

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Kalurghat tragedy: A futile reminder?

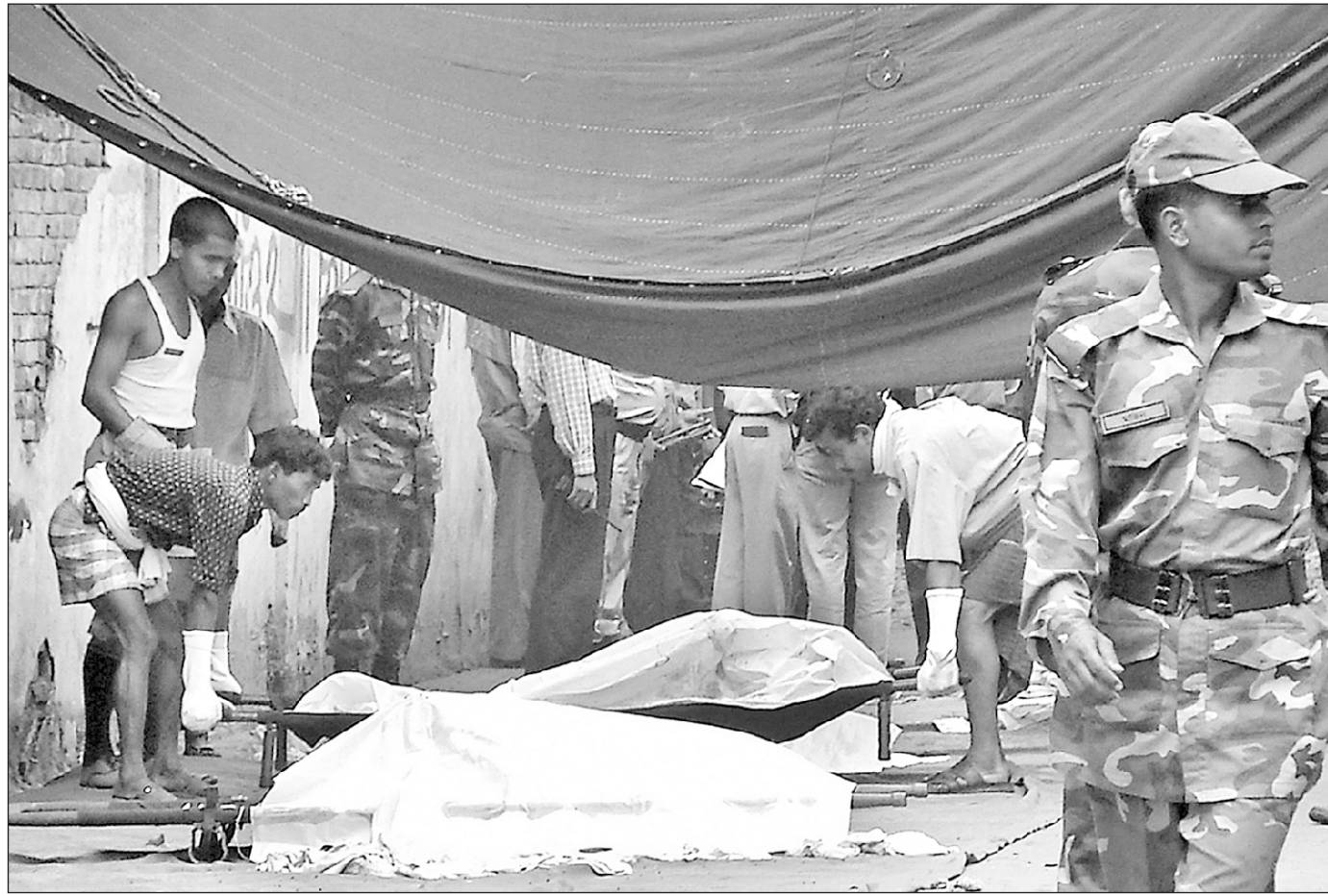
Kalurghat is witness to many significant events in our history and now it has witnessed the most terrible fire incident in the chronology of our garments factory disasters. Yes, the staircases of the multi-storeyed factory are not only narrow but also packed up with imported raw materials and goods. The gate to the rooftop is sealed. All the gates are ordered closed once fire breaks out. All the outlets of the factory are sealed so that the dying workers cannot escape with valuable properties of the factory. Fire erupts. Hapless human beings inside the various floors of the factory scream, shout, and pray for their lives. But who cares? Are they humans?

