

Ensure safe recruitment process for Malaysia

Strong monitoring arrangements required

IT is reassuring to hear from the new Expatriate Welfare Minister Nurul Islam that the government will introduce a disciplined system for sending workers to Malaysia so that no one would be exploited. To translate the goal into reality, the government has to plug the loopholes in the manpower export process, particularly with regard to mode of labour recruitment and migration costs.

Recently, the Malaysian government announced that it would recruit 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers through private sector, popularly known as business-to-business (B2B) system. Earlier, Malaysia had resumed hiring Bangladeshi workers through government arrangements (G2G) in 2012, after nearly a four-year ban clamped in 2009 following massive labour abuses through private sector recruitment. Though the government process is safer and economical, it is too slow to cope with the huge pressure of recruitment demand. During 2007-08, excessive workers were hired against 'fake' demands. As a result, on arrival many of them remained jobless or were forced to work with little or no pay. The workers also had to incur extra money due to high fees imposed by brokers. Now with the resumption of private arrangement, the issue of safe migration has come to the fore. The government should put in place effective monitoring system on private sector recruiters to ensure that no manipulation happens in the recruitment process. It has a plan to set up a service centre in Malaysia. After the workers' arrival there, the centre will take charge and hand them over to designated companies. We fully endorse the plan.

Malaysia is the second most sought after destination for Bangladeshi job seekers. Opening up of the Malaysian market is really a great opportunity for us. This time the recruitment process should be safe and worker-friendly to avoid the repetition of any unsavoury situation.

Errant factories flout HC rule

Tannery relocation fumbles

ALTHOUGH many tanneries located in Hazaribagh have been taking preparations to relocate to Savar, the High Court has issued a contempt ruling against ten factories for non-compliance. The saga of tannery relocation has stepped into its 15th year and we are informed that the government intends to complete the process by 2016. The last hurdle to the Savar project has now been removed with the installation of a Tk.600 crore central effluent plant. Differences of opinion persist between the government and tannery owners on the costs of relocation. Even though the compensation package may fall short of covering expenses, this largely export-oriented industry has grown at the expense of environmental pollution and public health and should therefore absorb the added expenditure.

With around 22,000 cubic litres of toxic waste being dumped into the Buriganga everyday, it is hardly surprising that ground and surface waters around Hazaribagh have dangerously high concentrations of chromium, cadmium, arsenic and lead. The sustained contamination of rivers allows for the accretion of such toxins in fish which are consumed by the general public at large, exposing them to various serious ailments. It is high time authorities took a tougher stance to protect public health by implementing the environmental laws to effect relocation to the new industrial park and adopt processes and technologies that are less polluting.

COMMENTS

"Murdered by 'same outfit'"
(August 11, 2015)

Kalo Jam

If any blogger engages in any blasphemous act, he should be tried by the existing law; killing them in the name of religion is not the solution.

"Call for rights, dignity"
(August 10, 2015)

Rakibul Hasan

The government took away the identity of indigenous people through the 15th amendment of the constitution by terming them as 'tribal and ethnic minorities.'

Nurul Amin

They should not be termed as tribal and ethnic minorities. It is insulting to them.

"You will have to pick patriotic and competent leadership who believe in the spirit of the great Liberation War, and you must do it by analysing things from a neutral standpoint."

--PM Sheikh Hasina

Manzoor Husain Sarkar

Did it ever happen with any Bangladeshi government? I don't recall any such case.

Shah Alam

The armed forces are the symbol of our national integrity. They should be kept above political affiliations.

STRATEGICALLY
SPEAKING



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

FIVE bloggers have been killed in the last five years. And except for the alleged killers of Ahmed Rajiv Haider, no others have been brought to justice yet. There is an uncanny feeling also among the people that the state is helpless to do anything against the extremists and the bloggers' killers. The fearful aspect of it is that, the killings are now being carried out in broad daylight without fear or apprehension.

