

FOCUS

MAY DAY

Making a Point of Progress

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

HERE is hardly any dispute that it is the working class who propel the economy; buoyancy occurs when employers realise it, and government plays the supportive role to bring in increased productivity providing labour welfare on a continuous basis. The recent example is the newly-industrialised nations in the East and South-East Asia where both employers and workers have attained prosperity. It is understood that the employers of Bangladesh wish to follow their model. About two decades back, the position of these countries were almost at par with us. But then, they progressed in a tremendous speed, with rapid industrialisation, which stems from appropriate use of capital and raw materials, quick reforms in government policies and increasing efficiency of labour and management, among others. They did not have enough raw materials for use in the industry and their domestic market was narrow. By importing raw materials, they put it to industrial process, and re-export the finished products to the international markets. Not only that, they now import manpower and employ them. Thus, they have become industrialised countries. And Bangladesh exports manpower, who have no employment here, to earn livelihood!

Reports of distressing conditions of Bangladeshi workers in foreign countries frequently appear in the press, which do not seem to stir the mind of the authorities here. It is known to all that many workers are lured to jobs outside the country under false pretenses. Upon arrival at a foreign destination they are simply undone. Because, before leaving the country, some of them might have sold all their belongings to pay the manpower recruiting agents, for employment opportunity visa etc. In such a solution they are also afraid of being deported by foreign employers, even when they are denied the wages they have earned, or forced to do something else than promised.

At home, the number of unemployed persons increasing and unjust discrimination continuing in the labour sector. Why should there be differences in hours of work, amount wages and security between employees under government sector and those under private sector? Why the losing state owned enterprises be maintained at the cost of the public exchequer, producing no competitive output? For the losing enterprises under the public sector, government has provided Tk 420 billion over the last 21 years. The government cell created to look into the problems of sick industries in 1991 could not provide suc-

cess to the private sector. It has resulted in elongation of the sick list, reportedly numbering 5500 at present. Ministry of Labour and its Directorate seem to bypass this burning issue, agitating the minds of the genuine workers and labourers, although they enjoy May Day as a government holiday and do not fail to show respect to the martyrs who initiated labour movement to establish rights of the workers in Chicago of the United States of America.

However, in the interest of the economy, selling a sick enterprise by auction is not the only course. There are other ways too. The core point is to relieve the exchequer from financing the unwanted losses and to assure the workers, whether in government or private sector, that they will be equally treated. This only can facilitated industrialisation on equal footing.

Following the historic May Day and labour movements throughout the world, International Labour Organisation (ILO) came into being in 1919. Bangladesh is a member of this organisation. ILO has adopted important conventions and proposals for welfare of the workers and enforcement of their rights. Member countries are to ratify those, in their domestic laws. Accordingly, the

working hours and working environment of the factory, compensation for accident, working time for female workers and their security, restrictions on child labour, care for the children of the working mothers, etc. are determined. The workers have right to form trade union and to collective bargaining. It is learnt that Bangladesh has so far ratified 32 conventions and prepared 46 labour laws.

To enforce the above laws and update those, there is the Ministry of Labour and Manpower and its Directorate of Labour, Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), Factory and Shops Establishment Directorate, 21 Labour Welfare centres, 4 Industrial Relations Institute, Minimum Wages Board, etc. All these are meant avowedly to promote welfare of the workers, which is further strengthened by the prevalent Labour Courts and Labour Appellate Tribunal. A retired government official of Labour, however, pointed out that in spite of the above arrangements the poor people of this country, the workers, as well as the industry and economy are not getting the due services. There is no use to find fault with administrative infrastructure, actual point is to see if there is genuine interest among owners, workers and

government for labour welfare, to maintain sound industrial relations, facilitating economic growth.

