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RMG workers

We feel embarrassed when we read the news that our garment workers block the streets demanding fulfilment of their basic rights. About 7% of our total exportable income comes from the garments sector and this sector also generates about 20% employment. Despite all this, no long-term policy has been formulated yet for the betterment of the workers and this industry by the entrepreneurs or the government. Should we draw a comparison with other sectors, it will be clear that this sector is not well established, well organised, well salaried (at the workers level), well bonded (between workers & owners) and is based on labour exploitation.

In our practical observations, we got the following in many garment units:
The workers are dissatisfied with their salary.

The workers are dissatisfied with their immediate bosses like floor in-charge, production manager.

The workers are not getting the monthly wages in time. Moreover, they are also not getting overtime regularly.

They are not getting sick leave & any allow-

ance. They are not getting medical facilities in case of major illness.

Women RMG workers are not getting maternity leave.

There is no job security of a worker and they lose their jobs without any prior notice from the owner in violation of the ILO rules.

Labour union rights are not recognised. Many of the garment factory owners say that presently they are getting low CM basis orders, so it would not be possible to meet all the demands of the workers. All of us should know that it is not possible to stay in competition keeping labour unrest alive. Already, India and China are making the most out of the situation.

I think the owners should have a positive view on the labour issue.

Tushar K. Pal
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Between the devil...

The general people of Bangladesh are facing a real dilemma with regard to the question of holding the next general election. Some of our intellectuals and political leaders are appealing for an early election as a solution to the current national crisis, particularly the economic one, and some of them do not want an election just for holding another election, that is, an election must be free, fair and impartial, which will produce a functional parliament, not a dysfunctional one.

This is a real problem for us. When we hear the distinguished Dr. Akbar Ali Khan advocating an early election we want to believe him, but when we hear other protagonists of democracy saying that we must have a free, fair and impartial election, then we want to believe them also. This is really a problem for us to decide which is better.

In this context, I would like to ask those who want an early election to kindly tell us how an election could be held in the absence of a voter list because the old voter list had been declared null and void by the highest court of the country. So what would be the benefit for us if an election is held just for holding another election?

Our general people should be guided properly because holding of an election is a matter of critical importance. If we could have calculated the total amount of money spent by the government and all the contesting candidates, then we should have seen a figure by which perhaps we could have paid off our total national debts!!

Whatever is said and told by our political leaders and the intellectuals, one thing is unambiguously clear to us that we must have an election free, fair, impartial, not dominated by black-money, free from armed cadres of the political parties and, above all, which will be beneficial in the long run for the country and the people.

Md Shah Jahan
Dhaka

The language issue

In response to the cover story "Preserving Purity" published in the Star Weekend Magazine (on February 22, 2008), I decided to write this letter to convey a few words about this topic. The theme of the cover story was to save the pure Bangla which is now getting mixed up with the informal one. Actually, language, the way of communication, is based upon change, evolutions and develop-

ment. So, through formal Bangla comes the informal one just like the English not used traditionally in the day-to-day life of the English speaking people. It is not that I am disregarding my own language for which the valiant sons of Bangladesh gave their lives but today's generation wants to have an easy path of conversation through which they can express their everything freely. There is a need for formal Bangla along with the use of the prevalent one.

In addition to this, I strongly protest against the mindset of the media that English medium school students do not give due priority to Bangla. It is a wrong perception because they can write essays, letters, applications or stories in Bangla and have knowledge of Bangla grammar. Most of the schools which follow the curriculum of the University of Cambridge or the London University do not lack in Bangla books and the school authorities put equal emphasis upon English and Bangla. There are a few which do not and they must be taken to task. I think the use of our mother tongue, instead of English, has to be inspired in every school, regardless of its medium. I request all journalists not to aim their pen only at the English medium schools but to dig out the real truth from everywhere.

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Forgetting our culture?

Nowadays the new generation likes fusion, rap, pop, metal, remix etc.

But in the past our people liked folk songs, Rabindra Sangeet, Nazrul Geeti etc. When these genres were introduced some people said they were not good. But now these are the assets of our nation.

