BIISS JOURNAL, VOL. 46, NO. 3, JULY 2025: 365-399
DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.56888/BIISSj2024V45n3a1
ISSN: 1010-9536 (Print)

Bijoy Basak

COUNTERING HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND MIGRANT SMUGGLING IN BANGLADESH: CHALLENGES AND WAYS FORWARD

Abstract

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are alarming global issues with significant socio-economic consequences. Bangladesh faces severe problems of human trafficking and migrant smuggling due to socio-cultural norms, poverty, gender discrimination, illiteracy, lack of awareness, poor governance and insufficient punishment cases. Combating these crimes in Bangladesh is difficult due to their intricate nature, as identifying human traffickers and migrant smugglers is tricky, with victims frequently lacking essential documentation. The paper aims to identify the key challenges in countering human trafficking and migrant smuggling in Bangladesh and suggest practical solutions to these issues for Bangladesh. Secondary literature is primarily used mostly consulted for data collection and extracted data are scientifically presented to draw conclusion for this paper. Findings depict that key challenges in countering human trafficking and migrant smuggling include lack of awareness among people, limited resources of law enforcement agencies, lack of proper security checks at borders, corruption, globalisation causing cheap labor demand, cyber crimes, influence of organised crime groups, limited victim support, insufficient punishment instances and political instability. Recommendations for combating human trafficking are suggested, such as reducing recruitment fees, enforcing laws, creating safer immigration routes, increasing surveillance, forming task forces, promoting socio-cultural values, supporting human trafficking Tribunals and promoting international cooperation.

Keywords: *Human Trafficking, Migrant Smuggling, Law Enforcement, Modern Day Slavery*

1. Introduction

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are widespread concern all over the world due to the clandestine ruthlessness of traffickers and smugglers[1]. In Bangladesh, human trafficking and migrant smuggling have long violated individual security to a

Bijoy Basak, BPM, PPM (Bar) is Additional DIG, Bangladesh Police. His e-mail address is: bijoybasak@yahoo.com

© Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)

[1] European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report* (2020).

significant extent. In fact, human trafficking and migrant smuggling can occur when the accused violates the victims' freedom and personal liberty. If the traffickers have informed the trafficked individuals about the dangers and the illegality of the mode of transportation to another country, willingness to travel abroad unlawfully will mitigate the traffickers' culpability for the crime of human trafficking.[2]. The prevalence of these crimes exposes the vulnerabilities of our security system, hence incentivising criminal organisations to exploit the geographical region of Bangladesh to fulfil their objectives. Most importantly, human trafficking and migrant smuggling can also create a risk for national security. These crimes primarily occur due to lack of proper security checks, especially at the borders and coastal areas[3]. Hence, to combat these widespread and rising transnational organised crimes, a holistic approach through involving all stakeholders is a pressing need. Bangladesh faces a significant threat from the widespread occurrence of human trafficking and migrant smuggling, particularly in its 32 districts adjacent to India and Myanmar, along with two neighbouring nations, Nepal and Bhutan.[4]. With the hope of finding foreign employment or other opportunities like foreign tours, higher education, marriage, etc., unfortunate and helpless people of Bangladesh are likely to travel to various Middle Eastern, European, American, and African countries without a proper visa or any type of labour contract[5]. Legal international migration is expensive and complicated which most illiterate Bangladeshis cannot understand. Traffickers transport unemployed, poor people abroad to find employment and other opportunities[6]. Numerous trafficked victims risk their lives by boarding small boats on the rough sea to migrate, which can lead to drowning and death, leaving them dependent, miserable, and dejected[7]. Many of them are being held as hostages. The traffickers extort large sums from their relatives in the country. In some cases, female victims are coerced into sexual exploitation[8]. The incidents of trafficking are rarely reported to law enforcement agencies due to fear for the victimised family's reputation and social status[9].

[2] Ishtiak Ahmed Talukder,. "Transnational Organized Crime and Security Threats in the Context of Bangladesh," *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 7, no. 1 (2021): 114-122.

[3] Norliza Dolhan and Nor Azizan Idris, "Human Trafficking and Human Security in Southeast Asia: A Case Study of Bangladeshi Foreign Workers in Malaysia," *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)* 6, no. 1 (2021): 136-155.

[4] Siddharth Kara, *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

[5] Tasneem Siddiqui, "Migration as a livelihood strategy of the poor: the Bangladesh case," (paper presented at the Regional Conference on Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia, Dhaka, 22–24 June, 2003).

[6] M Ala Uddin, "The Plight of the Bangladeshi Women Migrants in the Middle East," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 2 (2021): 66-94.

[7] Mary Crock, Ben Saul and Azadeh Dastyari. *Future Seekers II: Refugees and Irregular Migration in Australia* (Sydney: Federation Press, 2006).

[8] Natalie M McClain. and Stacy E. Garrity, "Sex trafficking and the exploitation of adolescents," *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing* 40, no. 2 (2011): 243-252.

[9] Amy Farrell, Colleen Owens, and Jack McDevitt. "New laws but few cases: Understanding the challenges

Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Over time, this issue has worsened due to socio-cultural norms and poverty. Gender discrimination, widespread illiteracy, lack of awareness and poor governance may contribute to migrant smuggling and human trafficking in Bangladesh[10]. Frontier districts of Bangladesh such as Jashore, Sathkhira, Barguna, Patuakhali, Jhenaidaha, Chuadanga, Meherpur, Kushtia, Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Lalmonirhat and Cox's Bazar are major exit points for human trafficking and migrant smuggling[11]. The first national study on human trafficking, conducted by UNODC, the EU and the Bangladeshi government, found out that most victims are extremely poor and seek a means of livelihood. People from Bandarban, Kishoreganj, Magura, Jamalpur and the five districts of Rangpur division are targeted and trafficked abroad[12].

In fact, unemployment is the primary contributory factor of this crime as unemployed poor people believe leaving the country will improve their situation. They often undertake dangerous migration journeys with the expectation of improving their families' economic condition. The traffickers exploit their vulnerabilities to personal gain. The traffickers gain their interests by taking advantage of their economic condition[13]. Many other factors including economic factors, political instability, social and cultural norms, environmental factors like natural disasters and networks of criminals and traffickers influence trafficking trends in Bangladesh and worldwide[14].

It is difficult to guarantee that trafficking investigations will lead to arrests and prosecutions of offenders, even when police agencies prioritise the crime, and their officers are properly trained to recognise the crime[15]. According to statistics, the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012 was the subject of 348 investigations by the Bangladesh Police, compared to 403 investigations during the previous reporting period. The number of suspects the government prosecuted

to the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases," *Crime, law and social change* 61 (2014): 139-168.

[10] Abdus Samad Khan, Taza Khan, Adnan Nisar and Riaz Ahmad Khan, "Understanding the Human Trafficking Doctrine from a Legal Perspective," *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education* 14, no. 7 (2022).

[11] Malini Sur, *Jungle Passports: Fences, Mobility, and Citizenship at the Northeast IndiaBangladesh Border* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).

[12] Nadiya Tasmim, *Human Trafficking: How Did It Become So Big of a Problem in Bangladesh*, paper submitted to Department of Criminology, University of Dhaka, 2023 (mimeo).

[13] Jishu Barua, "Factors behind Human Trafficking in Host and Rohingya Communities in Cox's Bazar: An Overview," *Social Change* 10, no.1 (2021): 195-220.

[14] Khandaker Mursheda Farhana, and Kazi Abdul Mannan. "The socioeconomic factors of female child trafficking and prostitution: An empirical study in the capital city of Bangladesh." *Social Sciences* 13.8 (2024): 395.

[15] Charles Hounmenou and Sachi Toepp, "Exploring private investigation agencies' experience of collaboration with law enforcement in Investigations of human trafficking cases," *Societies* 13, no. 2 (2023): 44.

increased to 517 (184 for sex trafficking and 333 for forced labour), up from 312 during the previous reporting period, of whom 56 were charged with forced labour[16]. According to the government, as of December 2020, there were still over 4,000 cases of human trafficking that needed to be investigated into or prosecuted. In light of the severity of the issue, the government acknowledged that investigations, prosecutions, and convictions for trafficking were still insufficient[17].

The situation in Bangladesh is exacerbated when cases involving human trafficking remain left unresolved. Only 245 of the 668 cases that have been filed under the heading of "human trafficking" have been resolved as of 2019[18]. For the purpose of handling cases involving human trafficking, Bangladesh established seven special tribunals[19]. Four of these tribunals now have taskforces in place. Cox's Bazar has established a "Women and Child Abuse Prevention Tribunal." Apart from that, Bangladesh has demonstrated its dedication to carrying out the national action plan to prevent human trafficking[20].

Effective combating of trafficking and smuggling in Bangladesh is hampered less by legislative absence than by four operational bottlenecks—identification, investigation, prosecution and policy integration. In these circumstances, preventing human trafficking and migrant smuggling is still challenging, and the implementation of effective measures to do so is insufficient due to their complex nature and varieties of manifestations.

Given this broad backdrop, the main objectives of this paper are twofold: (i) to identify the challenges of countering human trafficking and migrant smuggling from a law enforcement perspective and (ii) to explore possible ways forward to overcome these challenges in the context of Bangladesh. To guide the study, the following research questions have been formulated:

- What are the key challenges in countering human trafficking and migrant smuggling, particularly from the perspective of law enforcement in Bangladesh?

[16] Fakhrul Islam, "Human Trafficking Law Enforcement Over the Victims and Offenders: The Perspective of Anti-Trafficking Stakeholders," *Victims & Offenders* (2023): 1-29.
[17] Che Audah Hassan, Maruf Billah, and Fuad Mahbub, "The implementation of human trafficking laws in Bangladesh: comparison with Malaysia." *ESTEEM Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 8.2 (2024): 103-120.
[18] https://www.prothomalo.com/amp/story/bangladesh
[19] Bushrat Jahan, "Transnational Organized Crime and Future Threats in Bangladesh: Comparative Combating Measures," *Essays of Faculty of Law University of Pécs, Yearbook of*1 (2023).
[20] S. M Talukder, ""Establishment and Operation of Administrative Tribunals in Bangladesh," (PhD dissertation, University of Dhaka, 2023).

