

WHAT THE PAPERS SAY

A WEEKLY ROUND UP OF ARTICLES ABOUT EMPLOYMENT, THE LABOUR MARKET, SKILLS TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

THIS WEEK IN THE BANGLADESH ENGLISH PRESS...

FOREIGN INVESTORS AND LOCAL BUSINESSES STILL SEEK COMMON GROUND IN THE APPAREL INDUSTRY:

Thursday's Financial Express leads with news of a conference on compliance in the ready-made garments industry. This has been a long-standing issue around labour regulations and working conditions. The conference organized by a German foundation and a Bangladesh research group once again highlighted how local suppliers are struggling to meet the demands of foreign buyers. Business owners said that the tight prices demanded by buyers left little room to invest in bringing factories into line with the standards required by foreign buyers.

Trade advisors from foreign diplomatic missions and representatives of the research group hosting the conference once again emphasized that Bangladeshi manufacturers have no choice but to comply if they want to continue to do business with European and North American businesses.

But research does show that Bangladesh is a low cost supplier only because wages are low. Capital costs and other service costs are comparatively higher than Bangladesh's competitors in the region.

In related news the front page of Thursday's Independent reports on a visit of the United States Ambassador to two garments factories just outside Dhaka in Gazipur. The article focused on Bangladesh's exclusion from the general system of preferences in June 2013 following the Rana Plaza collapse and Tazreen Fashions fire where 1200 people, mostly garments workers, lost their lives. Despite these tragic incidents local business leaders felt that the United States was discriminating against Bangladesh. The Ambassador acknowledged that Bangladesh continued to make good progress around working conditions and she hoped that this would lead to acceptance into the general system of preferences.

MIGRANT WORKERS FOR MALAYSIA:

The Daily Star ran a three-part commentary this week on recruiting Bangladeshi migrants for work in Malaysia. The paper identifies failings in both past and present arrangements and criticizes employers, recruitment agencies and government departments in Malaysia.

Despite what appears to be a mutually beneficial position of high demand for labour in Malaysia and a large number of Bangladeshis willing to work there, the paper alludes to inefficiencies and alleges corruption in the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers.

This series of articles is set in the context of the recent migrant crisis involving hundreds of Bangladeshi and Burmese nationals attempting to land by sea on Malaysian territory. The paper argues that the restriction of legal migration opportunities has led to these uncontrolled flows of migrants from Bangladesh.

No doubt the arrival this week of a delegation from Malaysia headed by its immigration department will try to address these problems. Hopefully Bangladeshis will find legal work opportunities in Malaysia and be freed from traffickers and extortionists.

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY CELEBRATED

August 12th is International Youth Day and, in its Population Series, The Daily Star puts the 52 million Bangladeshi youths at the centre of the country's development. We have to bear in mind that Bangladesh defines youth as running from age 18 to 35.

Run in conjunction with the United Nations Population Fund (or UNFPA), this article argues that the potential of this demographic group will only be realized with appropriate investments in education and training. Without these interventions levels of workforce participation and productivity will disappoint.

Going beyond youth as a mere economic resource, several United Nation programmes, among others, aim to educate, empower and engage young people in democracy and governance.

Although not reported this week, the International Labor Office's recent survey of youth-to-work transitions points back to fundamental economic issues. The ILO warns, "it's not easy time to be a young person in the labour market today," and reaffirms what is well known:

The ability of rural youth to achieve successful transitions [from education to employment] depends on several factors, but most notably on the quality of schooling, the match between schooling and labour market demands, economic opportunity and the protection of workers' rights and the prevention of abuse.

FALSE DOCUMENTS DAMAGE OVERSEAS JOB PROSPECTS:

On its Wednesday back page The Independent warns that incidents of Bangladeshis in commercial shipping jobs using false papers is having severe consequences. A number of countries have said they do not want to offer work to Bangladeshi nationals. Sadly there are also incidents of Bangladeshis working on ships that have disappeared when a ship has been in port. One country has made a complaint to the International Maritime Organization while another has stopped issuing visas to Bangladeshis.