

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 2, 2015

Weed out the bad elements, says the PM

Leaders should follow her directive

THE Prime Minister has recently given a clear directive to her party leaders to 'weed out' the bad elements of the party as they contradict the ideals upon which the party was founded. In the wake of the disturbing trend of unlawfulness among some of the Chhatra League members and abuse of power by some ruling party members, the cautionary briefing could not have come at a better time.

Only a few days ago Chhatra League students violently swooped on teachers at the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology for their participation in a demonstration thus violating a basic code of conduct that defines student-teacher relations. Reports of student activists allegedly sexually harassing women, being involved in extortion and violence on campus have become commonplace. The main reason for such blatant defiance of the rule of law is the impunity and indulgence these errant members enjoy from their parent body and the law enforcing agencies. It is high time that the party carried out extensive probes to identify the unruly elements and take action against them. In the case of party members being involved in criminal activity, legal action must be taken. Thankfully in recent times some such action appears to have been taken, a trend we hope will continue.

It is now incumbent upon the leaders of the party to follow their party chief's directive and cleanse their organisation of such unwholesome elements that are tainting the image of the party.

Bangladesh remains at the top

Favourite RMG sourcing country

ACCORDING to a recent report by McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting firm, Bangladesh is slated to remain the top sourcing nation for global retail of readymade garments (RMG) for the next five years. It is estimated that the growth of RMG sector in the stated time period will grow at an average of seven to nine percent per annum with Vietnam and India trailing at second and third positions. The report is based on the feedback collected from 40 chief purchasing officers of the top 40 international garment retailers during January and February of this year.

With more than six out of the respondents saying that they intend to increase, not decrease, their orders from Bangladesh over the next five years, the RMG sector in the country is looking forward to years of robust growth. This growth comes primarily at the behest of China, the global leader, which has witnessed the gradual loss of its competitive edge with the rise in labour costs. This is reflected in the fact that 75 percent of the respondents said they intended to decrease their allocation to Chinese firms over the next five years. The fact is that more and more Chinese RMG manufacturers are looking at foreign destinations such as Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar to relocate their production facilities. We should be taking a closer look at the opportunities provided by an expanding Chinese middle class as China, by the sheer size of population, is a massive market to cater for.

COMMENTS

"Bus plunges from Kuril flyover, 3 hurt" (August 31, 2015)

Latifur Rahman Labu

From the photo, it seems that the bus was not fit for running on the roads.

Shahadat Hossain Rafian

What else can we expect from the reckless drivers?

"Goodbye little Casper, goodbye" (August 31, 2015)

Arifin Anik

You suffered a lot at such a young age. Rest in peace, little ghost.

Ziauddin Ahmed

Very sad and shocking.

"Zafar Iqbal shell-shocked" (August 31, 2015)

Shuvonn Rezaa

The VC must resign.

Zayed Rahman

Honourable PM, we are shocked by the activities of your student wing, are you?

Fatiha Tul Jannat Fahima

BCL is trying to demonstrate their power everywhere -- the power they get from AL.

Kalo Jam

Ban any sort of politics in educational institutions immediately. Student politics nowadays is not helping the students.

The illusion called home



RUBANA HUQ

KNOT SO TRUE
SHE was married on August 7, 2015, beaten two days later, and was brought to our home a fortnight later. Fifteen days after her wedding, with a broken finger, she had ended up

working for us. An unusually smart young lady of 19, she seemed efficient and used to do routine work. I am not surprised. She started work when she was eight, "playing" friends with her employer's children of her age. The second house help is also a classic case of a survivor. She has just returned from Dubai and claims that in spite of obtaining a valid "house visa", she did not feel "at home" there and thus returned. A feisty, talkative old woman, she often narrates sad tales of her ambitious, overseas trips. Both of them, ironically, have left their own homes and travelled for a safe refuge... to ours.

Recently, lists of names often pop up in dailies which contain names of the dead, who have perished in either sea or land, while undertaking the perilous journeys. The names often remain relatively unknown. But numbers matter. These men, women and children are mostly starved, often restrained, beaten, and sexually violated, which goes to prove that migration is a complex movement where refugees, and the stateless end up being most uncertain as voyagers.

According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the scale of the movement has tripled since 2012. Now, why is the number of Bangladeshi migrants going up? Why do we find more and more people leaving home? Are they all economic migrants? Or is it something beyond economy? At a recent investment summit in Singapore, your columnist met a number of non-resident Bangladeshis who have been in that foreign space for over 25 years. Most have invested in real estate, a few in restaurants, and a few even import clothing from Bangladesh. At the

end of the summit, a couple of them were given awards and certificates and a few of them happily took pictures, along with their family members, with chief guest, Kofi Annan, the ex Secretary General of the United Nations. By the end of the event, I sensed a sense of innocent pride in them that left me baffled. And I wondered, why is it that we always fail to bring our own ones back home, especially when most of them are just happy with as little as a small photo opportunity?

