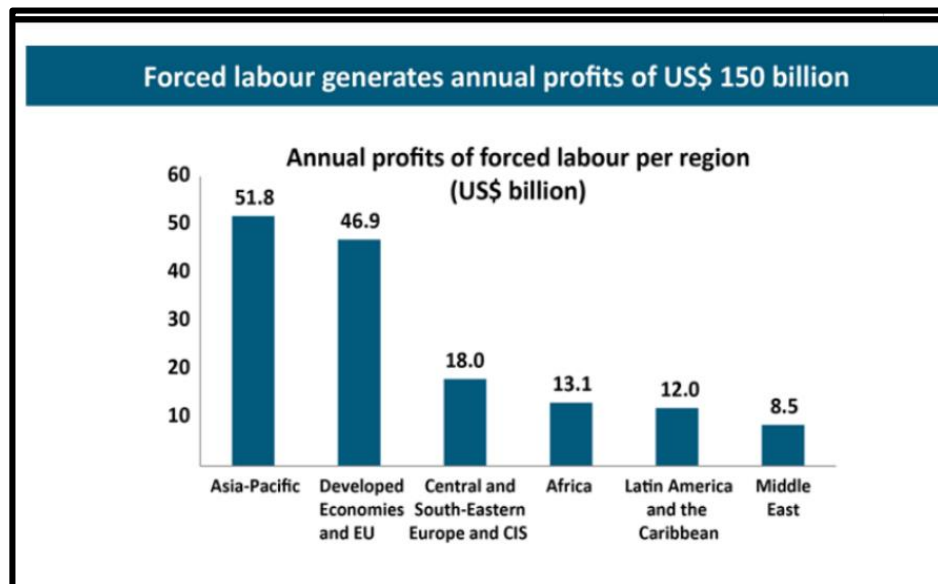
The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

(UNODC, 2019, para. 7)

Human trafficking is different from human smuggling. Smuggling is a violation of a country's border and immigration laws, but it is not a violation of human rights (Human Rights First, 2014). Traffickers possibly play tricks by giving false promises to deceive the potential victims. Other than men and women, children also become a target for traffickers. Families might exercise their last resort by selling their children to traffickers to pay off debts or gain income, or they might be deceived concerning the work offered and sound life for their children. As for

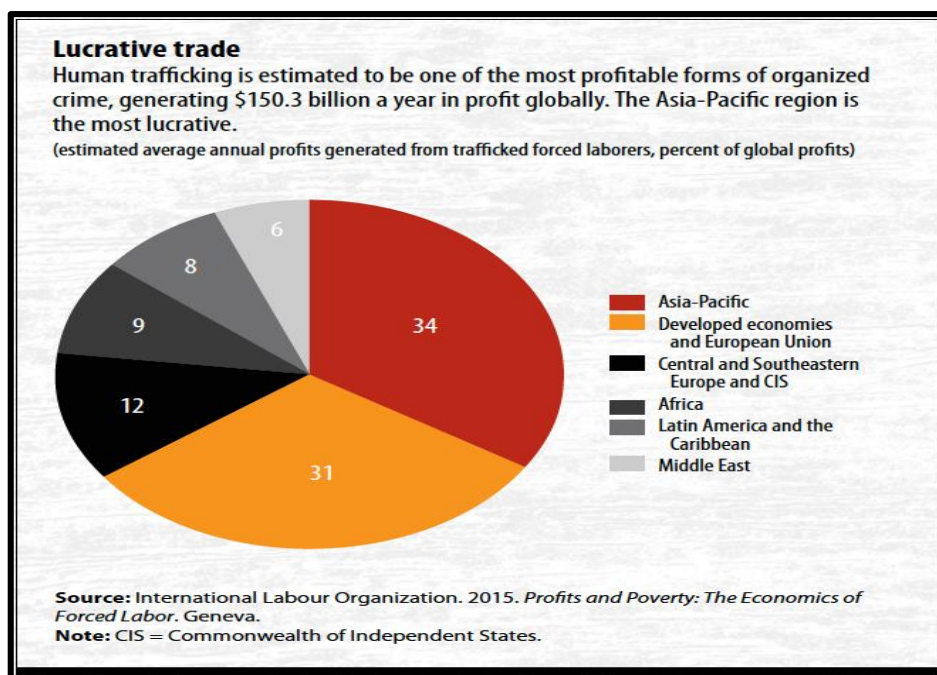
these organised gangs, they will always look for the best time to trick potential victims, especially when many are about to emigrate for economic freedom in other nations. Based on that reason, migration and organised crime are interrelated as the rising number of migrants crossing the country's borders are seen as relevant to human trafficking syndicates (Adamson, 2006).

