

The Implementation of Human Trafficking Laws in Bangladesh: Comparison with Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:

10 June 2024

Accepted:

28 September 2024

Published:

21 October 2024

KEYWORDS

Human trafficking,
Implementation of laws,
Bangladesh and Malaysia,
Lacuna in Human
Trafficking Law,

Human trafficking is an insensitive attack on the dignity and liberty of human beings. Millions of people worldwide are becoming victims of human trafficking every year. Bangladesh has become one of the most victim-supplied countries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Europe. Therefore, to prevent human trafficking the government of Bangladesh has introduced several laws, nevertheless, it has yet to achieve the objective effectively. This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, utilizing secondary data sources like academic publications, legal documents, and international reports to assess the efficacy and constraints of human trafficking legislation in Bangladesh and Malaysia. A comparative analysis considers the strengths and limitations of the legal systems of both nations, offering recommendations for enhancing Bangladesh's enforcement mechanisms informed by Malaysia's successful practices. Hence, in implementing human trafficking laws to combat human trafficking in Bangladesh, this study first examines the existing legal frameworks of Bangladesh on combatting the offense of human trafficking. Secondly, it explores the ineffectiveness of the existing legal frameworks that are not implemented accordingly. Third, it examines the Malaysian anti-trafficking laws and their applications in the Malaysian jurisdiction, since Malaysia is one of the best destinations for Bangladeshi traffickers to deploy the victims of human trafficking. Lastly, based on the lessons from Malaysia, this study concludes by suggesting several recommendations to the Bangladesh government such as increasing severe sentences for corrupted public officers involved in human trafficking, providing effective training to the police officers, prosecutors, and judges in dealing with human trafficking cases, enhancing collaboration with other countries in cross-border trafficking and providing more facilities to support the protection of the victims of trafficking.

e-ISSN 2600-7274

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1. INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is an insensitive attack on the dignity and liberty of human beings. Millions of people worldwide are becoming victims of human trafficking every year, where many of them from Bangladesh as four hundred women and children are trafficked every month from Bangladesh (Sultana, 2015). Nowadays, Bangladesh has become the most victim-supplied country in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Europe (Bhuyan, 2021). Bangladesh, as a financially growing nation with geo-political significance, is not free from the consequences of human trafficking as a form of transnational organized crime (Talukdar, 2021). It has been facing a particular human trafficking problem in Southeast Asia. Trafficking in persons is a severe problem in Bangladesh that affects a lot of vulnerable people in the country (Ahsan, 2022). The government intensified its protection measures. Because the government did not consistently provide anti-trafficking data from one year to the next, it was difficult to comprehensively analyse the situation regarding trafficking in the country, identify patterns from one year to the next, and compare data. At least 10,135 victims of human trafficking have been identified, according to reports from civil society and international organisations. These victims include 1,784 victims of sex trafficking, 8,090 victims of labour trafficking, and 261 victims of undefined kinds of trafficking (State, 2024). Bangladesh is both a source and a transit country for human trafficking because of its location, population, and socioeconomic standing (Joarder & Miller, 2014).

In Bangladesh, under 20% to 30% of the total population lives in extreme poverty (Mohajan, 2012), while many families cannot fulfill their basic needs. This huge amount of poverty and lack of income opportunities encourages them to move to another country illegally, to earn money for themselves and their family. It has postulated an imminent threat to the national and regional security of the country. Therefore, the current government of Bangladesh has taken so many steps to combat human trafficking by enacting proper legislation on human trafficking. However, it remains a significant problem in the country (Farouk, 2005). The first law regarding human trafficking in Bangladesh was The Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act of 1933, which was one of the old laws and was not able to achieve its goal. Hence, the government of Bangladesh amended the 1933 Act with The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000. Later the government realized that this act was also insufficient and needed to be amended again. Then, the Human Trafficking Deterrence and Suppression Act 2012 was enacted to combat human trafficking. Since then, it has provided the most comprehensive legislative framework for preventing trafficking and ensures victims' rights and safe migration to Bangladesh (Matubbar and Arifuzzaman, 2022).

