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Child labour

I was on my way to Mymensingh from my uncle's residence at Shankar bus-stand in Dhaka.

After waiting for some time, I got up to a vehicle and saw a 10 years old child calling passengers loudly with an unpleasant appearance due to the scorching heat.

I felt sorry for the poor boy. What is society doing for such hapless kids?

H.M. Sajibur Rahman
English language and literature
Jatio Kazi Nazrul Islam University
Trishal, Mymensingh

Price of urea

It's a distress to the farmers. Field level agricultural officials and staff have to play the role of shock absorbers to the farmers.

The price would be gradually increased. Isn't it an abrupt result of the unadjusted prices of urea? For fiscal 2008-09, 28.50 lakh tonnes of urea has to be imported. Import cost has increased more than 7 times in the 11 years.

The neighbouring countries have adjusted the prices regularly. We have not done that and thus a crisis has been created.

SaiTinku
Baridhara, Dhaka

Education loan

There are many poor students in our country. Some of them drop out every year. Many students are involved in private tuition or part-time jobs. It is not beyond our knowledge that only a few organisations provide scholarships for students which is insufficient for them. Though some banks provide education loan but such loans are not easy to get.

The costs of study are increasing day by day. So, I urge the government to take some positive steps to help such students.

Bokul Das
Dept. of Law
University of Dhaka

Comments on commentary

While chasing the target of 233, Bangladesh batsmen could not face the challenge. Towards the end of the match, when defeat of Bangladesh was certain I switched on to Bangladesh Betar commentary of the match as the electricity went off. The commentator was showering praises on Md. Ashraf for the innings he played using such words which were an exaggeration, to say the least. It seemed that Bangladesh was in a winning position where Ashraf played an epic innings creating history in the world of cricket. It's obviously a positive thing that our captain is back to form. But I have enough doubt whether that particular innings of Md. Ashraf had anything that could make it a memorable one. All he could do was to decrease the margin of defeat and not for a moment it seemed that he (or his boys) was competing for a win. It would be a lot better if Bangladesh could manage 163 in 30 overs for all ten wickets. But praises showered by the commentator were really beyond my understanding as if getting a fifty is the best achievement batsman could have.

The art of commentary is in danger!!
Wajahat, Mirpur, Dhaka

Political unrest

Being an optimistic citizen, I always think that this is the time we can overcome the political unrest, but now we observe new clouds on the horizon.

The political parties should try to place the interests of the country above everything else.

Rahed
One-mail

Threat to Biman?

The report by Rashidul Hassan, published on June 8, about Air Arabia starting flights from Dhaka to Middle East destinations can be a serious threat to Biman's near monopoly on these routes. Though Air Arabia is a low cost airline, Biman's passenger handling starting at check-in counter is in no way better, maybe even worse than the new low cost carrier! Their edge however will be the cheaper fare as reported.

Most Middle East travellers, who are manual workers, and even the budget conscious tourist, may well prefer to carry snacks in their carry-on bag, for the six to eight hour flight duration rather than in-flight meals of indifferent quality! On top of it, if the new carrier has new aircraft, and if it maintains schedules and can avoid delays (a normal Biman tendency), then they can easily win customers from Biman! No meals on board for this sector may not be a handicap!

All this means price war for Middle East travel. Here the lack of flexibility of Biman management could well be a major hindrance! If Air Arabia can provide suitable connections for European and US destinations with other carriers, Biman will have headaches. One wonders if Biman can handle and overcome this potential threat!

S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Youth and tourism

The World Youth Student & Educational (WYSE) Travel Confederation is a non-profit organisation that represents the world's leading youth travel and student travel. Its global community of 550+ members in 119 countries provides international travel and educational experiences to 10+ million students and youth each year.

WYSE Travel Confederation is committed to understanding the ever changing characteristics, motivations, and needs of young travellers. This investment in research and market intelligence informs the policies, services and products which make international travel and educational experiences exciting, safe, accessible and affordable for young people.

Bangladesh needs to keep in touch with WYSE that would be really helpful for our young generation to understand tourism and climate change.

Mohammad Shahidul Islam
A tourism worker

Prime minister

According to article 55(1), "There shall be a cabinet for Bangladesh having the Prime Minister" at its head and comprising also such other Ministers as the Prime Minister may from time to time designate."

