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Garment industry in disarray

While shopping in the malls of England, I have often sorted through ranges of flawlessly designed clothes that flaunt on hangers with the tags 'Made in Bangladesh' sown onto them. Whenever I wear these nicely fitted clothes it gives me a sense of great pride as I appreciate and respect the hard work that Bangladeshi labourers put into making these high quality products which are not only popular in England but also several other Western countries. However, at the same time I cannot help but feel a growing sense of dismay due to the unfair treatment that Bangladeshi labourers have to live with.

This current wave of unrest among garment labourers is a matter of great national concern. These individuals who work from dawn till dusk are getting paid wages that are inadequate for them to afford the basic everyday needs of life. This, therefore, will undoubtedly instigate strikes, further causing stoppages in garment production thus hindering business in the apparel industry

which accounts for about 80% of exports of Bangladesh.

Garment factories are labour intensive, it is of utmost importance then to keep labourers motivated so that their maximum potential is brought out in their production of garments. Without any incentive to work, productivity and efficiency will undoubtedly be low which will result in financial losses. This affects the development of Bangladesh further as export of garments is a major foreign exchange earner.

The solution to this then is for labourers to be given a fair wage, good working conditions and decent working hours, the government also assuring them that their voices will be heard. Only then will this unrest end, bringing about greater efficiency and profits in the garment industry which is one of the most effective tools for stimulating growth and development in Bangladesh.

Niza Talukder
Bashundhara residential area
Dhaka



MAHABUB ALAM KHAN / DRINKNEWS

Delayed decision!

The UNB report on the matter published in all dailies on 19 July, about urgent import of pulses, edible oil, sugar and chick-pea is a delayed decision taken by the Hon. Prime Minister. Realistically, even with all urgency and speed, the minimum time needed from ordering to availability of these important Ramadan food materials will be at least over two months, if not more! How can it reach buyers with Ramadan in mid-August?

If we rationally analyse the procurement process, then the period from tender notice to getting responsive and competitive offers, it will take at least three weeks. It will take minimum ten days for evaluating the offers, its approval and the opening of telegraphic letter of credits.

Another five to six weeks are needed before the ships reach port with the consignment, goods are cleared and delivered to government godowns. We can safely add another week for the goods to reach the retailers via whole-sellers! Assuming that we started from 20th July, it would not be available before the end of September in any manner! This is well after Eid-ul-Fitr; and if we follow the PPR (public purchase rules), it may not be available in the shops before Eid-ul-Azha!

The only option for the government is to go to the established bulk importers directly, for quick offers, by email or fax. Invariably the price will be higher by at least 10 to 15 percent! For immediate shipment, to reach before Eid, it will need air shipment in which case the landed price can well be more than double! Given this scenario, our present stockist and whole-sellers will naturally jack up their prices of materials that they have and still it will be cheaper than the price, if the above quick import procedure by the government directly, is followed!

At the end of the day, the

poor consumers will suffer, all because of this unexplainable delay in government decision making! One wonders, why this purchase decision could not have been taken in early May? We all knew the day when Eid will be celebrated given a day or two at most!

Who is responsible for this colossal mess? Will the honourable publicly elected democratic government let the voters know which is their right, if one may say so the underlying reasons for this unexplainable delay? After all, as we all know the saying: "a stitch in time; saves nine". For us, the 'nine stitches' will be the abnormally high prices that we will be forced to pay, or do without these luxuries for once that we eagerly look forward to every year!

Suffering citizen
Dhaka

Police excesses

"Suffocating" seems to me the right word to explain how we are here in Bangladesh now. Bangladesh an "Independent", "Sovereign", "Democratic" nation where everyone is supposed to have the free will to express their opinions, views and thoughts. However, the ground reality in the country now tells a totally different story. Mainly due to the fact that major international news agencies are maintaining a 'strategic' silence about the current Bangladeshi regime's human rights violations, people from outside of the country may not get the full picture of what is going on. We the insiders feel threatened to speak up! So the conscientious people of the world have few avenues to know about how we are in Bangladesh.

