

School boy abducted, murdered

Suspected juvenile crime needs deeper probe

THE news of a child being abducted, missing without a trace amid hair-splitting agony of the victim's parents and then finally surfacing as a dead body leaves one chilled to the bone. It makes you jarringly aware of the booby-traps laid round the corner for your unsuspecting child to stray into.

The latest incident centred on 15-year-old Sakib Hassan, a student of class IX in Ullapara upazila of Sirajganj district. He had gone out with friends and school mates to celebrate Pahela Baishakh on Tuesday and his strangulated mortal remains were recovered from Bangabandhu Safari park in Gazipur on Friday. Based on the statements of the victim's so-called friends (in police custody), the police tracked down the dead boy in Gazipur park, quite some distance away from the child's village home indicating a well-plotted conspiracy for demanding ransom, and failing which, finishing off the captive. Usually, ransom or no ransom, the kidnapped risks being murdered by the criminals who are constantly in fear of being identified and caught.

Mostafa Kamal, the father of the victim told the police that the perpetrator had demanded TK15 lakh in ransom money. Police are probing what part the child's friends had in the abduction and the killing and more precisely who had masterminded the dastardly crime. We can only suspect that interested parties may try to pass it off as juvenile crime. Even if it were so, how grave the offense is and what an eye-opener this is to a dreadful dimension to social crimes.

Hilsa stocks dwindling dangerously

Stop manufacture of gill nets

THOUGH the government amended the Protection and Conservation of Fish Act (1950) in the year 2002 to ban the manufacture and marketing of gill nets in the country, legal battles have ensued that continue to this day. This has impeded the authorities' ability to combat the rampant use of these nets all over the country to catch Hilsa fry. The practice is seriously impeding the natural repopulation of the most prized of fishes in Bangalee culture, the Hilsa. And it is not just the Hilsa that is facing impending doom, the gill net makes no distinction on other fish or aquatic mammals such as the dolphin and turtles, which too, get caught and die.

With the law the enforcement taking a backseat, factories producing gill nets has boomed in the district of Munshiganj. Investigative journalism by this paper informs us that there are some 500 factories in the district dedicated to the production of the net. That explains why the net commonly known as 'current jaal' is now used by fisher communities in every part of the country. While the department of fisheries conducts raids that apprehend fisherman and slap fines and prison sentences on them, these measures merely touch the tip of the iceberg. Until authorities figure out a way to implement the amended law to ban the manufacture of gill nets, the prized Hilsa spawn will continue to be caught and future stocks of the fish cannot be guaranteed.

Post-Rana Plaza initiatives and sustainability of the RMG sector



FAHMIDA KHATUN

MACRO MIRROR
THE tragedy that took place on April 24, 2013 in a suburb of Bangladesh, a few miles away from the capital, became a global tragedy. Though unsafe working condition is a problem in several low income and developing countries, the Rana Plaza disaster received worldwide coverage not only because of the enormity of the casualty, but also due to its global linkages. Rana Plaza, where five readymade garments factories were housed which supplied clothes to many brands and retailers in Europe and North America, drew global attention as interests of both domestic and international stakeholders were stitched in the same thread. The factory owners, the government, buyers, workers and consumers – they are all part of the value chain of this industry and have a claim on it.

Two years on, the RMG industry has experienced several positive changes, though ironically, at the cost of more than 1100 lives and about 2400 wounded souls and bodies. Following the incident, the labour law of the country has been amended and the right to form trade unions in the factory has been approved. The minimum wage of workers was raised to Tk. 5,300 in November 2013 from Tk. 3,000 set in 2010 in an attempt to make it comparable to other competing countries and to allow a decent life to workers.

The National Tripartite Plan of Action on Fire, Electrical Safety and Physical Integrity (NAP) in the readymade garment sector of Bangladesh has been set up by the government and facilitated by International Labour Organisation to undertake safety related activities. Other initiatives such as Alliance

by buyers and retailers of North American countries and the Bangladesh Accord comprising several global brands and retailers of the European Union markets have also been working on fire and building and workers' safety.

More specifically, Alliance has been undertaking inspection in all 700 factories from where its members buy their garments while the Accord has been inspecting all 1619 factories from where EU buyers source their clothes. NAP is also conducting inspection of about 1300 factories. In all cases, the number of risky and vulnerable factories has so far been small. On the other hand, BGMEA has also been doing its part by arranging training programmes on worker-management relations and labour laws for both factory management and workers.

These initiatives involve expenditures, but they are in fact the benefits in medium and long terms as they will contribute to improve the sector and make it sustainable. Such investments were necessary for the industry to maintain its growth. These are investments for future that will yield returns through higher exports, employment and growth. As Bangladesh eyes at earning \$50 billion through RMG exports by 2021, the sector needs to upgrade itself by undertaking such reforms.

The cost of the Rana Plaza tragedy is, however, insurmountable. The lives that were lost, the wounded workers who are unable to work, the families which have to spend on medication of the injured and the children who are deprived of education – all these involve high cost. No amount of money can really compensate for such losses. As economists we try to quantify everything and express them in monetary terms. We also estimate the value of life – of course purely in statistical sense. However, emotions, feelings, pain, discomfort, mental agony and the like cannot be measured. If the statistical value of lives of

the Rana Plaza victims are calculated the numbers will be humongous and beyond our imagination.

