

GAINING GLOBALISATION BENEFITS

Make S Asia an integrated labour market

Suggest leading economists

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

South Asia may be made an integrated labour market putting aside the traditional idea of security concerns to gain from the facilities of globalisation by meeting up the labour demands of the region, said two leading economists of Bangladesh and India yesterday.

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Chairman Professor Rehman Sobhan and Dr Mahendra P Lama, a professor of South Asian Economies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, made the suggestion at a regional workshop on Population Movements: non-traditional issues in South Asian Security Discourse.

Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) of Dhaka University in support of The Ford Foundation organised the workshop at Brac Inn in the city.

Referring to the benefit of India-Nepal open border policy, Professor Sobhan said, "Labour forces will move to the destinations where they are required and will return home at the end of work."

Chairing a session of the work-

shop, Professor Sobhan urged all to work to place the labour force of the region in proper sectors so that they can contribute to the economies.

"There is a strong potential for integrated labour market in South Asia and now the governments of the region have to decide on how the potentials are to be harnessed," Mahendra P Lama told The Daily Star in an exclusive interview. He insisted on opening up the borders of the neighbouring countries.

The entire issue of border should be looked at from a broader perspective, not from security-centred perspectives, he said, adding: "Ultimately there has to be a South Asian economic union and its basic premise is free flow of all factors of production, including labour, technology and capital."

Referring to the Nepal-India open border policy, he said there were no problems in the two countries, as the nationals of those cross without visas for trade and other purposes.

Forces, especially the security concerns, which advocate for closures of border, go against the realities in the era of globalisation, Lama, an internationally renowned

economist, said. Putting aside the security threats relating to migration, he observed that the reality is people of the South Asian countries are crossing borders to find their own ways of survival and none can stop it by tightening borders.

Referring to Japan's annual demand of 6.5 lakh labour force, both the economists said that the South Asian nations should avail of the opportunity through educating the workforce to cater to the needs of that country.

The Japanese entrepreneurs can make massive investment in education sector in the countries like Bangladesh and Nepal and there can be bilateral agreements in this regard, said Professor Rehman Sobhan.

There is a shortage of labour in Japan, Korea and Thailand and the labour force from Bangladesh and other South Asian countries can fill up the gap, he added.

In her presentation on perceived Bangladeshi domestic workers in Delhi, RMMRU Chairperson Dr Tasneem Siddiqui said labour movement through informal routes from Bangladesh to India is now

being labelled as security threats.

At one level it is argued that such movement is putting pressure on the economy of the host regions, while at another level it is viewed as a national security threat with migrants being identified with providing cover to foreign intelligence operatives, bomb blasts, terrorism and weapons of trafficking.

The governments and media exaggerate such views, Dr Siddiqui said, suggesting that the challenges that migration throws to the states should be addressed through recognition of the existence of an integrated labour market in the region and pragmatic policies should be formulated to address these.

Professor Amitav Acharya of Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Dr Jagannath Adhikari of Nepal Institute of Development Studies, Dr Sumaiya Khair of Dhaka University (DU) presented keynote papers, while Professor Asif Nazrul and Dr Borhan Uddin Khan of Law Department of DU and Dr Shahdeen Malik of Brac University took part in the discussion.

Eskayef plans to expand business in Lanka

Eskayef Bangladesh Ltd, a leading pharmaceutical manufacturer and marketer, is planning to expand business in Sri Lanka, says a press release.

Eskayef Bangladesh Managing Director AM Faruque met Sri Lankan Health Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva on Sunday during the latter's visit to Dhaka and expressed his vision regarding Eskayef's strong presence in Sri Lanka in the coming days.

De Silva appreciated the quality and packaging standard of Eskayef products and showed interest to import more from Eskayef.

Sri Lankan High Commissioner in Bangladesh V Krishnamoorthy, Head of Chancery of the Lankan high commission VW Aponu and Marketing Manager of Eskayef Bangladesh Dr Shagufa Anwar were also present at the meeting.

