

Allow unused public land to build industrial zones

Business leaders urge govt at MCCI discussion

Star Business Report



From left, Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, president of FBCCI; Amir Hossain Amu, industries minister; AMA Muhith, finance minister; Rokia Afzal Rahman, president of MCCI; and Tofail Ahmed, commerce minister, attend a meeting with the business community organised by MCCI in Dhaka yesterday. Photo: Star

Business leaders yesterday urged the government to set up industrial zones with adequate utility and **infrastructure facilities in unused public land** and on the premises of closed nationalised mills.

Setting up industrial zones in such a manner will save arable land and accelerate industrialisation, they said.

The businesses also called for reducing bank interest rates, maintaining political stability and creating a business friendly environment.

The demands came at a meeting of the business community with three key ministers, organised by Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) at its office in Dhaka.

The ministers said they will consider some of the valid recommendations.

Syed Manzur Elahi, chairman of Apex Group, said industrial plants are being set up using farm land. “So, we need industrial zones immediately.”

Chinese entrepreneurs are planning to relocate their factories to other countries including Bangladesh due to rising production costs in their country, he said. “But they are not getting suitable land in Bangladesh.”

On the under-construction 'leather estate' in Savar, he said: “If the factories are not relocated there, the government should cancel allotments of the lands.”

Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said industrial zones can be set up in the lands of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC).

“And we have to set up the industrial zones in a planned way.”

However, AK Azad, a former president of the FBCCI, said setting up the industrial zones is not enough; electricity and gas connections will also have to be ensured.

The government has initiated steps to set up special economic zones in seven districts, but there is no progress in the work, he added.

Azad, also president of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries, said the jute sector should be allowed to use the 'export development fund' so that it is revived and can earn more foreign currency.

“We should also send a positive message to the world that political stability is prevailing in the country.”

Mahbubul Alam, president of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the government should at first complete the four-lane highway between Dhaka and Chittagong immediately and then focus on an expressway.

Mahbubur Rahman, president of International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh, said the industries ministry and the Board of Investment should be revamped, as these institutions have failed to provide the desired support to the private sector.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith said the government has sought information from state-owned enterprises about their lands.

“A study has also been conducted on the prospect of using public land for industrialisation, and work is going on accordingly,” he said.

On reducing banks' lending rates, he said: "It's a complex problem." The government has not been intervening in setting the interest rate since 2004, he said. “We left it to the market. We only intervene for special purposes.”

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed said all economic indicators are moving towards a positive direction. “And for this to continue, political stability is a must.”

Stressing diversification of export products and markets, he said the government is going to sign free trade agreements with some countries soon.

Industries Minister Amir Hossain Amu said he also sought information on the BSCIC lands.

“If we find that industrial units or factories are not being set up in the allocated lands, we will go for fresh allotments,” he said.

MCCI President Rokia Afzal Rahman said: “We expect the government to strictly enforce the existing provisions of law, and if needed, introduce new ones, to maintain public order and provide security to citizens and businesses.”

She said developing strategic infrastructure in areas of power and energy, trade and transport and mass transit in large urban areas should be done on a priority basis.

Dependence on expensive rental power plants should be reduced quickly, and more sustainable

methods of power generation should be promoted, she said.

“Special economic zones and industrial land should be developed to accommodate industries in a planned manner, with minimum disruption to environment and farm land,” she added.