

We protest Adilur's remand

Let the names of deceased be given

THE CMM Court's grant of 5-day remand to the police to interrogate Adilur Rahman Khan, Secretary, Odhikar, following his arrest on Saturday night under the Information & Communication Technology (ICT) Act has shocked and outraged us. When alternative options were available to establish the veracity of a report being contested by the government, the way police acted is against democratic norms.

The allegation against him centred around Odhikar publishing a report on June 20, 2013, claiming 61 persons were killed on May 5 crackdown on Hefajat-e Islam at Motijheel. This report was also uploaded on their website.

On July 10 the ministry of information, in a letter to Odhikar, wanted a list of the 61 deceased, along with their addresses and names of their parents. On July 17, Odhikar replied that it will submit such a list only if an independent commission is set up to investigate the incident, as there is no "victim or witness protection law in Bangladesh."

However, we fail to understand whose "protection" would have been jeopardized if names of the deceased were given, not names of those who were the "sources" of information.

As a newspaper we ourselves have reported extensively on the matter and have found no evidence of 61 people dying during the event.

While we cannot agree with Odhikar's position of refusing to give names of the deceased we find the government's action to be questionable. First, they could have obtained judicial guidance as to how to get to Odhikar's sources without jeopardising their security. Secondly, it appears they have used the GD as a cover for police action. Late night swoop on the Odhikar secretary's residence, taking him into custody and subsequently on remand smack of intimidation and arbitrary use of powers.

Underage labour in garments sector Govt. oversight missing

THOUGH the labour law specifically prohibits children under the age of 18 to be used as labourers, a very large number of them are reportedly engaged in the garments sector. With little government oversight, it is not surprising to see children between ages 10 and 18 working long hours. The bulk of these children are brought to the city prior to Eid festivities to toil away at workshops which hold the lure of some fast cash and the promise to learn a new trade.

In the sweatshop-like conditions such 'work' may easily be described as modern day slavery. The argument that employing underage children provides financial gain for impoverished families also does not hold good in the face of little or as in many instances 'no pay' for children who have no say in the terms of their employment.

The sad reality is that there is no monitoring by government agencies as to how many such children are employed. Depriving them of education means that they grow up without an opportunity to enter the formal job sector. It is high time that the ministry of labour gets its act together to enforce the law and stop professing ignorance of a matter that is reaching alarming proportions.

Terror on the India-Pakistan border

RAJINDER PURI

AFTER the latest Pakistan terror attack across the ceasefire line, it is all the more essential for the Indian prime minister to meet Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in New York, as scheduled, in late September.

Manmohan Singh should meet Sharif to deliver his final ultimatum face-to-face. Readers might recall that on August 2, it was stated in these columns that continuing the Indo-Pak dialogue is futile unless there is tangible evidence that Pakistan is prepared to stamp out terrorism from the region.

I wrote: "Settling irritants and furthering people to people contacts as a prelude to attempting peace is meaningless. Such efforts can continue for decades and get periodically derailed whenever vested interests supporting terrorism choose to sabotage progress...The credible intent by Pakistan to eliminate terrorism will not be demonstrated merely by suitable legal action on 26/11...It will be demonstrated only if the Pakistan army...accepts in principle that it will enter into joint defence with the Indian army."

Possibly, New Delhi conveyed something to the Pakistan government through back channel diplomacy. On August 5, Hindustan Times conducted an interview with the Pakistan prime minister's adviser on security and foreign affairs, Sartaj Aziz. He told the newspaper that India and Pakistan will shortly resume talks and New Delhi has not set progress in the 26/11 case as a pre-condition. He said India had conveyed its verbal confirmation on resuming talks by early September.

"India is being responsive and there is no pre-condition that has been put forth on connecting the dialogue process with progress in the Mumbai attack trial," he noted. Did India surrender its pre-condition to attempt a major breakthrough?