Faruque said, "We have a major growth plan in Sri Lanka in the near future. We have already got registration for 25 products and another 45 products are in registration pipeline."

Due to its multinational heritage and top quality products, Eskayef has already got tremendous response among the physicians in Sri Lanka, according to the release.

In order to facilitate export to western countries and offer newer world-class healthcare products, Eskayef has taken up a new project to establish a state of the art customised pharmaceutical plant at Tongi in Gazipur.

The new facility is being designed to conform to international cGMP (Current Good Manufacturing Practice) with particular emphasis on meeting MHRA standard of the UK in order to facilitate export to the western countries.

Elomatic, one of the leading European pharmaceutical consultants, would provide technical know-how for the facility.

4 tenders submitted to buy Rupali Bank

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As the deadline for tender submission to buy state-run Rupali Bank ended yesterday, four bidders filed their tenders to Privatisation Commission.

The bidders include Saudi Prince Bandar Bin Mohammad Bin Abdul Rahman Al Saudi, Bank Muscat of Oman, Maa International Investment Ltd of Malaysia, and JJ Finance Ltd of the UK.

The commission also opened technical offers by the bidders yesterday.

"We will select technically-fit bidders from the four by August 28," said Privatisation Commission Chairman Enam Ahmed Chowdhury.

At this stage of evaluation, the commission in association with Bangladesh Bank will assess the bidders' efficiency, management and operations system and financial viability.

"We will open the financial offers

by the technically-fit bidders on August 30," Chowdhury said, adding that he is confident that the commission will complete all the procedures within the stipulated time to sell the bank.

When asked about the commission's choice in case of non-receipt of expected value for the bank, he said, "Then we will invite the potential buyers to re-evaluate their price offers."

Chowdhury also said Rupali Bank will be sold to the highest bidder.

Meanwhile, a large number of law enforcement members were deployed in and around the Privatisation Commission office yesterday, the last day for tender submission to buy the state-run bank, to avert any possible chaos.

After submission of tenders, JJ Finance, one of the bidders, alleged the commission showed favouritism to a few bidders. "The commission did not also cooperate with us by providing information,

although we had many queries before submitting the tender," said Shaha Jamal Ali, managing director of JJ Finance.

Denying the allegation, the Privatisation Commission chairman said every bidder got same treatment from the commission. He also said, "It is also not true that we did not give information to a certain bidder."

Earlier, the commission short-listed seven companies from home and abroad, including the Saudi prince, as potential buyers.

The government that owns 94 per cent of Rupali Bank's shares decided to sell 67 per cent of its shares in order to appease the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, who conditioned loans from them with reforms in the banking sector.

Total assets of the Rupali Bank as showed in December 2005 stood at \$1.07 billion and it has over 493 branches across the country.

First Solution, Galaxy Consultants sign MoU

First Solution (UK) Ltd, London, and Galaxy Consultants, Dhaka, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in the capital on Saturday.

The MoU aims at starting a joint venture to offer services in the fields of finance, property, travel, legal and international money transfer in Bangladesh under the brand 'First Solution', says a press release.

Fazal Mahmood, chairman of First Solution (UK), and Jameel Akhter, proprietor of Galaxy Consultants, signed the MoU on behalf their firms.

UK curry industry faces workforce shortage

Tower Hamlets may go for joint venture

UNB, Dhaka

The curry industry in the UK, mostly run by expatriates from Bangladesh, is facing crisis for shortage of workforce as the new generation British-born Bangladeshis are quitting their forefathers' restaurants for white-collar jobs, said Mayor of Tower Hamlets in London Shafiqul Haque yesterday in an interview with the

news agency. On the other hand, European workers cannot work in typical Bangladeshi curry restaurants due to cultural and language barriers. The mayor described the current problem the famous entertainment industry facing for the generation gap, which, however, opened up a window of opportunity for people here who can fit in the job. "We're already facing staff crisis; our new-generation children are no longer interested in their forefathers' restaurant business rather they go for higher education becoming professors, doctors, solicitors or bankers and getting into the mainstream of British life," he said talking to the news agency in his hotel suite.

