

## Violent murders in the city

### Don't term these as stray incidents

WE have been shocked by the two very recent incidents of murder on subsequent days in the capital. One of the victims was a high profile TV personality and well respected religious scholar and Imam of the High Court Mosque. What is frightening is that these killings have occurred in the early part of the evening by forcing into the victims' homes and perpetrating the crimes virtually in the presence of the other inmates.

We must put on record our strong reservation about the failure of the police to find out the killers of most of these murders, and in fact very few, if at all, of the high profile killings, abductions and disappearances in recent times, like that of Sagar-Runi and labour leader Aminul Islam have been solved.

We take issue with the state minister for home that the latest shooting to death of three of a family is a stray incident. The minister should acknowledge the reality that these are clear indications of deteriorating law and order when even ones own house is no longer a safe place for a citizen. It will be well to remember that stray incidents accrete till they assume overwhelming proportions that becomes too difficult to handle.

The current state of law and order will only help sap public trust in the agencies. While we admit that not every bedroom can be guarded by the police, what the taxpayers can at least expect from the police is that the felons would be apprehended and meted out the punishment they deserve. And that would act as effective deterrence.

## Eviction drive in Turag

### Given will, other things will follow

ANOTHER spurt of eviction activity in Turag is proving to be cosmetic , typically a case of morning showing the day.Impelled by a High Court order following a news report titled "Turag close to death" in this newspaper, the three-day drive to free Turag of some encroachments hit a snag on Tuesday,the very first day of its launching.

The first thing to note is that by habitual or deliberate default ,eviction drive is undertaken not to nip an encroachment or illegal construction in the bud but when it has taken place in a structured ,concretised manner,making salvage difficult and, unnecessarily, costly.The BIWTA ,local administrations and local government representatives are best suited to keep tab on encroachment taking place and preventing it.But their efforts will have to be backed up by a strong government will.

That said,we would emphasise the need for well-equipped,fail-safe and sustained eviction drives.Take the on-going operation in Turag.The adequacies have been debilitating:Biwta could not mobilize a pontoon with a long reach excavator and a tug boat or a bulldozer to remove concrete walls, pillars and earth filling within Turag.A serious impediment was faced in the low- height bridges across the river in terms of movement of tugboats,a problem that needs to be addressed from a broader navigability point of view.

We need not emphasise the fact too much that failed records of eviction drives can only proliferate the culture of impunity which is already causing havoc with the rivers.

## Faruqi's death signals...

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

IF murder allegations made by the family members of the slain Sheikh Nurul Islam Faruqi prove to be true then there is a cause for worry. The allegation clearly points finger at those who oppose Faruqi's religious views. And never a crime so gruesome was committed in recent times for possessing different religious views.

Faruqi , an Islamic scholar was renowned for playing the host of an Islamic TV show. Many may have differed with some of his opinions and viewpoints, but which of his opinions or remarks became so intensely repulsive that he had to be killed? This murder mystery must be convincingly solved. Disagreement must never be attuned to be.

Does his murder signal that we are becoming increasingly intolerant about those who oppose our religious opinions? Whatever the answer may be the countrywide showdowns of violent demonstrations by Faruqi's followers and supporters may trigger more violent outcomes, if the killers are not hunted down quickly.

Since Faruqi was a media personality and TV channels continue to air a number of Islamic shows I will attempt to express a close observation. An important source of inter and intra-religious conflict is the binary thinking existing among the many faith groups. And from the various TV channels followed I would say that it's the teaching of the principle of extreme particularism that has divided the viewers of our country. The belief that one's own view possesses all of the truths may have made Faruqi both popular and also unpopular.However, the end result has been recorded in a mounting fear and contempt towards other faith groups.

It's both sad and terrifying to see that differences manifest into violent acts.

Our Islamic shows must express forcefully that Islam teaches and promotes pluralism that different beliefs and practices are equally valid, when interpreted within their own schools of thought.

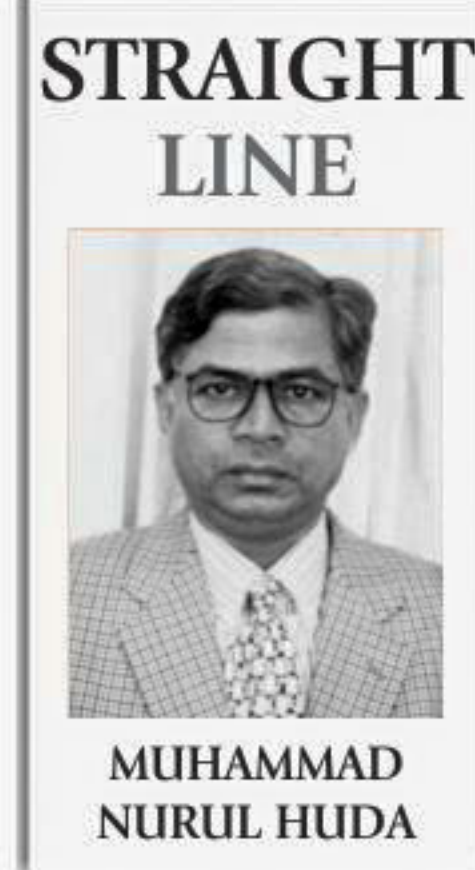
The reported ideological clash between Faruqi's Ahle Sunnat and Hefajat never appeared as blatant as after Faruqi's death.