In Southeast Asia, trafficking in persons is primarily considered a criminal problem, with high importance attached to the role of the criminal justice system and criminal law in the fight against trafficking. There are two defining features for non-traditional security threats in Southeast Asia, namely transnational and complex. The scourge of this neo-slavery, affects some 40 million men, women and children trapped in a terrifying entanglement of forced labour, sexual exploitation and forced marriage. This transnational misdemeanour becomes a multi-billion crime enterprise, second to drug and arms dealing, and now it becomes one of the world's most lucrative organised crime, generating more than \$150 billion a year. Data released by ILO in 2014 and 2015 (as per Figures 1 and 2) respectively, shows that the estimated profit earned by trafficking syndicates (forced labour) reaching billions of dollars. The Asia Pacific region posted the highest number with a profit of 51.8 billion USD a year.



Source: International Labour Organisation (2017)

Figure 1: Annual Profit of Forced Labour in 2014



Source: International Labour Organisation (2015)

Figure 2: Lucrative Income from Human Trafficking Crime in Asia Pacific Region

Generally, international migration helps to enhance people's lives in both the origin and destination countries and offers opportunities for millions of people across the globe to achieve meaningful lives abroad. This movement which is driven heavily by the advancement of technology in communication (Wahab & Khairi, 2019), nevertheless, not happens in favourable circumstances. As for some individuals, leaving one country after another is a complicated process that is fraught with risk and insecurity. Therefore, from a human security perspective, the movement of people should be emphasized at comprehensively, taking into account the political, civil, security, economic and social dimensions affecting people's decision to move.

In addition, to achieve a freedom from want and a freedom from fear, the United Nations was given the aim of maintaining international peace and security, promoting economic and social development along with human rights, goals to be achieved through international cooperation (Commission on Human Security, CHS, 2003). The two core freedoms can be traced back during the history of United Nations Organisation (UN) establishment in 1945. Reporting to the United States Congress in June 1945 shortly after the San Francisco Conference, US Secretary of State Edward Stettinius Jr. explained the objectives of the United Nations as follows:

The battle of peace has to be fought on two fronts. The first is the security front, where victory spells freedom from fear. The second is the economic and social front, where victory means freedom from want. Only victory on both fronts can assure the world of an enduring peace.

(Boyle & Simonsen, 2004, p. 6)

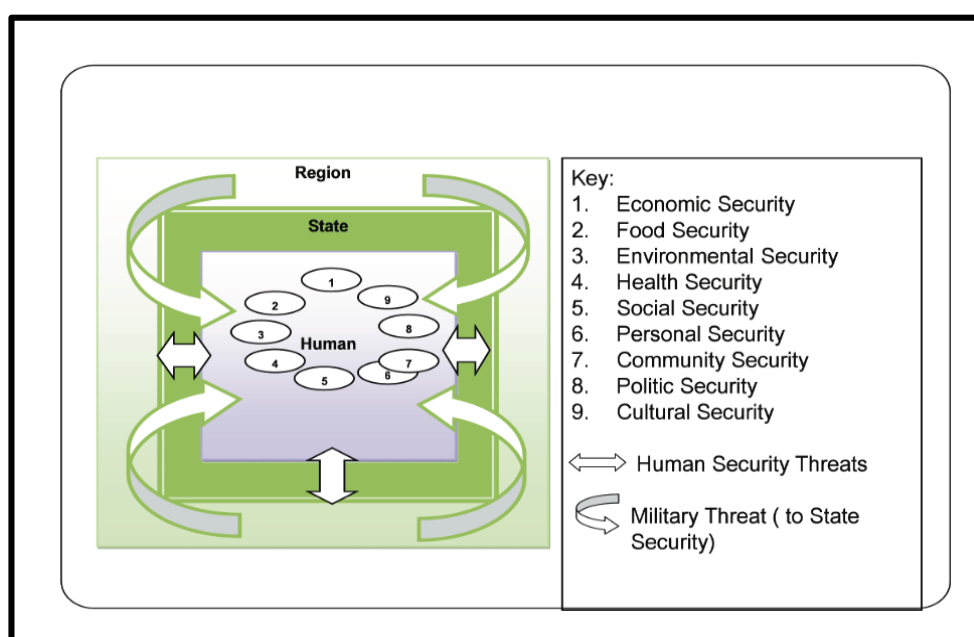
Nonetheless, today, after almost 75 years, people all over the world still struggle with being free from fear and want. Consequently, the essence of the discussion that covers the scope of basic human life and security among international migrants is imperative to intensify the understanding among world communities about the seriousness of human trafficking activities which directly defames human dignity across the globe. More importantly, a diverse range of practical strategies such as a centralised and holistic reaction must be made through a collective consensus among world leaders to resist the new millennium crime against all border (US Department of State, 2018).