"To protect the famous curry industry that earns GBP 3.2 billion annually, workers must be recruited from Bangladesh," he said and hoped that the British government would consider this problem seriously.

The new, point-based British immigration laws prescribe recruitment of workers from European countries, shutting the doors on workers from Bangladesh and other LDCs. Under the high-skilled category, only highly qualified professionals can compete and get jobs in Britain.

Tower Hamlets may invest in a joint-venture project (JVP) in recycling or arsenic-mitigation sector in Bangladesh, said the visiting mayor of Tower Hamlets. In 2002 the Tower Hamlets set up recycling project here as a test case, but it

was closed. Asked about expatriates' investment in Bangladesh, he said the Bangladeshi expatriates would feel encouraged to invest in a big way if governance and political situation here improved. And he thinks a change for the better is possible.

"It's possible to improve the situation if political parties work together...Investment will come if there is political stability and security," he said, explaining why those who live in faraway countries of the world so eagerly long for betterment.

"We feel proud to our white colleagues when we hear good news from Bangladesh, but we feel ashamed of political violence and uncertainty," said the Bangladeshi community leader in London. About the expatriates' demand to become voter in Bangladesh, he said, "It is our reasonable demand, and we raised it during the meetings with the Prime Minister and the opposition leader."

He lamented that despite persistent appeal, no governments have yet taken any step to make the expatriates voters. In support of the plea, he said Bangladeshi expatriates in the UK hold double passports of Britain and Bangladesh and they have their property in this country, because of their dual citizenship.

"Since we hold the Bangladeshi passport, why we will not be able to become voters," he argued. "The government seeks investment from the expatriates but refrains from making us voters."

Graphics fair held

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Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology yesterday organised a graphics fair with a view to projecting graphics works of its students of the department of Graphic Design and Multimedia.

In the day-long 'Graphic Fair 2006' on the university premises at Uttara in the capital, the students of six different batches of the department put their works on display at seven stalls.

The works included illustration, 2D and 3D animation, poster and layout design, product marketing and advertising, corporate solution, packaging and web design.

"Our students do a lot of things and we want to let the corporate and entertainment world know about it through this fair," Shahin Ahmed, head of the department of Graphic Designing and Multimedia, said.

Inaugurated by Imamul Kabir Shanto, chairman of Shanto Mariam Foundation, the fair was attended, among others, by Professor Atful Hye Shibly, vice chancellor of the university.

On the sidelines of the fair, the students of the university also made multimedia presentations highlighting their creative plans on graphics works.

\$2m Korean RMG plant in Dhaka EPZ soon

Jobs for 853 locals

UNB, Dhaka

A Korean company will invest \$2 million for setting up of a garment manufacturing plant in Dhaka Export Processing Zone.

The 100 percent foreign owned company, M/s Coda Fashions and Apparel company, will manufacture annually about 1.8 million pieces of trousers, jacket, track suit, jersey, T-shirt, woven shirt and garments products. It will also create employment opportunities to 853 Bangladeshi nationals and eight foreigners.

Coda Fashion Ltd is the sister concern of cap manufacturing company M/s Dada (Savar) Ltd of Dhaka EPZ. They will operate their plant in their own factory building.

In the regards, the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) has given a sanction letter to the M/s Coda Fashion and Apparel Garments Manufacturing Company Ltd in Dhaka yesterday.

Involve trade unions in implementing PRSP guidelines

Speakers at seminar suggest

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Speakers at a workshop in Dhaka yesterday stressed the need for involving trade unions in implementing the guidelines of poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) in a pragmatic way.

They said development strategies like PRSP in many countries could not achieve their real goals due to lack of understanding of the actual characteristics of poverty among governments as well as international financial institutions (IFIs).

In this context, the trade unions can play a vital role in revealing the actual scenario of poverty in accordance with the PRSP implementation, they suggested.

