

ILO speaks up

Make every effort to improve image

DISMAYED at Tuesday's fire in a Gazipur composite textile mill that claimed seven lives, ILO has observed that enough has not been done to ensure safety of workers in Bangladesh garment factories.

Given the history of our tragedy-stricken garment industry that lost hundreds of workers' lives in a series of accidents, this latest incident of fire is one too many. Obviously, it will be hard to convince anyone that the factory in question maintained necessary building and fire safety standards as claimed by its owner.

Clearly, the international image of our garment industry may have received yet another jolt. It has put under scrutiny the post-Rana Plaza international collaborative effort undertaken in partnership with UN to improve workers' safety through implementing fire and building safety measures.

The factory owners and the government should take note of the concern expressed by ILO. They need to take stock of the progress already made and take a renewed effort with vigour to improve working conditions, strengthen labour inspection and upgrade building and fire safety in all garment factories. Mounting a strong inspection and monitoring mechanism to keep tabs on the progress made is essential.

The garment owners, especially the apex body, BGMEA, and the government must face facts and try their utmost to present a brighter image to the world at large than it has at the moment.

JU deadlock must end

Future of students at stake

WITH BCL men reportedly foiling anti-VC demonstration and assaulting some agitating teachers in JU matters have come to a head there. Over a year's unrest at Jahangirnagar University has caused it to be three to four months behind schedule, with fears of further session jams ahead.

What began as a general protest against the appointment of a vice-chancellor has gained momentum with his alleged failure to provide security to students and teachers on campus resulting in the death of a student earlier this year, and his failure to take action against a ruling party student leader who was accused of physically assaulting a teacher. Protests have raged over months with the crisis now having reached an impasse. The government's recent warning that it would take 'appropriate action' to ensure an academic atmosphere has only been met with further discontent.

Surely the right to education, as scheduled and in a secure, peaceful environment is not too much to expect from an educational institution? Not only are the students -- whose months of academic backlog means years of struggle ahead -- suffering, but the administrative activities of the university have also come to a standstill, with senate, syndicate and academic council meetings missed during this time.

There must be an immediate end to the crisis. We urge all parties involved -- the administration, the protesting faculty and the government -- to engage in dialogue to end the stalemate for the sake of the thousands of JU students whose future is now in an uncertain limbo.

What people think



Friday: October 04, 2013

Do you agree with the claim of SHUIJAN's Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar that political parties are desperate to achieve power rather than resolving the political impasse?



Saturday: October 05, 2013

Do you think that the rise in the use of religion in politics in Bangladesh is a threat to the region's security and progress?



Sunday: October 06, 2013

Do you think addition of 175 megawatt of electricity imported from India will help reduce load-shedding?



Monday: October 07, 2013

Do you agree with BNP high-ups that all the signs indicate the Awami League would adopt all measures to stay in power during the next parliamentary polls?



Tuesday: October 08, 2013

Do you agree with Prof Anu Mohammad that the government has tricked people by hastily unveiling the foundation plaque of the Rampal power plant?



Wednesday: October 09, 2013

Do you think it was justified to empower law enforcers to arrest anybody without a warrant for violating information and communication technology (ICT) act?



Thursday: October 10, 2013

Do you think it was justified for the education ministry to ask agitating teachers of JU to stop their ongoing movement demanding vice-chancellor's resignation?



The incredible nonchalance

Seldom has a PM anywhere shown such "couldn't care less" attitude towards an imminent political crisis.

THE THIRD VIEW



MAHFUZ ANAM

As citizens, as tax payers, as journalists we really cannot believe that there can exist leaders who can be so unbelievably indifferent to impending political crisis with all the potential of spilling over into violence, loss of property and lives. And all this is being done in the name of democracy. How democracy is strengthened by prospect of violence is something we fail to comprehend.

Sheikh Hasina is repeating herself hoarse that she will only hold the elections under the present constitution. This would have been a perfectly justifiable position but for the fact that she changed the constitution most recently to suit her own game plan.

It is a supreme irony that she did away with the caretaker government system (CTG), the very system that she literally pushed down the throat of the nation in the mid-nineties through nearly three years of relentless mass agitation and with nearly two hundred days of hartals. Having brought about the CTG system, she arbitrarily and without any consultation with her own members of parliament and constitutional experts, leave alone those from the opposition, changed it, using a Supreme Court judgement, that while declaring the CTG system illegal, yet permitted its use for the next two terms on the grounds of 'safety of the people and safety of the nation.'

The PM keeps on repeating that the 15th Amendment was the result of a year long work of a constitution reform committee that she had set up. What she conveniently omits to say is that that very committee suggested retention of the CTG government in its draft recommendation submitted to the PM. In response to the draft Sheikh Hasina insisted that the committee reconsiders its recommendation and incorporate the proposal to do away with the CTG system. We have written about it in details and yet the PM keeps on repeating her narrative.

