

Turmoil in the RMG sector

Genuine workers' grievances should be addressed

WORKERS' violence is becoming a threat to the stability and normal working environment in the garment sector. Last Sunday's violence in the readymade garment (RMG) units at Ashulia and Jamgarah areas on the outskirts of the capital city has again caused panic among the owners of the factories so much so that, according to reports, production has been suspended in 25 factories. This is certainly bad news for the entire garment sector at a time when it is already reeling from the supply-order shortage from the recession-hit international market. The international factors apart, gas supply constraint is another factor that has forced many garment units in Chittagong to shut down.

The problem of a shrunken market for the garment sector is understandable. The industry, as it did before, especially at the end of the quota-protected era of multi-fibre arrangement (MFA), was again demonstrating its resilience through diversification of market and other timely measures. Briefly said, the RMG sector was well on its way to getting over the crisis of international origin. Hardly could it beat the market-related threat from outside when it has again been attacked from within. But how can it stand such a threat of gratuitous vandalism by quarters whose identity is yet to become clear?

Though the sporadic acts of violence in the RMG sector are often blamed on the workers, now a fresh question is being raised about the real identity of the rowdy elements going by the name of workers, who are in the habit of wreaking havoc on the same factories that provide them with their means of sustenance. Even the owners of the garment units affected by Sunday's vandalism have squarely put the responsibility on the toughs engaged in the so-called 'jhut' (waste garment cloths) trade. The law-enforcement authorities should find out the identity of the real troublemakers, if only for the sake of restoring trust among the owners and workers of the garment sector.

The most unfortunate part of the story is that the highest foreign exchange earners among all the industries of the country are, to all appearances, facing a multi-pronged attack from within and without. As a consequence, the most successful as well as robust sector of the industry so far is now facing the worst crisis in its history. Sadly though, such a volatile condition has been prevailing in the RMG industry for too long to be acceptable.

The authorities concerned must not allow the injury already done to the sector to fester any longer, if only in the greater interest of the industry and the economy. At the same time, the garment owners would do well to listen to the genuine grievances and demands of their workers and address those without further delay. That would help to avoid confusion as well as the risk of unsuspecting garment workers getting drawn into the plot of quarters out to fish in troubled waters.

A police force for tourists' security

It must be purposeful, effective and responsive

THE concept of a police force in relation to tourist spots in the country should have originated earlier. However, now that a tourist police force has been introduced in such areas as Cox's Bazar as a step toward providing security to tourists, we cannot but welcome it. And that is because of all the hurdles we have observed over the years where popularizing tourism and broadening its base are concerned. Despite the ubiquitous assertions about developing the tourism sector, there has hardly been any change that one can notice. As a matter of fact, when compared with other countries in the region, the number of tourists Bangladesh receives annually is pitifully low and for various reasons.

One of those reasons is of course the matter of security. In recent months, there have been incidents where tourists, both local and foreign, have fallen prey to such crimes as theft and mugging, with the ultimate result that the visitors have made a swift way out of the tourist spots. Worse has been the overall effect of such incidents on those intending to visit Bangladesh or our own citizens who have had plans to travel to the beaches and other areas with their families. And then there is the inescapable reality of the harassment tourists, especially foreigners, are subjected to by curious locals who make it a point to follow them at every stage of their sojourn, thus making things difficult for them. Indeed, there have been times when harassed foreigners have simply abandoned the spot and flown back home. All these factors obviously give people outside Bangladesh a bad impression about the country. Which is why an organized body such as the tourist police has been a long-felt need.

An additional and rather commendable aspect of the move is the broad range of duties the tourist police will carry out. Besides handling crime and protecting tourists from other problems, they will also stand guard in the matter of ensuring that no one tampers with nature. In other words, they will ensure that trees are not cut down, hills are not destroyed and sand and stones are not subjected to robbery. But let there be a note of caution here: all these good intentions must be backed by efficiency and firmness on the part of those who constitute the tourist police force. But such firmness must not ignore the fact that the police will need to be well behaved, courteous and ready to respond to any emergency.