- What strategies can be adopted to overcome these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of Bangladesh's response to human trafficking and migrant smuggling?

The present study adopted a qualitative approach and secondary data was collected to gain in-depth overview of the study issue. It has employed an interpretivism research philosophy to interpret the findings related to the intricate subject matters of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. This research followed an inductive thematic analysis method to identify and analyse the challenges of countering human trafficking and migrant smuggling. The secondary literatures related to human trafficking and migrant smuggling have been reviewed and analysed for this purpose. 20 closed trafficking-and-smuggling investigations (Police HQ archive, 2017-2023) were subject to inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke's six-step procedure). However, integrating the researcher's extensive career experience, particularly the one-on-one interactions with individuals affected by human trafficking and migrant smuggling, has enhanced the study's rigour. The researcher has had numerous personal conversations with victims and witnesses who have approached with complaints over time. The cases the researcher has encountered in professional life have been used as real-life examples, demonstrating the emotional and personal costs of trafficking and smuggling. Triangulating these sources strengthens credibility (convergent evidence), transferability (rich contextual description), and dependability (clear audit trail) of the findings and suggestions.

2. Literature Review and Research Gap

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are often used interchangeably in the literature, although they have different legal and practical meanings. Migrant smuggling facilitates illegal border crossings for financial gain without coercion or deception, while human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation and exploitation of people through force, fraud, or coercion, according to the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC)[21]. Studies show that these offences overlap, making enforcement and punishment difficult[22]. According to prior research, poverty, lack of work, gender discrimination and low education are linked to people trafficking and migrant smuggling[23]. Poverty and unemployment,

[21] Andreas Schloenhardt, Francesco Calderoni, Joseph Lelliott and Bettina Weißer, eds. *UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime: A Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).
[22] Yvon Dandurand and Jessica Jahn, "The Failing International Legal Framework on Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking," In *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, ed. John Winterdyk and Jackie Jones (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 783-800.
[23] Tunde Abioro and Omolara Akinyemi, "Worsening Women Trafficking, Multidimensional Poverty and

especially in rural Bangladesh, drive people to risky migratory routes supported by traffickers and smugglers[24]. Studies show that socio-cultural norms and familial pressures make women and children susceptible to trafficking[25].

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are tackled through several international conventions and national law. The UN's 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons emphasises prevention, prosecution, and protection for victims[26]. After ratifying this treaty in 2019, Bangladesh criminalised trafficking via the 2012 Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (PSHTA)[27]. Nonetheless, research indicates that these rules and treaties are not comprehensively enforced. The UNODC analysis indicates that inadequate enforcement, corruption, and lack of inter-agency collaboration result in low trafficking convictions, despite existing statutory frameworks. Law enforcement officers generally lack training in trafficking cases, resulting in delayed justice.[28].

Law enforcement is essential to discover and investigate trafficking networks. However, studies show that law enforcement agencies in many poor countries, including Bangladesh, lack the resources, technical ability and cooperation to combat these crimes[29]. Key issues behind these inefficiencies include limited monitoring capability at borders, airports, and coastal regions. Furthermore, corruption in law enforcement and border control agencies allows traffickers to operate freely[30]. The insufficient victim protection procedures lead to

Gender Inequality: The Vulnerabilities, Playouts and Governmental Responses in West Africa," *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 49, no. 4 (2020): 87-104.

[24] M. Mizanur Rahman Sarker, "Migration Flows in South Asia," In *Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Socio-economic, Spatial, Ecological and Institutional Aspects*, ed. Sumana Bandyopadhyay, André Torre, Paulo Casaca and Tomaz Dentinho (Cham: Springer, 2017), 47-68.

[25] Lemma Derseh Gezie, Alemayehu Worku Yalew, Yigzaw Kebede Gete and Florence Samkange-Zeeb, "Exploring Factors that Contribute to Human Trafficking in Ethiopia: A Socio-Ecological Perspective." *Globalization and health* 17, no. 1 (2021): 76.

[26] Saba Demeke, "A Human Rights-Based Approach for Effective Criminal Justice Response to Human Trafficking." *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 9, no. 1 (2024): 4.

[27] Aleksandra Jaskólska, "International Migration Flows in South Asia: Social and Economic Dimensions in the 21st Century," in *Global Migration: Mafias, States and Hybrid Warfare*, ed. Antonio Marquina (World Scientific, 2025), 199.

[28] = Arif Ullah, "Human trafficking in Bangladesh: the interplay of deception, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and structural challenges." *Global Crime* (2025): 1-22.

[29] Moniruzzaman Fakir, "Effectiveness of Community Policing on Crime Reduction in Bangladesh: A Comprehensive Quantitative Analysis," (2024), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5064220#:~:text=The%20findings%20reveal%20that%20areas,community%20policing%20on%20crime%20reduction.

[30] Uchenna A. Aja, "ECOWAS Borderless Protocol, AfCFTA and Cross-Border Criminalities and (in)Security Challenges in West Africa," in *ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement and the AfCFTA in West Africa: Costs, Benefits and Challenges*, ed. Samuel Kehinde Okunade and Olusola Ogunnubi (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2023), 213–237.

reluctance to testify against traffickers. The combatting of trafficking activities is further hindered by organised criminal networks utilising digital channels to evade prosecution. [31].

The challenges of countering human trafficking and migrant smuggling are rooted in the evolving nature of criminal activities, the role of transnational criminal groups, and the limitations of current legal and enforcement frameworks[32]. Migrant smuggling is a dynamic crime that continuously adapts to new legal and policy measures. The European Union has been updating its regulations to address these evolving challenges, emphasising the need for a comprehensive approach to combat smuggling effectively[33]. Criminal groups are not just threats but also influential actors in migration governance, shaping the legal and operational landscape. This necessitates a paradigm shift in how these groups are perceived and addressed by law enforcement[34]. Despite international and national legal frameworks, law enforcement efforts have largely failed to curb human trafficking and migrant smuggling. This failure is attributed to negligence in addressing the problem effectively and a lack of international cooperation[35]. The effectiveness of legal frameworks and international cooperation is crucial in combating human trafficking. However, challenges such as inconsistent law implementation, resource shortages and jurisdictional complexities persist, undermining these efforts[36].

However, the effectiveness of international legal frameworks, such as the Palermo Protocol, is often undermined by inconsistent implementation and jurisdictional complexities[37]. In this regard, the international cooperation mechanisms, including bilateral agreements and information-sharing networks,

[31] Viola Rentzsch, *Human Trafficking 2.0: The Impact of New Technologies* (LL.M. thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2021).

[32] Idoreyin Eyo and Glory Charles Okebugwu, "Analysis of fundamental challenges in the combat of transnational crimes," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 8, no. 4 (2024): 1297-1318.

[33] Olena Samoilenko, Arkadii Veits, Serhii Albul, Liudmyla Yankova and Taras Shchurat, "Combating exsise Smuggling: A comparative analysis of Ukraine and Poland." *Amazonia Investiga* 13, no. 77 (2024): 90-107.

[34] Luigi Achilli, Antje Missbach and Soledad Álvarez Velasco "Migration and crime in a divided world: Strategies, perceptions, and struggles," *The ANNALS of the American academy of political and social science* 709, no. 1 (2023): 8-22.

[35] Yvon Dandurand, "Criminalizing human trafficking has not made a difference: a law enforcement failure," *Journal of Human Trafficking* 10, no. 2 (2024): 383-387.

[36] Ananya V. Mehra and Gazala Sharif, "Legal Framework and International Cooperation in Combatting Human Trafficking," *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* 6, no. 2 (March–April 2024).

[37] Soumya Silver, "Twenty years after the passage of the palermo protocol: Identifying common flaws in defining trafficking through the first global study of domestic anti-trafficking laws." *Yale Law & Policy Review* 40 (2021): 336.

are crucial yet often hindered by insufficient resources and corruption[38]. Transnational criminal groups significantly influence migration governance, complicating law enforcement efforts. The interplay between state actors and criminal organisations necessitates a paradigm shift in how these challenges are perceived and addressed. Law enforcement agencies have struggled with a reactive approach, leading to low prosecution rates and victim identification[39]. Overall, the prior studies suggest a need for holistic approaches that address root causes alongside enforcement efforts.Despite growing attention to human trafficking in South Asia, several gaps remain in the existing literature. Previous research, such as Huda (2006) [40], has mapped sex-trafficking routes, while the UNODC (2023) [41] and U.S. TIP Report (2023) [42] provide national case counts. However, no study has conducted a data-driven audit of enforcement outputs. This paper addresses that gap by analyzing 20 police case files (See Appendix) from 2017 to 2023. While the TIP Report (2023) critiques the implementation of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (PSHTA) [43], and BFIU (2023) notes the occurrence of financial intelligence workshops, these sources do not include outcome-based metrics. [44] This study rigorously evaluates BFIU–Police cooperation and exposes money-laundering channels linked to trafficking operations. Additionally, while Lazarus et al. (2025) [45] examine cyber-based recruitment from the victim's perspective and Khan (2024) [46] highlights general police capacity gaps in handling cybercrime, no previous research connects these challenges to prosecution delays. This paper fills that void by showing how digital forensics delays obstruct timely charge sheet filing, proposing a Rapid Response Unit, and linking cyber recruitment to enforcement bottlenecks. Crucially, no prior study in Bangladesh has combined financial intelligence, police case files and cyber-evidence to assess enforcement effectiveness. This study fills that research gap by exploring the

[38] Mehraand Sharif, "Legal Framework".

[39] Luigi, et al., "Migration and crime in a divided world: 8-22.

[40] S. Huda, "Sex Trafficking in South Asia," *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics* 94, no. 3 (2006): 374–381.