One wished Aziz had not conveyed to HT his information and the newspaper had not published the interview. By coincidence or otherwise, the next day, on August 6, there was a terror incident across the ceasefire line, in which Pakistan regulars and terrorists jointly launched an attack killing five Indian soldiers.

Naturally, there was national outrage and demands are flowing thick and fast that the PM should cancel his proposed meeting with Sharif. If there was any movement towards a meaningful dialogue, it has, as earlier feared in these columns, been once again derailed.

That is why Manmohan Singh should meet Sharif and deliver his ultimatum. If the Pakistan PM cannot bring his army on board through a credible public commitment, all peace efforts should end. India then should adopt the hard option.

Through diplomatic moves, New Delhi can hasten the disintegration of Pakistan. It is not necessary to outline how this can be accomplished. Let sceptics rest assured that it can be done.

The writer is a veteran journalist and cartoonist.

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There was none to help him out

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

THE Bangladeshi youth Nafis has nothing in self-defence as he has admitted to having plotted to blow up the Federal Reserve Bank in New York. Had the explosive device he used to carry out the terrorist attack on the US establishment not been a fake, it would be devastating. But nothing like it happened, thanks to the undercover agents who intercepted Nafis' plot at its inception.

The whole circumstances of this boyish looking person's posing as a daredevil terrorist are shrouded in complete mystery. The very fact of his falling into the trap laid by FBI's undercover agents at the very beginning proves his naivety and credulity. The FBI men duped him into thinking that he was really going to do something big. That he wanted to do something very big he confided as early as July 2012 to the FBI informant, who he believed was an al-Qaeda man, a friend helping him to materialise his grand design: "I don't want something that's like, small. I just want something big, something very big. Very very very big, that will shake the whole country."

The way he was so easily taken for a ride by undercover agents gives the lie to his posture as a real terrorist. The reaction of Nafis' parents to the news of his arrest and the charges brought against him was one of disbelief. For they knew their son to be a very timid boy as he would not even dare to go alone to the roof of their three-story house at Jatrabari in Dhaka. And as much as could be gathered about his past days back home, there was no report of his involvement in any kind of terrorist activities in Dhaka. How then could such a timid boy turn into a violent and adventuresome person within months of his entry in the USA? What motivated this credulous, delicate and puerile person to go for something so dangerous?

If one is to believe what he wrote in his letter to the Brooklyn federal court, Judge Carol Bagley Amon, so she might consider his case with leniency, the young man had always been in a trance. He was a loner, a misfit and without many friends. His academic performance was also miserable. Unable to come to terms with this reality, he chose to escape it and take refuge in a world of make-believe.

So he grabbed at anything that looked grandiose, and the preaching of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, who

he knew to be behind the 9/11's Twin Tower blast, might, as reported by the agents involved in the sting operation, have appealed to his fantastic scheme of things. Unsurprisingly, he made friends through Facebook with imagined al-Qaeda men, who he thought would help him to fulfil his foolish scheme.

By his thoughtless act, Quazi Muhammad Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis broke the hearts of his beloved parents and sister and many of his well-wishers. His father invested all his savings in his only son's education. His beloved parents, with whom he never shared the truth that he was performing badly at college or that he was losing his grip on his life, were happy thinking that their child was carrying out his studies well in the USA. But even in their worst nightmares they did not think what their child would ultimately become and finally land in jail in a faraway land. And they may not even live to see him return home after serving his long jail term!

How many more such apparently innocent-looking youths like Nafis have undergone similar transformation for the worse unbeknown to their parents, siblings, close relations, society and even to themselves? Neither are we aware when and how they undergo a violent change, but

always cheating their parents, guardians and teachers with their ingenuous appearance. But it won't also be fair to lay all the blame at these Nafis-like youths' door. In the case of Nafis, his failure

to do well in his studies and get along with his peers forced him to find solace in drugs and in a world of fantasy. And the undercover agents were just waiting there to lead him down the garden path. But these hapless youths need help to come out of the self-spun cocoon they have been weaving around themselves to hide from reality.

