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Exempt grocery items from VAT



People are already over-burdened with steep rise in the price of essentials. Nowadays, most middle-class as well as poor people can barely afford the bare necessities and when VAT is added to the food bills, they are forced to cut down further on essential items. Even countries like USA, where there is sales tax on most items, do not charge sales tax on grocery items. At present there is no tax on computer mainly because it's connected with education. I believe if the government exempts food and other essential items from VAT, it would give people some relief.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali
Dhaka

Heavy academic load at BAU

Bangladesh Agricultural University is nowadays giving extra pressure of academic work on the students. As a result, students are remaining busy all day with their academic work and not having enough time to take part in any extra-curricular activities. Even they hardly get time to skim through the daily newspapers before 5 PM as classes start from 8 AM and ends at 4.30 PM. I think the result of this pressure will not be as good as expected. If this extra pressure is not reduced to a tolerable level, it will destroy the creativity of the students.

Jewel Rana
BCS (Agriculture)
Agriculture extension Officer
Ex-student of Bangladesh Agricultural University

Upgrade banking system to int'l standard

The banking system of Bangladesh needs to be upgraded to the international standard, according to the World Bank. The framework followed for the banks in our country needs to be upgraded. Although there are many private and public banks in the country, most of them lack efficiency and stability. There is lack of active state involvement in the financial sector, which if ensured can help maintain the economic stability of the country, stimulate growth and also create employment opportunities. Moreover, the various services provided by the banks like loan classification, provisioning, rescheduling, etc., need to be strengthened in order to reach the global standard. The role of the state needs to be adjusted from direct intervention to less direct involvement as the crisis subsides.

Tabassum Fahima Zaman
Muslima Sharif
On e-mail

Shut down garment factories without fire exit

The recent tragic fire at Tazreen Fashions Ltd. that killed more than 111 garment workers has raised many questions. This is not the first incident of fire at a garment factory. Very often we hear about fires at garment factories. But still there is no safety measures found in the factories. The result was the deadly fire at Tazreen Fashions on November 24. Most of the entrepreneurs are more keen on making profit rather than improving the working conditions of their factories. In Bangladesh more than 4,000 readymade garment factories of different size are earning more than three-quarters of the country's export revenue. Most of the workers of these factories are women. Over the last two decades, these garment factories contributed to changing the role of poor Bangladeshi women who mostly used to work as housemaids. Although the wages are low, this industry has a positive impact on the families of the poor female workers and it has been playing a vital role in empowering them. The factories which do not have sufficient fire escape must arrangements must be shut. The government should not sit idle. It must take necessary steps for improving the working condition of the factories. Why is the factory a prison? Working in a lockup is not at all acceptable. Moreover, action must be taken against the inspectors who issued licenses to those factories without verifying the fire safety measures.

Md Jalal Uddin
Assistant teacher
Natore Govt. Boys' High School
Natore



Is Kuril flyover safe?

I am a mother. I have to take my daughter to and from school at Uttara every day and on our way we have to cross the road underneath the airport road flyover 4 times a day. Every time I cross that road I read doa and sura. I wish I knew more doa. I feel that the poles which are supporting the girder are very weak and any time these may collapse on us. I always ask my driver to drive fast at that part of the road. But it is not always possible due to traffic jam. I am more afraid now after the incident of Chittagong. Is Dhaka's Kuril-Airport flyover safe? We request the government to please inspect the flyover with an expert team to know whether it has been built with good quality materials and by maintaining the construction rules and if this is safe for people. If not, the government should let us know that too and do the construction again.

A mother
Banani, Dhaka

Mount int'l probe into Ashulia garment fire

I am writing with reference to the Op-Ed: "Conspiracy theory: Fig leaf of an excuse," by Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan (Nov. 29).

Brig Gen Shahedul Anam has raised important issues. After the catastrophic fire at the Ashulia garment factory, which cost more than 100 lives (mostly women), all types of accusations have been flying around. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is blaming extremists for deliberately setting fire to the factory. This is a serious charge which must be investigated by an independent international body like International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Most factory owners in Bangladesh are notorious for their neglect of workers' safety. Violators are hardly punished. Poor workers are always victims of neglect by owners and managers. Enforcement of safety standards is almost non-existent. In advanced countries like Canada, enforcement of workers' safety is widely followed and most victims of industrial accidents are compensated. Although a Third World country like Bangladesh is not well-equipped to ensure workers' safety, wholesale neglect of workers' safety is not acceptable.

If the accusation of the prime minister that the fire was set deliberately by extremists is true, it calls for measures that go beyond workers' safety. All political parties should join hands to ensure safety of garment workers who are mostly women and have little social and political clout.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

A historical mistake by Israel



PHOTO: AFP

Ex-prime minister of Israel Ehud Olmert recently criticized the present government of Israel for planning new settlements in the West Bank. He also said that Israel had no reason to oppose Palestine's UN observer state membership. Rather it will be an historical mistake that will be disastrous to the life, to the people and to the future of the state of Israel.

