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PHOTO: AFP

Tears for Azad

I never knew Humayun Azad. In fact, having lived in the US for most part of my life, I knew nothing about him till the fateful morning in February when the news of the violent attack on him was posted on the front pages of the local newspapers. I have never read anything by Humayun Azad. Thus, it was a little surprising to me that when I read this morning the news of his death in Munich, my heart ached and I found myself checking back tears. I was mourning the passing of someone whom I had never met, about whom I knew virtually nothing. Still, I cried, because a faint and desperate voice inside said that it was the right thing to do, that the passing of Dr. Azad was somehow a personal loss. Then, gradually, I understood.

There is an inexplicable, rare, yet wonderful phenomenon that takes place in our human society from time to time. Once in a while, out of the endless sea of humanity, rise the enlightened face of a few men and women like beacons in a stormy sea by which a lost sailor might navigate his ship home. They speak out-- their voices hanging in the air far above the chaotic and often cruel symphony of life like perfectly struck chords. They're simple people-- like and you me-- but they're also special. They stand up for truth and fight for justice-- even when that is an unfashionable and potentially lethal thing to do. They're tireless in their goals to better our lives. They're self-effacing-- easily embarrassed by all the accolades they're given. Yet, they're totally incapable of dimming the aura that surround them, and when you stand near them you feel the heat of the sun. They possess qualities that seem magical, mystical and divine. They embody all that is good in us. They personify the better nature of humanity, and stand in stark contrast to all that is inhuman. Perhaps, it is because of this that such men (and women) are crucified, shot, or hacked to death.

The great English writer E. M. Forster once spoke of such men and women. And, at this moment of my grief, lacking the words and eloquence that are only too appropriate when speaking of such people, I'll simply paraphrase Forster: "I believe in aristocracy," Forster once wrote, "...not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky. Its members are to be found in all nations and classes, and all through the ages, and there is a secret understanding between them they meet. They represent the true human tradition, the one permanent victory of our queer race over cruelty and chaos. Thousands of them perish into obscurity, a few are great names. They are sensitive for others as well as for them-

selves, they are considerate without being fussy, their pluck isn't swankiness, but the power to endure and they can take a joke."

Jonathan Munshi
Uttara, Dhaka

Professor Humayun Azad was a scholarly gentleman. His death is indeed a loss to the nation. It is really unfortunate that he had to undergo so much of agony in the last six months of his life.

Radyan Rahave
One e-mail

Dr. Azad's death does not seem to be a natural one. He was cleared off any ailment before his departure for Germany. There is a missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle! The report states that heart attack was the cause of his death. We would like to know the details of his sudden death.

Waheeda Alam
Toronto, Canada

Somebody informed me of his death, I felt so disturbed, so depressed that I wished I could die instead of our dear Sir. Aren't we responsible for his death? Haven't we failed to ensure his security? We wanted to show that we had done much. But Dr. Humayun Azad could realise that he was walking fast toward death.

One of the few fearless voices that could roar in the days of crisis has been silenced.

Alam Sheikh Sabinha
One e-mail

Dr. Humayun Azad died a natural death. He is reported to have suffered a heart attack in a distant land.

But it is not unusual or unjustified for his family members to smell foul play, given what they have seen in the last six months.

AF Rahman
On e-mail

The most unexpected death of Professor Humayun Azad is a big loss for a nation like ours. The proposition of democracy is freedom of thought, speech & writings. As Bangladesh is going ahead to pave the podium of democracy in every aspect of the state, the demise of Professor Azad will inevitably defer our continuous progression on this path.

