

# "NO ONE KILLED FELANI"

LAM-YA MOSTAQUE

FOR citizens of Bangladesh, the news of fellow countrymen dying some horrible death is not new. Reports of gruesome murders, torture, abduction and rape are strewn all over the paper. There is news about hundreds of people dying in the sea in search of a livelihood. A person can be murdered in the middle of the street, and no one will do anything about it. Compared to these incidents, the death of Felani may seem normal, even insignificant. She wasn't a celebrity, nor was she a "valued" member of the society; she was just a fifteen-year-old girl who was trying to come back home, crossing the border illegally in doing so. So what if she was shot at the border? What if she died? People here die every day.

Hundreds of people are brutally murdered at the India-Bangladesh border every year. But in the case of Felani, we will never forget the shock and sadness we felt when we saw her body hanging from the barbed-wire fences at the border. In Bangladesh, most people have learned to live without basic human rights. But the brutal treatment of Felani broke all limits of tolerance -- an inhumane act that shook the very core of our existence. What was that little girl's fault? What did she do to deserve such a horrible death?

The answer is that Felani was born in a poor family. As a fifteen-year-old, she should have been in school but instead she had to cross the border to find work. Felani's father had already arranged her marriage, so she had to come back home. Even if she had made it back, she would have become a victim of child marriage. But she never made it back; she was sacrificed in the name of "border safety". What were her dreams? Did she have any dreams at all?

Like Felani, most victims of border killings belong to the poorest section of the population. Most of them are not



terrorists or smugglers; they're inhabitants of villages close to the border, and they live in extreme poverty. They often risk their lives to cross the border, not for huge financial benefits but just to get through the day. As Bangladesh becomes a lower middle income country, we read and hear about celebrations all over. But despite reaching most of the Millennium Development Goals, poverty still remains an everyday reality for millions of people in Bangladesh.

No effective action has been taken by the government of Bangladesh or India to stop these border killings. Many hoped that the Felani case would finally see justice once the alleged murderer was brought under trial in 2013. However,

even after the second round of trial, the court could not find enough evidence for conviction. The accused, who admitted to the shooting in his confessional statement, was acquitted, again.

Of course, the decision is not final, and there remains a chance of appeal. But in the face of an unpredictable justice system, what chance does the poor family of Felani have to attain justice? The government could not provide Felani a safe environment when she was alive. Can it at least do her justice after her death?

The news of Felani's murder created a media hype and outrage two years ago, but most people do not have the energy or the desire to continue supporting a cause. Why would we care about a

murder that happened two years ago? Let's celebrate our cricket team's recent success against India instead.

Felani represents the millions of people in Bangladesh whose lives are considered "expendable", both by the government and by the privileged sections of the population. Without public support and pressure on the government, the Felani trial will most probably end with the killer going unpunished. Just like the media hyped the "Jessica Lal murder case" in India, at this point, we can say that No One Killed Felani. What is being killed, though, is justice, truth and humanity.

The writer is a post graduate student of Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.

## IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL So near, yet so far

FROM A BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

WHEN the standoff over Iran's Nuclear Deal seemed to be coming to an end, new sticky issues emerged. The P5+1 (five UNSC permanent members plus Germany) foreign

ministers and Iran's Javad Zarif have been huddling together at Coburg Palace in Vienna since June 27, 2015 to conclude the Final Deal.

The Deal will essentially stop Iran from developing nuclear devices in return for lifting debilitating sanctions that the UN and the West had imposed on Iran.

Interestingly Iran's nuclear programme began in 1957 under Emperor Reza Shah Pahlavi with American and European technology. As a signatory of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran is very much within its rights to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Problems arose when in August 2002 an exiled Iranian opposition group exposed the fact that Iran was involved in uranium enrichment. And in December 2002, Washington accused Iran of covertly trying to develop nuclear weapons. Israel too joined the blame game. That was the beginning of the nuclear confrontation. For the past 13 years Iran half-heartedly participated in indirect talks with P5+1 under the aegis of IAEA, but with no progress.