## **2.0 BAGHUS MODEL FOR HUMAN SECURITY CONCEPT IN SE ASIA REGION**

Human security deals with the capacity to identify threats, avoid them when possible, and mitigate their effects when they occur (Tadjbakhsh, 2005). Its people-centred aspect also allows concentrating on multidimensional threats that challenge the survival, livelihood and dignity of people. In other words, human security is not only about preventing wars, conflicts and protecting the sovereignty of states against threats from other states (Tadjbakhsh, 2014). The inception of the human security concept took place after its report for the first time was published by The United Nations Development Programme's Human Development in 1994. The report highlighted the agreement of all party members in ensuring 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear' for people, and it is the perfect approach to deal with global insecurity (United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, 1994). The groundwork for the contemporary concept and policy instruments of human security was laid by a Pakistani economist, Mahbub ul Haq and an Indian economist Amartya Sen, Asia's first Nobel Prize winner in Economics (Acharya, 2017).

Human Security Framework by UNDP offered seven dimensions, specifically, environmental, economic, health, personal, community, political and food. Three years later, the dimension of "cultural security" was added in a refined version created by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The framework was supposed to be the relevant platform in advancing the perception of security and development

(Daud, Othman, & Ramli, 2015). The insights and goals work with the idea that as long as development and security could be achieved, then peace will be the ultimate purpose (Daud et al., 2015). Considering the Southeast Asia region's local community and other group requirements, particularly with different cultures and religion, the concept is yet to be adequately studied. Since the modification on the original UNDP and UNESCO model is the best way to meet Southeast Asia's cultures, Bangi Approach to Human Security and Peace (BAGHUS) was brought forward (as presented in Figure 3). The model was initially designed by Bangi Human Security Research Group together with research teams which were based in UKM, Bangi, Malaysia. With the understanding that the concept of national security and human security complement each other, the effort ideally fits the individual goal of freedom from fear and free from want. In other words, the combination of local context and local knowledge must be given priority within UNESCO philosophy (Daud et al., 2015).



Source: Daud et al. (2015)

Figure 3: Baghus Model

There were six elements embedded in the conceptualisation of human security and peace of BAGHUS such as economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratisation and respect for human and community rights, norms and the rule of law (Daud et al., 2015). In Southeast Asia, Thailand was the first country to accept the human security concept (Daud et al., 2015). As the security challenges and any other human development matters were mostly part of the consideration among politicians, this unique approach was seen

as fitting to be adopted as a government's foreign policy.

It is primarily applicable when the increasingly global economy also indirectly influences the migration patterns in the Southeast Asia region. The migration flows transform the environment in which ultimately requires a state to formulate policy, mainly which focuses on people's wellbeing. However, the massive influx of people crossing borders leaving their homelands, unfortunately, may probably become a trigger of other people's greediness. It is quite challenging for foreign workers who are directly exposed to ruthless trafficking syndicates. The initial purpose was to get a well-paid job and profitable income, and yet it ended with gruesome oppression and created a vague future.

## **2.1 The Trends of Labour Migrations in Se Asia**

Today's economic growth and technological advances influence international migration. Industrialized countries, for example, are the focus and target of the world's population to be the preferred destination for more significant economic opportunities, especially in Southeast Asia (Manning & Bhatnagar, 2003). International migration becomes the attention on the global agenda with considerable attention to its correlations with human development. There was an estimation of more than 740 million people who migrated within their country of birth and expected to generate \$596 billion in global remittances in 2018 (World Bank, 2017). This particular type of migration often happens in low-income developing countries and regions, especially in Africa and Asia (Royal Geographical Society, 2020). Among the countries, the top remittance recipients were India with \$79 billion, followed by China (\$67 billion), Mexico (\$36 billion), the Philippines (\$34 billion), and Egypt (\$29 billion) (World Bank, 2019). The reasons people migrated were because they intended to get a better salary or higher income, improve living standards, escape from political upheaval, survive from ethnic cleansing, leave arms conflict and prosecution, lured by friends and relatives and social networks and so forth. In terms of work scope, typically, they work as domestic workers, agricultural and construction sectors, factory and services workers, teachers and also professionals (Manning & Bhatnagar, 2003).

