

The tragedy of Aleya

When will such criminal impunity end?

THE horrendous incident that took place in the city the other day and that too in broad daylight in full view of the public leaves us stupefied. It was clearly the most upsetting for us in recent times. The jilted lover of a young woman (and this lover incidentally has a wife already), in company with his accomplices, set the woman on fire through pouring petrol on her. As we write this editorial, the young woman Aleya struggles for survival in hospital. She just might live or she might see her life come to a painful end. The point here is that criminality has reached a stage where those who engage in it are increasingly demonstrating newer versions of audacity in their sinister work. That is cause for new worry.

What does that tell us? It is simply this: that criminals are today operating with a degree of impunity never imagined before. It only proves that the law may have become so inoperative or ineffectual, because of the failure of the law enforcers to have their writ run, that criminal elements now think little of being penalized for their nefarious deeds. There are clear reasons why such incidents as sexual harassment have registered a rise of late. Add to that reports of the deaths of young women driven to their end by demands for dowry. And now that Aleya fights for her life merely because she rejected the advances of a man, we can raise the very legitimate question of what the law enforcing authorities plan to do about it. The unfortunate reality is that in similar cases earlier, little or no action was taken. Of course, cases were registered and the police made themselves busy inquiring into the incidents, in the initial stages. But then everything fizzled out and everyone but the victims and their families appeared to forget the sordid episodes. Again, there have been instances where the police have simply refused to take cases. In consequence, there has been no punishment of those responsible for the plight of such women as Aleya. This lack of sentencing and conviction has naturally given rise to the impunity with which criminals such as Aleya's attacker operate today.

We demand that there be a change in conditions. We take this opportunity to praise those members of the public who were able to nab one of the criminals who attacked Aleya. But then, they fell short of preventing her torching. This only raises the important point that greater reflexive action on the part of the community is vital in checking criminality.

More crucially, unless deterrent punishment is meted out to those responsible for such crimes, society will continue to be on a slide. Let a good, effective and swift example be set by bringing Aleya's attackers to justice.

Students protesting evening courses at DU

They have a point, but the manner of articulation is improper

EVERY now and then we are left dumbfounded at the degree of insensitivity that even an educated segment of society tend to demonstrate to concerns of public or civic interest of daily compelling nature. The latest case in point is the human chain laid across the Doyel Chattar of Dhaka University by students of Computer Science and Engineering obstructing traffic for two hours. That was their way of demonstrating introduction of evening master's degree programme in their faculty to force it to postpone the decision which it did.

Obviously, it has highlighted the students' streak of deviant behaviour in taking the wrath on the general public who had nothing to do with the grievance they were supposed to be airing. At the same time, however, the episode has thrown up some very legitimate lessons for all concerned to pay heed to in order that vital student affairs admittedly subjected to a degree of indifference over time were better managed.

The underlying reasons for the student outburst appear to be quite convincing and, to that extent valid; although one may have serious reservations over the manner of their articulation. The students are apt to complain that even day-shifts are not properly run, given the part-time involvement of teachers, apart from a general shortage of teaching staff resulting from over-stays abroad and unfilled vacancies. Besides, there is dearth of educational aids, constraints in terms of library facilities and access to other logistics. In such a context, the students cannot be faulted for being apprehensive of how properly and effectively the evening courses, when introduced, would get to be run.

Overall, there is no denying the rationale for operating more than one shift particularly in the high-profile departments to be able to cope with the pressure of enrollment on them. But won't it be self-defeating and counterproductive if we ran evening programmes without making sure that all necessary teaching staff, classroom spaces and access to library and computer facilities are in place?

This brings up the issue of funding and allocations to the DU which not merely need to be increased but also rationalised depending upon the priorities of different branches of higher education.



World Cup fever, Bangladesh-style

I begrudge no one their enthusiasm for the World Cup, and if people want to support Argentina or Brazil, or North Korea or Slovenia, for that matter, I guess, it's their business. Knock yourself out. But you have to admit: it's kind of odd. That's all I'm saying.

ZAFAR SOBHAN

DON'T get me wrong. I am second to none in my obsession with the World Cup, and have been since I tuned in to my first one in 1978. Go ahead, ask me anything.

But all the same, I don't know. There is something decidedly odd about World Cup fever as it manifests itself in Bangladesh.

The whole world looks forward to the World Cup every four years. But, as far as I know, we are the only country where people actively identify with and support a country that they otherwise have no connection to.

In Bangladesh, the big two are Argentina and Brazil, and I only need to go as far as my own office at the Daily Star to witness our devotion. The newsroom and canteen are festooned with Argentinian and Brazilian flags, and the more avid fans have already started sporting their team jerseys to work.

Just last week, Bangladesh hit the international headlines when two

neighbouring villages, one in the Argentina camp and one in the Brazil camp, squared off against one another in armed clashes that left 30 injured. British hooligans have nothing on us.

I have long tried to argue to my fellow countrymen and women that you can't support a country the way you support a club team.

Club teams are appropriate vessels for support sitting in Bangladesh. One can support Manchester United or Barcelona or Inter Milan, as club loyalties are self-identifying tribal loyalties, with little rhyme or reason, that cut across national lines. Big clubs have supporters in every corner of the planet.

But what is unique to Bangladesh is that we have adopted this attitude towards international sports. In vain do I argue that there is something a tad unseemly in supporting another country and that we are the only country on Earth that indulges in such foolishness.

It is fine to have a soft spot for certain countries. It is fine to want cer-

tain countries to win against other countries. But it is surely bizarre to support a country that level of identification unless you are from there.

