

Into a nightmare marriage

20-year-old girl maimed by husband, in-laws for dowry, loses eyesight

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

She dreamt of starting a new life when her family married her off. But for the 20-year-old girl, the marriage soon turned into a nightmare.

Only around four months into the marriage, Ishat Jahan Popy is left maimed allegedly by her husband and in-laws.

She lost her eyesight and the ability to speak as her husband Shahidul Islam, a seasonal construction worker, and in-laws tortured her for dowry, alleged her father Waliullah, a labour supervisor at Mominpur village in Patuakhali.

Shahidul, son of a farmer at Chandrapara village of Madanpura union, took gold ornaments weighing two tolas, Tk 1 lakh and furniture as dowry for marrying Popy on October 10 last year.

Just a few days later, Shahidul put pressure on Popy to get Tk 1 lakh from her father.

When she told him that her family was unable to meet his demand, he started torturing her physically and

psychologically, Waliullah told this correspondent.

"On November 16 night, Shahidul and his family members beat Popy mercilessly with sticks, gagging her with a piece of cloth," said the victim's father.

Learning about the abuse of his daughter, Waliullah, his wife Salma Yasmin and some of their relatives went to Shahidul's house the following day to see Popy. But they were not allowed to meet her.

"We were told that Shahidul had sent Popy to one of his relatives' house at Khajurbaria village of Baufal upazila," said the girl's father.

On November 19, he managed to rescue his daughter with the help of locals and relatives, and brought her to the capital for treatment.

He filed a case with the Baufal Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act two months ago, accusing Shahidul and his brother-in-law Atahar Chowkider of torturing his daughter.

But police are yet to arrest any of the accused.

Assistant Sub-Inspector of the police station Md Murad, also investigating officer of the case, said they were trying to arrest the accused.

Waliullah alleged Shahidul and his relatives had threatened him with dire consequences unless he withdrew the case.

The Daily Star repeatedly tried to contact Shahidul over the phone, but his cell phone was switched off. This correspondent recently went to his house at Chandrapara village but found it locked from outside.

Popy's father said he had already taken her to several hospitals, including Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Medical University and Islamia Hospital, but she was yet to regain her eyesight or the ability to speak.

Doctors told him that she had complications that might have caused by head injuries she had suffered at the hands of her husband and in-laws.

The poor man, who has already footed medical bills of around Tk 4 lakh, doesn't have the financial ability to continue his daughter's treatment.



The Biya Bhaban, left, in Halishahar in Chittagong, where law enforcers conducted a drive and recovered a large number of bombs and a huge amount of bomb-making materials, top, at a flat. The law enforcers also arrested four people in this connection.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

We are all Mukto-Mona

FROM PAGE 1

stand for, everything that our education teaches us, everything that modern-day culture stands for. Everything that Islam's all-embracing humanity and tolerance teach us.

In our special case, such murders are against everything that every freedom fighter dreamt of, fought and laid down their lives for and what our independence struggle collectively represents. Such murders are against our "Mind", against flowering of our human potential, our intrinsic capacity to love, innovate, invent. Against that innate human quality called creativity.

Avijit's has been one such murder and every one of us, as ONE, must condemn it, rise against it and build up the strongest, the widest and the deepest resistance against it.

He was a scholar, a writer and an intellectual. He was a freethinker and debated with others about the fundamental philosophic, social and existential questions facing humanity and us as Bangladeshis. He did not believe in religious dogmas and argued against dogmas everywhere and in everything. From his blogs, it is very clear that his was a philosophical position in which he argued against all sorts of prejudice, hatred, stigmatisation and compartmentalisation of the human spirit including those that stem from religious extremism.

From the exchanges in his blogs, it is clear that his intention was always to intellectually engage and persuade. His was the highest pursuit of the human mind and spirit.

So when such a person is killed, our nation as a whole, committed as we are to freedom of thought and expression, must see it as a threat to both our nation and to our own personal freedoms.

There are two issues here, the first, that of safeguarding our constitution that guarantees our freedom of thought and expression, and the second, preventing deliberate attempts to distort the teaching of the Holy Quran and the teachings of our Prophet (PBUH) in order to justify murders and killings which has nothing to do with Islam. Avijit's murder proves, if

proof was at all necessary, that these people are averse to any discussion on religion even if conducted purely at an intellectual level.

The peace and tolerance that is the core value of Islam is being completely distorted by the extremists that the true believers of Islam must do everything to expose and fight. Resistance to this trend must also come from our religious leaders, just as it must come from everyone of us.