Meanwhile, more than 85 per cent of victims were reportedly trafficked from within the region. Within Southeast Asia, Thailand is the most prominent hosting country from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar. However, Malaysia becomes a receiving and transit country for victims of human trafficking from Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam (International Labour Organization, ILO, 2017). About half of these immigrants are women, a ratio that persisted for decades. Nevertheless, the issue of migrant worker's future in the

destination country is increasingly alarming when their fundamental rights and freedoms are being ignored by employers and agents involved. While various poor, developing and underdeveloped countries depend on income from remittances, the rights of their people working abroad are denied by those who are irresponsible. Therefore, Migrant Rights at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) possess a vision of labour migration that promotes shared prosperity by lifting and empowering workers in both origin and destination countries (Global Labour Justice, 2020).

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This study used a qualitative method through a case study approach. It involved an in-depth interview session with five primary informants (refer to Case Study 1 to 5) who were the victims of human trafficking from Bangladesh followed by informants consisted of a government officer from related agency, two local academicians and a representative of Bangladesh's foreign workers' vending system company. However, to secure and prevent undesired circumstances from happening, the five victims of human trafficking were given pseudonyms. Accordingly, the selection of government officer and academicians informants was made based on the essential criteria that they possess. Among them, one officer from the Labor Policy Branch, Ministry of Human Resources, namely Yushairi Zafran Yussof, and two academicians who are an expert in the area of human trafficking. They are Associate Prof. Dr. Kartini Aboo Talib (KITA, UKM) and Dr. Mahbulul Haque from Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA). Other than that, one representative of a vendor company that manages the recruitment of Bangladeshi foreign workers in Dhaka was also interviewed. She is Jamayah Kassim (pseudonym). The entire interview with informants took place from early 2019 to February 2020 in Putrajaya, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan.

### **4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The study aimed to examine the human trafficking activities and to explore the experiences of victims particularly among Bangladeshi foreign workers in Malaysia. Therefore, this section will elaborate further on how some individuals or middlemen abetted the swindle which finally led to the prospect workers manipulation and later become the victim of this unlawful 'business'.



#### **4.1 Human Trafficking Activities and The Experiences of Victims Involved**

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Labour, Employment and Training (BMET), almost 64.48 per cent of Bangladesh's short-term contract workers emigrated to the Gulf and other Arabic countries. The rest or 35.52 per cent migrated to other Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia. Malaysia is also recorded as the second-largest country (23.96%) to accept the presence of migrant workers from Bangladesh. Over the past few years, migration enabled many people to gain productive, fulfilling and creative jobs. Nevertheless, for some people, they failed to do so. On the contrary, migration also created an uncondusive and inhumane work atmosphere, where the rights of workers are not respected (Alam, 2014). Many of them were exposed to exploitation, such as human trafficking and so on. When it comes to human trafficking in history, South Asia appears as the most vulnerable region to this immoral act. The countries involved include India, Nepal and Bangladesh (Rahaman, 2015). While Malaysia is the third-largest workforce export destination for Bangladesh with annual remittance receipt of \$1.1 billion (Alam, 2019), these foreign workers were also listed as the fourth highest registered victims of forced labour trafficking in 2018.

Malaysia's position in the 2019 TIP Report (June) reflects poor performance and gives Malaysia a wrong impression internationally. The widely reported cases in the country are mainly related to employers, employment agents, and illegal sub-agents exploiting some immigrants in the labour trade primarily through debt-based pressure when workers cannot pay the fees for employment and related travel. Some agents in the labour-resource countries may charge higher workers' fees before they arrive in Malaysia and additional administrative fees after they have arrived in some cases led to debt slavery (US TIP, 2019).

According to Jamayah Kassim (pseudonym), the fees charged to prospective employees in Bangladesh who want to work in Malaysia are high. Based on the experience of operating a foreign worker vendor system in the source country of Dhaka, Bangladesh, for two years, she saw many cases of expensive payment of fees among potential workers. The average amount paid to an agent or sub-agent is approximately a few thousands Malaysian Ringgit, and some reach tens of thousands. Many are aware of the high fees charged by the agents and sub-agents involved, but they have no choice.