We call all parties to show tolerance up till the police investigations reveal the actual motive behind the murder. Violence and terror on this count are unwarranted.

His murder marks an ominous signal for various reasons.

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# The August tragedies



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

IN August 1975, the architect of Bangladesh's freedom and most of his family members were violently and shamefully murdered by some disgruntled army officers. The tragic ramifications of that dastardly incident are still being felt by a shocked polity. The trial and conviction of some of the perpetrators of that gory incident have brought some solace and the nation waits for the punishment of the remainder.

However, dismal thoughts would surely occupy the minds of sane Bangladeshis when they venture to think of the deadly destruction and carnage of August 21, 2004. It was on that day the nation witnessed an unprecedented diabolic attempt to wipe out the major leaders of a political party. Our double jeopardy was that a most unfortunate and condemnable criminal incident was followed by a callous and slipshod investigation that only enraged the discerning public.

The criminal case in question has been further investigated and important points need to be clarified. There is allegation of establishment complicity in the gory killing and maiming. Top enforcement officials who have been booked in the case have to prove that they did not have any criminal intention in their alleged failings. The important question, however, is that whether the dastardly offence was politically designed and executed through foot soldiers. We will have to wait for the investigation and conclusion of the trial to find answers to many unresolved queries.

What, however, should cause concern is the deadly contour of our confrontational politics. We may have to admit extreme actions leading to the annihilation of the political adversary, though reprehensible, continues to be a sad reality in our society. The question is, how and why have we reached a stage when criminal elements become sufficiently emboldened to indulge in dastardly attacks in full view of the public?

To recollect, the multiple grenade assault of August 21, 2004 was clearly a manifest attempt to wipe out the entire leadership of the mainstream political party. The damage already caused with its far-reaching ramifications cannot be brushed aside. The double figure deaths and crippling injuries of hundreds should make us wonder if the state organs investigating the incident and the then political authority realised the enormity of the dastardly attack. We may also recollect that the investigation of the above incident was not taken in right earnest that it deserved and the first indication of that was the unpardonable failure to protect and preserve the scene of occurrence. There was allegation that physical evidence was tampered with and destroyed. The field units did not act with desired speed and circumspection. The question is, did this happen because of a so-called instruction from above? The culpability of all concerned, high and low, needs to be established.

Violent incidents that include murder of politicians are outcomes in a society marked by deep polarisation, weak institutions and chronic poverty. The quantity and quality of violence characterising Bangladeshi society at all levels today has an irreducibly political context. Overt and visible violence co-exists with invisible violence that destroys the identity of

human beings. The visible violence, being situational and physical, can be dealt with through law and order solutions. The invisible violence being structural and requiring radical solutions, however, flows into and determines physical violence in a bipolar interaction.

Bangladesh today is witnessing the politics of violence, which means resorting to physical violence to promote a political objective, as well as the violence of politics built into the institutionalised structure of politics. Unfortunately, there has been no serious policy discussion on the phenomenon of violence in Bangladeshi society, though there has been plenty of retail discussion in media. Politics did enter into a situation in which hired thugs who perpetrated violence were assured of protection from prosecution. Very few felt ashamed as politics in our parlance acquired a pejorative connotation by the fact of its manifest association with conflict and violence. The civil society has been undermined by the stimulation of politics based on division and acrimony.

Cynical observers of our social scene are of the distressing view that there is a functional utility of violence for politicians. Such opinions point an accusing finger towards the suspected state complicity in the perpetration of organised acts of violence and the inordinate delays in securing justice for the victims. This delay is alarming as it sends a clear message to potential delinquents that no harm will come to them in the event of repeated performances of criminal activities.

In Bangladesh we need to seriously acknowledge the significance of authoritative approval or condoning of violence because such action is construed as social approval. The so-called political circumstances have often obstructed accountability of the culpable individuals. There is good reason to doubt that considerable number of officials abnegated their responsibility to protect all citizens regardless of their identity.

