

CMS of NSU celebrates the International Migrants Day 2024

Dhaka, 22 December 2024: The Center of Migration Studies (CMS) of the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), North South University has celebrated the International Migrants Day 2024 by organizing a Colloquium titled “Honouring the Contributions of Migrants and Ensuring Their Rights” on Sunday, 22 December 2024, at the Syndicate Hall of the University.



Mr. Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, Chief of the Labour Reform Commission, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. He emphasized that migrant workers should have the facility to vote from overseas because politicians will not think about them unless they are voters. He also added that registered migrants must be recognized as workers in Bangladesh to attend various forums, raise their concerns, and state their opinions. He also said that the Labour Reform Commission will make recommendations based on all discussions, especially those with academics and practitioners.

As the Special Guest, Mr. Tuomo Poutiainen, Country Director of ILO, Bangladesh, graced the event. He said, “as we look to the future, it is essential that upcoming policies and measures consider the complexities of labor migration and ensure that our workers are equipped with the necessary support, protections, and opportunities to thrive. The reforms we implement today will directly shape the future of migration for our citizens, and we must ensure that these changes are meaningful, sustainable, and responsive to the evolving global landscape of migration.”



Mr. Lance Bonneau, Chief of Mission for IOM in Bangladesh, sent his speech. Ms. Disha Sonata Faruque, Senior Programme Officer and Head of the Mission Support Unit, IOM, Bangladesh read it on his behalf. Mr. Bonneau stated, “one of our primary concerns is supporting regular migration pathways. We must advocate for and promote legal migration channels, ensuring that migrants are not only able to travel safely but also have access to the vital services and protections they need during their migration. This includes advocating for safeguarding their rights at every step of the process, from departure to arrival.”

The discussion featured a distinguished panel, including Mr. Shahidul Haque; Professor, SIPG, NSU, Mr. Mohammad Sufiur Rahman; Senior Research Fellow, SIPG, NSU, Dr. Mohammad Jalal Uddin Sikder; Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and Sociology, NSU, Ms. Sumaiya Islam; Executive Director, Bangladesh Nari Sramik Kendra (BNSK), and Member, Women Affairs Reform Commission. Dr. Md. Mizanur Rahman; Research Associate Professor, Gulf Studies Center, Qatar University, Mr. Shariful Hasan; Associate Director, Migration Programme and Youth Platform, BRAC, Mr. Rajekuzzaman Ratan; President, Samajtantrik Sramik Front (SSF), Dr. M. Mahfuzul Haque; Member, Labour Reform Commission & Former Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Mr. Shahidul Haque, Professor, SIPG, NSU, stated, “when it comes to policymaking, migration is typically treated as an afterthought. Migration issues rarely hold a strong position at the policymaker’s

table. We must continue to advocate for stronger, more inclusive migration policies that recognize the rights and dignity of migrants while addressing the broader societal and economic challenges that arise from migration.”

Mr. Mohammad Sufiur Rahman, Senior Research Fellow, SIPG, NSU, highlighted the need for talent development and retention. He said, “if we can build and retain skilled talent within our country, we can drive the productivity of organizations to new heights. We need to work together to build a future where our youth are equipped with the necessary skills and given the opportunities to thrive, both at home and abroad.”

Dr. Mohammad Jalal Uddin Sikder, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and Sociology, NSU. He said, “restriction for regular migration promotes irregular migration. If destination countries can set up skill development institutions in Bangladesh, it will benefit our migrant workers. The system in destination countries needs to be developed to encourage regular migration from Bangladesh. Moreover, the government needs to implement employment generation in our own country and migrant-oriented policies.”

Ms. Sumaiya Islam, Executive Director, Bangladesh Nari Sramik Kendra (BNSK) and Member, Women Affairs Reform Commission. She stated, “monitoring is needed about the work environment, health, and overall wellbeing, after sending the migrant workers, especially women workers. She also added, “we are training women as domestic workers, but we are not preparing them to handle specialized caregiving roles, which are in high demand. This is an area where we could have made significant strides.”

Dr. Md. Mizanur Rahman, Research Associate Professor, Gulf Studies Center, Qatar University, focused on the internal dimension of migration and socio-cultural factors that trigger the desperation of the Bangladeshi youth to go overseas. He also commented, “there is a lack of coherent, structured channel for migration in Bangladesh, leaving many migrant workers unprotected.”

Mr. Shariful Hasan, Associate Director of Migration Programme and Youth Platform, BRAC, raised some pertinent questions. He said, “Bangladesh is now ranked first in crossing the Mediterranean Sea illegally. Syria and Tunisia hold the second position. We are a country at peace; there is no ongoing war here. So, the question arises: why are so many people from Bangladesh so desperate to leave? What drives this urgency? Why are people leaving the country and dying at the sea? And what is the

role of stakeholders in the case of the reintegration of the returnee migrants? If we don't give them respect, who else will give?"

Mr. Rajekuzzaman Ratan, President, of Samajtantrik Sramik Front (SSF) commented, "we often calculate how many laborers leave the country, but we seldom ask the critical question: how many of them return, and what happens to them after they come back? There is little to no follow-up on the reintegration of these workers, and as a result, we are not addressing the full picture of migration—its social, economic, and psychological impacts on the workers themselves."

Dr. M. Mahfuzul Haque, Member of the Labour Reform Commission & Former Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, stated, "studies by organizations like the IOM show that returnees often face significant difficulties in finding employment upon their return. Many of them even express a desire to go back to the countries they came from, as they find it harder to reintegrate and make a living here. This raises a critical question: are there sustainable models for reintegrating migrant workers, and how can we learn from the experiences of other countries like Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan, which have implemented successful reintegration programs?"

Dr. Selim Reza, Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Sociology (PSS) of North South University & Coordinator of the Center for Migration Studies (CMS), moderated the Colloquium. He stated, "we have chosen this title not only because of the July Revolution but also because of the significant contributions made by laborers working abroad. These workers play a vital role in supporting our economy, yet their contributions are often overlooked in terms of their humanity. Furthermore, it is equally important to discuss internal migration. We must explore ways to ensure the rights of these individuals and find solutions to improve their conditions."

The Session Chair, Prof. Abdur Rob Khan, Treasurer & Pro-Vice Chancellor (IC), North South University, stated, "at this critical juncture, we must focus on the impacts of migration and explore pathways for fostering regular, legal migration. This is an issue that demands our full attention and commitment. I am pleased that this colloquium is aligned with the broader discussions as part of our country's ongoing reform initiatives. It is encouraging to see so many stakeholders coming together to address this important challenge."

Professor Sk. Tawfique M. Haque, Director of SIPG, also joined the event. The Colloquium concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr. Selim Reza.