

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA MONDAY MAY 11, 2015

## Protesting garment workers

*Genuine concern for security evoking vindictive action?*

It is a story of aggrieved garment workers – with a difference! The ring of familiarity ends with their demand for payment of arrear salaries when this is drowned in the more strident chorus of serious grievances. About a thousand workers of two factories in Ashulia protested on Saturday against random termination of services and closure of factories.

While making their five-point demand, they were organised, peaceful and articulate under the banner of Garment Workers' Trade Union Centre marking a departure from the bashing or breaking speers of the past. Their demands rooted in a situational reality sounded logical. They called for stoppage of retrenchment, payment of termination benefits in case of job loss, reopening of closed factories, an end to worker repression and of course, payment of arrears.

To view this catalogue of demands merely as customary ventilation of pent-up grievances by workers would be simplistic. For, it risks missing the core point of concern revolving around the latest Ashulia episode. In the backdrop of recent earthquakes, the workers demanded that authorities examine the buildings the factories were housed in to determine their safety status. Such a concern finds an instant resonance with the heightened level of anxiety over earthquake preparedness. It is common knowledge that a large number of factories in Savar were but residential buildings raised on earth-filled low lying land with weak soil capital underneath.

In an apparent reaction, the factory management fired 29 workers; closed the factory taking the plea of shortage of work orders. The real issues of employment and safety are given a short shrift.

## University teacher roughed up by police

*Punish this condemnable act*

We wonder when, if ever, the police would learn to treat a citizen with due respect and civility. The haughty mindset that leads them to act in the most highhanded manner with the common man on the street is reflective of a colonial mindset perpetuated by a regime of impunity the members of the law enforcing agencies arrogate to themselves. What else can explain the reason for a university teacher being beaten up by policemen?

The teacher in question was going to catch a train when he was stopped by a sergeant on duty for checking of the vehicle's and driver's documents. Certainly a policeman can stop any vehicle anytime to check the papers. And if there is anything wrong with the documents then there are procedures to deal with that. But why must a policeman feel it necessary to manhandle a person? And that too after the teacher had given his identity? And it seems that one's association with a university or a media concern invites special wrath of the police as evident from reports. We wonder also whether a private car can be requisitioned at anyone's whim. It is in the law of the jungle and not of a civilised society where one sees such barbaric treatment of an innocent person by the police.

There must be an attitudinal reform in the police. They must understand that they are to provide help to the people while going after the criminals. And that must be done remaining within the bounds of the law which the members of the law enforcing agencies are themselves not above. Such errant policemen must be made examples of.

# Home away from home



MACRO MIRROR

FAHMIDA KHATUN

He is a graduate from Bangladesh. In the beginning of the 2000s, he migrated to the US. Now he owns three restaurants in Manhattan, New York, and has employed fifteen Bangladeshis. This effervescent person represents those who have struggled through and made their way to success by hard work, perseverance and sincerity in a foreign land. There are many like him in the US.

As we enter one of his eateries, we find a long queue of customers, all of whom are non-Bangladeshis. When our turn comes and we start speaking Bangla, everyone on the other side of the counter gleams and hastily ushers us to a table. In the next one hour the owner and employees of the restaurant focus mostly on us in between attending other customers. Politics, mayoral elections, the law and order situation and the business environment – all come up in the discussion. I realise that even though they live abroad, their hearts meander across Bangladesh. I also feel that they still see the potential of Bangladesh despite the chaotic situations and political disturbances.

As we see customers wait for their turn, we ask for the bill, but face an embarrassing situation. The owner refuses to accept any payment since we are guests from Bangladesh. Bangladeshis have a reputation of being hospitable both within and outside their own country. When you stop for fuel in a remote gas station or go to a grocery store in a foreign land and meet a Bangladeshi, he will promptly invite you to his house for dinner even though you have never met him before. This is how Bangladeshis automati-

cally connect with each other while we are far away from home.

On my way back home from the restaurant that day, sitting in a subway train, I think of the other side of the story. There are many successful professionals in large organisations including banks, insurance and private firms, universities, development organisations and many other places in the US. Some of them have earned the respect of their co-workers for their excellent work. But their role is disappointing when it comes to extending help to other Bangladeshis. Young graduates of Bangladesh graduating from good universities in the US need reference and guidance to survive in the fiercely competitive job market of the country. Ironically, success of our Bangladeshi professionals is not balanced with generosity and magnanimity to help these graduates.

