

# Home textile industry in the red—again!

## Even teachers are not spared!

*Why no action against the attackers?*

WE have, over the last few weeks witnessed the vicious attacks on students at Dhaka University and Rajshahi University by members of the student wing of the ruling party, attacks that left these students severely injured and then arrested by law enforcement agents. Meanwhile the attackers, the pictures of whom were published in various papers, have gone scot free. This time teachers taking part in a demonstration calling for a safe campus and immediate release of the detained students, have been assaulted—again by alleged members of Chhatra League. It seems these bullies will not stop at any level of indecency when it comes to attacking whoever they find voicing any kind of protest. What is worse is that no action from the authorities is taken against them even though they have clearly violated law.

The three teachers who were assaulted along with students on July 15, by BCL members were doing what is expected of teachers—standing by their students in their legitimate demand to want a campus free from violence and intimidation. But they were not spared and given the minimum courtesy due to a teacher. We must ask at this point, why no action has been taken against these attackers who it seems had planned their assault well in advance? Instead Dhaka university authorities have chided the teachers for taking part in the demonstrations. Where is the administrative support for teachers and students under physical assault?

Thirteen Supreme Court lawyers have sent notices to Dhaka University and Rajshahi University authorities demanding what action has been taken against the BCL men who had carried out previous attacks in those campuses. The inaction of the authorities of the universities has only encouraged the latest spate of violence by members of the same organisation.

The remarks of Awami League General Secretary and road, transport and bridges minister denying that the attackers in the recent incident were BCL members, are baffling, to say the least. The attackers, whose pictures have been published, have been identified as members of this youth organisation with some of them holding leadership posts. Instead of making such incredible statements the minister should condemn the attacks and call for immediate action against these hostile individuals who are maligning their parent party and the government's public image.

## Congratulations France

*End of a month-long spectacle*

AFTER a month of heightened tensions, eager waits and nail-biting moments, the 2018 Fifa World Cup in Russia is over. With a final between the favourites France and the underdogs Croatia, football fans could not have asked for a more entertaining World Cup. As we all know by now, the cup has gone to France and the final scores stood at 4-2. Croatia, a small nation punched above their weights, but the young French team won the day. But, for sure, both teams have won the hearts of the spectators.

It would be no great exaggeration to say that the great spectacle of the World Cup 2018 brought the world together in a way that few things can. Sure there were instances which should have been avoided, but overall the atmosphere was one of fair play and contest. Crowd favourites got knocked out and teams such as Russia, Uruguay and Croatia showed that it's the performance of the day that counts. Most of all this was an example of how the world can forget its differences and indulge in healthy competition.

Both the finalists deserve immense acclaim—France with its level-headed play from such a young team and Croatia for their rightly deserved rise to being a finalist. It is worth noting that for us Bangladeshis, only one thing could make the joys that the World Cup brings every four years much sweeter—seeing our own team compete. Croatia should serve as an example, that if prioritised and promoted, a team, however small, can rise to international glory.

Congratulations to France as we look forward to similarly exciting performances from both the finalists in the upcoming years. The four year wait for Qatar 2020 will be a tough one for football fans all over the world.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Patients' dissatisfaction with health services

Persistent dissatisfaction over the quality of healthcare services have led to a decline in people's trust in public and private hospitals, resulting in an increased tendency among patients to go abroad for treatment. Although the number of doctors and hospitals is increasing, the quality of service doesn't seem to satisfy the patients. According to a survey conducted by the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC), hundreds of people might have suffered premature deaths due to wrong treatment in the last five years.

The government should regulate the sector. If the high cost of treatment and diagnosis and the poor quality of service continue to persist, people's faith in the health service will not be restored.

Amdadul H Sarker, By e-mail



NO FRILLS

SYED MANSUR HASHIM

LAST year the Bangladesh Terry Towel & Linen Manufacturers & Exporters' Association (BTLMEA) wanted the government to stop the export of cotton waste so

that raw materials become available for production. Cotton waste is still being exported. It also wanted cash incentive to be increased to 16 percent so that Bangladeshi products can be competitive in the US market. There is however a proposal from the national committee under the finance ministry, that looks after revision of cash incentives, that a

*Putting in place measures to open up the market for importing raw material at most competitive rates and the implementation of policy measures would not only protect the industry but also allow Bangladesh to effectively take advantage of the China-USA trade rift.*

further three percent may be given for the US market. Presently there is a percent cash incentive for all exporters. Another basket exists that provide a further four percent incentive to small industries with an annual export not exceeding USD 3.5 million annually and which are single unit factories. BTLMEA



wanted a further eight percent, but there is only a recommendation for a further three percent for the US market which has not been gazetted as yet.

