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Vandalism at garment factories

Allah Hafez
US. Khoda
Hafez

I am writing in reference to the letter written by Mr. SN Mamoon on May 1. A year of debate has taken place in Pakistan on this issue of Khoda or Allah Hafez. Mr. Mamoon has stressed that it is not in our so called 'culture or tradition' to say Allah with Hafez and according to him- 'deviating from our age old culture is unnecessary'. 'Culture' seems to have become the most important element while trying to identify with our lost selves, in this time and age. That's a topic for another debate- religion first or race or creed first? The word 'Allah' to the best of my knowledge has existed since Prophet Ibrahim's (Pbuh) time or even before that. Thus, Jews and Christians call upon Him as 'Elohim' & 'Eloah' or 'Eloh'. As Muslims, we would appreciate Allah being referred as 'ALLAH' rather than 'Khoda'. He himself has written that 'Allah Hafez' is grammatically correct, then why is he objecting to it?

Jamshyd Osman
Project Coordinator
WorldTel Bangladesh Ltd.,
Dhaka

This is in response to the letter "Allah/Khoda Hafez" by SN Mamoon on 1 May. For your information, culture is a not a stagnant pond, it is an ever flowing river. Discarding wrong or false tradition and accepting the right ones enrich it.

What I would like to say is that only biased people could think that one of our past rulers tried to show solidarity with or please the Pakistani regime.

There is absolutely no reason for any Bangladeshi leader to show solidarity with a Pakistani General on an issue like this.

Monir Uddin Ahmed
Scientific officer
Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission, Dhaka



PHOTOS: AFP

I am condemning the group of people involved in attacking the garment factories inside the Savar EPZ area. RMG has been the major sources of country's export earnings over the years. For a long time foreign buyers have been pressing us for complying with many issues. When the garment factory owners are faltering on many accounts, such vandalism has occurred. It will surely have a negative impact on the country's economy. When some unruly people invaded the Savar EPZ, I was sitting inside the BEPZA office talking to a high official. She expressed grave concern about the arson at the garment factories.

But it must not be forgotten that garment workers are not even paid the minimum wages. Yes, it is right that the factories burnt and damaged are not responsible for the anomalies. But we have to decipher the human psychology. Garment factory owners must consider the issue of minimum monthly salary of Tk 2, 500 and other issues related to working conditions. But we see no positive

signal from the owners. Unrest has been growing over the years. Two days ago a worker died in police firing. It has been a common phenomenon in the country that when people agitate for establishing their legal rights, police open fire.

BGMEA and members of all the apex trade bodies are worried about the current tumultuous situation. The government should take the necessary steps to keep the situation under control.

Bazlur Rahman
Dhaka University

With the unprecedented violence in several garment units, this industry is now facing a grave crisis. The following questions need to be answered:

- a) Who are behind this unrest?
- b) Who are being benefited?
- c) Is there any political interest behind the subversive activities?

The industry has to be saved at any cost.

Kazi Abu Bakar Siddique
Lalmatia, Dhaka

I was dumbfounded to watch the

developments in the garment sector. I believe enough damage has been done to tarnish our image.

Now the question is how can we come out of this? I would suggest the following:

1. Tangible steps should be taken to address labour issues. The government and BGMEA should work hand in hand in this matter. BGMEA is now strong enough to adopt many corrective measures.
2. A task force should be formed to identify the damaged industries. Assess the loss, and provide soft loan (I dare to say grant), to restart each of these factories in 3 months. It's a challenge, but they must stand up to it. We can streamline the whole process from L/C opening to customs clearance.
3. BGMEA should immediately start processing of unfulfilled orders by distributing them to its associate companies, who have extra capacity, and meet the buyers' deadline. All it requires is a subcontract sort of agreement between original factories and producing factories. Yes, the origi-

nal factories would suffer huge loss, but the image of the whole industry won't be bruised.

4. It's about time to consider labour welfare seriously. And again this is an opportunity for BGMEA to show the world that they take care of their workers. Provide ID card to each worker, issued directly by the BGMEA authorities. Set up field booths (service centres) around the factory areas, to address labour related disputes. BGMEA should set up schools, hospitals for their workers. I believe each BGMEA member knows how much a BMW X5 costs, but doesn't know how long their workers walk to and from their factories every day.
5. EPZs should beef up security and surveillance.

Are these too difficult to achieve? We are talking about saving a \$6 billion industry!

Nasim Haider
Dhahran, Saudi Arabia



Performance of finance minister



Mr. Saifur Rahman is distinguished as a successful political technocrat, who has been privileged to run the ministry of finance for three terms. He is also the minister of planning. His key strength is that he understands the financial leakages. He knows how resources can be generated. What he apparently does not know is what to do next.