The disturbing reality in Bangladesh is that with the change of political regime the faces of the criminals and their sources of patronage change. At times the same criminals who had terrorised the community under the patronage of the outgoing ruling party continued their depredations with a renewed mandate from the incumbent ruling party. Quite often, the disconcerting socio-political reality is that the source of deterioration in crime and order situations originated in the continuing patronage of criminals and bullies by the incumbent ruling party. Practically, what the people see is the end result of cumulative process of patronised crime, practiced over successive regimes.

The premonition is that if criminals continue to enjoy immunity from law enforcement over successive administrations then we have a systemic crisis at hand, and a serious one at that. The manifestation of that crisis relates to the allegation of selective law enforcement scenario wherein state functionaries hesitate to enforce the law, suo moto.

The suspicion is that the systemic deficiency is located within the political parties and machinery of law enforcement. The desired corrective actions cannot be unilaterally taken by the ruling party and quite distinctly calls for a bipartisan approach with active involvement of the civil society. Demobilisation of criminal elements by the ruling party demands a reciprocal response from the political opponents. The remedy lies in cleaning our politics through its decriminalisation, backed by the de-politicisation of law enforcement as well as the administration.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

## INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE VICTIMS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

# Darkness in democracy

C R ABRAR

THIS day, 30 August, marks the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. The day is observed not only to remember and seek justice for those who were subjected to enforced disappearance but also to reflect on the conditions that breed such heinous practice. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to raise the issue why those in charge of the State continue to deny the existence of such practice of law enforcement agencies that are under their command and thus abet its perpetuation.

"He wanted to flee when RAB came. I dissuaded him and handed him over (to the law enforcers) believing my son will be proven innocent. Later, when I went to the concerned office, they flatly denied picking him up. My neighbours saw that he was pushed into a van used by the agency. How can I ever live with my conscience that I gave my own son to the killers?" This heart wrenching question was put to the audience at a recent consultation organised by Moulik Odhikar Shurokha Committee by a father of one of the eight youths who were made to disappear on 4 November 2013 from Shahinbagh area of the city. Till this day all remain traceless. None of the eight families has been able to secure any information regarding the whereabouts of their loved ones. This has not been an isolated case.

A single case of enforced disappearance is one too many. When that becomes systemic, one has little option but to deduce that something is grossly wrong in the domain of law enforcement and governance of the State in general.

From the 1970s as the authoritarian regimes began to held sway over some Latin American states several hundred thousands of people were made to disappear by the military and paramilitary forces. Secret imprisonment and forced disappearances were the order of the day. As the countries began to recover and make transition to democracy the incidence of enforced disappearances waned. Such disappearance is also common in countries that experience civil war. Rights groups estimate that as many as 100,000 to 120,000 people have become victims of disappearance in these countries since the strife broke out. Indian rights activists allege their law enforcement agencies are engaged in such practices in Kashmir and in a few north-eastern states.

What was essentially a feature of military dictatorships, enforced disappearance gradually transformed into an endemic phenomenon in 'complex situations of internal conflict'. In recent years the virus has contaminated other countries that pride themselves as democratic. Although these States have the paraphernalia of a democratic polity - parliament, executive, judiciary and periodic elections, and are under civilian rule, in reality they are no less authoritarian than the much detested military dictatorships.

Rule of law and citizens' rights become the first casualty of a system run by an elite that does not distinguish between party and people's interests, that cares little about popular support, and that vests all power on an individual. Devoid of democratic ethos such regimes' continuation depends on the coercive arm of the state, placating and condoning all actions of the law enforcement agencies, however loathsome and illegal those may be. It is in this context one needs to understand the cases of enforced disappearance and extra judicial killings in Bangladesh.

The first Awami League government created the infamous Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini (JRB) that introduced the practice. The first BNP government of Begum Khaleda Zia created JRB's apt successor by initiating the notorious Operation Clean Heart bestowing indemnity, and establishing the Rapid Action Battalion. Not surprisingly, the special force continues to

enjoy unflinching support of the current Awami League government as its human and materiel capacity gets further beefed up. One does not need to reiterate the level of confidence that the special force currently enjoys among the populace.

Incidences of enforced disappearance in recent years increased as the figure of extra judicial killings began to register a decline. Those involved in this act of the extrajudicial killings found it convenient to make such a switch. What began as a quick fix to get rid of criminals and thugs, who allegedly were able secure reprieve due to the loopholes in the system over a period, gave a way to contract killing for errant members of the law enforcers (the 7 murder case of Narayanganj). Following the pattern set in other countries, dissenting voices and political opposition became the next obvious targets. By now enforced disappearance became a handy tool to spread fear in the society. The feeling of insecurity generated is not necessarily restricted to the relatives and friends of the disappeared; it also affects the community and society as a whole.

