

Protecting the students' best interests



I remember I was in the classroom of a high school in a small district of Bangladesh when several students appeared at the door, and sought permission from our teacher to say a few words before everyone. It was very

surprising for us to see young men (who were probably studying in college) in a girls' school. We learned from them that a tragedy had occurred in Dhaka. Several university students had been killed by a truck while they had been protesting against the military rule. They also informed us that as an expression of solidarity, all students of Bangladesh would boycott class on that day. The college students urged us to join the movement, and all of us left our class within minutes.

Usually, I took my education very seriously and did not miss classes. But on that day, leaving the classroom felt justified. Even as an adolescent, who had limited understanding of the overall political reality of the country, I thought it was totally unacceptable that students would have to lose their lives or suffer in any manner while protesting in a non-violent way. The horror I had felt about the brutality of the incident remained with me for many years. The memory came back during recent student protests demanding road safety.

Many people have commented on their pleasant surprise to witness the courage of the students and the innovation as well as energy that they had brought to the present movement. Should we be surprised? Only a few years ago, we have observed the participation of school students in a movement demanding that the perpetrators of war crimes in 1971 be brought to justice. Adolescents have participated in various political activities including anti-British movement, the language movement of 1952



Students have protested against poor road safety after two college students were killed by a speeding bus.

PHOTO: AFP

and our liberation war. Very recently, we have seen thousands of school students in the USA participating in protests over school shootings. When students' lives are at risk, they do not remain in classrooms. There are many examples from different parts of the world.

Those of us working for children's rights strongly believe that children should not be involved in armed conflicts, and no one should exploit them to advance their own agenda. In many countries, there are initiatives to reintegrate former child soldiers with their families.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (which Bangladesh ratified), children have a right to express their views on decisions affecting their lives. It is also important to

remember that the views of a child must be given "due weight" in accordance with their age and maturity, and that children's "best interest" should be the prime consideration. Children should also be protected from violence and vulnerabilities while they exercise their right to participation by expressing themselves.

During the recent movement, it has been said many times by many people that children have taught us many things within a short space of time. They have done what we have failed to do all along. Yes, it is our collective failure that the children had to come to the streets leaving classrooms (thus compromising their right to education), demanding that our roads are made safer for all.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of observing a Child Council Election in a City

Corporation. Child candidates ran the campaign in a very peaceful way. On the election day, children exercised their voting rights in a festive environment, and the candidates who were defeated congratulated the winners and also expressed an interest to work together to realise children's rights. The adult observers, including myself, learned that day that it is possible to practice democracy in a mature way by respecting the opponents. During humanitarian responses, often times children are the most authentic source for assessing which families have been worst affected and thus deserve support, as the list prepared by adults could be biased.

In most countries, people can start to vote when they are 18 years of age. But no one turns into an active citizen overnight after reaching that age. Children need to learn

about their rights and experience democratic practices. This is a journey.

I have the privilege of observing children expressing the challenges they face while accessing health, education, protection services in "dialogues" with the representatives of relevant government departments and elected representatives in different districts of Bangladesh. In most cases, the duty-bearers listen to children actively and take actions. There has been a visible improvement in the quality of services, and the budgetary allocation for children has also increased in areas where children are engaged with the local government system to make those child-friendly. I have also seen how confidently child representatives talked to the ministers in Dhaka, and noted that their recommendations were received well by the ministers. Children are the "experts" on their lives. Expressing views candidly is an empowering experience for them. We need to create a safe space for discussions and debates for the children, and the duty-bearers responsible for implementing decisions should be held accountable. Then there will be no need for the children to be on the streets during school hours.

I hope the authorities will be able, through appropriate actions, to convince the students concerned about road safety that the roads will indeed be made safer and those responsible for compromising people's safety will be held accountable from now on.

Let us listen to our children in a meaningful way and consider their "best interest" in our actions. I urge all concerned not to use the movement for their own interest and do whatever we can to protect children in all settings. It is our responsibility to ensure that the students are safe, continue their studies, grow up as active citizens, and realise their full human potential.

Laila Khondkar is Director, Child Rights Governance and Child Protection, Save the Children.

For further growth of our RMG

Bridging the gap between education and industry



SINCE its foundation, the Bangladesh Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector has enjoyed rapid expansion, reaching an audience of international buyers and contributing to 83 percent of per annum exports, employing some 4.4 million people, and

contributing over USD 32 billion to the economy. One would expect a sector of the nation's economy that is performing so well and contributing so much to the benefit of the nation to be widely supported. But a look at the support offered in terms of the education of our next generation of skilled workers, designers, merchandisers, product developers and factory managers shows that it is woefully lacking today.

It is a sorry state of affairs when, given the importance of the RMG sector to our nation, there is not one single item on the curriculum of our schools and colleges pertaining to the RMG industry and, furthermore, there is only one public university (from the 39 public universities that exist) offering education on the textile industry. A handful of our private and public universities offer courses on textile or industrial engineering. The University of Fashion and Technology, established by the BGMEA in 2012, is the only fashion orientated educational establishment in the country offering support to an industry of such vast financial importance to our nation and the largest sector of employment for the country.

It seems fair to say that there exists a significant disconnect between the education being provided to our young generation and what the RMG industry actually requires in terms of new blood to both bolster our existing RMG business and, more importantly, help to develop the industry for the future. One only has to look at the substantial number of disaffected graduates, seeking to find work in the industry, and the considerable number



STAR FILE PHOTO

of expatriates being employed on high salaries in Bangladesh, to realise that the pool of human resources required to drive our thriving RMG sector is not up to the task in hand.

