

Accord with RMG retailers

The sector needs to be totally reformed

WE welcome, congratulate and thank the six big retailers for agreeing to sign a far reaching and legally binding plan to finance fire and building safety improvement in Bangladesh. It is expected that other buyers will also join in the effort. We are glad that our international business partners, who hugely benefit from Bangladesh's attractive cost advantage, and going to share in the transformative process which is now crucial for the future of our RMG sector.

However, the transformation that we need extends far wider than changes in the infrastructure. It must encompass the following steps:

(1) Workers must be paid internationally comparable salaries and given the different types of insurance coverage that are standard in the industry; (2) Trade unions must be permitted; (3) Understanding must be reached with foreign buyers not to push prices below a certain level; (4) Renovation work in all factories—shared and purpose built—must start immediately to adhere to safety standard; (5) Long-term plan for zoning of the RMG factories must begin now, starting with the relocation or closing down of the most vulnerable factories; (6) Separate ministry for the RMG sector, like we have for the manpower sector, must be immediately formed. The importance of the sector and its potential for growth demand it; (7) Punish all those responsible for major accidents of the recent past.

The above changes are a not only to preserve our \$20 billion industry but also to realise its potential whose near-term forecast is around \$50 billion.

End of Savar rescue operation

Rehabilitate the disabled

THE rescue operation of Rana Plaza is over, and 2438 were lucky to be pulled alive. Of the rest of the 3535 presumed to have been trapped in the debris, 1127 perished in the crash. For the dead it is the end of the road, but an urgent matter, which is often overlooked, is the rehabilitation of the large number of survivors.

To the already nearly twenty million physically disabled in the country the Rana Plaza disaster has added several hundred more, and while the survivors may be lucky to be alive, a large number of them who have become permanently disabled have a very difficult road ahead of them.

As is often the case, the survivors might be soon forgotten and left to fend for themselves. And in order that such is not the case, we suggest the government draws up a rehab plan along with the BGMEA and the government and non-government organisations that are working for persons with disability in Bangladesh, to train and rehabilitate the disabled workers who will have to live with physical impairment for the rest of their life.

It is important that these unfortunate victims of a man-made tragedy do not feel like a burden on the society. With proper training and reemployment they can not only have a secured livelihood, they can also become as efficient a contributor to the economy of the country as they have been before they suffered their tragic fate.



INSTANT REACTION

Closing down factory is not a solution

SYED SULTAN UDDIN AHMED

THE provision for sharing 5% profit with workers of garment industry was already in the Bangladesh Labour Law 2006. In April, the cabinet approved a proposal for excluding the provision. In place of profit sharing, a new provision for creating a welfare fund for the workers has been incorporated in that proposed amendment. TWorkers' demand for profit sharing is different from the proposed welfare fund.

Trade union right was also in the 2006 Law. With regard to trade union, workers have three demands. First, the workers would not need to send lists of the workers' representatives to the owners to inform them about the trade union leaders. It usually happens that after getting the list, the owner sacks the leader. The government has changed this provision, and the list will now be sent to the government, and they will look after the issue.

Secondly, according to present law, only workers in service can participate in trade union. Therefore, it happens that when a person is elected as representative of a trade union, the owner immediately sacks him and he loses membership. Before 2006, it was in the law that a trade union member can remain member of the union after losing the job or retiring. In 1969, even a person from outside could be a member of a trade union.

Thirdly, the garment industry is relatively new and the workers have little capacity to bargain. So it was a demand that leaders of Jatio Sramik Federations (National Labour Federations) should be allowed to participate in garment trade unions. I do not find any provision in the recent amendment that fulfills the second and third points. These two are crucial for forming a trade union, and are supported by ILO standards.

Next comes the point of new wage structure. This is a well-timed initiative. We have found from our research that, in the present market situation, the minimum wage should be Tk.8,000. For the time being, the government should immediately start giving dearness allowance until the new wage board comes into effect. Closing down factories is not a solution.

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Of a soldier and a politician

GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

GENERAL Hussein Muhammad Ershad believes that Bangladesh's people want his Jatiyo Party to assume charge of the country against the background of the mess created by the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Moudud Ahmed thinks that the Awami League-led government has made its talks overture to the opposition only to impress people abroad. Go back to recent history, if you wish to refresh your minds on the contributions, or otherwise, made by Ershad and Moudud to Bangladesh's politics.

Throughout the long period between 1982 and 1990, Ershad was Bangladesh's second military strongman by virtue of his seizure of power in a military coup. And between the early 1980s and right till the triumph of the popular movement against autocracy in 1990, Moudud Ahmed served as a significant cog in the wheel of the Ershad dispensation. Today, both men travel around the country extolling the virtues of democracy. General Ershad feels his party deserves one more chance in power. Moudud Ahmed honestly believes that the party he is now part of must somehow storm back to power if democracy is to have a chance in this country.

