

## Khaleda Zia on garment unrest

*She should share her experience of garment unrest during her tenure*

**B**NP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has expressed her concern at the recent unrest in the readymade garment sector that resulted in some deaths and massive destruction of property. We fully share her views and support her remarks since it is directed at the major foreign currency earning sector of the country. Her appeal to the owners of garments factories to clear the dues of the workers on time is in essence the crux of the matter, and we urge the owners and the BGMEA to take this advice to avoid further deterioration of the situation.

We are aware of a number of agreements signed by the factory owners, workers' representatives and the government to ensure timely payment of salaries, readjustment of minimum wages, payment of overtime, weekly holidays and so on. Most of these agreements remain to be fully translated into action. We feel unless and until these are made effective, it would be quite difficult to avoid more violence in future. The legal and moral responsibility of taking the right steps, therefore, lies on the shoulders of the factory owners.

The Leader of the Opposition has talked about the possibility of the hands of foreign competitors being behind the creation of a state of anarchy in the garments sector with a far-fetched motive. This is a serious allegation and it deserves to be investigated, and we urge the government to do so. We recall similar incidents of violence taking place in the garments sector during the tenure of her government. It is natural that she would have received intelligence reports about those incidents. Were there indications of "foreign hands" at that time? If yes, what steps did she take?

We would like to suggest that Khaleda Zia can raise these issues more forcefully in parliament and engage the government in useful deliberation for the interest of the country. After all, that is the specified role cut out for the opposition in parliament. The opposition has no right to deprive their voters of its representation in parliament and also has no right to deprive the nation in general of its opinion and wisdom on important national issues by boycotting parliament for no credible reason. If for no other reason then to save the garment industry, among our biggest foreign exchange earners, from "foreign hands," she and her party must raise these issues in parliament.

In conclusion we also wish to note with regret some remarks of the prime minister that were directed against the opposition leader, when the latter failed to show up at the UN Poverty Day function. We think such remarks should not have been made which did not befit the position and status of a prime minister. It only added to further distancing the opposition from the ruling party.

## Prothom Alo steps into its twelfth year . . .

*We celebrate its bold, committed journalism*

**W**E share in the happiness that *Prothom Alo* experiences as it steps into its twelfth year. In the eleven years that have gone by, *Prothom Alo* has clearly carved a remarkable place for itself in Bangladesh's media world through its bold, ethical and independent coverage of individuals and personalities. Briefly, *Prothom Alo* has brought about a significant transformation in Bangladesh's journalism by going deep into the issues as a way of upholding the public interest. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the newspaper is a journalistic phenomenon in our time.

Owing to its investigative reportage and its considered comments on national as well as global issues, *Prothom Alo* can rightly call itself (and few would disagree with that) the symbol of a resurgence of free and independent journalism we have seen taking shape in the country since the restoration of democracy in 1991. It is a resurgence which puts our media on a par with those in countries noted for freedom of expression. We note here that despite the many legal and structural impediments put in their way, the media in Bangladesh have generally and with finesse emerged as shining examples of freedom and democracy. This can be observed through the expansion of the media industry: the presence of hundreds of newspapers and weeklies as well as nearly a dozen private television channels and some privately-owned FM radio stations in the country at present. In the midst of it all, *Prothom Alo* stands out not only for its vast reach in terms of circulation (nearly 4,50,000 people subscribe to it every day) but also for its espousal of such critical social causes as the campaigns against drugs, acid throwing and Aids. The newspaper has also set a unique example of involving its readers in humanitarian and development work.

As fellow travellers across what is yet a difficult terrain for Bangladesh's media, we at *The Daily Star* and on behalf of our readers wish *Prothom Alo* greater success in the days ahead.

## Time for the garment sector to come of age

In a situation of mutual distrust and suspicion, dialogue is the best tool to bridge the gap between two sides at daggers drawn. In fact, a functioning workers' union can do the job best, and also help an industry grow better and prosper.

SYED FATAHUL ALIM

**T**HE October 31 worker-police clash in Tongi, which led to three deaths and injuries to about a hundred others, including police, has not surprised many, because workers' violence, whatever the reason, has become a regular occurrence in the garment sector during the last few years. It is very strange, though, that garment workers, 80 percent of whom are women, are capable of such violence. However, the October 31 flare-up reportedly saw fewer women than in the earlier ones.

