

## Landmark deal with Iran

Seize the opportunity for cooperation

**A**FTER the marathon 18-day Vienna talks a historic deal was signed on Tuesday between Iran and six global powers -- the US, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany. The deal is aimed at heading off Iran's nuclear ambition. At the same time it will resolve the 13 year stand-off between Iran and the West by lifting the international sanctions that have strangled Iranian economy and meant severe hardship to its people.

The agreement is a triumph of multilateral diplomacy. It brought together the great powers to resolve the Iranian crisis in a peaceful way rather than resorting to the often flaunted military means. The deal happens at a particularly explosive time when the Middle East is grappling with the rise of IS which holds sway over a large area of Syria and Iraq. According to experts, the agreement will help foster cooperation between Tehran and Washington to deal with this growing threat.

The accord will be a great boost for Iran's oil export, the fifth largest OPEC country, and will unblock its billions of dollars in frozen assets. It will enable Iran to realise its enormous potential and the world economy will also be immensely benefited from its great opening up.

We heartily welcome this breakthrough in the relations between Iran and the West. We hope this deal will contribute a lot to bring peace and stability in the Middle East by introducing a new balance of power in this volatile region.

## Extortion with help of DNCC officials

Abuse of public trust

**T**HE Daily Star's report on illegal toll collection by a gang of extortionists in collusion with DNCC staff highlights an undeniable fact. The practice of extortion from truck and other vehicle drivers as well as traders has flourished because of the involvement of corrupt officials of the city corporation.

The investigation has found that a well organised gang has been operating for the past few months charging each truck Tk 50 at night and Tk 10 for each CNG-run three-wheeler and rickshaw van for parking in the Karwan Bazar wholesale kitchen market. Parking is supposed to be free throughout the night with trucks being allowed into the city after 10pm.

Unsurprisingly, the rate of extortion has doubled in the month of Ramadan to make sure that the extortionists can fill their pockets before Eid holidays. It has been found out that since the expiration of a lease given to a private firm to carry out the parking fee collection on behalf of the DNCC, the city corporation has taken over the task. But while doing so, some of its members have been making a quick buck by assisting the extortionists.

Such blatant corruption must be remedied immediately. The mayor of the DNCC is morally obliged to investigate the matter and take proper action against his errant officials. The Karwan Bazar operation is but a small instance of the widespread extortion being carried out by goons with the support of corrupt public representatives.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Whither humanity?

Every time I come across the picture of Rajon (the 13-year old victim of the brutal killing by some perverts) in newspapers and TV, I fail to hold my tears. He was beaten mercilessly, treated like a beast and finally killed. The poor boy was even laughed and jeered at by those vile murderers, who found it so much as an object of delight that they even filmed the horrendous scene and shared it on social media. I wonder if they have a brother, son, sister, mother, father or a family.

Fabiha Zaheen

On e-mail

### Killed in stampede



PHOTO: STAR

We are shocked to hear the news of 27 people, mostly women, who were killed in a stampede. The tragic accident happened when they went to collect Zakat clothes. About one thousand people gathered in a narrow compound which led to the stampede. The man offering Zakat should be held responsible for this mismanagement.

Much has been said about the country achieving lower middle income status. But this unfortunate death of 27 people tells a different story about the health of the country's economy.

Zabed Wali

Chittagong

# The Boat and the BNP-Jamaat

SYED ABUL MAKJUD

**T**HE election symbol of the Awami League is a boat; interestingly, AL now resembles a boat as big as Noah's Ark as it accommodates anybody from any party, irrespective of political colour and ideology.

According to a *Prothom Alo* report, more than 19,000 BNP-Jamaat leaders and workers joined the Awami League during the last one and a half years in different parts of the country. Joining ceremonies took place in as many as 62 places in different upazilas, sometimes in presence of ministers and central leaders.

The door of the Awami League is wide open. Anybody who is somebody in the BNP and Jamaat, no matter whether he is a religious fundamentalist or a Muslim nationalist, is most welcome in the fold of the non-communal and Bangali nationalist party. An Awami League presidium member, who himself had left his leftist organisation and joined the Awami League, has said, "If any good organiser from the BNP (and Jamaat) comes to the Awami League, it will strengthen our organisation." As if the Awami League is suffering from a shortage of good organisers. But then again, it is.

The daily *Samakal* on Monday reported that a large number Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury's supporters recently joined the ruling party. Chowdhury has been sentenced to hang to death on charges of crimes against humanity in 1971. It seems as if the Awami League leaders are relieved that at least a portion of the anti-liberation forces will not resort to any disruptive activities or hurl petrol bombs on innocent passengers.