Washington's policy towards Iran changed appreciably when Barack Obama entered the White House as president in 2009. But not much progress was achieved because of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's chauvinism. The breakthrough came when moderate Hassan Rouhani became

Iran's President in August 2013. The 32-year antagonism between the West and Iran gave way to direct talks, between P5+1 and Iran, which started in November 2013 in Geneva.

After nearly 18 months of hard negotiations a "framework accord" was agreed upon on April 2, 2015 in Lausanne. The Final Deal was supposed to be completed by June 30, 2015.

In short, the Lausanne 'framework accord' poses these requirements on Iran: a) drastically slash the number of centrifuges, b) no enrichment of uranium beyond 3.67 percent purity, and c) strict inspection of all nuclear facilities by IAEA. For their part, P5+1 will lift all sanctions within 4 to 12 months of the Final Deal in phases. Tehran considers the sanctions illegal and wants immediate dismantling. Surprisingly, the deal does not mention anything about Iran's missile capabilities.

The new issues introduced by P5+1 are: a) IAEA's inspection of Iranian military sites, which Tehran vehemently opposes, b) IAEA to interview Iranian nuclear scientists; Iran opposes this too as it can lead to their assassinations, as has happened in the past, c) P5+1 also want snap-back sanctions, if Iran is found cheating, and d) P5+1 insist that Iran drastically curtail its nuclear programme for at least 10 years. Tehran wants to continue to do research and development during this period.

The West needs the Final Deal as much as Iran. President Obama has apparently sent private messages to Iranian leaders just before talks began in Vienna. President Obama needs this Deal to prove his doctrine that wars do not solve problems. It will be one of his foreign policy legacies.

The Deal will, however, impose new responsibilities on Washington to monitor whether Ayatollah Khomeini and Hassan Rouhani are busting the

provisions of the Deal. President Obama also has to deal with the neocons in Congress who are staunchly opposed to the Deal. Washington also wants to restore relations with Tehran, which President George Bush once described as the "axis of evil".

Iran's foreign policy is based on realpolitik and expediency, not necessarily on morals or principles. Iranian economy is in a shambles. Tehran desperately needs the money -- over \$100 billion -- blocked by sanctions to return to normal life. Iranians are tired of the economic strains created by the sanctions. President Rouhani's move to get out of this economic strangulation is enthusiastically supported by Iranians

already gained over the past decades. Iran already has the technological know-how to develop nuclear devices. All it needs is 90 percent enriched uranium.

The Final Deal will no doubt realign the balance of power in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, which are deeply opposed to the deal, may find themselves aligned with Israel for security reasons. Iranian support for Hezbollah and Shia regimes in Syria and Iraq will no doubt be boosted. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has warned against the deal saying that it "would threaten the very survival of the state of Israel."

The meeting in Vienna has been extended by seven days, and not more, for both sides to thrash out hurdles. That

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in general. President Rouhani cannot afford to fumble or fail. However, if the negotiations fail, the hardliners will be waiting on the wings to discredit Rouhani.

The Final Deal will also open enormous opportunities for American and European businesses to rush to Iran. They are waiting for lucrative contracts from Iran's oil industry. World oil prices will also be impacted once Iranian oil starts flowing freely.

Even without going nuclear Iran will become a formidable power once the economic restrictions are gone. One must not, however, discount the fact that restrictions imposed by the Deal cannot erase the nuclear knowledge Iran has

is because President Obama has to submit the Deal on July 9 to Congress for approval. Congress will have a month to deliberate and pass it before Washington can sign it. So even if the Deal is ready in Vienna on July 7, it cannot be signed until another 30 days, assuming Congress has endorsed it.

Everyone hopes that the Final Deal will be concluded as both sides desperately need it. However, both sides will have to come up with courage of conviction and determination. Last April, the Deal seemed close to completion but unless the two sides can bridge their trust gap the Final Deal may be a bit far off.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Tigers must take Test cricket more seriously

Congratulations to Bangladesh cricket team for a decisive series win against India. I believe the four pacer combination is perfect for Bangladesh and Taskin was deeply missed in the third ODI which was a key factor in us losing. If Taskin cannot play in the next series, he should be replaced with another pacer.

When it comes to tests, Bangladesh is still playing like minnows. Why is that? In all three tests, the opposition dominated and only the rain saved us the match. The pacers were reserved for the ODI's and this is proof that they are not serious about playing tests.

