

End cargo vessel strike

Work out an acceptable solution

IT was after six days of enormous suffering that we were relieved to hear the news of inland water transport workers calling off their strike. For six days not only were launch passengers put to severe hardship, movement of cargo was also severely hampered which affected, among other things, generation of power. The workers were demanding increase in pay.

However, no sooner had the workers called off their strike on 27 April than the cargo vessel owners stopped plying their vessels. We understand that the cargo vessel owners association has not called the strike but the individual owners who feel that they would not be able to bear the burden of the increased wages and have decided to shut down operation. The redeeming feature is that the passengers launch owners have worked out a modus vivendi with their workers and are plying their vessels.

Reportedly, the announcement of enhancement of pay was made unilaterally by the government, and although the meeting was participated by all the three stakeholders, the owners had not given their consent to the new pay proposals. It defies logic that a new pay scale would be announced without taking the views of the owners on board.

We feel that the government should immediately work out a compromise formula that will meet the demands of the workers as well the owners. As it is, a large number of cargo ships are anchored in Chittagong port and outer anchorage, waiting to be unloaded. And with the impending Ramazan and the current heat wave an amicable solution must be found without delay if the people are to be spared the inevitable hardship a continued cargo vessel strike will impose on them.

Forced marriage of an underage girl

A case of gamekeeper turned poacher

THE news of marriage of an underage girl after coercion and torture, allegedly by a policeman, is deplorable. Reportedly, a wireless operator of Dinajpur Kotwali police station picked up a 16-year-old girl on her way to tuition and beat her after putting her in confinement. There were injury marks on her body, and she had to be admitted to a hospital. Surprisingly, when the girl's father went to the police station to file a case the police officials put pressure on him to settle the matter by marrying off his daughter to the perpetrator. The helpless father had to concede to the proposal, and later the marriage was held in secrecy against the will of the girl.

Forcing a child in marriage is a serious offence according to the law of the land. We wonder how the police officials asked the victim's father to find an amicable solution instead of taking action against the offender and preventing an underage marriage. It is totally unacceptable. In cases of violence against women and children, we often see perpetrators evade punishment by forcing victims to settle the issue outside the legal framework. It only encourages criminals to do more mischief.

We are happy to note that the policeman has been withdrawn from duty, but we would like the authorities to seriously look into the issue and take stern action against the alleged culprit. The role of the officials of the police station is also questionable. They should be made to account for their role in the illegal marriage.

COMMENTS

"It's true that I don't understand English or Hindi too well. But at the end of the day, cricket has its own language and I know what is expected out of me."

Mustafizur Rahman



R.S. Jimi

You don't need to know English, Hindi or any other language, all you need know is the language of cricket and I am pretty sure that you know it very well.



Ibrahim Zaman

You don't need to suffer from an inferiority complex as your bowling speaks for you.

Where are we heading?

KHUSHI KABIR

FROM all the information we received, Rezaul Karim Siddique of Rajshahi University, hacked to death in the morning of April 23, 2016, appeared to be a quiet man, a man who was of a peaceful nature, a lover of music and a committed teacher. As is the case with most Bangalis, he loved music. Cultural activities were in his bloodstream. He tried to set up a cultural hub in his home, where he lived, not too far from the university where he taught. He was not a declared atheist, nor a blogger, not even an armchair or Facebook activist. Not one of those who were in the frontlines of activism, not a talk show star, not one who wrote long opinions and editorials about the state of affairs of the country. Why would he be killed?

He was what I often describe as the typical example of a citizen of this land, the kind of people I grew up with, secular in his thinking by encouraging culture, music, playing his favourite sitar, reading books, yet sensitive and responsive to the practice of religion of the people he lived amongst, his family perhaps, certainly his neighbours. We heard of his large donations to the building of the local mosque as a proof of this perception. His daughter has been very vehement in stating that he was a believer. I find it very telling on our current state of affairs that we have to insist that we are all believers. Why should it matter? A murder is a murder and a gruesome murder has to be taken in all seriousness no matter what one's beliefs are or where one stands. We all grew up learning to sing, dance, play an instrument, and write poetry, recite etc. Where else do we find that recitation is considered a part of cultural practice, a part of the performing arts? Was his fault that he embodied this very nature of the Bengali? Was he murdered so brutally simply to be used as an example of what not to be? Was he simply targeted because he embodied the very spirit of 1952, of 1971 in the quiet nature of his being?

