

CMS of NSU Hosts a Dialogue on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in Labour-Related Disputes

Dhaka, 1 March 2025 – The Center for Migration Studies (CMS) and the Center for Legal Research (CLR) at North South University (NSU) jointly hosted a dialogue on “*Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in Labour-Related Disputes*” at the Syndicate Hall of NSU. The event brought together distinguished academics, government officials, policymakers, and representatives from the International Labour Organization (ILO) to discuss the effectiveness of ADR mechanisms in resolving labour-related disputes in Bangladesh and explore pathways for reform.

Brig Gen (Retd.) Dr. M Sakhawat Hossain, Honorable Adviser, Ministry of Labour and Employment & Ministry of Shipping, Government of Bangladesh, emphasized the urgent need for better financial discipline in the garment sector and fair treatment of workers. *“Despite the growth in exports, several garment factories struggle to pay their workers, often due to financial mismanagement. We must ensure workers receive what they are owed while improving the sector’s accountability,”* he stated.



Dr. Md. Rizwanul Islam, Professor & Dean of School of Humanities and Social Sciences, NSU, highlighted the backlog of over 21,000 cases in labour courts, with 75% exceeding their statutory timeframe. He stressed that ADR could ease congestion in courts, reduce legal costs, and promote quicker dispute resolution. Mr. Nafiz Ahmed, Lecturer, Department of Law, NSU, underscored that ADR provides flexibility, lower costs, and faster dispute resolution, but warned that its success depends on voluntary cooperation. He called for a structured ADR framework that aligns with Bangladesh’s legal system.



Mr. Mohammad Sufiur Rahman, Senior Research Fellow, SIPG, NSU, cautioned that Bangladesh's ongoing ILO Article 26 case may lead to an ILO Commission of Inquiry. He emphasized that ADR could play a key role in stabilizing labour relations and protecting Bangladesh's international trade reputation.



Mr. A H M Shafiquzzaman, Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of Bangladesh, announced that the government has agreed in principle to establish an arbitration platform. "We will be discussing this initiative with the ILO next week to ensure its effective implementation," he noted.

Mr. Tuomo Poutiainen, Country Director, ILO Bangladesh, emphasized that strong institutions are key to making ADR successful. "Laws alone are not enough—we need well-functioning labour courts, an efficient ADR platform, and a robust Ministry of Labour to enforce decisions effectively," he remarked. Prof. Abdur Rob Khan, Treasurer & Pro-Vice Chancellor (IC), NSU, reiterated NSU's commitment to strengthening ADR research. "By improving dispute resolution mechanisms, we can ease burdens on the courts and create a more just and stable labour environment," he stated.

Prof. Abdul Hannan Chowdhury, Vice Chancellor, NSU, commended the speakers and participants for their valuable insights and active engagement. He emphasized the critical role of academic institutions in shaping policy reforms and driving impactful change in labour dispute resolution. "As Bangladesh progresses, dialogues like this will be instrumental in developing an efficient and equitable ADR system. North South University is committed to contributing to this journey, particularly through the Liberal Arts wing and the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance, fostering research-driven solutions and informed policymaking," he remarked.

Professor, Sk. Tawfiq M. Haque, Director of SIPG concluded the discussion by summarizing the key insights, reaffirming NSU and SIPG's initiative to establish a final ADR platform. He noted that in Bangladesh's history, proposing reforms has always been easier than implementing them, highlighting the challenges of translating policy into practice. "As we work towards structuring and finalizing the ADR framework, we must be cautious and strategic. Ensuring its effectiveness requires bringing all stakeholders—owners, workers, and policymakers—on board. Without their collective involvement, we risk falling short of the expected outcomes," he emphasized.



The dialogue was moderated by Dr. Selim Reza, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and Sociology; and Coordinator of the Center for Migration Studies (CMS). He expressed his desire to take the ADR mechanism forward, through a meaningful collaboration among NSU, the Ministry of Labour and Employment; International Labour Organization (ILO), and other stakeholders in the near future.