Though to prevent human trafficking the government of Bangladesh has introduced comprehensive laws, it has yet to achieve the objective effectively, i.e. suppressing human trafficking. Hence, in implementing human trafficking laws to combat human trafficking in Bangladesh, this study first examines the existing legal frameworks of Bangladesh on combatting the offense of human trafficking. Secondly, it explores the ineffectiveness of the existing legal frameworks that are not implemented accordingly. Third, it examines the Malaysian anti-trafficking laws and their applications in the Malaysian jurisdiction, since Malaysia is one of the best destinations for Bangladeshi traffickers to deploy the victims of human trafficking. Lastly, based on the lessons from Malaysia, this study concludes by suggesting several recommendations to the Bangladesh government such as increasing severe sentences for corrupted public officers involved in human trafficking, providing effective training to the police officers, prosecutors, and judges in dealing with human trafficking cases,

enhancing collaboration with other countries in cross-border anti-trafficking activities and providing more facilities to support the protection of the victims of trafficking.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative research approach to explore the effectiveness of human trafficking laws in Bangladesh and Malaysia and the limitations of these laws. The research method involves the following steps:

2.1 Data Collection

This study does not collect primary data like interviews or surveys; Rather, it relies primarily on secondary data sources. Therefore, primary data is not included in this study. The research team meticulously collected secondary data from a variety of reputable sources, including academic articles, reports, legal documents, government publications, and reports from international organizations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the US State Department's Trafficking in Persons report. The study examined Bangladesh and Malaysia's national laws on human trafficking, including the Bangladesh Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012 and Malaysia's Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Immigrants Act 2007.

2.2 Examination of Legal Framework

This study analyzes the existing legal framework in both Bangladesh and Malaysia. The study begins by examining the historical and legal background of human trafficking laws in Bangladesh, including amendments and shortcomings of the laws.

The Malaysian legal framework is explored for comparative analysis, focusing on enforcement mechanisms, victim rehabilitation and procedural effectiveness. Malaysian laws and their application in anti-trafficking are assessed to identify lessons that can be applied in Bangladesh.

2.3 Comparative View

A comparative approach was used to highlight the differences and similarities between the legal frameworks of Bangladesh and Malaysia and their effectiveness in combating human trafficking. This research compares the strengths and weaknesses of implementing anti-trafficking laws in both countries, highlighting Malaysia's successful steps that Bangladesh can adopt.

2.4 Critical evaluation and recommendations

This study critically assesses enforcement mechanisms, penalties, victim protection mechanisms and cross-border cooperation in both countries.

Based on the results of the comparative analysis, the study offers practical and actionable recommendations for improving the enforcement of anti-trafficking laws in Bangladesh, instilling hope for a more effective legal framework.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in deterrence theory, highlighting the necessity of punitive measures and legal deterrents in addressing human trafficking. This theory was selected for its relevance

in comprehending the function of law enforcement and the impact of penalties on the prevention and reduction of human trafficking. This analysis employs human rights and criminal justice theory principles to evaluate the protecting and rehabilitative aspects of anti-trafficking legislation.

2.6 Limitations

The study is limited to secondary data analysis and does not include empirical research such as interviews with victims or law enforcement officers. The study is also limited to Bangladesh and Malaysia's legal and institutional framework and may not represent the situation in other countries. In addition, the research did not investigate the socio-economic aspects that play a role in human trafficking, which would have provided a more comprehensive picture of the problem overall.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bangladeshi human trafficking laws, especially when compared to Malaysian procedures, are complex and require a thorough analysis of the legal framework, enforcement strategies, and socio-economic factors. Human trafficking is caused by multiple factors, such as poverty, gender inequality and inadequate legal framework, which is widespread in both Bangladesh and Malaysia (Lestari & Yulviani, 2023). The Royal Malaysian Police and the Immigration Department have established special units to fight trafficking, and the challenges encountered by enforcement agencies in Malaysia highlight the necessity of a collaborative strategy amongst different government agencies (Ab Hamid et al., 2017). This model of inter-organization cooperation can serve as a valuable resource for Bangladesh to improve its ability to enforce its law.

The enforcement of human trafficking laws in Malaysia has a substantial impact on their effectiveness, demanding not only a reliable legal framework but also the hard work and resources necessary to implement them effectively. Research suggests that Malaysia has made progress in the development of legal provisions; however, the actual enforcement of these provisions needs to be more consistent and frequently impeded by a lack of coordination among agencies (Othman et al., 2023). Other jurisdictions have found that legislation alone is insufficient to combat trafficking; rather, a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic conditions that encourage such crimes is needed (Bello & Olutola, 2022). Bangladesh can improve the effectiveness of its anti-traffic initiative by applying a comparative model of inter-organization cooperation, focusing on victim protection and rehabilitation. Furthermore, the Malaysian experience highlights the significance of addressing the root causes of human trafficking, such as financial inequality and a lack of job opportunities, which are also present in Bangladesh (Priyono, 2020). The socioeconomic environment affects the incidence of trafficking and the effectiveness of legal responses. For example, the trafficking of Indonesian women to Malaysia for forced labor and prostitution illustrates the transnational nature of this crime and the importance of ASEAN-wide cooperation (Rahman et al., 2023). Bangladesh could benefit from similar regional collaborations focusing on common approaches for combating trafficking and protecting victims across borders.