The ill-fated workers try their heart and soul to remain alive in this civilised land of ours. Not to speak of fire extinguishers, there were not even a few strands of ropes to scale down from various floors of the building. Even then, they try to climb down the high-rise building by wrapping up the garments they have put on. As the rooftop gate is also sealed, they cannot

jump down. Therefore, many of them are burnt alive inside the veritable death trap. All their desperation ends in a fiasco because, perhaps, they were destined to die like that as if they had committed a serious crime by being members of our so-called civilized society!

Business leaders rush to the spot. Our ministers through the effigy of our burnt national pride. Even the Prime Minister flies to the spot to see for her how miserably her poor countrymen were subjected to death. Meanwhile, some people belonging to the factory and the government are alleged to have done a good job by removing a good number of dead bodies so that real number of deaths remains unknown to the public.

Besides, the compensation declared by BGMEA will also not be drained out if the number can be kept to the minimum by manipulation. In fact, a good portion of the compensation money is supposed to remain unused, as the relatives of the dead workers will find it almost impossible to present cogent



proofs to the authorities as most of the faces and bodies of the workers had become completely unrecognisable.

However, nobody is sitting on the tragic incident. As many as three powerful probe bodies have been formed to come up with magic suggestions to prevent such incidents! What else can be done? After all, Allar Mal Allar Niece geche.

Actually, this is not a new incident or accident. It is rather the saddest reminder of many such accidents in our recent past. It, in fact, very badly betrays our exceedingly callous attitude to poor human lives as if these lives were freely expendable. Nobody seems to be concerned: neither the BGMEA nor the government. It is reported that many such incidents could have been prevented if only the factory authorities had met the legal requirements. But, the government organs are invariably lax in executing and monitoring these. The role of business leaders and the state apparatus in addressing the issue of garments' fire acci-

dents seems to be a dubious one. All their activities can be construed as demonstrating scant regard for the lives of the poor garment workers, most of whom are women.

Contribution of readymade garments to our national economy can hardly be overemphasized. The businessmen deserve a roaring applaud for that. But, exploitation of the poor garments workers is also a flagrant phenomenon in Bangladesh. They are forced to work for around 12 hours a day. The payment is minimal. Many are paid after 2/3 months. Many are not paid at all. As they are not given any document by the authorities, they cannot go for legal measures either. Anyway, as I mentioned earlier, it is a stark reminder of such tragic fire incidents. But the question is: will this also remain just a futile reminder?

Kazi S.M.Khasrul Alam Qudus
Assistant Professor
University of Chittagong

Bangladesh and tele density

Have my fellow readers of the Daily Star noticed that the discourse related to tele density in Bangladesh seems to have disappeared or reduced of late? Have we wondered why that may be? Here is a hypothesis. For as long as I can remember, we have been struggling to reach a tele density of 1% (1 land line phone per 100 people) - that would translate to roughly 1.4 million total landline connections. We are still far from reaching that goal if I am not mistaken, as our total now maybe around 1 million landline connections after 34 years of independence. But what has changed? Suddenly, cellular phone technology appeared and took off like a rocket - defying even the wildest optimistic projection - today one particular telephone company alone has reached 6 million subscribers - in less than 9 years! Kudos to it - it has shown that Bangladeshis like other people can work to bring about notable achievements. But, my fellow countrymen, what is terribly wrong with this picture? Our state corporation could not provide 1 million connections in 34 years where private operators have provided something close to 10 times that in less than 9 years! For all these years, that same corporation's projections for outstanding demand were something in the range of a few hundred thousand connections - wouldn't you agree that these projections in themselves lacked credibility and helped permeate a sense of inferiority in our society? If the outstanding demand was a few hundred thousand, how did the private cell phone operators reach almost 10 million? Were we the citizens being bluffed all this

time?