[41] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global report on trafficking in persons 2022: South Asia profile* (2023). https://www.unodc.org/southasia/frontpage/2023/January/bangladesh_-unodc-launches-the-global-report-on-trafficking-in-persons.html

[42] U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in persons report: Bangladesh* (2023). https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/bangladesh/

[43] U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in persons report: Bangladesh* (2023), https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/bangladesh/

[44] Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, *Annual report 202223* (2023) https://www.bfiu.org.bd/pdf/pub/annual/2022-2023.pdf

[45] Suleman Lazarus, Mina Chiang and Mark Button, "Assessing Human Trafficking and Cybercrime Intersections through Survivor Narratives,". *Deviant behavior* (2025): 1-18.

[46] Khan, M. A. R. (2024). *Digital Evidence, Surveillance Technology and Cybercrime: Analyzing the Impact on Criminal Law Policies in Bangladesh*. Department of Law and Justice.

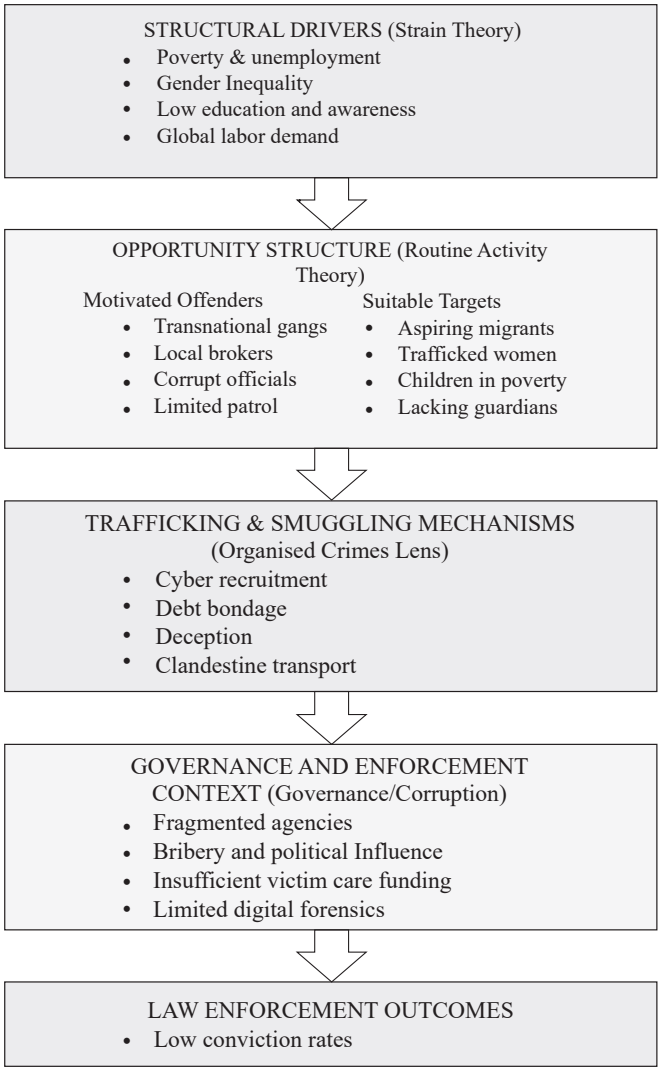
challenges and ways forward in countering human trafficking and migrant smuggling in Bangladesh.

3. Conceptual Framework

This study explores the challenges of combating human trafficking and migrant smuggling in Bangladesh by combining theories and concepts regarding criminology, law enforcement perspectives, policy analysis lens, and socio-economic factors. The framework is based on multiple concepts derived from several theories including the Routine Activity Theory which suggests that human trafficking thrives when there is a motivated offender, a suitable target, and weak law enforcement[47]. The Strain Theory suggests that economic deprivation and lack of employment opportunities drive individuals towards illegal migration and trafficking networks[48]. The Human Trafficking and transnational Organised Crime Theory suggests that trafficking is driven by highly organised criminal syndicates exploiting global migration patterns and weak border controls[49]. The Governance & Corruption concepts emphasise the need for effective coordination among multiple actors to combat trafficking effectively[50].

[47] Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson, "Routine Activity Theory: A Routine Activity Approach," in *Criminology Theory, ed. Frank Williams III and Marilyn McShane* (London: Routledge, 2015), 313–321.
[48] Robert K. Merton, "Strain Theory," in *Readings in Deviant Behavior*, ed. Alex Thio, Thomas Calhoun, and Addrain Conyers (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1957).
[49] Louise I. Shelley, *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
[50] Glória Texeira and Ary Ferreira da Cunha, "Public Governance and Political Corruption: A Framework for Anticorruption Policy," *OBEGEF Working Papers on Fraud and Corruption* no. 35 (2015).

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of this study (Developed by the Author)



Poverty and unemployment make individuals vulnerable to trafficking, while low education levels contribute to poor understanding of risks[51]. Women and

[51] Lemma Derseh Gezie, Alemayehu Worku Yalew, Yigzaw Kebede Gete and Florence Samkange-Zeeb, "Exploring Factors that Contribute to Human Trafficking In Ethiopia: A Socio-Ecological Perspective," *Globalization and health* 17, no. 1 (2021): 76.

children are disproportionately trafficked for forced labour and sexual exploitation[52]. Globalisation and labour demand fuel smuggling and trafficking due to the need for cheap labor in foreign markets[53]. The human traffickers and migrant smugglers take advantage of poor border controls, deception, and coercion to move victims across borders[54].Legal and policy barriers in trafficking include inconsistent legal definitions, lack of international cooperation, insufficient victim rehabilitation, and low conviction rates due to procedural loopholes, resulting in a lack of effective prosecution and re-trafficking programs, thereby hindering effective combatting of human trafficking[55]. Law enforcement faces challenges like weak border surveillance, corruption, limited investigative capacity, and cyber trafficking[56]. Porous borders facilitate illegal crossings, corruption hinders enforcement, and limited forensic tools and victim protection reduce successful prosecutions[57].

4. Challenges in Countering Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling in Bangladesh

There are some substantial problems in different levels, such as; identification and prosecution etc., of preventing human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Some of these problems are related to the weak infrastructure and lack of efficiency of law enforcement agencies. Some of them are also related to the lack of cooperation among the international organisations who work against this transnational crime.

4.1 *Problems in Identifying Human Traffickers and Migrant Smugglers*

Children and teenagers from economically and socially disadvantaged families are the main targets of traffickers. Human traffickers have recently entered the cyber world (digital space), luring victims with a variety of tricks[58]. The utilisation

[52] Cindy Miller-Perrin and Sandy K. Wurtele, "Sex Trafficking and the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children," *Women & Therapy* 40, no. 1-2 (2017): 123-151.

[53] June Kane, "Making Money Out of Misery: Trafficking for Labor Exploitation," in *Human Trafficking: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Mary C. Burke (3rd ed., New York: Routledge, 2022), 53–76.

[54] Alexandre Bish, Ella Cockbain, Peter William Walsh and Hervé Borrion. "Exploring the'blurred boundary': human smuggling and trafficking on the central Mediterranean route to Europe." *Journal of illicit economies and development* 5, no. 1 (2023): 70-94.

[55] Matthew Davis, "Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking: The Legal Issues, Challenges and Barriers," in *Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking: The Legal Issues, Challenges and Barriers* (Palgrave Studies in Victims and Victimology, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 1–27.

[56] Idoreyin Eyo and Glory Charles Okebugwu, "Analysis of Fundamental Challenges in the Combat of Transnational Crimes," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 8, no. 4 (2024): 1297-1318.

[57] Israel Eli Keikula Moss, *Role of Forensic Accounting in Combating Global Human Trafficking* (Northcentral University, 2021).

[58] "Internet Misuse Gives Rise to Human Trafficking," *The Business Standard*, July 30, 2022, https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/internet-misuse-gives-rise-human-trafficking-468194

of social media platforms, such Facebook and TikTok, has led to a significant rise in human trafficking. This trend has accelerated particulary during during the Covid-19 pandemic era. Young women were frequently enticed into employment by promises of acting or modeling roles. They were later sold to or exploited by human trafficking networks.[59]. The grassroots level carries a major portion of the responsibility in preventing human trafficking, which is a global concern[60]. In some cases, senior officials, including police, border guards, administrators, and leaders of political parties, are suspected of being involved in human trafficking[61]. The use of social media platforms like WhatsApp and Messenger by traffickers to facilitate unauthorised travel to Europe is on the rise[62]. The victims and their families are frequently coerced into making concessions by the traffickers, which is a significant obstacle to ensuring justice for those who have been the victims of migrant smuggling and human trafficking. Due to economic hardship, some victims accept financial settlements from traffickers rather than pursue legal action[63]. In addition to giving their family some financial support, it also allows them to avoid justice without having to go through the lengthy legal process in our country.

4.2 *Challenges in Smuggling Investigations and Prosecutions*

As primary responders, police face numerous challenges in addressing human trafficking and migrant smuggling. With the development of science and technology, organised crime creates and adopts newer methods to conceal their relics. In the investigation period police may face challenges as a result of lack of awareness of the investigators. Many of them are not familiar with the laws governing human trafficking and migrant smuggling, and procrastination is frequently visible. Another challenge is the fear of mass people getting services from the police station which creates a primary impediment for the victims to get access to the formal legal system. Because of the potential social stigma they face, victimised trafficked women sometimes hesitate to file complaints[64]. Likewise, because of the involvement of certain powerful groups, the prevalence of human trafficking and migrant smuggling is likely to be concealed. Also, the evidence in cases of human trafficking is frequently not properly gathered. Sometimes, cases

[59] Khan et al. "Understanding the Human Trafficking Doctrine"..
[60] Szablewska,"Human smuggling and human trafficking.".
[61] Ashraful Azad, "Recruitment of migrant workers in Bangladesh: Elements of human trafficking for labor exploitation." *Journal of human trafficking* 5.2 (2019): 130-150.
[62] Shoaib Salman Shoaib, "Social Media and Trafficking Nexus: The Contribution of Social Media in Accelerating Women and Children Trafficking in Bangladesh," (Master's thesis, Tampere University, 2022).
[63] Rahman, ""Understanding the Complexities of Human Trafficking in Bangladesh.".
[64] Ahmad Almaududy Amri, "People Smuggling in Southeast Asia: Trends, Challenges and Way Forward," *Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs* 7, no. 2 (2015): 132-151.

are not being lodged with the appropriate section[65]. The victimised children and women are not aware of their legal rights. The role of people's representative to the trafficked people and smuggled migrants is a great challenge. Court sets longer gaps between hearing dates. The complainants become reluctant to pursue the case further because the legal processing is taking too long. The competent court's summons is not properly served on the witnesses in a timely manner. When providing witnesses, the victims are preyed upon by powerful groups. The poor complainants and victims of trafficking and smuggling are unable to cover transportation costs during the trial of the relevant case. The complainant or victims agreed to withdraw their claims in some instances. In addition, the prosecutor and their assistants are likely to act inappropriately towards the complainant or victims. Moreover, due to various flaws in the legal system, the criminals are exonerated during the trial of the case[66].

