

Era of dialogue

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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26 years into our journey

We have tried to speak truth to power

AS *The Daily Star* completes 26 years in its journey, we extend sincere thanks and gratitude to our readers, well-wishers, patrons and advertisers without whom we would not be where we are today. More than two decades ago, *The Daily Star* began its journey, coinciding with the resurgence of democracy in the country. Since its inception, *The Daily Star* has made its best efforts to adhere to the highest ethical standards of journalism. We would like to think that we have been successful in our efforts.

The fruitful journey of 26 years has been a long, winding path filled with both ups and downs. In our effort to uphold the highest benchmark of journalism, we had to weather the storm from time to time. As we made friends because of our type of journalism so did we encounter detractors. But at every step of the way, we have welcomed constructive criticism to refine our brand of journalism and speak truth to power. Over the years, we have reiterated the importance of a free press for the healthy functioning of democracy – to ensure accountability of institutions and decision-making entities and protect citizens' right to information.

The Daily Star has displayed unwavering commitment to its motto – Your Right to Know – remaining truthful to its pledge to serve the readers, and the nation, with objective journalism. The journey of 26 years has indeed been a tumultuous and fulfilling one, and we hope that with the unstinting support of our readers, we will be able to continue our pursuit of independent, fearless journalism.

Gross disregard for commuter safety

Put an end to this

PICTURES may speak a thousand words, but they do not always tell everything. It was a sad spectacle of a helpless woman lying recumbent in the middle of a road, published in this paper on February 20, that has shocked us. The bus she was travelling in had thrown her into the middle of a busy road. It did not wait or slow down long enough to ensure that she alighted safely.

Only an hour ago, a man was killed while getting down from a running bus opposite to where the said incident occurred, and two years ago a journalist colleague of ours was killed in the same vicinity under similar circumstances.

Bus drivers in the city seem to be of the opinion that it is their God given right to stop the vehicle to pick and drop passengers wherever and whenever they feel like. Such behaviour is criminal because it endangers the lives of others; this is especially so when the nearest bus stop is only a few feet away.

The issue of road safety is one that the city has been plagued with for longer than we are able to remember. This originates from the law enforcing agencies' failure to enforce traffic rules and a culture of impunity that permits errant drivers and bus owners to go scot-free. We demand stringent punishment for such drivers and conductors and it has to be handed without much delay. Only then can this mindset be changed for the better. The traffic police department also needs to make commuters aware of the importance of following traffic rules.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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English for Bengali literature

Biru Paksha Paul's article "Love Bangla but do not hate English" published on February 19 has drawn my attention. In his lucid language, he explains how, while Bengali is our love, English is an investment for the sake of openness and growth.

To this statement I would like to add that English is not a rival of our mother tongue; rather it can play a vital role for the development and enrichment of our culture. As we know, early English literature was enriched by the Greek and other classical literary works. Bengali literature can likewise be promoted through the translation of Bengali works to English and vice versa. We have many literary works which could get world recognition like the Nobel Prize. This is currently curtailed due to the lack of enough expertise in English translation and communication. We must think of ways to promote these practices.

Kazi Abu Monsur, MBM student of BIBM

Preventing road accidents

It is appalling that 64 people die every day from road accidents in our country. It is common knowledge that driving licences and fitness certificates can be obtained in exchange of money. One does not have to appear for driving tests, and faulty vehicles often get clearance without inspection. What is BRTA doing regarding these issues?

We urge the Minister of Road Transport and Bridges to look into the matter as well, because poor conditions of transportation channels can also cause mishaps.

Nur Jahan, Chittagong

On Page 2 of the International Mother Language Day Supplement published on February 21, 2017, it was mistakenly stated "57 years ago...." which should read "65 years...." We regret the inadvertent error.



KNOT SO TRUE

RUBANA HUQ

ON January 26, 2017, 8:48 pm, Rokeya Khatun wrote:
"Hello Madam, Hope you are doing well. Our student life is going very well but, sometimes we are having some problems because we do not have any laptop. We usually do our homework or assignment by using computer in lab. Our professors tell us to submit the assignments by email and sometimes we need to do presentation with the Microsoft PowerPoint. However, after 12 am to 7 am we cannot log into any computer and we cannot bring computer in class. For this kind of situation sometimes we face problem. If we have laptop in our room then we can use it when we need. If it is midnight even anytime we can use it. So, if we get laptop then our student life become easier and we can do our best. Then we will not face any problem."

Thank you, Rokeya and Sathy."