The reasons for the state corporation's failure, important as they are to look into, are not at the heart of this letter. We have come to hope that our government, with the help of a vigilant civil society and bold press, has put into place institutions to look into any wrong doings that may have taken place with respect to that.

Khalid Islam
Garland, TX, USA

Which is the greater evil?

Just before the invasion of Iraq by the American and British forces in 2003, President Bush addressed the United Nations and delivered a speech, in which he said: "If the number of his own people that Saddam Hussein had killed during the period of his reign means no evil, then evil means nothing and consequently the word should be wiped out". In contrary to President Bush's statement, the number of people killed during 24 years of Saddam Hussein's regime is only a fraction compared to the number of Iraqis killed in just three years of occupation of Iraq.

President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair are solely responsible for the deaths of the innocent Iraqis since the day of their invasion. Both the leaders' illegitimate decision to go to war has created anarchy, completely destabilised the country, and of course, opened the gates of hell. Consequently, fierce hostilities are prevailing amongst Iraq's own communities. Thus, Iraqis are killing fellow citizens on a daily basis in 100s if not in 1000s.

Unfortunately, there is not a single international leader, who can openly and daringly con-

demn the UK/US' unlawful decision to invade Iraq.

Mohammed Ali
Manchester, UK

Political crisis in Bangladesh

People mistrust people. One group can't stand the criticism of another. Political tranquility of the country is very much disturbed. Even, we fail to unite on a national issue when the very existence of the country is in jeopardy. Unfortunately, some unscrupulous and corrupt politicians create this unhealthy environment, the so-called saviour of the nation having unbound thirst for power dividing the people into different schools of thoughts, even at the cost of our hard earned independence. To show their importance they always talk about the people but only think about themselves. In their public appearances they speak like saints with utopian thoughts but only nurture corruption behind the curtain, to fulfill their cherished desire. They work on the cheap sentiments of the public to agitate them and get pleasure spreading the ills of our country to the outsiders causing harm to our image as a nation, but fail to join spontaneously on the road of development of Bangladesh.

Also included in the list are a number of journalists and intellectuals who are working under the guidance of their foreign masters. Probably, they have forgotten the concept of patriotism, which is the very essence of freedom for a nation and is held in the highest esteem by our distressed mass and admittedly honoured by the people of our neighbouring countries irrespective of religion and caste. On the contrary, they sometimes remark

about the most delicate issues and try to make us believe that Bangladesh is heading for a political disasters.

Fortunately, the people are now very much conscious and can well identify those who are the creators of Banglabbhai, JMB, Janojuddha, and other subversive elements in the country. We, the Bangladeshis are peace loving but not cowards. We welcome suggestions but discourage interventions from outside since we are able enough to solve our own problems.

Md. Badruddoza
One-e-mail

Pledge to our nation

The month of February inevitably causes us to reflect on the Martyrs of Bangla Language Movement, their valour, selflessness and deep love for our Motherland. Bangladesh was born out of their sacrifices as well as of those innumerable brave freedom fighters. However it is not enough that we only remember our 'Shaheeds' with deep respect-we will be able to truly honour them if we learn to love Bangladesh with the selfless devotion that they have shown. We need to take constructive and positive steps towards that goal. I strongly believe that, once we pledge our unstinting love for Bangladesh, all the evils of present-day Bangladesh, including corruption and apathy in work at public institutions, will slowly but surely be rooted out.

I would like to offer a simple but effective strategy to make children aware of their responsibilities to our homeland. I have had reason to know that in most American public schools, each and every morning, children are

dutifully made to pledge their faith and honour to the American Flag in an atmosphere of extreme seriousness and respect. The children are also made to promise that they will serve their country, if ever needed. As an American citizen if one is over 18 years old and particularly if male, he/she needs to give two years conscription service to the army, navy or air force.