One peaceful night in the first week of this month (July 2010), a relative of mine, sleeping in his house, suddenly wakes up by the banging of his door. A group of "policemen" (as they identified themselves)

raided the house and wanted him to come out. His sisters managed to hide him out and asked them to break the door if they had proper search warrant. They didn't have any, and so they left. The police couldn't produce any allegation or warrant against him. Yet, they are in continuous search for him. He managed to escape, and still is not known how and where he has been living. His hand phone being switched off, even his family can't contact him. He is yet to know what he had done for which he has to face this.

Another relative's neighbour lives in one of those modern apartments of today with high level security. Police came to their house one night in search for their third son who is known to be a Shibir leader. They couldn't find him, so called out his elder brother, telling him that they had to talk to him and assured that he won't be harmed. He came out in his sleeping dress and was caught in that state! Moreover, we hear he is being taken to remand (torture in police custody)! We all know what inhuman treatment they have to face in remand. Why?

Conversely, we remain dumbfounded and speechless when we see that the Chhatra League (pro-government student organisation) leaders kill each other in broad daylight, move openly with arms around university campuses, threaten the lives of thousands of students. And yet they go unpunished and receive free licenses to kill and rape!

Every night we sleep with the fear that police might pay a visit and arrest someone of the family. Yet, we can hardly talk about what is going on, as they might be "hearing". We hardly talk over the phone. At home we hardly raise our voices. We hardly go out without compulsive reasons. And such political issues are totally "out of the subject"; if we discuss these, we know that we will have to suffer the consequences.

Who knows, maybe I will be accused of writing this small piece! Nothing is impossible for "them" now. Yet it is "they" who talk about human rights, about democracy, about freedom, about peace and solidarity, and mostly, about INDEPENDENCE!

Yet, we live, with prayers to Almighty, and hope that He is watching from above.
Mrinmoyee Rahman
Chittagong

Smoking campaigners!

It was 15 July evening. I was moving from Mirpur towards Agargaon along Rokeya Sarani in my car. When I reached Shewrapara, I saw 7-8 young men (age approx. ranging 20-30 years) gathering in front of 'Shukria Food', a food shop. All of these men were wearing green jersey marked with the word 'Oviyaan'. I understood that they were campaigners of 'Oviyaan', a Nokia-Banglalink (Ovi internet) joint campaign. I noticed with extreme annoyance that every one of them was smoking, exhaling smoke rings in the air in different directions. It seemed to me that the motive of the campaign was to teach people how to smoke publicly!
Sultana Gulshan Banu
Agargaon, Dhaka

Top-heavy governance

Successive elected political regimes introduce new styles of governing the country. Now we have too many Advisors and Deputy Ministers. One reason is to provide a helping hand to raw heads at the top levels.

Even the PM has too many Advisors. The obvious question arises: what is the difference between a Minister and an Advisor? On paper, the definitions are laid down, but how it works in day a day dealings? This has to be made clear to the citizens.

As a developing nation in the Third World, we have to be economical in daily procedures and processing; avoiding top-heavy administration, with less pen-pushing. The government offices have to be more field-oriented; and have more contacts with the public; especially in the rural areas. The political speeches do not tell us about the bureaucratic details and delays; but try to keep us turned to the political overtones of the regime.

There is a counterpoint: does delegation of power raise the graft level? The concept of decentralization needs more public debates, especially in the LDCs. Of course there are ad hoc, specialists' committees to analyse the pros and cons of a project. For coordination, reviews, analyses and reduction of communication gaps, meetings of various agencies are needed, from time to time.

We have an expensive parliament (JS) of 300 Members, but notice how it is contributing to the welfare of the people. We get a lot of reminders on the practice of democracy, but it all evaporates quickly!
Abu Abd, Dhaka

Helping the disabled

Cheshire Foundation Homes, an international philanthropic organisation, founded by Lord Leonard Cheshire VC, OM, DSO, DFC, recently has given a warm reception to renowned social worker Ali Nyeamat for his outstanding contribution to the anti-smoking and anti-tobacco movement at home and abroad and also for helping the disabled.