No sooner had this murder occurred than we heard of the brutal killing on the evening of April 25, this year, of Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy at Xulhaz's house in Kalabagan, a crowded locality in central Dhaka. Xulhaz was very well known in the activists' community. He edited the LGBT magazine, Roopban, which tried to bring forth many issues and concerns along

with talking about the rights of Bangladesh's LGBT community. People were in tears when I called to find out and be sure. I had not seen such a reaction before amongst a varied and large range of people, belonging to different ages and walks of life, people who normally do not associate with each other. These were people he interacted with or touched, through his gentle nature in wanting a multicultural and diverse Bangladesh. A Bangladesh that would allow all people, of all faiths, beliefs, orientation, identities and occupations to live and flourish without fear. He was truly fearless, he never felt threatened nor did he feel the need to leave his country or not continue to do what he believed in. He definitely had the option of leaving, which he never

today about how these two managed to dispel within them the idea of having to live in total fear. So why should they get killed? They were not hurting anyone; they were not using any kind of coercion or violence to force their position on others. On the contrary, they tried to let everyone have the chance to express their views.

Not one of these gentle people ever thought that one has to use machetes, knives, daggers or guns to influence people. Surely no rational or intelligent person can ever believe that it is only through fear and force that ideology can be established and followed. That analysis is so flawed it is beyond comprehension. Either passively or tacitly, by not acting or by deliberately pandering to this kind of action, by

those killed were bloggers, and those being killed now are not necessarily bloggers neither are they atheists. Secondly, not all bloggers or those active on social media are atheists. Thirdly, I would like to know, under which article of the Constitution is there any statement saying that it is against the Constitution of the country to be an atheist in the People's Republic of Bangladesh. The message that comes out loud and clear is that it is perfectly alright to hack to death anyone who is perceived to have divergent views regarding religion. It almost seems like the police can never find clues or identify the killers.

It also feels like those belong to different schools within Islam are also being targeted. I say this since many people killed in this brutal manner have been believers, including Shias, Ahmediyyas, followers of the Sufi tradition, priests from other religions, and writers who were not necessarily atheists. Those outraged at this barbarism are asked to be careful so as to not hurt the "sentiment of the believers." Whose sentiments are we really talking about? The sentiments of misogynists, obscurantists, communalist preachers, who are breeding a group that is financially solvent and has the backing of the powers that be? The sentiments of people misrepresenting and misquoting religion for their own and other's vested interests? The sentiments of those who are building a completely false base upon the lack of knowledge and understanding of the vast majority of the people in the name of religion? Why are these groups allowed to operate? In whose interests are they doing so?

As a woman, a feminist, and a rationalist, who believes in democracy, freedom of speech and thought, equality in all fields, freedom and security of one's movement and the right to our basic needs, including that of sharpening our intellect through knowledge and culture, I will speak out, I will fight, I will sing, I will dance, I will write. My mind is my own, it belongs only to me, free to move where it wishes to go and free to dream its own dreams and free to express myself. I do not hurt others' ideology or beliefs, just as I do not allow others to hurt mine. I am strong in my belief, because it is mine as I have come to understand it. My belief, my ideology, is not so feeble that just because someone does not share my ideology, it becomes insecure and shaky.

The writer is a rights activist.

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even thought of using. He took on the responsibility to care for his frail and ailing mother, in front of whom he was brutally killed.

I last spoke to him on Pahela Baishakh, when I heard four people had been held at the Shahbagh Thana. I had asked if he needed me. He was quite clear he could handle it and said that they would be released soon. That was the last I spoke to him. His friend Tonoy was a theatre activist. Both could instill confidence and courage in people, what many people who are marginalised always experience as insecurities, but through their assertions, they instead succeeded in giving them a feeling of strength and a sense of faith in themselves to be as they are, as they wish to be. Many spoke to me yesterday and

giving into the fear factor or by being brainwashed, this is exactly what is being propagated.

The list of people killed during the last seventeen months is long, and who knows who will be next? We have no idea about how fast this terror will spread all over the country. Of course the question asked time and again is: can we see signs that there is a serious effort to stop this? The confusing, and sometimes contradictory, statements given by those in the government certainly do not give any sense of progress in the right direction to suppress this.

It is randomly and broadly perceived by many that it is mainly the bloggers who are attacked, and that all bloggers are atheists. I think it is time to stop this oversimplification. First of all, not all

Dubious chopper deal

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

THE past seems to be catching up fast with President Pranab Mukherjee. This time his name figures in the case relating to the purchase of AugustaWestland helicopters for comfortable travelling by the then Congress government, of which he was the finance minister at that time.

His role has been revealed at an Italian court in Milan not by the CBI, which has been inquiring into the matter for the last three years. Apparently, the CBI, an agency which is a central government department, cannot be independent. Yet, it is expected to reveal the truth despite its handicaps.

Had the agency been reporting to Parliament directly, the helicopter deal would have been a part of the public domain. That no government wants to give the agency freedom is evident from the fact that the regimes do not want to loosen their control over it.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the Indian people come to know about bribes and corruption only when a foreign agency reports about them. The helicopter deal is just one example. Many scandals have come to light in the past only when some foreign agency tumbled upon them.

Why did the CBI or some other local agency not disclose a letter written by James Christian Michel to Peter Hulett, then head of India sales of Augusta

Westland? In his letter, he has said: "Since Signora Gandhi is the driving force behind the VIP, she will no longer fly with MI-8... Signora Gandhi and her closest advisers are the aim of the (British) High Commissioner... Manmohan Singh is PM, Ahmed Patel... Pranab Mukherjee was then finance minister... he is the current president of India. Oscar Fernandes... is a local politician..."