As a professional based in Bangladesh, I refer many Bangladeshi students, some of whom have worked as interns with me, to my former colleagues in Bangladesh or my professional acquaintances holding high positions in the US with the hope that the new job seekers would get some advice from them. Unfortunately, my experience has been mostly disappointing so far. Apart from a few supportive responses, I either receive a very official, non-committal response or an indifferent reply from some while others express their inability to help and many others don't even bother to reply to my email at all.

As I try to understand the cause behind such a non-cooperative attitude, I realise that there could be a number of reasons for their behaviour. It could be that they probably suffer from an inferior complex at their workplace or they actually might not even be in a commanding position. Due to this they feel that they could face problems in their job if they help another compatriot. They may also feel that their job is their prized possession, which they have acquired through hard work,

so they don't want to see others reaching that position so easily. Moreover, their behaviour could simply be a result of the common human instinct – jealousy and the desire to prove that they are the best and no other Bangladeshi can ever achieve what they have. They could also suffer from insecurity and a lack of confidence which prohibit them from encouraging or helping any Bangladeshi to the job market.

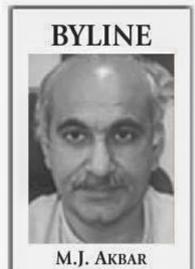
As opposed to this, professionals from our neighbouring country India are always looking for opportunities to bring another fellow Indian wherever they go. During my days in London and now in New York, I have seen this myself. Many of us complain about Indians being omnipresent – from small businesses to corporate jobs to academics. Instead of complaining, we should learn how and why their presence is so strong everywhere. They look at the bigger picture. They want to project the best of their country. They operate with a vision to present their country all over the world. This is real patriotism.

To a New Yorker, Bangladeshis are known as assiduous, sincere, resilient and polite people. That is why we see them in the corner shops in New York subway stations, many eateries in Jamaica or Astoria or even Manhattan. With the encouragement of established Bangladeshi-origin professionals, we could see more talented Bangladeshi youths in white colour jobs as well. Sadly, the concern of egotistical professionals is confined to criticism and cynicism, instead of attempting to improve the image of their country. Bangladesh has problems. But it also has many attributes to be proud of. I feel Bangladesh and its success stories are terribly undersold here in the US.

The writer is Research Director at CPD, currently a Visiting Scholar at the Earth Institute, Columbia University, New York.

*The concern of egotistical professionals is confined to criticism and cynicism, instead of attempting to improve the image of their country.*

## A lion in the room



BYLINE

M.J. AKBAR

VERY election shifts politics. It takes an unusual one to alter geopolitics. Britain became, in the first week of May, a different country. The big story is not that David Cameron converted a precarious toehold into an agile perch. Or that Ed Miliband will stumble out of the frame with the weird ineptitude he displayed when eating a sandwich. The news with historic momentum is that Scotland declared political independence from England without leaving Britain. How this will impact governance, stability and unity is the narrative waiting to unfold.

The Scottish Nationalist Party, a name which is quite uninhibited about intentions, won on a scale that ended ambiguity. It took 56 of 59 seats in Scotland. Both the Tories and Labour have been reduced to English parties, while the tired Liberal Democrats have been reduced to ash.

Labour's demolition had two reasons; and the second will be more difficult to resolve. It lost the argument on the economy because it cannot appreciate that faux socialism is passé. There is a message here for anyone who can read, and that includes us in India. Voters are not interested in the economics of sulking. They demand the economics of aspiration and delivery.

Political literacy can be determined by a simple measure; whether your mind is open or closed. There are still politicians in many Indian parties, particularly Congress, who imagine that pink blotting paper is a substitute for ideas.

Any electorate wants governance to lead to a better quality of life. That has not changed since Adam came down to earth. Everyone wants elimination of poverty and a rise in prosperity. The useful aspect of democracy is that voters understand the rational routes to prosperity. They know the difference between pseudo-patronage and growth that



Colin Fox, the founding member and national co-spokesperson of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP)

brings jobs across the spectrum.

But there was an important subtext to this general election that makes it unique in British annals. If Scots voted for their nationalists, then the English also voted for an English party: the Tories. That was the decisive undercurrent which swept Cameron to victory. Labour, neither here nor there, was lost in more senses than one. Even formations that claimed to have their nose close to the alley, like the United Kingdom Independence Party, or UKIP, missed this tide. UKIP was so busy protecting Britain from Europe that it forgot to stand up for England against an assertive Scotland. The Tories won the "England for the English" vote.