He introduced value added tax (VAT) in Bangladesh much ahead of other countries in the region. It was a revolutionary initiative for which he will be remembered in the history of Bangladesh. However, at the same time, he will be held responsible for making the conditions of living harder for the majority poor. VAT, as a principle, has a particular meaning in fiscal policy for development administration. A rate is fixed and it is applied to values added at different stages of production. It is not the same in Bangladesh. VAT is compounded on accumulated values at every stage of production, resulting in higher prices, which does not affect the producers since they shift the burden on to the end-users. The other side of the VAT story is that the amount collected is neither expended "efficiently" nor "equitably". These are the two key reasons for widening the income gap between rich and poor.

Mr. Rahman initiated various actions to reduce corruption, essentially as a strategy to increase revenue income of the government. One such measure is expansion of the income tax network. There is no denying that people should pay taxes. But the million-dollar question is if the government has the right to collect taxes from income earners then the tax-

payers also must have the right to know what for and how it is collected.

Mr. Rahman initiated various actions to restrict money laundering. I wonder how he does not understand that it is his own banking policy, which encouraged over/under-invoicing the L/Cs.

Mr. Rahman recently met with the noted economists of the country to discuss the fuel price hike. Over the past few years, fuel price in the international market increased from US\$25-30 to US\$55 and now it is hovering around US\$70 per barrel. Bangladesh's estimated current annual demand for fuel is 3.7 million tons of which 2.8 million tons are imported. For FY 2006, import of this quantity will cost US\$2 billion, i.e. 54% more than the previous year. In other words, subsidising fuel during the current fiscal year will cost the nation a Jamuna bridge! The economists suggested continuing subsidy for the poor's fuel, i.e. diesel (and kerosene); and withdrawing subsidy for the non-poor's fuel, i.e. petrol (and, octane and other POLs) as a measure to overcome the crisis. The finance minister is now left with a dilemma. The economists did not tell him how petrol should be priced to subsidise diesel, which constitutes 80% of imported fuel.

He has a rare quality to cut jokes to dilute serious questions and thus avoid confronting the hard reality. It is also true that he hardly got any advice, which was adequate, efficient and equitable.

M. Iqbal Karim, On e-mail

Woes of Uttara residents

We, the residents of Uttara, are facing lots of problems, but there is nobody to address them. Law and order has sharply deteriorated. Mugging is an everyday affair. The police station in the eastern part has little effectiveness in the sprawling western side. Again, a few new sectors are coming up in that side, apparently to increase the problem. One or two more police outposts need to be set up immediately. A part of Uttara is still outside Dhaka Municipal Corporation and there is none to provide civic amenities. Even there is none to control stray dogs, creating menace to morning and evening walkers. Streetlights are absent and most of the roads are dilapidated. Nobody came to register us as voters.

We urge the authorities concerned (we don't know who they are) to look into our plight. If DMC is overburdened, why can't they create a new municipality for Uttara?

M. Sanaul Haq
Uttara, Dhaka

Electricity crisis

There are some good suggestions like using power saving bulb. But suggestion of not watching TV, using refrigerator and closing shops after five o'clock is not reasonable. This is not acceptable to people.

However, you can get shops closed early by taking a simple measure. At least 70 countries in the world use it. That is day light saving. They save day light by advancing the clock time 1-2 hours during the summer when the day is longer. In this way people start their day early, leave office early and go to bed early. So power demand reduces.

In case of Bangladesh, changing clock time may create misunderstanding. But adjusting the office time may work well. In the winter when sun rises at 7:00am, people go to office at 9:00am. Now when the sun rises at 5:00, they can easily go to office at 7 or 7.30am. In this way, shops will be ultimately closed within 7:00-8:00pm. No official order will be needed, as people will have enough time to go for shopping during daytime if office closes at 3:30 or 4:00 pm.

It seems to me an effective measure for good management of the power crisis.

Monir Uddin Ahmed
Founder president,

Sherpur Zilla Chhatra Kallyan Samity, DU

My dearest Nasreen

The shock waves of your death are reaching distant shores and washed over me last Friday leaving me bereft. Dear friend, dear friend, how can this be? How can you who travelled so fearlessly meet such a fate in your front porch, haemorrhaging your lifeblood there? Your time is not up; your work is not yet done.

Your friends from Holy Cross, especially the expatriates stand frozen in grief. We call each other, email, try to get on with our daily lives and then stop as yet another memory floods our mind and transports us back to the high school years, thirty years ago. How young, how passionate, how confident we were, do you remember? We could and would make a difference we said. One by one we left, to acquire the necessary skills abroad. Some of us got distracted stayed on in foreign shores, picking up different causes. But you were steadfast and returned, and made the difference. But you never judged us, because that was not you only had unconditional love for your friends.

Do you remember Marylebone Station? 20 years ago. You were telling me about some of the issues you wanted to address the rights of women of course silent abuse at the home front. The right to be beautiful and independent without fear of unwanted attention and reprisals. Only someone as fearless as you could think this was a fight you could pick up and win. My train came and went and we still sat in the platform talking, until the last train arrived and the station was being shut? Another memory, even further back, I came to see you, States or Dhaka (I can't remember). You read me a poem: The snow has fallen, my friend is coming, and we will stay up all night and talk... We did. I didn't realise how lucky I was to have taken so much of your time.

