

## New deal with KSA good news for BD

### Workers' protection need to be prioritised

BAKGLADESH signed a deal with Saudi Arabia yesterday to resume recruitment of workers on a gradual basis, which will result in 10,000 jobs per month, primarily for domestic workers and drivers. After a seven year ban on recruitment from Bangladesh, the decision to reopen its labour market for our workers is undoubtedly a milestone development. We further welcome the fact that the cost of migration would be borne by Saudi employers, which would considerably lessen the burden on migrants.

As per the deal, Bangladesh must ensure that it sends people with clean records in KSA, which remains the largest manpower market for Bangladesh and the source of most of its remittances.

As we initiate a new partnership, some concerns regarding migrant workers' plights should also be addressed by both the governments. In light of the fact that India, the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka have set several terms and stipulations, including minimum wages and better work conditions, we, too, must ensure that our workers are not delegated to low-paying precarious jobs that no one else would take.

While India has recently demanded SR 1500 as minimum wage for its workers, the minimum wage for Bangladeshis has been set at SR 800, a significantly lower amount than what was initially discussed.

As more of our female migrants take up positions as maids and housekeepers, there is increased risk of various forms of exploitation, including sexual assault, which our labour attaches should work towards addressing. Meanwhile, the *kafala* (sponsorship of employer) system, which can be unjust and discriminatory, must be made worker-friendly.

## Aam Aadmi Party takes Delhi Kejriwal's remarkable comeback

IN what can only be termed as nothing short of phenomenal, Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has stemmed the blitzkrieg of the ruling BJP's attempt at winning the New Delhi polls. That the results have shocked not only the ruling house but many political pundits is understandable. For barely a year ago, AAP was being seen as a spent force when Kejriwal had quit as chief minister having lost over a key anti-corruption bill against the then ruling Congress party. This latest upset has come as a surprising message for the Modi-led government that has swept the nation winning several local elections recently.

Campaigns by both sides could not be more in contrast with each other. Whereas BJP concentrated on grilling the AAP leader, Kejriwal focused primarily on building support amongst the working class and underprivileged that makes up about 60 per cent of Delhi's population. Although BJP fielded a tough candidate, the former policewoman Kiran Bedi for the top post, it is perhaps AAP's anti-corruption stance that had the biggest pull on voters. That Kejriwal was a man who would stand up for the dispossessed helped swing massive votes to AAP, rather than the business-savvy BJP. One cannot but feel that somewhere down the line the ruling house lost sight of the common man who as a voter is the primary driver for democratic change. In the final analysis Kejriwal was able to appeal to the bulk of Delhi's voters that AAP and not BJP could deliver more transparent governance that would transform their lives for the better.

LETTERS  
TO THE EDITOR  
letters@thedailystar.net

People are living inhuman lives



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh is making good progress in the economic sector and the credit mainly goes to the garment workers, expatriates who send remittance and the people involved in the agricultural sector. But our politicians lay claim to that credit when in fact it is the nature of politics that is creating hindrance in the path of progress. They don't think about us, but only about the throne. It doesn't matter to them how many people get killed or burned in the anarchic situation created by them.

The hard working people are now living inhuman lives. The ongoing political unrest is pushing them to immense misery and suffering. Politicians! Please let them earn their livings safely and survive.

Shakhawat, On e-mail

## Energy efficient tube light

I came across this important matter of interest in an advertisement in the quarterly issue (Oct.-Dec. 2014) of Business Magazine from the Bangladesh German Chamber of Commerce & Industry. The advertiser claimed that their brand of imported tube light (Brand-SLED) consumed far less specific power and much better illumination, consuming far lesser electricity than the local brands sold in the market. According to them it was ideal for use in big factories (like garment factories) and other industries, and that it could save around taka twelve lakh annually if they use around one thousand such tube lights in their establishment. However the price of their tube is four times higher than the local brands.

In my view, to authenticate their claim they should ask BUET to carry out a comparative study and actual test on the matter related to their claims. If the supplier's claim is found true, then the government can be requested to reduce the import duty of these tube lights for overall national interest as it can save scarce electricity generated by imported fuel and local natural gas.

Engr. S. A. Mansoor, Dhaka

# FREE ELECTION

## Antidote to politics of annihilation

ATM NURUL AMIN

WHENEVER a minimum democratic environment prevailed and people got a chance to participate in political activities, including electoral politics, people have celebrated the event. In the post 1947 period, voting for Jukto Front in 1954 and for autonomy in 1970, participation in the Liberation War, and overthrowing of the dictatorial regime in 1991 -- all these denote people's power and also rejection of extremism.

