

## CROSS TALK

## Deplorable assault on media

*Restrictions on entry into DMCH unacceptable*

WE are appalled at the repetition of violence committed against reporters and journalists on the premises of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). The first round of assault was unleashed by interns against members of the press on July 22 when they had gone to report on an alleged case of maltreatment of a patient. What is disturbing is the fact that medical college interns had ganged up to assault pressmen who were merely doing their job. The second round of attack that came on July 25 was a much more organised one. It is interesting to note that this time round, interns and doctors were allegedly aided by ruling party student activists and the unruly mob broke into the makeshift reporters' office set up in DMCH with the intention to do bodily harm and damage property. It is disturbing that the incident occurred in the presence of law enforcement officials who were silent spectators to this orgy of violence.

This is not the first time patients have complained about lack of service, malpractice or rude behaviour taking place in public hospitals. What is new however is the highhandedness shown by hospital authorities in dealing with media personnel on DMCH premises in that journalists were banned from entering without having proper permission. Barring journalists instead of taking action against errant doctors indicate acquiescing behaviour on the part of authorities. The repeat violence committed under the very noses of authorities is totally reprehensible and we condemn it. The 3-member enquiry committee formed to probe the incident must identify the perpetrators and take stringent measures against them. Authorities must also look into allegations of malpractice that keep resurfacing and bring to book those responsible.

In the long run, medical authorities have an obligation to the general public to straighten out the nagging problems associated with lack of proper service. Complaints against the medical service range from lack of care to malpractice. Now it seems that we are to add physical assault to the list of complaints. It is high time, that these irregularities were straightened out and in future we hope not to see a repetition of draconian measures being enforced on the media.

## Congratulations, Rizwana!

*Magsaysay Award well deserved*

OUR heartiest congratulations to Syeda Rizwana Hasan for winning the Ramon Magsaysay Award known also as the "Asia's Nobel Prize". In fact she is the 11th Bangladeshi to be awarded the prestigious award, highest of its kind in Asia, for her role in protecting the environment. Her work had previously been recognised internationally when she was awarded the international Goldman Award for her role in environmental protection.

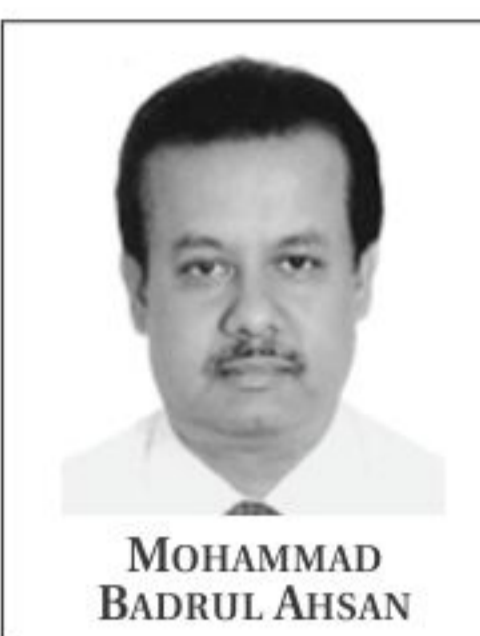
That she made her mission for ensuring right to good environment and elevating the issue as one of the basic rights of a person was also acknowledged by the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation who in their citation recognise "her uncompromising courage and impassioned leadership in a campaign of judicial activism in Bangladesh that affirms the people's right to a good environment as nothing less than their right to dignity and life."

In fact Rizwana is one of the few of activists and hers is one of the few organisations that have led the crusade to save our environment from not only natural degradation but also protect it from the effects of commercial ventures of those given to limitless profiteering at the expense of the ecology. Her efforts have really been a struggle against odds, and she deserves kudos for not wilting or giving up, sometime against such onslaughts that took a personal nature.

While we as Bangladeshis share the pride of Rizwana's achievement, we would like to say that international awards and acknowledgements cannot be the end of one's pursuit. In fact these impose even more responsibility and demand even more commitment to better all one has achieved so far.