Kumar Kajol
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Iraq situation

The US-led occupation forces in Iraq are finding it increasingly difficult to continue to operate in Iraq. By the middle of July 2004, the casualties suffered by the US-led forces had crossed the thousand mark. This is an unacceptable loss to the lone superpower; and it is a blemish on a US Commander-in-Chief in the year of US presidential elections. The way Iraqi nationalist forces are successfully challenging the occupation forces and their nominees in the interim Iraqi government clearly indicates that the United States is increasingly losing its credibility as the lone superpower in the new global order. Other than British support, the other three permanent members of the UN Security Council have left the US high and dry. The Iraqi nationalist forces' (INF) strategy is also undergoing a subtle shift. After inflicting losses, the INF is attacking the lifelines that sup-

port the US-led coalition forces in Iraq now. The capture of foreign truck drivers working for the Kuwait and Gulf Link Company, which provides essential supplies to the US army in Iraq, is indicative of this strategy. One of the demands of the Black Banners Brigade of the Islamic Army, the group that took truck drivers hostage, is that their employer company must cease its operations of providing the essentials to the US army in Iraq. The development in Iraq is also having its impact on the Islamic world's Shiite-Sunni politics. With the success of the Islamic Revolution in Shiite Iran in 1979, it became a role model in the entire Islamic world. Its success also undermined the predominance of Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia. Since then, though there were sporadic efforts to normalise relations between Iran and Saudi

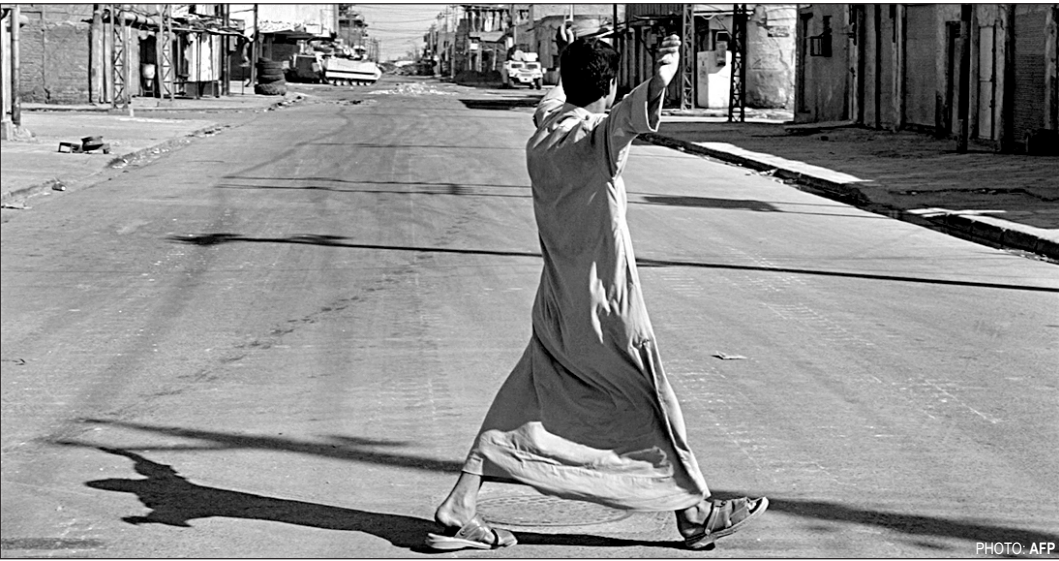


PHOTO: AFP

Arabia, Riyadh's efforts to contain Tehran continued unabated. Saudi Arabia's involvement in Iran's next door neighbour, Afghanistan, during the 1990s is fairly well documented. With the US-proposed democratic election in Iraq in January 2005, it is almost certain that the Shiites will govern. When that happens, it will emerge

as the second Shiite country after Iran. The observers of the Islamic world perceive that such a development will give a new momentum to Shiites to assert their identity in the entire Islamic world. In such an eventuality, the centuries old equilibrium in social order of the Islamic world between the Shiite and Sunnis may undergo a

change in favour of the Shiite. The Sunni-dominated Saudis consider that, they being the custodians of the holy shrines of Islam, it is their duty not to allow this new order to come into dominance.

