

## Withdraw hartal call Reject discredited method

**J**UST when we were bouncing back to a normal rhythm of life and the wheels of the economy have started moving, comes abrasively Jamaat-e-Islami's call for country-wide hartal on Thursday. And for no better cause than protesting lower court's conviction of accused Jamaat leader Matiur Rahman Nizami in the 10-truck arms haul case. Since an appeal would likely be made in the higher court, the process isn't exhausted yet. Regardless, why hold people hostage in a matter that is juridical relating to one of the most heinously designed big arms trafficking case known in our history?

The BNP-led alliance of which Jamaat remains a part reading the pulse of the people had settled for peaceful methods of political articulation. We welcomed it. But now Jamaat plans to revert to its discredited methods of destruction and violence in the name of hartal. How can one forget the terrorising tactic of Jamaat hurling petrol bombs and explosives to burn an entire bus-load of people just prior to hartal? And the least said about the shutdown day, the better!

We as a paper have been consistently opposed to hartal since our very inception. Now the reasons are far more powerful and the evidence telling to reject this discredited method on any pretext whatsoever.

We would, therefore, call upon Jamaat to withdraw the hartal, urge BNP to use its influence to that end, and counsel the people to quietly but vigorously ignore it.

## A serious blow to the rule of law

### Withdrawal of so-called 'politically motivated' cases

**A**CCORDING to a report in a leading Bangla daily, in his last act as the chairman of the national committee for recommending withdrawal of "politically motivated" cases its chairman, the erstwhile state minister for law, had recommended withdrawal of cases or names of accused therein in ninety much talked about lawsuits. What is inexplicable is that among those are forty cases of murder in many of which the accused have given statement admitting their guilt. Moreover, these did not have the recommendation of the district committees either.

The said national committee, which was set up in 2009, has so far recommended partial or complete withdrawal of seven thousand 198 cases. A substantial number of these are related to murder.

We feel that the committee has overstepped its remit. And we would hope the apex court of the country should suo moto seek clarification as to how legal action against murderers, rent seekers etc can fall within the category of 'politically motivated' cases. And many of the cases date back as far as 1988, while some of them have been registered after the AL led government came to power in 2009.

Admittedly, governments have during their period in office instituted cases to harass political opponents but to use that excuse to let notorious killers off the hook is a great disservice to the rule of law and good governance.

The matter is mind boggling and one that has serious implications, for the rule of law has been subordinated to the rule of men. The minister should clarify the rationale for his action.

## Safe cycling etiquette

RIDWAN QUAIM

**M**ANY citizens in the capital city have chosen cycling for their daily commuting purposes. Undoubtedly, this is a very positive change but the concern is that several of the 'new' cyclists do not have the proper knowledge and experience of cycling in mixed traffic, and know little about cycling etiquette.

Following these tips may help cyclists to be safe: **Safety gears and visibility:** Regardless of the distance that the cyclists are planning to go, they must wear helmets and gloves and other safety gears at all times. They should stay highly visible by using tail-lights and headlights at night, and use bells or call out if necessary to inform others about their presence.

**Safe cycling technique and behaviour:** Cyclists should strictly follow the traffic rules and regulations at all times. They should cycle on the left side of the road as much as possible. A controllable and safe speed should be maintained at all times so that there is enough time and distance to slow down or come to a complete stop if necessary. Cyclists should give proper hand signal or indication while changing lanes, making turns and also before stopping. Prior to changing lanes or making turns cyclists should check the sides and back to ensure a safe maneuver, and prior to entering another road or side street they should be sure that there is no vehicle coming towards them. Cyclists should cross a road only after ensuring that there is sufficient gap to cross or that oncoming traffic has slowed down.

**What not to do:** Refrain from aggressive and reckless cycling behaviour such as speeding or competing with other vehicles including other cyclists; frequently changing lanes; performing stunts on busy roads; cycling on the wrong direction/opposite side of the road and violating traffic rules. In addition, cyclists should refrain from using mobile phones or plugged earphones/headphones while cycling.

