

# Wide scope for jobs abroad

Analysts explain why Bangladesh is important to Arab and European markets

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Europe will lose a 60 million workforce in the next 20 years because of falling birth rates. So the continent will have to recruit more from abroad to fill the vacuum. Elsewhere, the Middle Eastern countries will need a large number of immigrant workers for their growing economies.

This appetite for workforce in the European and Middle Eastern regions in the coming days gives Bangladesh an opportunity for ensuring jobs for part of its surplus labour.

David Arkless, president of Global Corporate and Government Affairs of a leading international staffing firm, ManpowerGroup, shared this view in an interview with The Daily Star on the sidelines of a two-day multi-stakeholder roundtable on migrant workers in Dhaka recently.

"We are going to need workers from the sub-continent from Bangladesh, from Turkey from Egypt. So, in the normal sense, a surplus of labour today and for the next 50 years is a good save and you have got it," says Arkless, also vice-chair of International Confederation of Private Employment Agencies (CIETT).

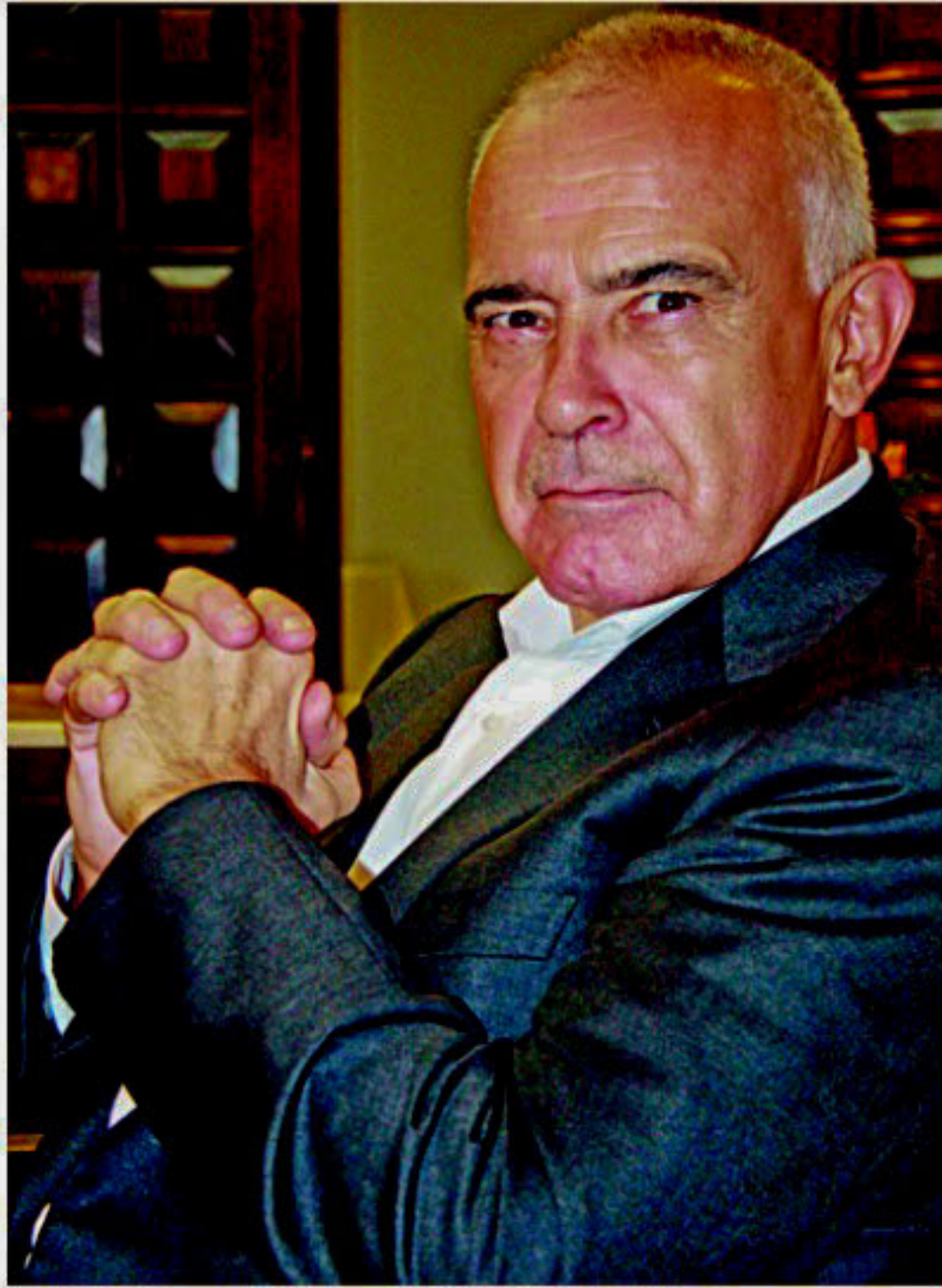
John Morrison, executive director of Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB), also spoke.

