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# INFERNO IN GARMENT FACTORIES

## Buyers' role



Our hearts go out to the bereaved family members of those who lost their lives in the tragic fire incident in a Kalurghat garments factory. This was not the first though, this may not be the last! For sure there will be investigations and for sure life will be as usual before the departed souls are laid to rest, and the unfortunate wounded will continue to suffer for the rest of their lives.

Whilst all roads of the investigation will lead towards the negligence and failure of the factory owners (rightly so!), I would like to throw light on one other area that is arguably a strong catalyst in the bigger scheme of the 'negligence' that caused so many lives

to come to such a tragic end. My humble request to the BGMEA not to cry foul on what is forthcoming in the name of losing buyers! Buyers will keep coming to Bangladesh so long as it is profitable.

I would request the head offices of all the international buyers to initiate an immediate internal inquiry on the code of conduct and ethical standards of their employees who are responsible for sourcing from Bangladesh. This should cover all staffs that operate from their overseas-based offices and regularly travel to Bangladesh, and the staffs of their respective liaison offices in

many countries in Europe, this 'freedom of expression' pretext seems to be the basis on which all attacks on Islam are made. Yet, in Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Poland, Switzerland and Holland, the law will prosecute and indeed throw in jail an individual who questions the Holocaust. It seems freedom of expression has its limits even in your part of the world. It is, however, unfortunate that these limitations do not include religious sensitivities.

We hope you also share that value and you are capable of the higher calling of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

**Abdullah Al Rahim**  
Yemeni political writer

### Prof Yunus

First of all, I wish to congratulate you on The Daily Star's 15th Anniversary and wish it many more prosperous years for the future.

Through your esteemed daily, I also wish to congratulate Prof Mohammed Yunus for his thought provoking speech at the 15th anniversary dinner of the Daily Star. However, having regard to our political culture that is prevailing

over the nation since Liberation, I am doubtful if the masses can be turned overnight (before 2007 general election) to choose their own candidates without being prodded by the political parties. But, of course, if our political culture has to be changed for the better, the process has to start right now - although a positive result one can expect a decade or two later at the earliest - in my humble opinion.

But I am absolutely certain that if both the electronic and print media - without those who are affiliated to any political party (ies) or who act as the mouthpiece of a political party - can take up the task of 'identifying and highlighting at least three potential clean candidates' as suggested by Prof Yunus, the impact on the masses will be immediate and will surely be of immense help to the general public in making choice for the upcoming election.

I wish the media all success in this noble cause.

**Ashfaque Chowdhury**  
New Delhi, India

### Indo-Saudi tie

Bangladesh has to examine the implications of the visit of the Saudi

Bangladesh. Because, in most cases these staffs are allegedly directly involved in running a cohort with the owners of non/sub-standard factories who compromise on the overall work environment but get away by paying underhand commissions.

These non/sub-standard factories even manage to secure orders in excess of their own capacity and then subcontract the surplus quantity to other factories. But, if these subcontracting factories go directly to the buyers then these corrupt staffs at the buying end become an obstacle, citing all kinds of policies and



uttering lame excuses, just to refuse. It is almost impossible for the new factories with better work environment to get a breakthrough with the buyers without yielding to the corrupt regimes. In this process, it is no wonder that among other things all-important issues like safe work place will be resting on the backburner to suit the offenders and corroborators alike! And who are the victims: the poor workers and the image of Bangladesh!

I think international buyers sourcing RMG from Bangladesh should come forward to play their role meaningfully in this respect. In the final analysis, poor Bangladesh will have to take the full brunt of it, but that should not allow you (buyers) to shrug off your responsibility.

**Moinul Chowdhury, Gulshan, Dhaka**

# Bird flu and counterfeit drugs

Tamiflu or 'Tamiflue'? Bird flu and counterfeit drugs threaten everyone. Bird flu, counterfeit drugs, AIDS and malaria, all in one article: not bad. But it is, literally, deadly serious. Counterfeit drugs not only kill individuals, they help diseases evolve and become immune to drugs. With India awaiting the results of tests on people suspected of having bird flu, the question becomes what can be done if the disease does jump to humans?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) made a number of recommendations at an international meeting last week about cooperation against counterfeiters, but Philip Stevens points out that the manufacture and distribution of those killer counterfeit drugs are carried out with the complicity of corrupt or weak governments. This week WHO said that fakes account for about 10% of world trade in medicines, overwhelmingly in poor countries, and are worth some US\$35 billion a year.

"People don't die from carrying a fake handbag or wearing a fake T-shirt. They can die from taking a counterfeit medicine. International police action against the factories and distribution networks should be as uncompromising as that applied to the pursuit of narcotic smuggling," said Howard Zucker, WHO Asst. DG for Health Technology and Pharmaceuticals, in a press release before an international conference on fake medicines. According to him trade in counterfeits is extremely lucrative, thus making it more attractive to criminal networks. According to WHO, a report released by the Centre for Medicines in the Public Interest, in the United States, projects counterfeit drug sales to reach US\$ 75 billion in 2010, a 92% increase from 2005.

