

No news on BGMEA central database

Essential for workers' welfare

THE garment sector's association BGMEA voluntarily took up a project in 2012 to prepare a central database of workers so that it could be used to identify workers in the event of an accident. We sadly note that the project has floundered since inception and no one has up to date information about how many workers are employed in the sector as a whole or individually in the various factories. Indeed, the confusion remains with precisely how many factories there are in the RMG sector, because not all factories are members of BGMEA. The database is of paramount importance primarily because, in the aftermath of the twin disasters of Tazreen Fashion fire and the Rana Plaza building collapse, allegations had been raised that many of the victims who suffered varying degrees of injury could not seek compensation because there was no official documentation of their employment there.

The question of proper identification is of utmost importance if we are to protect workers' rights and it is expected that there will be opposition to setting up of such a central depository of information from some quarters. Nonetheless, we feel that this is an essential directory that has to be prepared at the earliest, as it goes to show good faith on the part of the industry to foreign buyers and observers. Bangladesh has taken its share of bad press on the issues of safety of premises in the RMG sector, and getting the central database operational will go a long way to reaffirming that the apparel industry is a responsible one that cares for its workforce.

When going to school is life threatening

Repair the building immediately

THE derelict primary school in Bera municipality in Pabna is a tragic accident waiting to happen. Constructed in 1969, the school building was declared abandoned in 2013 but three years on, students continue to attend classes there risking their lives. About two months ago, plaster fell from the ceiling, injuring several students and a teacher.

One would think it would be a wakeup call to the authorities but it wasn't. Who will take responsibility in the event of the derelict building collapsing on the children? According to the headmaster, the only reason why they are still taking classes there is because there is no alternative facility to accommodate the students and maintain regularity of classes.

The government prides itself on the increasing enrollment at the primary and secondary levels, which is commendable. Also, in the post-MDG era, discussions about bringing up the quality of education make headlines in the media. Is this the way to deliver on the lofty promise of ensuring quality education for all?

Local officials have, reportedly, appealed to the relevant authorities several times but to no avail. Is it the lack of will or lack of adequate fund that is hindering the construction of a new building? The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education should look into the matter without delay. But before that, an alternative, temporary arrangement must be made for the students and it should be made sure that no student attends classes in this run-down building.

COMMENTS

"Missing IT expert Zoha back home"
(March 24, 2016)

Zia Uddin

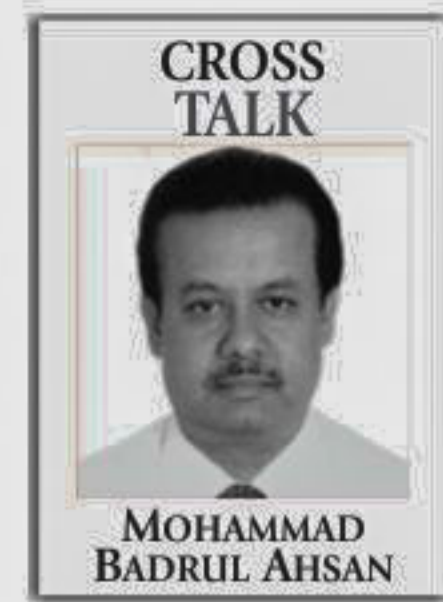
Was he released on condition that he keeps his mouth shut?

"Taskin ban upheld"
(March 24, 2016)

MD Kowser Ahmed

They are trying to destroy Taskin's bowling style so that he can't bowl the way he used to bowl.

An award that couldn't be rewarding enough



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

DIFFERENT people inhabit different worlds and one man's trophy is another man's trash. Jean Paul Sartre rejected Nobel Prize for literature in 1964.

Hollywood actor Marlon Brando turned down the Academy Award for the Best Actor in 1973. But a heartbroken poet of this country resorted to bizarre antics last week after he found out that he wasn't nominated for this year's Independence Day Award. Nirmalendu Goon posted his frustration in a sullen Facebook message, its tone hovering between despondency and veiled threat. Lo and behold, it worked for him! His name was added to the list.

That makes it difficult to tell if the poet has won the award for his talent or tenacity. Speculations are rife about why the reversal must have happened. One story gives credit to a poet's high connections. Another puts emphasis on his political commitment. Never mind why he is going to get it. If it makes one more happy soul, this world is a better place to live.