To tap the opportunity, Arkless says, Bangladesh should build skilled workforce in a bid to earn increased amount of remittances.

The government should also sign bilateral labour treaty with migrant workers receiving countries to stop abuse and discrimination of its people there.

The government should also clean up the local recruitment industry by putting in place better regulations and standards as well as enforcing those to stop practice of charging high fees from overseas jobseekers.

Arkless points to the need for skilled workers, saying: "We cannot find enough vocational workers in Egypt to fill up all the vacan-



David Arkless



John Morrison

cies in the industry."

He says, by improving the skills of workers, Bangladesh can double its remittance earnings to \$22 billion within five years from present \$11 billion.

"It means you get almost 18 percent of GDP coming from abroad."

According to him, better training will enable migrant workers to earn double or treble, enabling Bangladesh to increase its remittance income.

And a rise in remittance earnings will push up consumption, he says.

But Arkless says the recruitment industry must be regulated here.

"It is virtually unregulated," he says, blaming the government for its slack regulation, although the country earns \$11 billion in remit-

tances a year.

He urges the government to take steps so recruitment agents cannot charge high from to the migrant workers.

According to him, recruitment agencies are not supposed to charge the migrant workers for jobs and travel because the employer firms in the receiving countries pay staffing companies for helping them get workers.

There are allegations that sub agents of local recruitment firms confiscate passports and identity cards of migrant workers in the employing countries, pay them less than the amount specified in the job contracts and force them to live in an unhealthy environment.

"They prey on peoples' ignorance," says Arkless.

Apart from regulating the local recruitment

industry, both Arkless and Morrison suggest the government talk to recipient countries, especially the Middle-Eastern ones, for signing bilateral treaties to safeguard the rights and stop abuse of Bangladeshi workers in those countries.

They say Bangladesh should approach the recipient countries in the Middle East for signing bilateral labour treaties now.

They say the current uprising in the Arab world has given an opportunity for migrant workers sending countries to approach to the recipient countries for bilateral treaties as governments of many countries want to put better standards in place for ensuring decent works for their nationals and migrant workers.

Arkless says these countries need proper structure to ensure decent works for their people and migrant workers.

The countries that use a huge number of Bangladeshi workers are not going to reduce their requirement for those workers, he says.

"They have got two issues and those are completely separate and not interlinked," he says.

"One is putting their own nationals into jobs. All the economies that take your workers are growing and there is a limited human resource."

He says the Bangladesh government should give priority for signing bilateral labour treaties at least with the top migrant workers receiving countries.

Morrison also says Bangladesh should put the issues of migrant workers on the table when it sits for negotiation with other countries. "Make it part of the negotiations," says Morrison.

According to Arkless, some Middle East countries really want to put better standards in place.

That is why they are willing to negotiate right now for bilateral treaties.

"The sentiment is ready for treaties with Bangladesh. So the government should talk to Middle East countries," says Arkless.

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A woman walks past the 101-storey World Finance Centre (R) in the Pudong financial district in Shanghai.

AFP

# Asia boom attracts cutting-edge architects

AFP, Beijing

China and other rapidly developing Asian nations are attracting cutting-edge international architects as their increasingly futuristic skylines offer the chance to push design boundaries.

French architect Paul Andreu was handed what he calls a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity when Chinese authorities picked him to design an ultra-modern opera house in the centre of Beijing.

"I'm grateful towards China," said Andreu, whose 300-million-euro (\$430 million) opera house -- a rounded titanium and glass structure -- rises from a man-made moat next to the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square.

