

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA FRIDAY MAY 1, 2015

Observing May Day Workers' rights still a far cry

AS we observe another May Day, we note with concern that despite tremendous economic progress over the last few decades, a vast majority of workers in Bangladesh continue to live and work amidst extremely precarious conditions, denied their rights to a fair wage, safe working conditions and collective bargaining. It is frustrating that even 129 years after the Hay Market incident in Chicago, when workers were killed during a general strike for an eight-hour workday, we have failed to guarantee even eight-hour workdays and overtime of workers in many different sectors.

In the wake of the two year anniversary of the Rana Plaza collapse, we are reminded of the brutality of an exploitative capitalist system, and of the great strides we have to make to ensure the basic rights of workers. With workers' lives still valued at Tk. 1 lakh as per our labour law, it is no wonder that workers are treated as disposable, replaceable units of production. The compensation provisions in the Labour Law must be changed immediately and a more equitable compensation scheme put in place to support victims and their families.

Despite the amendments made in 2013, the Labour Law still remains inadequate in addressing the demands of workers; the 30 percent minimum membership requirement to form a trade union, especially in large companies, is a hindrance to guaranteeing trade union rights for workers. The law does not extend freedom of association and collective bargaining rights to workers in export processing zones. Notably, there are no systematic laws to protect domestic, agricultural and informal sector workers. We have still not been able to guarantee safe working places for our women workers, particularly women migrant workers.

The observations on May Day would have little meaning if we cannot make workers' rights a priority in the national imagination.

BNP abandoning election midway

It should have more faith in the voters

BNP's decision to boycott the election halfway into the voting has surprised most observers. The decision is at best a knee-jerk response bearing all the signs of haste and impolitic reaction. It has also exposed the fact that the party puts little faith in the people, particularly its supporters.

In spite of the manner in which the voting process was interfered with, and the failure or unwillingness of the EC to take cognizance of the happenings on ground, the number of votes obtained by the BNP supported mayoral candidates in the three city corporations is a very respectable figure. And that is even more creditable when one considers the fact that more than 90 percent of the votes were cast within only 3-4 hours of the start of voting in all the three constituencies; and one cannot say what might have been the final count had the BNP not decided to abandon the elections midway. Thus we fail to understand BNP's logic in doing so.

Insofar as BNP's accusation of election manipulation is concerned, it should have followed the established procedure and produced the evidence to the EC in support of its claim, for example, that many of their polling agents were barred from entering the polling centres.

BNP's decision, as much as it has done disservice to the election process has also disappointed its supporters, workers and the party supported councillor candidates. It has also raised questions regarding the intention of the party and whether or not joining the election was merely a political ploy. It has marred the party's credibility too.

COMMENTS

"Voting free of fear, interference: PM"
(April 29, 2015)

Ruhul1

Looks like we are in Hirok Rajar Deshel!

"STAY OUT, media"
(April 29, 2015)

Shariar Nobi

This election is rigged from the very beginning; the whole matter seems farcical. Kudos to BNP for taking part in it and showing everyone once again why this government cannot be trusted.

"PM terms Khaleda killer, repressor"
(April 27, 2015)

Lal Shobuz Potaka

Instead of talking about what Khaleda Zia said, you should concentrate on your agenda.

"Khaleda calls for silent revenge"
(April 27, 2015)

Zman7

She knows well who ordered, financed and supported the petrol bomb attacks that brutally burned and killed so many innocent people in the last few months.

"Brave officer foils BCL bid to capture polling centre" (April 29, 2015)

Sammy

Guess he will be made to pay for that pretty soon!

Fear is not the key

CHINTITO
SINCE 1995



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

THE Nepal earthquake of April 25, its worst in four decades, has again given free fodder to even freer speculations from the layman to the experts about the fate of Dhaka should the Bangladesh capital be struck by a tremor close to eight on the Richter scale.

Noticeably, most of the speculators seem not to be as bothered about a possible catastrophe in Sylhet, Sunamganj, Mymensingh, Sherpur and Kurigram districts, all of which lie in the 'maximum vulnerable zone', and the region was most severely affected by the 8.7 magnitude Great Indian Earthquake of 1897.