The whole conspiracy tale remains untold

And now that declassified documents on Bangladesh's politics in the early 1970s have been made available by the Americans, a whole new picture of the conspiracy patently appears to be unfolding. It all calls for new investigation into the tragedy.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

WE have been informed that the Bangladesh government will take action against Khairuzzaman, the soldier turned diplomat till recently the country's high commissioner in Malaysia. The man's offence is that despite repeated reminders to return home he has chosen to stay away, perhaps out of suspicion that the old charges of his complicity in the death of four incarcerated national leaders in November 1975 might come up again now that the Awami League is in power.

Now, what makes the matter so intriguing is why Khairuzzaman should refuse to come back home when it was the judiciary which acquitted him of the charges we speak of in the days of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-Jamaat government. From the perspective of the law and of logic, therefore, he ought to have no reason to fear that things might go wrong for him. But, of course, if there are yet things relating to November 1975 we as a nation remain unaware of, it is a different matter altogether.

Which brings us to the bigger theme of what has not been done about unearthing the broad conspiracy to murder Bangabandhu and the four national leaders in 1975. Some of the military officers charged with having caused the mayhem of August 1975 are in prison, certainly; but there are others who are still on the run. There was a good chance for the first Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina between 1996 and 2001 to expend all efforts into getting fugitives such as Shariful Haq Dalim and Abdur Rashid nabbed abroad and broad back home. That job was not done. Or you could say the paperwork done on tracking these assassins was weak at best and non-existent at worst.

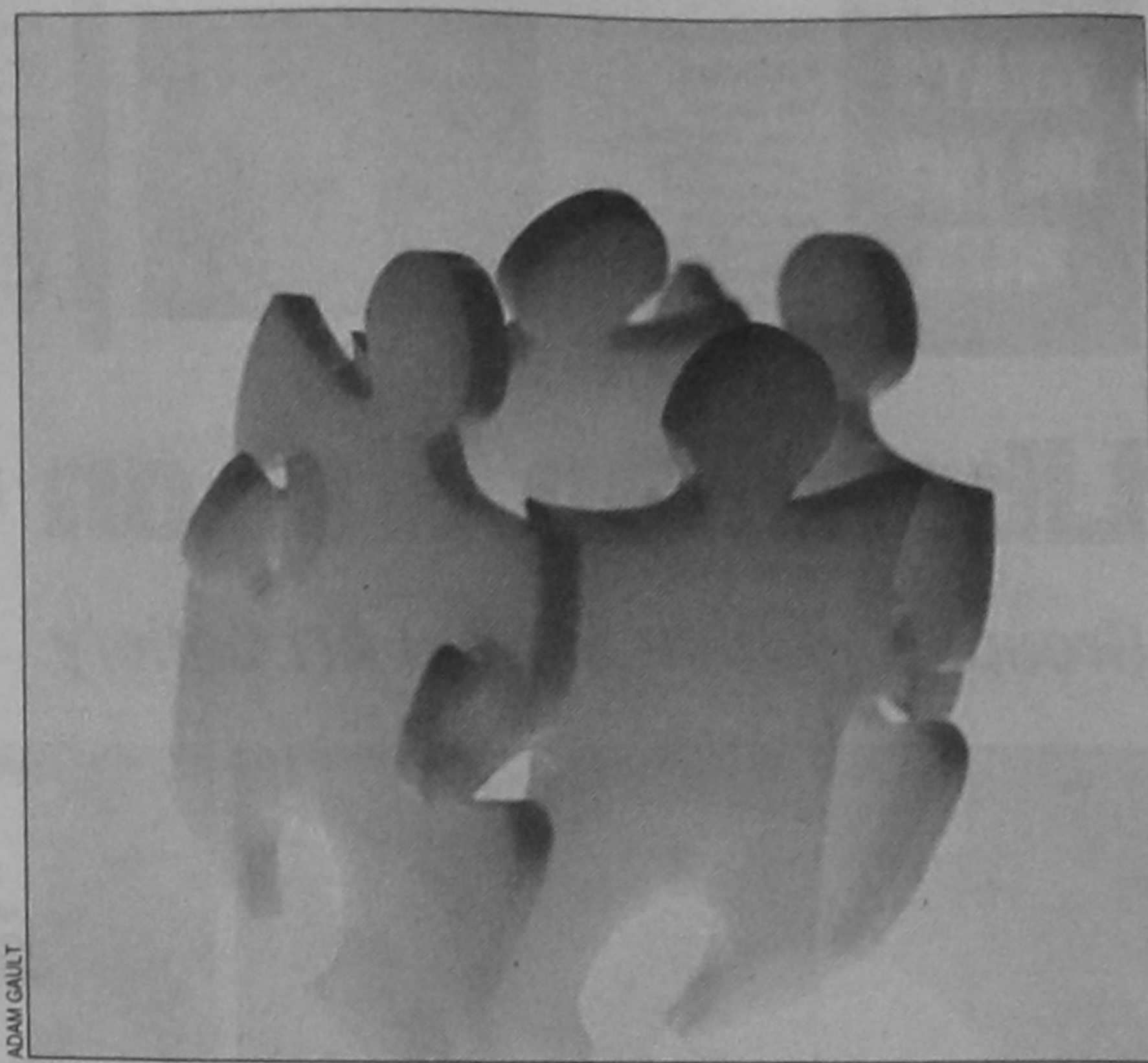
And then came the regressive period of Khaleda Zia's government, where all

