

# Our Blunted Senses Must Arise

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A photograph splashed on the front page of The Daily Star<sup>8</sup> February under 'Shocking shooting' has poignantly exposed the insensitivity that is sadly manifest in some members of the media in their eagerness to collect information. The photo shows a person with severe burn injuries on his hands and face, and in obvious pain, discomfort and distress, posing hands-raised for a photographer, who is well inside the high dependency unit in his street clothes, his bag dangling from his shoulder, having apparently no visible concern about the health or welfare of his 'model' and other patients. For heaven's sake! The victims of the ongoing highway murders, if not anything, deserve total privacy.

What the DS report did not mention was that there was another camera on its stand in the distance in the same ward, giving credence to our belief that the photographer was not alone in breaching patient privacy, clinical hygiene, and hospital discipline.

What would have happened if the photographer and his colleagues were not allowed inside the sensitive ward with camera, flashgun and stand? This 'unthinkable' incident has not happened in Bangladesh, more so after the rise in popularity of the 'right to information', and therefore the answer to that query is wholly conjectural.

If someone, a doctor, nurse, patient or attendant, dared to stop them from entering the ward and taking pictures, they would not succeed with all of them. Chances are some of them would force themselves in with the plea and license that 'people have a right to know'. A news would be made that journalists have been barred from covering an event. But, not all

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events can be or should be photographed, violation of which conduct results in photos of dead bodies, children included, being published in newspapers and magazines, or televised.

Such behaviour by some media people is common at any inaugural ceremony, concert, political meeting, musical soiree, dance rendition, seminar... the photo-journalists will crowd the front of the stage and thereby deny the attending live audience from viewing the proceedings or the performance. Excuse me! The people who are present at an event have the most right to know what is happening on stage behind the group of photographers. In some cases, the audience have paid for the

performance, not to see anybody's back.

Yes, there are newspapers and TV channels which blur the face and identity of a dead person or someone who needs to be given the privacy, and respect restrictions. We have only come that far, but we need to go a lot further. And this discretion should be practised by journalists and public alike. If I would not like to be photographed in a certain situation, I should not subject someone else to that ordeal, most so because I am a reporter, the conscience of the society.

As it is, the nation is reeling under weeks of heinous and senseless attack by petrol/fire bombers, call them serial killers. Because everyone (hopefully) knows it is wrong, there are obviously politics-coated denials all round, but the odour of burning human flesh and the air made heavy with the wailing of the aggrieved is coincidental with the hartal and blockade. At such an unusual and worrying time, we all

need to be extra careful about what we do, and say, and even think.

The sane may wonder, does not the bomb hurler or planter think even for a moment that the child playing on the lap of its mother inside the about-to-be-attacked bus will be dead in the next few seconds? That the college student talking on her mobile will be blown to pieces? That the father will not be able to return to his son? Does not the hand of the bomber shake, or vibrate? Nay! Demon(n)cracy to them is all-important.

A great sacrifice indeed is being made now by the supporters of the opposition out of parliament, those among them who own factories and business, whose children are unable to sit for board exams (except O's and A's, hah!), whose other children cannot go to

schools shut, cars are comfortably stowed away in garages and parking lots. Fear of the innocent is favouring the terrorists.

The danger however lurks on the inter-district communication line, where buses, trucks, covered vans, trains to some extent, and even water vessels have come under ruthless attacks. Continuous monitoring of long routes is not possible, and there lies the scope of the blockade-backers. Vehicles have been advised not to ply after 9pm for safety of the people. Ansars have been posted along some highways. In some areas, locals have apprehended the bombers, beaten them up, and handed them to police. People are vigilant for their own safety. And, yet cowardly assaults on the innocent public continues unabated. In the midst of this violent situation,



PHOTO: COURTESY

school; they too are suffering the economic glitch, given in the press that the loss to the nation has run into billions. But, they are towing the line of violence and keeping mum because they expect to be rewarded if and when their alliance will again form the government. Will the indiscriminate bombing stop then? The killing? The odour? The wailing? Are we not setting a dangerous precedence?

In the face of continued hartal it can be said that the monotonous call of 'shut-down' is increasingly falling on deaf ears of shop and bazaar owners, and footpath vendors. Their business in most towns and cities is almost as usual. They are open. The number of vehicles on the road is also increasing by the day. We are even getting traffic jams. But, then are private car owners who will not risk the adventure. And with

albeit infrequent and patchy, desperate people are trying to move from one place to another.

Let us pray, as we are doing, that civic sense dawns on the masterminds (of these acts of terror), who are safely tucked away in the comfort of their homes or otherwise. Let us pray that the bombers (makers and hurlers) realise that in the end they are killing their own people, their kith and kin; that their bosses are (and will be) safe and sound, and will most likely benefit wholly with a handful of others from this dirty episode. The hands of the used and abused will not be full. The sooner this realisation dawns on all parties participating politically or for money in this shameless hostility, it is that much sooner that the mercenary killings are likely to stop. But, it must.