Aminur Rahim

Mohakhal, Dhaka



PHOTO: STAR

### Creation of a training cadre

The views expressed by Dr. Mohammad Mohabbat Khan in his interview published in this daily on June 25 drew my attention. It is true that no employee of either government or private organisations can be efficient without having obtained proper training. Private business organisations are compelled to arrange training for making their staff more skilled. But the situation is totally opposite in government sectors. The whole nation is lagging behind due to the inefficiency of government officials.

However, it is clear that the present training method and curriculum are not working to make our government officials efficient. Dr. Khan's suggestion to create a separate training cadre sounds like a good remedy for it.

Mobarak Ali

Gopibagh, Dhaka

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## BSF man acquitted again!

### A travesty of justice

We are shocked that for the second time a Border Security Force (BSF) court has exonerated the BSF jawan accused of killing 15-year-old Felani Khatun at the Indo-Bangla border in January 2011. The verdict was delivered by the same BSF court that acquitted Amiya Ghosh, the only accused in the incident, the first time because of "inconclusive and insufficient evidence." It is beyond our comprehension how an accused can be acquitted when he himself admitted to the shooting in his confessional statement! This judgement, once again, highlights the culture of impunity that perpetuates human rights violations of the BSF at the border.

Bangladesh and, indeed, the world remembers with horror the story of the young girl shot while crossing the barbed-wire fencing at Anantapur border point in Kurigram's Phulbari Upazilla on her way back to Bangladesh. Her body was left hanging upside down from the fence. This year alone, as per rights organisation, Ain O Salish Kendra, 15 people have been killed in BSF firing, eight tortured and 38 others injured. According to Human Rights Watch, BSF has killed almost 1,000 Bangladeshis over 2001-2010, implying a shooting every four days. Hundreds others who live on the border land are harassed and tortured on a daily basis -- with impunity.

BSF men, on the rare occasions that they are prosecuted, are tried in their own courts, and remain, as the Felani verdict shows, above justice. We are deeply disappointed that instead of reassuring us of India's commitment to easing tensions at the border and upholding human rights, this verdict makes a mockery of the rule of law and, indeed, of Felani's death.

## Homegoers' misery

### Repetition of the same problem

THIS is a problem recurring every year and it is the unfortunate homebound passengers who have to endure the trauma. No sooner were the counters opened for the sale of advance bus tickets on July 3 than the buyers were told that the tickets had been sold out. It beats one's imagination how so many tickets can be sold out in such a short time!

But it's not only that tickets were sold out, those who were lucky to get a few had to cough up 25-30 percent more than the fare they would have paid on other days. It is difficult to buy the bus owners' absurd explanation that the jacked up prices during Eid holidays are the actual prices fixed by the government and that the fares cost less on other days because of the high demand and stiff competition. One would have thought that the reverse would be the case since the demand for bus tickets during festival holidays is higher than at any other time. The picture is the same for most of the train and launch travellers who have to suffer disappointment due to the nexus between ticket sellers and black marketers.

Every time we are served with assurances by the administration that no mismanagement regarding tickets would be brooked, we see the problems and woes repeated. Tickets are sold behind the counters and the helpless passengers are held to a ransom by the owners. The call for change has proved futile because some of those who can bring change have stakes in the business. The government should intervene quickly to redress the problem.

## COMMENTS

### "Licence to kill" (July 2, 2015)

Abdullah M. Khan

These hooligans are protected by their politically affiliated family members; Rony must face justice like any other citizen.

Kalo Jam

Power is concentrated in the hands of one party, no wonder these kinds of incidents keep happening.

### "Karnaphuli tunnel: \$705m deal signed with Chinese firm" (July 1, 2015)

Shah Alam

Good news! The concerned ministry should take the responsibility of completing it properly within the stipulated time.

### "DU teacher fired over sexual abuse" (July 1, 2015)

Mohammad Anisuzzaman

Termination is not enough; the punishment should have been much more severe!

Kamrul Hasan

Thanks to the authority for a good decision.

Alamgir Kabir

To establish justice, he should be tried for criminal offense.

Saleh Chowdhury

It's appalling and disgusting. Let the law take its course.