

First fall in FDI in four years

Roll back the trend

THE government disputed a report brought out by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) which stated that foreign direct investment (FDI) had slipped by 4.5 percent in 2014. The World Investment Report 2015 said that Bangladesh had received FDI worth US\$1.526 billion in 2014 compared to US\$1.599 billion the preceding year. The claim that the report did not reflect a lot of investments coming into Bangladesh and yet not being represented in UNCTAD's report, needs to be substantiated.

Whatever may be the bone of contention between government estimates and those presented by UNCTAD, we have to face the fact that Bangladesh is losing out on FDI, particularly at a time when it is seeing a major surge in South and East Asia. As pointed out by some economists, although Bangladesh has several sectors including readymade garments, telecommunications, banking and energy that hold a lot of potential for foreign investments, negative image portrayal has not helped bring in the desired FDI.

One cannot discount the fact that the recent decision to retake land allotted to KEPZ, on whatever grounds, has sent a wrong signal to the foreign investors. That issues over land availability and ownership take decades to decide on, is becoming a major hindrance to FDI flows. We need to sort out these issues expeditiously; cutting through red-tape, should we want to turn Bangladesh into a favourite FDI destination in South Asia.

An audacious carjacking

Catch the criminal gangs

A daring carjacking on the Tejgaon-Bijoy Sarani Flyover, during which one of the victims was shot in the abdomen, indicates that carjacking gangs may be resurfacing in the city. The two young men who were going to old town for Sehri in a car, were blocked by a vehicle with four men who lost no time in grabbing the car keys, pulling them out of their car, beating them and critically injuring one of the victims, before rushing off with the car. It is known that during the month of Ramadan up until Eid, criminal gangs become active with the flood of Eid shoppers rushing to the stores carrying large amounts of cash. With the recent trend of people going out for Sehri, criminal gangs have now another target.

Since many of these crimes are carried out by carjacking and hijacking rings, the law enforcers should not find it all that difficult to identify and catch them. Law enforcing agencies should use their intelligence units and their network of informants to stop these vicious crimes. In the past there have been many cases of carjackings and muggings where law enforcers have managed to not only retrieve the stolen goods but also catch some of the culprits.

Greater vigilance on the streets is also a growing necessity, more so in this season. If needed there should be a larger deployment of police patrols, especially on the highways, which become quite deserted during the early morning hours. Street lights must all be lit and the police must be prompt about catching these criminals who carry firearms and are capable of causing grievous harm to their victims.

Politics in cricket and cricket in politics

CROSS TALK


 MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN

WHEN former Pakistani cricketer Sarfraz Nawaz opened his mouth last week, he had everyone in stitches. He said Bangladesh won the ODI series against India because India conspired to keep Pakistan out of the Champions Trophy in 2017. But this wasn't

the first time this conspiracy theorist went Chicken Little over a cricketing event. Nawaz said on a Pakistani channel during the World Cup last March that the pitches were being deliberately designed by the International Cricket Council to suit India's strengths.

This time Nawaz sounded as if Bangladesh's victory was a collateral gain from the hostilities between India and Pakistan. He was asked on a television show if Bangladesh was smarter than before to win against India, and he replied with two emphatic no's first, before blurring out his conspiracy theory. He accused India of cutting its nose to spite Pakistan's face.

But he didn't explain why Pakistan suffered the whitewash series defeat to Bangladesh last April. Did India also have a hand in that defeat, or was it because Bangladesh played better than Pakistan? If anything, the Bangladesh team only consistently carried forward its winning streak decimating one country after another.

Nawaz should ask himself why it's a conspiracy when India loses to Bangladesh, but not when Pakistan does. We wouldn't be having this conversation if Pakistan had shown some steel in its bats in Dhaka. The former Pakistani cricketer did a stint in

politics as advisor on sports to Benazir Bhutto and that was when his sportsman spirit must have got laced with political guile. Late US vice-president Hubert H. Humphrey once said that to err is human but to blame it on someone else is politics. That's exactly what Nawaz did with his silly statement. To lose is sports, but he turned it into politics by blaming it on others.