Only Brazilians can legitimately be Brazil supporters and only Argentinians can legitimately be Argentina supporters in the true sense of the word. There is a nationalistic element to supporting a national side that cannot just be ignored.

The fact is that in any other country this kind of support for another country's national team would be unthinkable. Only in Bangladesh.

Of course, this is the case in cricket, too, with India and Pakistan being the two most widely supported teams. Again, there are many who support one side or the other without any recourse to the underlying politics of their support, and divorce their support for the side from any greater identification with the country.

Frankly, I have always found Bangladeshi support for Pakistan's cricket team a little off, but many Pakistan supporters insist that their support is not a political statement. Their support, they claim, has nothing to do with fondness for or identification with Pakistan as a country, but only with the attractive brand of cricket that they play.

Yeah, I don't know. I remain doubtful.

Fortunately, we now have our own

team to support, but when Bangladesh isn't playing, people still maintain their loyalty to other countries.

I can't help but think that all this somehow reflects poorly on us as a nation. I don't know of any other country where this is the case. And certainly there is no other country where people engage in fisticuffs on behalf of a country that has nothing to do with them.

Perhaps I am looking at this all wrong. Perhaps I should be proud that we are so post-nationalistic. But I am afraid that I can't help seeing this support as a fundamental misunderstanding of the very nature of international competition. And don't even get me started on what it suggests about our national pride.

Still, I begrudge no one their enthusiasm for the World Cup, and if people want to support Argentina or Brazil, or North Korea or Slovenia, for that matter, I guess, it's their business. Knock yourself out. But you have to admit: it's kind of odd. That's all I'm saying.

Incidentally, full disclosure: that first World Cup in 1978? I supported Scotland with all my heart and soul and was crushed when they crashed out of the tournament. But, in my defence, I was only 8. I didn't know any better.

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Minister of wild imagination

The state minister may not have realised it, he is saying two different things in the same breath. He is mixing up fact with fiction, his own sanity questionable in the process. It's one thing that a man spied against his country in a decisive war.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE Aristotelian definition of truth has it that to say of something which is that it is not, or to say of something which is not that it is, is false. The state minister for law has got us in a fix since he said last Friday that late president Ziaur Rahman had spied for Pakistan during the Liberation War in 1971. We don't know if he said of something which has happened, or happened to say of something, which is wild imagination.

The minister was pushing twenty-one at the time of the war. He was a freedom fighter himself as mentioned in his resumé posted on his ministry's website. He was old enough to understand what was happening around him, and might have stumbled on unappetising secrets he kept for so long but couldn't cope with anymore.

So, he decided to spill the beans. He told us what should scare us out of our wits: a decorated war hero of this country actually worked for the enemy. Why did the minister never talk about it before? Unless this is a recent finding. Unless he is serving us the surprise fresh from the oven.

All the more reason why we should dig into it. A hero either deserves the honour bestowed upon him, or he doesn't deserve it at all. The last thing we need is a national hero who is the butt of our jokes, or a target for rants. Nathaniel Hawthorne tells us that a hero cannot be a hero unless in a heroic world. If we diminish our heroes, it also diminishes us.

Not to say Ziaur Rahman is a hero, if he isn't. But of all the things said about that man, his being a foreign stooge is news to us. Even the minister couldn't absorb the shock of his own fabrication. Within two days of his iconoclastic remarks, the minister somersaulted and shifted his position. He said he was ready to accept Ziaur Rahman as a freedom fighter but not how the former president had sent many freedom fighters to their deaths.

The state minister may not have realised it, he is saying two different things in the same breath. He is mixing up fact with fiction, his own sanity questionable in the process. It's one thing that a man spied against his coun-

try in a decisive war. That by all means is despicable, lowest of the low for anybody across the political divide. If the same man slaughtered so many of his fellow fighters after the war, if he did indeed, is deplorable. He should be separately held accountable for his hideous action.

But it would be interesting to find out how this minister arrived at his ectoplasmic conclusion. How did he know what missed the discerning eyes of so many researchers, analysts and Liberation War historians? It's a subject obvious from his U-turn on the subject that the spying thing is entirely his own creation. He goosed up garbage to score brownie points.

Our minister should know that it's not easy to sully the name of a famous figure with flimsy evidence. In 2007, Ayub Khan's son Gauhar Ayub revealed in his interview to Karan Thapar, a distinguished Indian anchor, that a brigadier in the Indian Directorate of Military Operations sold to Pakistan India's 1965 war plan for a paltry sum of Rs.20,000.

When he met Indian journalist Kuldip Nayar in 1984, Gauhar Ayub told him a similar story. He said that a senior Indian army officer used to send a copy of secret defence papers to his father Ayub Khan before they reached the desk of Jawaharlal Nehru. When Karan revealed the name of that Indian spy, it

sent shockwaves throughout India. The alleged man was none other than India's most decorated war hero Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw.

Gauhar maintained that he never named anyone. It was Karan who took the interview as opportunity to speculate the name so that he could settle his score with Manekshaw. Here comes the Freudian twist. Karan's father General P.N. Thapar was the army chief when India lost the war to China in 1962. Karan believed Manekshaw had a role in the vilification campaign against his father. His revelation revealed the grudge that he subconsciously held against his father's enemy.

If the minister has any personal agenda against Ziaur Rahman, we wouldn't know it. But that he has political agenda against the man and his party is anybody's guess. Yet, what he tried has got a name already. The Goebbelsian propaganda technique was based on the principle that a lie, if audacious enough and repeated enough times, will be believed by the masses.

Joseph Goebbels was the propaganda minister in Nazi Germany. Perhaps our state minister is living under the illusion the law ministry has been renamed.

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