

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.

Workplace safety and owners' responsibility

Mr. Abu Tayyab, BGMEA Vice President heading its investigation team on Kalurghat tragedy, told BBC that one or two incidents in an industry with over 4,000 factories and 2m workers are not significant (Pravati, 2/25). He didn't say up to how many workers' lives are expendable as a normal cost of doing business, but we feel it is a little 55 lives too many in Kalurghat.

BGMEA wants to wash its hand by compensating Kalurghat victims: one hundred thousand taka for each dead and wounded. Of course these families need the money for more mundane use: to live through a life without their (sometimes only) earning member, or for the expensive burn treatment. But a hundred thousand taka is at best a joke that is not funny.

The association also cancelled the membership of KTS, the garment factory where these 55 of caged people were burned alive. That is odd, was anybody pleading to keep membership for a truckload of charcoal and ashes? If this garment makers' association really wants to make a difference it should put the stitch where it will save nine in future. They should focus on the membership of hundreds of current members who flout the rules for workplace safety and building construction.

Working in this industry for eight years, I have seen that many owners consider workers' rights and workplace safety requirements as nothing more than a drain on their finances. Those who give heartbeat to our economy with \$4.6b export earning deserve better mentality. It shouldn't have taken a tragedy of Kalurghat proportion to make that point. **Ashish Hsan, Uttara, Dhaka**

I note with deep concern and sincere regret the recent tragedies in Chittagong

and Tejgaon, particularly their immeasurable human cost. The deeper part of the tragedy is that these events have disproportionately impacted on those who have already had a marginal and vulnerable existence due to their poverty and gender (as more than 80% of RMG workers are female). For too long in this country the rights and safety of our workers have been undermined by a ruthless quest for wealth -- wealth which is earned through the hard work of workers, but which enriches others. Inadequate safety measures, blocked stair wells and inhuman working conditions are undermining the rights of the workers, the backbone of our economic growth, and are hampering the prospects of true and equal development in our country.

Though the warnings of previous tragedies such as the Spectrum garments factory collapse in Savar less than a year ago have not been heeded it is time for action now. I applaud the decision of BGMEA to inspect all garments factories across the country, and urge them not to lose sight of the importance of enforcing the law that exists, punishing offenders and above all ensuring that the rights of the workers are paramount concern in all activities undertaken within these factories. I further urge the government to recognise the immense wealth and potential that exists in the human resources of the country and to foster that resource through adequate education and by respecting the rights of all people in the country, especially the most vulnerable. Buyers are exerting pressure for improved working conditions. If the warnings of these tragedies are not heeded, Bangladesh faces another more enduring tragedy, the withdrawal of foreign investment and further descent into the quagmire of poverty.

Taleya Rehman
Executive Director, Democracy Watch
Ramna, Dhaka

We all know that a driver of a vehicle can be prosecuted for accidentally killing a person on the road. But what we do not understand is why the owner of the collapsed building in Tejgaon that killed dozens cannot be prosecuted under the criminal law of the country. It is now clear that the owner deliberately broke all relevant laws of the country to add three more floors to his existing structure that caused the building to collapse and with it perished the poor people who were in and around the building. In any country, the owner would have been prosecuted for manslaughter if not for first-degree murder.

I hope some benevolent judge will take note of it and issue a suo moto rule upon the owner of the building as well as the government. The police and the ministers seem to be compromised particularly when you see on TV that the owner was resting peacefully at home while the minister said that the person could not be found. The owner of the building cannot go scot free for his deliberate criminal act just because he happens to be one of the richest men.

Khandaker R Zaman
One-mail

Few months back I had the opportunity to visit some garment industries at Konabari, Gazipur.

What I found appalling is boilers located on the same floor where production and finishing were going on. These boilers are locally made and I doubt if these are safe and certified by the authority concerned.

Boilers can burst, if its pressure is not properly monitored, causing damage to

the entire building and loss of innocent lives. As far as I can feel boilers should be located away from the main building and working place.

The haphazard development of Konabari is an outstanding example of ignorance and greed. The lanes in this area are so narrow that in case of fire no fire brigade vehicle would be able to reach the affected site. More surprising is that the fire brigade unit for Konabari is located 15 km away in Joydevpur.

A government of any other country would have developed a place like Konabari, that earns huge foreign exchange, into a modern industrial township with latest facilities. It is our nation's bad luck that the authorities seem ignorant.