Not that the industrial arena under the Govt Sector only is affected by politicisation of trade union; the government offices are also afflicted with it. So, a total review is required if the Class III and IV staff of the government sector be treated as workers to form unions? Simultaneously, whether the government officers may also form associations? We have seen enough of inter-cadre rivalry in the preceding years. People do not like to see it recur. Such associations, be it at staff and officers level, have yielded no fruitful result so far, in terms of good administration and progress of the country. How we can justify when there is absence of trade union activities in the readymade garments industry, big NGOs and export processing zone, etc? What is needed is healthy trade unionism with a view to ensuring labour welfare and progress of the country.

Let May Day, 1997, which is observed today, not remain confined in one day; let its spirit flow throughout the year and beyond, to improve the conditions of workers, industry and economy alike.

The writer is an economist and Advocate, Bangladesh Supreme Court.



Ensuring Rights of Workers

by Abu Imran

AS usual list of May every year is observed almost all over the world as May Day to recall the contribution and sacrifice of those human rights martyrs who laid down their lives for the cause of the working class people. On this day in Chicago nearly more than a century ago, they protested against the tyranny of employers and wanted fair deal for the wage-earners. In the process of their justified action, they were killed by mercenaries engaged by their tyrant employers. But their blood did not go in vain. It paved the way for introduction of some improved working conditions in the form of reduced working hours, more-wages, holidays etc. which in those days were almost unthinkable. The relationship between the employers and the employees was something like that of masters and slaves.

And in the above back drop, the day is observed. On this day, the workers are allowed a day off i.e. no-work, but paid for. The condition in the west of course has improved much. But regrettably though the day is observed, holiday allowed, seminars, symposia etc. are held but hardly the working condition of the poor wage earners in third world countries has changed. They work for longer hours, with shorter wages mostly in unhygienic and hazardous situations. They are ex-

posed to occupational hazard for which hardly adequate protective measures are taken. And the worst exploited ones are the females and the children. There is great discrimination in wages and ancillary benefits. The females are paid normally lesser than the males while the children, the least despite that in many cases they work for longer period of time. An example of abuse of child labour is cited below which appeared in The Daily Star on 24.4.97 under the headline: Poverty drives them away from schools in Karachi.

Thousands of children are toiling at auto-repair shops and car-wash stations in Pakistan's largest city of Karachi to support their impoverished families. They clean vehicles, remove tyres, repair and fill them with air and fix auto parts, besides, dashing off to fetch food and perform other chores for adult employees. Karachi's leading English-language daily Dawn said... it cited the cases of several children forced away by poverty from schools and homes.

Yasir dropped out of class to work in a dirty, grimy welding shop. His father works as a truck driver for monthly wages to 1,800 rupees (45 dollars) and Yasir's 60 rupees (1.5 dollar) daily supplement the meager earnings of the family of eight people.

Employers engage boys at a

fraction of regular wages, the report said. At a petrol pump five boys have been hired as mechanics, earning as little as 20 rupees (half a dollar) each per day. One of them, 11-year-old Kashif said, they were working to help their families. A contractor told the newspaper that children were routinely brought for work by their relatives. The children are able to perform nimble chores which makes it more suitable to hire them in comparison to adults, he said.

The dreadful situation is not only true for Pakistan, but it is equally true for Bangladesh as it appears from reports and personal experience. The garment sector was the largest organised sector to have employed largest number of children and females. But following Harkin's bill. The government had to yield and displaced most of the children from the work on the pain of export ban. Tom Harkin might have good intentions behind his bill since children are exploited. But he failed to appreciate the reason why do children in the third-world countries are forced into child-labour? It is sheer poverty that does. In some cases like the very poor sick or crippled parents, the child is the only bread earner for the family. True it is that they are exploited. But at least it brings

half bread to the family. Moreover by applying Harkin's condition it has not solved the problems of all the children rather a fragment of the children have been displaced and that too from the organised sector. Some measures like some sort of schooling, allowances etc have been extended to some children so displaced. But that is too inadequate. Moreover millions of children still are employed with greater degree of exploitation in the unorganised sectors. Hence, Tom's good intention by and large for the children have also not materialised. The desirable thing would have been to force the authorities to improve the working conditions of all in general and those of children in particular, with some sort of schooling at the places of work and extension of humane treatment so that life for them would have become easier. A patch work solution is no solution rather it in some cases creates problems.