It is an endless struggle to combat human trafficking in Malaysia. The country is considered a source, destination, and transit country for human trafficking. As a result, Malaysia has been dramatically affected by this crime. Despite the government's ongoing efforts to combat human trafficking, notably by reinforcing the requirements of its legal framework, the prevalence of

this crime is concerning. The government has introduced awareness programs for government officers and the public, which involve investigation and prosecution training for all enforcement agencies in the country and abroad. These programs included discussions, forums, and seminars for government officers (Ahmad et al., 2022). Besides this, the Malaysian government has implemented several initiatives to combat human trafficking, beginning with the establishment of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (ATIPSOM) in 2007, which was later amended to improve enforcement, prosecution, and victim protection. The government has formulated the National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan (NAPTIP) for 2021-2025 and partnered with other NGOs to improve victim identification and assistance. Initiatives include establishing special courts, shelters and training programs. For example, the government has cooperated with international organisations and airlines (MAS, Air Asia and Malindo Air) to provide trafficking victim identification to cabin crews (Bernama February 6, 2018). In addition, international cooperation has been enhanced through many Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with countries such as Saudi Arabia, China, Canada, United Kingdom and United States. The government regularly engages in ASEAN forums and international conferences while also raising public awareness through various media outlets and offering platforms for reporting cases of human trafficking (Othman et al., 2023). The government provided a platform to report any activity related to human trafficking or smuggling of migrants via special hotline 03-8000 8000 in collaboration with 1 Malaysia One Call Centre. Moreover, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development has provided a careline (NUR line 15999) as a medium for public and victims to complaints. Hamzah et al (2019) viewed that Malaysia always take a proactive and holistic measures in dealing with human trafficking issue.

4. HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND RELATED LAWS OF BANGLADESH

Generally, the term human trafficking refers to the unlawful act of transporting or coercing people to benefit from their work or service, typically in the form of forced labor or sexual exploitation. The term "human trafficking laws" refers to the collection of rules and legislation aimed at stopping human trafficking, defending victims, and bringing legal action against those who engage in such crimes. Once international treaties and national laws come together, they can have different definitions and terms. However, the main goal is always to stop people from taking advantage of others for personal or financial gain. Before analyzing the existing legal frameworks of Bangladesh and their ineffectiveness, it is indispensable to define the term human trafficking from a legal viewpoint.

4.1 Definition of Human Trafficking

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children 2000, also called the Palermo Protocol, strengthens the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. It gives a clear definition of human trafficking that is agreed upon by all countries and lays the foundation for working together to stop trafficking. All states must include comprehensive measures in their laws to stop trafficking, protect victims, and bring traffickers to justice. Article 3(a) of Palermo Protocol states,

"Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the

prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, or practices like slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs.”

The human trafficking law in Bangladesh and Malaysia received the definition from that protocol. So, the definition is almost similar. The Action-Means-Purpose Model can describe the components of human trafficking. Three elements are present in cases of human trafficking that are considered severe:

- Any action (recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt)
- Means (threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or a position of vulnerability, the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person, having control over another person)
- And a purpose (at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, or practices like slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs).

4.2 Laws on Human Trafficking in Bangladesh

First, the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh 1972 is the supreme law of Bangladesh. Articles 27 to 47 of this constitution protect the human rights of the individuals of Bangladesh. Those articles follow international rules, such as Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). In addition, this law monitors the application and effectiveness of all Bangladeshi local laws. Although this constitution does not contain human trafficking directly, it addresses the fundamental rights of humans, and some articles are relevant to the prevention of trafficking. For example, Article 32 appoints the right to life and the right to personal liberty, Article 18 mentions prostitution, and Article 34 is about forced labor. Those two are related to human trafficking and are mentioned indirectly in the constitution. Specifically, Article 18(2) of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh states that the state should take all the effective methods to prevent prostitution.

Second, the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (PSHTA), 2012 is a significant law that the Government of Bangladesh passed to deal with the severe issue of selling human inside and outside of Bangladesh. This Act is a general attempt by the government to prevent trafficking in persons, protect victims, and bring offenders to justice. Bangladesh has been named as both a source and a transit point for trafficking people, which includes sexual exploitation, forced labor, and other forms of exploitation. The PSHTA 2012 was a crucial step by the government of Bangladesh to overcome the issue of human trafficking. The 2012 Act mentions that it is expedient and necessary to make provisions, keeping conformity with the international standards to prevent and suppress transnational organized crimes relating to human trafficking. However, this law has yet to achieve its ultimate goal which is to suppress human trafficking. Therefore, the following discussion endeavors to examine why the human trafficking laws of Bangladesh are not effectively applied.

