



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.

INFERNO IN GARMENT FACTORIES

Buyers' role



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



Putting 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

A letter to the Danish PM

In the spirit of 'Freedom of Expression' that you and we all value so much, I have taken the liberty to write this letter to you.

You stand as the leader of a democratic society, which has promoted itself as a peace-loving member of the international community of nations, valuing the spirit of human coexistence. Yet, recently, both, you as the leader, and your country have failed the test.

Under the pretext of freedom of expression, you have allowed with impunity freedom of insolence, totally disregarding the fundamental requirement of harmony and peaceful coexistence. Mr. Prime Minister, allow me to quote to you an edict from the Quran, which is compelled upon Muslims in the chapter Al Ana'am verse 108. "Do not insult those who call upon gods other than Allah." This legal provision will prosecute any Muslim who abuses the religious sanctities of others. This is a divine proclamation that was revealed to the same Holy Prophet upon whose dignified head your 'freedom of expression' has drawn a time bomb and whose

sacred faith you have made a mockery of. Now ponder this legal provision, which requires its adherents to coexist with others and compare it with the value system you proudly represent.

When the Taliban destroyed the statues of Buddha, I addressed to them a letter in another English language publication in the UAE condemning that atrocity based on this very Qur'anic edict 108. As a Muslim, and like you, also proud of my heritage, I was not only defending the sanctities of others, but also defending the very values of my heritage, which were violated by the Taliban's deed. Decency requires that we stand and be counted, perhaps more so, when one of our own commits a wrong. The Taliban did not represent my faith, I made that clear. However, your defense of your newspaper, and your refusal to apologise for its sacrilege, clearly indicates that it does represent your values.

Your defense has been based on the pretext of 'freedom of expression'. Which 'freedom of expression' allow you to permit your subjects to transgress upon others? Is it 'freedom of expression' for me to permit my child to insult our neighbour? 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 upcoming election.

I wish the media all success in this noble cause.

Ashfaq Chowdhury
New Delhi, India

Indo-Saudi tie

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

monarch to New Delhi (skipping Pakistan); suspected to be at the wink of America.

In one way it is a good sign, indirectly, for the Saudi initiative in South Asia, as the OIC is a dummy and could not make its mark in the global arena so far, obviously due to the aloofness of the oil-rich Islamic countries, which earn their dollars in the Western world, and keep their earnings there.

This friendly exploitation of energy resources by the rich developed countries is a sad sign of the decline of Islamic domination prevailing for a millennium, as revealed by history. The world is sensitive to the potential prowess of the Muslims, and the West is trying to suppress their aspirations and possible return to glory. Today, the OIC is suffering from severe disparities and communication gaps. It has to learn the hard way how to unite and present one front, and safeguard their territories and natural resources.

It has dawned on the Western world that China and India hold the keys to the coming decades (combined population over two billions). The way the West is treating Iran (after Iraq) is clear enough. The

chess game in Pakistan misfired, and Bangladesh is on the short-list (India has been wooed in a non-vegetarian 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

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.

Reading the article it seemed to me that people in Bangladesh are suffering from identity crisis including the writer. She criticised Hollywood and Bollywood culture and English medium schools etc, but she was not vocal in criticising those responsible for importing these culture and education. Administrative actions at the top level are being executed in English. Even the verdicts of higher courts are declared in English though the general people cannot understand it. Where is the spirit of the Language Movement when these culture and education, which produce thousands of children with apathy towards Bangla, are being allowed in?

Somebody believes in Islamic ideology and wants to establish Islam in all aspect of our life. If they are Islamic fundamentalists, then those who are secular and want to

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



PHOTO: AFP

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

Political professionalism and ethics

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.



PHOTO: AFP



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.

Badrul Islam
Uttara, Dhaka