

## Clandestine killings go on

People's frustration mounts

THE furtive killings have become too repetitive not to engender an aura of uncertainty in the minds of the people. This time it was a homeopath in Kushtia who was the unfortunate victim of the killers. A university teacher, the homeopath's friend, was severely injured in the same attack. The assault displays the hallmarks of all the recent killings, 15 in the last five months. Of note is the fact that the two shared common interest in the ways and lives of the Bauls.

While there has been an immediate owning up of the killings by the so called Islamic State, according to US-based SITE Intelligence Group report, what is distinctly noticeable is that these extremists and terrorist groups are singling out individuals and not going after mass targets, quiet a deliberate ploy in our assessment. Their targets they project as 'anti-Islamic' to justify the killings hoping that those would not draw adverse reaction from the majority of the people, which a large-scale attack would.

We are disturbed to see the murders going on and the government coming out with the predictable rhetoric. We see arrests by the police; but frustration among the people is growing because there has not been very definitive and evidential breakthrough in the cases notwithstanding the agencies' claim of netting the suspects in most of the similar killings of minorities and people with different views and ideologies since 2013. We fear frustration might give way to more unease and sapping of public confidence in the administration if the masterminds are not netted and the network not neutralised and the spate of the secretive killings arrested soon.

## Boro procurement

Foul play by middlemen

THE government-declared Boro paddy procurement is in a mess. Boro farmers are at the mercy of private buyers and middlemen who are offering prices much below the government committed price, and this is happening because the government purchase scheme is yet to get off the ground in earnest. It was hoped the April decision would pave the way for the government to procure 1.3 million tonnes of paddy and rice directly from the growers. The problem is, as we understand, the district food officials have not received farmers' lists from agriculture officers at the grassroots. The lack of coordination between government agencies have put the entire procurement drive in jeopardy and there is the prospect of farmers being let down – again!

That some farmers in Lalmonirhat are being forced to sell harvested Boro at Tk12 per kilo, a price lower than the production cost and far below the government decision to procure the same at Tk23 per kilo is a disaster on two fronts. Failure to have a much-hyped procurement policy implemented properly will make such announcement seem hollow and risk turning farmers away from producing Boro, the most important staple, next season which will adversely affect our food security.

We find such a dismal performance by the government agencies disheartening, especially in light of the fact that farmers for years have been held hostage to powerful syndicates of middlemen and rice mill owners. It is time for agriculture officials to get their act together because failure is not really an option.

## COMMENTS

**"Injustice done to him"**  
(May 20, 2016)

Siddharth Chowdhury

The saddest part is that even though he didn't say a word against religion, people held him responsible for a crime that he didn't commit in the first place.

Abir

Those who forced him to undergo such humiliation should be punished in an equally insulting manner.

# Remembering Rubel

NO STRINGS ATTACHED



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

THE name suddenly made me stop reading the lead story of DS's May 18 issue. Shamim Reza Rubel. He was an IUB student picked up on July 23, 1998, by plainclothes law enforcers, tortured and killed in their custody. According to this report, his death in custody had prompted a writ petition to be filed as a public litigation by human rights groups and individuals. This led to the High Court issuing directives on April 7, 2003 to stop the arbitrary arrests of citizens on mere suspicion and on the way the arrestees were to be treated while in custody. Now, thirteen years later, the Supreme Court has again brought to light the fact that consecutive governments have chosen to ignore these directives that attempted to stop the abuses that occur while individuals are taken into custody.

I remembered him because back in August 1998, my colleagues Lavina, Zahed and I had done a story on Rubel's ordeal after the news of his death came out. We had gone to his house in a narrow alley in Siddheswari and talked to his brother and some of those who had witnessed the whole incident. His brother didn't want us to talk in their house; he took us to a tin shed and nervously locked the door and then told us the terrifying story.

Rubel, a soft spoken, shy student of IUB had been chatting with the shopkeeper of a neighbourhood lungi shop in

the afternoon. On July 23, at around 4pm a microbus with several members of the DB (Detective Branch) came to Rubel's house; in a matter of minutes they had caught the young man and started beating him up indiscriminately, accusing him of having illegal weapons. They were in plainclothes but everyone knew who they really were. They took him away. At the DB office in Mintu Road, the torture continued until Rubel, to save himself, 'confessed' that there were indeed weapons in his house. They brought him back. But there were no weapons and when Rubel admitted he had lied just so they would stop the beating, their fury knew no bounds. The young man's bloodcurdling screams were heard by many in the neighbourhood. Rubel's brother described how one of the men struck Rubel on the head, another one kicked him so hard he hit the electric pole. Then they dragged him back into the microbus, despite the desperate pleas of the young man's father who asked them to take him along with his son. In a matter of seconds, Rubel was gone. The family didn't give up and tried everything to get him back. They did get him back but as a corpse with gruesome marks of torture on his body. The post mortem report stated that Rubel died of haemorrhage and shock due to severe beating. It was a clear case of murder.