May day is observed to preserve and secure rights of the working class people.

But by and large it is seen that the great Day comes and goes as a routine matter, of course with a difference that the day remain's mostly a closed holiday. The West to a great extent has solved the problems of the working class people. But the problem lies very much in the third-world countries — the East including the Muslim

world. Now let us see what Islam says about the issue as recorded in the book, 'Workers' rights in Islam' (Islamic Foundation).

Moreover Islam keeps a vigilant and wakeful eye on the legitimate rights of the workers. It has prescribed just and pragmatic measures for protection of such rights. The Holy Prophet (SM) has said in this regard, 'Workers are your brothers, giving you service... give unto them what you yourselves eat or wear. Don't impose any load on them that they cannot bear. Even if you have to assign a heavy duty to them, please render them necessary assistance.' (171)

It leaves no scope to guess that Islamic principles as practiced in the past if followed now will go a long way to solve the problem of at least people in the Muslim world. But it's irony that as some one has aptly said — 'The good Muslims are under the ground (graves) while the good principles [the Quranic laws and sunnah — practices of the Holy Prophet (SM)] are on the shelves.' In such circumstances, how can we reap the benefits Islamic system has ensured.

It can be only possible if they are really practised. Why not this is given a try in Bangladesh since it is a predominantly Muslim country to make the spirit of May Day a success and rights of working people ensured?

The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Thursday 1st May
(All programmes are in local time. There may be changes in the programmes)

BBC
6:00am BBC World News 6:30 Time Out: Holiday 7:00 BBC World News Inc World Business Report/Asia Today 24 Hours 10:00 BBC World News 10:30 World Focus: The Money Programme 11:00 BBC Newsdesk 12:00noon BBC Newsdesk 12:30 Hard Talk 1:00 BBC World News 1:30 World Focus: The Money Programme 2:00 BBC World News 2:30 World Focus: Film 3:00 BBC World News 3:30 Hard Talk 4:00 BBC World News 4:30 Time Out: Holiday 5:00 BBC Newsdesk 6:00pm BBC Newsdesk 6:30 World Focus: The Money Programme 7:15 World Business Report 7:30 BBC Newshour Asia & Pacific 8:30 Time Out: Top Gear 9:00 BBC World News 9:30 Hard Talk 10:00 BBC World News 10:30 Time Out: The Clothes Show 11:00 The World Today 12:00am The World Today 12:30 Hard Talk 1:00 BBC World News 1:30 World Focus: Panorama 2:00 BBC World News 2:30 Time Out: Tomorrow's World 3:00 UK Election '97

CHANNEL V
6:00am Lunchpad VJ Samira

7:00 Rewind VJ Sophiya 8:00 Frame By Frame 11:00 The Vibe VJ Luke 12:00noon Rewind VJ Sophiya 1:00 By Demand VJ Trey 2:00 Frame By Frame 2:30 Liberty First Day First Show 3:00 BPL Oye 4:00 Planet Ruby 4:30 Big Bang VJ Alessandra 6:00pm Rewind VJ Sophiya 7:00 By Demand VJ Trey 8:00 The Vibe 9:00 Videocon Flashback 9:30 Top of the Pops 10:00 Liberty First Day First Show 10:30 Malibu Jammin 11:00 The Ride 12:00mm Rewind VJ Sophiya 1:00 Haysah 2:00 By Demand VJ Trey 3:00 Big Bang VJ Alessandra 4:30 BPL Oye 5:30 Jump Start VJ Alessandra