4.3 *Challenges in Investigating Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Cases*

The legal process has specific protocols and procedures that must be upheld in accordance with the law. The cases must be conducted in accordance with certain legally binding provisions from start to finish. The credibility of any legal affairs eventually erodes if the law's provisions are broken during any step of the case process[67]. In the same way, poor case preparation, weaker than expected witnesses, and an inability to produce witnesses are the main reasons why most human traffickers do not receive the punishment they deserve. Although the "Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012" prohibits compounding of the crime of human trafficking[68]', being released on bail benefits a lot of traffickers. Law enforcement doesn't target human traffickers at all. According to a recent report, the learned courts are currently hearing charges in nearly 90 per cent of the cases that fall under the category of human trafficking. Only 3.88 percent of these cases are actually resolved. Only 15 per cent of the total cases are convicted, whereas 85 per cent get acquitted[69]. However, it is irrational to keep the relevant cases in trial court for future consideration because the witnesses have not appeared.

[65] Fakhrul Islam, "Human trafficking law enforcement over the victims and offenders: The perspective of anti-trafficking stakeholders." *Victims & Offenders* 19.8 (2024): 1512-1540.
[66] Syed Ahmed Ali, . "Emerging Trend of Transnational Threats in the Region and the Role of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB)," *NDC E-JOURNAL* 16, no. 1 (2017): 35-55.
[67] Andrea Di Nicola, "Researching into human trafficking: Issues and problems," in *Human trafficking*, ed. Maggy Lee (Devon, UK: Willan, 2007), 49-72.
[68] Ministry of Law, *The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012* (Dhaka, 2012), http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-details-1086.html
[69] Wakil Ahmed Hiron, "সাজা কম, খালাস বেশি," *The Daily Samakal*, January 13, 2023, samakal.com/asia/article/151225.

Experts say that while human traffickers are powerful, the victims of trafficking are less powerful financially. The miserable individuals who are the targets of trafficking grow frustrated to devote more time and effort to the ongoing cases. As a result of weak evidence and outstanding witnesses, the government's lawyers lose the case in court. Due to the difficulty of gathering evidence for investigators, the 90-day charge period, and the 180-day trial deadline stipulated by the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act of 2012, cases of human trafficking proceed at a very slow pace. Due to their inability to gather relevant materials and case evidence, the investigation officers are unable to finish their work on time[70]. As of December 2022, statistics revealed that there were 7233 human trafficking cases in Bangladesh, of which only 368 were resolved by the learned court. There were then 5970 cases that still remained pending under trial[71].

Unprofessionalism

Unprofessionalism in the form of dishonesty is one of the obstacles to establishing governance, so far as human trafficking and migrant smuggling are concerned. To prevent, identify, and investigate crimes involving migrant smuggling and human trafficking, the police are the primary law enforcement agency[72]. Investigating officers of the Bangladesh Police have achieved notable, internationally applauded successes in thwarting and preventing migrant smuggling and human trafficking. It is important to note, however, that some inept police officers have an inclination for working with migrant smugglers and human traffickers, who open the door for further trafficking[73].

Influence of Organised Criminal Network in Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling

Since human trafficking and migrant smuggling are globally organised crimes, the Mafia is still active and still runs the cruel industry from a different country. The trafficking mafia and slavery tycoons run a number of criminal enterprises and operate in a hierarchical structure. With regard to power and financial mobility, the Organised Criminal Network namely 'Mafia' is incredibly restrictive. The influence of the Mafia in human trafficking and migrant smuggling in Bangladesh

[70] Islam, Fakhrul. "Human trafficking law enforcement over the victims and offenders: The perspective of anti-trafficking stakeholders." *Victims & Offenders* 19.8 (2024): 1512-1540.
[71] BRAC Migration Program, 2022
[72] Haradhan Kumar Mohajan, "Human Trafficking in Asia: A Heinous Crime against Humanities," *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 29-41.
[73] A Biswas. "Human trafficking scenario in Bangladesh: Some concerns." *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies* 1.4 (2015): 85-90.

is a significant challenge for law enforcement agencies. In order to avoid detection and prosecution, criminal organizations frequently use bribery and intimidation. As a result, there is now a culture of impunity, which allows smugglers and traffickers to operate with little concern for getting caught. In Bangladesh, the Mafia is also involved in the smuggling of migrants, with India and the Middle East being the main destinations. They work through networks of brokers who guarantee migrants better employment prospects and arrange for their transportation. However, these immigrants frequently face difficult working conditions there, such as long hours and low pay[74]. Bangladesh's 15 per cent conviction rate aligns more closely with India (19 per cent) and Nepal (8 per cent) than with Thailand's 46 per cent, underscoring how dedicated anti-corruption and cyber-units influence outcomes[75]. The National Plan of Action (2018–2022) met only modest targets—new MoUs were signed, but core capacity promises (vetted task-force, e-forensics cell) remain pending[76].

4.4 *Procedural Complexities in Countering Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling*

Countering human trafficking and migrant smuggling is a challenging endeavour that takes into account a number of social, economic, legal, and political factors. Firstly, many people are not aware of the risks and dangers of human trafficking and smuggling, especially in developing nations. Their lack of awareness renders them more susceptible to being deceived by traffickers and smugglers who offer false promises of an improved life[77]. Secondly, law enforcement agencies frequently lack the resources, expertise, and equipment for effective trafficking and smuggling prevention. Consequently, they encounter difficulties in identifying and locating traffickers and smugglers. Thirdly, Corruption within law enforcement agencies, border control, and other vital sectors frequently increases the likelihood of trafficking and smuggling activities. Officials and other people are bought off by traffickers and smugglers so that they will ignore their crimes[78]. Fourthly, the demand for cheap labour has increased due to the globalisation of the economy, which has sparked a rise in migrant smuggling and human trafficking. It is challenging for law enforcement agencies to identify and bring charges against traffickers and smugglers because of the transnational nature of these crimes. Fifthly, it is challenging for many victims of trafficking and smuggling to recover from their trauma and reintegrate

[74] Talukder, ""Transnational Organized Crime."
[75] U.S. Department of State.,. *Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh* (2022).
[76] Government of Bangladesh, *National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking 20182022* (2023).
[77] Akond and Sharmin. "Combating Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling.".
[78] Jannatul Ferdous, "Child and Woman Trafficking in Bangladesh: A Study Exploring its Causes and Challenges," (PhD dissertation East West University, 2019).

into society because they do not receive adequate support and protection[79]. Finally, political unrest, hostilities, and displacement foster circumstances that make populations more vulnerable to human trafficking and smuggling[80].

Minimal government efforts to help trafficking victims

The Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013 (OEMA) denotes the legal procedure to use when making claims against recruiting firms. The Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) is the government agency responsible for preparing and certifying outbound Bangladeshi workers[81]. At that time, the home minister affirmed that police-reported migrant worker trafficking complaints should be forwarded to BMET for resolution. The new procedure would prevent potential victims from reporting a crime to the police until BMET was unable to resolve the complaints. Since the penalties for violations of the OEMA are less severe than those for violations of the PSHTA, recruiting agencies would also benefit from the revised procedure[82]. If formally adopted, the change would necessitate treating human trafficking as a labour issue that requires negotiation and arbitration as opposed to a crime. The government's choice to limit possible labour trafficking cases to arbitration through the BMET prevented law enforcement from apprehending recruitment agents who might still assist migrant transit despite significant risks. Again, despite the PSHTA's inclusion of provisions for the repatriation of foreign victims of human trafficking discovered in Bangladesh, the government made only minimal efforts to help Bangladeshi sex and labour trafficking victims abroad[83].

Inadequacy of Trawler Boats to Patrol the Sea

However, there are not enough trawler boats to patrol the sea. In some instances, trawlers or small boats from the area are used to conduct raids. For a city like the size of Teknaf, the 36 Coast Guards who patrol with two boats are woefully understaffed. According to sources from Bangladesh Coast Guard, human trafficking takes place through almost 80 points in Cox's Bazar and Teknaf[84].

[79] Ali,. "Emerging Trend Of Transnational Threats in the Region.".
[80] Biswas,"Human trafficking in Bangladesh.".
[81] Syeda Rozana Rashid, Anas Ansar and Abu Faisal Md. Khaled. ""The Pandemic has Added to My Miseries": Bangladeshi Migrant Workers' Social Protection Revisited," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 8, no. 1 (2023): 273-290.
[82] Joydeb Garai, " Climate change adaptation on indigenous peoples in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)," (PhD dissertation, University of Chittagong, 2022).
[83] Imam, "Bangladeshi Female Migrant Workers in The Middle East.".
[84] Biswas, "Human trafficking in Bangladesh.".