In Bangladesh, it is good that the children sing, "AMAR SHONAR BANGLA, AMI TOMAI BHALO BASHI," every morning but this is not enough. They will have to learn from an early age that they not only need to love Bangladesh, they should be able to serve the country after growing up and give back some measure of the service that Bangladesh has given them. They should perform all their duties to the best of their abilities without slacking off. The children should also be made to realise that as a developing country, we should not waste national resources, but be aware of how to share our meagre resources with all strata of the society. So every morning, children should pledge their love, allegiance and service to the country. They should also remember Martyrs of the Language Movement, of Independence and other proud sons and daughters of the soil, so that they feel proud of Bangladesh. They should remember the hard-working farmers, because of whom, we are self-sufficient in our staple food.

Zeba I. Seraj (Ph.D.)
Dhaka University

Let's put a stop to dowry

In the newspapers everyday we read about many crises. Along

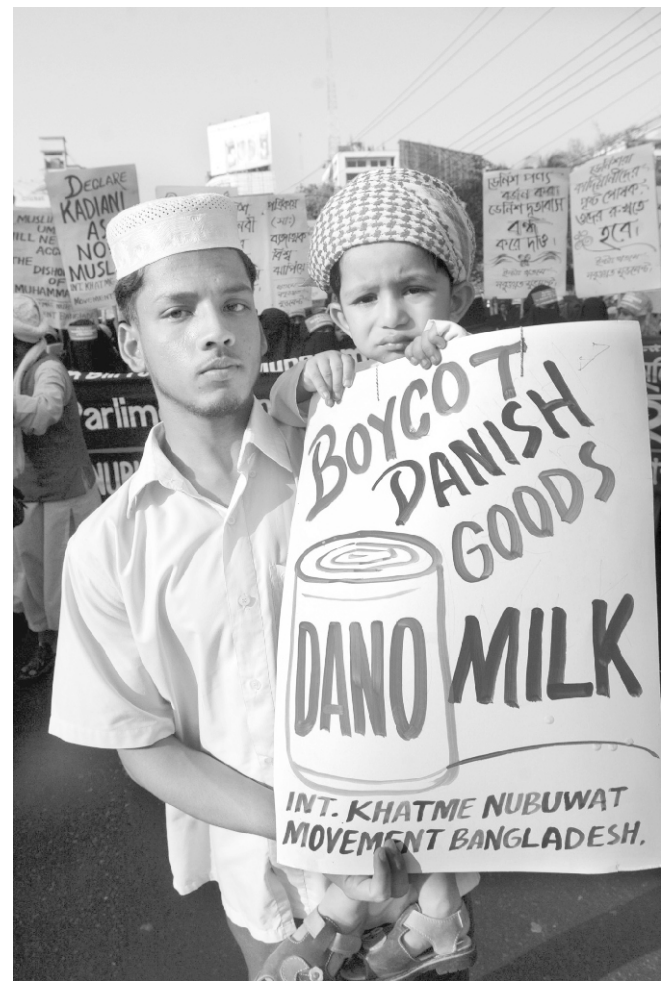
with these news it is now common to hear news related to 'Dowry'. Sometimes it brings before us the picture of suffering housewives, newly wedded girls, and sometimes it carries the news of death of women beaten or set afire by her in-laws, or even by her own life partner!

It is true that we live in a society where people cry in front of the blind eyes of the law. When a bridegroom asks for dowry, the bride's family has to pay his demand! But how? Have we ever thought about it?

There was a newspaper report on a victim, Fazila Khatun, aged 20 who was married to a 25 years old man named Shajahan Omar. On this occasion, 20 thousand Taka in cash, furniture and ornaments were given as 'gift' on demand. After receiving the 'gift' and a year after marriage he became greedier and started to torture his wife for more money. He demanded that she brought 50 thousand Taka from her father. Fazila died on account of a heavy blow on her head. A case has been filed with the police station but without the exact facts of death.