"That was an opportunity that you only get once in your life, if at all," the award-winning architect, who is currently working on two other projects in China, told AFP.

"China is building a huge amount, so opportunities are huge. But China also has a lot of ambition. For years, they didn't do much, and I'm sure they had the feeling they were lagging behind."

Now, the Asian powerhouse -- whose breakneck growth over the past 30 years has transformed it into the world's second-largest economy and fuelled a colossal construction boom -- is making up for lost time.

The 90,000-seat "Bird's Nest" stadium, which became the centre-piece of the 2008 Olympics with its threads of interlocking steel beams, is probably the best known of innovative structures that dot China's skyline.

Beijing's soaring CCTV tower -- described as one of the most daring pieces of architecture ever attempted -- and Shanghai's 101-storey World Finance Center are also high-profile examples of cutting-edge design.

Andreu is designing a colourful archaeological museum in the northern city of Taiyuan and Zaha Hadid -- the first woman to receive the Pritzker Architecture Prize -- has

just finished a 1,800-seat opera house in southern Guangzhou.

Renowned British architect Norman Foster, who designed the much-acclaimed Terminal 3 at Beijing's international airport, is also building the headquarters for CITIC Bank in the eastern city of Hangzhou.

Foreign firms are not the only ones taking advantage of opportunities in China. Homegrown architects are also making their mark at home and abroad.

Ma Qingyun, whose firm MADA s.p.a.m. has countless projects across China, was named one of the world's most influential designers by Businessweek last year, along with Hadid.

Earlier this month, the French Architecture Academy gave its gold medal -- a top award -- to Wang Shu, who focuses on sustainable design.

"The architectural arena is changing -- it's leaning towards more intellectual and creative freedom," said Andreu.

Michael Tunkey, the Shanghai-based partner at international firm Cannon Design, said other countries in Asia were also proving a boon for architects.

"The fact that Chinese salaries have been rocketing over the last couple of years has generated larger opportunities for places like Vietnam and Thailand," he said.

Nguyen Chi Tam, design director at HighEnd Architecture in Hanoi, said there had been "more and more" architect offices opening in Vietnam in recent years -- both mid-sized firms and global giants.

"With a downturn in Europe, foreign firms have turned to Asia, including Vietnam," he said.

Tam's office is collaborating with famed Italian architect Renzo Piano on a project for a new opera house in Hanoi, while the New York-based Carlos Zapata recently worked on the 68-storey Bitexco Financial Tower in Ho Chi Minh City.

But, as in Beijing where much of the old town has been torn down, Hanoi is having trouble preserving its heritage despite a law on conser-

vation enacted in 2001.

"On paper there are still more than 1,000 French villas in Hanoi but in my opinion, there are really only a few hundred that have kept their original colonial style," Hoang Dao Kinh, a Hanoi-based architect, told AFP.

Preserving the old while embracing the new is a challenge that other Asian nations face too. Singapore, for one, has been relatively successful.

To date, more than 7,000 old buildings have been preserved by the city-state's national planning authority, adapted into restaurants, offices or homes.

But it is also the home of architectural feats such as the \$5.5 billion Marina Bay Sands resort that boasts three 55-storey hotel towers linked by a huge sky park 200 metres (656 feet) above the sea.

Sustainable engineering is also starting to take hold in Asia. Ciputra World, a business and entertainment complex in Indonesia's capital Jakarta, is one such example.

The three-trillion-rupiah (\$350 million) project aims to reduce energy usage by at least 20 percent compared to a regular building, with double-glazed windows and a sophisticated indoor air system.

Back in China, the Pearl River Tower in Guangzhou, due to be completed this year, has been dubbed "the world's greenest skyscraper".

Its structure directs winds to openings where they push turbines that generate the building's energy, according to architecture firm SOM, which is working on the project.

Tunkey said China is still lagging far behind the United States and Europe in terms of clean technology buildings.

"But if it decides to get in front of the curve, it has got the potential to ramp it up in a way that no other country really can," he said.

Ma, meanwhile, said China faced a key challenge in the next few years in finding its own architectural path "that corresponds to Chinese people's aesthetic habits and experiences."