5. REASONS FOR THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF THE EXISTING LEGAL FRAMEWORKS ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is in an excellent spot in South Asia, which makes it very easy for people to be trafficked. Its borders with India to the west, north, and east, and Myanmar to the southeast, make it easy for people to move illegally and be trafficked across those lines (Chouvy, 2013). Poverty, lack of schooling, unemployment, gender inequality, and social instability are some of the socioeconomic problems that make people even more vulnerable. This is especially the case in rural communities with high rates of poverty, which are major hubs for human trafficking recruitment (Cole & Sprang, 2015). Unstable politics and an ineffective government worsen the problem by making it harder to implement effective regulatory and law enforcement measures. Therefore, the above-mentioned laws are not implemented accurately. Some of the specific reasons for such ineffectiveness are as follows.

5.1 Lack of Enforcement Mechanism

Section 19 of PSHTA explains how investigations work, focusing on crimes reported to the police or sent by the tribunal. When a criminal offense is reported to the police or requested by the tribunal, a sub-inspector at the relevant police station must complete the investigation. Usually, it takes 90 days to finish an investigation after they receive a complaint from a person or a request from the tribunal. It is a lengthy process that hinders to speed of the trial process of the criminal of human trafficking.

The way human trafficking offenses are investigated in Bangladesh under the PSHTA differs from international approaches, mainly in terms of how enforcement agencies are organized and specialized to ensure the smooth running of the legal proceedings. The PSHTA of Bangladesh designates police officers as the exclusive investigators of human trafficking. This approach centralizes responsibilities but provides difficulties because of the variety of trafficking offenses and specialized knowledge requirements. This method makes investigations more scattered, inefficient, and less focused, and it prohibits other law enforcement agencies such as immigration officers, border security forces, and customs officers from using their unique skills to deal with the complicated nature of human trafficking more successfully.

5.2 Lack of Rehabilitation and Treatment of the Victim of Human Trafficking

One of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of Bangladeshi laws is there is no specific regulations on the rehabilitation and immediate treatment of the victims of human trafficking. Bangladesh is still calling for laws in searching and helping persons who have been trafficked. Cooperation between the government and non-government organizations is an important aspect of this call. If a Bangladeshi victim is found in another country, the Bangladesh embassy pays less help to bring them back home.

When examining the regulations in Bangladesh in assisting persons who have been victims of human trafficking in other countries, it is essential to help these victims recover from their injuries. However, Bangladeshi laws lack to provide specific procedures for assisting vulnerable individuals. For example, the Bangladeshi government needs to ensure that the victims receive adequate medical care by assigning a physician to take care of them specifically. When the victim gets medical attention, the judge may also request that the victim be brought before the magistrate for further action. However, Bangladesh's laws do not devote as much attention to the provision of medical care for victims of human trafficking.

5.2.1 Procedural Delay

The term "procedural delay" describes inefficiency and delays in the judicial and administrative systems. These delays create severe challenges to Bangladesh's efforts to combat human trafficking. In other words, the country's ability to address this issue successfully is hampered when the system takes too long to process cases, accomplish convictions, or implement anti-trafficking measures. Delays can happen for many reasons, including inefficient bureaucracy, a lack of resources, or cases of trafficking that involve crossing international borders, which are more complicated.

In Bangladeshi human trafficking laws, there are some reasons that cause delay in the prosecution, for example, lack of evidences such as contractual agreement between the person trafficked and the traffickers causing it difficult to secure conviction. Furthermore, traffickers and their criminal organizations frequently threaten human trafficking witnesses. Traffickers may intimidate, threaten, or assault witnesses to prevent them from testifying or collaborating with the authorities. Hence, witness protection can help provide a safe environment for witnesses to testify (Ward & Fouladvand, 2018). Nevertheless, there are no such provisions mentioned in the Bangladeshi laws.

5.2.2 Corruption in Investigations and Lack of Accountability Among Officers

Bangladesh could not successfully fight human trafficking because of significant problems like officers not being held accountable during investigations and corruption (Moniruzzaman, 2021). Therefore, those authorized to prevent human trafficking occasionally accept bribes or neglect to perform their jobs (Willman, 2008). As a result, even when laws exist to prevent human trafficking, they are not appropriately applied. Traffickers may not be detected or punished because they can influence those officers. Bangladesh has a hard time keeping people safe from trafficking because of this main issue. Officers must do their duties honestly and must be held accountable to combat trafficking more effectively.

The government of Bangladesh does not take the same approach in dealing with officers who are involved in human trafficking. Bangladeshi law does not have any provisions outlining severe penalties for public officers found guilty of engaging in human trafficking activities, such as life imprisonment or corporal punishment. This absence of harsh punishment in Bangladesh's human trafficking law indicates that although Bangladesh is dedicated to combating human trafficking, its legal system may not target or inflict harsh consequences on public officers who abuse their positions regarding trafficking offenses.

