



FORGET THE SCOOP

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If we had just read about the victims or heard it on the news without any visual image of their suffering would we be as shocked and outraged as we are now? Would we be as vehement in our demand that this carnage be stopped immediately? Perhaps not. The pictures of the victims of arson attacks during the latest spate of political violence are essential for the society to wake up and realise how far the madness has gone. Nobody can deny the importance of images and video footage of the aftermath of senseless violence in sensitising the public and the powers to be. But how far should a journalist go to give the real picture to the audience?

There is endless debate on whether in a situation where a crime is being committed, a photographer or camera person will shoot the crime or try to save the victim. It is a hard choice to make and of course the first instinct as a fellow human being should be to try to help the victim. But in many cases it is not possible to stop the crime, in some cases the photographer's life may be in danger and so the person behind the camera makes that cold but necessary decision: to shoot the incident. Which is why we know about the atrocities carried out during wars and violent political movements.

But when it comes to victims who are being treated at a hospital or trying to cope with the physical and mental anguish of vicious crimes the modus operandi should be very clear. The victims' welfare must come first. These people who are in excruciating pain and whose condition is so critical that any kind of exposure will threaten their survival further, must not be subject to the trauma of being interviewed or photographed by insensitive journalists.

Despite repeated requests from the burn unit officials of Dhaka Medical College to get permission from them before interviewing or photographing the patients, the wards where patients are struggling for their lives, are being bombarded by visits from media people. The recent photo of a photographer making a severely injured burn patient pose for the camera is an

example of how oftentimes the need for the 'perfect shot' overpowers the need for restraint and sensitivity.

And it wasn't just this particular photographer who should be chided for being insensitive. All those other photographers and camera persons who were crowding around the ward at that time and at other times, exposing the patients to possible infection, should not have been there either.

A few days ago there was a report and picture of some individuals, claiming to be from a TV channel, coming into a ward and making a child patient sit up on his bed while a woman – playing the role of a journalist (!) talked to him. She was asked to put glycerine in her eyes to induce tears, no doubt for a great emotional scene. The incident is shrouded in mystery as no one really knew what these people were shooting this scene for – a music video or TV drama. The audacity and ease with which this was carried out shows how thick the level of insensitivity is among certain people in the media.

Yes the public needs to know what is going on, how these victims are faring and just how reprehensible these crimes are. Yes we need to know so that we wake up and do something about it. But not at the cost of causing more discomfort and pain to the victims and definitely not because a particular 'shot' will provide a scoop or make a photograph look more artistic.

Whether they are telling the story with words, letters or images, journalists must remember that before they bring that 'human angle' that will appeal to the audience, it is more important to be humane as individuals.