Parents like to think that the money they are spending for their education would automatically meet all their child's needs. Teachers think the instructions they provide in the classroom will solve their students' educational needs. But what the parents, teachers and guardians are missing is that these growing boys and girls are often falling out of step with reality which is in a state of constant flux. Parents and teachers cannot afford to be aloof. They should make friends with their teenage children and students, try to share their feelings and watch out for anything going amiss, and know when they are in need of help. Nafis needed this help, but there was none to help him out.

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| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE Syrian war offers bargaining chip in Iran conflict

OMID NOURIPOUR

WITH a new moderate president and increasing focus on the civil war in Syria, Iran is finally in a position to compromise on its nuclear programme. The West should seize the moment and head to the negotiating table.

Everyone seems relieved to see Hassan Rohani as the new Iranian president -- and there are plenty of reasons to be. His election has unleashed an unprecedented boost of energy and optimism among Iranians that has the potential to bring about change in the country -- though probably only in the long run. And there is new hope for a solution to the seemingly never-ending struggle over Iran's nuclear programme. A soft-spoken diplomat compared to his predecessor, Rohani is under immense pressure to get economic sanctions lifted in order to set the fledgling Iranian economy back on track. And there are some signs that even the powerful Ayatollah Khamenei might have his back on this topic.

But just days after Rohani's inauguration celebration in Tehran on August 4, the challenges he'll have to confront have risen to the foreground. If the choice over which foreign head of state to meet first is any indicator of his administration's take on foreign policy, then the scheduled visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin on August 12 should sound some alarm bells in the capitals of the Western world.

Besides the fact that Iran's Islamic dress code might spare us the sight of a half-naked Putin cruising through the beautiful Iranian desert, there is not much else to rejoice about. The visit confirms the growing alliance between Teheran and Moscow that is playing out in Syria. This is very bad news for the prospect of a peaceful resolution of the Syrian civil war. If it becomes a war for regional dominance, then the stakeholders in this struggle have every interest in keeping it going even if the Syrians themselves might be willing to find a compromise.

The fact that even Khamenei, the country's "spiritual leader," seems ready to find a solution to the nuclear issue looks like proof that he now holds a potential Iranian nuclear weapon to be less important than a favourable outcome of the Syrian civil war, which has become a proxy war for domination in the Middle East. Russia has little to lose and a lot to win in Syria. The defeat of Syrian autocrat Bashar Assad would be a major blow to Iran's ambitions in the region. A strengthened partnership with Russia



Keeping in mind the dire outlook in Syria, the stakes in the nuclear talks might have gotten even higher. Solving the issue could be a way of establishing diplomatic ties between Iran and the West that might eventually be able break up the seemingly hardening blocks of the Syrian civil war.

founded on the common struggle in Syria, on the other hand, would give it a potent ally both in regional and world politics. And Rohani does not seem to differ substantially from his predecessor's line on Syria: Unlike many Western governments, Teheran has grasped the importance of the Syrian conflict.

This frightful outlook relegates the nuclear dossier to secondary importance. But this is also reason for renewed optimism. Tehran has realised the political and economic cost a nuclear bomb would carry. It has also recognised its relative uselessness should the United States in turn allow

Iran's staunchest enemy Saudi Arabia to get one, too -- a fairly probable scenario. We should take advantage of this moment and start serious negotiations.

A positive outcome would do away with the looming danger of a catastrophic war with Iran. And it could be a signal to the Iranian public that we, "the West," are not against the Iranian people. We do not impose sanctions just to keep a country and its people down. We want to solve a problem by diplomatic means. This meant sticks (i.e. sanctions), but it must now also mean carrots. After 15 years of playing cat-

and-mouse we must show the Iranian people that if their government chooses to seriously cooperate, they will be rewarded with a lifting of sanctions and the cautious resumption of political, cultural and economic cooperation.