Bangladesh Chapter President, Justice M A Maleque gave this honour to Ali Nyeamat at a grand function. An organiser and renowned artist Hena Kabir was also present and spoke on the occasion. She said, "None will go to grave with a pocket. So, if you are capable, please, do help the suffering disabled in our organisation." There are 33 disabled persons living here and they are working and producing handicraft. If any one can feel for them, please go and see them and talk to them at Uttara Dhaka (Road # 32, Sector # 8). Ali Nyeamat, an internationally renowned social worker, who is also a journalist and a guest professor of English language and literature said, "There is nothing greater than doing good to the helpless. They are disabled but working, reading and producing handicrafts. They are singing, dancing and reciting also. This is a great source of joy for us, for everybody".
Nayem Sikander
Elephant Road
Dhaka

Session jam at NU

We cannot understand why session jam is prevailing in National University. National University is not the place of academic activities directly. Students do not study on its campus. There is no student politics like other public universities. Different public universities are often closed sine die due to unexpected clashes between rival student organisations. So exams and other academic activities are postponed for an indefinite period and session jam is created there.

To escape from this problem, National University was established in the early 1990s. But alas! National University could not function properly. It is an absolute failure. As a result, our under graduate and post graduate students of different colleges under National University are facing session jam.

For example, at this moment there are three batches of degree pass course at the same year (1st year). Two are preparing for the first semester exams and another one is attending class.

We want to draw the attention of respective authorities to save the valuable time of our students and to minimize this alarming session jam.
Santosh Das
Khulna

Local products

The quality jam & jelly produced in our country is very poor. Hence people are compelled to consume the foreign variety which are very expensive. This also drains our precious foreign exchange every year.

In Bangladesh "Almighty Allah" has given us a large number of delicious fruits like mango, pineapple, guava, orange, melon etc. etc.

From the above fruits, delicious fruit jams, jelly and fruit juices can be prepared throughout the year and supplied to the consumers. At present some manufacturers produce these items but the quality is really poor. Hence people are compelled to buy expensive foreign jams and jelly all the year. These are imported from India, Nepal and Australia and a large amount of foreign exchange is spent to meet such demand every year.

Therefore it is necessary that our jam/jelly manufacturers bring in experts from abroad to train them for producing quality stuff. This will help them to regain the local market and also start exporting to the Middle East and other countries.
Mrs. Salma Khan
Dilu Road, Eskaton
Dhaka

An neglected FF

A few days back while I was staying at Comilla Circuit House, a news report published in a local paper named "Comillar Alo" drew my attention. It was news of the family members of freedom fighter Kafil Uddin. He was a UP member of Debiddar Thana in 1971. He actively participated in the liberation war and was brutally killed by Pakistan army along with his brother. His wife and two children were forced to leave Debiddar, just after the independence, by his relatives just to occupy his property. Kafiluddin's family neither got the recognition of a "Shaheed Paribar", nor got any support from any corner. For the last thirty-nine years they are leaving a miserable life. I met with the family out

of curiosity.

May I therefore hope and pray that you will investigate the matter through your Comilla correspondent.
Arif Ahamed
Major (Rtd.)
Nasirabad, Chittagong

Stop patronising Israel

We are of the opinion that Israel is the only country in the world which practices dictatorship in the guise of democracy. The Israeli dictatorship is worse than that of dictator Adolf Hitler of Nazi Germany.

Israel does not believe in humanity, human rights, freedom and democracy for the people of Palestine.

We are surprised, shocked and ashamed that Israelis have forgotten and they have not taken any lesson from their dark, horrible and sorrowful days, tragic period of history, and untold sufferings.

Due to their own conduct, manners and character Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 721 BC and subsequently it was ruled by the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabians. Israel was wiped away from the map of the world for about two thousand years.

The Israelis (Jews) lived as slaves, beggars, gypsies, and stateless people in different countries of Europe and Africa.

Following the great holocaust, mass murder of the Jews

by Nazi Germany 1939-1945 (World War II) the Jews begged the USA for a homeland for their living.