As much as we take pride in our remittance figures, we also perhaps need to realise that this is earned at the cost of their lives. While our workers sail out to unfamiliar territories and face subhuman working conditions, the foreign lands are, in reality, never home for them. Their identities there are mostly performed and contested. Whether it's a Bangladeshi doctor in Libya, a construction worker in Jeddah, a house maid in Dubai, a flower vendor in Rome, or a business tycoon in Canada, most of them suffer the pangs of hybridity. More and more of us have begun to live in what Edward Said called "a generalised condition of homelessness," in a world where identities are increasingly coming to be differently territorialised. Refugees, migrants, displaced and stateless people are perhaps the first to live out and suffer these realities.

We have inherited these unfortunate realities as a result of many multinational corporations steadily exploiting raw materials, primary goods, and cheap labour of the independent nation-states of the postcolonial "Third World." Laws of the market have historically encouraged the international flow of capital while on the other hand, national immigration policies have ensured that there should be no free (meaning "anarchic", or "disruptive") flow of labour to the high-wage nations belonging to the capitalist core. In case these "rules" are ever violated, the outcome ends up being a case of a binary opposition of oppressor and oppressed, male and female, master and victim. As a result of which, our men and women live unversed in their new homes, suffering interstices of foreign

spaces. Results have been horrific. The last ten days have surfaced with tragic figures of the death toll of Bangladeshi migrants. twenty four were killed while a boats capsized off the Libyan coast en route to Italy; around 78 Bangladeshis were in the two boats that sank with 500 would-be migrants in Mediterranean Sea near Libyan coastal town of Zuwara where the boats had disembarked; Bangladeshi corpses were even found in a parked truck in Austria; liquid from the decomposed bodies was spotted seeping from the vehicle.

While our workers sail out to unfamiliar territories and face subhuman working conditions, the foreign lands are, in reality, never home for them. Their identities there are mostly performed and contested.

Reality is that more of our own people are living outside their place of birth in spite of the share of international migrants in the world population remaining at around a steady 3 percent every year. More than 300,000 people have risked being drowned or suffocated trying to cross the Mediterranean this year in order to find their illusion of a home. 107,500 migrants risked perilous transits in search of a home, and reached EU borders in July. More than 170,000 migrants arrived in Italy in 2014, which was considered to be the largest influx into one country in EU history. 88,000 people crossed the Bay of Bengal since 2014, and 25,000 since 2015. Out of them, according to IOM, excluding the recent incidents, an estimated 2,373 people have died so far this year while trying to reach Europe by sea, and 3,573 in the past 12 months.

Trapped in holds, and dying of asphyxiation, seems to be a new and altered reality for the aspiring migrants. Whether it is Bangladeshis fleeing from Libya after the country's descent into chaos since 2012, whether it's the disastrous political reality of Syria that forces people to escape, whether it's a desperate journey of the sole bread earner in the family to land up in Australia through Malaysia or Indonesia, or whether it's only to go to Malaysia through Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea... all of them risk death.

In spite of all this, stakeholders and member states of EU are reacting differently. A few countries like Hungary is building a new fence along its border with Serbia to control migration; Germany is expecting 800,000 asylum applications this year; Berlin, backed by Austria, wants a new state of mandatory quotas for refugees while UNHCR is expecting 3,000 people a day to enter Macedonia from Greece until at least the end of the year.

Many of us hop into airplanes and have the privilege of crossing skies with ease; many of us undertake cruises and enter foreign lands with prestige. But at the other end of the tunnel, there are millions who come dangerously close to the smell of death while trying to leave their native lands, in quest of a new identity in a new nation-space. These are the same people who experience a profound sense of a loss of territorial roots, and an erosion of the cultural distinctiveness. While Radcliffe drew the line with a 2HB pencil and partitioned us in 1947, he also gave birth to thousands of people seeking to reconcile with a treacherous in-between-homelessness. And while many academically refer to the pulverised space of postmodernity and contest geographical lines, the image of Felani pinned on a barbed wire fence is still hauntingly fresh in our memories. Many of us have been on the run for far too long. Since fences kill and borders eliminate, maybe now is the time to come home.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

China's political interventions



KOICHI HAMADA

The Asian Convergence
IN the last week or so, stock markets around the world have been hit by an upsurge in volatility, with large price swings confronting traders in New York, Tokyo, London, and beyond. And the entire global financial spasm has been largely blamed on a single culprit: China.

