

## FDI continues to rise

### Could be much better

ACCORDING to a report published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on June 23, the country received 24 per cent more foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2013 compared to the preceding year. It now stands at US\$1.6 billion. This is nearly a full 10 per cent higher than what was recorded in 2012. What is interesting to note here is that the flow has not slowed despite serious political upheaval the country witnessed last year. There is however, little to celebrate given that the No. 1 spot is held by neighbouring India which attracted a hefty U\$28 billion in FDI over the same period.

A third of the FDI Bangladesh received last year was direct investment but the lion's share, i.e. nearly \$700 million were reinvestments by foreign companies back into the undertakings they held in Bangladesh. Whatever may be the case, the trend is upward and the surprising part of the finding remains that violent politics did not dampen the spirit. This shows greater confidence on the part of foreign investors that Bangladesh holds the potential to be a country worth cultivating.

That said, serious impediments remain, which have effectively held back FDI inflow into the country. Besides drawbacks like inadequate infrastructure and power, a major hindrance remains availability of land for export processing zones. Although the Board of Investment is upbeat about FDI growth, the window of opportunity that has presented itself will remain open as long as potential investors feel that authorities are serious about dealing with and delivering on the multifaceted problems that is impeding business.

## State of rural health service

### Doctors should respond to their calling on their own

IN the face of declining health service at the rural hospitals, the health minister has voiced his concern over the matter. He put it down to doctors skipping duties at the rural hospitals, while speaking at a recently held regional conference on health informatics in the city. In terms of rural health complexes, however, Bangladesh has a fairly good infrastructure. The short-coming is in its underutilisation.

The health minister's desperation over doctors' absenteeism in rural areas is understandable. But what baffles us is how can the physicians continue to stay in service defying the authorities? Should not the ministry concerned ensure that the doctors serve at rural health complexes rather than express its helplessness over the situation?

Sadly, people in our villages are being denied their rightful access to health service, when information technology has come in a big way to deliver it to people living in the remotest corner of the globe. To improve things, the government has been exhorting as well as offering various inducements to persuade doctors to stay at their rural duty stations. It's all very well and good. But why can't they be equal to their noble calling and serve patients at their places of posting on their own?

It's hardly surprising that medical treatment is getting costlier for the rural patients, because, unable to find any service near at home, they have to rush to the cities for it. This is leaving a damaging impact on their social and economic situation. The government must go all out to ensure that health service is delivered to the rural people right at their doorsteps.

## From vehicle friendly city to pedestrian friendly city

RIDWAN QAUIUM

VEHICLE friendly cities are cities where the transportation system in the city is geared towards providing infrastructure and facilities to commute by personal vehicle rather than to commute by non-motorised modes of transport such as walking and cycling and by public transports. Such cities offers nothing but long commuting time, traffic congestion, pollution, poor living standard and a financial burden to the economy due to the huge maintenance cost of the road infrastructures. This may hamper economic growth as citizens waste valuable hours of their day just by getting stuck in traffic rather than doing productive activity and the country has to spend a lot of resources maintaining the road infrastructure when it could have spent it in other more sustainable development related projects.

To ensure a sustainable growth and development, rather than first designing vehicle friendly cities by concentrating on enhancing the road infrastructure within the city by building massive concrete structures in the form of flyovers and elevated expressways, then realising that it is a big mistake to build such infrastructures due to the huge construction cost and maintenance cost, and then finally designing pedestrian friendly cities by building a continuous network of sidewalks and bicycle lanes and a diverse, integrated public transport system, developing countries such as Bangladesh may leapfrog the urban transport planning development pattern followed in American cities and from the beginning concentrate on designing people friendly cities. This process will save a huge amount of resources, most importantly it will create cities with less traffic congestion and pollution, as a result people will have to spend less time commuting and get more time to spend with family or to do other meaningful activities. This will help to significantly improve the standard of living of the citizens.

The writer is a Transportation Engineer in Thailand.

# Uncanny peace, eerie prospect

## STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen  
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
ndc, psc (Retd)

IF one were to believe in the forecast of some Awami League leaders then there might not be any existence of the BNP after Eid. One wonders why Eid has been chosen as the datum point, first by the BNP and then by the AL, for some political deluge to submerge us. Well the BNP has threatened to start political agitation including hartal, after a month of Siam and Qiam, after having cleansed both the soul and the body. But what will be their strategy to force the government to talks no one knows as yet. Perhaps it is waiting for the AL to commit further blunders or perhaps hoping for certain developments in the nature of Narayanganj, Phulgazi or the Bihari camp to occur, which, it hopes, would subsume the ruling party in the morass even more. To put it in the parlance, it is waiting for the AL to 'rot' a bit more. However, while its demand for fresh dialogue has been summarily dismissed by some AL leaders, nothing has come from the PM though. But the president seemed to have acted as an AL party spokesperson while articulating his views on dialogue and next election to the UN Secretary General.