We are proud. They want laptops to work on. This is what Sathy and Rokeya have written to me. Both are now studying at the Asian University for Women situated in Chittagong and are having the time of their lives. These two women sat for the admission test and qualified to enter the university. Away from their machines, away from their sewing lines in a readymade garment factory, they are happily in a campus that takes care of them, celebrates their birthdays, looks after their wellbeing and makes them feel at home. A year ago, they were busy working for their homes, earning salaries and feeding mouths that would go hungry without their support. Today, amongst forty other RMG workers in the campus, they too are going through a one-year access course to enter university education. It's definitely a new chapter for female readymade garment workers to dream of a future in education.

The BGMEA summit kicks off on February 25. An engaged conversation with all parties, including brands, workers and manufacturers is a pre-requisite to make the movement of the summit a success. The industry must move forward and overcome any

challenge through dialogue and empathy with all its stakeholders. This is because we have no other choice but to stay united at our end. This is because Bangladesh must remain most relevant amidst all supply challenges through an honest and well meaning conversation between manufacturers and workers both.

Starting from 384 factories in 1984-85 exporting goods worth USD 31.57 million with only 0.12 million workers, today we have 4,296 factories employing more than four million workers, exporting goods worth more than USD 28 billion. In absence of agglomeration, the factories have sprung up on their own and despite space constraints, have

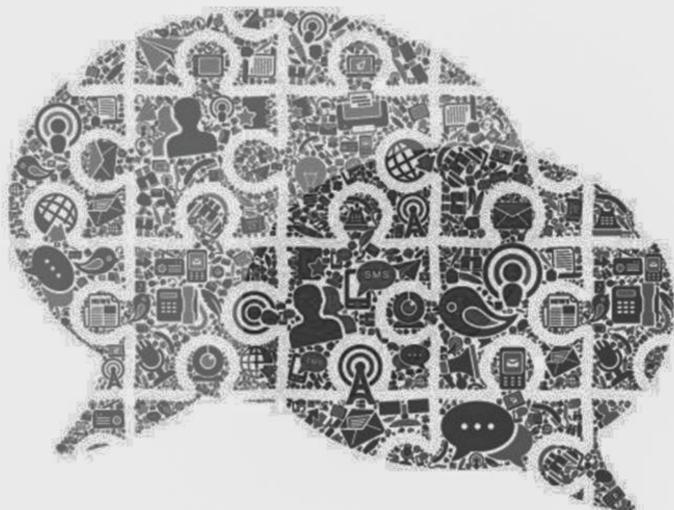
been able to steer through the minimum wage protests in 2006 which took the level to Tk. 1,662.50 and then got revised to Tk. 3,000 in 2010 and then finally to Tk. 5,300 in 2013. The industry has also faced the challenges of the industrial tragedies of the Spectrum collapse (64 deaths) in 2005, Tazreen fire (112 deaths) and finally Rana Plaza (1,134 deaths). But amidst it all, the industry has also fallen prey to a sandwiched situation of not getting paid enough, which continues to rattle the scenario. Many manufacturers have moved from old locations to new ones with increased production offers and are finding it difficult to find enough work that will

forget that the post-Rana demands on workplace safety have remediated the industry with even health and safety committees identifying and acting on all the health and safety risks.

In spite of lack of space, funds, energy, efficiency, negotiation, and public shaming, the industry has, even recently, moved on to a positive export growth. While we continue our journey through all the hiccups, we need to religiously remember that the only persistent attacks on the industry relate to wages and labour practices. If the minimum wage is not enough and if the take home, after overtime is not enough, the conversation needs to move to the next level. One wonders if wage is a discussion to be had with manufacturers alone or if other stakeholders should also participate and shoulder the responsibility. And in case of unionising, one also needs to wonder if there is an alternative process to increase awareness amongst the workers so that effective unionisation can be implemented in the sector. Instead of expecting instant, fully functional and conducive trade unions overnight, maybe the responsibility to groom workers about their rights and responsibilities should be inked in detail? And just maybe exporters should not be the only ones to be audited? Just maybe the progress and eligibility of functioning trade unions also need to be objectively assessed?

As the discussion just boils down to labour, and as we stand proud of the sector, I honestly feel that there is no alternative to dialogue. All parties must stay engaged in a positive manner so that the four million plus workers in this sector don't lose their bread and butter and so that the economy also stays afloat. Instead of repeating the discourse on unfair labour practices, the time has come to also realise that a sector that turned around in less than three years, is surely serious about being sustainable. And since labour is an integral part of sustainability, the industry definitely has no plans of moving forward without it. All accusations must be supported with evidence from every party and all penalties must be shouldered by all who trigger unrest. Meanwhile, the industry will continue to be proud of what it has: products and labour.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.