In a free economy, market mechanisms can produce stability or instability. An increase in the price of a tangible good would typically cause demand to fall, leading the market toward a new equilibrium. By contrast, an increase in the price of an asset like a stock raises expectations of a further increase, causing demand to rise, potentially to excessively high levels.

In a planned economy like China's, where policymakers use various tools to influence asset prices, such instability could, in theory, be avoided; indeed, the Marxist view is that government intervention to stop crises is precisely why controlled economies are superior to their free-market counterparts. But, in practice, that does not seem to be the case.

So-called price-keeping operations by China's monetary authorities (an approach tried in Japan in the early 1990s) are presumably the reason why the domestic stock market rose sharply over the last year, far beyond the levels warranted by the country's economic fundamentals. The recent stock-market plunge suggests that investors have con-

cluded that equity prices have become unsustainable.

Yet, the Chinese government has remained committed to intervention, responding to the correction with heavy-handed, politically motivated measures, including the complete suspension of trading of many companies' stocks. The move seemed to have halted the further deterioration of the Shanghai stock market. But the effect was only temporary; on August 24, the market fell by 8.5 percent, the largest drop since 2007.

The long-term systemic impact of China's interventionist approach may be even more serious than the stock market's current decline. Few want to invest in a market where the government can change the rules of the game at any time, especially if they have had first-hand experience of being blocked from trading at a crucial moment. To make matters worse, Chinese investors do not have the same access to information that investors in other markets do. Can a highly organ-

ised financial market like the one that is emerging in Shanghai ever be compatible with an authoritarian regime?

Another recent intervention by the Chinese authorities - gradual appreciation, followed by the unexpected devaluation of the renminbi - raises similar questions. To be sure, the first part of the move was probably motivated largely by the desire to strengthen markets' role in setting the exchange rate, which promises to boost long-term stability and improve the renminbi's chances of

becoming a global reserve currency. But, as the recent devaluation showed, the shift, coming after years of efforts to strengthen the renminbi, could fuel a sharp increase in volatility in world currency markets.

Of course, the renminbi's recent depreciation was much smaller than the de facto currency devaluations engineered by the United States and the United Kingdom after the financial crisis of 2008. It was also nowhere near as significant as the devaluation that the Bank of Japan has pursued since 2012. But the fact that the renminbi has been so highly managed, together with its history of steady appreciation, meant that the sudden devaluation had a more significant effect on the market than the US, British, and Japanese moves, all of which were communicated better in advance.

Still, warnings that renminbi devaluation will spark a "currency war" are unwarranted. Under the flexible exchange-rate system that now prevails around the world, if each country focuses its monetary policy on achieving ideal inflation and employment conditions at home, the result will be reasonably stable - or even so-called Pareto-optimal - macroeconomic conditions. To be sure, the US may respond to China's devaluation by postponing interest-rate hikes or moderating the pace of its withdrawal from quantitative easing, and Japan may intensify its own QE to cope with negative spillovers. But competitive cumulative devaluations will not arise.

Nonetheless, recent events should compel China's leaders to reconsider the extent to which they control the country's economy. If they maintain their secretive decision-making and continue to manipulate the price system for political ends, their chances of building a stable, resilient, and market-oriented economy, underpinned by a major international reserve currency, will be seriously compromised.

The writer is Special Economic Adviser to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Professor Emeritus of Economics at Yale University and at the University of Tokyo.

Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2015.

www.project-syndicate.org

Exclusive to The Daily Star

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Scarce rabies vaccine in Chittagong division

Recently I came across news reports which stated that in the rural areas of Chittagong, poor victims of dog bites have to travel all the way to the port city because only two hospitals there provide free rabies vaccine. There are cases where patients died because of not taking vaccine on time as the patient and their family could not afford the costs and turned to local quacks or 'ojhas.' This is very unfortunate indeed.

Rabies is a hundred percent vaccine-preventable disease. The government should increase rabies vaccine supply in Chittagong division's hospitals to save patients from untimely death.

Hashem Miah
Chittagong

Keeping Dhaka clean is everyone's duty

I want to commend the writer of the news analysis "Dhaka vs Kolkata" (August 25, 2015) for plainly setting up the undeniable fact that Dhaka is indeed one of the worst cities in the world. While other major cities in Asia are making advancements, Dhaka is only falling behind and getting worse every year. I marvel at how the authorities and officials concerned can see such deplorable conditions in the city day in and day out.

While there is very little that ordinary citizens can do in terms of creating designated waste dumping grounds and recycling the waste, it doesn't mean that they haven't any responsibility at all. Can't we, the citizens, start a public campaign in keeping Dhaka clean and eradicating habits such as public urination and littering? I marvel at how the elite class in our city is comforted by luxury cars and residents, and never take a look at their surroundings. It is up to us to decide how filthy a city we are willing to live in. We crossed all limits a long time ago.

Naheed
On e-mail