This paper and this writer have consistently supported this government's stand against extremism in Bangladesh. We believe that the government led by Sheikh Hasina has been steadfast and most determined in taking a firm stand against extremism.

At the policy level and in terms of public standing, the government's role has been clear and unambiguous. However, in terms of implementing its policy by catching and then punishing the culprits, the record is disturbingly poor. This has given birth to a sense of impunity for which the authorities have to bear criticism.

The death threats against bloggers started mainly from the time of the 2013 Gonogajoron Mancha. The murder of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider during the protest was the first such case. Asif Mohiuddin was another blogger who was stabbed. He fortunately survived. While in the case of Rajib, seven accused are about to be charge-sheeted, none has so far been arrested in Asif Mohiuddin's case.

Two unidentified men came from behind and hacked Avijit to death and seriously injured his wife Bonya. Both naturalised citizens of the US, they had come to Dhaka on the 16th February to launch three of his latest books in the Boi Mela. He was to return on the 4th of March.

We find police statements to be highly inadequate and the overall efficiency of the force a matter of grave concern.

For obvious reasons, security during the just ended Boi Mela was far more intense than before. There was police presence almost everywhere. As it is now established, police were nearby and in fact witnessed the incident, initially taking it to be some sort of a

scuffle. Even if police were taken by surprise at first, its response was highly inadequate signalling a lethargic attitude that marks all emergency responses of our police. If not to assist the victims, the police should have definitely done a better job in pursuing the fleeing assassins. Why they failed on that score is a very serious question that leaders of our police force must investigate in all seriousness.

It is our earnest belief that culprits will be caught and justice will be meted out to them. But far more important is to fight the intolerance against 'free thinking', against 'debates' and against all sorts of religious discourses that seem to underlie the viewpoint of Avijit's killers. The tweets in support of the killing show, however small, that there is a group within Bangladesh who seems to have adopted the thinking of global extremist groups and who thinks nothing of murdering people they identify to be of other views.

This is our real battle, and one in which we must fight together. There cannot be any relenting in isolating and destroying these groups. But simultaneous to the direct physical confrontation, we must also fight them ideologically. It is our view that through direct contact with people and through a very comprehensive and well thought-out door-to-door campaign we must convince those ordinary people who may have fallen prey to the extremists' call that they are misinterpreting the message of Islam and that of our Holy Prophet (PBUH). There is no denying the fact that the extremists have made some inroads among a section of our youth, especially the educated ones. These young men and women have access to the internet and can directly link with the global networks of extremism. Obviously, we can and must be monitoring them. How effectively, continuously and comprehensively such monitoring can be done is only known to the authorities. But in addition to that we strongly urge the above suggested comprehensive grassroots level campaign against the evils of extremism.

So far there has been no such effort to the best of our knowledge.

Scary recovery

FROM PAGE 1

Just 100g of PETN is powerful enough to blow up a car, according to a 2009 report of the British daily The Guardian.

Four people, including a woman, were arrested at the house. They are Md Fayzul Haque, 30, Jahedul Alam Jahed, 30, and Rahima Akhter, 21 -- all hailing from Pekua of Cox's Bazar; and Md Abdul Hai, 36, from Morelganj of Bagerhat.

The elite force personnel also recovered a number of books and documents on jihad and a copy of the constitution of Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student front of Jamaat-e-Islami which is a key member of the BNP-led 20-party alliance.

The combine since January 6 has been enforcing an indefinite country-

wide blockade and intermittent harts, marked by widespread firebomb attacks and violence that have claimed at least 80 lives so far.

Yesterday's drive was a sequel to a February 21 raid in which the Rab busted a militant training camp camouflaged as a poultry and livestock farm in Chittagong's Banskhal, arrested five people and seized some firearms, including AK-47 assault rifles, and training equipment.

Based on information from those arrestees, the Rab conducted the drive on the five-storey building yesterday.

During the raid, the elite force also seized a huge number of batteries, light bulbs, masks and gloves from the flat on the ground floor.

Besides, 97 pairs of training shoes and as many jungle boots, nylon belts and combat boot socks were also found there, leading the law enforcers to believe these would be used for training militants for carrying out "an awful attack" in the country.

Rab chief Benazir did not disclose what militant outfit the arrestees belong to "for the sake of investigations", and said they were working to track down the entire network.

The elite force will also look into whether the militants had any domestic or foreign support, he added.

Meanwhile, residents of the building said the arrestees had rented the flat only a month ago and they had no idea what the flat residents did.

