

KEPZ crisis sending wrong signals?

Calls for a fast-track amicable settlement

THAT the much-vaunted Korean Export Processing Zone (KEPZ) project has remained virtually stuck for the last 17 years is as unwarranted as it is instructive. It broadly reflects the fact that things had not been adequately thought through before taking the plunge.

So it seemed from the deliberations in a discussion meet on A New Investment Regime for Bangladesh co-organised by the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) and the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM) on Saturday. Analysts voiced concern over the KEPZ impasse saying that it may have earned a bad name for Bangladesh among the investors.

A tussle has been developing between the government and the KEPZ, more precisely its operator, the Youngone Corporation, on the allocation of nearly 2,500 acres of land to the corporation. The government plans to take back 2,000 acres of the 2,500 acres of land it had allocated for the KEPZ in 1999 on the ground of Youngone's failure to fully use the industrial land in the zone. Youngone, on the other hand, complains of delays in executing the deed transfer of the land.

We endorse the experts' views that since the discord bears the potential for sending an adverse signal on the country's foreign investment climate, we should address the issue on a top priority basis to reach an amicable settlement.

Three-wheelers continue to ply on highways

Be alive to ground realities!

IN a brazen display of disregard for government orders, three-wheelers continue to hog the highways to the discomfiture of heavier vehicles. Not only that, in a picture carried by this newspaper yesterday, we see even a rickshaw vying for space with motorised vehicles on Dhaka-Mawa highway.

The government had taken a timely decision to ban three-wheelers from the highways because those were one of the major causative factors of road accidents there. But what good is an order if that cannot be enforced?

Here the government will also have to rethink lumping together all types of three-wheelers. The types like *Karimon* and *Nasimon* should never be allowed on the highways because those are totally unauthorised contraptions devised with the help of shallow pumps, with neither a steady control device for speed nor inbuilt stability. We wonder why they were allowed to come on the streets at all in the first place.

However, the genuine auto-rickshaws are quite another matter on which a lot of investment has been made by the owners. They, because of their limited speed which hamper faster vehicles, should also be seen off the highways. But we feel that it should be done gradually. Alternatives should be offered not only to the three-wheeler owners but also to those who use them in the rural areas. Because of lack of lateral road network, they have to perforce come on the highways to travel to the next village.

Ground realities must be addressed before a decision is made by the government and should be enforced once made.

COMMENTS

"Free, finally" (August 1, 2015)

MD Raihan

Now around 64 thousand inhabitants of 162 enclaves inside Bangladesh and India will taste freedom after being stateless and in a state of deprivation and in limbo for 68 years! The neighbouring countries will exchange adversely possessed territories, bringing an end to decades of isolation for the people living there. This is a historic moment. My congratulations to all of you.

Atm Nazrul Islam

Extraordinary picture. Thanks to the photographer.

"I used to be a right-handed batsman" (August 1, 2015)

Unmukto Akash

He will be a legend in the history of world cricket.

Kazi Mahmud

We should call this genius of a batsman "Triple S" - Soumya Shanto Sarkar.

BNP frustrated over Ashraf's remark (August 1, 2015)

Mohammed Shawon

Who cares?

Reaz AU

Trying to write a new epic

The fifty percent



MACRO MIRROR

BA NGLADESHI women are increasingly getting into high value professions. During the last two decades, many have joined non-traditional and emerging service sectors such as banking, insurance, telecommunications, hotel and restaurants, transport and real estate services. Higher education and skills have contributed to this rise. However, the number of such professionals is far below the number of female university graduates. Nowadays, girls outperform boys in most departments at universities. But we don't see a similar trend in the job market. Many women don't opt for employment at all and prefer to be homemakers. Some take up jobs but quit after a while to perform family responsibilities. Some return to the job market once their children are grown up. But by then their colleagues have gone far ahead in their career path. So there is a natural process of elimination of potential good women workforce. And then those who choose to continue with their jobs, they have to juggle roles at office and home. Both roles are so demanding that they end up working much harder than men.

It isn't quite right to say that just because of these hurdles women don't get to top positions. It is also the attitude and a deliberate act of the society to situate women in a particular frame. They are not viewed the same way as men in the organisational pipeline. Many a times, assumptions, biases and prejudices work against women to hold a leadership role. This may happen unconsciously as well. Irrespective of their capability, it would be perceived by the office that a woman may not be able to deliver the task. This immediately lowers her level of confidence. Sometimes, the management assumes, with what they perceive as sympathy, that women won't be able to accept new responsibility, or take on a new role or even handle a promotion. The pretence that they are considerate to her predicament is only to undermine her potential. When a meeting is set up towards the end of office hours, or a breakfast meeting with a visiting high official is scheduled, nobody really thinks about their female colleagues.

