

Negotiating levy-free work a must

Malaysia should reconsider its decision

MALAYSIA will now take Bangladeshi workers for all sectors including construction, industries, services and plantations. While that is good news, the latest decision of the Malaysian government to slap an annual levy on expatriate workers spells trouble for Bangladeshi workers working, or intending to work, in Malaysia. Previously this levy used to be paid by employers; the new rules put the burden on workers directly. Unless the government is successful in negotiating with Malaysia to keep our workers out of the new levy system, a Bangladeshi worker engaged in construction and manufacturing sectors will have to cough up Tk 47,205 every year to work in that country.

Needless to say, how Malaysia conducts its financial matters is its business. But we must stress that as a rich country, Malaysia should take into consideration that our workers emigrating to work abroad come mostly from poorer backgrounds. They literally sell or mortgage the few fixed assets they have to work under very strenuous circumstances in countries like Malaysia to send back crucial foreign exchange to Bangladesh – an essential prerequisite that drives our economy.

Hence, the move to slap a levy on workers from Bangladesh, we feel, is an unreasonable move. Certainly such an extra burden will cause an increase in migration costs which is already one of the most expensive in the world. It could also potentially put a dampening effect on transforming Malaysia as an attractive foreign labour market for our workers. Surely, the case for exemption is strong enough for a rethink and renegotiation.

Rampant tree felling in national park

Evict illegal sawmills

WE are outraged at the news of unbridled tree plundering in the reserved area of Kadirgah National Park in Mymensingh. And it is happening before the eyes of forest officials! There are over 50 sawmills that have sprouted around the forest area where the illegally collected trees are being processed.

In 2010, the government declared 80.5 acres of land of Kadirgah and Palgaon areas as a National Park to save gazari trees, wild life and birds from extinction. But a section of local people have been destroying gazari and other valuable trees of the forest with impunity. This unmindful act has also been adversely affecting the wildlife of the Park which has been declining dramatically.

We wonder what the forest officials are doing there. It is alleged that some unscrupulous officials and employees of the forest department are involved in the illegal timber business. According to a local beat official the district administration has also been informed about these illegal sawmills several times but they are yet to take any action against them.

The government should look into the issue seriously and take stern action against the corrupt forest officials. The local administration should immediately conduct an eviction drive and clear the forest area off illegal sawmills and furniture shops. Saying we are committed to protecting the environment rings hollow when we allow our forests to be denuded in this way.

COMMENTS

“There'll be no more question paper leak: Nahid”
(February 2, 2016)

Raabee Mahtab

Let's hope the minister delivers on his promise.

“BNP to make list of 1971 martyrs”
(February 1, 2016)

Syed Najmul Hussain

When they were in power for 14 long years, they didn't do anything to try the war criminals. On the contrary, they included the branded 'war criminals' into their fold to share the bliss of the state power.

But when Awami League began to try these criminals, they shamelessly started raising their voice against the process demanding a 'fair trial'. When they were in state power, they never debated on the numbers of the martyrs, but as soon as Pakistan denied the genocide committed during the Liberation War, they began to make the whole issue controversial.

Hasan Ahmed Chowdhury

Good, it will be justice towards those who sacrificed their lives for a free country.

Sabbir Hossain

What did you do when you were in power? Why didn't you do it then?

MUHAMMAD RUHUL AMIN

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina seems to have inaugurated a brilliant chapter in the country's development history by shifting its aid-focused policy to an investment-oriented strategy. I've been inspired by her life-awakening call to domestic and global investors to “grab business opportunities in Bangladesh” through her seminal speech at the Bangladesh Investment and Policy Summit, which started on January 24. The summit doesn't simply give me a picture of a business gathering, but provides prismatic colours that can orchestrate our long-awaited but grossly unattended vision towards national development. The summit theme, as outlined by the Prime Minister, provides the framework, policy and direction of a sustainable development strategy.

Let's have a brief look at economic theory. Most literature on the development of least developed countries (LDCs) like Bangladesh argue that a country can't elevate unless its industrialisation process takes root through a flourishing spree of privatisation which is considered as the gateway of growth and development of the countries all around the globe. Privatisation is, in reality, a component of World Bank prescribed structural adjustment programmes based on notions of economic liberalisation, free trade, competition and limited government intervention. Theoretically speaking, there are thus pro-privatisation and anti-privatisation arguments among many of us. Economists such as Maxim Boycko, Andrei Shleifer and Robert W. Vishny suggest that the theory of privatisation leads to efficient restructuring of firms. Moreover, privatisation is more effective when combined with a tight monetary policy, and when the new owners of firms are profit maximising investors, rather than their employees or even managers.