The latest violence harks back to widespread frenzy of garment workers' violence witnessed in late June this year when on-duty Ansars fired into a rally of workers from a sweater factory. In that incident, too, workers were demonstrating for pay hike. But the provocation triggered a nightmare of workers' fury that led to widespread vandalism and destruction. Small wonder that the incident helped to make the theory of external interference and sabotage sound plausible.

Even earlier, in 2006, we had a similar

experience of flare-ups that ended in bloody encounters between garment workers and the police, supported by paramilitary forces. As expected, in every case, the factory management and workers have mutually conflicting versions of the same incident, including the suggestion of sabotage. So, what then is the truth? To determine the real cause of the violence, probe committees are formed, but our experience in this respect, too, is far from gratifying.

The latest incident at Nippon Garments Industry Ltd. had the home ministry, as is customary, give an order to form a five-member probe body represented by the government, the owners and workers.

That apart, the whys and wherefores of the incident are not quite incomprehensible, as one can see the same old pattern of happenings that ultimately precipitate into a bloody battle between workers and law-enforcement. The present case, too, is no exception, and the factory management concerned again sees outside hands, alleged to be out to destroy the country's garment sector.

Talking of foreign hands, one wonders

how they are able to incite the workers so easily to destroy the factories that provide them with their sustenance. There are also allegations of people from nearby localities being drawn into the worker-police confrontations. Why should they like to be a party to such clashes? What is their interest? Have they all become pawns in the hands of the alleged foreign agents?

In earlier outbreaks of violence in Savar and Ashulia, agitated workers went to such lengths as to set fire to the factories they worked for. Many well-meaning people were then wont to buy the conspiracy theory of saboteurs involved in the act. Still, such explanations of each and every incident of garment workers' protests, that often turn violent, are rather simplistic. Interestingly, earlier, the unrest died down as soon as factory owners were ready to admit facts and agree to a minimum pay scale for the workers.

Presently, the factory workers who talked to the press gave identical explanations about the cause of the unrest. It was over the non-payment of arrears dues and sudden closure of the garment factory ahead of the Eid-ul-Azha. It is not hard to understand why workers were so anxious about their pays, Eid bonuses, and most importantly, their jobs. That was reason enough for them to demonstrate.

Yet, on duty police, factory management, leaders of the apex trade body for the garment sector, the Bangladesh Garment

Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and members of parliament (MPs) who have a stake in the garment business, spoke as one in their statements: there were no workers involved in the protest march, no worker died, and outsiders caused the violence. What will the man on the street make out of these two mutually conflicting versions of the same incident? Since both versions cannot be simultaneously true, truth becomes the first casualty in such a situation.

On the contrary, the entire picture would be different had there been any mechanism to mediate between the workers and the owners. A workers' union, uncorrupted by vested interests or party politics, is a time-tested mechanism to solve such problems that arise between management and industry workers. The union works as a safety valve and resolves such crises. In a situation of mutual distrust and suspicion, dialogue is the best tool to bridge the gap between two sides at daggers drawn. In fact, a functioning workers' union can do the job best, and also help an industry grow better and prosper.

If the management and industry workers cannot see eye to eye with each other, then for how long will the industry sustain itself and thrive? And the foreign hands? Well, what provides a better breeding ground of conspiracy and infiltration than a mass of deprived, disillusioned, and angry workers who have to struggle for their very survival?

Fatahul Alim is a senior journalist.

## All anti-taliban combatants should unite

Terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan, coupled with the arrest of Islamist militants in Bangladesh, furthered by the American assessment that al-Qaeda has tentacles in about sixty countries, makes it imperative that they be destroyed to safeguard our sovereignty and economic development.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

**P**RESIDENT Obama's strategy to fight the Taliban is yet to get unanimous support in all the quarters in the US. The war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, albeit sanctioned by the UNSC and sought by the international community, if pursued as prescribed by General Stanley McChrystal, that the US shift its strategy to population security and dedicate more resources, as distinct from the advice by Vice President Joe Biden of the US cutting its losses and prosecuting the campaign using Predator and cruise missile strikes to produce better results, could bring into focus Gabriella Blum's thesis of (The laws of war and the lesser evil -- Yale Law Journal) whether the absolutist stance of non-recognition of lesser evil is justification for breaking the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law.