sorts of machinations went into making sure that not enough judges were around to see the entire judicial process of the Bangabandhu murder case through. No matter how men like Moudud Ahmed defend themselves, the bizarre and glaring truth is that it was on their watch that Bangabandhu's murderers, both those in jail and those absconding, got a breather. It was a curious case of a government deliberately defaulting on its responsibilities. It was natural too, because that government, in association with a clutch of academics ready to use the machete against history, was too busy trying to manufacture its blinkered version of the story of Bangladesh's liberation.

All of that is history and is well comprehended by the nation. But now that an elected government symbolised once again by the Awami League is once more in office, it becomes the responsibility of the state to plumb the depths of the vast conspiracy that led to August and November 1975. It was all right to bring the killer majors and colonels to trial. It will be even better to go purposefully into the business of hunting down the absconding ones. That will call for appropriate and priority-based coordination with countries within which the rest of Bangabandhu's killers may at present be residing.

And then comes a broadening of the idea. The question remains, to this day, why Khondokar Moshtaq Ahmed was never charged with conspiracy to assassinate Bangabandhu and the Mujibnagar leaders and foist an unconstitutional regime on the state. Moshtaq, in one of those quixotic workings of fate, died barely three months before Sheikh Hasina took office as prime minister in June 1996. He was, in that sense, fortunate. But that has never been any reason for the country to absolve him of involvement in the bloodletting of 1975.

Under the law and in terms of morality,



Time to unravel the mystery.

it ought to have been for the government to file charges of murder and conspiracy against Moshtaq, posthumously, as a way of plumbing the depths of the planning that had gone into the overthrow of Bangabandhu's government. To suggest, as some did in the late 1990s, that death frees a man of guilt is an absurdity. Add to the Moshtaq question the matter of the role played by the likes of Mahub Alam Chashi in August 1975.

And now that declassified documents on Bangladesh's politics in the early 1970s have been made available by the Americans, a whole new picture of the conspiracy patently appears to be unfolding. It all calls for new investigation into the tragedy. It is plainly inconceivable that Bangabandhu's murder, followed by the elimination of Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, M. Mansoor Ali and AHM Quamruzzaman, could have come about merely through the action of a handful of army officers with guns in their hands. A wider network of insidious intent was, at work, one which now must be unravelled if the

cause of justice is to be served.

No Bengali can rest easy with all the questions that have assailed him for the last thirty-four years. Why did senior army officers not move against the men who had already murdered the Father of the Nation? If Colonel Jamiluddin Ahmed could rush to save Bangabandhu and die in the process, what prevented his peers from taking similar action?