According to article 55(2), "The executive power of the Republic shall, in accordance with this Constitution, be exercised by or on the authority of the Prime Minister."

Because of the above Article, it can be said that the Prime Minister is the constitutional dictator!
Mohammad Rayhan Uddin
Premier University, Chittagong

Democracy?

I applaud the number of articles in Te Daily Star in which noble souls express the wish that Bangladesh should become more democratic and more tolerant but the degree to which this is a challenge is illustrated by something I find acutely embarrassing:

It is quite usual, in our capital city, for the residents of smart apartment blocks - most of whom consider themselves well-educated and have positions of status in society to vote not to allow the maidservants to use the lifts. In our case, the thin little 'bua' who used to clean our common staircase was expected to carry a bucket of water up 5 flights. Because she could not cope with this harsh regime, imposed by the manager, she is now unemployed.

In a true democracy, her voter ID card is just as valid as anyone else's but how do we create a nation of people who have the courage to stand up against behaviour that denies the truth of that?

Areader
Dhaka

Daily Star-DHL Business Awards

There is no doubt that the DS-DHL Annual Business Awards are the premier and most prestigious awards for the entrepreneurs and corporate entities of Bangladesh. While the recipients of the accolades are no doubt deserving, I have a feeling that these awards have missed out on two points.

First, I am disappointed that one, whose candidature is thoroughly deserved has not been considered for the last 8 years. This group fulfills all your criteria as they have pioneered a sector that is practically suitable for an agrarian economy like Bangladesh. They foster cultivation of indigenous raw materials; add manifold values to it through processing, thereby creating wealth; provide employment opportunities to the rural population by building rural facilities near growing areas, thereby inhibiting urban migration; earn considerable foreign exchange by exports of quality goods to over 70 countries; pay vast sums to the government exchequer as taxes, VAT etc and they are in the best borrowers (to my knowledge) category as far as bank loan repayments are concerned. They are also in the 'Blue Chip' category in the Stock Exchanges.

At the same time they pursue gender equality policies by employing women as far as possible and their growth curve over the last 15 years has been nothing short of phenomenal, akin to a F-16 taking off! I am referring, of course, to the PRAN-RFL Group.

Second, your commendable inclusion of a woman entrepreneur in the awards every year has encouraged mass replications,

with women coming forward to play positive roles in the business world. This has encouraged me to place before you (for next year) another category that would benefit a large section of our population that is presently oppressed, suppressed and denied equal employment opportunities suitable for them.

They are the 14 million + (fully 10% of our population) disabled people of Bangladesh, a vast majority of whom are languishing in the bottom rung of the economic ladder because of the misconception that they are 'unemployable'. This is absurd, since 56% of employees where I work are persons with disabilities and we have no problem whatsoever. So we would welcome a DS-DHL Award in 2009 to the 'organisation that employs the largest number of differently-abled people during the year' or 'one with the highest percentage of challenged people on their pay-roll'.

Food for thought, but it would definitely boost their economic independence and drag them up and out from their present description of being 'the poorest of the poor'.

Sikander Ahmed
Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Dhaka's traffic congestion

The city's main roads do not have any rickshaws to be blamed for the traffic congestions. For example, five kilometer distance from Mohakhali Flyover to Dhanmondi road # 32 on a Friday takes 10 minutes, whereas the same route on a weekday will take around 45-60 minutes. Now I do not see any rickshaws for this congestion. It's simply because we have too many vehicles on the roads and the number of roads are limited. Moreover, the drivers of the cars (as majority of the vehicles plying on this particular route are cars) need to be educated by the person(s) sitting on the backseat "The owner(s)". Now the question is, is the car owner himself aware of the traffic rules? I personally believe they are not. I have seen many times the owner honking for no reason on a red light, taking over another vehicle from the wrong side and parking the car in a no parking zone.

I believe the traffic police are also to be blamed and should be educated about the traffic rules. Starting from the officer to the constable, they have very little idea about the rules. The licensing authority should be trained as well. To do all these, the government should bring in experts from the United Kingdom. The UK has a unique system on the streets.

I personally believe we also need to develop the habit of walking. Though some of the roads have pavements but again the conditions are very poor for a pedestrian. The pavements need to be wider and cleaner and the surface has to be plain for the pedestrians. By walking a certain distance we can also avoid the use of a vehicle and help reduce the carbon dioxide.