5.2.3 Lack of Specialized or Trained Officers Who Deal with Human Trafficking Cases

The shortage of police officers with specialized training to combat human trafficking is also an obstacle to anti-trafficking efforts in Bangladesh (Momen, 2008). Human trafficking includes a wide range of issues, including the unlawful transportation of individuals for exploitation, whether it be sexual, labor, or any other type of exploitation. It takes in-depth knowledge and specialized abilities to identify crimes, rescue victims, and bring those responsible to justice. Some of these skills include being aware of the networks that traffickers use, able to spot the warning signs of trafficking in vulnerable populations, and being able to comfort and assist victims who may be very scared and traumatized.

The effectiveness of Bangladesh's efforts to combat human trafficking has been hindered due to the lack of a determined and adequately trained special force. Members of the general law enforcement community may lack the expertise to recognize or comprehend the subtleties of trafficking functions, which results in lost opportunities to save victims and detain traffickers

(Akond & Sharmin, 2017). Therefore, this would be one of the central focus points that the designated laws shall be adhered to with adequate provisions on the training and skills of authorities who are directly involved in handling human trafficking cases. But, it is unfortunately true that Bangladeshi human trafficking laws omit to mention any training facilities for the officers.

5.3 Cross-Border Trafficking Challenges

People are trafficked illegally from one nation to another, and they are frequently taken advantage of throughout the process of cross-border trafficking, which is an important issue (Van der Laan et al., 2011). The enforcement of the laws is challenging in cross-border trafficking due to the fact that the border regions are large. Therefore it is difficult for the law enforcement officers to watch them constantly and to be everywhere simultaneously. In addition, there is the possibility that the individuals who are tasked with putting an end to human trafficking may not have the funds for operation cross-border as well as lacking training to perform their duties effectively. There are also situations in which the laws of one country are not compatible with the laws of another country, which makes it challenging to collaborate in preventing human trafficking. Finally, some of the individuals who engage in human trafficking are incredibly clever in implementing new techniques to avoid being detected and caught. So, it is pertinent that the national laws of any country shall adhere to all means to support cross-border mutual assistance to support anti-trafficking activities, which was missed in Bangladeshi laws.

5.4 Lack of Collaboration with Other Countries

To combat the issue of human trafficking, Bangladesh has enacted legislation that includes a strategy to collaborate with other nations (Uddin, 2014). Regarding investigations, trials, and assisting victims, they are fulfilling this by establishing agreements that make it easier to share information and support one another. These agreements can help in many ways, such as by sharing proof, sending criminals or victims back to their home countries, or even working together to take legal action against people who traffic people for money or goods. They also work to help people get better and rejoin society in their home countries.

It is of the utmost importance for nations such as Malaysia, Bangladesh, and neighboring countries to collaborate closely with other countries and large organizations such as the United Nations to put an end to the practice of human trafficking (Renshaw, 2015). This collaboration indicates that they ought to cooperate with their neighbors and collaborate with programs in their region to combat criminals who engage in the act of trafficking humans over international borders. Additionally, they should agree to adhere to and implement significant international regulations, such as the United Nations Protocol, which is designed to combat human trafficking and penalize those who engage in it. Bangladesh is not actively cooperating with its regional and international partners to combat human trafficking.

6. HUMAN TRAFFICKING LAWS IN MALAYSIA AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

It might be questionable why this study is dedicated to comparing the Bangladeshi human trafficking laws with Malaysia followed by specific recommendations from Malaysian jurisdiction. Bangladesh and Malaysia have shared common historical relationships since their independence. Lots of Bangladeshi people are visiting Malaysia for work purposes. One of the reasons is that Bangladeshi workers chose Malaysia to get better payment than Bangladesh, as Malaysia is the first economically growing country. However, in this journey, Bangladeshi

workers in Malaysia suffer from various problems. For instance, forced labor, misrepresenting the job scope by the migration agencies, using force or deception, fraud, and coercion. Malaysia, due to its diversified population and advantageous geographic location, has become a hub for human trafficking operations, both as a destination and a transit nation. Therefore, the crime of human trafficking is becoming more serious. Therefore, the efforts made by the Malaysian government in terms of policy, legislation, enforcement, custody and protection, media coverage, and publicity, as well as awareness are praiseworthy.