Although the initial impetus of our privatisation was a result of heavy losses of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), it is now considered an effective economic agenda for sustainable development. This school believes that privatisation stimulates a country's growth by raising the efficiency of the enterprises, creating competition among industrial units, acquiring modern technology, safeguarding the wastage of scarce

FROM AID TO INVESTMENT

A paradigm shift in Sheikh Hasina's development policy

resources, preventing budgetary pressure, attaining macro-economic stability and above all, keeping pace with the tide of globalisation. Sheikh Hasina's investment-led privatisation model doesn't seem to be based on sole privatisation which, as some critics may warn, leads to old stereotyped capitalism. Nor does it advocate vulgar nationalisation. It moves to the balanced paradigm between the two extremes in which the secret of success of any development effort lies.

Through the investment summit, the organisers as well as the participants are formulating a policy plan and operational strategy of implementing above economic theory. A roadmap of how Bangladesh economy can achieve expected growth from investment-centred industrialisation policy can be of great importance.

The summit has been organised jointly

condition. Serious government attention needs to be laid on the development of roads, high-ways, transportation, business plants, and economics zones, generation of gas and electricity so on et al. Focusing her policy to that end, Sheikh Hasina has argued that public-private partnership in infrastructure investment offers a new window of opportunity for investors while the existing Export Processing Zones and Special Economic Zones are being expanded for competitive manufacturing in local and global markets. The Prime Minister's declaration to establish Bangladesh Development Authority for the simplification of investment procedure might be an important task ahead. The government plan to set up one hundred economic zones should immediately be implemented in order to create congenial atmosphere for investment.

The smooth process of privatisation. The business stages from license – giving to plant-setting to business operations – all are, on many occasions, dependent some way or the other on political boon. Moreover, the red-tapism and bureaucratic complexities should also be removed. Too many restrictions discourage the investors. Thanks to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her guarantee of security and profitability of investment in Bangladesh. But these utterances have to be substantiated with action-oriented policies and effective implementation.

Fourth, all sorts of tariffs and non-tariff barriers for Bangladeshi investors in foreign countries need to be removed in order to strengthen equal opportunities for both domestic and foreign businesses. Domestic savings - both individual and national - must be encouraged and to that end, citizens should avoid excessive expenditures. It is wrong that we invite and depend on only foreign investments. We must strengthen our own investments through wide-savings so that we can build up solid domestic-foreign collaboration through investments and business.

Last but not the least, Bangladesh should gear up business research and development studies. Mere establishment of Private Sector Development Policy Coordination Committee (PSDPCC) is not enough to meet the demand of research and study for systematic, research-backed and fact-based business operations.

According to known sources, around forty thousand foreigners are working in key-executive positions in different manufacturing and industrial sectors. Time is now to prepare our own graduates by providing the required education and training so that they can shoulder the responsibilities of these business organisations. That will check the lawful and unlawful cash outflow from Bangladesh and be a great contributing factor for the investment-oriented growth and development strategies. The opening speech of the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will be enshrined in the annals of the history of the sustainable development of Bangladesh.

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The investors – both foreign and domestic – are scared to invest in expensive and long-life projects due to the increasing insecurity and disorder. The public order management, police patrol and intelligence need to go through a major overhaul.

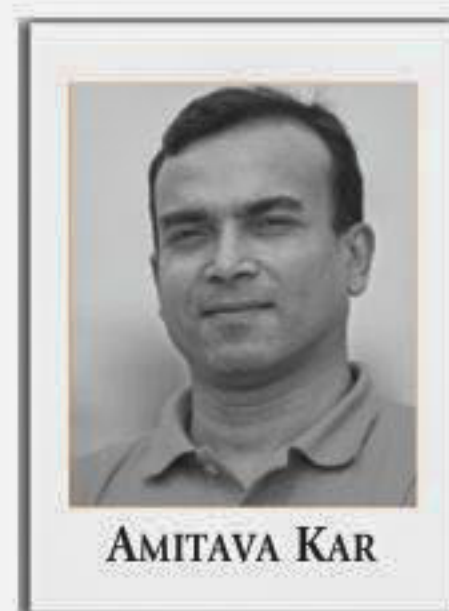
by the Board of Investment (BoI), Business Initiative Leading Development (BUILD), and Prime minister's Office (PMO). The incorporation of all three super-sensitive business organs structures an all-inclusive investment and trade policy that might open up multifarious avenues of investment for business boom. The participation of more than a hundred domestic and foreign investors as well as global financial organisations, such as the World Bank and the International Financial Corporation (IFC), brings an opportune moment for investors to consider the summit as the most appropriate platform to invest in Bangladesh.