"Our new generation is going to be spoilt" say seniors of our society, neighbours, and parents.

We have our own choices. If we don't do any experiments we can't create anything new. If we want to give our nation something new we have to try new flavours and do experiments with which we can enrich our culture. We hear those things, but this does not mean we would forget our culture. They think we waste our time. But when they were young they also wanted new taste, new themes. Were they spoilt? Aren't we their children, their next generation? Then what are they doing for us? Don't they have confidence on their teaching

techniques?

What is remix? A remix is an alternative version of a song, different from the original version. We have our old version. If we want we can enjoy it. If we make a new recipe what is the problem? So all new things are based on the old.

We can't forget our culture. It's not possible to forget ourselves, forget our roots.

Jaharna Rafi Chowdhury
One-mail

USAID for crop diversification

According to a recent USAID press release, the United States will undertake a programme involving more than \$50 million to help the farmers in the Dominican Republic learn how to be competitive by growing new crops and manufacturing handicrafts for the global markets.

Agriculture is the main employer in the Dominican Republic where farmers grow mainly beans, rice, onions and garlic. The economic and poverty reduction programme called - "The Rural Economic Diversification Project" will create opportunities for more profitable products with overseas demand. Under this project, the Dominican farmers will be trained on making wooden and decorative products to supplement their income and on environmental measures.

The project is no doubt very pragmatic. As I was going through the above mentioned press release I was thinking about our farmers. They also need technical assistance for switching over to crop diversification and for learning domestic agro-processing skills. Particularly at this moment such a project is very much essential for the farmers of the cyclone 'Sidr' devastated areas.

It is sincerely expected that the USAID, as part of their development programme in Bangladesh, will consider undertaking a Dominican Republic type project for the economic development and poverty reduction of our farmers.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
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Buriganga tragedy

It is the same old story. Launches capsize all too easily and malpractices of owners, IWIA, Ministry of Shipping, police at terminals, and various others are never brought to light, in spite of the so-called committees formed so speedily after so many tragedies in Bangladesh. That has not yielded any results which could bring the culprits to book. It is no secret that the majority of the launches do not comply with the authorised specifications/drawings, they exceed their load capacity, bribe the police and are not operated as per marine laws etc. etc.

I sometimes wonder why The Daily Star hasn't delved deeper into this subject.

Linda Nasreen Rahman
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My experience with doctors

The caretaker gov't drive against revenue corruption and fraud is being pursued in full swing but another corrupt practice of a very grave nature affecting both the revenue of the gov't. and the pocket of general masses is being totally ignored. I am talking about the corrupt practices of the doctors, whether for writing prescription or giving specialised services. I am sorry to see that neither the gov't nor the medical council, constituted of doctors only, has looked into this social corruption involving our life and death. In the absence of any strong Regulatory Authority, the doctors are involved in corrupt practices and earning a huge amount of money without paying taxes to the gov't. These practices, if left unchecked, will become the greatest social menace.

Let me give some examples of my trust with doctors:

(1) In Chittagong, I visited an ENT doctor who after giving prescription twice or thrice without curing my problem, told me to visit another ENT specialist in Dhaka, for audiogram as he had no such machine available with him. After listening to his advice, I wanted to leave his chamber but to my utter surprise he stopped me to ask for his fees! I told him about his failure to keep an audiogram machine for which he should have felt sorry but instead, he was asking for the fees for just referring me to another doctor in Dhaka. I had to pay him as I found him shifting to an offensive mood.

(2) A few years later in Dhaka, I had to visit another Prof. of ENT who was sitting in a dark room wearing headlights plus two assistants on both sides of him. I found myself in a psychedelic surrounding! Before I could finish describing my ear pain problem, I was given a note by one of the assistants for doing a CT scan of the head at a particular diagnostic centre. I requested for doing this test at another place which is very close to my residence but this was rejected. So I had to go to that centre with Tk 900 in my pocket. But I was told that the test would cost Tk 6000/- . The charge shocked me but not the ENT doctor who would surely get 25% commission! I could not do the test but thank God within a few days my ear pain was gone. It is almost 10 years that the CT scan and the doctor's commission is still due but I am totally cured without their help.