6.1 Human Trafficking Laws in Malaysia

The Malaysian government has acted against human trafficking by enacting victim identification protocols, pursuing and convicting traffickers, and increasing public awareness of the problem. To combat against human trafficking the government of Malaysia enacted the following laws

Firstly, the Penal Code of Malaysia is the law that codifies most criminal offences and procedure in Malaysia also mentions some modes of human trafficking that are prohibited in the law. Section 370 is about Buying or disposing of any person as a slave, and Section 371 is about Habitual dealing with slaves; Section 372A Persons living on or trading in prostitution; Section 372B Soliciting for prostitution; Section 373 Suppression of brothels, Section 374 Unlawful compulsory labor.

Secondly, the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (SOSMA) 2012 is a legislative framework established in Malaysia following the provisions outlined in Article 149 of the Federal Constitution. It repealed the Internal Security Act of 1960 and stipulated severe penalties for security-related acts. The Act defines the term "security offenses," including acts against the state and offenses about terrorism. Security agencies can act before a heinous crime, like a terrorist attack, takes place because of their ability to permit preventive action and detention. Malaysian authorities claim that the Security SOSMA remains crucial in the ongoing efforts to combat terrorism. The primary subject of the special provisions outlined in the Act pertains to offenses categorized as "security offenses," as enumerated in the First Schedule. The SOSMA Act aims to protect public order and national security by establishing exceptional measures for security offenses. Ss. 4-5 of Part II, "special powers for security offences," grant the authority to detain someone without a warrant for up to twenty-eight days after the initial 24-hour period to investigate. More particular procedures apply to (i) electronic monitoring devices (section 7), (ii) sensitive information (sections 8–11); (iii) protected witnesses (sections 14–16); (iv) evidence (sections 17–26); and (v) High Court trial of security offenses and bail (sections 12–13). In the case of *PP v. Norman Mohd Noor*, the learned DPP submitted that the accused was charged under a national security offense listed in the First Schedule of SOSMA 2012 after the amendment in 2014. This indicates the seriousness of the Government of Malaysia in combating the illegal immigrants into this country. However, In the passing sentence, the honorable court stated that the offense committed was severe, as submitted by the learned DPP. It may not only pose serious social problems but also threaten the safety and security of the state. Therefore, a deterrent sentence must be imposed on the accused to punish the accused and deter other offenders from committing the same offense. Considering this, the court sentenced to three years imprisonment from the date of arrest, i.e., 01.04.2022, to the accused. From this case, it can be said that the first schedule of SOSMA mentioned security officers, which are used for any related occurrence under Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act (ATIPSOM), 2007, as trafficking in person is an organized crime and a significant threat to the country.

Finally, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act (ATIPSOM) 2007, is a law that tries to stop the trafficking of individuals and the illegal entry of migrants. Individuals who participate in the activities of labor or sex trafficking violate the law, and therefore, they will be subject to legal penalties as stipulated under this law. The Act has been amended several times to make the regulatory system more substantial and the fight against these problems more effective. The most recent amendments took effect on February 22, 2022. It made people who traffic people or bring migrants into the country illegal and punished them by whipping and life in jail or a term of at least five years. The Malaysian government has done a lot to fight human trafficking. They have started more investigations, charged, and convicted more traffickers, and given money to raise awareness of trafficking on palm oil plantations. But there are still problems, like the fact that human trafficking and migrant smuggling crimes are often confused with each other, which makes it harder for police to follow the law and find victims. During law enforcement raids or interactions with vulnerable populations, the government failed to consistently apply Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) nationwide to identify victims, particularly victims of forced labor, proactively.

6.2 Why Malaysian Human Trafficking Laws are More Effective?

Many practical reasons facilitate the smooth application of human trafficking laws in Malaysia, some of them are as follows-

6.2.1 Presence of Effective Mechanism

Section 27 of the ATIPSOM (Malaysia), lists the persons who are authorized to be enforcement officers under the Act, giving them the power to do all enforcement duties connected to the Act. Among these are labor officers, police officers, immigration officers, customs officers, and Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency officers. Additionally, the condition mandates that law enforcement personnel inform their identity by showing their official identification card when exercising their investigative power to the persons investigated. This requirement ensures that the enforcement officer's actions are legal and also protects the public by making sure they are working with authorized personnel. Malaysia also has a more varied and specialized approach, assigning several authorities, each with specialized knowledge in a particular area, to address different facets of human trafficking. These officers include police, immigration, customs officers, and others. This method makes investigations more organized, efficient, and focused, and it lets each agency use its unique skills to deal with the complicated nature of human trafficking more successfully.

6.2.2 Providing Rehabilitation and Treatment of the Victim of Human Trafficking

The Malaysian law against human trafficking namely ATIPSOM 2007, sets out a complete plan to prevent and combat trafficking, bring offenders to justice, and protect the victims. This part (sections 41–57) is mostly about protecting and rehabilitating victims of human trafficking. It states that the Malaysian government protects these persons' rights and respect. Human trafficking is complex and has a severe impact on victims, requiring a variety of approaches to their rehabilitation and incorporation into society.