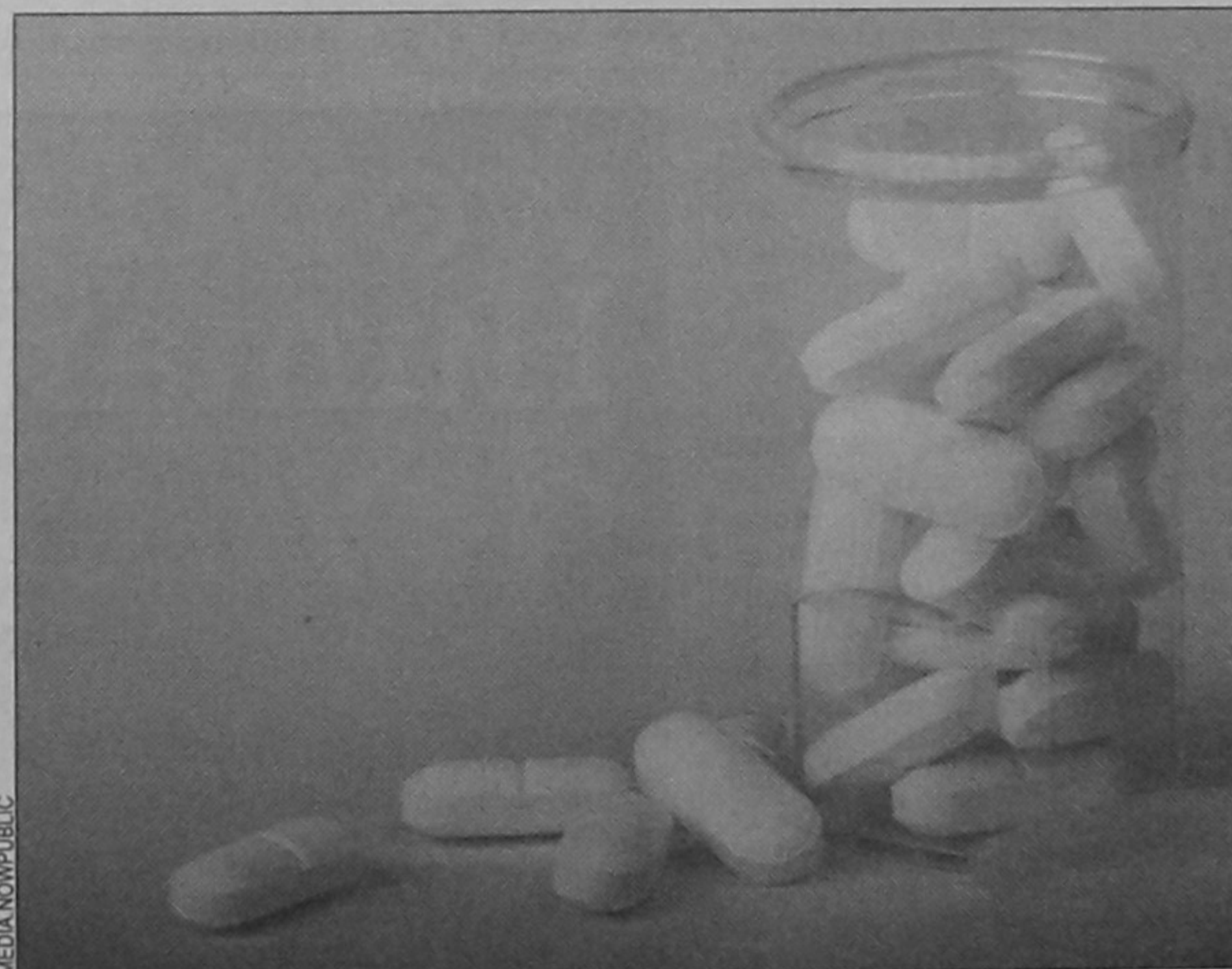
How did men so sycophantically loyal to Bangabandhu till the late hours of August 14 suddenly turn up at dawn on August 15 as Moshtaq's cohorts? Why did General Zia send off the assassins to diplomatic jobs and on what convoluted grounds of morality did the countries they were sent to accept them, knowing full well that they had killed -- and killed in savage manner?

The full tale of the intrigue against Bangabandhu remains untold. Healing cannot begin until that cobweb of conspiracy is broken through.

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Making health care healthy

This can be done through establishing strong infrastructure and proper regulatory environment under appropriate policy guideline. Having a good quality assurance program and participating in the external quality assurance schemes will assist the diagnostic laboratories to improve their service and ease patients' sufferings.