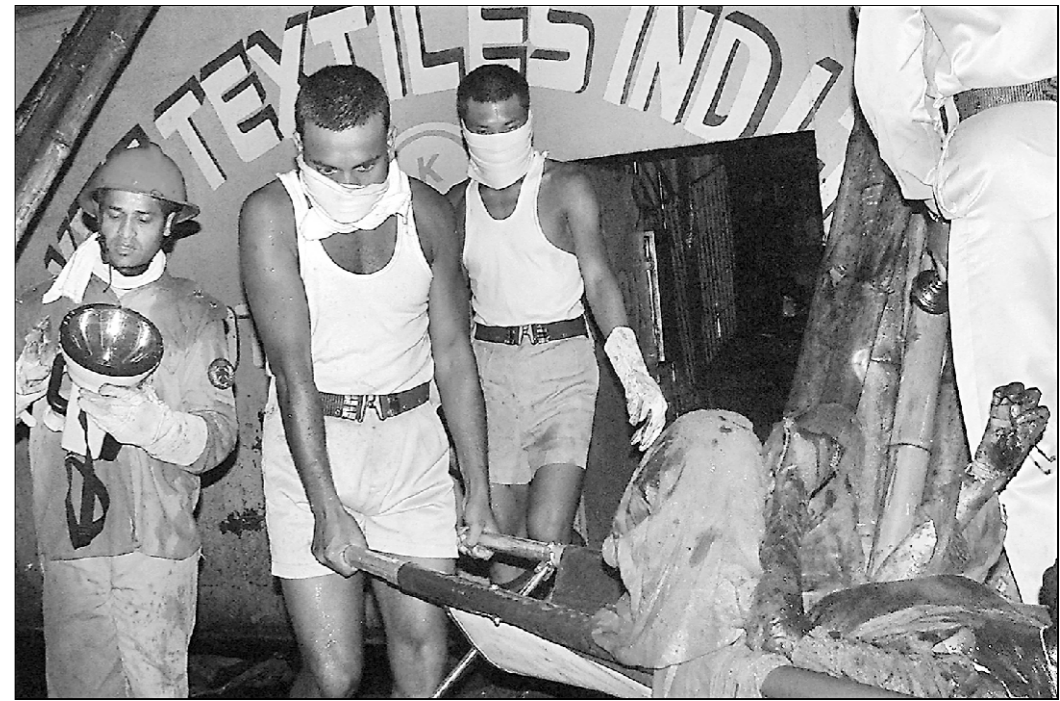
Finally none of the factories have a workers' union or staff welfare office located in the premises to look after the workers.

Another surprising fact is that most of these factories despite their hazardous locations get buyers' compliance approval. After all who inspects the factories and give approval? In most cases the local staff of the foreign organisations/buyers.

If you go to the main crux of the malaise, it is the corruption at all levels that has made lives of the innocents hazardous.

At least if the owners of factories had some heart to accept the fact that it is the workers who actually earn money for the factory and they (workers) need to be well looked after in terms of safety and well being, then many accidents could have been avoided.

Ziauddin Ahmed
One-mail



Awesome Ashraful

Mohammad Ashraful, the wonder boy played another awe-inspiring innings. He simply mesmerized us with his magic wand. He was simply irresistible that day. He has done everything according to his will. He played every shot of his repository -- cover drive, cut, pull, sweep, reverse sweep everything. He made Murali, the world premier spinner pale. He single-handedly dragged the Bangladesh innings beyond 300 run marks.

He's the only world-class cricketer in Bangladesh. He doesn't fear any bowler. No Murali, no McGrath, no Harmision, no Kumble did create any pressure upon him. He's truly world-beater.

He is in super form now. Three 50 plus innings in a row as a Bangladeshi batsman is as rare as Tendulkar bagged three ducks in a row. He reminds us his super form in the NatWest series. But sometimes he looks so vulnerable that every bowler hunts him easily. He must overcome this problem. Thank you super-boy.

