

The multiplier effect of an editor's admission

The slaughter of children

Killers must receive the harshest punishment

WE have been covering the steady rise of murder of children nationwide over these past few weeks, but what has happened in Habiganj leaves us speechless. Four children aged 7 to 10 were murdered and buried in a field. The bodies were discovered by chance by a labourer. Although the police are investigating the matter and suspicion lies with two rival groups over the control of the area, it is beyond comprehension how low we have sunk as a people that we commit the most horrendous acts on helpless children.

The killing of children has become something of a trend and this latest incident was not about mere kidnapping for ransom which points to a severe moral degeneration in society. There is also a general idea that in many cases such crimes go unpunished which has encouraged the criminally inclined to carry out their heinous acts with impunity. The lives of the families have been shattered and we really have no words of condolences for the bereaved ones left behind.

What is amply clear is that the strongest of punishments must be handed down to those responsible for planning and carrying out these murders. It takes people with no soul to spill the blood of innocents. We must send a clear message to such perpetrators that such diabolic acts will result in the most severe of punishments. We must also examine the factors behind this rise in brutality against children and find all possible solutions to put an end to it.

Contradictory and counterproductive

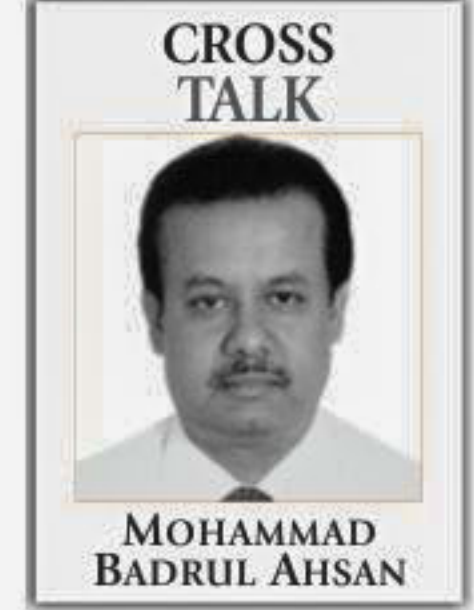
A clause that may encourage child marriage

IT is extremely disappointing that despite all the concerns expressed by activists and international organisations working for the rights of young girls, the government has chosen to retain the provision of the Child Marriage Restraint Act that will make girls between 16 and 18 eligible for marriage. According to the relevant ministry, the rule will be applied 'under special circumstances' such as if a girl gets pregnant before marriage or if she elopes. Such reasoning is neither logical nor acceptable in a situation where we are trying to eliminate child marriage altogether.

Despite the flimsy reassurances that the clause will not be used at people's whims, the reality of the situation compels us to fear that this rule will allow for parents to marry off their girls not just at 16 but even before that. The 14-year-old girl whose marriage was prevented by a conscientious nirbahi officer in Narail, as reported in this daily yesterday, is proof of this age-old practice that is carried on despite a law prohibiting it. According to Unicef, 65 percent of girls are married off before they reach 18 years.

With such a high incidence of child marriage this clause is counterproductive to all the efforts to prevent this social malaise. It seems to be rather a number crunching ploy to show a reduction in the number of child marriages.

The rule therefore, contradicts the legal definition of a child which is a person under 18. As activists have pointed out, it will be more realistic to provide education on reproductive rights and unwanted pregnancies rather than give a pretext for families to continue to marry off minors. We urge the government to listen to these concerned voices and rethink this decision.



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

FRENCH existentialist philosopher Albert Camus said that a guilty conscience needs to confess, and a work of art is a confession. Somewhere between his desperation to unburden his conscience and his desire to create an example of honest journalism, the editor of *The Daily Star* blurted out an uneasy truth on a television show, which has now got him in the soup. Instead of appreciating his honesty and courage, he has been subjected to painful harassments. Dime a dozen lawsuits are popping up against him across the country, and some politicians are asking for his resignation. Anyone else contemplating confession anywhere, beware! Truth doesn't set you free in this country, but gets you in trouble.

That Mahfuz Anam was in error has been signified by his own admission. In other words, he wouldn't have accepted responsibility for what he had done some eight years ago were it not bothering him already. Anybody who missed that show can check. He didn't resort to circumlocution to dodge the question. He went straight for the kill, and made his admission.

But how much is he guilty of what he admitted? He may have failed to uphold his professional standard by publishing leaks. True, he had failed to follow a vast conspiracy to its logical conclusion. That's exactly what the editor said in his admission before publicly regretting it on television. He didn't hesitate to bite the bullet or pretend innocence to deflect the blame.