As a result of life struggles and poverty, as well as being influenced by the false promises made by agents including attractive salary offers, this potential employee cadged money from their family members or asked for a loan from unlicensed moneylender company. Many of them traded mortgages by selling land and cattle to raise money to finance their travel costs and passport management. They are determined to reach their destination. They will work

hard and then pay back all the money they borrowed before saving for their future and their family. Jamayah also added that:

Usually, agents appointed in Dhaka will charge individual workers who desire jobs in Malaysia. Typically, agents in Dhaka will use the sub-agent services they appoint to find these potential pools of workers everywhere in Bangladesh to meet the quota required of employers in Malaysia in various sectors. The sub-agents will then contact the village headman to provide the job opportunities to interested villagers. Since many parties are involved, the cost to be paid by these potential employees is high. Without doubt, if the top agent in Dhaka asks for RM5000, the sub-agent asks for RM5000, but the community leader must be paid for RM3000. The runners for the community leader who were asked to look for the potential workers also ask for a commission of RM2000. In total, they have to pay a sum of RM15000. It does not include the charges of the other parties involved who were also in charge of the potential workers. Once they have paid the money, they will be managed for inclusion in the employment system until they reach Malaysia.

(Interview with Jamayah Kassim on February 15, 2020)

Unfortunately in some cases, when they arrive in a destination country, the promised job does not exist. They have to find accommodation with their fellow countrymen. During the first week, they were also abused when they asked for food and drinks due to lack of money as all their money were given to the agents in Bangladesh before reaching Malaysia.

For Hashem and Khoan (pseudonym), the difficulty of raising funds to finance the cost to travel to Malaysia was already too much to bear. It was especially so when the agent told them that the work promised, did not exist. The reason was because the companies where they were supposed to work has gone bankrupt.

I have to pay RM20,500 to my agent if I wanted to work in Malaysia. My friend introduced me to this registered agent in Dhaka. The agent told me there were numerous works available here (Malaysia). There was a manufacturing factory in Kuala Lumpur which was recruiting new workers, but he did not mention the name of the factory, and after talking to my wife and other family members in Dhaka, I agreed and paid him RM20,500 to buy flight tickets, work visas and other charges imposed by the source country. I sold my land in Dhaka and managed to get a buyer with a sale price of RM10,000. The balance of RM10,500 was borrowed from a money lender. The agent told me I would be paid RM1,500 for my monthly salary, including insurance. There were 30 of us at the time, but we were all from different parts of Bangladesh. After one week, the agent suddenly told us that we had to find our jobs because the company that was supposed to hire us was bankrupt. We had to get out of this place, and he returned our passport without our work visa as promised by the agent in Bangladesh. Both agents in Malaysia and Bangladesh had deceived us. There was no job vacancy for us in the factory. We had all paid for travel and passport fees. They took much money from us. I was very depressed because I did not know how to settle my debt in Dhaka. I was also trying to send money to my family as my main goal here (Malaysia) was to work and earn better wages to improve my life.

(Interview with Hashem on October 2, 2019)

Agents in Bangladesh tell us that there are many good jobs in Malaysia. The pay is great, and there is comfortable accommodation. They promised that in Malaysia I would work in a car workshop. I love working in workshops because that is my interest. In my village, I work in a workshop but with a low salary. Here, in Malaysia, the job comes with a high salary, so I can save and repay the money I borrowed from my friends and family in my village. However, a week later, they told that there was no work. The company was closed and went bankrupt. We were surprised because back in Bangladesh the agents said that in Malaysia we would get good jobs and the accommodation would be good. My friends and I were feeling sad because we had never been here (Malaysia). How was it possible for us to find a job? We did not know anyone. We had no money. There was no work permit. The agents in Bangladesh said there was a permit and told us not to worry. Apparently, we were fooled. We could not go back, because we wanted to make money and pay our debt. It is a shame on our family if we get home because we have just got here. We wanted to work so that we can save money.

(Interview with Khoan on October 7, 2019)

In addition to the high fees, the TIP 2019 report also reported the employers exploited foreign workers as the labour trade such as in the oil palm and agricultural fields, on construction sites, in the electronics, clothing, and rubber industries and homes as domestic helpers. The employers employed practices that indicated forced labour, such as movement restrictions, breach of contract, payroll fraud, excessive debt imposition and passport retention. Malaysian law allows employers to hold a worker's passport with a worker's permission, but it is tricky to determine whether a worker voluntarily gives his or her permission, and some employers hold a passport to prevent workers from switching jobs.