Cameron won a majority just from the seats in England, with 36.9 percent of support. But that figure, like a good statistic, or, more famously, like a bikini, hides more than it reveals. Take away Scotland, where its support was dismal, or Wales, where it was dismal, and then minus the immigrant section, and you find that the Tories won more than 40 percent of the white English vote.

The challenge before the next Cameron administration is enormous. England is adrift of both its unions, the arranged marriage with Scotland crafted five centuries ago, and the rather more recent, unsteady affair with the European Union. The ménage à trois is coming apart at the seams. Much of England wants to opt out of Europe. Most of Scotland wants to opt out of Britain, and hold on to Europe as an alternative anchor. The seams will be tested when Cameron holds the referendum on Britain's association with the European Union within two years. They will be strained when the Scots ask a logical question: what happens next?

The short answer, preferred by the Tory establishment, is to offer Scotland greater autonomy leveraged by further economic handouts. A compromise works when there is room for give and take. Every previous elected government in Whitehall had its unwritten quota of Scottish ministers. This will be the first government in Britain without an elected Scottish minister. Cameron cannot share power with

SNP because SNP wants power in Scotland, not Britain. There is another question whose answer remains difficult to find: have the Tory and SNP constituencies drifted too far apart?

Britain will, in all likelihood, be too engrossed in its internal problems to find the energy for a meaningful presence on the world stage in the next five years. That is perfectly understandable. A break-up of the union would be too traumatic for the Tories, a party which still privately mourns the loss of Hong Kong during the Margaret Thatcher era. But, as Alex Salmond, father figure of SNP, said, a lion has roared in Scotland.

Cameron would surely prefer to view Scotland as merely an elephant in the room: huge problem, and dangerous when provoked, but still a vegetarian. Lions hunt. Elephants nibble at leaves. London will offer a feast of nibbles. We shall see if the Scottish lion changes its diet.

The writer is Editor of *The Sunday Guardian*, published from Delhi, *India on Sunday*, published from London and Editorial Director, *India Today* and *Headlines Today*.

## COMMENTS

**"UK polls: Tulip, Rushanara, Rupa win"**

(May 9, 2015)

Abu Elias Sarker

Best wishes. Hope they will manage to contribute to restoring democracy in their motherland.

Habib Zafarullah

They have all been elected in a free and fair electoral system. So their win has legitimacy and acceptability. They are genuine representatives of the people and they have risen through the ranks in their constituencies. Wish our political parties could follow a similar system.

Sajeda Minhaj

Congrats everybody! We, the Bangladeshis are proud of you.

**"Another spillage in Bhola River"**

(May 8, 2015)

Abu Jar

For how much longer will the authority allow ships into the rivers of the Sundarbans?

Mamun Chowdhury

We are destroying our future.

**"Dialogue with city dwellers soon: Khokon" (May 8, 2014)**

Shafiul Azam

We don't believe in words, we believe in action.

Mamun Chowdhury

The city dwellers' couldn't cast their votes in the last mayoral polls. So, give their voting right back first.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Occupying footpaths illegally

This refers to the letter published on May 7 on the above mentioned topic. Most footpaths in Dhaka are illegally occupied. Moreover, many motorcyclists think that the footpaths are meant for riding their motorcycles, making the situation even worse. The motorcyclists come from behind and honk, forcing pedestrians to move away. Also, oftentimes motorcycles and even cars are parked on footpaths in front of restaurants and shops for a long period of time, blocking the walkway. This is illegal. The traffic police should impose fine on the owners of these vehicles and tow away these vehicles when necessary. Only then can we expect to see this problem solved.  
S. A. Mansoor, Gulshan, Dhaka



PHOTO: STAR

### Promise of democracy vs. mayoral elections

Promise of democracy remains a self-fulfilling prophecy in this country. During election times, people rush to the polling centers enthusiastically only to be disappointed by the anomalies and vote rigging. The recently held city corporation elections have cast a shadow over the government's credibility as well as its standing with the people. These polls have also proved the hollowness of the JP in its role as the opposition in the house. Most importantly, the city corporation elections have brought the focus back on the question if BNP is still a force to be reckoned with. The total number of votes cast in their favour despite all the adversities, attacks and other anomalies gives the answer loud and clear.

Yusuf Azad  
Chief Evaluation Officer (Retd.)  
Education Board Office, Rajshahi