A drama was staged at Raujan in Chittagong recently. A local BNP leader

joined the Awami League after he was arrested the previous evening on charges of murder of a local Awami League worker. Police released the man the day after and in that very evening, he went straight to the Awami League office and joined the party. Everyone is eagerly waiting to witness many more dramas in the near future.

Activists of BNP and Jamaat seem to be in a state of calamity; they need a shelter, or maybe even a boat, that will take them in. There are times

when a human being needs a stone to lean against. Most of these BNP-Jamaat men seem to have no other alternative but to join the ruling party.

The BNP people have seemingly lost faith in their leader Khaleda Zia while the Jamaat leaders and cadres have lost faith in the Almighty, whose rule they apparently wanted to impose on earth. Now they do not have enough courage to face disaster and endurance to survive a difficult ordeal. The difficulty of life had compelled them to come close to the Awami League. And the Awami League accepted them heartily.

Life and politics are nothing but compromise and adjustment. Politics is

no longer a matter of ideals and values. In the near future, a new era will usher in where there will be no difference between secular and communal, pro-liberation and anti-liberation forces. Everybody will live in peace

and harmony on this soil.

Pointing to the BNP leader's planned trial in a special tribunal for 'instigating arson attacks', Information Minister and JSD leader, Hasanul Huq Inu, categorically said, "If Khaleda Zia can prove her innocence there, she will continue to be in politics; otherwise, she will have to say goodbye to politics and go to jail." The information minister informed that when the elections will be held in 2019, Begum Zia will stay in Kasimpur Jail.

We have no doubt that the Awami League think-tank is pragmatic and wise enough. They have a road map. Their message to the opposition parties is to either join your hands with us or perish. They will try their best to weaken or break up BNP, because BNP is a threat to Awami League. There are many ways to destroy BNP and Khaleda Zia. They do not bother to realise that whatever popularity BNP

ILLUSTRATION BY NAHELA NOWSHIN



has had is because of the government's unpopularity. Awami League's policymakers should take measures to gain popularity by means of pro-people activities and establishing the rule of law.

Pakistani President Ayub Khan and Governor Monem Khan left no stone unturned to destroy Awami League and Sheikh Mujib. But they failed completely; their attempt was actually counter-productive as AL gained more popularity. In politics, the principle of peaceful co-existence is the best policy. AL will not be strengthened if tens of thousands of BNP-Jamaat people join the party, as these men could turn out to be a burden. The original Awami Leaguers will feel uncomfortable and deprived. When a boat is overcrowded, it is sure to capsize or sink.

The writer is a noted author, researcher and social activist.

## FOR RAJON'S SAKE



NAHELA NOWSHIN

**T**HIS week alone, thirteen-year-old Rajon was tortured to death by a group of men in Sylhet, seven-year-old Tikon was beaten to death by his uncle in Chittagong and Lucky Akther, a transgender, otherwise known as a "hijra", was killed by villagers in Natun Bazar. A new video has just surfaced showing two minor girls being severely beaten at an orphanage in Barisal.

We're disgusted, but not shocked, at the inhumanity shown by the gang of thugs captured in the video of Rajon being tied to a pole and his teenage body being brutally assaulted. We're repulsed, but not shocked, at Tikon's infant body being caned because he dared to leave home without permission. We are sickened, but not shocked, by the mob beating of Lucky Akther to death. We're ashamed, but not shocked, by the incident in Barisal.

We're outraged, but shocked we are not. Saying we're shocked would be naïve. It would mean that child abuse in Bangladesh is an anomaly. It would mean that Rajon and Tikon's deaths were isolated incidents. It would mean that like Lucky Akther, those belonging to marginalised "hijra" communities are not viewed as subhuman, or as inherently criminal by Bangladeshi society. We are not shocked that all these incidents were perpetrated by able-bodied, adult men. Because in the patriarchal society and world we live in, the adult male is the default. And the rest of us are aberrations.

Every such brutal crime on the poor child, woman, *hijra* becomes a sensational headline for the media, a common occurrence to be temporarily condemned and forgotten for the privileged, and a stark reminder of what it means to exist for the impoverished.