UN, US shocked

FROM PAGE 1

US Department of State Spokesperson Jen Psaki in a statement issued on Friday.

"We, of course, will provide consular assistance as is appropriate. We also stand ready to assist in the investigation, if asked," Psaki added.

The spokesperson said this in response to a question if the US administration could at any point ascribe any kind of motive to this and if there was anything more to the murder.

Avijit's killing on Thursday night in the TSC area of Dhaka University triggered strong condemnations from his fellow writers and publishers at home and abroad.

He was the founder of Mukto-Mona (Free-mind) blog site.

Different political, social and cultural organisations including the ruling Awami League and BNP strongly condemned the heinous killing and demanded bringing the perpetrators to the book.

Talking on this issue, UN Spokesman for the Secretary-General, Stéphane Dujarric has said their colleagues in the human rights body condemned the killing.

"On the attack on the blogger, we

spoke to our human rights colleagues who obviously condemned the attack," Dujarric said while responding to a question at the regular briefing in the UN headquarters early yesterday.

He said they had observed that it was obviously very important that the space for freedom of expression in the civil society should be upheld in Bangladesh.

In a statement issued on Friday, the CJP also condemned the killing and called on the authorities to investigate thoroughly the murder of the blogger and ensure justice.

"We call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government to leave no stone unturned in investigating and prosecuting the attack on Avijit Roy and Rafida Ahmed Bonya," said CPJ Asia Programme Coordinator Bob Dietz from New York in a statement.

"This attack is emblematic of the culture of impunity that pervades Bangladesh, where the lack of accountability in previous attacks on the press continues to spurn a deadly cycle of violence," he said, adding that the bloggers and commentators covering religious issues in Bangladesh had been at risk in recent years, according to CPJ research.

Referring news reports published in Bangladesh, the statement also said Islamist groups in 2013 called for execution of bloggers for what they said was committing blasphemy.

Mentioning the killing of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider in February 2013 and the attack on blogger Asif Mohiuddin, the CPJ added that no-one had been convicted or held responsible.

Avijit, a naturalised US citizen of Bangladeshi origin, had covered secular issues including science, homosexuality, atheism, and free expression on his blog and had published several books on those issues.

He had reported receiving death threats from Islamists to his friends and family and to the UK-based rights organisation the International Humanist and Ethical Union, the statement added.

Avijit and Bonya who were visiting Bangladesh came under attack on Thursday evening by two unidentified men while leaving the book fair in Dhaka. They were taken to a local hospital where Avijit was pronounced dead and Bonya was critically wounded.



A car and a microbus of Desh TV burns at Mouchak in the capital yesterday evening after criminals hurled a petrol bomb at the vehicles.

PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

Yemen separatists pull out of UN-backed talks

AFP, Aden

Separatists from southern Yemen suspended their participation in UN-sponsored talks on the future of the crisis-hit country as nine soldiers were wounded Saturday in a clash with secessionist fighters.

The violence coincided with a drone strike that killed three suspected Al-Qaeda militants in southern Yemen, tribal sources said.

An official in the southern province of Lahij told AFP that separatists opened fire on an army convoy and three soldiers were wounded in a gunbattle.

The separatists last week abducted 12 soldiers and threatened to kill them unless the army handed over a military base to offset the growing influence of the Shiite Huthi militia that has seized Sanaa.

Tensions in Yemen have soared since the Huthis overran the presidential palace in the capital in February and placed Western-backed President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, a southerner, under house arrest.

Hadi escaped last week to Aden, where he has been reconsolidating his grip on power buoyed by support from Gulf states which have relocated their embassies to the southern city.

Several countries, including Britain and the United States, closed their embassies in Sanaa over security fears following the Huthi takeover.

Yemen has never managed to achieve stability since longtime president Ali Abdullah Saleh stepped down in early 2012 after a bloody year-long popular uprising.

Hadi's escape to Aden has turned what was the capital of an independent south Yemen before unification in 1990 into a diplomatic hub.

Kuwait became the latest Gulf nation to reopen its Yemeni embassy in Aden, instead of the militia-controlled capital, following similar moves by Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

Aden was the capital of an independent south Yemen before unification in 1990.

The Southern Movement, which seeks the secession of the regions of the formerly independent south, announced overnight Friday that it was pulling out of UN-brokered talks.

UN envoy Jamal Benomar has been shuttling between Yemeni parties to secure an end to the country's political deadlock and to persuade them to return to the negotiating table in Sanaa.