While we wish Rizwana the very best for the future we feel certain she and her organisation, BELA will have the full support of the people in all her future work. In that she should also be prepared to face greater odds but carry

# Chronicle of a death retold



MOHAMMAD  
BADRUL AHSAN

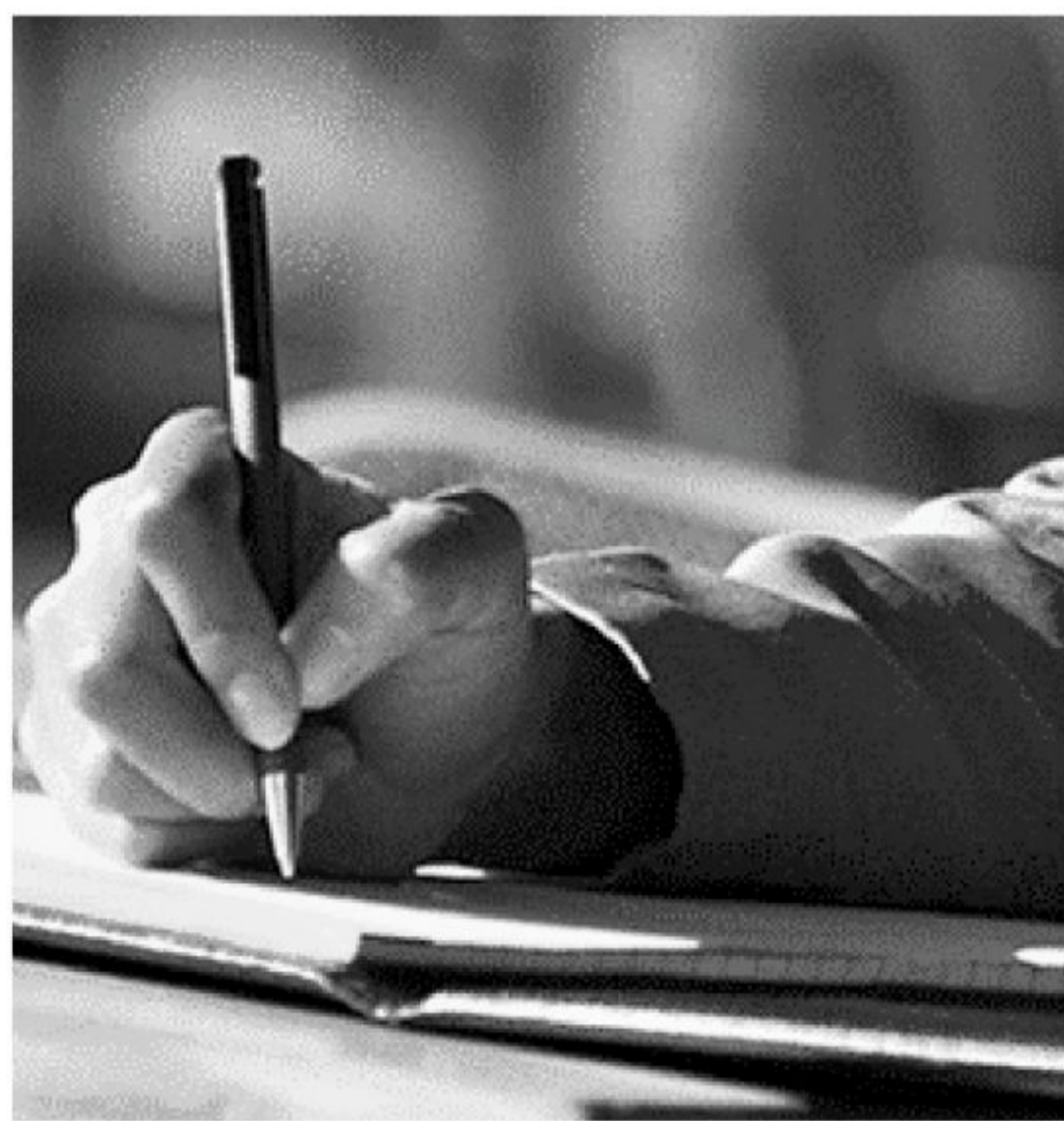
"HE died without understanding his own death," said the narrator in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Chronicle of A Death Foretold* to describe the state of mind of Santiago Nasar, a young man

who remained ignorant of the plot to kill him until minutes before it took place. Everybody dies like Santiago because death sneaks up on us like an assassin leaping from the shadows. Famous people die in the inverse order. Their bodies leave us, their souls endure.

Last week this nation mourned the enduring loss of a famous man in an unprecedented display of their love and respect for him. Younger people dominated the queues of mourners. Older ones poured their emotions into newspaper columns and television talk shows. Not since the funeral of a late president has this nation experienced such an overwhelming crowd of mourners, paying their last respects to someone close to their hearts.

Humayun Ahmed proved in death more than he did when alive, that a man could gain star quality from writing, a vocation that once produced a starving bunch whose tattered clothes and emaciated bodies used to have want and neglect written all over them. Consumption disease and indigence were assured fate of writers as it was that of gamblers to fall on hard times. Many of us grew up with images of poets and writers coughing blood from bouts of tuberculosis. They lived not only on borrowed money, but on borrowed time as well.