Lack of knowledge regarding Proper Protocol Maintenance of Search and Seizure of Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Issues

Most investigating officers lack the necessary knowledge to conduct searches and create seizure lists in relation to issues of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Since human trafficking and migrant smuggling are illegal, the tendency of indiscriminate searching by a first responder or investigating officer is likely to jeopardize the investigation's protocol, which could open a door for the criminals involved to evade prosecution. To search and compile a seizure list, systematic searching is required as per the Police Regulations. Otherwise, there will be enough scope to question about seizure list in the trial of the relevant case under the learned court[85].

Lack of Coordinated Approach Among the Countries Involved in Transnational Human Trafficking

As human trafficking and migrant smuggling are transnational organised crimes, different countries adopt their efforts in order to decrease the prevalence of these crimes through their individual strategies. But coordinated initiatives from various nations and important international stakeholders with creative ideas need to be in place. It is a challenging and tedious task that requires extradition and MoUs to bring human traffickers and migrant smugglers to justice[86]. The countries across the globe have the legal right to use their authority to establish jurisdiction to conduct investigations, file cases, and impose penalties for migrant smuggling and human trafficking because they have ratified the Convention against transnational crime. However, some countries do not have the capacity to apply for extradition in order to repatriate or prosecute offenders from other countries[87].

Lack of Exemplary Punishment Incidents in Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling

Only eleven offenders have faced the death penalty thus far, while 306 have received life sentences, and 86 have been proven guilty and handed down varying punishments. One factor for guaranteeing conviction is the absence of the witness protection statute[88]. Most often, the complainant and plaintiff enter the negotiation process out of financial resentment for the weaker parties. In addition, the investigating officers are unwilling or unable to produce technological evidence

[85] Amri, "People smuggling in Southeast Asia.".
[86] Anik Barua, "Competition Law in Bangladesh: Law and Reality," *Indian Journal of Law & Legal Research* 2, no.2 (2021).
[87] M. Rafiqul Islam, *National Trials of International Crimes in Bangladesh: Transitional Justice as Reflected in Judgments* (Boston: Brill Nijhoff, 2019).
[88] Interview with Advocate Salma Ali, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA)

in the docket of cases involving human trafficking. Owing to the intricate judicial proceedings and scarcity of proof, individuals convicted of people trafficking often evade punishment. A significant number of individuals are trafficked annually in pursuit of a prosperous future. And securing a conviction and holding the perpetrators accountable has proven difficult. Due to their ongoing influence and financial power, recruiting agencies have not yet faced conviction. [89].

Cyber Slavery

Cyber slavery is a modern-day phenomenon that has emerged with the widespread use of the internet and technology. 'Cyber slavery' has added a new layer of complexity to combating human trafficking[90]. The internet has become an integral part of everyone's daily life in our modern day. We use the internet for everything from social networking to financial activities, including sharing personal information. While there are many advantages to being online, there are also many ways in which we might be victims of cyber slavery. Encrypted chat applications, social media, and dark web platforms are used by traffickers to recruit and exploit victims, according to research[91]. In Bangladesh, reports indicate that traffickers are using platforms like WhatsApp and TikTok to lure individuals with fake job offers and then trap them in forced labour situations. There are cases of forced labour and exploitation through the dark web. Criminal organisations and individuals operate hidden websites where they buy and sell illegal goods and services, including human trafficking. Victims are often coerced or forced into performing various tasks, such as creating content, engaging in criminal activities, or providing sexual services[92].

One alarming manifestation of cyber slavery is the rise of deepfake technology. Deepfakes involve the manipulation of audio and video to create highly convincing but entirely fabricated content. Malicious actors can use deep-fake technology to impersonate individuals, spreading false information or engaging in fraudulent activities[93]. Migrant workers, who often leave their home countries in search of better economic opportunities, are particularly susceptible to various forms of digital exploitation. Migrant workers often fall victim to fraudulent online recruitment schemes. Unscrupulous recruiters or agencies may promise lucrative

[89] Interview with Z I Khan Panna, President, BLAST

[90] Sanja Milivojevic, Heather Moore and Marie Segrave, "Freeing the Modern Slaves, One Click at a Time: Theorising Human Trafficking, Modern Slavery and Technology," *Anti-trafficking review* 14 (2020): 16-32.

[91] Jonathan Mendel and Kiril Sharapov, "Human Trafficking and Online Networks: Policy, Analysis, And Ignorance," *Antipode* 48, no. 3 (2016): 665-684.

[92] Salman, "Social Media and Trafficking Nexus."

[93] Noah Giansiracusa, "Deepfake Deception: What to Trust When Seeing Is No Longer Believing," in *How Algorithms Create and Prevent Fake News: Exploring the Impacts of Social Media, Deepfakes, GPT3, and More* (Berkeley, CA: Apress, 2021), 41–66.

job opportunities abroad but then exploit workers through low wages, poor working conditions, or withholding passports and essential documents. Recently an incident has been reported regarding migrant workers from Bangladesh to Cambodia.[94] Basically, these human traffickers take the victims to various countries, including Cambodia, with promises of well-paying jobs in IT institutions. Then the job seekers are made captives there and used for hacking and online fraud[95].

It was reported that the victims were taken to a room. There were hundreds of computers on the table. Many fake IDs were opened with pictures and names of different Chinese beautiful girls on Telegram apps. Then the victims were forced to build a relationship with foreign men over thirty with those IDs. It was the victim's job to take that person's mobile number, address, bank account number.[96] It was quoted from the interview of a victim that the traffickers live in Cambodia, but they work through the network of different countries like Australia, Canada, America. They basically change their projects every two or three months. Later the victims were sold to a different group. The victims were handed over and the traffickers took three or four thousand dollars from new groups. It is a matter of great concern that this type of human trafficking is the work of international criminal gangs. The government of that country or our country has no control over the place where they are being victimised. In fact, even if the host countries have some jurisdiction over this type of incident, migrant workers are not aware of their legal rights in host countries or may not have access to information about labour laws and regulations. Cyber slavery further isolates the victims from resources and support by limiting their access to accurate information[97].

Based on the findings of the key challenges, the following matrix has been developed:

[94] "Save Bangladeshi 'cyber slaves' in Cambodia," *The Daily Star,* January 22. 2023*,* https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/editorial/news/save-bangladeshi-cyber-slaves-cambodia-3227481.
[95] Sarah Hupp Williamson, *Human Trafficking Hysteria: Historical and Modern Perspectives on Moral Panics, Media, and Crime* (London: Routledge, 2025).
[96] Mary Ann Jolley and David Boyle, "Meet Cambodia's cyber slaves," *Aljazeera,* August 11, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2022/8/11/meet-cambodia-cyber-slaves.
[97] Beatriz Susana Uitts, *Sex Trafficking of Children Online: Modern Slavery in Cyberspace* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

Table 1: Summary of the key Challenges and Proposed Actions

Issue	Impact on Counter-Trafficking Efforts	Primary Stakeholder(s)	Proposed Action
Victims rarely identify traffickers (fear, threats, no documents)	Leads to few named suspects; investigations stall at first step	Victims, families, police, local leaders	Creating confidential intake units; deploying victimcentred interview protocols; community awareness drives
Digital recruitment via social media (cyberslavery)	Expands reach of traffickers; evidence is encrypted and cross-border	Cybercrime unit, telecom regulator, platforms (Meta, TikTok)	Forming a joint DigitalForensics Rapid Response Cell; MoUs with platforms for expedited data requests
Organised criminal networks with local protectors	Intimidation of witnesses; culture of impunity	Police, BGB/ Coast Guard, political elites	Establishing vetted AntiTrafficking Task Force; rotating personnel to reduce local capture; applying assetfreezing laws
Limited investigator expertise & evidence mishandling	Poor case files; low conviction in court	Investigating officers, prosecutors	Mandatory skills course on PSHTA/OEMA; standardised evidencehandling checklists; oncall legal advisers
Long gaps between court hearings & weak witness protection	Victims drop cases; witnesses missing	Judiciary, public prosecutors, MoHA	Fasttracking trafficking dockets; enacting Witness-Protection Act; provide transport stipends to victims
Chargesheet deadline (90 days) vs slow crossborder evidence	Cases submitted incomplete; defence exploits gaps	Police, foreign liaison desks, MLAT focal points	Extend deadline for complex transnational cases; activate Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties early
Victim–offender financial settlements	Offenders avoid trial; undercuts deterrence	Victims, traffickers, community powerbrokers	Create Victim Compensation Fund so families are less tempted by payouts; criminalise outofcourt settlements
Corruption in frontline agencies	Traffickers obtain safe passage and forged papers	Immigration, BGB, local police	Introducing evisa/bioID systems; rotate border staff; internal affairs sting operations
Insufficient patrol assets (trawler shortage)	Sea routes in Cox's Bazar/Teknaf remain porous	Coast Guard, Navy, MoD	Leasing additional fast boats; joint patrols with Malaysia/Myanmar; radar coverage expansion
Fragmented international coordination	Extradition delays; offenders relocate jurisdictions	MoFA, INTERPOL NCB, regional partners	Negotiating bilateral extradition & datasharing MoUs; activate SAARC & ASEAN working groups

Minimal government support to overseas victims	Returnees lack rehab; retrafficking risk	BMET, embassies, MoEWOE	Operationalizing PSHTA victimfund clauses; embassy focal points for rapid repatriation
Deepfake & AI exploitation	New forms of coercion and blackmail not covered by law	Cybercrime unit, legislators	Updating cyberlaws to criminalise deepfake misuse; AIforensics toolkit for investigators

Source: [98],[99],[100], [101]

5. Way Forward: Role of Law, Protocol and Law Enforcement Agencies

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons was introduced by the United Nations in 2000 and established a victim-centered approach to trafficking[102]. It has since been signed by 177 countries of the world. This UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Persons Trafficking, Especially Women and Children was ratified by Bangladesh in 2019. The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012 was passed by the government of Bangladesh in order to fulfil its legally binding obligation as a signatory to the UN Convention. Some regulations were promulgated in 2017 as part of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, which was passed in 2012. A National Action Plan (NAP)[103] against trafficking has also been implemented in order to accelerate the preventive measures being led by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA). In fact, the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act of 2012, when properly implemented, can significantly reduce human trafficking[104].

