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FOUNDER EDITOR
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Another Blogger Murdered

Absence of deterrents have encouraged killers

ANOTHER gruesome assassination of blogger and an organiser of local Gonojagoron Mancha, Ananta Bijoy Das in Sylhet illustrates that the systematic killing of free thinkers is still on the extremist agenda. The manner in which Das was killed points to a pattern similar to the killings of other bloggers – Rajib Haider in 2013, Avijit Roy this February and Oyasiqur Rahman Babu in March. Extremist group Ansarullah Bahini Team have claimed responsibility for the previous killings; Al Qaeda has also done the same regarding Avijit's murder though the video's authenticity is yet to be established. But it is evident that fanatics are behind the brutal murders of these bloggers, a frightening trend that seems to go on unabated.

In Avijit's case the lackadaisical attitude of the law enforcers in finding the killers and their seeming reluctance to push for the investigation to be carried out quickly is a cause for concern. Unless these cold blooded murderers are exposed and brought to book, the killings of individuals, whose opinions fanatics cannot tolerate, will not stop. Apathy from the authorities only serves to encourage fanatics and gives out the message that they can continue their diabolical operations to silence free voices with relative impunity.

There seems to be a sliver of hope in the fact that blogger Rajib Haider's murder case will be sent to a speedy trial tribunal. A quick, transparent disposal of this case may be seen as a precursor to proper investigation, arrest of the killers and trials for all the other cases including Ananta Bijoy Das's murder.

Lax fire safety measures in hospitals

Expired extinguishers cause for concern

AUTHORITIES appear blissfully unconcerned about the fact that the fire extinguishing equipment at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) had expired over a year ago. This is not some tin-pot, run down medical establishment; this is BSMMU, the country's premier medical institute and hospital which is housed in several multi-storied buildings. It has 1,520 beds which, at any point in time, has around 1,200 – 1,300 patients admitted in it and where thousands of outpatients receive medical treatment daily. Hence, we are shocked to learn through a report published in this paper on May 12 that the 2,000 or so fire extinguishers meant for protecting the various buildings that constitute the BMSSU complex have been left installed beyond expiry date.

Precisely what do the authorities have to say for themselves? Have they moved for replacement? If so, when is this due? Although we are informed by authorities that 60 staff members have been trained to operate the equipment, the fact remains that the safety of so many thousands of patients and staff are left in harm's way because people in charge are not seized of the date expiry issue. Such behaviour goes beyond a lack of professionalism, it is downright negligent and hospital authorities need to redress the oversight as soon as possible. Date expired equipment must be replaced and requisite personnel have to be retrained. There can be no compromise on safety.

The system redux



KNOT SO TRUE

RUBANA HUQ

THEY had pink in common. The girl in my office and the girl in the newspaper picture both were wearing pink. On top of that the girl standing right in front of my table also was called Pinky. Her story was a grim one. Her husband beats her everyday with a big rod and won't let her leave. Pinky leads an accursed life where her marriage wears the big label of abuse and where her husband forces her to beg and borrow from friends and family every time he needs his dose of Yaba. Pinky is a supervisor at one of our factories, who simply wanted me to help her change her address of residence so that she could just walk away from her husband once and for all. Her money is not her own. The phone banking that we have introduced does not benefit her as her husband has control of her phone and she has no privacy. He knows how much Pinky earns, what she craves for and how to stop her. While I promised to save her, she eventually looked at me in utter helplessness and asked, "How will you protect me if he attacks me on the road?" I don't have any answer to that. How can you, me, or us protect thousands of them out there? One can't effectively do any of it unless we are supported by the system.

Now comes the crucial point. Which is the system that protects us? Is it the same system that turns into an ineffective mechanism every time an Avijit Roy is brutally murdered while walking back home from Ekushey Boimela? Is it the same system that raises its boots on Ismat Jahan in pink kamiz out in the open day, whose pictures were all over print and social media two days ago? Is it the same system that cannot bring a just closure to an incident of assault that happened over twenty-nine days ago? Is it the same system that ironically assaults and attacks protesters who want justice to prevail? Unfortunately it is. It is



PHOTO: STAR

indeed the same system that picks and chooses its priority and aligns itself with powerful blocs. It is the same system that picks and chooses to react with either utter callousness or with speediest action as and when required. It's the same system that decides priority on an as-and-when needed basis instead of treating it as its sole duty. Therefore, a young woman in pink, amongst the other 32, is ruthlessly beaten up and admitted to hospital; therefore Avijit dies while cell phone cameras click around him and his wife and police turn a blind eye.