Finally, cyclists should be patient, tolerant, and considerate and ride safely and sensibly at all times.

To be a part of the recent cycling trend, children are insisting that their parents buy them bicycle. However, before letting their children cycle in mixed traffic, it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that they can cycle properly, know the traffic rules and regulations, and are aware of the cycling etiquettes.

## Report on the rubble

RUBANA HUQ

**T**HE pretty 25 year-old Moina from Potia thana still reminisces about her lovely lunchtime with her colleagues, who stayed trapped for three days; 25 year-old Sonia from Gaibandha, who a team of eighteen people rescued after her leg was finally chopped off after the third try...still smiles; 23 year-old Laboni from Gaibandha, who lost her leg, today just wants to just go home and continue with sewing. There are many more amputees who have lived through hell; there are many stories that still need to be told. Amidst memory, recollection, interviews and records, how does this nation of ours heal collectively?

The global news on textiles isn't encouraging. Chinese companies are investing heavily in Punjab, where a new garments industrial zone is being set up. An MOU between the Punjab government and a Chinese group for a \$2 billion dollar investment is only a starting point, while other Chinese companies are now set to eye the region's textile sector. According to the Union Textile Minister of India, Kavuru Sambasiva Rao, India's annual production of textile goods is expected to increase to \$220 billion by 2020.

Cambodia is the only country that seems to be faring as poorly as ourselves, where on January 26, eight people were injured at a rally organised by nine unions and associations asking the government to free 23 arrested workers.

So, do we have any good news at all at our end? Yes, we do. An International Trade Expo on Building and Fire safety, organised by BGMEA and alliance and supported by Accord, IFC, Elevate, C&A Foundation, is taking place in February. And yes, we have moved forward by recruiting 41 new labour inspectors. In spite of "tumbling backwards" falling "far short of international standards," as per Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, and notwithstanding HRW's observations on trade unions not having made progress, post-Rana Plaza scene not being too satisfactory and their observation on "toxic" working conditions, Bangladesh has actually made substantial progress starting from May 2013 till date.

In a recent report, questions have been raised on why only 777 workers out of 1,135 received Tk.1.5 lakh from PM's fund; why 'insignificant' compensation was being offered to the 1,800 injured; why the PM's fund had disbursed only Tk.18.85 crore from a fund which probably had more than Tk.100 crore; why only 40 have received the Tk.15 lakh fund that the government had promised to the seriously injured. There are reports on how out of 25 steps only 12 have taken shape and how the rest have failed. Really? How feasible was it to have set such a long-term

expectation based on the ground realities, which involve procedural formalities and norms that bind the national and international organisations?

Questions were also raised about why only 70 workers out of 100 were given jobs by BGMEA. Out of 3,572 victims, according to the report, BGMEA had given Tk.7.06 crore whereas in reality, when one adds up the figure rests at Tk.13.58 crore. There were orphans and pregnant women being helped out as well. Requests were made to be transparent about funds being received from the international entities whereas, in reality, not a dime has been received by the sector. However, as manufacturers, we continue receiving regular notices from BGMEA on what more could be done for the victims of Rana Plaza and their families. So, things have changed. Not only are we on our toes trying to get a positive audit rating of all our factories by fixing our cracks and closing our fault lines, most of us are actually taking a hard look at ourselves and at our CSR levels and thinking about what more could be done at this point of time.

I often wonder about the level of aggression and lack of empathy. While donations from local partners are being referred to in reports, the contribution from BGMEA ends up sounding like a contribution from the Rich Boys' Club instead of the manufacturers' donations. While routine dissections are done on the sector, a lot is spoken about what has not been done and not so much about what has been done so far.

While all this is being weighed, as a member of the manufacturing sector, I can only appeal to the judgment of the civil society and ask them to kindly consider that most of us do not leave our phones on silent mode at night. We breathe and sleep in fear. In case there's a call late at night, we know that darkness is courting disaster and by the crack of dawn our factories may end up in ash. Even mornings end up with mixed messages. Desks aren't that busy anymore. Most of us are pursuing clients with new samples and new prices. The race to the bottom is far from over. With fewer clients coming in, and fewer orders being placed, it's time for us to chase the rainbow, yet once again.