Yet, he has been getting flak as if what he had printed was his own invention. He had printed what he was handed under questionable circumstances and those who handed him a motivated story had acted out their own ambitions. If anything, the editor acted as a mere messenger, sort of a courier service for ideas. He either didn't have a choice, or

unsuspectingly chose to deliver the wrong package. By God, it's not about defending an editor who, for one time, had deviated from the ideals of his job. It's about defending a profession that's now threatened because one man's editorial judgment faltered many years ago. If this is how a leading editor of this country is intimidated, the cub reporters aspiring to lead the news industry in future must be shaking in their boots.

Sixty-nine lawsuits to date have been filed against one man that makes this great country look like a giant incubator for witch hunters. All the war criminals are being tried by two tribunals, whereas courts after courts are being engaged to drag a decent man from pillar to post.

This isn't to exonerate the editor of his share of guilt. But if one could map the trajectory of his soul from the time he had committed the mistake to the time when he admitted to it, perhaps one would find fluctuations recording many nights he must have spent tossing and turning in bed. How could you tell? The straightforwardness, instantaneity and innocence with which he accepted responsibility for his mistake had the readiness of an abscess ripe for incision.

There are many walking monuments of mendacity in this country, those who swallow truth without as much as a twitch. Many of us know many of them;

YouTube postings as well as sound bites, images and newspaper commentaries of those fateful two years still bear witness to their mischiefs. If they are being tolerated and some of them have been rewarded, why should this editor be isolated for ludicrously heavy-handed treatment?

The standard common law test of criminal liability has it that the act is not culpable unless the mind is guilty. If anybody really believes that this editor should be punished then she or he needs to find that connection. It must be proven that the mistake was made with a criminal intent.

History books, biographies and autobiographies are filled with instances when influential people confessed to their errors in judgments. By that time millions had perished and billions were squandered in wars, conflicts, famines, and dislocations. How many of them have been put on trial because they thought they should honestly step back and take a second look at their mistakes?

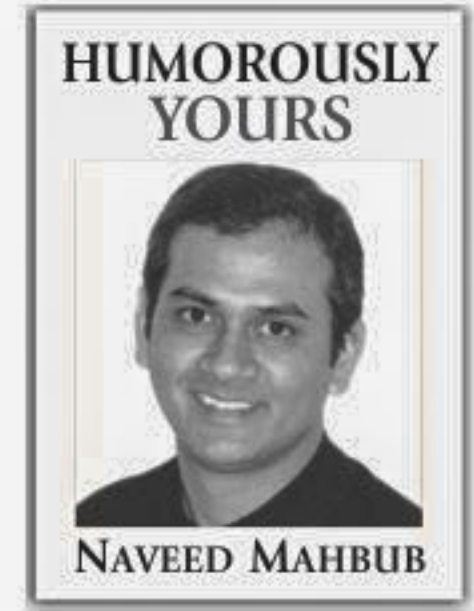
Sixty-nine lawsuits to date have been filed against one man that makes this great country look like a giant incubator for witch hunters. All the war criminals are being tried by two tribunals, whereas courts after courts are being engaged to drag a decent man from pillar to post. If anything, every lawsuit filed against Mahfuz Anam is only lengthening the trail of his incremental persecution.

What we are watching is a convoluted crucible. A conscientious editor attempted to elevate the ethical standard of journalism by investing his honesty in a sincere admission. What he gets in return is an accelerating stream of blows below the belt.

No man can be tried twice for the same offense, and the exponential number of court cases is redundant. The line between justice and vengeance gets blurred when a man is the target more than his mistake. The multiplier effect is how political madness amplifies one innocent admission into a nationwide wild goose chase.

The writer is editor of the weekly *First News* and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*.
Email: nadrul151@yahoo.com

Write about the Right Rite



HUMOROUSLY YOURS

NAVEED MAHBUB

BANGLADESH is the right place for an abundance of things to write about. But even then I thought I'd written myself out of topics. But then, the not-so-right thing happens at the right time to give me plenty to write about. Arrright!

So, here I write: I hang a right, only to find myself having to yield despite my having the right of way. That is the right thing to do, for otherwise it is the right place and the right recipe for the right disaster – a head on collision. After all, I am driving on the right side of the road, which is the left side, while the oncoming motorbike is on the right side of the centre divider.