The Afghan war also strengthens Professor Michael Paulsen's argument that international law is never more than an opinion and that US constitution should keep international law at bay. Such debate apart, Hillary Clinton's tough talks during her October visit to Pakistan, virtually accusing the country of complicity with al-Qaeda,

and her difficulty in believing that no one among Pakistani authorities knew whereabouts of the al-Qaeda leadership though al-Qaeda has had safe havens in Pakistan since 2002, shook not only Pakistanis but also Washington. She also implicitly criticised the Pakistani military security establishment.

It is believed that the Pak-Afghan border region had been the base of 9/11 hijackers and many other terrorists, and that most terrorist attacks after World Trade Center in 1993 have been traced to Pakistan and not to Afghanistan, Iran or Iraq.

US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry opined in May that Pakistan, with its nuclear arsenal, terrorist safe havens, Taliban sanctuaries and growing insurgency, has become the most difficult challenge faced by the US. He added that Pakistan at present had the potential to be crippled by the Taliban or to act as bulwark against everything the Taliban represented.

Senator Kerry underscored both the Pakistani feeling of being used by the US and then left in the lurch and the American policy of cooperation with the military while paying scant attention to the wishes of the people. Concurrently, President Obama's

APak representative Richard Hallbrooke testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that a stable, secure, democratic Pakistan was vital to US national interest. He said that President Obama's policy towards Pakistan was to ensure Pakistan's stability for the security of the US and the rest of the world through increased security, governance and development assistance.

Hallbrooke spoke of the trilateral engagement among the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan in which the three parties shared commitment to combat terrorism and extremism. South Asian expert Rory Stewart testified that the final goal of the Obama administration to disrupt, dismantle and defeat the al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to prevent their return to either country in future, "is trying to do the impossible. It is highly unlikely that the US will be able either to build an effective, legitimate state or to defeat the Taliban insurgency."

In the same vein, Pulitzer Prize winner journalist Steve Coll (New Yorker, October 19) writes that since the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 attempts by foreign powers to shape events there have repeatedly been thwarted by what intelligence analysts call "mirror imaging," which is the tendency of the decision makers in one country to judge counterparts in another country through the prism of their own language and politics. Coll cautioned that safeguarding American interests in APak region to free it from the Taliban should not be confused with the quest for an honest president in Kabul, where rulers often have not been trustworthy.

This converges to some extent with Samuel Huntington's proposition in his

book *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968) that authority, even of a brutal kind, is preferable to none at all and that the degree to which a state is governed is more important than how it is governed. Huntington felt that despite ideological differences the US had more in common with the USSR than it did with any weakly ruled state. Unsurprisingly, neo-con Michael Ledeen (Rediscovering American character -- September 11, 2009) has called for dismissal of claims that "all people are the same, all cultures are of equal worth, all values are relative, and all judgments are to be avoided."

He calls the al-Qaeda terrorism as the "latest incarnation of servitude -- this time wrapped in a religious mantle" that must be defeated. This line of thought appears to strengthen Bernard Lewis's oft quoted rage against Islam and the Muslims and of the assertion by Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi that the problem facing the world was not al-Qaeda but Islam. But then, President Obama's Cairo speech has assured the Islamic world that the so-called war on terror is not directed at the Muslims but at the wayward group of Islamists bent on terror to recreate a "pristine 6th century Arabia" as an answer to Western "degenerative" modernity.

Terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan, coupled with the arrest of Islamist militants in Bangladesh, furthered by the American assessment that al-Qaeda has tentacles in about sixty countries, makes it imperative that they be destroyed to safeguard our sovereignty and economic development.

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## Davutoglu's Doctrine

Turkey has now signed historic protocols with Armenia, warmed icy relations with Syria to the point where visa has been abolished, lifted ties with Iran and become a vital partner of Iraq in the reconstruction of the country.

M.J. AKBAR

**W**HEN Turkey's president, Abdullah Gul, visits India early next year, he will be representing a nation that has reinvented its geostrategic role through an independent foreign policy in barely eight years. I hope he brings along Ahmet Davutoglu, who shaped the theory and then structured the practicals, first as principal adviser to Prime Minister Recep Tayyab Erdogan, and now as foreign minister. He must be one of the few academics fortunate enough to get a chance to make ideas work.