The suggestions came at a two-day national seminar on "IFIs Poverty Reduction Programmes in Bangladesh and Trade Unions Participation: Lessons Learned and Future Action Plan" held at a city hotel.

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions-Bangladesh Council (ICFTU-BC) organised the seminar. Presided over by Abdul Matin Master, chairman of ICFTU-BC, the seminar was also addressed by M R Chowdhury, member secretary of ICFTU-BC, Nazrul Islam Khan, president of Bangladesh Jatyadabadi Sramik Dal, Mujibur Rahman Bhuiyan, general secretary of Bangladesh

Mukto Sramik Federation, and Shah Md Abu Zafar, president of Bangladesh Labour Foundation.

Noriyuki Suzuki, general secretary of ICFTU-APRO, and Syeed Ahamed, senior research associate of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), presented two keynote papers on Globalisation, Poverty Eradication and the Role of the ICFTU-BC and Trade Union Participation in Bangladesh's Poverty Reduction Strategy respectively.

"The guidelines of PRSP for Bangladesh will not come into force without IFIs or government understanding of poverty at the grassroots level," said general secretary of ICFTU-APRO in his presentation.

Citing an example, he said, "IFIs had prescribed different strategies to reduce poverty in some developing countries in the beginning of 1999. But unfortunately, all of their prescriptions resulted in unemployment instead of poverty reduction in those countries."

"This happened, because the IFI strategies did not match with the reality of poverty at the grassroots level of the countries concerned", he added.

Referring to the Bangladesh Country Report-2005, he said there is a clear recognition of the role of trade unions in the PRSP. So the demands and concerns of trade

unions should be reflected in the PRSP process, he opined.

He also suggested that the representatives of trade unions should arrange dialogue to deliberate on the prevailing poverty situation with the IFIs, who are making a role in implementing the PRSP in the country.

Meanwhile, the IFIs consider trade unions to be legitimate stakeholders groups who should be included in the PRSP process.

As per their strategy, the trade unions should have given an opportunity to examine and discuss draft PRSPs with the government so that they can put recommendations for alternative policy reforms and strategies.

Syeed Ahamed of CPD said, "The unions welcomed the notion of a participatory PRSP process. But while attempts have been made to ensure participatory process in the policy formulation part of PRSP, it is however not evident how the participation was ensured in the approval, implementation and impact assessment phase of PRSP".

Lamenting the lack of capacity both at the government and unions end, which limited the potentials of a participatory process, he said, "The effective trade unions participation in the PRSP process can hold governments and the IFIs accountable for their policy decision".



Eskayef Bangladesh Ltd Managing Director AM Faruque (2-R) presents a bouquet to Health Minister of Sri Lanka Nimal Siripala de Silva (3-R) during a meeting in Dhaka on Sunday.

E-commerce in India set to boom: Study

XINHUA, New Delhi

E-commerce in India is set to jump 95 per cent from 11.8 billion Rupees (256 million US dollars) to 23 billion Rupees (500 million US dollars) in 2006-07 on a whopping 2.18 billion Rupees (47 million US dollars) advertisement-spend, a new survey says.

This is largely because India's current 38.5 million Internet users will shoot up to 100 million by 2007-08, says the study by the Mumbai-based Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMI).

"Referrals by online shoppers work as they come from a trusted source. The consumer is more credible and trusted than the advertiser or marketer," says the

survey, which covered 1,240 online shoppers.

However, the report does not comment on the problems that such shoppers in India face due to the lack of a system allowing those who do not own credit cards to make online payments speedily and cheaply.

The survey found that 55 per cent of visitors to e-commerce sites have adopted it as a shopping medium. Forty-six percent of the shoppers were from the 26-35 age group, 25 per cent in the 18-25 bracket and 18 per cent in the 35-46 category.

There is also a gender bias in cyberspace, the survey found, as 85 per cent of the shoppers are male, according to Indo-Asian News Service Monday.