Rickshaws cannot be removed from the streets of Dhaka in the near future as economically the country is not strong enough to get these poor pullers another job.
Sohel Ahmed
Dhaka



MUNIR UZ ZAMAN / DRINKNEWS

Since the time Bangladesh emerged as an independent country with Dhaka as its capital, the city has been expanding rapidly in a very unplanned and uncontrolled manner. Today nearly 10% of the country's population live in Dhaka. The pressure of population is increasing every day. Our country does not have the resource or the means to maintain such a mega city with the required facilities. Our traffic system is terrible and even after massive investment in underground trains and multi-storeyed overhead roads the situation will only marginally improve. It will not be considered satisfactory. Then there is shortage of electricity, water, gas and other

essential services. Most of the multi-storeyed housing complexes will not be able to withstand a earthquake of the magnitude that struck China recently. We are in the earthquake zone. The last major earthquake to hit the city was nearly 100 years ago and another major earthquake is due any time. Should a earthquake strike Dhaka city, it will become a city of rubbles. There will be huge loss of life and property.

When we take these factors into consideration, we do not find any justification for having all our eggs in one basket. The only way to save this city would be to stop its further growth and expansion.

I suggest that as the first step we shift our capital to a less earthquake prone place in the western half of the country. Once that is done we should fully decentralise administration and concentrate on developing twelve to fifteen cities in the country, each should accommodate a maximum of half a million people. These will be achieved a lot more easily than trying to make Dhaka what it will never be even after massive investment.

The new cities could be developed in a planned manner.
Salahuddin Ayubi
On e-mail

Judges

I refer to the suggestion of Rayhan Uddin from Chittagong under the above heading (June 12) to amend Article 97 of the Constitution because it apparently conflicts with Article 96. The recommendation of Supreme Judicial Council is required to remove any Judge (Article 96) whereas the President can remove the Chief Justice without any such recommendation if the President is satisfied that the "Chief Justice, on account of absence, illness, or any other cause is unable to perform his functions".

The objection of Mr. Rayhan is to the phrase 'any other cause' which implies reserve power lying with the President to remove the Chief Justice and hence the necessity for amendment of Article 97. As I learnt from my studies for an LLB degree from University of London many years ago, legal interpretation is a specialist minefield, and it is often difficult to understand by laymen with common sense. For instance in common parlance "any other cause" can be an open wide clause embracing all, however this will thwart the legal intention and cause the Article to fail. In legal practice therefore such clauses are given 'restricted meaning' by the courts in many cases to make definite sense and avoid contradic-

tion. And clues to such restrictive interpretation follows from the words preceding any such wide clause, and in the case of article 97 these words are "absence and illness". So that "any other cause" would have to be something of the nature of absence or illness, and not be something completely different such as say "incompetence, or corruption or not toeing the government's line", etc.

So in my humble opinion I do not think the Article 97 requires amendment on this score.
Engineer Shafi Ahmed
London, UK

Diplomats

A very common and popular topic of talk show discussion is rationalizing the direct interference of diplomats in our political matters. One of such discussions was held in the GP Tmatra recently. The participants were a former adviser of the CTG and an educationist-cum-diplomat. It is nice to hear them pointing out at the weaknesses of the country to firmly handle such so-called diplomatic "discipline". The other catch word we hear is: It is a breach of Geneva Convention. If it is a real breach of Geneva Convention, why Bangladesh cannot seek legal remedy from the UN which is the

ultimate custodian of this Convention? I do not know whether the UN has any role in monitoring the observation status of such an important UN Convention to protect the rights of the citizens of an under-developed and poor country like Bangladesh; The only way Bangladesh can achieve some limited success is to put moral pressure on the overactive diplomats through a well organised citizens' group and to correctly represent the interferences made by diplomats in our internal matters. The media, especially the electronic media, can play a very significant role by not making them focal point of the news.

The diplomats are our development partners, if you ask them one important political question, ask them 3 questions on development. Make them less visible on TV screen. TV reporters should be much more professionally capable to handle the diplomats, and may even undergo very special type in-service training. The unfortunate part of it is that here also we perhaps need foreign assistance.