SOURCE: ESS.SOTT.NET

mostly grown around Dhaka (1,976 factories), Gazipur (1,144 factories), Chittagong (705 factories) and Narayanganj (357 factories). The natural growth and ability to foresee and prepare the sector for the next new odd, has pushed the manufacturers to work with an agility that beats all bars.

While there are risks that accompany growth, we have kept the thread of manufacturing intact. Yes, there have been accusations about elevated social risks owing to disparity, infrastructural risks owing to lack of yardstick, and industrial risks stemming from lack of self-auditing, but 'all' are being addressed this minute. The industry has

feed the workers. In a global scenario, where people buy less apparel and prefer to spend the extra dollars on travel or a restaurant, the race to the bottom has hit the industry. There is today, no alternative to bringing prices up to an acceptable level.

The industry that we serve may not have more margins, may not have the extra icing that it used to have years ago, but we are still bringing food to the table for most of the economy. And while the industry continues to do this, let us also not forget that a contribution of 0.03 percent of export value has today created a Workers Welfare Fund of almost Tk. 200 crores. Let us also not

TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE

Unleashing the power of the private sector



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

SALEEMUL HUQ

OVER the next two to three decades, there are two major overarching trends that Bangladesh will have to deal with, and therefore have to plan for as well. The first trend is a positive one, which is our desire, and indeed commitment, to graduating out of Least Developed Country (LDC) status within less than a decade. The second, more negative trend, is to tackle the adverse impacts of climate change that will occur along the way.

In order to deal with both these trends, while the role of government is key in setting policies and goals, the private sector will have to become the major engine of delivering the twin goals of economic development that is also climate resilient. This column will discuss how the private sector can contribute towards meeting these two goals.

First let us define what we mean by the private sector which is a very large catch-all term that includes everything from multinational companies operating in Bangladesh to large Bangladeshi corporations to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as well as individual farmers and road-side vendors.

For the purposes of this column, I will use the term to mean the larger corporations (counting both multinational as well as national ones) as well as SMEs.

In this domain again there are major sectors in which they can be disaggregated like finance and banking, industry, energy, transport, garments, textiles, tea growing, etc. Each sector is usually represented by trade and industry associations who are all members of the major chambers of commerce and industry such as the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) and Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

For the overall economic development of the country, the key roles will have to start with finance and banking sectors

which can leverage both national and international capital to invest in the other industries and commercial sectors at a much larger scale than we have done in the past while reducing our dependence on concessional loans and grants through Official Development Assistance (ODA) from the richer countries. This will enable the country become much more self-reliant economically.

On the climate change front, there are two separate aspects, like two sides of a coin that need to be considered, namely threats and opportunities.

With regard to threats of adverse impacts of climate change, as one of the world's most vulnerable countries, Bangladesh has to prepare itself to face more frequent (and possibly more severe) floods, cyclones and droughts as well as sea level rise in coming decades.

However, Bangladesh has a long history of successfully tackling such challenges, such as the cyclone warning systems and shelter programmes, which

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have resulted in lives lost from cyclones to drop by nearly 100 percent over the last few decades. Cyclones still happen and cause damage to crops and infrastructure but human lives lost have been successfully prevented.

So for the private sector, the



SOURCE: REMINETWORK.COM

requirement is for all of them to become aware of the climate change risks that they will have to face over time and build their own capacity to prepare to face those risks without too much damage to their business. For the larger corporations, they can afford to pay for this advice and capacity building but for SMEs, there will need to be an investment from the government to initially provide information to raise awareness and then do training and capacity building to enable them to take necessary actions.

For the other side of the coin, namely opportunities to make profits, there are two domains of such opportunities available for the private companies in Bangladesh.

The first is to tackle the emissions of greenhouse gases through climate change mitigation actions, which include promoting renewable energy such as solar energy, where a number of Bangladeshi companies are already making good profits. The second is to find profit making business opportunities for adaptation to the

adverse impacts of climate change through things like selling saline, flood and drought tolerant varieties of crops and other agricultural products, insurance schemes and other activities. This is a relatively unexplored area where Bangladeshi companies can indeed become pioneers and possibly even export their expertise to other companies over time.

It may be noticed that I did not mention the issue of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This is not because I don't recognise its role but because depending on CSR alone will not be enough. Unless we can unleash the power of profit-making from good development and tackling climate change, we will not be able to make the changes at the scale required to meet our aspirations and goals. However, with the right kind of policies, and incentives along with knowledge generation and sharing, it is well within our grasp.

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