5.1 Legal Provision of Preventing and Suppressing of Human Trafficking

A provision of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (PSHTA), 2012, outlines a penalty for the offence of sex and labour trafficking of

[98] Jonathan Mendel and Kiril Sharapov, "Human Trafficking and Online Networks: Policy, Analysis, And Ignorance," *Antipode* 48, no. 3 (2016): 665-684.
[99] "Save Bangladeshi 'cyber slaves' in Cambodia," *The Daily Star,* January 22. 2023, https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/editorial/news/save-bangladeshi-cyber-slaves-cambodia-3227481.
[100] M. Rafiqul Islam, *National Trials of International Crimes in Bangladesh: Transitional Justice as Reflected in Judgments* (Boston: Brill Nijhoff, 2019).
[101] Syeda Rozana Rashid, Anas Ansar and Abu Faisal Md. Khaled. ""The Pandemic has Added to My Miseries": Bangladeshi Migrant Workers' Social Protection Revisited," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 8, no. 1 (2023): 273-290.
[102] Ruth Dearnley, "Prevention, Prosection and Protection - Human Trafficking ," United Nations, February 26, 2020, https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/prevention-prosection-and-protection-human-trafficking
[103] Baiq Wardhani, and Farida Noer Fitri, "Pending Accession to the Palermo Protocol: The Case of Bangladesh," *Journal of Islamic World and Politics* 7, no. 1 (2023): 64-79.
[104] Bushrat. "Transnational Organized Crime".)

five years in prison and a fine of at least BDT 50,000[105]. The law also stipulates that engaging in bonded labour carries a sentence of five to twelve years in prison and a minimum fine of BDT 50,000. Despite the fact that organised traffickers are subject to the death penalty, there are not many cases where it has been applied[106]. In reality, the penalties listed above, with the exception of the death penalty, are insufficient to punish those who commit this long-standing and organised crime.

In 2012, Bangladesh formulated The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012 to eradicate the heinous crimes of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. According to Section 4 of the aforementioned act of 2012, the enactment has been designated a special law, which gives it greater authority than all other laws in this area. However, Section 3 of the act, which is part of this special law, contains a very broad definition of human trafficking that is subject to a wide interpretation[107]. Because of this, cases of numerous other crimes that are not directly related to migrant smuggling or human trafficking are piling up before the Anti-Human Trafficking Offence Tribunals, a special tribunal established by Section 21 of this notable law from 2012[108].

Thus, this study recommends amending PSHTA to raise minimum prison terms to 10–20 years and add mandatory asset-forfeiture to strip traffickers of profits. It also recommends to redraft Section 3 using the Palermo definition, so only genuine trafficking cases reach the special tribunals, unclogging their dockets (Case Study No. 7; 13 & 19, Personal Communication with Bangladesh Police Headquarters, 2025).

5.2 Legal Provision of Action to Combat Human Trafficking

The National Plan of Action (NPA) includes programmes, initiatives, and tactics to combat domestic and international human trafficking. The National Plan of Action for Human Trafficking (2012-2014) has limitations that have been attempted to overcome in this NPA. For instance, despite placing much emphasis on increasing public awareness, the previous NPA gave relatively little attention to enhancing the social and economic security of individuals in order to combat human trafficking[109]. On the other hand, the current NPA has prioritized creating social and economic safety nets. A few targeted interventions for preventing child trafficking have also been added. The NPA 2018-2022 identifies five action areas: preventing

[105] Amit Verma, "The Practice of Human Trafficking in Bangladesh," *ACADEMICIA: An International Multidisciplinary Research Journal* 11, no. 12 (2021): 180-185.
[106] Natalia Szablewska, "Human Smuggling and Human Trafficking," in *International Conflict and Security Law: A Research Handbook*, ed. Sergey Sayapin et al. (The Hague: TMC Asser Press, 2022), 1181–1206.
[107] Rahman, "Understanding the Complexities of Human Trafficking in Bangladesh."
[108] Barua, "Factors behind Human Trafficking"..
[109] Wardhani and Fitri. "Pending Accession to the Palermo Protocol".

human trafficking; providing comprehensive protection for victims of trafficking; prosecuting traffickers; partnering with other countries to provide legal assistance; and monitoring and evaluating progress[110].

Four fundamental pillars including Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership make up the second national plan. Stakeholders and policymakers alike frequently adhere to these pillars when taking any action to combat this crime[111]. The second national plan has been considered a significant step forward in the country's efforts to combat human trafficking as it seeks to prevent trafficking by addressing the underlying issues that contribute to the issue, such as poverty, a lack of access to education and employment opportunities, and social and cultural norms that support trafficking[112]. By giving them access to medical, legal, and social services, including safe housing and reintegration support, it aims to safeguard and help trafficking victims.[113]. This plan also aims to strengthen the legal system and law enforcement's response to human trafficking, including bettering inquiries into and prosecutions of traffickers, toughening up the penalties for such offences, and fostering better collaboration between law enforcement and other stakeholders[114]. To ensure a more effective and well-coordinated response to trafficking in Bangladesh, this plan seeks to strengthen collaboration and partnerships between government organizations, civil society groups, and international partners[115].

Thus, this research suggests creating an independent results-monitoring unit with its own budget line and quarterly reports to Parliament on NPA targets. Also, it suggests to publish an annual public scorecard on Prevention-Protection-Prosecution-Partnership, triggering automatic mid-term plan reviews (Case Study No. 2; 5 and 19, Personal Communication with Bangladesh Police Headquarters, 2025).

5.3 Role of Law Enforcement Agencies in Countering Human Trafficking

Law enforcement agencies play an essential role in preventing human trafficking by identifying and investigating into cases of trafficking, apprehending

[110] Rahman, "Understanding the Complexities of Human Trafficking in Bangladesh.".
[111] Faizah Imam, *Bangladeshi Female Migrant Workers in the Middle East: A Study of Migration and Women's Empowerment* (Master's thesis, Dalhousie University, 2022).
[112] Bangladesh Counter Trafficking in Persons, *Report: Situation Analysis / Need Assessment on Trafficking Victim of Male Youth and Adults and Migrant Returnees in Bangladesh* (Winrock International, 2018).
[113] Bhanumathi Vogety, "Prostitution and Free Will," *International Journal of Law, Management & Humanity Studies* 5, no. 4 (2022): 662.
[114] Nasrin Gannat Seba**,** "Child Trafficking in Bangladesh: A SocioLegal Perspective," *Judicial Administration Training Institute* (Dhaka, Bangladesh), 157.
[115] Baiq, and Fitri. "Pending Accession to the Palermo Protocol".

and prosecuting traffickers, and offering assistance and protection to victims[116]. The law enforcement agencies employ various strategies including prevention efforts, collecting intelligence, prosecutions of criminals, and providing support for victims in order to prevent human trafficking. Particularly, to increase public awareness of human trafficking and its warning signs, law enforcement agencies collaborate with neighbourhood associations, NGOs, and other stakeholders. Frontline responders help to identify potential victims of trafficking including healthcare professionals and border guards[117]. Moreover, law enforcement organisations collect and analyse intelligence to identify trafficking networks, routes, and operating procedures[118]. Besides, investigating suspected cases of trafficking, gathering evidence, and presenting compelling arguments against traffickers are all tasks undertaken by the law enforcement agencies. Collaboration with NGOs, victim services organisations, and other law enforcement agencies are necessary for this[119]. Also, by holding traffickers accountable for their crimes, law enforcement organisations ensure that they are brought to justice. Working together with prosecutors and other parties help create compelling arguments that hold traffickers accountable[120]. Most importantly, ensuring that victims of trafficking have access to medical care, legal counsel, and other support services is one way that law enforcement agencies help them and protect them. In order to offer comprehensive support to victims of trafficking, this entails collaborating with victim services organisations and other stakeholders[121].

5.2.1 Role of Police in Countering Human Trafficking

Investigations are typically only launched when specific incidents are brought to the attention of authorities due to the clandestine nature of the smuggling of migrants. Law enforcement organizations are primarily in charge of preventing heinous crimes like human trafficking[122]. Such as:

[116] Yvon Dandurand, "Human trafficking and police governance," *Police practice and research* 18, no. 3 (2017): 322.
[117] Md Rahaman, "'Human Trafficking in South Asia (Special Preferences on Bangladesh, India and Nepal): A Human Rights Perspective," *IOSR Journal of Humanitites and Social Science* 20, no. 3 (2015).
[118] Atwar Rahman and Muhammad Hassan, "Protection of Migrant Workers in Bangladesh: Legal Barriers and Way Forward," *Journal of Judicial Administration Training Institute* 17 (2017).
[119] Louise I. Shelley, "Human Trafficking as a Form of Transnational Crime," in *Human Trafficking*, ed. Maggy Lee (Devon, UK: Willan, 2007), 116–137.
[120] Jahirul, Islam and Md Zahir Ahmed. "Recent human trafficking crisis and policy implementation in Bangladesh," *Journal fpr Social Advancement 3* (2018): 275-291.
[121] Rahaman, "'Human Trafficking in South Asia".
[122] Md Aurongajeb Akond and Sumona Sharmin, "Combating Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling in Bangladesh: Conceptual Understanding and Lessons from International Community Based Approach," *Journal of Law, Policy & Globalization* 66 (2017): 38.

Police Patrol

The police are, in the truest sense of the term, the outward sign of any government in any country,[123] and patrolling is frequently described as the police force's backbone[124]. Therefore, police patrol is crucial for preventing human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Because of insufficient and ineffective police patrols, human traffickers and migrant smugglers prey on victims whenever an opportunity arises. However, this circumstance is often attributed to the inconvenient infrastructure and a lack of logistical support[125].

This study suggests deploying night-vision drones and GPS-tracked interceptor boats along all 80 Cox's Bazar–Teknaf exit points. It also suggests to ring-fence a fuel-and-maintenance fund to guarantee 24/7 coastal patrol coverage throughout the peak trafficking season (Case Study No. 6 & 14, Personal Communication with Bangladesh Police Headquarters, 2025).