The possible cause for the bias against quake-hit Dhaka is because it makes the probable destruction and the loss of lives appear more sensational. Figures ranging from half of the buildings to three-quarters being reduced to rubble have been doing the rounds in print articles, and radio and television talk shows as well as in our living and dining room conversations. Curiously, no one seems to be able to predict the number of human lives that may be lost.

Many of the commentaries are about the dire negatives the city has to offer should a sizeable quake strike: buildings will crumble, gas lines will catch fire, electricity breakdown will plunge the city into darkness, water connection will fail, airports will be unusable, electronic communication will be cut off, rail and road network will not function, petrol will be scarce, food supply line will be snapped, hospitals will be overrun, burial and cremation will be difficult, rescue equipment will be in short supply...

Most of the 'specialists' (not all of them hold degrees in earthquake preparedness) give us little hope, perhaps because that is their pessimistic nature. A lady mentioned in a forum that 'the fear the predictors are disseminating publicly should be enough to

kill us from heart failure long before an earthquake'.

Earthquakes can happen, and we are indeed lying close to a vicious fault line straining at the meeting of the Eurasian and the Indian plates. To lessen damage to property, loss of life and injury from an earthquake, we should prepare ourselves to the best of our ability. On a priority basis, we should seek professional advice about what we should build, how and where. Most importantly, we should rehearse what to do before, during and after the earth starts shaking. Fear will not help us, rather it will cause panic and that will be devastating, especially for our children.

Preparedness, mentally as well as logistically, is crucial. Our focus should be on

walls and windows; if you are in bed, hold on and stay there, protecting your head with a pillow; keep away from dangerous objects; do not run around; after the shaking is over, walk out slowly watching for anything that could fall in the aftershocks; do not use the elevator or try to leave the building by the stairs; stop your automobile and stay in; avoid overpasses, bridges, power lines, signboard; if you are outside, stay there; move away from lampposts, trees, vehicles and buildings; if you use a wheelchair, stay sitting and try to avoid falling objects.

AFTER: For any possibility of tsunami, move inland 3km (2 miles) or to a highland at least 30 metres (100 feet) above sea level; keep calm; implement personal, family and community emergency plans; if possible,

On a priority basis, we should seek professional advice about what we should build, how and where. Most importantly, we should rehearse what to do before, during and after the earth starts shaking. Fear will not help us, rather it will cause panic and that will be devastating, especially for our children.

adopting safety measures, and involving our family and workmates. Here are some of the tips I gleaned from the Net:

BEFORE: Consult a civil engineer for structural matters; fasten unstable furniture, equipment (gas tanks and water heaters) and hanging objects; move beds away from dangerous places; keep the exits free of obstacles; create a duplicate of the keys of your home and vehicle; keep a radio, a torch and spare batteries; install and learn to operate a fire extinguisher; stock suitable food; store abundant water; ready a first aid kit; secure important documents; keep domestic animals inside your home; if you have a disability, plan accordingly; familiarise your movement by using alternate routes.

DURING: If you are inside a building stay there; drop, cover and hold on; avoid exterior

inspect if there are wounded or stuck people; wear suitable clothes; verify if there are fires; do not make unnecessary calls; close the main gas valve; get away from the building; if possible, disconnect the electrical power line; do not touch cables or electrical posts that have fallen to the ground; inspect your house for structural damages; do not go outside to gossip; be prepared for more earthquakes; if you are trapped call/whistle for help; cooperate with the Fire Service and other emergency services.

The impact of an earthquake cannot be predicted, but we can react better (most probably) by being ready and organised.

The writer is a practising architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Multiple Paul Harris Fellow-Cum-Benefactor Rotarian.

Yes We Con

HUMOROUSLY
YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

THE handsome, charismatic and successful young men join hands and smile for the perfect photo. For the last few weeks they have been adorable in doing such

adorable things as sweeping the streets. Makes me want to vote for all of them. I secretly hope that like the SSC exams, the election date is rescheduled several times, so as to prolong the pleasure.

Election day. The alarm on the table clock goes off. I hop onto my bicycle, not to show support for the bicycle, but to ride through the middle of the road otherwise reserved for the bus. I ride to the polling station, where my identity is scrutinized with eagle eyes. I gaze through the telescope in the hope to see a bright future.

And sure enough, Bangladesh joins the ranks of the mighty USA. The latter had it in 1929, the former gets it in 2015. I'm talking about Black Tuesday - officially kicking off The Great Depression.