There are just too many fingers being pointed towards the RMG sector. Including our own. It's almost as if we are using boomerangs to kill ourselves. Let's not talk about conspiracy theory anymore. Let's just call it plain and simple harakiri. We are slitting our own bellies open and inviting a feast at the expense of a critically injured sector. Question is, what do we do next? Where do we go from here?

The writer is MD, Mohammadi Group.

## Evidence for action: Making invisible children visible through data

PASCAL VILLENEUVE

**T**HE world made a set of promises to children 25 years ago when it adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We promised every girl and boy the right to survive and be healthy. We promised every child the right to an education, to a name and to an identity. We promised that no child should be subjected to violence.

Have we kept those promises? The only way to know is to use data to see how far we have come, and where we still need to go. Data are more than just numbers -- they represent the reality of life for children around the world.

For example, data show us that fewer children now die before their fifth birthdays and more girls are in school than ever before. While this is good news, data also reveal that even in countries where progress is being made, far too many children are left behind. This marginalisation is often hidden by statistical averages, which show overall improvement but mask disparities within nations. Children left behind become 'invisible.'

In Bangladesh, significant progress has been made in

years are out of school. Even in the best performing upazilas, 13 out of 100 children are out of school. One upazila has 45 out of 100 children out of school, a distressing number that calls for appropriate policy review and action.

Globally, the births of nearly 230 million children under five have never been registered and the denial of an identity deprives them of services and protections that are theirs by right. Bangladesh is among the 10 countries with the largest numbers of unregistered under five children in the world. Some 10 million children under five in Bangladesh do not officially exist.

UNICEF's new report, *State of the World's Children 2014 in Numbers: Every Child Counts - Revealing disparities, advancing children's rights*, exposes some striking inequities. The world's poorest children, for example, are nearly three times less likely than the richest to have a skilled attendant at their birth.

Revealing these disparities allows us to understand the barriers that children confront in accessing and using essential services, and design and monitor initiatives that make it possible to overcome them. Data alone do not change the world, but they make change possible by providing evidence to drive action, identify gaps, influence decision-makers, and target investment and intervention to reach the most vulnerable children.

In Bangladesh, recent data collected in 19 of the most deprived unions have revealed important disparities in the availability, access, utilisation and quality of essential services for women and children. For example, household accessibility to safe water supply ranged from 38% to 99% between the least performing and the best performing upazillas.

Involvement of local stakeholders in the analysis of data and identification of the right corrective actions is proving essential, given their knowledge of local constraints and resources. For example, in one particularly deprived union, use of locally generated data has led, within one year, to a fourfold increase in the use of iron folic acid supplements by pregnant women.

Children and their communities can use data and mobile phone technologies to measure and report the extent to which national commitments are honoured in their homes, clinics, schools and streets.

Data are making visible the children at greatest risk -- those furthest from society's reach. It is up to decision-makers at all levels to make sure that those children -- and all children -- are granted the opportunity to fully enjoy their rights.

As we mark the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child this year, Unicef challenges the world to use data and evidence to inspire creative thinking and find innovative solutions to the most pressing issues confronting children. This anniversary is an urgent reminder of the promises that have yet to be fulfilled -- promises that can mean a world of difference for children.



increasing primary school enrollment and ensuring gender parity in schools. Immunisation services in Bangladesh routinely reach the majority of children. Yet, even for very successful programmes such as these, what might at first look like a small percentage of children being missed out may actually hide a large number of children who are left behind. For example, the 14% of Bangladeshi children aged 12-23 months who are not fully vaccinated translates into about 370,000 children remaining vulnerable to deadly yet easily preventable diseases such as measles, tuberculosis and tetanus. Children not reached by immunisation services are predominantly found among the poorest and hard-to-reach communities.