Try remembering the times immediately after the assassination of General Ziaur Rahman, Bangladesh's first military ruler, in May 1981, in a putsch in Chittagong. As chief of staff of the army, Ershad earned the appreciation of various sections of society through staying away from launching a coup in the aftermath of the murder. Vice President Abdus Sattar, having

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taken over as acting president, went on to win the presidency in his own right in November 1981 through defeating the Awami League's Kamal Hossain at the ballot box. Within weeks of Sattar's victory, however, Ershad's reflections on the need for a national security council, made public through the media, raised eyebrows and then questions on what it was that he wished to do.

It was not normal that the chief of a disciplined force, which the army was and is, should be speaking openly about matters that were and are the sole prerogative of the president of the republic. President Sattar, in office on the strength of a popular mandate, should have taken action against the army chief. He did not. Four months into his election, he was overthrown in a coup d'etat led by General Ershad. Democracy, thanks to Sattar's pusillanimity and Ershad's ambitions, went on the backburner once more. In time, the BNP divested Sattar of its leadership and, taking a cue from the Awami League, passed the mantle on to General Zia's widow. Moudud Ahmed, having served as a minister in the Zia regime, stayed, for the time being, loyal to Begum Zia. It was loyalty not destined to last.

At some point in the earlier part of the 1980s, Ershad the soldier and Moudud the lawyer-politician came together. These days, the former military ruler accuses the BNP of having tried to break up his Jatiyo Party. Maybe he is right, but the bigger truth is that all military rulers in our part of the world, from Ayub Khan to Ziaul Haq to Ziaur Rahman to Ershad, have systematically attempted to destroy

established political parties by drawing their leading figures into their corner through a variety of blandishments. In the Moudud case, Ershad first dispatched the man to prison and then, through mystery not difficult to fathom, freed him before luring him into his Jatiyo Party. It was on Ershad's watch and under Ershad that Moudud Ahmed almost made it to the nation's presidency. He was the vice president who was compelled to resign in early December 1990 to make way for Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, who then took over as acting president from an embattled Ershad.

You go through the entire trajectory of Moudud Ahmed's career as a politician. And you are left quite surprised at this ability in him to survive in ever new metamorphoses. His public life commenced through his association with Bangabandhu's legal team in the Agartala conspiracy case in 1968. He could have properly hitched himself to the Bangabandhu bandwagon, but by the early 1970s, something must have gone wrong between the two men. Moudud was taken into detention once the government imposed a state of emergency in the country in December 1974. There are stories of his father-in-law, the poet Jasimuddin, interceding with the Father of the Nation on the matter of his freedom. By the late 1970s, Moudud was part of the political machine General Zia was so assiduously trying to build. Between 1983 and 1990, Moudud had ditched Khaleda Zia, gone over to Ershad, risen to being deputy prime minister, then prime minister before finally making it to the vice presidency. By the mid 1990s, he was back in the BNP, to rise to a position of power again in 2001 as minister for law.

In nations around the world, military rulers like General Ershad, having fallen from power and public grace, do not ever make it back to the public domain. Politicians of shifting loyalties like Moudud Ahmed slowly recede into the forgotten regions of memory. But, yes, ours is a strangely different land. We forget and forgive. And then we fume and fret in indignation, year after year, at our lack of collective self-esteem.

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INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FAMILIES

Family: Magic mirror

SHEGUFTA YASMIN

THE family is a haven in a heartless world." Every year May 15 is celebrated as International Day of Families. Only he knows what a family is who does not have one.

This year, the theme of International Day of Families is "Advancing Social Integration and Intergenerational Solidarity."

In our society the generation gap is like a disease. One generation does not value the other. The older generation thinks the young generation is heartless and restless, while the young generation thinks the older generation is outdated. We need intergenerational solidarity in a family, society and country. All parties have to be considerate to others. If a son sees that his father does not respect his grandfather, later on he will not respect his father. "What we sow, so shall we reap." If a husband and a wife honour each other, then their children will honour them. There is a famous saying, "Honour cannot be asked for, it has to be earned."

If a child shows respect to his parents out of fear, that is not real respect. Parents can earn respect only for their moral values. If a family has members who feel solidarity among themselves, it can be called a real family. The members can be successful in life as they have peace of mind.

"Family: A social unit where the father is concerned with parking space, the children with outer space, and the mother with closet space." To enjoy family life we need everyone—father, mother, children etc. Lack of any one relation makes us feel incomplete.

There is a wise saying: "When you educate a man you educate an individual. When you educate a woman you educate a whole family." A woman has a great role to play in keeping unity in a family, as a wife and as a mother.

"When you look at your life, the greatest happiness is family happiness." However successful you are, if you are not happy with your family, if you don't have any peace at home, you are the poorest person. Money is important, but it is not the ultimate criterion for happiness. A rich, unhappy person is poorer than a poor but happy or satisfied person.

There is a Spanish proverb: "An ounce of blood is worth more than a pound of friendship." Often, we find that our friends are kinder than family members, but in the end we have to come back to our family. So it is wise to make your family your best friend, where you will be always welcome whatever the situation.

A family can produce successful citizens as it is the foundation of a society. Nowadays, people define "family" in a narrow way—only husband, wife and children. We forget to think of our close relatives as family. We feel disturbed if our relatives stay for a long time in our home. "When our relatives are at home, we have to think of all their good points or it would be impossible to endure them," said George Bernard Shaw.

