

What a regressive mentality!

Double trauma for a rape victim

It can only be described as an exhibition of the most decrepit mind of the authorities of a high school in Habiganj that have barred a young girl from taking her final exams. Her fault – she may be the victim of rape and the school committee have pinned the blame entirely on her, casting aspersions on her character. This reinforces the common perception prevalent in the country that it is the victim who is responsible for being sexually assaulted.

The school authorities have our fullest contempt. What right do they have to not only accuse her of bad reputation but indirectly blame her for her plight? It is the fundamental right of any girl to seek education. And not only has she been denied that, the minimum of sensitivity that a victim of rape deserves and which is often missing in our society has been denied her also. To think that the school authorities, which we presume are made up of civilised people, should behave in this most despicable manner is beyond our imagination.

We demand that the local administration, including the local education officer, address the matter with urgency. The headmaster must also be held to account for his unacceptable behaviour with regard to a student of his school, whose situation required a more sensitive and humane approach than he has displayed. Although the school authorities eventually allowed the victim to sit for her exams, the question is why did she have to go through such humiliation by them in the first place? In the same vein, the police must do everything to arrest the alleged rapists and bring them to justice along with the person who was complicit in the rape.

Plague of institutionalised corruption

Deadweight around the nation's neck

THE Pabna Zila Parishad's criminal mismanagement of funds is representative of most government projects where huge sums of taxpayers' money are spent, but no substance is produced. Official documents, for example, falsely show an expense of Tk 8 lakh on a brand new sound system that was never set up. They also show a tree-plantation project worth Tk 5 lakh at a university which only had two trees planted on campus. And, of course, there are countless other such examples to draw from.

But what all this shows is that the level of corruption infesting in these institutions is simply beyond belief. According to reports, local Awami League men and people close to the zila parishad administrator, for instance, were awarded development work without tenders in most cases which, of course, paves the way for such corruption. And what it also does is turn state institutions into rackets serving select individuals at the expense of the general public. They are not only forced to fill up the coffers of these shameless individuals through taxes with their hard earned money, but are then denied the benefit of their money being used for productive purposes.

Is this any way of building a nation? The story, however, does not end there; large chunks of money constantly go missing even from development funds meant to build schools for young children.

As long as the administration continues to turn a blind eye to such corruption simply because ruling party men and powerful individuals are involved in it, this plague will continue to be a deadweight impeding the country's move forward. We call on the authorities to punish these corrupt individuals exemplarily.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Paradigm shift in teaching

It is common in our schools and colleges for teachers to deliver boring lectures. Whatever the subject, instructors tend to use antiquated lecture methods.

Learning occurs best when the students remain at the core of the teaching-learning process, interacting and playing a significant role in the process themselves. Each student has different individual needs. Some may have a flair for writing while others may be better with mathematics, etc. Nobody should be labelled as a fool or as a superman possessing all kinds of intelligence.

A good facilitator must address every single student's demand of learning and focus on their special inclinations and interests – an admittedly herculean task. But this is how we can evolve from archaic teaching methods and correctly guide the future luminaries.

Muhammad Sohrab Husain
Victoria University of Bangladesh

Parents' harassment of home tutors

A large number of people from poor or middle class families bear their daily expenses by serving as a home tutor. However, a lot of parents pay the tutors' salaries after more than half of the month has passed. Others terminate the service within a day's notice, leaving the tutors with no way to pay the mess rent, meal charge, electricity and water bill, which are due within the fifth day of each month. They fail to realise how this kind of behaviour also ingrains the young students with the notion that such exploitation is acceptable.

Rasel
Barisal University

MYANMAR'S ETHNIC CLEANSING

A deterrent to regional development

MACRO MIRROR



FAHMIDA KHATUN

FOLLOWING the end of almost fifty years of military rule in Myanmar and the release of the Nobel Laureate leader Aung San Suu Kyi in 2011, the world had looked at the country with much enthusiasm. The quasi-civilian new government brought some hope for the country to return to democracy as well as economic progress. Even with rich natural resources including land, forests, minerals, oil and gas, the country remained poor and could achieve a per capita income of only USD 1,197 in 2011. So once freed from the military regime, with a view to modernise its economy, Myanmar embraced economic openness and initiated reforms in areas such as currency exchange rates, taxation, foreign investment laws and anti-corruption. Several countries, including those which isolated the nation through economic sanctions such as the US and the European Union, saw opportunities to rebuild economic ties with Myanmar. Political leaders from the US, Europe, Japan, Australia, China, India, Thailand, Bangladesh and many other countries flew in, investors rushed and businessmen flocked into the country to explore its untapped resources. International endorsements revived the country's confidence and growth prospects. Its GDP grew by more than 7 percent in the last couple of years.