For his rejection of the Nobel Prize, Sartre gave two kinds of reasons: personal and objective. The personal

reason is that he always refused to accept honours because it transforms a writer into an institution. For example, he said, his sympathies for the Venezuelan revolutionists should commit only himself. But if Jean-Paul Sartre, the Nobel laureate, championed the Venezuelan resistance, he would also commit the entire Nobel Prize as an institution. His conception of the writer's enterprise was that a writer must act only with the means that are his own if he adopts political, social or literary positions.

The objective reasons followed from Sartre's perception of contradiction between two cultures. Since his sympathies went to socialism, he felt he couldn't accept an honour awarded by cultural authorities, those of the West any more than those of the East. For that matter, he confirmed, he would have rejected the Lenin Prize as well.

Marlon Brando refused the Oscar because of the treatment of American Indians by the Hollywood film industry. There are more examples of honours and awards spurned due to humanitarian reasons. Rabindranath Tagore renounced his knighthood after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919. Legendary Indian singer Lata Mangeshkar refused the Filmfare Award twice, once because the statuette was designed in the shape of a woman, and again because she wanted new talents to

get the fair share of recognition. In 973, Vietnamese politician Le Duc Tho won the Nobel Peace Prize jointly with Henry Kissinger but refused to accept it because Vietnam was not at peace yet.

The list of rejections, however, runs much shorter compared to the list of those who have rejoiced over their wins. And, exceptions prove the rule that everybody covets some awards, honours and recognitions in life. But only a handful of people desire what they deserve, and repudiate anything that clashes with conscience.

Our poet reconciled himself to those challenges with common sense, which he expressed in an interview. He said one doesn't get something unless one asks for it, a truth trumpeted every day by infants around the world screaming for their mother's milk. While nobody can question if the poet deserved the Independence Day Award, his go-getter attitude has somewhat tarnished its glamour. The trophy forever shall remind the world how pitifully he went to this award, which should have propitiously come to him.

We tend to interchangeably use the words award and reward because many of us have forgotten the difference between them. An award is a prize that's given to somebody because he or she has done something great. A reward is not a prize. It is compensation in

cash or kind for the effort somebody has made. For example, Mughal emperor Akbar awarded the honorific title Mian, meaning a learned man, to Ramtanu Pandey, who subsequently became famous as Mian Tansen. But reward is when a king granted feudal land to his knight warrior in recognition of his valiant service or threw a pearl necklace or gold coin at a courtesan impressed by her singing or dancing.

In this country, many of the awards have been dished out as rewards because government after government picked nominees under political considerations, their emphasis being more on loyalty than merit. So we have got two growing lists of reverse contentions. One list has those who have undeservingly won and another has those who have unfairly lost.

Nirmalendu Goon is lucky to be neither. A leading light of poetry in this country, he should have won the award in his own right. That it needed some push from his side is lamentable since it shows an inherent weakness that undermines the purpose. For a long time to come, the trophy and the poet will stare each other in the face, wondering whether it was poetry or persistence that got them together!

The writer is editor of the weekly *First News* and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

Bloodshed in Brussels and Angst of Muslims of the West

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

TERRORISTS struck again within six months of the carnage in Paris, this time in Brussels, the city that serves as headquarters of both NATO and European Union. Brussels is not unknown to terrorism; the city saw acts of terror no less than six times in the past few years, but none with the ferocity and violence of March 22 that demolished part of an international airport, a subway station, and took at least 31 lives. The number of deaths is the highest so far from terrorist attacks in a single day in a European city. As in the past such occurrences in Europe, the viciously militaristic outfit of ISIS came out, boldly claiming ownership of the horrendous attack.

While governments in Belgium, France, USA and UK condemned the attack and swore to strike at ISIS and end its cycle of violence, the entity continued to thrive and attract militants who are either directly employed by the organisation to carry out terrorist attacks or are inspired by the organisation's message to attack countries that are deemed to be its foes. The most fearful and daunting aspect of such attacks is that these have been launched by militants who are mostly homegrown. All seven of the attackers in Paris in November were either French or Belgian citizens. The three identified as the bombers of the Brussels attack are reported to be Belgians. But more importantly, all of these attackers are also Muslims descended from immigrants from Morocco or Algeria. And that is the crux of the problem and cause of angst of the Muslims; not only in Belgium, France, and UK and other parts of Europe, but also as far as the United States.

Immediately following the Paris attack, the neighbourhoods targeted for search and surveillance were those mostly inhabited by Muslims. Despite protestations by the French President and politicians that Muslims need not fear a counter attack, the Muslims of France felt vulnerable to condemnation by general public because the attackers were fellow Muslims. Although no visible discrimination was made against Muslims, they felt insecure as police scoured Muslim neighbourhoods and raided apartments in search of suspects.