Solaiman Palash, East Jurain, Dhaka



Wasa billing

The Dhaka Wasa supplies water through one and only water meter to each building whatever may be the number of floors or apartments. Thus consumers are not aware about their water consumption apartment-wise while there exists Wasa classified consumers like domestic and commercial. The domestic consumers are to pay taka twelve for one cubic meter of water supply while commercial consumers are to pay taka forty for the same one cubic meter of water. My office consumption as commercial is hardly twelve cubic meter bimonthly while my landlord's consumption exceeds sixty cubic meter bimonthly but Wasa bill meters do not accept this figure and they are determined to bill on fifty-fifty basis i.e. 36 unit commercial amounting to Taka 1440/- for me. Thus I have no alternative but to negotiate with Wasa officials against regular payment while I am ready to pay actual bill as consumed -- Taka 480/-.

Wasa should arrange water meters apartment-wise like Gas, electricity, telephone or adopt uniform tariff structure so that consumers are not compelled to negotiate with Wasa officials or harassed by them!

There is no harm if LGRD Ministry and general secretary for

the political party in power seek UN, IMF, EU, ADB, DFID, JAICA etc assistance in this respect. Let gentlemen of the jury do ponder over the facts stated above.

Mahbubar Rahman
New Eskaton Road, Dhaka

Exorbitant private university fees

North South University is the first private and probably the best among the private universities in Bangladesh and as a student of NSU I was also proud of this fact. But no more. The increasing tuition fees in different names have pushed me today to a state where my future education has become very much uncertain.

This is my third year at NSU and I come from a family where my father is the only earning person and I have one younger brother and a sister in the family. My educational expenses were met by often taking loans from relatives, as I was unable to get admitted to any public university. I teach students privately and thus arrange pocket money for me and for my siblings. But as NSU is increasing tuition fees by the name of campus development (3500 Taka each semester) and other reasons, it has become difficult for my father to pay my fees. I applied for financial aid, which requires me to submit the

documents of my property and that I wished if I had any property to get the financial aid!

I don't know what I should do. I become frustrated at the beginning of every semester when I have to ask for the fees from my parents and feel more frustrating to think that from now on they have to pay much higher fees for my education. Moreover, this increased tuition fees does not give us any facility needed and there is always shortage of course availability and the campus is becoming so crowded that you have to wait long for the elevator or stand still in the stairs to allow people to move.

I honestly hope that there is someone who would come forward to help us out and stop the profit-making motive so that we students can actually afford to have education and serve the country.

Anonymous, Dhaka

Long term electricity solution

Electricity is a major driving force of today's economy and Bangladesh is not an exception of this. Practically electricity production and investment in this sector have been ignored altogether over the years. As a result today's electricity crisis is a ripple effect of over the years negligence and carelessness by govern-

ment machinery. This problem cannot be solved in five or ten years. There has to be a long-term plan for this particular sector.

As Bangladesh has been inviting foreign investors in its energy sector such as petroleum and gas, it should take the similar steps for foreign investment in electricity production units. During summer, this crisis increases manifold. Not only it makes people suffer, it cripples all economic and social activities of the country. It's surprising that government is reportedly going to spend thousands of crores on purchasing new aircraft without a proper long term vision and mission. It may be a suicidal decision. If the government does want to help the country in true sense it should do something for its electricity and water supply projects. The government has spent billions of hard earned money on many fancy projects such as city beautification before the Saarc summit. Unfortunately it did not do anything praiseworthy for the country's essential sector such as electricity.

The government should immediately hand over its electricity production and supply to private investors. As long as this sector would allow its corrupt officials to remain a part of it, it will keep on bleeding. Let this crisis of electricity be an eye opener for the government and

hopefully it will create a positive impact on its upcoming foreign investment projects.

Mohammad Jamal
Scarborough, Canada

Voters' enlistment

The squabble over the preparation of voters list is mysterious and meaningless. It only reveals the rot in the head. The most crucial point is the accuracy and authenticity of the list. Adopt every possible means to ensure the same. Prepare fresh list by door to door visits, cross check and verify with the old list (not above question anyway), display draft list in every locality and hear public complains, if any, and further, ensure countersigning the final draft by the local representatives of the major political parties at union/ward level in order to eliminate the scope for any subsequent controversy. Do whatever is necessary to prepare a correct and perfect voters list regardless of some extra cost, and please stop all the unbecoming bickering.

M.A. Hashem, Mirpur, Dhaka

What is the motive behind it?

The publication of Prophet Muhammad's (SM) cartoon in a Danish newspaper and followed by newspaper of other countries seems to be a calculated step, knowing perfectly well that it will be condemned by the Muslims all over the world and there was bound to be violent demonstrations protesting this heinous deed. So, it is quite clear that they have done it on purpose to portray the Muslims as extremists.