But for the first several hours of voting it is all euphoria. We are busy uploading photos of our blackened thumbs. Beauticians miss the opportunity for a PR blitz with "You should manicure that nail!" The elite discovers the joy of riding this strange contraption called the rickshaw, abhorred otherwise for being a nuisance but adored today for being a transportation lifeline. The breezy ride spices up the marriage of many a numerous middle aged couples.

The election is 'free and fair' with 'free and no fare' rickshaw rides to polling stations, earning brownie points for some candidates. Then there is the anonymous,



benevolent person who spares you the hassle of voting altogether. The voter can now expect to go to the DESCO office and discover that his bills have already been paid or go to the bank and discover that his money has already been drawn.

Several candidates, however, look right through the stratagems of these fringe benefits. With deserted streets, some candidates perhaps (finally) even see and smell the piled trash on the roads, thus realising what entails all in a day's work (if done properly) should one be elected mayor. So, a mass exodus away from the mayoral seat. One candidate even goes further and quits politics altogether, perhaps seeing photos of Ilias Ali.

If a single day can have BOTH an apex AND a nadir, today is that day...

So, the first page of the newspaper on the day after election shows neither the winner smiling, nor the defeated gloomily conceding, but rather, scenes from the Normandy landing.

US Ambassador Bernicat tweets: "Winning at any cost is no victory at all." Exactly. Case in point: Iraq. I'm trying to recall what the Bangladesh Ambassador to the US said after G W Bush's 'win' by way of hanging and dimpled chads in Florida. And the winner did say, "Fool me once, shame on - [awkward pause] - shame on you. Fool me - you can't get fooled again."

But we are mere mortals and therefore CAN get fooled over and over again. We allow ourselves the luxury of a momentary lapse of reason - forgetting that regardless of who is the incumbent and who are the contenders, an election here is merely a survey, at best, with the latter having far less of a margin of error.

Autopsy time. First let's look at the photo of the charismatic candidates beaming away while holding hands. Perhaps Photoshop isn't dead. Or, maybe this is our version of *The Last Supper* (ok, it's a

buffet - they are standing) before the election is cruci-'fixed'...

Now let's look at all the photos of blackened thumbs. It somehow makes more sense now that the colour of choice is black. Look deeper - there are fifty shades of black, depending on which perspective one has - it could be a thumbs-up, a thumbs-sideways ('suck your thumb', i.e., you are a sucker), or a plain, thumbs-down. I know it all sounds confusing! Next time, let's make it simple and let's just use the middle finger for the black ink.

So, here's the coroner's report: It is demock-crazy with a suck-stress-fool campaign slogan: "Yes we con".

Ok, back to the drawing board. We continue our quest to discover the cure for Electile Dysfunction...

The writer is an engineer & CEO turned comedian (by choice), the host of NTV's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

A mockery to the nation

January 5, 2014 and April 28, 2015 are two different elections; one was the general election and the other, city corporation election. The difference is, in the first one, the opposition did not participate and in the second one, twenty-party alliance participated but the result is the same. In 2014, Awami League formed the government without caring about anything and this time also they ensured victory through unfair means.

Leaders of the Awami League surely know how to win an election. Many newspapers reported how law enforcement agencies looked the other way during incidents of ballot stuffing by activists of Chhatra League at several polling stations.

What does the Election Commission have to say about this? This would not have happened if the Army was deployed during the city corporation elections.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Terror at TSC on Pahela Baishakh

The word 'disgrace' is used to describe the loss of respect towards one due to unacceptable activities. Using the word disgrace to depict the events that transpired on April 14 would be undoubtedly an understatement! A group of women out to celebrate the Bangla New Year was assaulted and stripped off their clothes. So far the criminals have faced no consequences for their sickening activities.

It was noted that police were on duty just yards away, as silent witnesses

or perhaps just as admirers of the event. In light of the recent political turmoil in the country, days such as these come rare so it is natural for people to celebrate. Who knew it would turn out to be such a nightmare for some?

These hooligans did not only hurt the women and the minor, but also left a scar on their hearts that will last forever. Incidents such as these really make me question whether we are human beings and whether we really possess an ounce of humanity. We are outraged, upset, astounded, disappointed and ashamed. Justice has to be served. These beasts have to pay.

Mashiat Zaman
Dhanmondi, Dhaka