While we watch and read about the tales thousands of trapped Bangladeshis being rescued from the waters, while we hear ghastly details of them being stuffed into fish drums for hours and being transported to big trawlers, while we hear about drug lords like Zafar Majhi who has turned Ukhiya Uapzila into one huge area having 13 trading points for yaba, we gape in disbelief at the utter inefficiency of our system to track and arrest social injustices. It seems

as if we have been sold to the system for good or for worse, with no escape.

Somehow, something has gone wrong within the system. A few of us sit on the fence, picking issues, writing about them and engaging in talk shows in the media while the system moves on unaffected. So, sitting on the fence is not particularly commendable either. A young female MP approached me the other day and introduced herself to me in one breath: "I am Ms., a Member of Parliament from, a victim of the August 21st grenade attack." I was taken aback by her introduction and wondered why she would even add the last bit about her having suffered the bomb attack. But then as I made eye contact with her, I gradually understood her pride. She was out there suffering the splinters on her body; I wasn't. She was the one who believed in an ideology and offered her life; I hadn't. So, while we celebrate our roles as sideline critics, we also ought to come to terms with the fact that one can't bring about any change without

being part of the system.

A "breaking news" just surfaced on my screen as I end this column. Ananta Bijoy Das, a blogger has just been murdered. Four people chased Ananta down in Subid Bazar in Sylhet, stabbed him indiscriminately and killed him. Ananta is the third blogger to be killed after Avijit and Oyasiqur this year. For how long do you think we will have to wait to track their assailants down? For how long will the Sagar-Runi case hang for lack of closure? Does it really take three years to identify the culprits? I guess not. It also seems that cyclically and systematically the system collapses and hops back on an ineffective machine just to be on tracks again, without promising accountability, vision or justice. But then that is the system. And the system never changes as we all are enslaved by self-interest and considerations, which ultimately ends up defeating the entire concept of public good.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

Iran's foreign policy plays



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

IT is not just the State of Israel, the staunchest US ally in the Mid-East that is up in arms over the American engagement of Iran on the nuclear issue. Indeed, judging from the furore it has created among the Saudi-led GCC, one would think that perhaps there is some meat in their disenchantment with the world's only superpower and how it is conducting its foreign policy in one of the most volatile and important regions in the world. That the US has decided to go all-out to clinch a nuclear deal with Iran bypassing concerns of Sunni-majority governments in the region is clearly causing a major rift between the Americans and Saudi Arabia. While Iran has effectively launched proxy wars from Lebanon to Yemen and helping unpalatable regimes like the Assads in Syria and the US turning a blind eye to repeated insistence by the Saudis to help unseat the Alawite regime in Damascus could cost the Americans friends in a troubled region.

While the US stumbles around trying vainly to ratchet up support for a peace deal with the Iranians which ironically has driven Israel and Saudi Arabia into the same camp, Iran has played the extremist card to the hilt and managed to run rings around the US that continues to suffer from a joint ISIS-Al Qaeda phobia. The Persians for instance have had great success in selling the prospect of an impending ISIS takeover of all of Syria should the Assads fall from power. Indeed, it has allowed for Iran to play an active role on the ground in Iraq to prop up the Baghdad-regime which set new records as the fastest national army in the Middle East to capitulate in the face of an ISIS offensive last year. Iran has made gains in the region as a major power broker at the behest of the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia and the Sunni-Shiite divide that had held true for decades is in tatters. An Iran in ascendance is something that will not be taken lying down, as has been witnessed by a Saudi-led coalition that has been waging a war of intervention against Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Iran, according to veteran statesmen like Georg P. Shultz, who has served as the U.S. Secretary of State from 1982 to 1989, has effectively turned the negotiation "on its head". He and Henry Kissinger who was the 56th Secretary of State from 1973 to 1977 recently stated in an article published in April in the Wall Street Journal: "The threat of war now constrains the West more than Iran. While Iran treated the mere fact of its willingness to negotiate as a concession, the West has felt compelled to break every deadlock with a new proposal. In the process, the Iranian program has reached a point officially described as being within to three months of building a nuclear weapon. Under the proposed agreement, for 10 years Iran will never be further than one year from a nuclear weapon and, after a decade, will be significantly closer."