Sports and politics have collided throughout history, but there are also examples of collaboration between them. South African president Nelson Mandela used rugby to heal the racial tension that divided the blacks and the whites in his country. Most recently, members of the US football team St. Louis Rams orchestrated the "hands up" gesture before their game against the Oakland Raiders. They expressed solidarity with protestors in Ferguson, Missouri against the fatal shooting of a black teenager.

At times sports marked watershed moments in history. In 1967, heavyweight boxer Muhammad Ali refused to join the US armed forces, saying, "I ain't got no quarrel with those Vietcong." He was sentenced to five years in prison, fined USD10,000 and banned from boxing for three years. Political commitment can ennoble sportsman spirit.

Again, misguided political commitment can be a spoilsport. The Black September group killed 11 members of Israel's Olympic Team in Munich in 1972. Yet commitment to sport has smashed political walls many times. Jackie Robinson made history in 1947 when he broke baseball's colour barrier to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers in the USA. Tennis star Billy Jean King is credited for the change that saw increase in the prize money for women players. African-American boxer Joe Louis knocked down German Max Schmeling within 124 seconds of rematch in 1938, dealing a severe blow to Adolf Hitler's

ideological pride over the supremacy of the German race.

Coming back to Bangladesh, there is no reason to believe that its cricket team has played with anything but commitment to the sport in their heart. They have punched above their weight winning against two cricketing giants, which may be a sheer stroke of luck or culmination of their training and hard work. Either way they deserved commendation and Sarfraz Nawaz outrageously missed that point.

It would have been more relevant if he separated the two parts. He could have praised Bangladesh and criticised India, sounding considerate and critical in the same breath. But he got mixed up as rancour took over reason in his mind, producing the ridiculous sound bites that had the climactic effect of the punch line in a joke.

Pakistan's relationship with Bangladesh has always been on the seesaw, first when they were two provinces of the same country, and now that the former occasionally tends to be a country with provincial minds. Anything that lifts our spirit has been a damper for Pakistan. Meanwhile, those of us who grew up admiring and cheering foreign teams and players are excited to find there are also heroes amongst us. If that's an eyesore to some Pakistanis, we can only feel sorry for them.

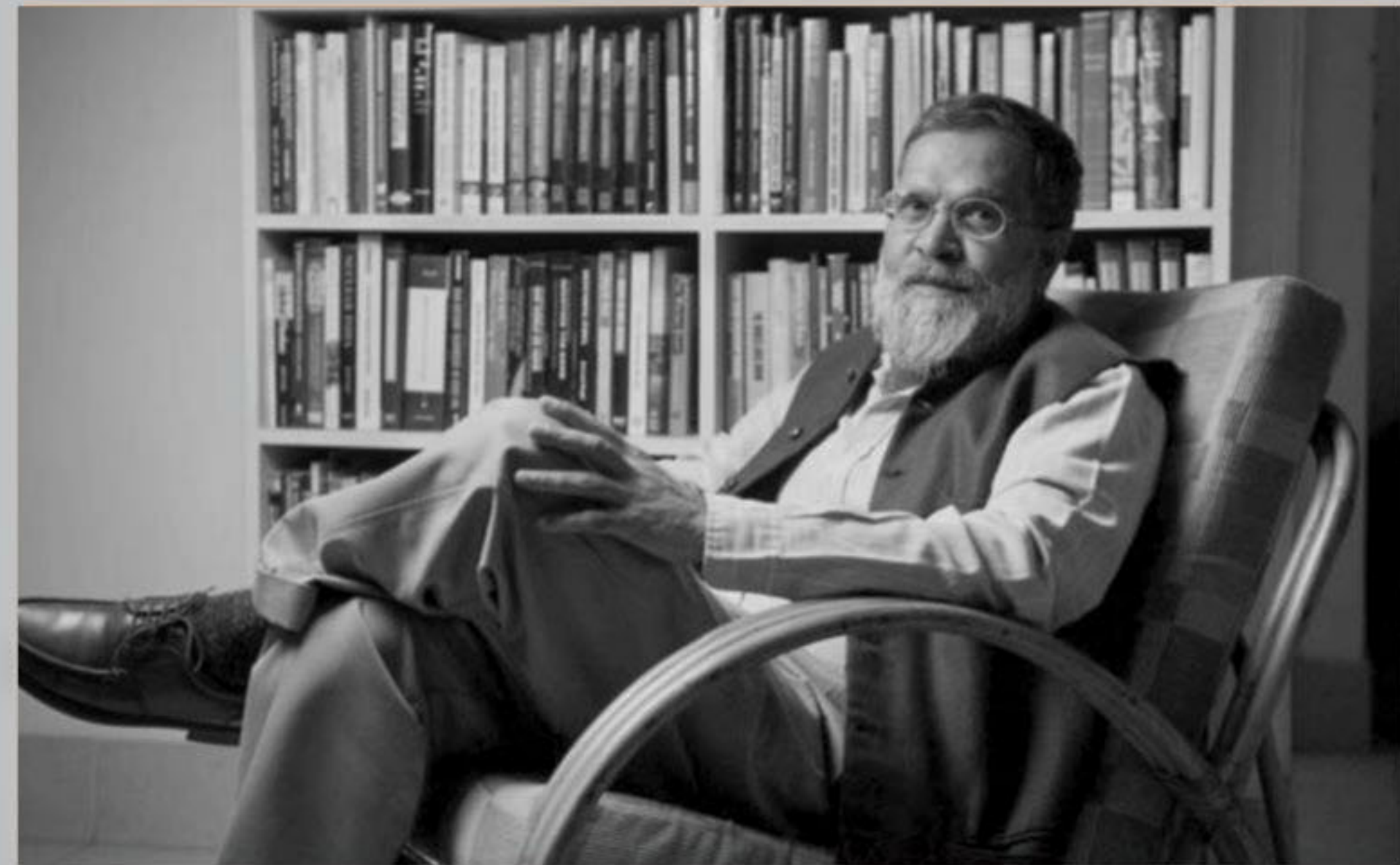
Sports can heal political wounds, but it's seldom the other way around. Our cricketers have done us proud when divisive politics is bringing us shame. They have given us the strength to believe that a nation's dreams are an index to its greatness, and the size of a country is no limit for its hopes.