Sections 45 to 49 of ATIPSOM explain in detail about the rehabilitation and treatment of the victim of human trafficking. The victims who have been injured or suffered from illness due to trafficking must receive the appropriate medical assistance that they require. An enforcement officer can take a victim into temporary custody under section 44(1). If that person needs a medical examination or treatment, the enforcement officer can go to a medical officer instead

of bringing him to court. The doctor will examine them thoroughly to determine what condition they are experiencing. It may be required for the doctor to do specific tests or procedures to understand the individual's health better if they believe it is necessary. The physician will be able to determine the most effective course of treatment for the individual once they completely understand the situation.

The Act also gives the Minister the right to declare any home, building, or location, or any part of it, as a haven for people who have been trafficked. This part of the law, namely section 44 of the ATIPSOM 2007, is essential because it makes it possible for safe shelters to be built so that victims can get care and protection away from their traffickers. These safe places are significant for the physical, mental, and social recovery of people who have been trafficked because they give them a place to start recovering. Besides that, victims of human trafficking are required to see a doctor to get appropriate treatment if the need arises. Additionally, the Malaysian government is recommended to further enhance its victim protection. Under Sec 51(3)(a) of ATIPSOM, the Magistrate may make a protection order and order a foreign trafficked person to be placed in a place of refuge for a period of three months. Sec 51(4) and (5) permits the magistrate to extend or revoke the order for the purpose of completing the recording of his evidence under section 52 of the Act or for any exceptional circumstances as determined by the Magistrate.

“While such custody is justified with regard to the need to protect victims from their exploiters, conduct family tracing for the purposes of safe repatriation and ensure victims’ safety as witnesses in criminal proceedings, recent reports have highlighted that prolonged, pre-repatriation detention can cause considerable anxiety. Victim often express desire to reunite with their families and resume work, and this prolonged detention can contribute to negative attitudes towards assistance providers ...” (Surtis, 2023)

Priya (2024) therefore argued that an absence of a maximum prescribed time for extension and the ambiguity of the phrase ‘exceptional circumstances’ creates uncertainty in the process and fails to ensure structured, timely, expeditious investigation with preciseness and clarity.

6.2.3 Accountability Among Officers in Corruption and Effective Investigations

In Malaysia, the government amended their human trafficking law in this regard to show the officers that if they do any wrong or commit corruption, they will be punished with severe punishment. Section 13 (f) of the Act says, "where a public officer committed the offence of trafficking in persons in the performance of his public duties, shall, on conviction, be punished with imprisonment for life or with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than five years, and shall also be liable to whipping." These specific provisions carry the message that any officers involved in corruption or other financial crimes in dealing with the case of human trafficking are subject to severe punishment that is more than enough to control corruption and other fraudulent behavior of government officers.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above discussion, it is obvious to infer that Bangladesh’s efforts to combat human trafficking are highlighted in the 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report by the US Department of State, which also discusses the obstacles that the government has in this area. Even though Bangladesh has made significant efforts, such as increasing the number of prosecutions and identifying Rohingya victims, the country continues to struggle with problem areas such as

internal sex trafficking, official cooperation, and victim protection initiatives. One of the reasons that efforts were hampered was that many traffickers were sentenced to fines rather than imprisonment, which weakened the deterrence. In addition, the above-mentioned analysis highlights the importance of stronger boundaries on labor recruiting, improved judicial capacity, and more efficient methods of identifying victims. According to the 2023 report, Bangladesh is still on a tier 2 watch list. Bangladesh still fails to maintain the minimum international standard so that this status can be downgraded at any time.(PERSONS, 2023).

The above discussion also shows that in combating human trafficking, Malaysia signed agreements with Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand in the mid-1980s to facilitate the recruitment of migrant laborers for its construction and plantation industries and its domestic staff (Abdul-Aziz, 1995). Human trafficking legislation in Malaysia is a major step toward combating the country's serious issue of modern-day slavery. To combat both human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants, the government enacted the ATIPSOM 2007. The legislation established a comprehensive legal framework to deter crime effectively. It is also aimed to investigate and bring criminals to justice by ensuring protection and assistance to the victims. The ATIPSOM Act was passed by Malaysia in 2007, and it was later amended in 2010 and 2015 and 2021 (Hossain & Ahmad, 2021). Part V of the Act is devoted to providing care and protection for victims of human trafficking. It covers matters such as finding shelters, providing medical attention, and introducing a new provision adopted in 2015 that permits victims to leave the shelter and work outside of it with authorization from the anti-trafficking council (MAPO).