So don't tell me Rajon and Tikon's murders were 'shocking'. In a country where child labour and child abuse is rampant and suspended in full public view on a daily basis, we know better than to be 'shocked'. We have no right to feel unsettled when we, as a nation, continue to perpetuate in our everyday lives a culture where kids are no longer allowed to be kids. We watch children being hurled abuses or smacked by grown men on the streets and we do nothing. We see children pulling carts and chipping bricks and we turn a blind eye. We utter annoyances at the hungry kid who hopes to make a few bucks by wiping the windshield of our private car. We live in a country where people see nothing wrong with lowering the marriageable age for girls. So don't tell me you're 'shocked' at how a thirteen-year old child was beaten to a pulp by a gang of grown-ups.



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Let's quit treading the moral high ground to make ourselves feel better and see ourselves for the kind of sick society we have nurtured and the toxic, child unfriendly environment we have let thrive. It's hypocritical to expect our fellow countrymen to treat children with respect when we are collectively responsible in twisting and perverting the very definition of what it

means to be a child.

How dare we be 'shocked' at the barbaric torture unleashed on Rajon? If the physical abuse of children in Bangladesh is so 'shocking', then why did the 20 to 25 bystanders watching Rajon being lynched not do anything to stop it? Have we turned blind to the types of torture and abuse borne by children before our eyes and of which we read almost daily in newspapers, or is it simply a stubborn refusal to introspect and accept what we've become? The latter sounds much more plausible since we have a national habit of going in denial mode in the face of injustice, or every time we feel 'uncomfortable'. We are afraid of our illusion being exposed, of our happy little bubble being burst. We take discomfort to the realisation that we are not as moral and humane as we think we are. We don't want to look in the mirror because we feel guilty. Admitting that we, too, have a role to play in the depravity that we seem to have succumbed to may not be easy but we must acknowledge the part we play in all of this.

How dare we be 'shocked' at the thought that monsters in the form of Rajon's torturers live among us? Is the alarming rate of violence prevalent in our society not proof enough? Or are we particularly jarred this time around because we were actually forced to watch what Rajon was made to endure? Would we be this outraged if Rajon had been abused outside of public view, and if the video hadn't gone viral? Would we even believe what his poor family would have to say?

By recording their heinous crime on video, the sadistic torturers brought about their own downfall; the illusion of the "all is well" stable society we have as a nation was shattered and our fragile collective conscience left shaken. The outcry over Rajon's murder shows that we were forced to wake up, to come face to face with the depraved souls that we harbour among us. We live in a society where criminals are so used to evading the purview of the law that beasts like Rajon's killers deemed it safe to display their acts of savagery on social media. While ordinary people fear for their security, criminals are the ones who feel safe.

We have no choice but to come to terms with the reality that is our societal degradation, and we can start by not viewing every human rights abuse as an outlier. Every time we feel 'shocked' and treat such common crimes as 'isolated', we nullify everyday incidents of physical and sexual violence inflicted on women and children; we dismiss their pain and we render them invisible at the cost of feeding our illusion just so we aren't made to feel uncomfortable and face our own demons. So please, for Rajon's sake, for every Rajon before him and for every Rajon that will follow, don't tell me you're 'shocked'.

The writer is a journalist at *The Daily Star*.

## COMMENTS

**"Savage"**  
(July 13, 2015)

**Durdana Matin**

I'm completely speechless! I don't have adequate words to condemn this brutal act. These are the worst specimens of human being and should be punished in such a way that no one would ever dare lay a finger on a child.

**Lee Schreier**

Death to these monsters, justice for this poor boy and his family- nothing less is acceptable!

**Fatema Zannat**

These brutes should be punished as soon as possible.

**Shummy Begum**

If a petty theft by a poor young boy warrants this sort of punishment, then what should happen to the men who murdered him?

**Salma Nasreen**

These bloody killers should be beaten to death in public in the same way they beat this poor kid. The whole nation must protest against this so that such incidents never take place again. These perverted people should be stopped at this very moment, before such an act happens once more. If required, a special tribunal should be formed so that a speedy trial can be ensured within a week.

**Farhan Rahman**

Honestly, a death sentence isn't enough for them. They should be imprisoned, and tortured over and over again.

**Nadia Obaid**

And so they became murderers to stop a thief! Shows who the better one out of the lot is. And someone videoed it instead of stopping them!

Really, where are we going as a nation? Reminds me of Haider Hossain's song, "Nirmomota koto dur hole jaati hobe Nirlojo".

**Sanjidah Hussain**

Whoever videoed this instead of saving this child is equally guilty of murder as the perpetrators! We want justice! Now!

**Salman Shahab**

I don't even have the heart to see this video that's gone viral, but I do want to urge the government to serve the perpetrators the highest punishment.