The latest apprehension of a Paris attacker, Salah Abdeslam, from a mostly Muslim neighbourhood of Molenbeek in Brussels lent further fear among Muslims, making them worry that any neighbourhood inhabited by Muslims could be an easy target for police raids. What is more worrisome for Muslims is how such new attacks feed the apprehension of non-Muslims against Muslims in general, and make their normal life more difficult in those countries. In the ongoing campaign for the presidential nomination in the US, the candidates have made war against terrorism a central issue, and are projecting each as the best to beat ISIS. But in running that campaign against



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terrorism, two Republican candidates, Donald Trump and Ted Cruz, are vilifying not only the ISIS, but also ordinary Muslims. In the heels of the Brussels attack, Ted Cruz declared that he will support policing and surveillance of Muslim neighbourhoods in the US.

Terrorism is not a new global phenomenon. It has been the chosen path of many organisations and political parties in the past to claim freedom or to overcome oppression. Terrorism was not identified with one particular political belief or religious entity. But unfortunately, in the past decade, it has generally come to be identified with Islamic radicalism because the activists who carried out acts of militancy did so in the name of Islam. While the majority of the Muslims in the West either denounced these acts or distanced themselves from such groups, the Muslim communities were not proactive enough to counter these forces that secretly grew within.

Radicalism does not grow in a vacuum. It either comes from a feeling of neglect, frustration, and desperation, or from being brainwashed by an ideology. In the case of radicalised youth of UK, it has been suggested that a large number of them turned this way because they felt they were marginalised or unassimilated in a society that gave them no promise of growth. In the case of the militants in Belgium and France, who were apparently born in those countries, their radicalisation came not from a deep religious faith or ideology, but from societal neglect, poverty, and early association with crime and criminals. All reportedly had criminal records before they bonded with ISIS, which gave them the wherewithal and

required training for militant operations. They were easy cannon fodder for the malevolent organisation with grandiose schemes.

Unfortunately, elements like the Brussels and Paris attackers cannot be stopped by hitting at the ISIS territory alone. The biggest conundrum of fighting the militant outfit of ISIS is determining whether the fighters working for the entity are limited to the geographic territory it has currently occupied, or it has volunteers and loyalists who have penetrated more countries, extending far beyond its known territory. It is important because a war that targets only the territory that it currently occupies may dislodge them from it, but not its loyalists or volunteers who have spread out. Similarly elimination of a single leader may not bring an end to the whole organisational structure. The entity as a whole may rotate leadership, just as it may move its physical location from one country to another.

To ensure that a war against terrorism is a success, the efforts will have to be made in each country affected by it or likely to be affected by it, starting with its minorities, Muslims in particular. Assimilation is not a one-way exercise. Community leaders have to make efforts to make themselves, their culture and religion better understood in schools, community spaces, and by participation in local activities, including local elections and political parties. The more the Muslims spread out among the larger, mainstream communities, the lesser will be the impact of fear mongering tactics of bigoted politicians.

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Acceptable and peaceful election indeed!

On March 22, 2016, the first phase of the UP election was held amid violence in which 10 people were killed and nearly 500 hundred injured. Intimidation, stuffing of ballot boxes and capturing of polling stations were rampant. We are dumbfounded by the claim of the Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed that the first phase of UP polls was "acceptable" as voting was "peaceful".

This is unacceptable. When the CEC is unable to hold a fair election, should he not resign instead of turning a blind eye to the mayhem?

Nur Jaban
Chittagong



Tigers gave a tough match to the Aussies

The Tigers couldn't win the match against Australia (held on March 20) but they played very well indeed. Though Tamim, Taskin and Sunny didn't play, Tigers gave Australia a tough match. They tried their best to win. We want to say to our players that no matter what, we will always support you.

Sayek Ahmed Sajib
University of Rajshahi

It's not the right time to criticise

After the exclusion of Taskin Ahmed by ICC, captain Mashrafe's emotional reaction was widely criticised in the media. Even Sunil Gavaskar has questioned Mashrafe's captaincy after the match with the Aussies. We want to say to all the critics that it was not the right time to criticise him as he was already under a lot of pressure. It is only natural that he would be a bit emotional after losing two of his best bowlers before a tough match. He is a human being after all, not a robot.



Shakhawat Hossain
Chandpur