Whilst the above comments do not paint a pretty picture for the future of the RMG industry of Bangladesh, there are a number of ways that we can improve the situation over a period of time—but, there is no short-term fix, and the necessary transition will require investment and support from the government, NGOs and from within the RMG industry itself.

The first issue to consider is the level of education provided at secondary and college levels that deals with the requirements of the RMG industry. Given the importance of the sector and the varied opportunities that it can offer, particularly to female employees (who constitute about 70 percent of the RMG workforce) and the empowerment that it can bring, it would be logical to introduce an educational programme with relevance to the RMG industry, drawing attention to its importance to the nation's economy and the opportunities that are offered

across the sector. Surely, it would be possible to incorporate a syllabus within our education system that highlights the benefits of a career within the RMG industry and the vast array of roles that are available?

Another approach to consider is the foundation of incubation centres, a model that is being successfully championed at many universities in the developed countries. Programmes at the university incubation centres combine world-class education, incubation and global opportunities in entrepreneurship, innovation and product management. Such programmes offer networking and support for start-up businesses, encouraging young entrepreneurs to hone their craft with the guidance of experienced professionals and a network of their peers.

This form of education purposefully challenges chosen business practices, encouraging students and start-up businesses to innovate and "think outside of the box." This approach is something that we as an industry and the government and other interested parties need to consider.

While the establishing of incubation centres in Bangladesh may seem to be a long way from happening, we need to encourage greater dialogue and interaction between academia and the RMG sector. The apparel industry needs to be more active in the promotion of the vast array of career opportunities available to our younger generations, and the academic community needs to establish a system that provides education to graduates that is relevant to the RMG industry, starting with the provision of basic training in the fundamentals of the sector and explanation of the levels involved, from factory floor worker, to merchandiser, designer, product developer and beyond. This will give students the opportunity to make an informed decision about their future career choices and participate in the necessary training for their chosen career path.

This approach will necessitate involvement and funding from the government and educational bodies and, most importantly, participation from industry leaders from the RMG sector to ensure that any changes to the curriculum provide the correct level of relevant education and advice to students. We need to see this as an investment for the future of the nation's RMG industry. Developing an educational system that can provide the necessary skill-sets to students will allow the industry to compete at higher market levels and will address the need for competent middle management.

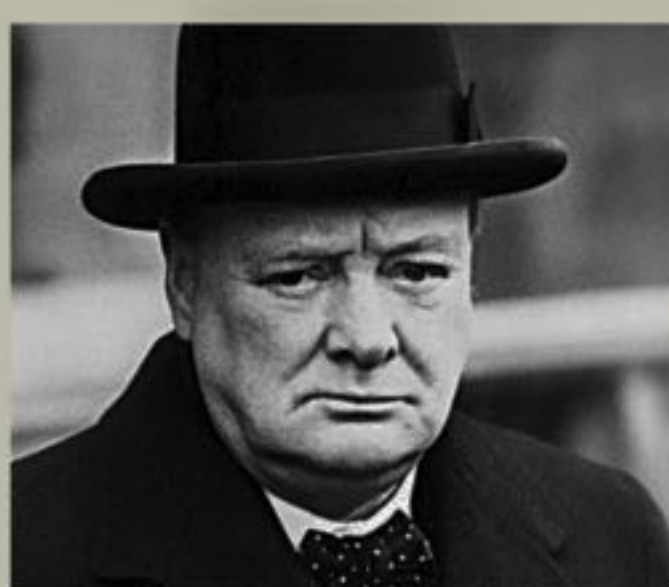
In order to take the process of integration between the RMG industry and the educational system one step closer, we should also consider the practice of establishing a programme of internships and apprenticeships within the industry.

Our industry faces many challenges in the years ahead and we need to prepare ourselves for the next phase of the RMG sector's evolution. I firmly believe that addressing the educational gap that currently exists will help during these challenging times.

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QUOTABLE Quote



WINSTON CHURCHILL (1874-1965)

Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1940-1945 and again from 1951-1955

If we open a quarrel between past and present, we shall find that we have lost the future.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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| ACROSS | 33 Folding money | 9 Secret society |
| 1 Terra-- | 34 Aspirin target | 10 Drunks |
| 6 Bulb rating | 36 Diet no-no, for some | 16 Debate side |
| 11 Kind of committee | 38 Writer Asimov | 18 Price holders |
| 12 "Gesundheit" lead-in | 40 Weeper of myth | 19 Cain's brother |
| 13 Saw things? | 43 Special jargon | 21 Tied up |
| 14 Bouquet | 44 Locker room need | 23 Canceled, as a launch |
| 15 Horn sound | 45 Moved carefully | 24 Bike part |
| 17 Meringue base | 46 Parquet feature | 25 Some votes |
| 18 New Mexico art colony | | 27 Like most prom goers |
| 20 Make over | DOWN | 30 Co. abbr. |
| 22 Gym rat's six-pac | 1 Manx, for one | 33 Starry hunter |
| 23 Freshness | 2 Horace creation | 34 Carpet feature |
| 26 Reach | 3 Henry James book | 35 Mongolia setting |
| 28 Jockey Arcaro | 4 Lugs | 37 Against |
| 29 Reddish liqueur | 5 Aspirin target | 39 Atlantic fish |
| 31 Stretch of years | 6 Used to be | 41 Arthur of TV |
| 32 Very bright | 7 Gave in | 42 English cathedral |
| | 8 Henry James book | |

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY



BABY BLUES



BY MORT WALKER



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