The killings have exposed the wide contrast in the society between liberal thoughts and extremist reaction, between freedom of expression and how far that freedom extends without offending the sentiments of others and between one's right to feel offended and how that right should be expressed.

The government for its part is at a loss as to how to address the matter. And statements from people close to the PM like the "issues are too sensitive for the PM to speak up in public" and "we in the Awami League don't want to be identified as atheist or non-believers" do not speak much about the party's conviction or commitment to secularism. Even atheists have the right to life and protection. They live by their beliefs and should be allowed to go their way. And the government must not only seek out the killers it should come down heavily on these extremist groups by formulating policies that can combat them both ideologically and physically. Pussyfooting on the issue only encourages the extremists, as is evident from all that has happened in this regard, particularly in the last ten years.

Almost ten years ago, in October 2005, I ventured an opinion in this very column entitled, "It is time to declare

Jihad." I cannot resist quoting some parts of the piece just to show that we have not yet been able to grapple with the demon of extremism. I wrote:



"It is time to declare Jihad. And this must be declared immediately, against those that go about endangering the lives of the innocents in the name of

establishing Islam in the country, calling their activities Jihad. It is against these people, a tiny minority... that we must declare Jihad against. I see no reason why these people should be allowed to go about both misinterpreting the teachings of Islam and making the rest of us suffer by their acts that are neither

sanctioned by Islam nor compelled by any political or religious compulsions in Bangladesh."

"Are what these so-called Jihadists saying in conformity with the teachings of Islam? How does one justify their threat: 'You will be executed if you do not stop arresting our men and celebration of puja. You are our Muslim brothers, so do not arrest our men to protect the non-Muslims,' contained in a letter sent to journalist by post by these groups? This is bigotry in the vilest form, which has no place in Islam. And those who countenance it are as guilty as those who preach it."

The demon has acquired a more dangerous form. It is an apparition lacking, apparently, a form, which is why the law has not succeeded as yet to catch any of the perpetrators who have carried out the killings of the bloggers.

It is regrettable that threats are now being carried out in the name of Islam against those the extremists accused of desecrating the religion. But the so called protectors of Islam, who claim to be defending the faith, are choosing the path of violence which Islam calls upon us to abjure. Surely, violence cannot be the arbiter between divergent views.

The fundamental question is, given the nature of the threat, should it be the business of the state/the government alone to combat a menace that has assumed the dimensions of a phenomenon which needs a multi-pronged approach? I repeat what I said ten years ago, that this is the time and these are the people that we as a nation must stand up to and thwart. And it is disheartening to see the abject inaction of the majority of Muslims and the silence of our religious scholars and Ulemas in this respect. I feel that the society at large, particularly our religious leaders, must openly castigate the killings and violence as heretical.

And I repeat what I said ten years ago – there is no alternative but to go on a war footing.

The writer is Editor, Oped & Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

ELUSIVE REGAINING of GSP benefits in the USA

MD. RIZWANUL ISLAM

THE honourable Minister for Commerce Tofail Ahmed has appositely diagnosed that the Government of the United States of America's exclusion of Bangladesh from the new list of 122 beneficiaries of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) scheme is motivated by politics. He also has a very valid point that countries with no better record in the promotion of human rights or labour rights, have been kept in the list of eligible countries, but Bangladesh has been left out. Indeed, like many, I have felt and publicly written that the decision to withdraw Bangladesh from the list of beneficiaries had more to do with politics than with the professed moral reasons cited by the United States Trade Representative (USTR) that is the lack of adequate provisions upholding labour rights or safety at work. I harbour this cynicism because while the allegations of lack of safety at work was mainly about the garment industry, almost none of the products of this industry was ever eligible for GSP. Thus, it was like punishing your innocent neighbours for flaws of some other neighbours, although the former group has no nexus to the latter with regard to the flaw in question, apart from the two groups being located in the same neighbourhood.