Conducting Community and Beat Policing Activities

The majority of local law enforcement officers do not think that human trafficking problem exists in their community. The situation becomes more precarious, and traffickers have a ready-made environment to operate in. Community policing addresses societal issues such as human trafficking and migrant smuggling because it is a problem-oriented form of policing. Community leaders and volunteers will be able to track down the human trafficking offenders with the help of the local population. People's perspectives are greatly broadened and their awareness has been raised by the court yard sessions, tea stall sessions and open house day. Additionally, the beat police officers will go to the community's doorsteps to help residents with their issues and offer legal assistance regarding human trafficking[126].

This study suggests holding monthly "Safe Migration Clinics" co-hosted by beat officers and NGOs, using village forums to surface tips and victims early. This study also suggests to award performance credits and fast-track promotions to beat cops whose intel leads to arrests or rescues (Case Study No. 1; 9 & 18, Personal Communication with Bangladesh Police Headquarters, 2025).

[123] Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division, The Police Act, 1861, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

[124] Robert M. Bohm and Keith N. Haley, *Introduction to Criminal Justice* (New York: Glencoe, 1997), 202.

[125] Suvendu Biswas,. "Human trafficking in Bangladesh: An overview," *Foreign Affairs Insights & Review* (2015).

[126] Akond and Sharmin. "Combating Trafficking in Persons"..

Monitoring Cell of Police Headquarters

A *Central Monitoring Cell* [127]for human trafficking has been established at the Police Headquarters of Bangladesh Police that has been delegated to monitor any incident of human trafficking in any place in Bangladesh. Additionally, they have the right to direct the investigators in human trafficking cases, examine the data, and make the necessary recommendations locally. They also develop a plan to reduce the likelihood of human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

This research suggests building a real-time dashboard that auto-pulls FIRs, arrest logs and border alerts, producing hotspot heat-maps for field units. It also suggests to assign trained regional focal officers to upload case-status updates within 48 hours, letting HQ unblock bottlenecks fast (Case Study No. 6; 9 & 18, Personal Communication with Bangladesh Police Headquarters, 2025).

5.2.2 Money Laundering and Human Trafficking

The Money Laundering Prevention Act of 2012 recognizes human trafficking as a serious offense, as it is often linked to money laundering activities [128]. Human trafficking, being one of the most profitable criminal industries globally, has the capacity to generate substantial and ongoing income for its perpetrators. Victims' earnings, generated through exploitation, must be obscured prior to their integration into the legal economy. Considering these factors, it is said that human trafficking is a money laundering predicate offense, which indicates that it is a crime that calls for money laundering to be committed as a subsequent, connected crime[129].

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimated that in 2020, 25 million people had been victims of human trafficking crimes, which had profited somewhere about $150 billion[130]. Governments all over the world are introducing measures to detect and prevent human trafficking as well as financial regulations to identify, halt, and seize the illegal profits that it produces in response to the serious physical and psychological damage that it causes to individuals and communities[131].

[127] A Cell of Special Crime Section at Police Headquarters, Bangladesh

[128] Nahid Joveda, Md Tarek Khan and Abhijit Pathak, " Cyber Laundering: A Threat to Banking Industries in Bangladesh: In Quest of Effective Legal Framework and Cyber Security of Financial Information," *International Journal of Economics and Finance* 11, no. 10 (2019): 54-65.

[129] Edi Setiadi and Dian Andriasari, "The Correlation and Cohesion of Criminal Act of Money Laundering (TPPU) and Criminal Act of Human Trafficking (TPPO) Perceived from the Perspective of Criminal Law Reform in Indonesia," in *Proceedings of the 2nd Social and Humaniora Research Symposium (SoRes 2019)*, (Cham: Atlantis Press, 2020), 553–556. DOI: 10.2991/assehr.k.200225.120

[130] Bright Mills, *Human Trafficking* (Ukiyoto Publishing, 2023).

[131] Jamille Bigio and Rachel B. Vogelstein, *Ending Human Trafficking in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

Financial institutions play an essential role in fighting against human trafficking. The governments hope to involve financial institutions in the global fight against people traffickers, identify specific offenders, and lessen the opportunities for criminal organizations to exploit vulnerable people for profit by focusing on the illegal money it produces. In light of this, it is crucial that financial institutions are aware of their regulatory obligations with regard to human trafficking and know how to implement effective anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-financing of terrorism (CFT) measures[132].

The Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) has taken a number of measures to curtail or eliminate human trafficking in Bangladesh[133]. It is the responsibility of reporting entities, such as banks and Mobile Financial Services (MFS), to monitor their customers for any unusual or suspicious behaviour and report it to the BFIU. Other intelligence agencies like National Security Intellegence (NSI), Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), and Criminal Investigation Department (CID) also share their intelligence related to human trafficking or other financial crimes of suspicious subjects[134].

Hundreds of human trafficking cases have been uncovered by the BFIU based on the information provided by STRs (Suspicious Transaction Reportings), SARs (Suspicious Activity Reports) or other intelligence agencies. BFIU relays information to law enforcement agencies, particularly CID and Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC), after collecting it from banks, Mobile Financial Service (MFS), and other relevant domestic and international agencies[135].

This study recommends requiring banks and MFS providers to apply Financial Action Task Force (FATF) red-flag indicators and freeze suspected trafficking funds within 24 hours. It also suggests authorizing BFIU-CID joint financial-investigation teams to convert STRs directly into prosecutions and rapid asset seizures (Case Study No. 8; 13 & 15, Personal Communication with Bangladesh Police Headquarters, 2025).

[132] Tanya Wyatt, Jennifer Maher, Daniel Allen, Nancy Clarke and Deborah Rook, "The Welfare of Wildlife: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Harm In The Legal And Illegal Wildlife Trades and Possible Ways Forward," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 77, no. 1 (2022): 69-89.

[133] Habib Zafarullah and Halima Haque, "Policies, Instrumentalities, Compliance and Control: Combatting Money Laundering in Bangladesh," *Journal of Money Laundering Control* 26, no. 1 (2023): 189-204.

[134] Jerin T. Jyoti, "Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Activities and Its Prevention: A Study on bKash's AML&CFT Department" (BBA thesis, BRAC University, 2019), accessed via BRAC University DSpace, https://dspace.bracu.ac.bd/xmlui/handle/10361/12108.

[135] S. M. Solaiman, "Fighting Against Black Money by Offering Amnesty for Economic Development in Bangladesh: A Stigma Can Never Be a Beauty Spot," *University of Miami International & Comparative Law Review* 29 (2021): 42.

Table 2: Summary of Recommendations

Priority Area	Action Plan	Lead Stakeholder(s)
Ethical Recruitment & Fee Abolition	• Banning worker paid recruitment fees in all bilateral labor Memoranda of Understanding. • Enforcing the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012 (PSHTA 2012) and the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013 (OEMA 2013) against overcharging agencies	Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE); Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET)
Border & Route Security	• Deploying additional fast patrol boats and radar equipped watch towers along Cox's Bazar–Teknaf coast. • Forming mixed patrol task forces with human rights observers	Ministry of Home Affairs; Bangladesh Coast Guard; Border Guard Bangladesh
Cyber Trafficking Response	• Establishing a Digital Forensics Rapid Response Cell at Criminal Investigation Department headquarters. • Signing expedited data sharing agreements with social media platforms	Bangladesh Police – Criminal Investigation Department; Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission
Specialised Police Training & Intelligence	• Integrating an anti-trafficking module into Sub Inspector basic training. • Creating district level Human Trafficking Intelligence & Analysis Cells headed by an Additional Superintendent of Police	Police Staff College Bangladesh; Other Training Institutes, Police Headquarters
Judicial Efficiency & Witness Safety	• Expanding the number of dedicated Human Trafficking Tribunals. • Passing a Witness Protection Act and fund transport stipends for victims	Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs; Supreme Court of Bangladesh
Victim Support & Rehabilitation	• Activating the "Human Trafficking Prevention Fund" (PSHTA 2012, Section 42). • Establishing one stop crisis centres in every administrative division	Ministry of Social Welfare; International Organization for Migration (IOM); Accredited NGOs
Legal & Policy Reform	• Amending PSHTA 2012, Section 3 to narrow and clarify the definition of human trafficking. • Introducing enhanced penalties for cyber slavery offences	Law Commission of Bangladesh; Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs

International Co-operation & Extradition	• Negotiating additional extradition treaties and Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties with Association of Southeast Asian Nations and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation members. • Setting up liaison desks at major airports and seaports	Ministry of Foreign Affairs; INTERPOL National Central Bureau Dhaka
Disrupting Trafficker Financing	• Empowering the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit to freeze traffickers' assets within 48 hours. • Mandating financial sector reporting of suspicious recruitment fee transactions	Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit; Bangladesh Bank; Financial Institutions Division

Source: [136],[137], [138], [139]

6. Conclusion

Human trafficking has existed globally since ancient times. Nonetheless, historical offences entailed coercion and power. These heinous crimes were most exemplified by wars where the defeated group was carried away by the winners. The women were seized by the conquerors' sexual pleasure, while the others were enslaved. With the development of the modern welfare state, policing developed, and the open display of power became the complex and tactical strategy of criminals who never considered their victims as human. The victims of human trafficking were continued to be exploited as commodities by the traffickers. Thus, the most heinous organized crime exploits vulnerable individuals. These people are victims of other crimes besides being trafficked. For example, fraudulence, forced physical and mental torture, forced sex work, forced labour, extortion of money as ransom, use in drug trafficking, selling body parts by transplanting, use in dangerous sports and even killing many people are common scenarios with the victims when the traffickers do not get money. Hence, human trafficking is the 'mother of all organized crimes' because it causes so many serious crimes like prostitution, narcotics, illegal organ trading, forced labor, etc. No powerful international criminal group can operate without human assistance. Thus, human trafficking is crucial to their manpower needs. Human trafficking supports terrorism, theft, and other crimes that makes them further victims. The vicious cycle is supported by many mafias. Human trafficking

[136] Akond and Sharmin. "Combating Trafficking in Persons".
[137] A Cell of Special Crime Section at Police Headquarters, Bangladesh
[138] Nahid Joveda, Md Tarek Khan and Abhijit Pathak, " Cyber Laundering: A Threat to Banking Industries in Bangladesh: In Quest of Effective Legal Framework and Cyber Security of Financial Information," *International Journal of Economics and Finance* 11, no. 10 (2019): 54-65.
[139] Habib Zafarullah and Halima Haque, "Policies, Instrumentalities, Compliance and Control: Combatting Money Laundering in Bangladesh," *Journal of Money Laundering Control* 26, no. 1 (2023): 189-204.

has become a chain reaction that can only be prevented by addressing its root cause. An awakened society can break this cycle forever.