Enforced disappearance removes the 'disappeared' from the safe zone of the law. The victims are deprived of all their rights and are left at the mercy of their captors. They are denied the benefits of a plethora of rights that include recognition as a person before the law, liberty and security, not to be subjected to torture, degrading and inhumane treatment, right to life, to an identity, to a fair trial and judicial guarantee, to effective remedy, to know the truth regarding circumstances of a disappearance and to protection and assistance of the family.

Enforced disappearance also harms the law enforcement agencies in a major way, endangering national security - purportedly a major concern of the ruling elite. Through subverting the regular criminal justice system, the perpetrators attempt to erase signs of their association with the crime by not recording the detainees in the register, by denying that the victims are in their hands and by disposing off their bodies secretly. Various indemnity measures encourage them not to follow the due process of law. Once an act is committed, instead of exposing the person/s engaged, the concerned agencies are predisposed to deny any wrongdoing and shun any call for investigation. The institution that perpetrators represent develops a psychology that repudiates the rule of law and that of dissent. Their newfound mental mooring makes their return to institutional discipline and standard norms of law enforcement almost impossible. In most cases they are unable to perform their regular law enforcement task with loyalty.

If the government remains unaccountable and oblivious to disappearance and extra-judicial killings it generates cynicism and apathy among the common masses and they begin to lose faith in the law. Law enforcement without responsibility and due process erodes the foundation of a democracy and augurs ill for everyone - rulers and the ruled.

It's time we collectively demand an end to enforced disappearances and extra judicial killings, justice and reparation for the victims, ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and framing of enabling laws to criminalize the acts. We also urge those in the political leadership to take a fresh look at their approach to enforced disappearance and instead of denying, come to terms with the reality and take action against the perpetrators, adhere to the principles of rule of law and positively respond to the demands made above. Needless to say, this day dedicated to the disappeared provides both parties the opportunity to reflect and act.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Control power use

A few days ago, PM's energy adviser stressed the need to conserve power and ensure efficient use of electricity and gas. In my opinion, he should have started working on this critical issue soon after he was made the energy adviser.

About gas, I feel there are two issues that can be considered. The most important thing is to have gas meters for all consumers: domestic, commercial and industrial.

For industries, we should have power factor capacitors installed at the earliest so that both the consumers as well as power suppliers can reduce power consumption. For this important step, I strongly feel that power factor capacitors should be allowed to be imported with minimum duty, not more than five percent on C&F basis. Also loans for opening LCs for its import should be allowed at a very nominal rate. This is justified for the tremendous possibility of reducing power consumption all across Bangladesh. If we press and go ahead for power factor improvement for all electricity consumers, then at least we will save between 500 to 800MWs. So why any delay?

Engr. S. A. Mansoor  
Dhaka

### Imran Khan's threats to Pak govt.

This refers to the report, "Led by Imran, 34 Pak MPs resign" (Aug.23). The Army in Pakistan seems to be playing backdoor games and is supporting the two protesting groups. However, these protests are empty threats, as there is no mass support. Two different protesting groups can never agree and they have not spelt out their agenda for Pakistan's problems. Just asking for resignation of the current Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif has failed to draw mass support. Had Imran Khan's party members resigned from the Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province where the PTI is in power, it would have sounded somewhat convincing. Another reason the threats are empty is that a member of Imran Khan's party has exhorted the public not to pay power and tax bills and he has threatened to cut electricity supply to other provinces of Pakistan from Tarbela dam. The power and tax bills are collected by the Sharif government. If people stop paying taxes, from where will the provincial government of Imran Khan's party get money to pay salaries to its staff?

Deendayal M. Lulla  
On e-mail

### Security system in DMCH

We are relieved to know that the newborn baby, stolen from DMCH a few days ago, has been rescued by Rab on August 28. DMCH authorities should improve its security system so that no



The rescued baby in its mother's lap.

more babies get stolen from the hospital. It is very true that the director of the DMCH is a high ranking military officer and he knows the security plan better, yet I suggest that DMCH authorities place guards at every important entry points/wards where a visitor will have to write his name, mobile number, and the time of his entry and exit.

Shafiq  
Barisal

### Comments on news report, "UNO, AC Land seek transfer in face of UP chairman's threat" (August 25, 2014)

Molla A. Latif

The UNO and the A/C land should not be transferred. They must either take legal action against the chairman and his cronies or leave their job. Applying for transfer and flashing it in the press do not prove their eligibility, rather demonstrates their incapacity and cowardice.

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### "Govt to export 50,000 MT rice to Sri Lanka" (August 26, 2014)

Nazmul Hassan

Very good news. Bangladesh can also export to Middle East including Saudi Arabia. There exists good demand for rice where India and Pakistan are the major exporters.

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### "Key part made in Bangladesh" (August 25, 2014)

Saidur Rahaman

Excellent news. It proves that we can.