**Mark Baillie**  
London



lead their life according to their will and deny the divine rule are also secular fundamentalists. And so also are the socialists. The author's writing indicates her narrow view on ideology and creed from which one's identity emanates.

However, she could not give any solution to this crisis, and that makes her writing stereotype. She compromised by writing, "the article was not written to persuade my generation to take upon a puritanical stand on the matter of globalisation and our prolonged identity crisis. But rather how do we absorb such massive changes that the world is undergoing while retaining certain important and vital lessons of the past."

**Taslim Hasan Sabu**  
University of Dhaka

**Dhanmondi, Dhaka**

### O Bangali: Crisis in identity

This is in response to the article written by Ms. Shahana Siddiqui titled "O Bangali: Crisis in Identity" published in the Daily Star on February 21, 2006.

**A Husnain, Dhaka**

chess game in Pakistan misfired, and Bangladesh is on the short-list (India has been wooed in a non-egotistical way, perhaps.).

We in Dhaka badly need' political consensus at the national level' but party aspirations are sabotaging patriotic approach. The so-called leaders have to rise to the demands of the times so that the millions of voters feel motivated during the coming general elections.

**A Husnain, Dhaka**

### Wanted electricity

Those responsible to provide us with electricity are making us extremely irritated. It's midnight and I found this to be the best time to write this letter as life is continuously interrupted by electricity shortage. Talking about 'light', we often see poems or songs talking about "finding light, walking on dark path of life." The government may indirectly define itself as a 'dream team,' that took us to the darkest part, projecting nightmare, yet to get worse in the future. According to the media the State Minister for Power, he was unable to see any darkness while returning to Dhaka after three-day vacation.

**Tahsin Hyder**

# Political professionalism and ethics

## Middle East situation

There is a serious problem brewing in the Middle East now, which can virtually ignite the world. Especially in a turbulent time in Iraq, this could be a triggering cause for a global conflagration.

However, the situation, strangely enough, also offers the greatest opportunity for peace in our time -- ushering a new era of trust and goodwill between the Muslim and the Western world, even Israel -- that never existed before. The US is in the position to make this critical choice. Let us not fail the world.

One attempt at a courageous reconciliation now could essentially wipe out many decades of past rivalry and animosity. The temperature of the Muslim world would suddenly drop if it were seen that even Hamas is given a hand in order to help and honour the Palestinian people. The world would know that Israel is ready for peace, and the talk of democracy is real. Unfortunately, this very opportunity is being sabotaged by the wrong and reactionary Israeli-US policy to prevent Hamas from fulfilling the Palestinian mandate. The cost of this blunder will be incalculable.

After a long wait the Palestinians have been allowed to elect their representatives. If the West invalidates this verdict, it essentially would invalidate the nationhood and the dignity of the Palestinians. This would not fly well with a world, which is desperate for peace, and with a nation more resolute and defiant. The situation then can rapidly regress into a state completely out of control. Let us not play with fire.

As for Hamas, it was a different set of agenda and identity it had pursued as an absolutely desperate freedom fighter for its destitute nation. It is quite another set of agenda and identity it would have to follow in order to lead the Palestinian Authority. This distinction must be borne in mind in order to do any constructive work for peace in the future.

**A reader, On e-mail**

Bangladeshis heaved a sigh of relief when the Leader of the Opposition joined the Parliament after a long absence (from September 15, 2004) and the ruling party cordially welcomed her. In her speech, Sheikh Hasina on behalf of AL and 14 party Alliance placed "Reform proposals for fair polls".

The BNP Secretary General responded that the Government was also ready to discuss ways to make future elections more credible, free and fair. We all should indeed feel proud of this positive outcome. This brings the political position from confrontation to the level of "Deuce," as they say in tennis. From this point onwards only the most skillful player(s) wins the game; likewise, between the AL and BNP, the skillful deliberator, within the Parliament, will be the winner.

"The Reform proposals for fair polls" are categorised as follows: Five relate to the Care Taker Government, 15, to making an independent Election Commission and 11 to electoral laws. That's a total of 31 proposals which Hasina said, "are to establish the people's right to vote, not to go to power." Khaleda Zia too, on several occasions, has confirmed that

proposals for reforms placed in the Parliament will be negotiated to ensure "rights of the voters and a free and fair elections." Now the citizens are eagerly awaiting the results.

As reported in newspapers, amid huge desk thumping by party deputies, the AL chief

said, "People want a change and for the change a free and fair election is a must." Does this



phrase sound familiar? Of course it does. The media had organised many roundtable conferences; additionally, civil societies, human rights activists, legal and professional associations, all, organised seminars and discussions for creating mass awareness for all voters and the political parties to understand this hard truth, "People want a change". The Nation feels proud and honoured that their efforts have finally been proved to be productive.

Hasina should have added three more proposals: One, appointment of non-partisan Speakers. Two, deleting Article 70, and three, women's right to participate in direct elections. These are the main hindrances in the smooth running of the parliament and democracy.

The Government and the opposition leaders, as elected representatives, owe it to the citizens and therefore it's imperative that they jointly devise a strategy to solve the problems that hinders the establishment of democracy.

**Badru Islam**  
Uttara, Dhaka