Whether AL 'rot' will come about is anybody's guess, but that the deposition of the former half colonel who seemed have made the most of his army uniform and his political link while serving in Rab, and about whom new stories are emerging from time to time, and the statement of the main accused, whose power to acquire invisibility by which he managed to escape the notice of even those who were supposed to have kept him under close watch after the gruesome Narayanganj murder, was, unfortunately for him, dissipated by some cosmic intervention leading to his arrest by the Paschimbanga Police, may open a Pandora's box once their statements become public. His statement that he is in India on the advice of his mentor will be a cause of public embarrassment for the ruling party. But the AL has become so absolutely inured to embarrassing developments that these are likely to be dismissed as "these things happen." However, one is not sure if the BNP is capable of exploiting these situations to its political advantage.

UN Secretary General's remarks that there should be further dialogue with parties outside the parliament for holding an inclusive and participatory elections, and the EU's renewed interest in dialogue, suggest that the international community is still concerned about the January 5 elections as well as the state of democracy in the country and the political issues that have kept the country on

the hook for the last two years. The US has not budged either on its position on dialogue and an inclusive election. And this may be used as a pressure tool by the US on bilateral issues particularly renewing GSP facilities in the future.

Notwithstanding the High Court ruling on the legality of the 5 January elections, the government is still on very wobbly moral grounds in this regard. The government's apparent success in its diplomatic forays with our friends in the Near and South East Asia suggest a shift compelled by the need to reduce dependence on the West whose terms and condition for economic assistance is perhaps more stringent and predicated on the country's politics and governance, something that our friends in the East are not too much particular about.

AL may feel smug that there has been no adverse public reaction to the present state of affairs where we have a parliament that is virtually one-sided (at least we can

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take pleasure and pride that the unique character of the parliament has added a new definition of the term 'parliamentary opposition' in the lexicon of political science), where the civil society is not only divided, a part of it remains constantly under threat for attempting to speak out, and another part feels no qualms in keeping silent and letting things drift, where the media is wary because of a government that has become so innately anti-criticism that even fair criticisms become victims of self-censorship.

We hear the argument that peace, being an important precondition for progress, is preferable to the kind of politics and democracy the practice of which has been destructive and injurious to the country, at least of the kind one saw last year. That is a distorted argument reminiscent of dictators' rationale for autocratic rule. We want peace but not a deviant situation as obtaining today.

# Switching over to Hindi?

## BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

media. This is an entrance through the backdoor. Non-Hindi speaking states spotted the fugitive move and protested against it. New Delhi readily withdrew its step and declared that the circular was meant for the Hindi-speaking states.

This belated realisation does not convince anyone. I think the government was testing the waters. When it found that what it considered an innocuous step has evoked strong opposition, it changed its stance. But the circular has done the damage. The fears of non-Hindi speaking people have got rekindled. And they are afraid of what may happen tomorrow.

India had gone through large linguistic riots in the late '50s and early '60s. At that time also the home ministry had issued instructions to different departments to make preparations for a switchover from English to Hindi as laid down in the constitution. Riots took place in southern states and one man immolated himself in Tamil Nadu to convey his refusal to accept Hindi. Even the old slogan of secession got renewed.

The then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was unhappy but did not want to interfere. However, when he saw the fire spreading, he gave an assurance on the floor of parliament that there would be no switchover until the non-Hindi speaking people themselves said that they were ready for Hindi to be an exclusive language of Union administration. This categorical statement disappointed Hindi fanatics but the nation on the whole heaved a sigh of relief that India had been retrieved from the brink.

No doubt, Modi feels at home with Hindi and his sweep in the Lok Sabha elections is primarily because of the campaign he led in Hindi, somewhat Sanskritised for northern Indians. But he should remember Nehru's promise made in 1963 that both Hindi and English would continue to be the link languages for administration throughout the country. He did not fix any deadline for the exclusive use of Hindi.

I wish this bilingualism should have continued without anyone tinkering with it. But then the Modi's men were in a hurry. They wanted to restrict the use of English to certain fields. Yet they realise that their haste can tell upon the country's unity. Non-Hindi speaking states, particularly Tamil Nadu, have accepted the constitutional provision that Hindi is the Indian Union's language. But they want time to learn it and come up to the standards of people living in the Hindi belt like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh or Rajasthan.

Already, some candidates from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, whose mother tongue is not Hindi, have excelled in competitive examinations. India of today is very different from what it was 50 years ago, each linguistic group asserting for its identity. The turmoil during the States' Reorganisation process should be a warning. The idea

of India can be jeopardised. The entire fabric can get torn if the sensitivities of the people are not allayed. What is the hurry? A few more decades' wait is too small a price to pay for preserving the nation's cohesion.

