**Relocation of tanneries**

Relocation of the tanneries from Hazaribagh to Savar Leather Estate has missed a number of deadlines since 2004. Whether it will miss yet another timeframe now freshly set by April next only the future can tell. Industries Minister Amir Hossain Amu sounds confident enough that this time there is no scope for failing on the set target. In fact, he warned that failure on the part of any plant to comply with the order will be at a heavy cost. The erring plant will be demolished and the industrial plot at the new location will be cancelled as well. In the past too, ministers concerned coaxed and threatened tannery owners with undesirable consequences but somehow they managed to stay where they are now. Let it not happen once again.

An apprehension lurks only because tanners have demanded allocation of Tk 55 billion as soft loan from the government at the same venue of the discussion meeting on "Leather and Leather Goods: Next to RMG". It is in this meeting that the industries minister also expressed his optimism for relocation of tanneries within the stipulated time. Is there an impression of making relocation conditional to obtaining the loan sought? If such a loan was badly needed, the proposal for it should have been placed quite sometime ago. Now that there remain barely three months for the task, the issue of soft or hard loan should not come to the fore for diversion of attention from the main issue of relocation. The shifting of tannery factories has been on the agenda for a long time and critical issues such as loan sanction and disbursement for this purpose cannot be settled overnight. Let this not be another ploy to delay the relocation process.

Experts have rightly been upbeat about the bright prospect of the leather industry in the country. With 90 per cent value addition, the industry stands to flourish like the apparel sector and earn enough foreign exchange to be ranked second to the latter. A sizeable employment generation in the higher category is also in the offing. But the tannery owners have opposed the move mostly because of the initial investment. What they fail to realize is that a business of improved version and environment is all set to catapult their position as producer and exporter several notches higher than their present status. In fact, the Central Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) to be set up will mostly do the trick. Environmentally sound, they will qualify for enlistment with high-end importers from abroad for exporting their products. On its part the government should patronise the ventures as much as is rationally sound. In setting up the CETP, the government has reportedly made its fund available.

Even if the prospect of the tannery industry was not that bright, its relocation was a prerequisite for saving the lifeline of the capital, the Buriganga. Tanneries are the main polluters of the river's water. So relocation can no longer wait. The process has to be expedited in order to save the river and by implication the city itself.

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