However, Israel's intention to push ahead with plans to build constructions in a strip of West Bank land outside Jerusalem called E1 was expressed a day after the Palestinians won UN non-member state observer status. It disheartened the whole world. It is observed that the international outcry since Israel's latest move has been intense. The UN chief Ban Ki-moon has also said that it would represent an almost fatal blow to remaining chances of securing a two-state solution. We have learnt from the news reports that France, Britain, Spain, Denmark and Sweden have already summoned the Israeli ambassadors to protest the plan. The White House authorized Europe to pounce on the Israel government and to punish it.

It may be mentioned that Israeli plans for E1 have been in the works since the early 1990s but have never been implemented due to heavy pressure, largely from the United States.

We, therefore, hope that Israel would realize the reality and would not defy the request of the world community.

Mobarak Ali
RK Mission Road, Gopibagh, Dhaka

When will this recurring tragedy end?

Thank you for the article from the New York Times captioned "Walmart blocked safety push in Bangladesh", reprinted in the Business section of The Daily Star of December 9. In view of the importance, and urgency of the subject matter, relevant extracts are given below.

Quote, "two officials who attended a meeting held in Bangladesh in 2011 to discuss factory safety in the garment industry said on Wednesday that the Walmart official there played the lead role in blocking an effort to have global retailers pay more for apparel to help Bangladesh improve its electrical and fire safety....."

The meeting was arranged in April in Dhaka and was attended by "global retailers, Bangladeshi factory owners, government officials and non-government organizations after several apparel factory fires in Bangladesh had killed dozens of workers the previous winter."

"According to the minutes of the meeting available to The Times, Sridevi Kalavakolanu, a Walmart director of ethical sourcing, along with an official from another major apparel retailer noted that the proposed improvements in electrical and fire safety would involve as many as 4, 500 factories and would be in most cases a very extensive and costly modification..." "It is not financially feasible for the brands to make such investments," the minutes said.

I wonder if the Walmart director concerned would have made this statement if one of the workers were her daughters working in one of these factories. How much would you invest on the price of a life of one worker whose family depends on her wages of an average of USD 50-80 a month (price of a pair of jeans or whatever), which are not even paid regularly.

How many more fires and how many more lives will be lost before "extensive and costly modifications" are made?

This is what the families of the workers who perished, as well as the society is legitimately asking. When will there be an end to this recurring tragedy? The solution does not lie at flying flags at half mast or observing one minute silence. Now is the time for decisive action in the crucial need of the hour.

Nilufer Ahmed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

READERS respond

Here are some comments that came in response to Tuesday's The Daily Star news report headlined "Of The Murderers"

Akhtar Hossain

This is a horrible crime. If we continue to let these criminals go unpunished, more criminals will do more such heinous crimes knowing that they are above the law.

Nazrul Islam

I think if government does not know how to take responsibility for such heinous crimes of their student front, they do not have any right to practice politics through their student front.

Shumon

This is horrible. The PM can spend some of her valuable time on this matter and take steps so that it does not happen again.

S. Chowdhury

I would not be surprised if one or many of these killers would later become lawmakers and castigate TIB. This is our trend now.

Matiur

How will the government try the war criminals for their crimes committed 42 years ago when they can not punish the killers who have killed people in broad daylight....and that everybody knows the killers?

Muhammad Ahmedullah

These barbaric attackers must be hunted down and not allowed to sleep ever again. Local people of the area should know their names. Please get their names and make a 'Wanted' publicity advertisement.

Mahmudul Hassan

I would like to ask the PM and all the political leaders, if this poor fellow were your son, what would you do?

AA

Shame on the government! Their party activists are beyond control. As a ruling party, before talking about other parties' crimes, government should first clear its own party. If AL does not hang them immediately before public, these crimes will never stop.

Sadiqur Rahman

Parents of these criminals should appear before court and beg punishment.

Translucent

Great work, The Daily Star! The perpetrators of this brutal killing must be punished. The people harbouring these killers must also be brought to justice. The AL leaders who let loose such killers must be given the maximum penalty. I hope the DS pursues justice for Das' killing.

Nuruddin Azam

If police cannot identify and arrest these murderers, then the prime minister and her cabinet will lose their legal and moral right to govern the country.

Sham Khan

I sincerely request the editor of The Daily Star to keep pursuing this story until Bishwajit and his family get justice. Please keep this on the front page and if possible expose the rest of the murderers.

Khan Shaheb

It is really sad how we as a nation have grown apathetic to such incidents. We are desensitized to a point of degradation that can only be reversed when we actually give a damn about the politics of business and the business of politics. Until then, bleed your hearts out in vain.

Nasim Hasan

Three million people would have never sacrificed their lives if they had ever known that this country would run this way. A nation loses all of its glory if it fails to provide its citizens with minimum security of their lives. In this country, six students were beaten to death in front of police. Here murderers get heroic receptions. Here justice exists only in schoolbooks. The whole nation has been divided by the politicians just to satisfy their never-ending greed. Crying for Bishwajit is absolutely pointless as we have witnessed incidents like this over and over again during our lifetime. And we have already forgotten most of them as we will forget Bishwajit soon.