The starting point was 2002, when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) won the elections and ended the monopoly on power exercised by a military-bureaucratic-civilian Istanbul-centric elite which claimed the inheritance of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and his European-style secularism which still prohibits a Turkish woman from wearing a headscarf to university. This elite protected Ataturk's secular vision, but, somewhere along the way, lost sight of Ataturk's independence.

The wives of Erdogan and Gul wear headscarves, but that is not the point: the wives of many cabinet ministers and high officials do not, and are not required to. What is relevant

is that AKP subtly shifted a policy that had become synonymous with America's, without the angry rhetoric that has become a regrettable hallmark of so many who strut as lead actors on the anti-American stage. AKP proved that change was possible without compromising an amicable and mutually beneficial relationship with Washington. Their predecessors had America's friendship. AKP has America's respect as well.

Turkey has played a pivotal role in two of the three great wars of the 20th century. It was an ally of Germany and the central powers in the First World War, but refused to declare war on the United States even when the latter joined the Anglo-French alliance. Even though it lost its empire in the fighting, Turkey did not permit a single enemy soldier on its territory during wartime. Istanbul was occupied only after truce. Ataturk, victor of Gallipoli, was the great hero of this conflict; but took his true place in his nation's history after 1918, when the vainglorious trio of Lloyd George, Winston Churchill and Clemenceau, leavening their intent with anti-Muslim crusader sentiment, armed and financed a Greek invasion of Turkey. Their aim was to partition the country and leave Turkey as a rump Anatolian state. Ataturk mobilised a proud army and people, and shocked the victors of World War I by

destroying the Greeks after they reached the outskirts of Ankara.

Ataturk, protecting his nation's independence, kept Turkey neutral in the Second World War. Historic fears of next-door Russia, now the Soviet Union, drove Istanbul into Washington's embrace in the Cold War. But when, in the 1980s, flexibility became an option, and in the 1990s a necessity, Turkey remained rigid. When it looked south, it could only see Israel; when it looked east, it could see nothing more than Pakistan. Both were American allies. Turkey did not have a policy or a vision for the 21st century.

Davutoglu selected the moment of departure with uncanny vision: George Bush's war on Iraq in 2003. Turkey gave an early sign of change, when it refused to let American troops pass through Turkey on their way to Iraq. It also realised, fairly early, that America would be weakened by Bush's Iraq folly, creating space for new players, since the Soviet Union was too weak to play any role at all.

Israel and Iran have sufficient muscle to fill a regional vacuum, but both were inherently belligerent. They would be able to intervene, but as destabilisers rather than stabilisers. Iran had a natural advantage in Shia-majority Iraq, but it simultaneously provoked deep suspicions in the Arab world. Turkey set itself up as the region's centre of stability. Ironically, this was its role during the days of the Ottoman Empire; but this time around, it could create an arc of influence only through diplomacy and harmony, not imposition.

Turkey set about strengthening its relations with Arab nations. It distanced itself

from warriors in Israel, without breaking ties of trade and cooperation. It criticised Israel's Gaza war unambiguously, but it realised that a critical key to peace lay in the amelioration of its own antagonisms with its neighbours. This was, given the emotionalism that is attached to the past, difficult.

Turkey has now signed historic protocols with Armenia, warmed icy relations with Syria to the point where visa has been abolished, lifted ties with Iran and become a vital partner of Iraq in the reconstruction of the country. In October, Erdogan signed 48 MoUs covering energy, commerce and security (among other things) with Baghdad. Davutoglu paid a visit to the Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq, which is equivalent to an Indian foreign minister dropping in on Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Not too long ago, Turkey's air force was bombing this Kurdish region as punishment for being a base for terrorism. Turkey, America and Iraq are working together to bring the long and bitter Kurdish war against Turkey to an end -- another sign of Washington's new respect for Istanbul.

Pakistan has recognised the change as well, but done so in its India-centric manner. It has asked Turkey to help solve the Kashmir problem. Istanbul is not so green as to try and do so; and certainly Delhi will be frosty towards any such misguided initiative. However, Turkey has found its role on the world stage. A stem in the Cold War greenhouse has flowered in the fresh air of an open mind.

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