No picture of Prophet Muhammad (SM) has ever been published, it is quite natural that these cartoons will deeply outrage the Muslims and they will protest vehemently. We do not understand why the Danish government and the government of other countries are not seeking apology; their adamant attitude is really deplorable.

Nur Jahan, Chittagong

I strongly condemn from the core of my heart the publication of blasphemous cartoons of

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in a Danish newspaper and also in some other European countries. This reprehensible publication has triggered protests in the entire Muslim world. Yes, it is a bit disappointing to see some protests going violent, thus leading to loss of lives and property. But still I do not support the notion of remaining silent and not protesting.

A few writers in this column have suggested that Muslims should have remained silent instead of getting violent and cited some verses from the Holy Quran where Allah advocated His Messenger to show patience and forgiveness in the face of adversity. Allah asked His Messenger to show such forgiveness when hostilities were directed personally to him. But the Danish newspaper, by putting a bomb over his turban, has portrayed the Prophet as a terrorist and has thereby suggested that he preached terrorism. This is therefore insulting to the entire Muslim community

since it has implied that each and every Muslim is actually a terrorist.

When the sentiments and rights of the entire Muslim community are concerned, there is no point remaining silent but to protest as Hazrat Hussein did at Karbala. But of course we should not turn violent. There is a Hadith which says that, "A first-class Muslim is that person who, when he sees any injustice, stops it by getting involved physically. A second-class Muslim verbally protests such injustice while a third-class Muslim only abhors it from his heart." So, simply remaining silent relegates us to below third-class, which implies there is no real faith in us.

So, it is always better to live as second-class Muslims rather than third-class or even below that. I ask all my fellow Muslim brothers and sisters to boycott all Danish products till the Danish government formally apologises for the misdeeds committed in the name of free



speech by a Danish newspaper and enact laws to punish those who hurt the religious sentiments of others. That will appease the Muslims and pave the way for peace and harmony among peoples of all religions.

Sameer Ahmed Khan Mojlish
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Tens of thousands of people throughout the Muslim world have staged protests and

torched three embassies in the name of protest of cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). In addition, at least 20 or more people have died during rioting.

The European leaders and politicians, however, as a matter of free speech, defended the newspapers' right to publish the blasphemous images. Many of the western leaders and editors told that freedom of speech is essential, and it doesn't mean

they are in favour of disrespect. But doesn't it only give the illusion of freedom?

Some people say that the press can say whatever it wants. But does somebody dare write anything about the Holocaust? Is that freedom of speech? The media in the world should consider adopting a voluntary code of conduct to avoid any blasphemous publication to seek a model of living together that would avoid radicalisation. The mainstream Muslim community worldwide is somehow happy with the West, but there are signs of revulsion after publication of the blasphemous cartoons of their Prophet.

On the whole, so far I know, people in the European or Western countries are tolerant of religion, but there is continual misunderstanding about Islam throughout the Western world, nowadays. There is a lot of bad propaganda about Muslims, that they are all terrorists, that there is no way to talk to them, etc. As a result, Muslims and

non-Muslims around the world begin to feel a little apprehensive of one another. The artists who drew the cartoons might have chosen to express their freedom of speech, but failed to depict anything other than an ignorant stereotype.

Sirajul Islam
Shyamoli, Dhaka

Idle brain is devil's workshop that is what can be said about the cartoonist. In Bangla there is a saying that the Satan's job is "Gur Lagano" to stick molasses, rest of the work i.e. the fighting part is done by the human beings and the Satan enjoys if from afar. Whosoever has done it, he did it knowingly and enjoying his success with a wide grin in his face.

I am sure except for very few no one would like to see that cartoon, leave aside making any meaning of it. Then how the Muslims, who are offended should react? Should the Muslims fall into the trap of the Satan to make him winner? Or

should they react sensibly and show restraint under such provocation? There are many cohorts - Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasrin to name a few whom we know. They could not do any harm to the Muslims and will take appropriate place in history and I am sure anybody hurting some one's or a group's sentiment will be paid back in his own coin. So don't worry.

The picture we paint about the west is high morale, civilization at its peak and champion of democracy.

To this a Muslim should just say, "Thank you Mr. West, we do not need the kind of civilization that you portray, please keep it with you".

Commodore AMA Alam
(Retd.) BN
New DOHS, Dhaka