In post-facto justification of her action the PM argues that CTG provides for un-elected individuals to run our "republic" for 90 days which is against the fundamental spirit of our constitution and of democracy that insists -- as it should -- that we must always be governed by elected representatives of the people.

She is right. But the argument is as true now as it was true in 1994-96 period when she insisted that it be incorporated in our constitution. So one can be quite justified in suspecting that CTG is good when AL is in opposition but not good when in power. If BNP had won the elections in 2008 and it abolished the CTG system for the same reasons, would Sheikh Hasina and the AL have accepted it? We seriously doubt it.

PM's other argument against CTG is that it provides a very weak link between two elected governments. CTG opens up possibilities of unelected governments to lengthen their stay in power as it happened in 2006-8 period.

She is again right. But that happened because of the activities of BNP and the AL during the pre-election

period and also due to some lacunae in the existing provisions.

Those should and could have been corrected and the CTG system could have been made fool-proof. We also believe that if Khaleda Zia did not make President Iajuddin the Chief Advisor, and then try to remote control the CTG then the crisis could have been averted. So instead of correcting the faults she did away with the system. It was like cutting off the head to get rid of headaches.

Now let us look at the other side. Why did the CTG system become so popular and gain public support as it did. In a way it can be termed as Sheikh Hasina's grand success that the idea she and her party promoted and made into law had become so successful and so popular that people of the country want it continued, including the opposition whose leader who once said: "Only a child or a mad person can be neutral."

The reason for CTG's success is that it responded to a very special need of our politics. That need was for a neutral governmental structure to oversee the elections held every five years. That need arose from a deep seated suspicion between the AL and the BNP. Neither side trusted the other to control the levers of government machinery during elections, lest it uses it to its own advantage.

That suspicion has increased over the years. So while our PM may repeat a million times that she will hold the freest and fairest of elections ever, if her opponents do not have confidence and if they do not want to participate in that process, the AL chief cannot ignore that position.

The onus of ensuring that the elections are held on a level playing field definitely rests with the government. This is especially so because the "level playing field" has been upset by Sheikh Hasina's own constitution amendment.

There is no hiding away from the fact the PM, her government and her party have made no attempt so far to talk with the opposition. So far all saner elements within the country and all major international friends of Bangladesh have repeatedly urged Sheikh Hasina to initiate talks with the opposition. So far all such advice have fallen on deaf ears. The UN, no friend of the opposition, had sent two special missions both of which insisted on a dialogue. Chinese, who never express views on internal politics, have this time around, along with the EU, US and UK, publicly suggested that a dialogue with the opposition is good for the country.

We find it absolutely incomprehensible that the prime minister can be so very nonchalant about the impending political conflict that most concerned citizens seem to be predicting. Instead of trying to find a solution the PM is busy daring her opponents to prevent her from holding the elections, as if the technical holding of the elections is everything.

There appears little concern that if election is to reflect public opinion then it must be participated by all leading parties. Without BNP's participation the election will lack credibility, and consequent acceptability.

Most importantly, holding a one-sided election will not give the country the peace and harmony that it so badly needs to move towards greater economic advancement.

The writer is Editor and Publisher, The Daily Star.

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The bold telegram from Blood

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

tion to open the secret conduit to China via Pakistan worth the lives of so many Bengalis? Extrapolate that question with three million, which is our figure for the deaths, its horror is magnified fifteen times.

Sheehan answers his own question. Where the Bengalis were concerned, he concludes, Nixon and Kissinger didn't give a damn. That bitter truth eluded Archer K. Blood, the then US consul general in Dhaka, who had sent a cable to the State Department in Washington urging "strongest possible"

American intervention to stop the carnage. When the cable met with a "deafening" silence from Washington, Blood and his staff in Dhaka refused to give up. This time they resorted to what is called a "dissent cable," a measure initiated during the Vietnam War to allow US Foreign Service officials to speak up against official policies. This is the cable that Bass in his book has termed as "the Blood telegram."

The twenty Americans, who signed that cable in Dhaka in 1971, didn't know like rest of the world that both Nixon and Kissinger were wooing the mastermind of the genocide, Pakistan's President Yahya Khan, like smitten lovers. A declassified US government document has revealed a handwritten note by Nixon in April 1971 that read: "To all hands, don't squeeze Yahya at this time." In that same month Yahya's quiet negotiation paid off when the Chinese finally agreed to receive Nixon. Blood paid the price for his conscience; he was recalled from his post eighteen months ahead of time.

What can the world do with this late indictment of two American political figures, one of whom, Richard Nixon, is dead? Kissinger remains an influential public figure in the United States although his global image dimmed over the years. A proponent of *Realpolitik*, his sclerotic con-

science is unlikely to be scratched by scathing so late in the day. Kissinger believes that politics or diplomacy should be based primarily on power and on practical and material factors and considerations instead of explicit ideological notions or moral or ethical premises.

Leo Tolstoy argued that war is under all circumstances a crime. Forty-two years ago a heinous crime was committed on a race of people to punish them for their love of freedom. Whether 200,000 or three million people got killed in that genocide matters for the same reason the law of large numbers describes the result of performing the same experiment a large number of times. More people killed made the crime more despicable, its atrocity multiplied as many times.