Another way of undermining women's confidence is to ignore their insights. In meetings, female employees don't speak up as much as men do. A male colleague would draw much more attention by saying the same thing in a louder and more forceful voice. Men would also have mentors both within and outside the office.

But, in case of a woman, it isn't a desirable thing in our socio-cultural setting. Her family may not like it. People around her, including both male and female colleagues, would talk about it. When a man does well in his career, all credit goes solely to him. When a woman does well, it is because X or Y has helped her, she got a break and of course, her family is so supportive. Perception also makes us think that when a man can't complete his work on time, it is because he is overworked and when a woman can't meet the deadline, she just isn't prioritising her work or isn't good enough to do the job.

Have you considered how much time a man spends in socialising and networking? What does a woman do

woman is selected solely to fulfill the so-called 'female quota'. As if her credentials are lesser than her male counterparts and she can only compete with women. In reality, her qualifications would be the most robust one. She had to be twice as good as a man to get there. She has studied the same curriculum, sat for the same exam under the same board and excelled. There was no quota for female students in the exam. She works in the same field and has equal or even more expertise than her male colleagues. But she can't be considered a professional for any such position without her female identity.

The glass ceiling exists everywhere. Breaking through



after office hours? Her time would be dedicated exclusively for the family. She has neither time nor social approval for professional networking. For some professions, this is quite important though. In the West, many women these days try to network after office hours to catch up with their male colleagues and to explore business opportunities for their companies.

But this isn't a viable solution for our women to a problem which is deep rooted. This is the mindset which doesn't keep in mind that a woman can be equally competent for a decision making position. That is why, even in government bodies and committees, we see that there aren't any women at all or only one

the glass ceiling would require courage and sacrifice. Even Pepsico's Chief Executive Officer Indra Nooyi feels that "women can't have it all" as they struggle to perform within and outside home. Facebook's Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg advises women not to leave their profession before it is time to leave. It takes away the enthusiasm and spirit. We also have our own inspirational women in government offices and in corporate, private and non-government sectors who stayed the course till the end and succeeded. We deserve to have many more of them.

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The writer is Research Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

THE AMERICAN ZEROS

MAHFUZ KABIR

THE world has seen a new United States in the last couple of years. It intended to pursue three great zeros through calming different heats, which had never been imagined even a decade back. These are zeroing frustrations among the American middle-class; zeroing military deployment in the hot geopolitical spots, and zeroing distance with its long-standing foes. The 'middle-class economy' has recently emerged as a normative buzzword subsidising the Kuznets' mantra of inevitable income inequality. Indeed, President Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* set the implicit tone of the middle-class economy seven years back, which he elaborated quite eloquently in his State of the Union in January 2015. It is yet a semi-utopian notion in the American context but achievable by undertaking manifold reforms in economic and social policies subject to managing formidable Republican ego. The first zero is therefore likely to be a long trail through promoting middle-class interest in the economy and polity, which also require economic and social transformations, and has a good chance of becoming a model of economic equalisation.

The second zero has also been initiated by the Obama administration to lessen the enormous burden of budget deficit to fight terror in South Asia and the Middle East. A decade-long war made the public economy of the United States considerably weak due to an estimated \$6 trillion subsidy — continuing military deployment in Afghanistan and Iraq has become economically and socially unviable. Despite sporadic insurgencies and attacks on US-led NATO troops since withdrawal started in 2011, trailing a strategic zero is still continuing despite some airstrikes and Special Operations raids by US forces. Billions of dollars are

also being spent to bring normalcy in economic spheres of the war-ravaged economies, which could have precious alternative uses. In fact, about 85 bailout packages could have been backed to reverse the global financial crises stemmed from the US by saving the cost of warfare in these two countries. The economic appearance of the present world could be much stronger and could be shining. The Obama administration has pragmatically realised the considerable opportunity cost of destructive dollars.

Bridging the gap between Iran and the West would help soften Iran's present voice against Israel through a possible political and social transformation in favour of the West.