The biggest problem now is the crisis in yarn. The industry was founded basically in 1990 on the premise that cotton waste would be used to produce the yarn for home textiles. Today there are 105 mills with only three enjoying bonded warehouse facilities including Noman Group's Terry Towel, ACS, which is a British investment venture in Bangladesh and another Bangladeshi company. These companies are at liberty to import (duty free) raw materials from the international market, be it yarn or chemicals for the purpose of producing goods that are for export only. The advantage here is that these companies can buy yarn at competitive international rates.

Since the export-oriented home textile and linen manufacturers have from the beginning been using yarn made from local cotton waste, there was no move towards getting bond facilities and that has become a major problem today. Now the availability of local yarn has reached crisis point. The industry uses primarily 10 single, 16 single and 20 single grade yarns

to produce products that range from bed sheets, pillow cases, curtains, quilt covers, comforter, various types of sheets, etc. Terry items include all types of towels. All these yarns are produced by Bangladeshi spinners. Home textile mills use the open end variety yarn.

It is fortunate for the RMG sector that denim export from Bangladesh has got a boost over the last three years and demand for local yarn (seven single, eight single and 10 singles grade yarn) has increased. That means denim factories are using the same yarn counts to make their garments that Terry towel factories use to produce low to mid end towels in the country. The only difference is that for denim yarn, spinners may increase the percentage of virgin cotton from 60 to say 70 or 80 percent. While investment may increase by Tk 10 per kg, selling price increases by Tk 20 per kg. So, naturally, spinners are shying away from selling to terry towels/home textile mills in favour of denim factories. To put all this in perspective, spinners can sell towel yarn (count 10s) at USD 1.80 per kilo. While denim yarn at the same count fetches USD 2.20 per kilo. So naturally, spinners are selling the 10s yarn to denim

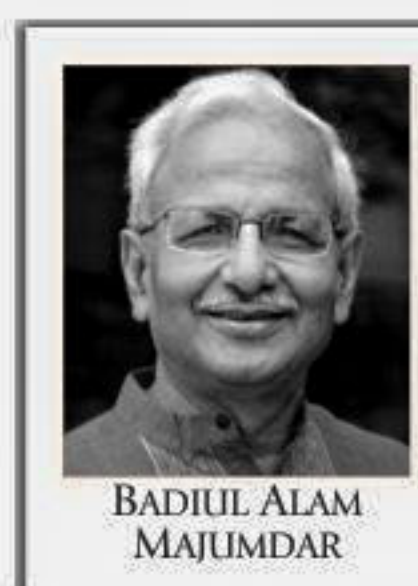
factories.

On top of the yarn shortage, Bangladesh does not have a comparative price advantage in the US market over Pakistan. The Pakistani rupee exchange rate (USD 1 = Rs 110) and the industry there is getting a cash incentive of 12 percent coupled with paying less duty to enter into the US market. On the contrary, our exchange rate stands stronger with Taka trading against the USD at 83:1 and enjoying an inferior 8 percent cash incentive (for SMEs). Then again Pakistan's 10 single grade yarn price is approximately 12-15 percent cheaper than the price of same grade yarn available to Bangladeshi millers. All this means that Pakistani terry exporters are having a 25 percent to 29 percent price advantage over Bangladesh in the US market.

In this scenario, the BTLMEA in a letter to the parliamentary standing committee on Jute and Textile Ministry this month proposed that the government allow for the duty-free import of 10 single, 16 single and 20 single open-end yarn (for towel production) through land or sea port from India or Pakistan, which would be 15-20 percent cheaper in price. It was also proposed that a five-year cash incentive scheme for exports to the US market that would increase the export basket of these products from USD 1.2 billion to USD two billion over the period. Putting in place measures to open up the market for importing raw material at most competitive rates and the implementation of policy measures would not only protect the industry but also allow Bangladesh to effectively take advantage of the China-USA trade rift, where China's textile exports to the US may soon face further duties. It is prime time to cash in on the China-US trade war and put Bangladeshi home textile/terry towel export in an advantageous position over India/Pakistan.

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# Five features of controlled election



BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

JUDGING from the May 15 election in Khulna, and the Gazipur city corporation election on June 26, five distinct features of a controlled election have emerged. It is clear that the so-called Khulna model of controlled election was used in Gazipur as well. In order to make our democratic system functional and meaningful, further use of this Khulna model must now be prevented.