It is not compulsory that all the family members have to be happy and satisfied with each other. Their may be quarrels. Where there is expectation, there is question of affection or quarrel. "Family quarrels are bitter things. They don't go by any rules. They're not like aches or wounds; they're more like splits in the skin that won't heal because there's not enough material."

"Having a place to go is a home. Having someone to love is a family. Having both is a blessing." We earn money to lead a happy life with our loved ones, or else one can live in a hotel—which is a life of less responsibility; but why do



people take so much pain to make a home? It is easy to buy an apartment or villa but it is hard to make a home.

"Family—that dear octopus from whose tentacles we never quite escape, nor, in our inmost hearts, ever quite wish to." But if you fail to create a happy family, the devilish octopus of frustration, anxiety, failure will not let you escape.

Remember Leo Tolstoy's saying: "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." It means that to be happy all of us need the same things, but we make our life unhappy for different reasons.

In today's fast-paced world, the words "emotion," "expectation," "dependency" have a negative impression, and the lack of these feelings make our family life just like a hotel life, where everything is bought. Bring some emotion into your relationships, you will start to depend on others with some expectation—life will be happier and warmer.

Mother Teresa said: "What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family." Let us bring peace in our minds, then in the family, and ultimately it will make a peaceful world.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Country in chaos

Dialogue between the two main parties is essential now, and immediate steps should be taken by the ruling party to create a congenial atmosphere for holding the next general election. The govt. should leave the idea of holding the election under the current administration. And the main opposition should not also be so adamant about restoring the caretaker system. Because holding a free and fair election is the main thing. And about Hefajat, most of their demands are against the spirit of our constitution. They can form a political party and fulfil those demands after getting people's mandate.

Md. Enamul Haq
Dhaka

Use Ijtema ground

No government in its right mind can allow a mob to occupy the hospitals, business and commercial zones of a metropolis, much less in the capital of a country. If the authorities have run out of ideas, then I suggest they should use the Ijtema ground (unused for 11 months) for all future rallies without hampering Ijtema activities. If necessary, amend the constitution for banning meetings of all sorts within the confines of metropolitan areas.

Sikander Ahmed
Gulshan, Dhaka

Holding a referendum

Our country is passing through a confrontational time. It seems every day things are getting increasingly bad, and as peace-loving common citizens, we are feeling tremendously insecure. The party in power should take the initiative to pacify the current confrontational political environment. I suggest that a referendum be held as to whether the next election should be held under a caretaker/ neutral government.

Syed Mansurul Haq
Gulshan, Dhaka

Examinees in trouble

Our O level and A level exams are going on. Continuous hartals and political programmes may force us to fall at least a year behind in our educational career if an exam is cancelled. Although the British Council has assured us that they will do everything in their power to hold the exams, we are still extremely worried about the current political impasse, and it is difficult to concentrate on our studies. Apart from their personal political ambitions, the leaders should consider the interest of the people of our beloved country.

Mir Aftabuddin Ahmed
A level candidate, Sunbeams School

Post office without letter box!

I have been living in Uttara for more than two decades. The sub-post office in Uttara Sector-3 is the only facility that caters to our postal needs. Sadly, in this sub-post office, there were three post boxes at the beginning, which was very convenient for dropping letters at any time of the day. These post boxes have been removed some months ago to install an ATM cash machine. How come a post office is running without the post boxes for the last 6 months? It would be appreciated if the postal department does something about this basic service.

Syed Enam Murshed
Uttara, Dhaka

Mushfiqu, don't despair

I must admire Mushfiqu for taking the responsibility of the entire team's failure in the Zimbabwe tour on his own shoulder. It may be mentioned here that cricket is a team sport and the captain alone can not be blamed for losing a tournament or match. It was also the other players who failed the team by failing to play as a unit. During the final match, catches were dropped and there were fielding lapses. Our players drop easy catches purely due to lack of concentration.

Mushfiqu's leadership is extraordinary. He should not blame himself. Rather, he should take this as a lesson and come back stronger in the next series.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Ode to Savar bravehearts" published on May 13, 2013

Vikram Khan

The prime minister showers our cricket team with cars and money for playing games. But what the rescuers did was not a game. They are the heroes who risked their lives to save hundreds of people. They are the ones who deserve free land, cars and money.

Anon

Our country is now in a shameful condition with recent factory fire, building collapse, and hartals but there are still honest people with good intentions and these people give me hope.

Jelal Hossain

Most of our people are like this. We just need to understand their pulse and guide them accordingly.

Niloufar Naseem Sarker

These great souls are not like most of us. They needed no guidance when thousands stood at the disaster site to watch the tragic drama. These heroes jumped to help risking their lives and one rescuer named Kaikobad sacrificed his life. They are truly great and I will not demean them by comparing them with us who just stood there to watch. With all the insensitivity, greed and corruption surrounding us, they give us a sense that all is not lost yet. They are the rare gems of the human species.