Accordingly, I, for one, would concur with Mr. Ahmed's diagnosis, but despite agreeing with it, it is disappointing that he has not offered any real explanation for the failure of the so-called intense diplomatic efforts (not to say the spending of public money) made by the Government of Bangladesh to regain GSP in the market of the USA. It is also

possible that the American importers of Bangladeshi products, which benefited from the GSP to Bangladesh, have not been engaged by our lobby groups as much as they could have been. After all, as pointed out by Mr. Mozena, the former Ambassador of the USA to Bangladesh, the import duties are paid by the importers.

While some want to dismiss any link, arguably it is now apparent that the candid (at times bordering on undiplomatic) public remarks of some of our ministers and high-ups in the party in power, have further antagonised the administration of the USA, and now it is evident that those have not done any service to the bid for regaining the GSP. It is also a clear sign that the Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement (TICFA), which was touted as an avenue for improving bilateral strategic and trade relations between the USA and Bangladesh, has achieved nothing on the front of GSP.

GSP is always riddled with the subjectivity of the benefit granting countries. Indeed, trade analysts would recognise that this element of subjectivity is one of the fundamental problems with the GSP regimes. While in theory, it has been set up as a mechanism for promoting economic development, financial, and trade needs of developing and least developed countries; in practice, not so infrequently it has been used as a mechanism for promoting non-trade, social or arguably moral preferences of the benefit granting countries with no direct or discernible linkage to the needs of the beneficiaries of the schemes. For example, the USTR website proudly proclaims "GSP promotes American values." Thus, GSP can always potentially be used as a leverage to pressurise a

regime willing to benefit from the scheme to concede to the demands of the benefit granting country.

The limits of GSP and the leeway granted to GSP granting countries were clearly manifest when India challenged the Drug Arrangements of the EU, granted under its GSP scheme. India claimed that more benefits were

ground (that being the list of the EU was a close-ended one), interpreting the relevant WTO rules in such a way that the preference granting countries can unilaterally determine the list of beneficiaries and criteria for inclusion in the list. And such unilateral determination would not fall foul of the WTO rules on non-discrimination.

While I, as an academic or researcher, may be within my rights (or constrained) to limit my analysis of a perennial problem to its diagnosis, it is dismaying when Mr. Ahmed takes such a limiting route. After all, academics can only ask questions and try to find answers; more often than not it would be beyond their powers to act on those answers and to have any direct bearing on policymaking. Perhaps, one of the age old allegations hurled at the academic approach to many real world problems is that it fails to solve them. Suffice to say that the policymakers with all their clout are expected to accomplish more tangible and practical goals, however daunting those may be. Maybe this ardent need for pragmatism is one of the many points that can make policymaking and diplomatic negotiations an arduous task. Thus, while the value of GSP access to the US market in direct economic terms is nominal (because of the limited coverage of eligible goods with export potential), simply blaming the USA administration would be of little use for our industries. After all, the GSP beneficiary status in the USA has some practical value and that has prompted our policymakers to invest their resources in regaining it.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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From filth to wealth

Recently I have come across news reports which state that the US scientists have found a huge potential from solid human waste. They discovered microscopic nuggets of silver, gold and platinum through electronic scanning at a sewage disposal plant. It is believed that faeces from a million American people can produce precious metals worth around USD 13 million. Considering the large number of population, Bangladesh government should send our scientists and researchers to work and learn from US researchers for getting hands-on expertise on the study and recovery of precious metals from human solid waste.

Engr. S. A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Save the tigers

According to a survey of 2004, there were only 440 tigers left in the Sundarbans. The present figure is much smaller, only 106, which is very depressing. Tigers' skin and other body parts are sold at high prices and that is why poachers kill them. Saving tigers is not just a question of aesthetics; it is an issue that concerns the whole ecosystem of the Sundarbans. Something must be done by the authority concerned to save this endangered species as early as possible.

Zabed Wali
Chittagong