I recall how the Hindi fanatics offered quotas in jobs in cases where the use of English was stopped. This approach by ex-speaker Purshotam Das Tandon from Uttar Pradesh was ridiculed by a parliament member in Kerala. He warned him not to open the floodgates of quota lest there should be a demand for such an arrangement in every field. All other members from non-Hindi speaking areas also supported him. Finally, the proposal was dropped.

There are 22 languages recognised in the constitution, each with its own script. True, Hindi is a link language along with English, but all the 22 languages are national. This was conceded by the parliamentary committee on language commission, although the committee gave Hindi the status of principal language and additional language status to English.

The purpose of my narration is that the status quo should continue until the nation can have a consensus on some other formula. This means that the push currently given to Hindi will have to take into consideration the feelings and aspirations of each area and assure that there is no alienation of any language of any linguistic community. Modi's fiats to quicken the pace of switchover to Hindi have created the alarm.

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Meanwhile, the chauvinist supporters of Hindi should patiently wait till people all over the country are proficient in Hindi. Already, it is a compulsory subject in all the states except Tamil Nadu. Job seekers from different states too have underlined the necessity of learning Hindi. Films have spread the language throughout the country and one can converse in the south in Hindi or Hindustani. A few more years will see the entire non-Hindi speaking population speaking the language fluently.

Language is a very potent force. Urdu in preference to Bengali gave birth to Bangladesh. The step-motherly treatment meted out to Baluchi is at the back of demand for an autonomous Baluchistan in neighbouring Pakistan.

In fact, the rulers' worry should be how to save regional languages like Punjabi, which is being gradually discarded at Punjabi homes. The new generation is indifferent to their mother tongue and for them English, which brightens their employment prospects, comes first because it helps them to secure bread and butter.

Heritage is linked with languages and therefore leaders all over the country will have to devise ways and means whereby regional languages get succor. Without a long-term plan to reinvigorate them, some regional languages would fall by the wayside as the days go by. How many regional languages will survive 50 years hence is anybody's guess.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

# LETTERS

## TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Switching to Swiss banks

It's really stunning to see that Bangladeshi depositors' money is going to the Swiss banks in huge amounts. It gives us the signal that our rich people are depositing money in overseas banks to live posh life in those countries in times of political and national crisis. It seems they have forgotten that they also have a role to play in times of national needs.

We hope and believe that those who are at the helm of the country will ponder the matter seriously.

Saikat  
Mohakhali, Dhaka

### Won't our cricket improve?

Elliot's letter published on 23rd June has diagnosed our national cricketers' illness. Our cricket team is swiftly taking a nosedive. I am afraid that other test playing countries will take note of India's clever move and send their second or even third grade teams to take on Bangladesh. Maybe we should go for playing 'danguly', the popular rural game, instead of cricket. Who knows many of our rural danguly playing teams may also beat our national team!

Frustrated Bangali  
Dhaka

### Reducing Ramadan traffic mess

As every year, people will have to face unbearable traffic jam during this month of Ramadan. And traffic jam will reach its peak during the last ten days of Ramadan ahead of the holy Eid-ul-Fitr. In order to ease the agony of common people during this month, concerted efforts should be taken by the government to reduce traffic jam on an urgent basis.

Partha Saha  
Farmgate, Dhaka

### Comments on news analysis, "Why should Matarbari project cost \$4.4b?" published on June 21, 2014

#### Molla A. Latif

There are no materials cited in the article based on which a calculation could be carried out to show that the cost of the project is higher than in the feasibility study. Rather it explains the details of costing. At least there should have been a comparable source for terming it costlier. Writing such an article should contain enough technical and comparable financial analysis to draw a negative conclusion rather than creating confusion in public minds.

#### Hardreality

Unfair bidding, no transparency, no accountability, junky company, dishonest politicians -- all are contributing to bulking up the cost of the project.

#### MH Khan

It is questionable. The government should conduct another feasibility study before expending such a huge fund.

#### Ibrahim Zaman

It's because \$ 0.4 billion will be invested in the project and the rest \$ 4.00 billion will go to the pockets of the government and the contractors. Hope that answers the writer's question.

#### PlainSpeaker

Fair estimation; it is not the project itself, but plundering that is most important. It is thievery in the name of a project.

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### "Bye to discrimination?" (June 22, 2014)

#### Hardreality

This law will change very little unless our society changes its attitude towards those people. We should not judge people based on their race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.; rather we should respect them as they are.

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### "Drug peddling goes on" (June 22, 2014)

#### Snr Citizen

Since it is an open secret, authorities must start a drive to nab the culprits.

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### "Caught red-handed?" (June 22, 2014)

#### Akhtar Shah

In all probability, the local police is in the pocket of the MP. They will be singing a tune from the MP's music sheet.