Sirajul Islam
Social sciences researcher
and consultant,
Shyamoli, Dhaka

Our agricultural entrepreneurs

The two interesting news item on flowers and fruits from Rangpur and Magura respectively (DS: Aug 17) are a refreshing change from the usual plethora of the daily dose of depressing news of violence, lawlessness and corruption.

I think we should be proud of enterprising people like Mr. Ershadul Bari, Ms. Momota Begum and Mr. Zafar for proving the point that "God helps those who help themselves".

Ours is an agrarian country, and the examples are a move in the right direction through diversity of products like fruits and flowers. We should also feel proud of the local Agricultural Extension Department officials who through their positive encouragement and support helped these worthy people in their endeavour. They do need some recognition, if not through the department at least through the press. This could motivate other officials in other areas.

The Daily Star is doing the right thing in focussing attention on these activities, and more such news items from various areas would be most welcome reading.

SA Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka

Writing back...

I am writing this letter to clarify the 'ambiguity' which Durdana Ghas detected ("Read only for Pleasure", DS Aug 11, 2004) in my letter "Not for Adolescents". Actually, this ambiguity, this self-contradiction, is my creation to demonstrate the contradictory selves existing within me. It is true that I am tired, exhausted, and want a 'change' but whenever I see the alluring movie clipping, I just swoop on it. It will be pedantic of me to elaborate it by comparing my condition with the condition of "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde". Dr Jekyll was trying to retrieve his previous state of life but he was not successful. The story is certainly exaggerated as the writers do it to focus on the vulnerability of a condition. I fear people would laugh at this eccentric comparison but my condition is rather like this.

I just cannot call our parents 'wrong'. The main cause of the urge they felt to forbid us to read Masud Rana was perhaps that they wanted to stay aloof from the intrigues of the content. They perhaps wanted to keep our thinking fresh. It is true that the

content in *Felu Da* or Sherlock Homes (from which I was never kept away) has few intrigues but they were not as crude as in Masud Rana. Dr Watson was always there in utmost tension for his dear friend Holmes and Topshey never wanted to part with his beloved *Felu Da* but this human love always absent in Masud Rana. They were much more intelligent and ingenious in their thinking than Masud Rana. I am also a pleasure seeking person in reading so I left reading Masud Rana because I do not get much pleasure in Masud Rana but even today I get pleasure from Sherlock Homes and *Felu Da*.

So I compare our parents with the father of our teenage fantasy Robinson Crusoe, who forbade Crusoe from endeavouring the life of a sailor. Crusoe did disobey to undergo a miserable part of life. The theological interpretation of the story proclaimed

that Crusoe's father was a god-like person and, and Crusoe had to suffer for evading the words of his father.

When a person goes by instinct, he hardly leaves any place for the judgement of merit of a thing.

Mahfuzul Haque
Department of English,
University of Dhaka

Malignant missed call

GrameenPhone's latest eye-catching but inventive advertisement focusing on the bad effects of giving 'missed calls' really drew my attention. Frankly speaking, missed calls are turning out to be an integral aspect of cell phone subscribers. A good number of these subscribers pass their leisure period giving missed calls not only to their near and dear ones but to alien ones as well. Many of them might not treat this as a malpractice which hinders smooth network function. However,

this sort of novel advertisements will create awareness among the subscribers to refrain from giving 'missed calls'.

Under this scenario of high call charge, many people reluctantly give 'missed call'. Nonetheless these 'missed calls' are not meaning-less all the time. Artificial symbols are imposed on these 'missed calls' e.g. if one friend is belated to join a party he will give a 'missed call' which might mean he is on the way or stuck in traffic congestion. These are very common, especially among students. To me, reduced call-rate is the way out

Md. Nazrul Islam Sumon
Department of English,
University of Dhaka

US report

The visit of the US team to see firsthand the Bangladesh government's response to US report on human trafficking that relegated Bangladesh

to Tier-3 and in immediate danger of facing US sanctions has attracted a wide response from the press and media and from our government. You have also written an editorial on this where you have put the onus on the US to be fair with the demand part of the equation in deciding Bangladesh's fate (DS August 12th).