The victory of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy in the election of November 2015 was considered to be another step towards re-establishment of the democratic process in the country. Unfortunately, this has not changed the political ideology of the country when it comes to dealing with the Rohingya minority. Suu Kyi's upper hand in Myanmar's politics has not changed the old image of a nation violent against the Rohingya population. In recent times, the unspeakable atrocities against the Rohingya population in the Rakhine state by the security forces of Myanmar have reinforced this image. Shockingly, while the world watches with horror as Myanmar's army shoot innocent people, burn their houses and abuse women and children, Suu Kyi, the icon of democracy and human rights remains a quiet spectator of this brutality.

The Muslim Rohingya population has long been marginalised. They are the poorest community of Myanmar, with little or no health, education and other basic facilities. They are a stateless ethnic minority, as

they are not even recognised officially. They are denied citizenship, even though they were born and have been living in Myanmar for generations. Tellingly, some Buddhist monks, who are generally perceived to be non-violent and do not support killing, also take part in this abuse of the Rohingyas. Had such a crime been committed by a majority Muslim community, they would have been immediately branded 'terrorists' or human rights abusers, and taken to task by the international community. The cruelty of Buddhist monks only reiterates that extremism has nothing to do with religion. It can take root in anyone with an extreme sense of nationalism and intolerance.

Bangladesh has a 193-kilometres long border with Myanmar. Being its next door neighbour, Bangladesh bears the brunt of Myanmar's brutality against Rohingyas. Thousands of Rohingyas have already

equally.

Bangladesh is also connected with Myanmar through various sub-regional cooperation initiatives. These include the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) launched in 1997, and the Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor initiative launched in 1999. Both these initiatives have high potential for economic advancement in the region through greater market access for goods and services, investment in infrastructure development, energy cooperation and higher connectivity. The BIMSTEC region has a GDP of about USD 2.7 trillion and a population size of around 1.3 billion. The BCIM sub-region, with a population of about 440 million, has potential for intra-regional trade



ILLUSTRATION :CAVEMUM

entered Bangladesh. Several thousand others are waiting to cross to this side. From a humanitarian point of view, we cannot close our border. But Bangladesh itself is a poor and populous country with limited capacity. It requires both financial and managerial capacity to deal with the pressure of such large inflows of Rohingya refugees. Repatriation of these refugees will require political and economic efforts. There are security issues as well.

From 1978-79 and 1992-94, Bangladesh had to deal with a similar situation. And the flow of Rohingyas into Bangladesh and their illegal residence here has continued. Desperation has led them to disguise their identity. Several Burmese are working in Saudi Arabia as Bangladeshi labourers, and thus Bangladesh runs the risk of being liable for any unwanted acts of those migrants.

Myanmar should not take Bangladesh's magnanimity for granted, and continue to push Rohingyas here. If Myanmar wants to prosper and be part of regional and sub-regional initiatives, it has to change its perspective and make place for all its ethnic groups and treat them

equivalent to USD 125 billion.

Till now, none of these initiatives have taken off in a meaningful way due to lack of political commitment. With political relationships getting worse due to violence against Rohingyas, there is little hope of an improved situation. After all, regional economic cooperation cannot take place in a void. Peace and security are preconditions for regional success. Two giant Asian economies, India and China, have active interest in both Bangladesh and Myanmar. It is time for them to play their role to uphold the spirit of humanity. For decades, Myanmar has either ignored or refused to sign various international treaties that protect human rights, such as the United Nations Convention against Torture, and thus, it has found a convenient excuse to get away with such humanitarian crimes. It is also therefore time for the international community to take actions to stop such barbarism against innocent Rohingyas.

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

How to make Special Economic Zones successful

SELIM RAIHAN

SPECIAL Economic Zones (SEZs) are geographically delineated 'enclaves' in which regulations and practices related to business and trade differ from the rest of the country and therefore all the units therein enjoy special privileges. SEZs can generate both static and dynamic benefits. Static benefits include employment creation, export growth and rise in government revenues; whereas dynamic benefits include economic diversification, innovation and transfer of technology through foreign direct investment (FDI), and skills upgrading.