In 2002, the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka sentenced 13 of the accused (in the case filed by Rubel's father), including Assistant Commissioner Akram, to life term imprisonment, and Mukuli Begum, another accused, to one year in prison. But in 2011, after appeals challenging the lower

court verdict, the HC in May 2011 acquitted Akram and nine others, including Mukuli Begum, of the murder, saying that the allegations brought against them had not been proved beyond reasonable doubt.

Now after 18 years, it is strange that the name of that forgotten, dead young man who liked table tennis, cricket and dreamt of going abroad on a scholarship, has cropped up again. Since then so many other names have been added to the list of victims of custodial torture who have died the most frightening of deaths. According to Ain O Shalish Kendra, there were 68 deaths in custody between January and November of 2015; for this year between January and March, it is already 19. One of the directives of the HC says that an accused must be interrogated by the investigation officer in a prison room instead of a police interrogation cell, until the cell has a glass wall or a wall with grilles on one side to make the accused visible to the lawyer or relatives. The court also ruled that the draconian Sections 54 and 167 of the CrPC that allow arrest on suspicion and subsequent remand were not consistent with the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Arrest under the Special Powers Act has also been challenged by another directive.

Ironically, opposing such changes is one area where both our main political parties, usually so vitriolic in their hatred of each other, have actually converged – of course while in power. The BNP-led government appealed against the directives and this has been followed up by the AL government. An attorney defending the appeal has said that the directives are

not 'proper due to the socioeconomic conditions of the country'. Pray, tell what could such conditions be! He has also said that such directives will actually favour the accused and may lead to deterioration in law and order. Such mindboggling arguments do little to alleviate our fears that the practice of random arrests, torture and death in custody will continue without any fetters.

Our consecutive, democratic governments have been very lenient towards abuses committed by law enforcing agents, undoubtedly to keep them malleable and compliant. Thus abuses in custody have become more frequent and difficult to stop in this culture of impunity. There have been many cases of individuals being picked up by plainclothes security personnel and taken away. Police stations and offices of other security agencies have turned away family members of missing persons, sometimes denying that they had taken anyone into custody, or refusing to even register a general diary. Allegations of torture and death in custody have tainted the reputation of security forces, giving them an image of being predators rather than protectors in the minds of the public.

For ordinary citizens the directives of the HC represents a sliver of hope that the process of arrest and being in police custody will not be arbitrarily applied, that it will not entail torture, extortion and worse, a horribly painful death. If they are accepted by the court, it will mean that Rubel's death and those of hundreds of others will not have been in vain.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Editorial & Op-ed, The Daily Star.

## POLITICAL CRISIS IN BRAZIL

### A "neoliberal coup"?

FROM A BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

BRAZIL'S progressive centre-left government of Dilma Rousseff has come to an awful end. On May 12, 2016 Brazil's Senate voted 55 to 22 to suspend President Dilma Rousseff, and began the formal impeachment trial against her. Earlier, on April 17, the lower house voted 367 to 137 in favour of her impeachment.

Rousseff is accused of serious budgetary malfeasance – allegedly transferring loans from public banks to the treasury, in order to disguise the size of Brazil's fiscal deficit. Actually, it is common practice by governments to juggle with budgetary figures to hide the actual condition of the economy (for example, Greece, which went into an economic meltdown after it was discovered that budget figures were tampered with).

Rousseff denied any wrongdoing and described the impeachment process as "fraudulent" and a "coup". Dilma Rousseff is, however, not accused of personal enrichment.

Rousseff formed a left-leaning coalition government of nine parties after the 2014 election. Rousseff's Workers Party (PT) and Vice President Michel Temer's Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (centrist PMDB) were the larger components of the coalition. Temer was Rousseff's running mate in the 2014 election, and technically was not elected.

The conspiracy to depose Rousseff was in the making for some time. Clearly, two factors contributed to the ouster of the Workers Party, which has been in power for the past 13 years. First is Brazil's poor economic performance in the last several years, and second, the exasperation of rightist parties, the ruling class, economic elite, and the mainstream media.

The country is suffering its worst recession in 25 years. In 2015, the economy shrank by 3.8 percent, and Brazil's central bank projected that it will shrink by 3.5 percent in 2016. This has been compounded by low commodity prices of exports, mainly oil and manufactured goods; a weak currency; contraction of domestic demand; surging public spending; budget deficit at 6.75 percent of GDP; inflation at 9 percent (2015); rising unemployment; and an external debt at \$230 billion.