It might appear that the views expressed here are applicable to all foreign diplomats, but in reality we are referring to about only a few of them. They might have emerged

so eye catching because of the prevailing political situation in Bangladesh. The issue can easily be discussed with them.

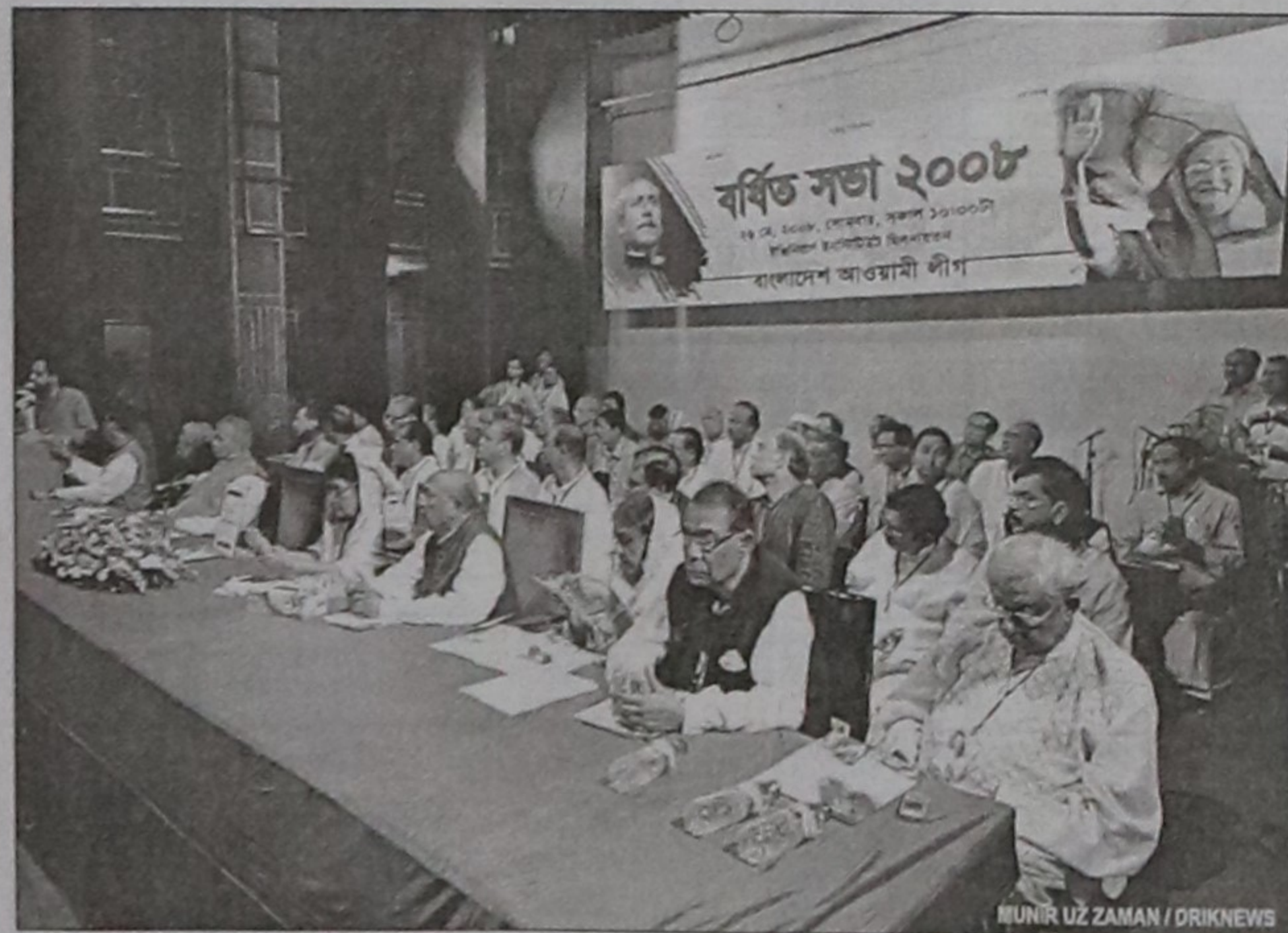
A citizen
One-mail

"Rude foreigners"

It is incredible that grumbling, however rudely, by two foreigners about delays at the payment counter can lead to such a generalization about foreigners (DS 15/6/08). Such rude grumbling is not the exclusive domain of the English and is certainly well within the domain of Bangladeshis. If such a generalization is acceptable, it is no wonder that Bangladeshis are all painted with the same brush in the Middle East. It would have been more appropriate to complain about the rudeness of the two English ladies without referring to 'these foreigners'. The generalization that foreigners are rude is itself far ruder than rude grumbling about customer service.