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TRIBUTE TO A COURAGEOUS VOICE

A long time contributor to The Daily Star, eminent Indian journalist Praful Bidwai is no more. He passed away on the night of June 23 while attending a conference in Amsterdam. His sudden, tragic death has left us shocked. The renowned journalist was known for his fearless commentary on politics in publications worldwide. Here we publish one of the last pieces he wrote for The Daily Star.



PRAFUL BIDWAI (1949 - 2015)

Laloo's 'Poison' Or Nitish's Elixir? Bihar elections' significance

Praful Bidwai

AS a secular anti-Bharatiya Janata Party alliance at last been sealed in Bihar, following Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Laloo Prasad's declaration that he would fight the Assembly elections jointly with the Janata Dal (United) and Congress, with Nitish Kumar as its Chief Ministerial candidate?

The final answer would only emerge when seat-sharing arrangements have been negotiated. Yet, if a strong secular alliance is forged, it will doubtless give the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance a bloody nose and prove a greater trendsetter than the Aam Aadmi Party's Delhi victory.

The BJP's defeat in a core Hindi-heartland state would take the shine off Modi's artificially-glorified image and strengthen growing disenchantment with him. It wasn't easy to persuade Prasad to accept Kumar's leadership. The two have traded charges of "jungle raj" and "betrayal". Even more important was the BJP's pressure, coupled with handsome inducements, to wreck JD(U)-RJD reconciliation.

What brought Prasad around was a two-pronged approach: convincing him he would become a pariah by collaborating with the BJP; and second, getting the Congress to force him to accept Kumar's leadership. JD(U) chief Sharad Yadav got

RJD members to send Prasad one lakh-plus SMSs for a JD(U) alliance. Secondly, Rahul Gandhi told him that the alliance is non-negotiable.

One hopes Prasad puts his heart into building the alliance. Earlier, he tried to undermine it, by using Samajwadi Party leaders to veto a merger between various Socialist groups which joined the Janata Party. The 'Janata Parivar' merger was to precede the Bihar alliance.

This Parivar, to be headed by SP chief Mulayam Singh, would also include HD Deve Gowda's JD (Secular), and smaller splinters—with 15 MPs in the Lok Sabha and 25 in the Rajya Sabha.