Therefore, funds to cover loss of income and medical expenses from various sources are only a small fraction of the actual amount of losses. ILO has come up with a compensation figure of \$30 million and initiated Rana Plaza Donors Trust Fund. Clearly, this is an underestimation. Of course, it is commendable that

outcomes. How long will Accord, Alliance and others continue to work on buildings and workers' safety? Are the government agencies ready to take responsibility for such disasters in future? Will the spirit of the industry leaders continue to be upheld in the same manner in the coming days? What will be the commitment of global brands toward ethical buying? Can the workers take the opportunity to organise themselves and articulate their



STAR FILE PHOTO

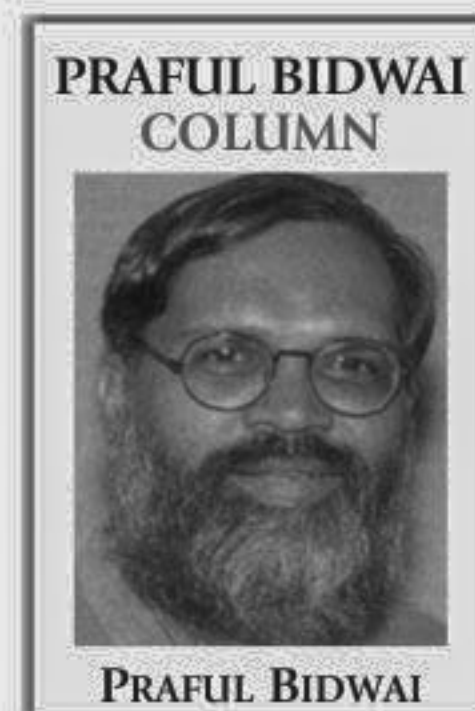
resources for compensating the victims have been committed from various sources including the government, RMG manufacturers, buyers and donors. However, international brands have not provided adequate fund to fill up the pot of the Donors Trust Fund.

While the initiatives during the aftermath of Rana Plaza have been promising, it is time to think about the sustainability of these programmes and their

demands through better negotiation skills both at home and globally? And finally and most importantly, will these initiatives make any substantive positive change in the lives of workers? These are some pertinent questions that need to be addressed on the eve of the second anniversary of the gruesome Rana Plaza incident.

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CLAIMING AMBEDKAR, TRASHING THE CONSTITUTION Parivar's crass hypocrisy



PRAFUL BIDWAI

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN
WHEN it comes to hypocrisy, it's hard to beat India's Hindutva-driven Sangh Parivar. It strenuously claimed the legacy of Dr BR Ambedkar, a principal author of India's secular Constitution, and a Dalit, on his 124th birth anniversary. Its motive lies in the coming Bihar election, where a Dalit (former Chief Minister Manzhi) has emerged as the BJP's potential ally against Laloo Prasad and Nitish Kumar.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is usurping Ambedkar by likening him to its own founder KB Hedgewar, a brazenly obscurantist casteist opposed to Ambedkar's values of equality!

The RSS has added a further communal twist to this by complaining that India's highest honour, the Bharat Ratna, was conferred on Ambedkar 10 years after it was given to Mother Teresa, its bête noire.

The Indian government had no choice but to honour Teresa after the Nobel Prize was awarded to her. Honouring Ambedkar was delayed because there was stiff resistance to doing so from the Parivar itself! Strangely, the BJP-RSS made no fuss when the award was bestowed on its real icon, Vallabhbhai Patel, even later than on Ambedkar!

The Parivar's ideology and politics

remains the opposite of Ambedkar's. He had contempt for Hindutva, with its narrow faith-based definition of nationhood, as opposed to citizenship cutting across ethnic-religious identities. He repeatedly said "Hindu Raj" would be India's "greatest calamity".

Ambedkar regarded scripturally sanctioned and actually practised Hinduism as inseparable from casteism, and incapable of reform within Gandhi's framework, which patronisingly yet piously saw Dalits as Harijans (God's children).

Ambedkar burned the Manu Smriti. He converted to Buddhism after declaring: "I was born a Hindu, I had no choice. But I will not die a Hindu because I do have a choice."

Ambedkar wanted a separate electorate for Dalits, but was blackmailed by Gandhi into dropping the demand. The separate electorate remains a sacrilege for the Parivar, which champions mythical "Hindu unity".

These Hindu-supremacists reject separation of religion from politics, which was pivotal to Ambedkar. Hence their dangerously misleading "pseudo-secularism" slogan!

Anti-secular majoritarianism now manifests itself virulently: banning the slaughter of bulls, old buffaloes and cows (Maharashtra); attacks on churches (Delhi, West Bengal and now Uttar Pradesh); and hounding Muslims out of "Hindu" areas through intimidation (as in Bhavnagar in Gujarat).

Hate speech is becoming "the new normal". BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj makes hysterical statements about Muslims having "40

children from four wives". Even worse, Sanjay Raut, editor of the Shiv Sena's "Saamna", demands that Muslims be deprived of the vote altogether.