The USA in collaboration with the UK created a homeland for the Jews -- the state of Israel within the state of Palestine in 1948. The Jews (Israelis) became insane with excitement, joy and happiness having got a piece of land to live in. The Israelis started to loot and plunder, killed and banished millions of Palestinians and forcefully occupied Palestinian territories. Ever since for over six decades the Israeli reign of terror, oppression and suppression on the Palestinians are continuing indiscriminately unabated.

Israel is suffering from fetid brain and superiority complex because of US economic and military aid to it. It does not care for UNO or world public opinion.

We firmly believe that there can not be any comprehensive peace in the Middle East and Palestine can never achieve freedom unless and until the USA completely stops economic and military aid to Israel.

White House should kindly wake up and President Obama has to make a practical and bold decision without further delay not only for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East but world peace and harmony at large.
OH Kabir
Dhaka

Public-private partnership

The parliamentary committee chief did express great dissatisfaction on meter readers of Dhaka electricity distribution co. because of their unholty practices relating to meter reading, electricity bill making etc. Similar is the situation with Dhaka WASA meter readers cum revenue personnel. When the govt is preaching public-private partnership (PPP), the job of meter reading, bill making, bill serving and bill money collection may be given to large NGOs, so that consumers are not harassed by electricity or Wasa people. Since those authorities do possess records of individual holdings of the past, the performances can be judged on digitally prepared records. In the context of accountability and transparency, let the present government do something in the name of corruption control as depicted in the JS election pledge.

Let something happen in the name of Public-Private Partnership as practised globally.
Mahmud Ali
New Eskaton Road
Dhaka

Income tax

This is in reference to your Star Business Report dated 9 July, 2010, regarding Hon Finance Minister's explanation for the deduction of income tax on Jatio Sanchay Patra. In his explanation he clarified the position that Sanchay Patra that matured before 1 July this year will not be applicable for income tax deduction. In this respect I would now like to draw the kind attention of the Hon. Finance Minister through your column that the relevant quarters in practice are not abiding by what has been explained in the said star report in the absence of any directive issued to them. As a result, our sufferings know no bound.

May I therefore, expect that necessary orders are issued early so that we do not continue to suffer any longer. The statement given in the press needs to be substantiated by an administrative action to be followed. Else, we the general public must lose the confidence on the performance of our government.
Engr. Shaheedul Islam
Former Member, BWDB
Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Hartal

Hartal a hitherto democratic right like freedom of speech has already lost its appeal as it transcended beyond what democracy permits -- the spontaneous response to hartal call by keeping away from works and joining in protests against the grave wrongdoings/ failures, if any, of the government without taking resort to violence. But now the hartal callers give their activists the free rein to indulge in destructive activities to cower the public and this time in the evening before the hartal day the activists spread fear into the public mind by torching a number of vehicles and by terrorizing through coercive processions. During the last decade we have witnessed such enforcement of hartal to meet one party's end at the cost of human lives and properties. The present Opposition Leader Begum Zia and her GS were prompt to congratulate the countrymen for success of the hartal that took life of a promising young man and many others were injured and that damaged many private and public vehicles. What consolation do they have for the family of the deceased engineer of what gain did their hartal that took life of a promising

engineer including many others injured and that damaged many private and public vehicles. What consolation do they have for the family of the deceased man or what gain did their hartal yield to them? She is awfully concerned about the well being and release of her sons (purpose of hartal had relation), but what about the mother whose son fell victim to the hartal? It only stirred and spurred the BNP activists and cadres and their leaders on to get the political atmosphere hot.

Hartals of the past remind us of the havoc they did in human lives and the nation's economy. A BRTC bus load of passengers were almost killed with explosives (one or two succumbed to their injuries later). The Janakantha Bhaban was massively wrecked and many other properties here and there ravaged.

Mr Jafar Sobhan's articulation in the post editorial (Friday 2nd July) has all the elements to support why a law banning hartal is the need of the hour.
Dewan Md Hafiz
Auliabad, Doha, Dhaka

Don't waste gas



PHOTO: AMIRUL RAJIV

I know some people who keep their gas burners on even after cooking is over.

Such wastage of gas must be stopped.

Sumon Corraya
Monipuripara, Dhaka



QAMRUZZAMAN / DRINKNEWS