As for traffickers, the economic incentives were too high, and the possibility of being caught in a country that did not enforce anti-trafficking policies was too low, thus causing trafficking crime to escalate (Ravlik, 2019). The same situation was applicable in resource countries like Bangladesh. The legal framework in Bangladesh covered several forms and elements of human trafficking, especially for women and children under the Prevention of Women and Children Act 2000 (amended in 2003), but did not cover all forms of trafficking. Instead, the law tended to focus on the crimes of trafficking in women and children (sexual exploitation), while largely ignoring the trafficking of men among adult men (Ayon, 2020). Therefore, the unfortunate fate of Bangladeshi men who were the victims of a fraud agent continued to become prevalent.

### ***Case Study 3***

For Uzzal (pseudonym), as another victim of an agent scam in Bangladesh, his emphasis on getting a job and changing the fate of his family in the village led him to forget the importance of choosing a duly qualified and licensed agent. Because of this mistake, Uzzal, who is from Chomilla, owed significant debt with his employer, which forced him to do two jobs daily. Uzzal began working in Malaysia in 2015. Initially, an agent known as a friend in Bangladesh promised him that upon arriving in Malaysia, he would work as an apprentice in a car workshop with a salary of RM1,500 a month.

Uzzal was required by the agent to pay RM 17,000 for his air ticket and visa matters at the Malaysian embassy. In Bangladesh, Uzzal worked at his workshop with a monthly income of RM 500 only. Thus, the lucrative salary offer caused Uzzal not to think thoroughly and agreed to pay the money within two weeks. According to Uzzal, he did not want to bother anyone, and he was convinced that a job in Malaysia existed. Hence, borrowed from an unlicensed moneylender. For Uzzal, this was quicker because there were no conditions imposed compared to licensed money lenders. After being introduced by his friend, Uzzal

finally managed to obtain the loan at RM700 a month. Although relatively high, Uzzal was determined to work diligently in Malaysia to pay off the loan as soon as possible.

Miraj (pseudonym) is 24 years old and is from Magura, which is about four hours of travel from Dhaka city. He came to Malaysia in June 2018 to work in a factory. However, upon arriving in Malaysia, the company where he landed his job had assigned him on a farm, the work which was not agreed upon when he was in his home country. Miraj paid RM15,000 to an agent in Bangladesh. According to the agent, Miraj would be paid a salary of RM2,000 to RM2,500 a month and would work at an excellent manufacturing company in Kuala Lumpur.

Nevertheless, what happened was opposite to what the agent said a few days before leaving for Malaysia. Upon arriving in Malaysia, Miraj and three other countrymen were taken to a place. The travel time was approximately two hours. They were taken to an oil palm plantation located in a district in Negeri Sembilan. Miraj and his friends were housed in a small, narrow room in the area.

Miraj felt very betrayed and depressed because his hopes of working in the factory were destroyed. Agents in Bangladesh lied to him, and Miraj was sure that his fellow countrymen were also victimised. Being left with no choice but fear for his life, Miraj accepted the job given, even though he felt unhappy. After a week of work, Miraj tried to talk to his employer, but his efforts failed when his employer scolded him and threatened to send him back to Bangladesh if he still raised the same issue.

Miraj and his three friends were told to work for about 14 hours a day without leave and were informed that their pay would be cut as their agents in Bangladesh still owed them. The reason given was baseless and insignificant to Miraj and his friends. It was because all the travel costs were paid to the agent in Bangladesh. Miraj and his other friends were fed only once a day. Each time they asked for more food for a day, their employer would scold them. After one month passed, Miraj and the other workers were still unpaid. Based on what was promised, the salary would be between RM2,000 to RM2,500 per month. Not just that, Miraj was tested again when his employer did not pay his salary despite being forced to accept without his consent. At the end of the third month, Miraj dared to ask his Indian employer about his salary for three months. Miraj said he must send money to his village to settle the loan instalment used to pay the agents and other costs of working in Malaysia. So after hearing Miraj's complaint, his employer kept him locked up in the house for four weeks. Food and beverages were not provided. They only ate what was in the house. Apart from that, their hands and feet were tied. Due to the abuse by his employer, Miraj and his friends finally ran away.