Though Rousseff's anti-poverty programme – "Bolsa Familia" – remains widely popular, as it benefitted millions, she failed to stem the economic downturn. As frustration grew among the people, her popularity rating plummeted to 10 percent. Right-wing parties instigated anti-government demonstrations over the past months in Brasilia, while other cities called for Rousseff's resignation. To make matters worse, PMDB withdrew its support in late March 2016. Other coalition partners also turned against Rousseff. Michel Temer and the Lower House Speaker Eduardo Cunha (from PMDB) actually led the impeachment drive, which began in late



PHOTO-AFP

2015.

What is disturbing about Brazilian politicians today is that almost all leading political figures have been implicated in some form of corruption. According to Transparency International Corruption Index, Brazil is placed at 76 among 168 countries (2015). The unpopular Michel Temer (according to polls, 58 percent of the voters were against him), who succeeded Rousseff as interim president for 180 days, is implicated in a number of scandals, including the infamous Petrobras corruption case, in which billions of dollars changed hands.

Dilma Rousseff's impeachment trial will be held in Brazil's Parliament. The 81 members of the Senate will act as the jury, and the presiding Chief Justice of Brazil's Supreme Court will be the judge. After both sides submit their arguments, two-thirds vote of the full Senate will be required to either convict or acquit Dilma Rousseff for crimes de responsabilidade (crimes of responsibility). The process will have to be completed within six months, and during this period, Michel Temer will run the government as president.

Michel Temer has already formed a 22-member all-male cabinet, which does not include any of the ministers who worked under Dilma Rousseff. Interestingly, Wikileaks, on May 12, tweeted that Temer is a US embassy informant.

Actually, there is a widespread belief that the US was behind destabilising Dilma Rousseff's left-leaning government. It is an open secret that the CIA had played a key role in Brazil's 1964 military coup. Civilian rule was reinstated in 1985, but the democratic process is yet to become strong and stable.

Brazil, an ethnically diverse nation with a population of 206 million is the eighth largest economy in the world (GDP \$2.4 trillion, 2014). It is a leading power in

South America and an important member of BRICS. The impeachment process against Dilma Rousseff will have implications for UNASUR (the 12-nation Union of South American Nations, established in 2008), a bastion of independence from US hegemony in the region. Brazil's conservative economic orientation under Michel Temer may also drive MERCOSUR (10-nation Southern Common Market, established in 1991) into the free trade camp, isolating leftist governments of Venezuela and Bolivia. Besides, one hopes that the Rio Olympic Games (August 5-21, 2016) will not be affected by the political crisis facing Brazil.

Analysts say that the right political parties in Brazil may soon find themselves faced with an eroding ephemeral legitimacy if the economic situation does not improve immediately. The IMF has projected that Brazil's economy will improve, but it will take quite some time.

The current political crisis will no doubt further weaken Brazil's democratic system. However, Brazil's judiciary remains strong and has been relentlessly pursuing investigations against corruption.

The impeachment trial of Dilma Rousseff, a one-time Marxist guerrilla, is a constitutional procedure - it is not a criminal indictment. Even if she is acquitted, it is unlikely that she will regain the presidency, as other conspiracies will be churned out to block the left-parties from regaining power. The next general election, due in 2018, will tell which way Brazil is heading.

Indeed, the more one looks at the current situation in Brazil, the more it resembles a soft coup, described by a professor of Federal University of Rio de Janeiro as a "neoliberal coup", against Dilma Rousseff.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Turkey's reaction

Turkey's recent stance on a war criminal's execution in Bangladesh is clearly a blow to diplomatic norms. Turkey is failing to manage its own internal affairs, as the country is plagued with severe economic crises and the rise of insurgency. The Turkish government would do better if they concentrated in managing their own internal affairs, rather than giving Bangladesh advice on why a war criminal should not be executed.  
Saikat Kumar Basu  
Lethbridge, AB, Canada

### Suicide due to result glitch

Recently, an SSC examinee, Sarbajit Ghosh Ridoy, committed suicide upon learning that he had failed in the exams. Upon re-examination, it was found that he actually got GPA 4.67.

I fail to comprehend how such a terrible error could occur. What kind of checking and re-checking apparatus are in place to ensure that the results published are accurate? I would request

the education minister to order an enquiry into this tragic case, so that such mistakes do not occur in future. The people responsible should be given due punishment, and the bereaved family should be adequately compensated.  
Engr. ABM Nurul Islam  
Milton, GA, USA

### "Nothing free in prison"

This is in reference to the above titled article, published in *The Daily Star* on May 17, 2016. The report stated the horrific conditions prevailing in the Dhaka Central Jail. The jail staff and thugs there forcibly collect money for food, sleeping space, meetings with family members, toilets with water etc. It is also alarming and shameful

that prison officials and the jailor are denying these allegations that are in plain sight.

Prisons are supposed to be correction centres for convicts. What can be worse that finding that jail authorities are involved in such criminal practices?  
Md. Abdul Halim, Sirajganj