Neil Sheehan contends that Nixon and Kissinger had the power to stop the killing of innocent Bengalis because the Pakistani military was using American weapons and depended on the United States for ammunition and spare parts. But priorities were misplaced in their deranged minds. A diplomatic victory was more important than

saving scores of lives. British historian George Trevelyan observed that the curse of the victors is not to die but to live. In Bangladesh, that thing turned on its head. The victims turned out to be victors. Those who killed were eventually defeated. The Pakistanis surrendered and went about their lives as usual. Tikka Khan retired as the army chief of a dismembered Pakistan and received a state burial with full military honors at the age of 86. A.A.K. Niazi lived to be 89 although his awards were withdrawn and honours stripped due to the surrender in East Pakistan.

But the key players involved in Bangladesh's independence struggle met tragic ends. Nixon resigned in 1974 and lived his last twenty years as a hated man. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated in 1975. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was hanged in 1979. Yahya Khan lived under house arrest and died in obscurity in 1980. The following year, Ziaur Rahman was gunned down. Bodyguards killed Indira Gandhi in 1984.

It's God's mystery why the arithmetic of justice doesn't always add up. The innocent dies and the guilty survives. One butcher kills millions, then dies alone hanged or sent to the firing squad. Others escape justice. Pol Pot died naturally at the age of 72. Hitler took his own life.

A telegram from the past may not correct those anomalies, but it resurrects the truth for us. A genocide can't be forgotten because even long after the blood of victims has dried, history heaves their mournful sighs.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Smaller parties can merge to become a force

First-past-the-post is an electoral system where small parties have difficulty winning seats, so Bangladesh needs fewer political parties. Simple vanity creates an excess of parties as people enjoy "leader" status, particularly when there's no risk of actually winning and needing to take responsibility.

Many small parties contribute little to their alliances as separate entities (no seats). They should explore formal mergers with other parties in the same position as consolidation is also a potential solution to AL/BNP dominance. One imagines a competitive system with several medium to large parties of different types: secular (socialist, centrist, free-market) Islamist (conservative, moderate), Bengali nationalist or others. These new parties would be stronger and more adaptable as their members share common principles but also hold varying opinions on some issues due to their pre-merger party affiliations. To enable these parties to reach their full potential, Article 70 must be repealed.

Neil Taylor
On e-mail

Thaw in US-Iran relations upsets Israel

We dislike the reaction of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the efforts of Iran's new president Hassan Rouhani to mend fences with the international community. Rouhani's historic 15-minute telephonic conversation with US President Barack Obama on September 27, 2013 was a turning point in that process. People all over the world are feeling happy and they welcome the move of the Iranian President who said last week that he wanted a deal within months to end international doubts about Iran's nuclear intentions.

Israeli prime minister said that Tehran is fooling the world and if Israel is forced to stand alone it will stand alone and tackle Iran. We condemn this attitude and hope that US President Barack Obama will accept the hand of friendship which the people of Iran have extended towards America and recognise Iran's declaration that its nuclear programme is strictly meant for peaceful purposes.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Where life is cheap

I feel extreme sorrow to see another fire incident in a RMG factory. My deepest sympathy goes out to those who lost their lives in this tragedy and their families. This kind of tragedies continue to happen in Bangladesh again and again as our government and local city council planning department allow factories in densely populated area without minimum compliance. It's a country where people's lives are the cheapest things.

Mamun Bakth
England

Govt. fails to see what a child can

We have come to know from the media that the PM reaffirmed that Rampal power plant won't harm the Sundarbans. When even a child can realise that thermal power plant adjacent to the Sundarbans will destroy this forest, only the government fails to understand the truth. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to those who have been protesting strongly against setting up this plant for a long time with long march and other activities.

Sheuly Haque
Tarash, Sirajgonj

Comments on news report, "Extra-treaty with India ratified," published on October 8, 2013

Saif Masum

This treaty is apparently good for both countries. But, I'm so confused about its final implementation. We did a lot with them, got a few.

Deep purple blue

One more treaty while land boundary and Teesta river agreements are stuck at the Indian end...

Abul Kashem

To get anything from India is not possible. They will only take.

"Over 30 'grenades' stored there" (October 8, 2013)

Touchstone

These Hefajatis and their cohorts are violent people. They are wolves in lambs' coats.

Abul Kashem

It is strange how a leader (whatever political party he represents) keeps illegal arms or explosives in his possession so irresponsibly when there are possibilities of police raids or other occurrences.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Since when an exploding laptop can cause so much destruction? The man's ignorance and pathetic attempt to cover up is a laughable matter even under such tragic circumstances.

SM

Why is the law enforcer, in the first picture, not wearing any gloves to safeguard the evidence?

Deep purple blue

Really frightening!

Jafar Iqbal

BNP and Jamaat leaders must have some explanation for this?