At first glance, resolving the nuclear issue might not hold the same importance today as it did before the Syrian conflict. But keeping in mind the dire outlook in Syria, the stakes in the nuclear talks might have gotten even higher. Solving the issue could be a way of establishing diplomatic ties between Iran and the West that might eventually be able break up the seemingly hardening blocks of the Syrian civil war. It might be a first step in a necessary long-term strategy of offering both the Iranian government and the Iranian people a perspective for a political role in the region outside of a potential Shia-Russian alliance that would bring about the risk of further conflict. It is therefore in our most vital geopolitical interest. This is a fact we have to point out in our effort to win over the political and public opinion not only in Iran and Syria but especially in our own countries.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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AL hijacked city billboards!

I wonder why they did such foolish thing at the end of their tenure. I must say it is a very bad decision which will be harmful for them in the long run. They shouldn't have done so.

A F Rahman
On e-mail

Nada's fight for self-respect

Her name is Nada Al-Ahdal, an 11-year-old Yemeni girl living with her uncle now. Of course, she has a family but she ran away from home driven by her dreams when her mother was about to marry her off with a Saudi expatriate living in Yemen. In an interview, the girl described the whole saga of how she did all these.

There are thousands of underage girls being compelled to get married around the world, especially in the underdeveloped countries. In Bangladesh child marriages are taking place quite often despite the awareness raising campaigns by the government. I think Nada Al-Ahdal represents all the liberal and self-respecting girls of the world.

Samuil Raijul
Bangladesh University of Textiles
Dhaka

Jamaat getting stronger

The strength of Jamaat does not lie in its religious stickier; it is more in their power to hit back with ease at any time anywhere threatening the lives and properties of the ordinary citizens of Bangladesh. Jamaat has acquired such power over the years by getting support from the political mentors at home and abroad. BNP is still mum on the trial of war criminals, as if nothing happened in Bangladesh during the War of Liberation, and, killing of millions of men, women and children is an imaginary thing.

Anami
CA, USA

Comments on news report, "Jamaat makes a farce over 48-hr hartal," published on August 7, 2013

Nds

Why do the democracy lovers raise objection to Jamaat's democratic right to chalk out their plan of observing hartal? Of course raising objection also falls within the democratic right. Democracy is really flourishing in this country. Let us enjoy it.

WD

Breaking buses and burning trains are also democratic rights, I suppose?

Mahboob Hossain

Observing too many hartals cannot be a democratic right. Jamaat is losing its popularity by calling such hartals; instead they could have changed their constitution to regain registration.

S M Iftekhar Ahmed

A farcical shutdown from a farcical, fanatical and delusional organisation that continues to abuse the good name of Islam thanks to the indifference and ignorance of some voters.

Abbasuddin

These are Eid gifts from Jamaat.

Mo

First of all, these people never even wanted a free Bangladesh. Now free Bangalee people have given their judgement and they want to cause us pain yet again. Why don't you people go back to Pakistan and never come back?

S M Iftekhar Ahmed

I don't think that even Pakistan would take these rejects. They are just a scourge on humanity and the good name of Islam.

"Cheers for 'murderers'" (August 6, 2013)

Ash C.

With over a thousand billboards so far forcibly and unlawfully grabbed in Dhaka by the ruling party (at taxpayers' money) to enlighten the people on AL's achievements in last four and half years, AL should also show their achievements in withdrawing 7,177 cases of which many were against murderers, rapists and hardened criminals.

Saleh Tanveer

Looks like the ruling party wants to use the services of the thugs and murderers to go after opponents.

Max

AL is setting a shameless criminal trend. In future other political parties can do the same and set free other criminals. What makes these politically affiliated criminals special and above rule of justice? The whole system is not just corrupt but completely rotten.

SM

I guess AL needs them out to win the election. What a plan by the advisor!

Mahboob Hossain

Let the judges go for strike for too much interference in the judiciary.