It is difficult to believe that the CBI was not in the know of all these. The agency has been conspicuous by its silence. The most shocking part about all of this is that the Defence Ministry wanted a helicopter which could achieve a particular height. A French helicopter that met the requirements was available. Yet, AugustaWestland was given preference, although it could not fly that high. The government lowered the height required to favour AugustaWestland.

Whoever is responsible at the political level and in the bureaucracy should be named. Seldom has the responsibility been apportioned in the past. The practice is not in the interest of the country because they are neither named nor shamed.

Sonia Gandhi has outright denied any role in the choppers' deal. That Ahmed Patel, her political secretary, should have himself come in the open to protect Sonia Gandhi is something worth noticing, because normally a spokesman voices the Congress president's viewpoint. It is a different matter that he used the same opportunity to defend himself because Christian Michel had named him as well.

Coming to the AugustaWestland chop-

pers' deal, the Milan court has punished the bribe-takers but was unable to do anything about the bribe-givers. This is where the Indian actors come into play. Now that the country is ruled by the BJP, the CBI can make public all the material which it had collected but was afraid to divulge during the Congress regime. At least, the names should come out.

That Parliament has not been able to function because of the rumpus created by the Congress members, indicating that the allegation against the party leaders has a grain of truth. This reminds me of the Bofors gun deal in which former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was implicated. Even the top Congress leaders did not know the inside story because Rajiv Gandhi had opened a separate bank account which benefited the people concerned in Italy.

Veteran Congress leader Kamal Nath knows the full story but he would not divulge it because of his loyalty to the party. The other person who was in the picture was Ottavio Quattrocchi. But he was allowed to leave the country even when it had been proved that he was the middleman in the deal. Since the Congress was ruling at the centre, no bar was imposed on his leaving the country. At that time, Sonia Gandhi's name was also brought up as is the case now.

The CBI should pick up the thread from the remarks made by former Defence Minister A.K. Antony that there was no doubt about the bribery in the choppers' deal, as he stated: "... We had initiated the process to blacklist Augusta Westland, its parent company Finmeccanica and all its subsidiaries. We

also initiated proceedings for encashing bank guarantees and recovered an amount of Rs. 2068 crore. Three helicopters of Augusta Westland have remained confiscated with us." But, according to Antony, the Modi government had warmed up to the company again, inviting it to participate in Make in India events and even allowing it to bid for contracts.

If I were to hark back on the days of the Jawaharlal Nehru government, Jagjivan Ram was a suspect. In fact, even when there was no concrete proof, his integrity was always in doubt. In the 1990s, the Jain hawala case divulged several names that included top politicians of the country like L.K. Avani. A diary retrieved from the possession of the Jain brothers mentioned several beneficiaries, but hardly a leader, be it from the Congress or from the BJP, was convicted.

Things are different now because the media, particularly television, has become more vigilant and powerful. It is difficult to imagine that after all the publicity which the chopper deal has got, it will be allowed go into oblivion without any action. Parliament members realise that the people cannot be taken for granted because now they know the value of their vote.

Political parties can hurl charges at one another, but cannot ignore the anger which dishonest deals evoke. Therefore, however loud the denial from Congress, action against bribe givers and takers in the chopper deal is inevitable. This is a good development.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Industrialists should act responsibly

We read with disgust the story of Indian liquor Baron Vijay Mallya. What a fall from grace! Subrata Roy of Sahara also dug his own grave and is facing multiple cases. Both of them ventured into risky projects and became defaulters.

A responsible industrialist is an asset to the country. He or she creates employment, generates income and takes calculated risks. Not

everybody can be an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur requires conviction, confidence, capital and character. Creation of employment and paying taxes are the major contributions of an industrialist. When he deviates from the primary goals, the same person becomes a liability.

Wealth itself is worthless if it does not benefit the society, community and the coun-

try. Some rich people squirrel away their wealth abroad for a presumed notion of safety. The same wealth, if invested in the country, would have generated employment for many. We urge the industrialists to invest in Bangladesh and pay due taxes. The government should take appropriate measures when they break the law.

Dr. SN Mamoon, Dhaka

A plea to DCC (north)

As a permanent resident of Uttara sector no. 7, I would like to request the Dhaka City Corporation (North) authority to do something about stray dogs in the area. Recently, the numbers of stray dogs have risen alarmingly in Uttara Model Town especially in sector no. 7, causing fear among people especially children. Since dogs without collars are no longer put down by the authorities on compassionate grounds, it would certainly be wise to routinely vaccinate street dogs in a bid to check deadly conditions like rabies. Also, breeding groups may be neutered to control the population of such dogs.

Md. Ferdous Alam Sector no. 7, Uttara, Dhaka