Another notable feature of free electoral politics, not only in Bangladesh but also in India and Pakistan, is the strength of bi-polar politics. It has flourished in this part of the world whenever people have got a chance to participate in politics. We know about politics of Congress and Muslim League during British period, Muslim League (ML) and Awami Muslim League (AML) during the early period of our failed statehood with Pakistan, Awami League (AL) and National Awami Party (NAP), and AL and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) since late 1970s and early 1980s. In terms of leading personalities in this bi-polar politics, it has been Gandhi and Jinnah, Bhashani and Mujib and Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina since early 1980s. One outcome of the bi-polar politics has been not only weakening of the working class-based parties of the left but also the religion-based parties of the right.

Danger from rejection of free electoral politics

What we are witnessing in today's Bangladesh is a vivid exposition of the consequence of discarding the path of free electoral politics. Whenever political dispensation moved away from a multi-party to a single party system, it gave rise to violence.

Whereas the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution ended multi-party system, the Fifteenth Amendment has abolished any chance of holding free election in the country. If there is ever to be a free election under a ruling party, it must be preceded by removal of all partisan appointments at all levels of the administration.

The rejection of free election, as manifested in January 5, 2014, has created the

present situation. As a result, a centrist political party is being pushed to the extreme. At the same time, the BNP cannot resort to underground politics or to violence to extract political demands. The moot point is that the 15th Amendment and January 5 elections have created the flux, and, if not corrected, will harm the whole nation, and soon politics will also come to be controlled by extremists.

This is particularly dangerous in the contemporary global situation of War on Terror on the one side and suicide bombers on the other. As a Muslim-majority country, political leaders of Bangladesh need to adopt utmost caution to steer the country away from the suicidal course.

Way Out is simple: Holding free election

Fortunately, discarding this path is rather easy in Bangladesh. The tradition of free electoral politics has kept people of

Bangladesh happy despite the many problems. People of this country are politically happy if they can vote freely and participate in political activities and they are economically happy if they are allowed to do their work to earn a living. No matter how strongly AL campaigns to make people believe that there has been a free and participatory election on January 5, 2014, the people, and the international community too, do not believe that was so. They are more for an inclusive election because without an election and a government elected through a participatory election, things might get even worse.

The PM as a politician knows people's mind, so she did not hesitate to go to console a grieving mother. Too bad, it did not work out, as people would have loved to see the two leaders sitting together. But it is still possible. Another move is necessary on the part of the PM, not just for consoling a grieving mother but for stop-

ping the mindless attacks on innocent people by the extremists on both sides and even by the law-enforcing agencies.

Allowing politics to slip away from moderate leaders like Khaleda Zia or Mirza Fakrul Islam Alamgir will strengthen the hands of the extremists. Politics of annihilation will not work in this country. It is evident in the fact that AL could come back to power after 21 years of disarray despite unimaginable tragedy of August 15 and with the BNP becoming even stronger after Ziaur Rahman was assassinated. This reemergence simply tells us that people of this country are essentially followers of two major political camps represented by AL and BNP. I entreat the Honourable Prime Minister not to listen to those who are asking for "a second liberation war"!

The writer is Professor at North South University (NSU).



PHOTO: STAR

## PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

# Maintaining growth in India



RAGHURAM RAJAN

THE global economy's slowdown has not spared India. Sustaining the growth that it needs to continue to lift millions of people out of poverty will require rethinking its economic-policy approach. If India is to succeed, it will have to deepen regional and domestic demand, strengthen its macroeconomic institutions, and join in the fight for an open global system. Diminished expectations abroad should not lead India to lower its ambitions.

Fulfilling these ambitions will require efficiency-boosting investments, particularly in infrastructure. Every corner of the country should be linked to domestic and international markets through roads, railways, ports, and airports. Inputs, such as energy, minerals, and water, must be made available at competitive prices. The country should be linked to broader markets through mobile devices and broadband, and access to finance must be made easier, especially for those who traditionally have been excluded. Plans to achieve these goals are being developed; they must now be implemented.

Moreover, human capital must be improved. This presupposes higher investment in health care, nutrition, and sanitation, so that India's citizens are healthy and able; education tailored to developing skills that are valued in the labour market; and the creation of jobs in firms that have an incentive to invest in training. Achieving all of this requires that the bureaucracy focus on serving the economy, rather than -- as has too often been

the case -- vice versa. Promisingly, the political leadership has affirmed its belief in "minimum government, maximum governance."