Humayun brought the first stellar touch to a rather somber profession so much so that he could give up the more secured life of a university professor to embrace it fulltime. He became the first superstar of the writing industry, a man whose publishers threw advance money and themselves at his feet. He is perhaps the first writer in our history, who wrote in style and comfort with a



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Midas touch for everything he did. I don't know of any other writer in this country, who has a resort-like retreat to do his pleasure as he wished.

It's now being discussed in many living rooms of this country how it was possible. How could a writer get the funeral of a statesman, if not in full panoply of formalities but in the extent of public adoration and media frenzy? Both people and government mourned his loss; people looked like government and government looked like people.

Many would conclude it was just another craze that is peculiar of our national attributes. Others would call it an organised game. But every discussion also included those who believed the man

deserved every bit of what he got. He had reached out and touched millions of hearts through his books, dramas and films.

Nobel Prize winning Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was persecuted by the Soviet authorities. He was sent to Siberia to do hard labour and eventually banished from his country. He summarised his experience when he said: "A great writer is, so to speak, a second government in his country. And for that reason no regime has ever loved great writers, only minor ones."

Humayun was the exception who proved the rule, and this country changed the rule to accommodate this exception. He was not known for taking sides with any particular brand of politics. It has been a rare feat given the divisive nature of our politics that both the government and the opposition chose not to turn his death into a political crisis. They gave him a hearty sendoff worthy of an accomplished son of their country.

Then again, it probably had an element of politics in it because the politicians could gauge the depth of public grief. It's possible that neither side dared to be on the wrong side of it. It showed that when people are united, politicians have no choice but to walk in a straight line. Writers can play a powerful role to empower their people, and inspire them in their turn to strengthen democracy.

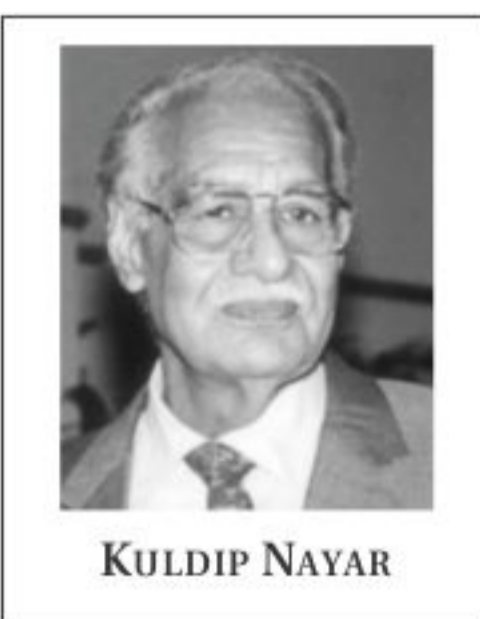
Such writers are seldom at peace with their governments. Fyodor Dostoevsky was sent to exile with hard labour. In the midst of a massive campaign against him by both KGB and the Union of Soviet Writers, Boris Pasternak was forced to decline the Nobel Prize for literature. After he died his admirers carried his open coffin reciting from memory his banned poem "Hamlet." Humayun Ahmed's admirers didn't have to do nothing of that sort. They came to bury their Caesar; they also came to praise him.

Critics often compare Humayun's writing to munchies that are appetising without nutrition value. Even if that's true, the writer has won half the battle. He got people started to think to read. If they don't read to think, that futility is mutual. A writer can be as deep as his readers. The opposite is equally true.

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## BETWEEN THE LINES

# Regional leaders in demand



KULDIP NAYYAR

THE president in India is only a constitutional head. He or she draws authority from the elected parliament and state assemblies. Yet the office became a point of contest because both the Congress and the BJP, the two main political parties, wanted to test the waters

before the 2014 general elections.

The Congress has proved that its support, including that of allies, is intact. Its candidate Pranab Mukherjee, former finance minister, has become India's 13<sup>th</sup> president. The BJP, however, showed chinks in its armour and balloted only half of the polled votes. P.A. Sangma, a northeast tribal leader, was its candidate.

Yet the result of the presidential election should not be the basis of assessment for next parliamentary polls because elections to the Lok Sabha are 22 months away. True, the Congress has lost a lot of ground since the 2009 elections in which it secured 207 seats and formed the government. The party's image has been tarnished by several corrupt deals which have come to light in the last couple of years. The Congress has also been hit by the adverse fall-out of sliding economy and rising living cost.