I rightfully protest. The biker is nothing to write home about. I can handle him alright. Yeah right! With a gaze lasting for what seems to be an eternity from a Zee Bangla drama serial (this type of gaze is the in thing right now), he lifts his right arm, takes his sunglasses off and looks right into my eyes. Right then and there, he starts yelling right at me with his colourful words flying left, right and centre. And all of this for MY not doing the right thing of scanning with both my left and right eyes independently (like a lizard) to the left and right sides of the road.

Right away, a small crowd gathers from right out of nowhere which seems to have known right from the beginning that it was inevitable for something like this to happen right here for them to gawk at. Talk about being at the right place at the right time.

Meanwhile, my left brain tells me to stay on the right track of protesting. So, I persist in trying to right his point of view. Then my right brain kicks right in, brained trying to be a right brained while in the process being incapable of knowing the right from the wrong or getting to right a wrong. Being an alpha male, I am rightfully upset for having to turn the right cheek, but I'm right as rain now. After all, when it comes to a bike versus a car, the tide of the argument, as experienced here, is in essence the rite of road rage. Not knowing that who, in his right

mind, would drive on the right side of the road, I now realise that it is an acceptable rite of the right people to have the right to drive on the right side of the road. Meanwhile, the right people of law enforcement don't have the right to do the right thing and write a traffic violation ticket, the right citation, for fear of becoming a write-off to Khagrachori. For the right thing to happen, we need the right man for the right job on a suicidal career track.

from the right side of the tracks. I did think for a while that I wouldn't write about this or even if I did, I'd write down to the public. Anything we write becomes a digital tattoo only to re-surface at the right time when the right salvo is needed for the right target. So, I do the right thing and write while I schmooze with the right people. Till I'm read out the Eastern version of the Miranda: "You have the

Being an alpha male, I am rightfully upset for having to turn the right cheek, but I'm right as rain now. After all, when it comes to a bike versus a car, the tide of the argument, as experienced here, is in essence the rite of road rage.



So who is this guy on the motorbike? I dare not ask for he is surely right in his own rights. And I thought I'd written my own ticket, answerable to none. Dream right on... Serves me right for being outright naive. The left, right, religious, fundamental, secular and blogger will all agree that right now, for now, this is merely a rite of passage for those who are NOT

right to remain silent...". I think I'll do alright. So, here's my write-up – *Humorously Yours* (all rights reserved). Oh, and write to me with your comments. My email address is right below.

The writer is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of ABC Radio's *Good Morning Bangladesh* and the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*.
E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

COMMENTS

"BCL men' of CMC beat up Prothom Alo photojournalist"
(February 18, 2016)

Analytical Sifat

Strongly condemn this kind of harassment by government backed student organisations.

Zakir Hossain

That's totally unfair and such maltreatment should be stopped.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

A welfare association is not a trade union

On February 16, 2016, TDS published a lead report on the EPZ issue titled, "Trade union in EPZs gets nod," referring to the decision of the cabinet meeting held on the previous day. But it is contrary to the fact and misleading. Actually the draft law has provided provisions for "Workers' Welfare Association" which cannot be termed as a trade union given its formation process and mandate. It is nothing new;

The prescription of welfare associations, actually, prevent workers from forming and joining trade unions because the processes are very cumbersome and the regulatory authority, the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones

Authority (BEPZA) has wide discretionary powers over the matter which is not reasonable and judicious. Given the observations from the Committee of Experts of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the government should consider urgently to standardise the EPZ labour law in line with the international labour standards. Also, it is not logical to have a separate labour law for the EPZs; rather, the jurisdiction of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (with amendment in 2013) should be expanded to the EPZs.

Udatta Bikash, Ph. D.
Lawyer and Researcher
Shankar, Dhaka

"Development and Democracy: Time to look to the East"

This is in reference to the above mentioned article published in *The Daily Star* on February 2. The writer appreciates Bangladesh's development in many sectors which at some point seemed to me as indirect appreciation of the present government's performance. He should have also mentioned the current state of absolutism prevailing in the country.

Anonymous
On e-mail

We are deeply worried about Mr. Anam's indictment

I, as a reader of *The Daily Star*, am deeply worried about the cases filed against Mr. Mahfuz Anam. In a civilised society, nobody is immune to justice. But what we are watching now is totally different. It is like a political vendetta. I am worried about the nature of the complaints lodged/ filed against him with a tag of crores of taka and counting. I also do not know if there is any such precedence in any part of the civilised world to bring these kinds of charges against a journalist of Mr. Anam's stature and reputation who is a freethinker, a freedom fighter, and an uncompromising supporter of Bangladesh's Liberation War and of secular Bangali nationalism.

Romeo A.
On e-mail