Last summer when we met, we laughed at our younger selves. We are such non-conformists you said, always were. "I am so proud of you", you said to me. I was astonished, the other way round? Isn't that typical of you? You let me hold your daughter; so proud of her you hugged mine. I am glad you had the pleasure of being a mother, however brief. Then we talked about your work again, Action Aid. Which social issues needed more lobbying? The rights of women, how much further we had

to go. The fire in your speech, the clarity of your thoughts, the single-mindedness of your approach entranced me. You were encouraging me to start up some research links with Dhaka. So optimistic, allaying my fears; anything is possible given the will. You never seem to entertain any doubts what has to be done must be done. That my friend may be your final gift to us never to doubt the differences and ourselves we can make.

Happy, tributes and eulogies are pouring in. Did you realise how many people's heart you had touched? All this is far too early though? I was looking forward to breaking rules as an octogenarian with you.

I talked to two other school friends of ours, of 30 years ago. You are bringing us together another gifts my healing friend. I feel grateful, I would rather have you alive and doing your amazing work, and meeting me once in a blue moon when we talk as if we still were the idealistic girls of yesteryear and the world is our oyster, and we will live forever and time is a commodity that never ends.

Dr. Lopa Leach
Faculty of Medicine, University of Nottingham
Queens Medical Centre

How long should we top the list?

Yes, we agree that it is a Herculean task on the part of the prime minister to dethrone the cabinet ministers who are corrupt, yet the nation as a whole would appreciate such bold decisions.

It is very much regretted that we have been given the first place in corruption for the last five years. No other nation could beat us. Yet, the government has failed to activate the ACC. The reason behind keeping the ACC dormant is not far to seek. We have not forgotten that the ACC chairman issued a notice to all secretaries and other bureaucrats concerned to inform the ACC within a month the whereabouts of the lost vehicles of various projects and then the local electronic media and print media circulated the most sensational news that twenty six thousand govt vehicles were missing! But the matter ended there.

I would request the Honourable Prime Minister and the President to kindly look into the matter and take

immediate steps to activate the ACC.

As regards price hike of all commodities, the government should take immediate action and the ACC should be empowered to catch the powerful swindler group.

Peerzada Syed Rofiqul Hussain
Hiala Shaheh Bari, Habigonj

World Cup in Bangladesh

We are very glad to hear the news that Bangladesh will be one of the organising countries of World Cup cricket with four other countries. It is a splendid achievement for our nation. When we are suffering from the curse of corruption such kind of news will bring some sort of international fame for our nation. One thing is very certain that owing to the grace of cricket we are going to have a worldwide acquaintance and reputation as well. This news also indicates that we have the infrastructure for organising the World Cup successfully. I specially thank ICC for choosing Bangladesh as one of the organisers and BCB for taking the initiative in this regard. Though we have been selected as one of the organisers, from now we have to work hard to make it a grand success.

Abu Bakar
Rupnagar R/A, Mirpur, Dhaka

Paying taxes

Mr. Shawkat Ali's write up in "Opinion" column (DS: April 27) deserves appreciation for raising valid queries on the management of state funds.

However the unfortunate fact is that who will bell the cat, while "commoners" become "millionaires"? Unfortunately our prosecution system from top to bottom is stymied by corruption. Even if something is started the "neo-millionaires" can evade the whole process by investing a small fraction of his or her windfall. Knowing the names of these free for all millionaires will be of no avail unless we have some authorities like Rab with "licence to kill". Otherwise, lubrication by cash or the "Non-Einstein theory of Relativity" (of chachas and mamas) will effectively block all investigation with some cash incentive.

Loss, mismanagement and pilferage are all done with due process, through appropriate "proper" channels, supported by foolproof paperwork; thanks to our "top class" and highly "professional" bureaucracy! That is another way

for many "commoners" to become "millionaires" even if they are only pen pushers at that!

Giving aid or loan is also a thriving process, because even a ten percent overall transit loss keeps everyone involved in the transaction and distribution chain happy; starting from the donor agency down to the receiver! Why upset the apple cart? After all it is free windfall! Both the giver and receiver are happy and well entrenched and protected.

Common citizens should pay taxes to keep the wheels of government turning. Process loss, transit loss and other losses between intention and implementation is a fact of life. Long live development!

The final question remains where is transparency? It is now gyrating only in the realm of popular sloganing! From ideological slogan to actual reality, transparency as we understand, is light years away! Meanwhile we all "make hay while the sun shines".

S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Den of criminals

Maghbazar Dili Road under Ward 54 has remained unnoticed for a long while. As a result sometimes we feel it is out of sight and out of mind of the law enforcers.

Dili Road has two parts, one leads up to the turn from the starting as we usually see from the main road and the other is the inner part close to a shrine. Drug traffickers have made it a safe abode for themselves; People cannot do anything about the problem. The faces of the criminals are very familiar but the law enforcers are allowing them to carry out all sorts of illegal activities.

We would request the law enforcers to look into the matter immediately.

A victim, Dhaka