Last month, the SP ruled out a merger before the Bihar elections. This partly reflected the reluctance of Janata Parivar leaders to cede to others the perks they enjoy as party chiefs, including exclusive party offices in central Delhi.

Prasad's other ploy, proposing that Nitish rival Jitan Ram Manjhi join the alliance, collapsed. Manjhi was made CM after the JD(U)'s rout in the Lok Sabha. He started building his own base and was removed. He has since cosied up to the BJP. Nitish could have prevented that by placating Manjhi, but didn't.

The RJD and JD(U) are divided along caste-community lines. The RJD mainly represents the Yadavs, the uppermost OBCs, about 12 percent of the population. The

JD(U) represents the Kurmis (8 percent), other lower OBCs and non-Paswan Dalits.

Modi's BJP-led alliance exploited these rivalries and won 31 out of Bihar's 40 Lok Sabha seats. This was attributable to the false hopes Modi created, his use of his OBC identity, and the immense caste-class polarisation he wrought. A staggering 78 percent of the upper castes and 68 percent of Paswans voted for the BJP-led combine.

The opposition vote was divided between RJD (20.5 percent), JD(U) (16.0), Congress (8.6), and NCP (1.2), but still added up to 46.3 percent—well above the combined vote of the BJP (29.9 percent), LJP (6.5) and RLSP (0.1), totalling 36.5 percent. Ten percent represents a massive lead in a two-way fight.

Even if the opposition's combined vote falls somewhat, it will probably still have an unbeatable advantage. Modi's honeymoon is long over; and the underprivileged who voted for him from ignorance of the Gujarat model, and the desperate hope that he would deliver jobs, are sorely disappointed. Even the upper castes are unlikely to show much pro-BJP enthusiasm.

The election won't be a cakewalk for the JD(U)-RJD combine. But it's an eminently winnable fight if it agrees on a reasonable seat distribution formula and campaigns sincerely for the selected

candidates.

That formula cannot be based on the 2010 Assembly elections, when the RJD won just 22 seats (Bihar's total, 243) with a 18.8-percent share, and the JD(U) won 115 seats with a 22.6-percent share.

Nor can the formula be founded on the exceptional 2014 election. A new paradigm is necessary, based on balanced constituency-wise representation of social groups and candidate credibility.

The secular bloc parties must negotiate this soon. They would be wrong to exclude the Left. The Communist Party of India and the CPI(ML-Liberation) have a sizeable base among Bihar's poor peasants and landless. They can also provide sensible policy guidance to the secular bloc.

Bihar's Socialists and Communists had a creative dialogue and mutually beneficial, if competitive, relationship between the 1950s and the mid-1970s. It was disrupted when the Socialists merged into the Janata Party, from which they came out splintered. The Communist Left must now be included in the secular bloc.

Kumar is relying on the likes of publicist Prashant Kishor, who played a key role in Modi's campaign through Big Business-funded Citizens for Accountable Governance. Kumar would do better to get advice from tried and tested progressives.

COMMENTS

"Hope for Razzak's return as Myanmar agrees flag meet" (June 24, 2015)

Zaman Khan

A conditional flag meeting, what a joke! Bangladesh should give them a 72 hours ultimatum. Because of our political weakness, nobody takes us seriously.

Saleh Chowdury

What Myanmar did is unacceptable. We demand justice and fair investigation into this matter. Our government should ensure that no such incident occurs in future. BGB should be given freedom to defend Bangladesh from any foreign incursion. Our Border Guards should be provided with sophisticated armoury and weapons. Myanmar should be held responsible for this crime against Bangladesh.

"These Tigers are brilliant" (June 23, 2015)

Saleh Chowdury

Indian advertisements clearly indicate that Bangladesh could be the next Pakistan in cricket. We are not bothered about the commercial aspects of the game as long as Bangladesh gets what they deserve from world cricket.

Jd Aziz

Taskin and Sabbir have become the advertisement darlings in India overnight!

"Cops in yaba business!" (June 22, 2015)

Kyou Shijuka

Cops involved in drug trading is not new. It happens very often.

Rupok Azim

It's shameful for the police department.