The third and final zero is relatively new, which called for a really brave heart aiming at addressing some high-voltage issues of the US foreign policy. President Obama dared to attain diplomatic normalcy with Cuba, its long-standing foe since the middle of Cold War with limited opposition from domestic politics. The Cuban flag has been hoisted at its diplomatic mission in the US land after 54 years, just some days back. Cuba is believed to be one of the next destinations of enormous global investment which would help revitalise the bystander US economy. Obama has also met Central and South American leaders at the Summit of the Americas in

Panama in April 2015 where he met Raúl Castro and held face to face discussions with him. He also addressed the 33 presidents and premiers attending the summit, including Bolivian President Evo Morales and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro who are still highly sensitive to the US. Countering Maduro's wreath for the civilian victims in the US invasion of Panama in 1989, President Obama surprisingly acknowledged that the US is perhaps ready to remove the label of "meddle with impunity" in Latin American affairs.

These developments are just peanuts in comparison with the recent six-nation high-profile nuclear deal with Iran. The agreement is still subject to approval of the US Congress where President Obama is expecting a formidable challenge. He interpreted the accord as the alternative to war with Iran, but did not mention whether it is the first or second best solution. The Economist has, however, categorically narrated it as "better than the alternatives — war or no deal at all" in its cover story titled "Hiyatollah!" on July 18, 2015. The US and its allies were perhaps compelled to continue dialogue with Iran due to the changing political atmosphere in Iran and the Middle East, along with greater confidence in President Rouhani and achieving a reasonable agreement to defer its nuclear ambition. Understandably, legitimising another sensational war in the Middle East would be much costlier and complex than the deal, a far more feasible alternative.

In the context of growing IS concern and distance of the US with Saudi Arabia, the realist approach of international relations suggest that the West has both imperative and opportunity to converge with Iran in deferring its nuclear ambition despite a hard resistance from Israel. The situation is popularly known as a "Corner Solution" of economics in

which a player is compelled to adopt a strategy to move forward. The deal would pave the way to take the Iranian economy off, and a small part of the extra money would be spent to purchase costly modern non-military nuclear technology, and work closely with the scientists of the US and other big nations. Nevertheless, technology transfer and knowledge spillover would strengthen Iran's skill to fulfill their nuclear ambition after a decade or so, despite intrusive monitoring of all its nuclear facilities, and enable Iran to inspect its military sites on request as per the accord, as apprehended immediately by David Rothkopf in Foreign Policy. On the other hand, the US and its allies would be able to engage Iran to curb and undo IS. Israel, which started helping Iran's nuclear programme before 1979, would eventually benefit from fighting IS, although it is now acting as a hardliner to resist the deal. Bridging the gap between Iran and the West would help soften Iran's present voice against Israel through a possible political and social transformation in favour of the West. Thus, the political economy and geopolitical equations surrounding the Gulf nations is indicating the inevitability of taking the deal forward for a win-win outcome.

As the situation moves forward in the US, President Obama is likely to be chased heavily even by some Democrat senators who are inclined toward Israel. Therefore, he has to work hard to convince the senators in line with his press briefing that 99 percent of the world population is in favour of the deal. Not very hard to predict, he will try time and again to succeed if it is not passed in the current form. Why? A new America is perhaps approaching three historical zeros!

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

l e t t e r s @ t h e d a i l y s t a r . n e t

Speak out against mob killing!

This is in response to the editorial titled "Spike in mob killing" (July 27). The brutal murder of people accused of petty crimes has once again proved how law and order has almost ceased to exist in our society. Molestation, rapes, acid attacks and violent behaviour in public places are increasing by leaps and bounds! However, the audacity of the brutes is bound to increase because of the extremely low conviction rate due to lack of witnesses, political interference, tedious legal processes, and innumerable other reasons.

The situation has come to such a pathetic pass that it has almost become a "sin" to be weak and vulnerable! And by drawing inspiration from the adage "Might is Right", the coward public

shamelessly take the side of those who wield muscle power. Whenever any verbal duel turns physical, the public invariably support the stronger person. Instead of protesting against the rapist, people question the "character" of the vulnerable victim!

Many precious lives will continue to meet tragic and brutal death unless and until the rule of law is practically restored in society and the common people come out in support of those who have been victimised. In this context, Martin Niemoller's comment may be recalled: "First they came for the Communists and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist; then they came for the Socialists/Trade Unionists/Catholics and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Socialist/Trade Unionist/Catholic; then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me."

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata, India

Dhaka's dilapidated roads

Almost all the roads in Mirpur, Rajabazar, Indira Road, and Kalabagan area are in very bad shape. These roads have not been repaired in a very long time. If it rains even for an hour, most of these roads get submerged under knee-deep water. Pedestrians often fall on the potholed roads and get their arms or legs broken or get badly injured. Indira Road area is the worst because it always stays flooded during the rainy season. We wonder if the situation will ever change for the better.

Sharmin Sultana
Farmgate, Dhaka