STAR PLUS
6:30am Ninasad 7:30 Good Morning India 9:30 Nine To Five 10:00 Mollie Katzen's Cooking Show 10:30 Behind The Scenes Vegas Vacation 11:00 Eek! The Cat 11:30 The Oprah Winfrey Show 12:30 Picket Fences 1:30 Santa Barbara 2:30 The Bold & The Beautiful 3:00 Tenkkaat 3:30 Newstrack 4:00 Banyara Guest House 4:30 Hindi Film 'Arjun' (Sunny Deol, Dimple Kap) 7:30 Star News (Hindi) 8:00 Awaz 8:30 Tu Tu Main Main 9:00 Ghatan 9:30 Star News 10:00 Are You Being Served? 10:30 Baywatch 11:30 The Bold & The Beautiful 12:00mm Santa Barbara 1:00 Star News 1:30 Space: Above And Beyond 2:30 Mystery Movie: Hallifax FP

4:30 The Oprah Winfrey Show 5:30 Star Sports

STAR SPORTS
6:30am PBA Game Of The Week 7:30 India Tour West Indies 3rd One Day Int'l H/L 8:30 LIVE NBA Game Of The Week Play-offs 11:00 ASIA Sports Show 12:00 US Senior PGA Championships Golf 1997 Final Day From Florida, USA 1:30 English Cricket Benson & Hedges Cup Gloucester v Surrey 8:30 World Wrestling Federation Raw 9:30 India Tour West Indies 3rd One Day Int'l H/L 10:00 India Tour West Indies 3rd One Day Int'l H/L 10:30 WJAF 11:00 NBA Game Of The Week Play-offs 11:00 US PGA Tour 1997 Greater Greensboro Chrysler Classic Day 3 3:00 WJAF 3:30 English Cricket Benson & Hedges Cup Gloucester v Surrey

STAR MOVIES
7:30am Comedy: Love At Large 15 (Arabic Subtitles) 9:30 Comedy: Yellowbeard 15 11:30 Classic: Oh, Mr Porter PG (Hindi Subtitles) 1:30 Family: Heart Of A Child 12 (Hindi Subtitles) 3:30 Classic: The Little Shop of Horrors 12 (Hindi Subtitles) 5:30 Family: Lucky Luke — Daisy Town PG (Hindi Subtitles) 7:00 Deccan Dream 7:30 Film Club: TIM 9:30 US Top Ten 10:00 Romance: Danielle Steel's Mixed Blessings? 12:00 Action: The Big Sleep 18 (Arabic Subtitles) 2:00 Comedy: Talkin Dirty

After Dark 18 4:00 After Dark: Mad Dogs And Englishmen 18 (Arabic Subtitles) 5:30 Thriller: Final Judgement 15 (Arabic Subtitles)

ZEE TV
8:00 Jagran 8:30 ZED 7:00 ZED 7:30 Adarniya Pradhan Mantri 8:00 News 8:30 Ru-Ba-Ru 9:00 Disney Hour 10:00 Gaane Anjaane 10:30 Jhatpat Khana 11:00 Andaz 11:30 Zimbo 12:00 Khana Khazana 12:30 Mast Mast Hai Zindagi 1:00 Aakanksha 1:30 Silsila 2:00 Hum Paanch 2:30 Tara 3:00 Raahat 3:30 Low Cal Show 4:00 Campus 4:30 Suhana Salar 5:00 Chanakya 6:00 Film Deewane 6:30 Disney Hour 7:30 Raahat 8:00 Gaane Anjaane 8:15 Ek Nazar 8:30 Chuki Baja Ke 9:00 Yeh Kahan Aa Gaye Hum 9:30 Dastan 10:00 Vakaalat 10:35 News 11:00 Umed 11:30 Nirma Hum Paanch 12:00 Action Hindi Feature Film 2:30 Zee Arabia: Infotainment TMM

EL TV
7:00 Music Capsules 7:30 Stand By 7:40 Music Capsules 8:30 Hasenat 8:40 Brigadier Balwant Bhawan 9:00 Abhinav 9:00 V3+ 10:00 HFF 1:00 Parag No. 1 1:30 Zandu Balm Dance Mania 2:00 Nordsue 3:00 Aakhi Dard 3:30 Amar Prem 4:00 Dard 4:30 ZED 5:00 HFF 7:50 Hasenat 8:00 Shadyanta 8:30 Liberty