At the time of the interview, Miraj was working at a poultry farm near Seri Kembangan without a valid document. The researcher was informed that the owner of the farm where he currently works, is a responsible and kind employer. In addition to providing comfortable accommodation, the employer also pays him a reasonable wage. According to Miraj, his employer also promises to issue a valid work permit soon. The event that happened to Miraj is an example of how employers use remote work conditions as a means of extorting foreign workers for their gain and benefit. This worker was abused and also suppressed economically.

Also, there were cases in which to save costs, Bangladeshi foreigners were willing to come to Malaysia using student visas and tourist visas. They did this to get a job. If they were arrested, they would be placed under the supervision of the Malaysian immigration. According to Dr. Mahbabul, an expert in the area of human trafficking, the Bangladeshi workers were influenced by the beautiful stories shared by their former colleagues in Malaysia. In other words, this group of workers was deceived in the opportunities that were imaginative and lucrative especially after seeing the success of their friends who returned to their home country besides the assurance of employment obtained through known brokers. Other than that, these workers also misinterpreted the term free visa which did not exist in Malaysia. This misconception was taken solely to save money from paying the levy and even commissions to agents (Interview with Dr. Mahbabul Haque, May 1, 2019).

Apart from being transported by air, trafficking of people through sea routes was one of the illegal forms used by trafficking syndicates in Bangladesh which led to anger among the public (Ahmed, 2016). In an attempt to save costs and expenses, some Bangladeshis were willing to take risks at sea with strangers or traffickers. Although the fees charged were lower than the costs imposed by the so-called legal or licensed agents, the Bangladeshi foreigners were eventually trapped and treated like slaves by the syndicates involved.

### ***Case Study 5***

Tracing Mortin's (pseudonym) story as a human trafficking victim who managed to escape the syndicates who manipulated him, revealed how unfortunate his fate was. Mortin initially refused to be interviewed because of his still-illegal status due to the absence of his official travel documents when he entered the country. Nevertheless, after being persuaded, he finally agreed. Mortin came from a very low-income family background. He entered Malaysia by the sea with a few other individuals in 2018. Mortin was charged only RM5,000 for his travel expenses compared to his other friends who paid between RM15,000 and RM21,000 for their

air tickets and valid travel visas. Due to lack of funds, Mortin was forced to use illegal channels and risky transportation methods.

Although he knew of all the possibilities, Mortin was determined to face them with the confidence that he could reach Malaysia safely. According to Mortin, the journey from Bangladesh to Malaysia by sea would usually take about a week. However, as they sailed, it was understood that there was a bit of trouble in Malaysia (he was not sure what was going on) so they had to halt their voyage to Malaysia temporarily. What was still fresh in his memory was that their boat was anchored in a Thailand coastal area for a week. Mortin also told us that this was where the episode of their abuse began.

There was a Bangladeshi middleman for the agent in Bangladesh and Malaysia who directed them to do various work on the ship such as cooking, cleaning toilets and preparing raw materials for cooking. One day Mortin and several of his friends went astray after walking for hours to get their fresh food supplies in a town which was situated about two hours away from the location of their dock. Once they were back on the ship, they were severely scolded for being late by the middleman known as Ali. Then, they were severely mistreated and threatened to be thrown into the sea if they violated the given instructions.

Mortin added that the experience did not end there. His persecution continued after he arrived in Malaysia when he and his friends were handed over to irresponsible employers. Mortin and his friends were forced to work with a Chinese employer who runs a cattle farm in Klang. While in Bangladesh, his agent informed him that in Malaysia, he would work as a cleaner in a supermarket and would be paid a salary of RM1,200 per month, excluding wages for overtime. The agent also said that the employer would later take him for the job (in Malaysia) and would apply for a valid work permit to avoid any legal issues. However, what happened was the opposite. Mortin was not only given a different job than what was promised, but he was also paid a small salary that did not match the workload. When he was asked to work overtime, wages were sometimes not paid for unreasonable reasons. Mortin explained that his employers were hiring them to make hefty profits. It was because even though the employer initially promised to make him a valid work permit, it did not happen even after he worked for a year. Thus, Mortin and his friends finally decided to run away from their current employer.

Since Mortin and his other friends did not have any valid travel documents, this made it difficult for them to claim their right. Claims of human rights norms are not uncommon when foreign workers have illegal status. Similarly, the economic discourse has also provided very little space for legal immigrants, although there is strong evidence that they are the main drivers of economic prosperity in a country (Dauvergne, 2008).