(3) I took my one-year old grandson to a doctor for treatment of some urinary problem. He took his fees and prescribed some medicines and also referred me to a hormone specialist. I took my grandson to the hormone doctor who saw the baby and told that hormone treatment before 5 years of age is not done, so I was told to forget it for the time being. So much so but I was shocked when the doctor pressed me for his full fee of Tk 500/- After arguments, he showed mercy and asked me to pay Tk 300/- which I had to. However, I am yet to understand why the former doctor did not know that children below 5 years are not advised hormone treatment?

(4) I had to go to a cardiac doctor who was once not obliged by me for some services while I was working in a monopoly gov't dept. I had some blood pressure related problem. He immediately recognised and told me to leave and visit him if I got fainted. It was great of him that he did not charge any fees but took the revenge any way.

It is now high time that their malpractices and excesses are contained. I think many more people must have more painful experiences with doctors, including misbehaviour by them.

Mohammed Alauddin
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Dhaka-Kolkata train service

We welcome the initiative of General Moin to sort out differences with the Indian authorities. We are optimistic about improvement in Indo-Bangla relations after his visit.

It might be relevant to mention that the BBC Bengali service in its newspapers review programme pointed out that the Communications Secretary had said that a few issues are yet to be sorted out to pave the way for the train service between Dhaka and Kolkata. This reminds us of the previous occasion when everything looked set for the train service to begin. Similarly, the Home Secretary mentioned to the media that the fencing issue remained unresolved and Bangladesh had opposed the idea.

We hope the government would clarify the official status of the train service between Dhaka and Kolkata formally.

Areader
One-mail

War criminals & voting right

It seems there is confusion and mix-up on this vital issue of national importance. I am most surprised that even intellectuals and people we regard as having balanced opinion are delivering mixed views.

In my view, fundamentally the two issues are quite different and must not be mixed up.

War criminals are war criminals. Nobody has any right to acquit them arbitrarily or out of kindness. All suspected ones must be listed, tried as per international law and convention and if found guilty, punished as per the existing law of international criminal justice. There cannot be limitation of time, as we know listed war criminals of Nazi Germany are still being haunted, tried and punished. If necessary, a special tribunal should be formed in this country, to list and bring them to justice. It's never late, nor should it be avoided because they once had been elected to public offices etc.

Voting right is another issue, it is a fundamental birthright of anybody who was born in Bangladesh. Incidentally, this includes children (born in this land since independence) of "Pakistanis" who have been still living in various refugee camps or other places. They also have the right of getting the national ID card. I am surprised that even the Election Commission is issuing statements contrary to fundamental human rights.

Fundamental human rights must not be confused with emotions, political views or reasons.

MAlam
Dhaka

Doctors

Giving medicare service to people is a noble profession. People from all walks of life are benefited by sincere health services from the doctors and so they respect the doctors wholeheartedly. In spite of all the limitations, their sincere efforts to give better treatment to the patients are commendable. We should not forget that we live in a poverty stricken country. Our gov't. with limited resources cannot bring positive changes in the hospitals overnight. In Bangladesh, a person can easily get treatment from a government hospital almost free of cost, but in other countries this is not possible. As per the standards of modern medicare the hospitals are not well-equipped with modern instruments, still the doctors are trying hard to give better service with what they have.

We should bear in mind that doctors are not angels, they are human beings too.

AKM Anisul Haque
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Kosovo: US role

Predominantly Albanian Muslims recently declared their independence in Kosovo backed by the USA and some other European nations. Germany, Britain, Italy, Turkey and a few more countries, meanwhile, recognised Kosovo as an independent and sovereign country.

Neighbouring Russia, Spain, Romania, Bulgaria, China have, however, protested Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence. They fear that it might trigger independence movement by the separatist groups existing in their own countries.

Anyway, we appreciate the US initiative to establish an independent state of Kosovo.