This is a flagrant attack on constitutionally guaranteed universal franchise. Raut is an MP. It's simply not open to him to make obnoxious anti-Constitutional statements. He must be punished.

India has been far too indulgent towards important functionaries' communal excesses. It took the Election Commission 13 years to declare Bal Thackeray guilty of seeking votes in the name of religion during a 1986 election—and bar him from contesting or voting for six years.

During the last Lok Sabha election, Narendra Modi repeatedly invoked Lord Ram in his campaign speech at Faizabad. A model of the BJP-proposed Ram Mandir formed the backdrop. Former chief election commissioner SY Qureshi, no less, asked why the Election Commission had not initiated action against the organisers.

Chronic inaction has created a culture of impunity for anti-minority atrocities. That's the message from the just-delivered Hashimpura verdict - on the gruesome killing of 42 Muslims in 1987 in Uttar Pradesh by the Provincial Armed Constabulary personnel.

The state took nine years to file a chargesheet. The accused were never arrested despite 23 non-bailable warrants. They were all acquitted. As Outlook magazine (April 6) has revealed, the massacre was an act of revenge by an army officer whose brother, an RSS member, was killed in a communal clash. The govern-

ment knew all this, but did nothing.

A day after Hashimpura, the PAC joined a mob in killing 72 Muslims in Maliana next door. This trial hasn't even crossed the first stage—despite 800 dates. Only three of 35 prosecution witnesses were examined in 28 years.

These terrible failures of the justice delivery system have encouraged uniformed personnel to brutalise citizens - e.g. at Pathribal in Kashmir in 2000, where the army killed five innocent civilians falsely charged with the anti-Sikh Chittisinghpura massacre. The culprits were let off by an army court-of-inquiry.

The latest episode in Nalgonda (Telangana), in which five Muslim undertrials were killed, falls in the same category. The state won't bring the culprits to book unless public-spirited citizens and political parties intervene.

The greatest beneficiaries of such justice-delivery failures are the forces of Right-wing bigotry and violence. Self-styled "Chhatrapati" Bal Thackeray wasn't able to put the Shiv Sena in power on its own in Maharashtra. But he succeeded in inflicting grave damage upon the Left and trade union movements and shifting the state's political discourse Rightwards.

Similarly, a Sanjay Raut won't be able to disenfranchise Muslims, but he has further shifted India's entire political terrain towards anti-Constitutional forces. Those committed to secular democracy and humanism must actively combat this danger.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist. E-mail: bidwai@bol.net.in

COMMENTS

"Outrage over sex assault" (April 16, 2015)

Touchstone

This kind of unruly behaviour stems from how they were brought up. Men from birth are pampered with a sense of entitlement without any accountability. In most families in Bangladesh men are given a superior status, as a result they do not respect women.

Saif

This is just unbelievable. What have we become? Why is the government tolerating such atrocity?

Binodbangali

Just appalling! Let's hope that the perverts will soon be arrested and face justice. This type of incident brings disrepute to the nation.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

DMP can not absolve themselves of their responsibility. Law enforcers were stationed there, what were they doing? Law enforcers trumpeted before Pahela Baishakh that they have taken fool-proof security. We now know what their 'fool-proof security' means!

Nasim Uddin

What country do we live in? Don't we have the right to live freely?

Shoeb Saleheen

These "unknown miscreants" will forever remain unknown to our law enforcers. It's really funny how police use this term to cover up an issue.

"Tracking climate finance" (April 14, 2015)

Timmons Roberts

Excellent points on a key issue--tracking will be crucial in proving that funds went where they were supposed to and if they were actually effective.

"BANGLADESH" (April 14, 2015)

AKK

Very nice write-up. It speaks for itself. Intolerance starts with someone else and ends with self-destruction. If the intolerant people do not have the willingness to hear others, soon there will be no one else to hear them either. Either they will destroy the free thinkers or it'll be the other way around.

"Tabith pledges smooth traffic, safe footpaths in Dhaka" (April 17, 2015)

Malcolm Arnold

Just more promises by politicians.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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For a trip to trauma

This refers to the column "Flying Biman for a Trip to Trauma" published in your daily on April 18. I think the writer and his spouse deserve some serious apology. No airline can possibly survive in this fashion and I have all the reasons to believe that this is deliberate to damage Biman.

Dhaka Airport is flooded with foreign carriers and everyday ministry/CAAB is issuing more landing rights to other carriers bypassing the national interest. Why?

Opee Monir
On e-mail

Reckless driving costs many lives

A few days ago we were returning to Dhaka from Cox's Bazar by a non AC night coach. The journey was very unpleasant. The driver was driving recklessly. Every second we thought that anytime an accident could take place. I cannot possibly describe the terror. The bus was running at high speed, literally bouncing on the highway. Our heads were banging on the windows all the time. But some passengers were sleeping on their seats, relaxed and without worry. This is how many passengers sleep peacefully, leaving it all in fate's hands. No wonder fatal accidents take place on the highway almost every day.

Reckless driving has to be stopped. Nothing is more precious than life.
Cantara Wali
On e-mail