We Bangladeshis are more than capable of inflicting injustice on our fellow Bangladeshis without help from foreigners. On a lighter note though, the English would be far ruder about corrupt politicians than we are.
Ezajur Rahman
Kuwait

Huge communication gap



MUNIR UZ ZAMAN / DRINKNEWS

The political dialogue started in the fourth week of May, but the communication gaps are huge (amongst the citizens, politicians, and the foreign observers who also act as advisers).

The uncertainty might increase after completion of the distribution of the new Voter ID Cards. The possession (for the first time) of the digitalized voter/national ID card is more important than regular elections from time to time for generations to come (one-time operation vs. periodic operation).

The question which arises is what are

the (grey areas) game plans by the different sets of players after this ID project. Why some disagree with the holding of the LG elections before the general elections? Losing established political bases? Why some parties support local elections before the general elections? The criterion is public interest. Now one party has recommended the formation of a new constitution commission to review the Constitution; and the sharing of power between the President and the PM.

Second doubt: suppose the two lead-

ing political parties decline to participate in the general elections. The authorities (the government, EC, law enforcers, etc) would be able to control and maintain a peaceful environment (different parties have confidential roadmaps for survival and power sharing). It reminds us of the proverb: There might be a slip between the cup and the lips.

Our beautiful forest has to be cleared of political garbage. This operation sweep-up is not yet complete; and it cannot be completed in one or two phase -- as 60 million voters are involved -- the majority are below the average awareness level (which gives political crooks the advantage of marketing the communication gaps).

Wobbly governance of the newly emerged nations in the third world is not a familiar routine job, as the master plans of the rich industrialised countries, (note how they tackle the rise in the oil prices; and the relocation of factories and IT offices).

Another point: today Bangladesh is under foreign monitoring, due to its strategic location in South Asia, and proximity to mighty China, which is a thorn in the Western eyes. Hence be prepared for subtle foreign interventions in our internal affairs (in 30 years the foreigners never showed so much interest in our general elections!).

A Mawaz
Dhaka

Garment industry

The garment industry has become the main export sector and a major source of foreign exchange in Bangladesh over the years. It currently exports about \$5 billion worth of products each year giving employment to 3 million workers of which 90% are women.

It is a discernible fact that it is, in a sense, promoting women's empowerment because they are the prime contributors to its rapid development and continual expansion. Since, Bangladesh is an underdeveloped country and its resources are limited, the most optimum solution to provide for its citizens with favourable subsistence and moderate standard of living is to utilize its most valuable asset-- manpower. To put the huge population to use by employing them in large industrialized sectors would be very useful. This is what the garment sector is doing.

But at the same time we cannot overlook some of the most vital drawbacks that the garment industries have brought along with them. Most of these industries are in fact multinational corporations and their crucial objective is to expand production and diversify their profits in whatever means they need to adopt. In the process of business expansion, they are cutting off the very hands of their profit generator--depriving their labour force. The same product, if made in their own country, would have cost them a lot more. Because in a developed country the cost of living is quite high. As a result,

production costs including labour wages are much higher and also environmental issues will have to be considered. Our country requires huge provisions of funds including job facilitations and improvisation of machinery. These are offered by these multinational garment companies. So, these negative effects are somewhat left without necessary reflection.

The workers have very little or no rights to increase their wage or to get holiday benefits. The menial and back-breaking hours are not at all relaxed

because if this is done then production will decrease and so would profit. Alienation as well as health deterioration leads to fatigue among workers and they are compelled to drop out. If we do not look into these matters, then our garment sector will come to a standstill.

The garment entrepreneurs must be compassionate towards their labour force. Only then can the sector flourish as a job provider and foreign currency earner.
Naome Syed
Mohammadpur, Dhaka



DAWR AHMED / DRINKNEWS