Public Demand 9:30 Anuraag 10:00 Jaguar It's My Choice 10:30 Stand-By 11:00 HFF 2:00 Shadyanta 2:30 Public Demand 3:30 Sorry Men Lorry 4:00 Hindi Feature Film

PTV
8:00 am Tilawat Aur Tarjuma/Hamd/Naat 8:20 Cartoon 8:30 Khabrain 8:45 Cut Piece 9:20 Aahang and Roshni 9:45 Phool Chandi 10:05 Sonu Chandi (Drama Serial) 10:30 Buttons and Rustys (Eng Film) 10:55 Milli Nagma 11:00 Khabrain 11:10 Aabshaar (Music Programme) 11:55 Tele Play (Drama Serial) 12:45 pm Qawwali 12:55 Quran-e-Hakeem and Basmillah 1:15 Mugaddar (Drama Serial) 2:00 Puthar (Drama Serial) 2:45 Perspective and Health Forum 3:40 Taleemi Maloomat 4:35 Aurat Aur Qanoon 5:05 Home Economics 5:25 Humayr Saath 5:55 Varna (Drama Serial) 6:25 Aiou Courses 7:05 Muqabil Hai Aaina 7:20 Anaki Waia Jinn 7:45 English News 8:05 Jawaan Sangeet 8:45 Eendhan (Drama Serial) 9:00 Break for Headline News 10:00 Khabrainama and Commercial News 10:35 Mast Mast Sanyo 11:15 Urdu Feature Film and Khas Khas Khabrain/Close down

SONY ET
8:30 am Yaadon Ki Baaraat 9:00 The Three Stooges 9:30 Dennis The Menace 10:00

Dream Of Jeannie 10:30 Bewitched 11:00 Taak Jhanak 11:30 Gaane Jane Mane 12:00 Ghay 12:30 pm Premier/Chamatkaar (Serial) 1:00 Boogie Woogie (Serial) 1:30 The Young And The Restless 2:30 Cine Matinee-Hindi Feature Film 5:30 The Three Stooges 6:00 Dennis The Menace 6:30 Yaadon Ki Baaraat 7:00 I Dream Of Jeannie 7:30 Bewitched 8:00 Surf-Wheel Of Fortune (Game Show) 8:30 Star Xpress 9:00 Siddhi (Serial) 9:30 Mahayaga 10:00 Aahat 10:30 Janees Kaha Mera Jigar Gaya Ji (Serial) 11:00 The Young And The Restless 12:00 Yeh Sadi Nahi Ho Sakti (Serial) 12:30 Bindas Bol 1:30 Surf-Wheel Of Fortune (Game Show) 2:00 Premier 2:30 Closed

DD 7
10:30 Janmadin 10:35 Classical Music 11:00 Dance 11:30 Parliament Hour 12:30 Monorama Cabin 1:00 Janmabhumi (Serial) 1:30 Trishna (Serial) 2:00 Classical Music 2:30 Surja Sunnan 3:00 Ghum Nai (Serial) 3:30 Tanaporan (Serial) 5:30 News 6:00 Aparajito/Palikatha 6:30 Mone Rekho More Gaane 7:00 Darsaker Darbare 7:30 Bangla Sambad 8:00 Salbone Katha (Serial) 8:30 Chetana (Serial) 9:00 Janmabhumi (Serial) 9:30 Monorama Cabin (Serial) 10:00 Bengali Movie Club Film Show 1:00 Closed

THE PIONEERS IN CELLULAR NETWORKING IN THE COUNTRY...

THE LARGEST CELLULAR COVERAGE: DHAKA - CHITTAGONG...

THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL CALLS (OVER 22 MILLION) MADE...

CALL CHARGES DROPPED!

Effective from 1st May

Find out on the 7th of May.

CITYCELL

I'll be there.

PACIFIC BANGLADESH TELECOM LIMITED, 4 / FLR., PACIFIC CENTER, 14, MOHAKHALI C. A., TEL: 882186, 882187, 885281, 885282