Despite all these initiatives, Malaysia's anti-trafficking status was reduced to Tier 3 Watch List in the US Department of State's 2022 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) (Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons) 2022 Report, highlighting the need for stronger laws and regulations to safeguard victims and prevent human trafficking. Accordingly, the Malaysian government took more initiative to combat human trafficking after 2022, and the following year 2023, the US Department declared Malaysia in tier 2 (Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, 2023). This result shows the efforts made by the Malaysian government in overcoming the offense of human trafficking are exemplary. It is undeniable that despite these endless efforts and measures taken by the Malaysian government, there are still challenges faced since Malaysia is not only the source but also the transit and destination for human trafficking. Nevertheless, the proactive steps that Malaysian government is taking, worthy and commendable. Hence, this study provides several recommendations for Bangladesh to follow based on the Malaysian experiences.

7.1 Increasing Severe Punishment for Corrupted Public Officers

Laws and policies are designed to deter crime by focusing mainly on increasing the severity of punishment. Individual deterrence refers to the aim of punishing to deter individuals who have already offended them from doing so again. General deterrence justifies the imposition of punishment to deter other potential offenders. The logic of deterrence theory is that if the imposition of criminal punishment deters people from committing crimes, then the public can enjoy a greater sense of safety and security (UNODC, 2024). So, by imposing the severe and exemplary punishment one can deter himself from committing the crimes.

Therefore, the current law of Bangladesh needs to be revised to incorporate heavier sentences, including Life imprisonment or whipping for public officers involved in trafficking. There is a need for more vigorous enforcement of legislation on human trafficking, and this should also

entail imposing penalties on corruption and misconduct during crucial investigations. In addition to imprisonment, monetary compensation is also desirable to rehabilitate the victims of human trafficking.

7.2 Providing Comprehensive Training for the Officers

Training the officers who are dealing with human trafficking cases is essential to maintain legal competence, uphold ethical standards, and effectively fulfill their duty towards the government. It is a cornerstone of a successful officer's career and ensures that he/she continues to meet the evolving needs of their profession. In Malaysian laws, there are many provisions for providing effective training for the officers who are involved with human trafficking cases. So, setting up unique training sessions for police officers, prosecutors, and judges to enlarge their understanding of practices will facilitate identification, investigation, and prosecution in cases connected with human beings smuggling.

7.2 Enhancing Collaboration with Other Countries in Cross-border Anti-trafficking Activities

Collaborative work improves the way our team works together and problem-solves. This leads to more innovation, efficient processes, increased success, and improved communication. Therefore, in deterring human trafficking collaborative work with other countries is indispensable. To collaborate better with neighboring nations to address cross-border trafficking and adequately facilitate the reduction of human trafficking and cross-border criminal activities. Improving the administration and monitoring of borders to deter the trafficking of persons across the border is one of the ways to achieve the goal of the human trafficking laws. Malaysia is one of the best examples that recently collaborated with neighboring states. So, Bangladesh certainly needs to increase collaboration with other countries regionally and globally.

7.3 Ensuring Comprehensive Support for the Victims

The victims of human trafficking are the most vulnerable in the society. So, they must be getting adequate support for forgetting the trauma of this horrible act. Malaysian law already ensures several initiatives for the victims such as providing shelter and protection, rehabilitation, medical care, and legal advice. In addition, it requires educating them with information regarding their rights and the services available and guaranteeing their safety and confidentiality during the whole legal process.

Also, it is one of the duties of the officers to initiate specialized operations to raise the awareness of the public about the actual dangers of human trafficking and the necessity of reporting any suspicions or concerns. Establishing partnership agreements with civil society organizations, universities, and media to actively promote awareness and policy changes and pool resources towards a more efficient counter-trafficking program. As a result, the Bangladeshi laws on human trafficking will be more comprehensive and will be implemented completely without any obstacles.

8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study analyzes the systemic issues undermining Bangladesh's endeavors to fight human trafficking. Specifically, it tackles the systemic problems of procedural delays and institutional shortcomings. By relying on academic sources and secondary data, the current

work identified issues such as corruption in police work, a lack of severe punishment for officers, insufficient human resources in specialized units, lack of cross-border cooperation in trafficking, and inadequacies of the support system for victims. In response to this analysis, by critically evaluating the Malaysian jurisdiction on human trafficking, the study suggests a comprehensive and targeted list of recommendations to strengthen Bangladesh's anti-trafficking framework to prevent and prosecute criminals and support human trafficking victims effectively.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the support of, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia Faculty of Law for providing the facilities and financial support on this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

FM involved in conceptualizing the study, developing the methodology, conducting formal analysis, investigating the subject matter, and writing the original draft. **CAH and MB** contributed to the conceptualization of the study, methodology development, formal analysis, supervision of the research, review and editing of the content, and validation of the findings.

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