The beauty of the negotiations is that while the US administration pitches its deal with the Iranians, it effectively loses the faith of its allies, while Iran emerges as the victor, free of the burden of U.N. embargoes – the billions of dollars in frozen accounts abroad that can now be used to revamp the economy and its conventional forces. Multinational oil and gas exploration companies are waiting in the wings to strike major deals with the Islamic republic and there is talk about transnational pipelines to take Iranian gas beyond its borders. A nuclear deal, for Iran, which if we are to go by what has been stated by the two former Secretary of States, will allow that country to be able to go nuclear in the span of a few short years should the deal fall through sometime in the future.

There is no denying that Iran has always envisaged a greater role for itself in the

region. That it has managed to help fellow Shiite allies to put up more than a fight in the Arab peninsula despite being bogged down by crippling sanctions speaks volumes of its ingenuity. Despite all the hoopla around how bad things are going to be with the Iranians off the leash, consider what is the alternative? To allow the current situation to continue and force the Iranians into a hole whereby they have no option but to build a bomb? Nobody wants to go there for it will mean all-out war in the Mid-East and that's just terrible for business and stability.

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In the words of Aaron David Miller "while the U.S. entangle itself in the nuclear negotiations, Iran is gaining a freer hand to assert its regional influence." Mr. Miller, a Middle East analyst and negotiator and a man who has served six secretaries of state as an advisor on Arab-Israeli negotiations also concedes in his latest article 'How Iran Outfoxes U.S.' published in CNN that "we've made our bed, apparently, and now are going to have a way to find a way to sleep. A nuclear deal will avert a crisis over the nuclear issue for now. But unless it really does change Iran's behaviour, we've only bought ourselves a bigger one down the road."

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

COMMENTS

"Bangladesh decides to impose 10pc duty on rice import"
(May 11, 2015)

Rehab Uddin

Well, it's too late for this season but in the next season the farmers are definitely going to get the benefit of it if the middlemen do not create a new syndicate.

"Poor administration erodes confidence"
(May 9, 2015)

Rakibull Hassan

The government that goes to power without people's mandate is bound to be riddled with corruption. A government without accountability is bound to have a poor administration.

"Textbooks going digital in September"
(May 10, 2015)

Eshan Palash

This opportunity should be made available to every secondary school of the country.

Karimon Nesa

Many secondary schools in remote areas are ill-equipped to go digital. Improve their conditions first. Then I'll appreciate it.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Evidence of police brutality

Your front page photograph along with the report published on May 11 depicts the police at their worst. Here we saw a policeman ferociously attacking a totally scared young girl. No words can describe the brutality of the scene.

But, on Pahela Baishakh at the DU premises, when women were harassed and some students caught a few culprits handing them over to the police, they were soon released. Was it out of kindness or was it the result of some financial incentive? Interestingly, on that day, police personnel on duty saw no evil and did no evil! Now after students' pressure, they have initiated



PHOTO: STAR

an inquiry by senior police officers who have to keep their slate clean while the inquiry can crawl on from here to eternity.
Elderly citizen
On e-mail

Don't cut the summer vacation

This is in reference to the news "Cut summer vacation" published on May 11. The suggestion made by the education minister is not judicious. The reason for this problem is man-made and can be easily avoided with strict implementation of law and order.

In the name of hartals and blockades, no political party has the right to trouble the common people. It wouldn't be wise to cut the students' vacation by half. Holidays help students to revive their energy and enthusiasm.

Political parties are not meant to trouble people by unnecessary strikes. Government should maintain law and order strictly as well as ensure compulsory punishment for the law breakers.

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