The team has given their preliminary reaction to their investigation. It has expressed satisfaction with the legal steps taken by the government but has deep reservations with the officials responsible for dealing with human trafficking whom they have termed as corrupt. The government's reaction articulated by the foreign minister went against these preliminary findings and rejected the truth in the report. Your editorial had added the demand side to partly defend Bangladesh. Then of course there is this nagging perception among many of us that Bangladesh' case was motivated by politics, meaning that Bangladesh was relegated to Tier-3 because of the government's failure to send troops to Iraq.

The last point, that Bangladesh has been penalised for failure to commit troops is of course a non-issue because the US would not act this way overtly as it would be an uncivilised way and if this did go into consideration, there is no way to prove it. So much for this point. Then comes the point of demand as raised in your editorial. This point also I am afraid will get us nowhere because demand does not absolve Bangladesh of sustaining this trafficking. The comparable case could be the issue of drugs. Demand for drugs is the highest in the US that sustains drug trafficking but this does not absolve countries where drugs originate of the responsibility.

Thus the onus for dealing with this problem is squarely upon us or more precisely upon the government that needs to do its utmost in bringing to book the corrupt officials who encourage and sustain this trade. The US team has taken favourable note of the legal framework, which is encouraging. With this as basis, the government should crackdown upon the officials who contribute the most to this unfortunate problem.

If our government does its part in reining the corrupt officials, we will get over this problem. Otherwise we really have only ourselves to blame.

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmondi RA, Dhaka

Flood victims



PHOTO: AFP

Our country has just faced one of the worst floods in history & it seems the authorities are not that concerned about it. We know that our country often gets affected by flood but we still do not know why the government does not take appropriate measures to minimise the losses. It is only the poor people who suffer. Rather than giving small quantity of help to the individuals, why does not the government implement the plans that will help these poor people in rebuilding their lives?

Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

While the whole country was deluged, people lived on platforms, diarrhoea was breaking out in an epidemic form, and there was bad news from all the affected places. Then we saw a little ray of hope when the government decided to give free seeds to the affected farmers.

The economy of our country stands on agriculture and for this reason it is imperative that the agriculture sector gets the logistic support that it needs at this hour of crisis.

Sultan Khandakar
One e-mail

Unethical business

Love is divine. It is the driving force of the whole universe. The Creator loves all His creations and that's why He went through the hassle of creating all these. In human society love has been playing its eternal role from time immemorial.

In this age of 'civilisation' love has also become an innovative tool of business in the most obnoxious and distasteful way. Some unfortunate girls were actually trapped in the name of love and then coerced or persuaded to get extremely physical with their boyfriends. They were not aware of the fact that a video camera or web cam was secretly kept somewhere and the sole objective was to make some 'Bangladeshi porn film' and get money. This is kinds of matters we don't like to discuss in our conservative society and try to sweep everything under the carpet. The silence is turning out to be fatal for the society in the long run. 'Sex' (irrespective of its meaning) is a taboo term in our society.

When the first of this kind of CD 'hit the market' (involving a receptionist of a mobile phone service provider) everyone was crucifying the girl alone and was silent about her male counterpart's role, who masterminded it. An extensive media report however at least convinced the common people the main culprit was the guy. (no action has yet been taken against him and his collaborators) At that time there were news items like 'Meyera Sabdhan' (Be aware girls).

I do know that these are hush-hush issues in Bangladesh and no one should be highlighting these. I am compelled to write about it because unfortunately there has been another CD. This time the victims are female students of DU and AIUB.

Putting aside the moral and religious issue, does the animals in human masks not know what are they doing to some girls? It is more than a capital punishment in a country like ours. What about the humiliation of the family of those unfortunate girls? In this social structure the guys can get away with anything and everything.

We don't want to see any recurrence of such incidents. Exemplary punishment should be meted out to the perpetrators of such heinous crimes. Is anybody listening?

Saif, Dhaka



PHOTO: INTERNET