MAMUN AHMED

WE have a drug policy and a regulatory authority like Drug Administration to monitor manufacturing and sale of safe drugs. Even then some unscrupulous people have been manufacturing drugs with poisonous compounds. Poisonous paracetamol is thought to have recently caused the death of more than twenty children. Bypassing the surveillance system of the Drug Administration some pharmaceutical companies manufacture low quality drugs and market them in rural areas.

Let us look into the state of another important area of health care, the medical diagnostic testing services in our country. Diagnostic service is an essential component of the medical system, and high-quality clinical laboratory services are critical for effective patient management. A diagnostic test is one of the most important parameters on the

basis of which a patient gets right and timely treatment from a doctor. The laboratory test results must be accurate because misdiagnosis can give rise to wrong treatment, which results in increased cost and sometimes in death.

Allow me to relate a personal experience. Recently, a friend's minor daughter was admitted into a city hospital with prolonged high fever. Her physician had done some diagnostic tests but the laboratory results did not match the clinical symptoms of the patient. The results of platelet count and dengue virus antibody test were in conflict, making it difficult for the doctor to prescribe the treatment. So, the doctor was compelled to send blood specimen to another diagnostic laboratory.

The test results from the second laboratory came out different, but closer to the clinical symptoms of the patient. The utterly frustrated father of the child took the blood specimen to another laboratory for a third opinion before the

doctor started the treatment. This is not an isolated incident. Patients have regularly received faulty diagnostic results, causing wrong treatment and increased suffering.

Why does this happen? What can be done to get rid of this and ease the sufferings of patients?

The quality of test results from any laboratory is influenced by the technical expertise of the personnel, quality of diagnostic reagents/kits used for the test and regular calibration of the instruments used. Moreover, measures to control the quality of the test results in a diagnostic laboratory are extremely important, along with the administrative measures employed before, during and after each assay. In an ideal laboratory setting, a good quality assurance program is designed to monitor this.

Quality assurance ensures producing the right result at the right time on the right specimen from the right patient, with the right interpretation based on correct reference material and equipment. Quality assurance includes quality control and quality assessment, and must be supported with effective safety procedures, decontamination and sterilisation process and equipment maintenance.

In Bangladesh, diagnostic laboratories have grown very fast in the last two decades. There are some first-rate diagnostic laboratories, and some are even moving towards international recognition through maintaining high standards. But in absence of policy guidelines and strict regulatory measures, most of the diagnostic laboratories do not implement quality control programs.

Reagents and kits are crucial for assuring quality laboratory results, but there is no policy guideline or regulatory authority to ensure their quality. These reagents are imported and sold to diagnostic labs through local traders. Recent technological advancement in the field of biotechnology has made the diagnostic kit manufacturing process easier than before. This has created scope for local traders to import kits from different manufacturers but has raised serious concern about the quality of these imported materials. We do not have adequate infrastructure and mecha-

nism to assure quality of diagnostic kits, which is why the laboratories are being offered sub-standard diagnostic kits.

For the sake of ensuring high-quality laboratory testing services it is necessary to have quality reagents. This can be achieved by adapting policy guidelines that can be implemented through a national regulatory authority in whom all the legal powers will be vested. It is also necessary to establish an independent National Reference Laboratory (NRL). More than one laboratory may be designated as NRL for a specific category of diagnostic kits. These laboratories must have quality management system and meet high standards to provide technical support to the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) in all matters pertaining to diagnostic kits.

The government should also constitute an advisory committee for the NRA and the NRL, which will undertake evaluation of diagnostic kits. NRA, on the advice of the committee, should develop guidelines based on international criteria for manufacturers/importers to get the quality of diagnostic kits assessed for certification, licensing and registration. Moreover National External Quality Assessment Schemes must be initiated and the results of these NEQAS should be made available to the NRLs to monitor their competence and also to indicate the performance of various kits that have been used.

Our country needs cost-effective and quality diagnostic services. Problems associated with diagnostic laboratories should be assessed and monitored for the sake of ensuring quality health care services. This can be done through establishing strong infrastructure and proper regulatory environment under appropriate policy guideline. Having a good quality assurance program and participating in the external quality assurance schemes will assist the diagnostic laboratories to improve their service and ease patients' sufferings.

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