We suspect after a couple of years it will be lost in the waves of negligence. Yes, it is always being done with them. Here in Bangladesh, we just can shout for our rights, but did we ever try to create awareness against 'Dowry' to protect our sisters, who are the victims? Do we want to let our sisters be the object of business transactions?

S.M. Shaikat
University of London, U.K



Humiliation!

Humiliation of the Muslims by the West has been going on for a long time, but in recent times the frequency of such incidences has increased. After each incident, groups of unruly people in different Muslim countries resort to processions, burning, damage of properties, issuance of threats, and a handful of intellectuals publish protests letters and condemnations. After sometime the heat subsides and the episode is forgotten. Nobody seems to be interested to analyse the causes of the incidents and come up with suggestions to avoid recurrence of the same. The rulers and intellectuals of the Muslim countries are least bothered about these matters, because they themselves are responsible to a great extent for the degradation of their communities. The next episode of Muslim bashing may be a military attack on Iran by the USA and their European allies.

I have identified the root causes of the humiliations and sufferings of the Muslims. These are mentioned in many verses of the Holy Quran in very clear language. In the Holy Book, Allah forewarned the followers of Islam that He would punish them in this world and in the after world if they become disobedient (Bakara 85, Anaam). In these two verses, Allah Almighty promised that He would not allow the non-believers to win over the Muslims in any military clash (Nisa 141, Fath 22). In verse, 31 of Sura Raad, Allah declares, 'He never retracts His promises'. He also gave the assurance that, if they obey, He will not only keep them secure in this world, but will also grant them heaven after death (Hajj:50). Allah says, "It is my responsibility to help and protect the faithful (Rum 47, Yunus 103). Allah promised the Muslims a state (Khelafat) (Noor 55), and gave it even before the death of the Prophet (pbuh). This state, though not properly managed, continued until the First World War. Kamal Ataturk formally dissolved it on 3rd March 1924, and with it the Muslims virtually sank.

In view of the continued humiliation of the Muslims by the non-Muslims, one may raise the question, is Allah unable to keep His promise of protecting the Muslims from the non-believers (kafirs) or are the so-called Muslims no longer Muslims? The answer is not far to seek. The so-called Muslims have not only abandoned Islam, they have been involved in many activities that are insulting to Allah and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)

Dr. M.M. Rashid
On e-mail

WIDENING RICH-POOR GAP

Sitting at my study desk in a well-furnished room in the middle of the night when temperature outside must be hovering around freezing point (but I have no trouble in concentrating on my studies in the comfort of the centrally heated home), I took a break from my studies to read the online edition of the Daily Star. I have been reading all the articles of Mr. Inam Ahmed

on the widening rich-poor gap, and the article that I just finished reading was on the stipends of the female students.

The series of articles exposed the harsh facts of the ineffectiveness of the various socio-economic programmes of the government in providing any meaningful benefit to the extreme poor of the society. While Dhaka glitters with fancy

shopping malls (with the help of generators in the wake of frequent load shedding), expensive cars, and extravagant lifestyles of the recently created ultra-rich class, the extreme poor in rural Bangladesh are still left without adequate food, a decent shelter, or a real education.

I feel rather apologetic for my upbringing in a sufficiently well-to-do family, and for the high-quality

education I received in Dhaka (that gave me access to even better education in the most advanced part of the world), when I read about the daughter of a poor rickshaw-puller who could not qualify for the government sponsored stipend because her poor father could not afford to buy her textbooks due to which she could not acquire the minimum 45% marks to

qualify for the stipend. To add to her miseries, the government's twisted policies force her to pay for school fees when the education for girls is supposed to be free.

While the rich are getting richer (thanks to not only their entrepreneurial skills, but also to their skills in evading taxes, and in maintaining proper connections with the proper people), the poorest segment of the

society is still limping in the darkness of poverty and deprivation. I wonder how many years, or how many generations, it would take before the benefits of economic progress of the country starts bringing real benefits to the grass-root level of the society.

Zubair Sadeque
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