So what is the Khulna model of controlled election? What are its basic features?

Broadly speaking, there are five essential features of the Khulna model:

First, *making the leaders and workers of the main opposition party be on the run.* This happened in Gazipur as well as in Khulna. For example, on May 6, the police arrested 13 people including the BNP's Vice President Abdullah Al-Noman from the surrounding areas of the home of the BNP candidate Hasanuddin Sarker for vandalising a laguna. Noman was released after six hours. The next day, a case under the Special Powers Act was filed against 103 people, including those 12, of which 48 were members of BNP's election management team, although the laguna was later found undamaged in Tongi thana. In addition, BNP alleged that nine members of its election management team were arrested from the night of June 20, all of whom were apparently arrested under cases filed in adjoining districts. Such arrests, violating an earlier High Court order, clearly made the BNP activists be on the run.

Second, *preventing BNP polling agents from performing their duties.* Many BNP polling agents were prevented from reporting to the polling stations or they were forced to leave the stations. Some were picked up by law enforcement agencies and released after polling. Some were even found in Keraniganj central jail (Prothom Alo, June 28). Picking up over 100 BNP polling agents in Gazipur is unprecedented. In absence of agents, it is easier to commit many electoral offences, including ballot box stuffing, fake voting and inflating the vote count in absence of polling agents. For example, the EWG observers have found evidence of inflating the vote count in two centres in favour of a candidate in Gazipur.

Third, *using force on election day.* According to media reports, ruling party activists used force in Gazipur as they did in Khulna. Casting false votes and stuffing ballot boxes by temporarily

capturing polling centres, and creating an intimidating environment and indiscipline in and around polling centres are among some of the excesses they indulged in. One important characteristic of ballot box stuffing with forced, fake voting is that, with increases in the turnout rate, the vote share of the winner increases at a rate faster than the turnout rate, and the vote share of his/her nearest rival decreases at a rate faster than the turnout rate. Thus, compared to BNP's Hasanuddin Sarker, the vote share of AL's Jahangir Alam was 33 percent higher in two centres with turnout rate of 20-30 percent; 51 percent higher in 124 centres with turnout rate of 30-50 percent; 89 percent higher in

quite some time, the EC issued a directive one day before the election in Gazipur not to arrest anyone without warrant, which amounted to doctor's showing up after a patient's death. The Commission also took no action against the SP of Gazipur despite repeated complaints against him of partisan behaviour, although even the previous Rakibuddin Commission ordered his transfer before another election. More importantly, no action was immediately taken against anyone for misconduct after the Khulna election. The City Corporation Election Rules, 2010 clearly states, "Any public servant who uses his official position to influence election results will be liable to be sentenced for a minimum of six month and a maximum

of five years." Fifth, *making mayors from the opposition party powerless.* Like in Khulna, the last mayor of Gazipur, who belonged to BNP, was a victim of many cases, arrests, jailing and suspensions. These cities were also deprived of development funds from the government, as a result of which their voters were denied many services that they deserved and needed. The conditions of roads, sanitation and garbage management in Gazipur is particularly appalling. This left the voters of these two cities with no option but to vote for the ruling party candidate if they wanted development. It is clear that the Khulna model could be used in Gazipur because of the indifference and inaction of the EC. The spirit of all our electoral laws is that the



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111 centres with turnout rate between 50-60 percent; 158 percent higher in 177 centres with turnout rate of 60-80 percent; and 309 percent higher in two centres with turnout rates of over 90 percent. In other words, while the ratio of votes between the winner and his nearest competitor were 100:133 in centres with the lowest turnout rate, it continuously increased to reach 100:409 in the centres with the highest turnout rates.

Fourth, *inaction of the EC.* Like in Khulna, complaints were repeatedly made regarding the violation of electoral code of conduct, harassment of opposition activists by law enforcement agencies, which the EC largely ignored. Although law enforcers have been arresting BNP leaders and activists for

distinct advantages in Gazipur due to a lack of development there under the previous regime, vigorous campaigning of its youthful and rich nominee and all his past community development activities, which could perhaps ensure its victory. But all the excesses of its activists, law enforcement agencies and the EC's allowing those to go on unabated greatly marred this victory. I hope the commission will now rise up to its constitutional responsibility and do what is needed to ensure credible elections in Sylhet, Barisal and Rajshai, although there are already allegations of arrests in Sylhet and Rajshahi and forcible withdrawal of some councilor candidates in Barisal.

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