Technological capabilities in the police are being enhanced for continuously monitoring the increasingly large number of interactions of the human traffickers on social media. Many perpetrators are constantly being arrested and brought under the law for various types of crimes related to human trafficking. The police are taking action after receiving information about any crime. The police have conducted a wide-ranging operation across the country on allegations of human trafficking. However, sometimes the police are one of the barriers or steps, after passing through which crimes like human trafficking are committed. Law enforcement is the highest priority for both from the police and the family of the victim to prevent this heinous crime. In order to do so, patrolling, raids, search, arrest, and rescue of victims are required along with border security. Besides, all forms of exploitation, sexual abuse, and modern slavery which fall under human trafficking and migrant smuggling must be challenged by the police so as to prevent them in the primary stage. Overall, law enforcement agencies can play a critical role in preventing human trafficking by identifying and investigating trafficking cases, arresting and prosecuting traffickers, and providing support and protection to victims. By working collaboratively with other stakeholders, law enforcement agencies can develop comprehensive strategies that help to prevent human trafficking and bring traffickers to justice.

All walks of people should look into the incidence of human trafficking and migrant smuggling to ensure that awareness-raising initiatives enhance community consciousness in combating the many kinds of trafficking. Reducing unemployment by increasing technical education of youth and women for providing employment in their own country can be a great step to tackle a great evil like human trafficking. The government should continue to train police officers through an anti-trafficking module at the Police Academy during basic training. The government requires continued effort to train and provide onward support to international organisations and NGOs to impart training for judicial, immigration, and border officials. In the 21st century, slavery is highly incompatible with a civilised system. Human trafficking is the most heinous form of modern slavery. By eradicating it, Bangladesh can get rid of this modern-day slavery.

ANNEX

20 Cases of Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling (Names are Pseudonyms)

1) Amina's Seized Passport

Recruited via WhatsApp for a "cleaner" job in Dubai, Amina's passport was confiscated on arrival and she was forced into 16–18 hours of live-in domestic work without a weekly rest. She returned unpaid. The case shows passport seizure, coerced confinement, wage theft, and weak destination oversight. Remedies aligned to the study include a passport-custody ban and QR-coded written contracts embedded in bilateral labor agreements, embassy hotlines with rapid extraction protocols, and wage recovery through consular claims backed by employer asset freezes.

2) Nayeem's Evidence Clock

Nayeem's PSHTA-2012 case faced the 90-day charge-sheet deadline while key proof sat overseas. This mismatch between domestic timelines and cross-border evidence is central. The way forward is to trigger MLAA requests at FIR stage, file rolling partial charge-sheets within the deadline, and add supplemental evidence on return.

3) Tareq's Group Repatriation

Tareq returned from KSA with a cohort who shared recruiters, bank channels, and handlers, yet cases were opened piecemeal. The challenge is fragmented, case-by-case pursuit. The study urges cluster investigations using banking analysis, freezing assets across linked FIRs, and consolidating prosecutions so networks—not just symptoms—are dismantled.

4) Shila "Sold" Three Times in Riyadh

Shila entered Saudi Arabia as a domestic worker and was "transferred" between three households without consent, with her phone taken so she couldn't call home. Her dues were never paid. The challenges are chained transfers, communication control, and non-enforceable wage claims. The study's ways forward: criminalize unauthorized worker "sales/transfers," guarantee workers' right to a personal phone, and embed cross-border wage-enforcement clauses so dues can be recovered even after repatriation.

5) Masud's Intimidated Family

After a PSHTA FIR, Masud's relatives were warned to withdraw and pushed into an off-book settlement. This shows local capture of justice. Remedies include transferring investigations to outside districts, fast-track PSHTA courts with victim advocates, and criminalizing coercive settlements that derail prosecutions.

6) Hasan's Sea Detour, Then Air

Hasan's group first attempted a sea crossing, then shifted to forged air itineraries, ending in forced labor. The challenge is modality-switching by networks to evade patrols. The answer: a joint maritime-aviation intelligence cell, public blacklists of sub-agents and their fronts, and publishing successful prosecutions to deter copycats.

7) Nazma's Night FIR & Pressure

After an Oman route failed, Nazma filed a PSHTA complaint at 00:05, only to face community pressure to withdraw. This illustrates witness intimidation and coercive "informal settlements." The report prescribes court-ordered witness protection, penalties for coerced withdrawals, survivor legal aid with safe housing, and transferring investigations outside the influence zone to preserve due process.

8) Javed's Forged Papers & Debt

Moved via India to South America on forged tickets and invitation letters, Javed was detained and deported; lenders then seized family assets. This blends document forgery with predatory financing. Remedies align to **Penalty** for fraud/ forgery, civil asset claw-backs from perpetrators, and court-ordered debtor relief for victims' families.

9) Parvez's "Airport Clearance"

A handler promised escorted departure and swapped Parvez's skilled job for live-in servitude abroad. Challenges: corruption at departure and job substitution. The study's fixes are an airport integrity taskforce with CCTV audit trails, random secondary interviews, and contract verification at immigration counters before boarding.

10) Farida's Tourist-Visa Trap

Promised a salon job in Kuwait via Facebook/WhatsApp, Farida was sent on a tourist visa with a counterfeit contract and then pushed into domestic labor; a raid led to deportation. Challenges: visa misuse, contract fraud, opaque digital recruitment. The response: platform evidence-preservation orders, pre-departure visa/contract verification at airport counters, and QR-coded contracts verifiable by workers and border officers.

11) Roksana's Shelter Bottleneck

After 14 months in Jeddah under abuse, Roksana waited weeks for exit permits at a consulate shelter and returned with no reintegration support. The bottlenecks are slow exit processing and a post-return vacuum. The study calls for a destination fast-track exit desk staffed by labor attachés and, at home, a reintegration package—cash assistance, PTSD-informed care, and job placement.

12) Samira's Broken Remittance

Samira's employer withheld wages as "punishment," cutting remittances and triggering stigma and hardship for her family. The challenge is wage theft cascading into household harm. The ways forward are a binding wage-recovery mechanism within BLAs, escrowed wage bonds before deployment, and emergency income support for families while claims are pursued.

13) Ibrahim Khalil Abandoned, Then Deported

At 20, Ibrahim was dumped by the first handler in India, paid again to continue via Latin America, reached the U.S., and was deported. The anatomy: multi-broker layering and family asset sales. The study prescribes "follow-the-money" prosecutions across the broker network, seizure of broker assets to fund victim compensation, and blacklisting sub-agents tied to repeat patterns.

14) Arif's Latin Route Ordeal

Arif sold land to finance months in Brazil, endured jungle crossings and cartel safe houses, and was denied in Texas. Challenges are extreme transit risk and smuggler violence. The response combines targeted information campaigns warning of Latin-route lethality, hotlines along the corridor, and cross-border investigations coordinated with source-country evidence teams.

15) Marina's Embassy Mediation Failed

Marina reached a consular mediation where the employer promised back pay but reneged after she flew home, leaving her destitute. This shows the limits of non-binding mediation and lack of asset restraint. The report recommends pre-negotiated employer wage bonds/escrow, immediate MLAA requests to freeze assets in destination states, and a state-backed compensation window when recovery fails.

16) Anika Misidentified as "Overstayer"

Fleeing abuse, Anika was detained in a status raid and deported as an immigration offender. The problem is victim mis-identification and the absence of screening. The remedy set is standardized trafficking screening during raids, embassy focal points trained on indicators, and formal non-penalization pathways so victims aren't punished for status violations caused by exploitation.

17) Lina's Online Grooming

Approached on Facebook for a "Qatar salon" job, Lina was diverted into domestic work and her phone was seized. Challenges: online grooming and technology control. The study proposes a digital-safety pre-departure module, verified recruiter registries, and contract clauses guaranteeing the right to own and use a personal phone with emergency numbers preloaded.

18) Rafiqa's Vanishing Chats

Rafiqa's Kuwait recruiter used disappearing messages; by the time she complained, crucial chats were gone. This highlights digital evidence loss and slow preservation. The solution is a 24/7 cyber cell to issue immediate preservation notices to platforms, standardized chain-of-custody within 48 hours, and guidance to workers on backing up proof before reporting.

19) Ratan & the Broken U.S. Dream

Staged through the UAE to Brazil and up through Mexico, Ratan paid heavily, was held in cartel-run "safe houses," detained at the U.S. border, denied asylum, and deported. Challenges include high-fee Latin routes, extreme transit risk, and lack of vetted legal aid. The plan: community paralegals and vetted asylum counsel, an anti-fee/broker crackdown with compensation for unlawful charges, and joint investigations targeting the route's financiers.

20) Sadikur's Costly Return

After paying BDT 1.8 million and spending years in Brazil before a U.S. denial, Sadikur returned to care for his ill mother, carrying debt and stigma. The case shows debt bondage at home and no return-to-work pathway. Remedies are debt-relief/compensation windows, time-bound return-to-work grants, and psychosocial support embedded in district social services.

Source: ***Police Headquarters, Concerned District Police (Personal Communication, 2025)***