Fueling growth through domestic demand will have to be carefully managed. As a country that does not belong to any power bloc, India cannot afford to put itself in the position of needing multi-lateral support -- a trap into which even developed countries, like Portugal and Spain, have fallen. There is the risk of overstimulation, with fiscal deficits fueling large current-account deficits and debts, which suddenly become unsustainable when money gets tight. The few emerging economies that have avoided booms and busts have done so by adhering to sound policy frameworks.

Fiscal prudence is essential. Whether India needs more institutions to control deficits and monitor the quality of its budgets is a question worthy of discussion. A number of countries have independent organs that pronounce on budgets. These bodies are especially important in providing budgetary estimates, particularly for unfunded long-term liabilities. As the experience of developed countries has shown, long-term fiscal commitments, such as universal pensions and health care, can be easy to make, but difficult to fulfill.

On the monetary side, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) should focus on keeping inflation low and stable, ensuring optimal conditions for growth. As it focuses on inflation, however, the RBI must recognise that emerging markets are not as resilient as industrial economies. They are more fragile, and their households' economic buffers and safety nets are thinner. Disinflation, when necessary, cannot be as steep.

The RBI will also have to pay attention to financial stability. This is normally a

secondary objective, but it may become central if the economy enters a low-inflation credit and asset-price boom. It will be important to remember that the central bank's role is not to boost stock prices, but to ensure that the economy's underlying fundamentals and its financial system enable sustainable growth.

India will run a current-account deficit for the foreseeable future, which means that it will need net foreign financing. The most stable form of financing, foreign direct investment (FDI), has the additional benefit of bringing in new technologies and methods. But India should not

**India can no longer simply object to proposals by developed countries; it must put its own proposals on the table.**

be railroaded into compromising its interests to attract FDI. For example, India's requirements for patenting a medicine are perfectly reasonable, regardless of what the international drug companies say. But India must ensure that its policies are transparent, and that contractual disputes, especially over taxation, are quickly resolved. Efforts to ensure this have already begun.

Finally, as a country that does not export vital natural resources and is dependent on substantial commodity imports, India needs an open, competitive, vibrant system of international trade

and finance. India's energy security, for example, depends not on owning oil assets in remote fragile countries, but on ensuring that the global oil market works well and is not disrupted. Strong, independent, multilateral institutions that can play the role of impartial arbiter in facilitating international economic transactions are in India's interest.

For now, the international monetary system remains dominated by the frameworks implemented by developed countries. Though this is slowly starting to change, there is a growing need for a rapid overhaul. As developed countries struggle with slow growth and large debt burdens, their interest in an open global system can no longer be taken for granted. Indeed, their policymakers' attention is likely to turn inward amid growing demands for protectionist measures.

Responsibility for keeping the global economy open may thus fall on emerging countries like India. That is why these countries must press for quotas and management reforms in multilateral institutions and inject new agendas, new ideas, and new thinking into the global arena. India can no longer simply object to proposals by developed countries; it must put its own proposals on the table. Our research departments, universities, and think tanks have to generate ideas that India's representatives can use.

India can continue to thrive if it invests in physical and human capital and pursues prudent fiscal and monetary policies. But this strategy also requires India to embrace its place on the international stage.

The writer is Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. This commentary is adapted from his Bharat Ram Lecture, delivered in Delhi on December 12, 2014.

Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2015. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

## COMMENTS

**"Everyone has the democratic rights to wage a movement. But do they have the right to burn and kill people?"**

-CM Shafi Sami, former adviser to caretaker govt.

### OpeeMonir

Did the government allow that democratic right to be exercised by the political opponent? Are you absolutely sure that these arson attacks are not funded by third parties?

### Concerned Bangladeshi

People should unite and fight against such abhorrent atrocities committed in the name of politics, regardless of their individual political affiliations.

**"'Shootout' story sounds hollow" (Feb. 6, 2015)**

### Deep

Gripping power by all means should not be the principle of AL. This party has some successes in terms of prosperity and bringing the war-criminals to book but completely failed to build a cohesive society. It was supposed that the culture of vengeance would come to an end when AL won by a big margin in 2008. But the government pursued the path of oppression and created a revengeful atmosphere. Now AL leadership seems more authoritarian and rigid than before to remain in power by any means.