According to Yushairi Zafran Yussof, an officer at the Labour Department of West Malaysia (JTKSM), Bangladeshi migrants could be associated with the victims of human trafficking where there were problems with the cost of migration that these workers had to bear, especially in the cost of recruitment in the source country which was said to be quite high and a burden to them. It forced these workers to make financial loans to manage their entry into Malaysia and contributed to the debt bondage element among foreign workers, including those from Bangladesh (Interview session with Yushairi Zafran Yussof, on November 18, 2019).

According to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kartini, who was interviewed on April 18, 2019, not many people in Malaysia are aware of the importance of the sense of responsibility and tolerance among employers towards Bangladeshi foreigners. Whether their status is legal or not; the basic rights of this group of migrants must be respected. Many of the Bangladeshi foreign workers were not paid wages for up to three months. Some of them sold their cattle and land, and when they work, to their great surprise, they are paid little. This situation led to another problem whereby when they are desperate, they will be in debt to their employer, and this will continue for a long time.

The cruel treatment of foreign workers has a massive impact on the workers themselves. If they are not paid, they are not cared for and not protected then what the meaning of humanitarian is? Moreover, the significant impact is on them. As for the country, if this oppressed group is captured, it will affect the country's reputation. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kartini stated that:

Its impact is huge. When our image is tarnished, the scale fluctuates, and in terms of foreign investors' confidence, this will be detrimental to Malaysia as our also heavily dependent on foreign investment for its economic development. Foreign investors might be willing to open manufacturing facilities based in Malaysia by taking foreign workers from Thailand, Cambodia, Philippines and Bangladesh. Due to its good geostrategic location, Malaysia is the best place, but if such cases are recorded and recognised internationally, it will ruin Malaysia's image. That is the far-reaching impact I can foresee in terms of institutions, individuals and societies.

(Interview with Associate Prof. Dr. Kartini Aboo Talib on April 18, 2019)

The trafficking of forced labour in Malaysia can generate high income for the syndicates involved. This immoral act caused many foreign workers in Malaysia, such as Bangladeshis, to lose their human rights and dignity (Samuni & Kanyo, 2016). In this regard, the Human



Rights Commission (SUHAKAM) recommends that the awareness level of trafficking crime among all levels of society, especially women and children, be increased (Samuni & Kanyo, 2016). The Bangladesh Bureau of Labour took several steps, Employment and Training (BMET) to improve the situation of locals working overseas (Alam, 2014). Unfortunately, even though many attempts were made by the Bangladeshi government, in real life, many Bangladeshi migrants who arrived in their countries of destination, including Malaysia, faced fraud by their agents and employers. The experiences of the trafficked victims themselves in the previous discussions indicate that although the Bangladeshi government made various initiatives and improvements in the management aspects of their overseas workers, these measures were still ineffective and ultimately pose a threat to the security of the workers involved.

Such a situation put the potential workers at risk, whether by immigration detention and deportation because according to the immigration law in Malaysia, foreign workers are not allowed to work with companies other than those on work permits. At the same time, in the event of exploitation or mistreatment, these non-Malaysian-speaking workers have no choice but to flee from the third-party employer who took them. It is the root problem, and it becomes increasingly out of control.

The value of humanity seems to be ignored by firms in this country because of the advantages that these workers may bring. It is applicable in this highly competitive world where everyone wants to pursue wealth quickly. The scenario is illustrated by Tantiana (2015) in her study of the impact of globalisation on human security that cheap labour can be obtained easily and quickly.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, most of the Bangladeshi trafficked migrant workers are under pressure or threatened by an economic and individual security. Economic security necessitates the need for a secure basic income (UNDP, 1994). At the same time, individual security means protecting human life from the threats of various types of violence by other countries and groups. From the perspective of Baghus Model, individual security is closely related to community security because of the significant relationship between individuals and communities. This study has shown that the brief forms of economic and individual exploitation include the payment of small wages which does not commensurate with the work done. In some cases, the victims are also faced with a situation where wages are only paid for over some time and eventually causes the victims to become debt-ridden with their employer.

The same situation is observed for individual security threats. Victims of human trafficking suffer from prolonged trauma such as mental and physical abuse as a result of a violation of their rights by their employers. Numerous victims are restricted in terms of their freedom to socialise and threatened to be surrendered to the authorities if they defy the instructions and wishes of their employers. It is hoped that the findings of this study can serve as a guide to find the most suitable solution between the government and stakeholders, especially in fighting the complex cross-border crime activities of foreigners in Malaysia.

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