MAH Nazim
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EKUSHEY

Claude Levi Strauss once remarked that the French Revolution represents an apocalyptic convergence of the past, the present and the future for France as a national entity. I strongly feel that Ekushey February of 1952 is analogous to such an "Epiphany" for Bangladesh. It captures the essence of our nationality. And to make an end is to make a beginning. History will reveal a pattern that Bangladesh is not an ordinary nation among the third world countries to contend with. One can even claim, without any axe to grind, that its people have already proved to

be greater than its leaders, who somehow have always failed to measure up to their expectations because of hubris or tragic flaws, inevitably precipitating their downfall.

I hope that our common dream of a secular, democratic, and economically stable and thriving Bangladesh will be fulfilled.

Let there be the light of Ekushey at the end of this tunnel!

Faridul Alam
New York, US

Hospitals and our leaders

A news item in today's (February 15, 2008) newspapers has attracted my attention. It is on the health condition of Sheikh Hasina, a former prime minister of Bangladesh, who is now in custody suffering from ear and eye ailments and has marginal blood pressure. Some physicians examining her in jail have recommended that she be shifted to the Bangabandhu Hospital for observation and treatment. The IG (Prison) has even assured that she can be sent to any hospital of her choice in Bangladesh for treatment. But she has stated that she is concerned about her security in a hospital in Bangladesh and has expressed her wish to be sent to the US for treatment. Zillur Rahman, a leader of the Awami League, in echoing Sheikh Hasina's wishes, has even suggested that the party (Awami League) will bear all expenses of her treatment in the USA. Sheikh Hasina has been in the USA, during and after her premiership, for treatment of her various ailments.

Several years back Khaleda Zia, also a former prime minister, visited the New York Hospital for Special Surgery, for treatment of her leg problems. In 2006,

Iazuddin Ahmed, the President of Bangladesh, was shifted to a hospital in Singapore by an air ambulance for emergency care. Some months back it was learnt that the eldest son of Khaleda Zia, now in custody, also needed medical treatment overseas. A prominent Awami League leader (cannot recollect his name) has been visiting Bangkok (or is it Singapore) quite frequently in connection with the treatment of his wife. Similarly, it is common knowledge and practice that many of the political leaders, high government officials, businessmen and wealthy citizens of Bangladesh regularly visit hospitals in Thailand, Singapore, India for medical treatment.

While it is the right of every citizen of Bangladesh to receive proper medical treatment, do the ordinary Bangladeshis receive the same attention and medical treatment like the VIPs mentioned in the previous paragraphs? What, of course, is common amongst these VIPs is that they are either powerful or wealthy, or both.

The hospitals in Bangladesh are in dismal condition and the care these hospitals provide is substandard. In the rural areas there is hardly any medical care available even though there are government run hospitals at the thana level. Most of the doctors posted there

are busy in private practice disregarding the plight of the poor patients. Most hospitals lack medical equipment or there are equipment but no trained technicians. The same holds true for the hospitals in the major cities. And corruption has reached endemic levels at these facilities.

The quality of these hospitals would improve dramatically if our politicians and wealthy government officials would get admitted as patients in these hospitals when they or members of their families are sick. After all, they are the representatives of the people and are in a position to change things. They are the movers and shakers. Then they would see first hand the substandard medical care in these hospitals, and then it is they who would raise a hue and cry to improve the quality of medicare in these hospitals.

So next time when some big boss suffers a heart attack he should be air lifted to Bhurungamari thana health complex! I am sure there are highly qualified medical specialists and facilities in these hospitals offering the treatment that these VIPs require. After all don't the common Bangladeshis receive medical care in these hospitals?

M. Akbar
New York

Talk shows on agriculture



The TV channels are holding talk shows on agricultural production, price level and inflation. The marginal farmers who do not have any TV set or any access to information are not really reaping any benefit from this type of talk shows. Those who listen to this type of talk shows are well aware. It is better to hold a seminar or a talk show at the village or thana level and deliver the message on the spot.

It will be beneficial if we verify on the spot whether all cultivable land has been tilled, whether good seeds, seedlings, manure, water and agri-loan have been made available to them.

If not, remedial measures should be adopted in consultation with the authorities concerned or the administration.

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