If the Congress can improve the economy and bring down prices, it might be in the reckoning. Public memory is short and therefore voters can be influenced by the atmosphere obtaining at that time. It might be indeed difficult for the party to repair numerous dents on its machinery. Were the Manmohan Singh government to give a sense of direction and shed indolence which has crept in governance, the Congress would count. The party's advantage is that its rival, the BJP, has not benefited from the Congress loss.

BJP leader L.K. Advani has been frank enough to admit that his party too has not endeared itself with the people. The problem with the BJP has been that it has reacted to the situation created but failed to take the bull by its horns. The party has looked more negative than positive. It has been willing to strike but afraid to wound, probably realising that it is no position to replace the government.

People reeling under the rigorous conditions have wanted relief, not a mere statement after statement to analyse how the nation went wrong without the party offering any concrete proposal for

improvement. The argument that the BJP is not in the government to make the difference is only a lame excuse which does not impress the electorate.

And all the time the party lives in the shadow of the RSS, which speaks too often to emphasise that the power lies with it. By appointing bumbling Niting Gadkari as party chief and then persisting with him for the second term may have satisfied the ego of Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS chief, but it has not gone down well, either with the BJP followers or the party's well wishers. They have, in fact, taken to heart the humiliation heaped over Advani who built the BJP from scratch.

Since both the Congress and the BJP look like the

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parties of yesterday, engrossed in their petty quarrels and pettier politics, they may not improve upon their present strength in the Lok Sabha. The BJP may, however, do slightly better. But even this may not happen if there is any truth in the news that Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, who is always on an ego trip, is the BJP candidate for the post of prime minister in 2014 elections. It is not because of the Muslims' opposition to him, but because India cannot hold its head high in the comity of nations if its prime minister is a person whose hands are soaked with blood. Modi did not have even an iota of sensitivity to say sorry or apologise for his complicity in the killing of Muslims.

With Modi as the prime ministerial candidate, no political party will touch the BJP. With this being the case, the party may well be all by itself in the next parliament, which looks like a hung house. Even the present complexion of the BJP-led front, the National Democratic Alliance, may collapse. Let the BJP be not under any illusion. Modi's candidature is like blowing the bugle of Hindutva which a secular

India cannot accept.

When it comes to the Congress, its leading allies are with it because of the government's handouts. It is not a secret that both Mualayam Singh's UP and Nitish Kumar's Bihar have come around after huge financial packages that the Manmohan Singh government has promised. Worst is the use of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to threaten some chief ministers who were not toeing the line on the presidential election. One specific example is that of Nagaland's chief minister.

Sangma, although after losing, has made certain allegations. The government or the media cannot dismiss them as an expression of frustration after defeat. There should be a judicial inquiry to probe the charges. Sangma has said on record in public that "economic packages have been given in a big way. Why was Bihar given Rs.57,000 crore and Uttar Pradesh Rs.27,000 crore? There were threats. Be it Mayawati, Mulayam Singh Yadav and chief ministers of Nagaland and Sikkim --"there are cases against you, so vote for us."

Even the age-old ally of the Congress, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), led by central minister Sharad Pawar, has been found asking a price. He does not want inquiry into the NCP-held portfolios of irrigation in Maharashtra. In the past decade, the state has spent Rs.42,500 crore on several projects but has failed to increase the area under irrigation by more than even 5%. Moreover, Rs.75,000 crore is required to complete pending projects, which have been languishing for periods ranging from five years to three decades.

The Congress has unabashedly done everything to placate Pawar. It is no surprise to see that the Manmohan Singh government is cajoling other allies to keep the coalition going. The Congress does not realise that it is further losing its stock and enabling the BJP to be more acceptable, although the latter too offered packages and used CBI to keep its flock together when it was in power.

Acts of omission and commission by both Congress and the BJP have made the regional parties larger than their size. They too are increasingly conscious of their importance. The 2014 elections may be fought regionally. Both the Congress and the BJP will have to look for regional leaders in their ranks. Regrettably, the country is short of leaders. This is its tragedy.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 27

**1302** Battle of Bapheus: decisive Ottoman victory over the Byzantines opening up Bithynia for Turkish conquest.

**1942** World War II: Allied forces successfully halt the final Axis advance into Egypt.

**1955** The Allied occupation of Austria stemming from World War II, ends.

**1974** Watergate Scandal: the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee votes 27 to 11 to recommend the first article of impeachment (for obstruction of justice) against President Richard Nixon.

**2012** The opening ceremony for the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, England is scheduled to be held on this day.