Bangladesh has made significant progress by curbing the under-five mortality rate to 41 per thousand live births. However, nine neonates still die every hour, which is 76,000 neonatal deaths every year. The neonatal mortality rate has not decreased substantially for the past 10 years. Mortality among children in the poorest households and those in hard-to-reach areas is at least 50% higher than those in the wealthiest areas.

While Bangladesh has made significant progress in primary education for both boys and girls during the last two decades, still almost 25% of children aged six to 10

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## LETTERS

### TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

#### Biman's cabin crew recruitment

It was very heartening news that Biman is adding another Boeing 777 to its fleet in the first week of February and one more in March. With this increase in fleet Biman advertised to recruit more cabin crews to meet the shortage. What is the response to Biman's ad is not known to me but I recollect that for the last year Hajj flights Biman had advertised for recruiting 90 experienced cabin crews for wide bodied aircrafts on casual basis. Around 45 Bangladeshi experienced personnel could be found and were inducted into service for the Hajj flights. After the Hajj flights were over in November 2013 these casual cabin crews were said goodbye as per contract. I was wondering why these experienced cabin crews cannot be recruited again as they had come forward at the time when Biman had crisis for more cabin crews for Hajj flights. I think Biman would be doing injustice if these experienced cabin crews are not taken back into service. Some of them may be bit over aged and in their mid thirties but they have better experience of working in reputed foreign airlines and can render good service to the national carrier. I hope Biman will make more concession in its cabin crew recruitment policy. Ziauddin Ahmed Gulshan, Dhaka

#### A punishable offence!

We all know that smoking is harmful to health. Government made a law against it which has not been implemented at all. The Daily Star front page photo on January 28 of our social welfare minister smoking at a school programme proved it again. My request to the government, please implement the law. Please prove that smoking in public places is really a punishable offence. Salman Shuvro On e-mail

#### My hijab, my choice

When some people see Muslim women with their heads covered, the first impression they get is that these women are oppressed. As a 7th grade student, I have faced many such prying questions due to my headscarf. As I was raised as an Ahmadi Muslim in the United States by parents from Bangladesh, my parents had to struggle to make sure that I was aware of my identity as a young child.

After wearing my hijab, I instantly recognised many changes in the way people behaved towards me. Many ignorant students attempted to remove my hijab from my head and seemed to think of it as a humorous act. I know my purpose and my reason behind my choice of wearing my hijab. On February 1st, which marked the first anniversary of the "World Hijab Day," I held my head up high to be known as a young Muslim girl.

Husna Ahmed Mirza  
New York, USA

#### Comments on news report, "GALLows for 14," published on February 2, 2014

##### Sara

The judgment sounds harsh at the surface but below are some thoughts to justify otherwise:

- Weapons were large enough in quantity to arm a formidable force (e.g. Chittagong cantonment).
- Weapons were knowingly being supplied to a terrorist group.
- Weapons were likely to cause mass deaths and destruction, including of civilian lives (e.g. the JMB grenade mayhem in 2003-05 was created by only a handful of grenades)

Taking into account the abuse of authority of the convicts, death sentence is appropriate. Alternatively, think of a scenario where the weapons were being supplied to JMB. All arrested JMB high-ups were executed for killing civilians (with a much smaller arsenal). If the suppliers of bombs to JMB were arrested and not handed death sentences, would it have been just?

ULFA may be different from JMB in many ways but the application of the weapons could hardly be different.

##### Nazrul Islam

The government and a section of newsmen are trying to establish that BNP was involved with this arms smuggling. People know it very well those arms were seized by the BNP government.

##### Opeemonir

I see this as direct incapability of handling of our national security apparatus which concerns DGFI, NSI, home ministry including ministry of defense (MOD)...no country would allow a sensitive case like this one to go so public.

##### Shahin Huq

This verdict follows the pattern of weakening the opposition parties. It definitely came from across the border.

##### Truthprevails53

Insinuating that India is doing it is just childish. Think of what your Pak brothers did by killing our great men like Zahir Raihan and Shahidullah Kaisar. Nizami deserves to die a thousand deaths.

##### Rashed

Good verdict. No anti-Indian act should be tolerated inside Bangladesh.