The basic idea of SEZs emerges from the fact that, while it might be very difficult to dramatically improve infrastructure and business environment of the overall economy 'overnight', SEZs can be built in a much shorter time, and they can work as efficient enclaves to solve these problems. With these aforementioned objectives in consideration, Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) was instituted by the government in November 2010, based on the Bangladesh Economic Zones Act, 2010, with the aim of establishing 100 SEZs across the country by 2030.

Weak infrastructure and poor business environment are critical problems for Bangladesh in attracting both domestic investment and FDI. According to the 2017 Doing Business index of the World Bank, Bangladesh ranks 176th among 190 countries. In terms of sub-components of the Doing Business index, Bangladesh's worst performances are observed in the areas of 'enforcing contracts', 'getting electricity' and 'registering property' with rankings of 189th, 187th and 185th respectively.

There is no denying that rapid and sustained economic growth is very important for the Bangladesh economy on its way to becoming a middle income country. The importance of SEZs, aimed at propelling both domestic investment and FDI for rapid and sustained

economic growth in Bangladesh, can't be undermined. However, to make the SEZ initiatives successful, several issues need to be addressed carefully.

First, SEZs have to deliver what they promise. The standards of infrastructure and business environment within SEZs have to be up to the global standard. Delays in implementation and unsatisfactory delivery of services would make the SEZs unsuccessful. One important issue related to the faster implementation of SEZs is the solution of the land issue. In Bangladesh, with a huge scarcity of land and overwhelming disputes over land, this will however

overall economy can't be overlooked. If there are vast differences in the quality of infrastructure and business environment between SEZs and rest of the economy, then excessive and continued external support would be needed for the survival of SEZs, which can have large financial implications.

Third, the SEZs would need to be connected to 'efficient' sea and land ports. Otherwise, many of the benefits of the SEZs would be lost. Therefore, port infrastructure and its efficiency would need to be improved substantially. Furthermore, the quality of roads, connecting SEZs and ports, would need

While SEZs are aimed at creating 'efficient' enclaves, improvements in the business environment and infrastructure of the overall economy can't be overlooked. If there are vast differences in the quality of infrastructure and business environment between SEZs and rest of the economy, then excessive and continued external support would be needed for the survival of SEZs, which can have large financial implications.

remain a big challenge. In this context, the contrasting experiences of China and India are very relevant. While China was very successful in establishing well-functioning SEZs by effectively addressing infrastructural and land issues, India in most cases failed to do the same. It is, therefore, very important to understand why India's SEZs haven't been successful so far, and what lessons Bangladesh can draw from those experiences.

Second, while SEZs are aimed at creating 'efficient' enclaves, improvements in the business environment and infrastructure of the

to be upgraded. In contrast to India, China's success was in establishing SEZs nearby efficient ports and developing much improved road networks connecting SEZs with those ports. Likewise, SEZs in Bangladesh should also be located keeping in mind the ongoing efforts of regional connectivity and economic corridors involving many South and Southeast Asian countries.

Fourth, SEZs in Bangladesh should aim for facilitating economic and export diversification leading to progressive structural transformation of the economy. Emphasis should be on production of high value-added and

diversified products. Therefore, sectors with high potentials of economic and export diversification should get the priority in the SEZs.

Fifth, with respect to the question on which sectors to get the priority in SEZs, it should be kept in mind that apart from very weak country-wide infrastructural and business environment related problems, many potential sectors also suffer from some very sector-specific problems. Unless and until these sector specific problems are solved, many potential sectors would not be able to enjoy a large part of the opportunities provided by the SEZs, and the prospect of economic diversification would be lost.

Sixth, the whole issue of the management of SEZs is very important. The gravity of institutional aspects for the well-functioning of SEZs can't be underestimated. Therefore, it has to be ensured that the institutions governing the operations of SEZs are competent enough.

Seventh, the government has invited Japan, China and India to set up SEZs, and these countries have also shown their interests in doing so. If properly materialised, these SEZs will have the potentials of receiving substantial FDIs from these countries. However, given the dismal experience of the Korean export processing zone (EPZ) in Bangladesh, it is very important that the government understands what went wrong with the Korean EPZ, and necessary measures are undertaken to avoid such lapses in the future.

Finally, there is a need for strong commitment from the political elite in Bangladesh for necessary economic and institutional reforms towards realising the bright prospects of SEZs. In this context, political stability and avoidance of economic policy reversal can ensure the success of the SEZs.

The writer is Professor at Department of Economics, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Executive Director, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM). Email: selim.raihan@econdu.ac.bd.