However, in order to execute the policies detailed in the summit, the Government of Bangladesh must give attention to eradicate the barriers to investment. First, no investment can be effective in a bad infrastructural

Second, deteriorating law and order situation of our country poses a severe challenge. The front pages of daily newspapers are splashed with dreadful news of killings, hijacking, robbery, terror attacks, road accidents, traffic jams and traffic congestions due to shutdowns and political demonstrations. The investors – both foreign and domestic – are scared to invest in expensive and long-life projects due to the increasing insecurity and disorder. The public order management, police patrol and intelligence need to go through a major overhaul. Despite a few government steps towards containing terrorism, there is enormous scope to broaden anti-terror preventive measures. Social awareness through radio, electronic and print media can play a very effective role in combating these disorders.

Third, politicisation and political muscle-flexing in achieving undue financial gains from the investors obstruct

Germany's Cologne Test



AMITAVA KAR

GERMAN Chancellor or Angela Merkel seemed all set to regain control of Germany's polarising debate over refugees. In her New Year's Eve address, broadcast with Arabic and English subtitles for the first time, she struck the right note by urging Germans not to be divided and warned of “those who, with coldness or even hatred in their hearts, lay sole claim to be German and seek to exclude others”. She also reminded the 1 million plus asylum seekers who arrived in her country last year to respect German rules and traditions.

As Merkel was busy being the conscience of Europe and by extension, the world, about a thousand men, mainly of African, Middle Eastern and Balkan descent, started gathering between Cologne's railway station and cathedral where celebrations were about to begin. Then they set upon the women, groping them, stripping them of clothing and valuables. One woman was raped. Witnesses said they had never seen anything like this in a German city.

The assaults played right into the hands of xenophobes. Thugs roamed the streets attacking foreigners, injuring at least two Pakistanis and a Syrian. According to a survey by INSA, a pollster, more than 60 percent of responders think that there are too many asylum-seekers in Germany while only 29 percent still agree with Merkel's liberal policy. Skeptics are not only on the populist right. A leading feminist said that Germany is “naively importing male violence, sexism and anti-Semitism.”

So far Merkel and her coalition parties have responded by talking tough, suggesting that asylum-seekers who commit crimes would be deported. Even the Social Democrats, her centre-left coalition partners, want to crack down hard. Sigmar Gabriel, their party leader, wants offenders to serve their prison time in their home countries to spare German taxpayers. Finland and Sweden have followed suit announcing plans to deport tens of thousands of people in a bid to contain the migrant crisis.

Germany cannot and should not try to deport its way out of this situation. First,

it is not clear how many of the attackers can be identified. Second, Germany typically cannot deport criminals with sentences of less than three years; the sexual offences in Cologne mainly fell short of rape, and would carry lighter sentences than that. Earlier this month the interior minister and the justice minister said they would expand the definition of rape and lower the deportation threshold. But the Geneva conventions forbid deporting people to a country where they face persecution.

code—and in turn, more likely to violate it.

Neither the cultural backgrounds of the male refugees nor the fact that they are traumatised, desperate, and angry can be an excuse for abusing women. By the same token, the criminal acts of a few hundred men are not an excuse for abdicating responsibility in the face of a human tragedy that has engulfed millions.

Many are quick to claim that they were right when they said it was a blunder to

law-abiding people and who came to Germany seeking safety for themselves and their families. We cannot blame them for trying to find a better life. In their situation, we would do the same. But in no platform or forum a key question is ever asked, as pointed out by Peter Singer, the Australian moral philosopher and Chair Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University: Why should someone who is able to travel to another country have priority over others who are in refugee camps and unable to travel?



Police use pepper spray against supporters of anti-immigration right-wing movement PEGIDA during a demonstration march, in reaction to mass assaults on women on New Year's Eve, in Cologne, Germany, January 9, 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Finally, countries of origin must cooperate; many don't.

Much is still hazy about that night. How could so many people commit such a horrific act together? A prominent study on mob mentality authored by Mina Cikara of Harvard and Adrianna Jenkins of the University of California might shed some light on the issue. The study suggests that being swept up in the excitement of a crowd can make people lose touch with their personal moral

open Germany's doors to so many asylum seekers, unfamiliar with its culture. But that's to say that violating women is okay in the countries they came from. Is it really? Among the first list of suspects issued by the federal police were also three Germans and an American. No one has argued that Germans and Americans are savages who do not know how to treat women with respect.

Among the forgotten victims of Cologne are the many migrants who are

The men who assaulted the women in Cologne committed a serious crime and they should feel the full force of the law. “What happened here on New Year's Eve is terrible, but it's a criminal matter,” said Claus-Ulrich Proelss, director of Cologne's Refugee Council which coordinates assistance to migrants in the city. “Treating it like a migration issue only creates more problems.”

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