

## Detained children in India

### Speed up process of repatriation

WE are alarmed to learn that more than 200 Bangladeshi children are in public correctional centres in West Bengal, India, some of them staying there for years. One is surprised to learn the reasons or circumstances of these children and adolescents finding themselves in India, but be that as it may, it's undesirable that so many of them should have to spend such a long time alone in a foreign land.

However, it is heartening to note that Bangladesh High Commission in India has taken steps to ease the lengthy and time-consuming bureaucratic process, which required the involvement of a number of government agencies on both sides of the border. Now, the High Commission has taken it upon itself to verify the address and identity of these children, and thus speed up the repatriation process. Yet it could still take months.

It is, of course, reassuring to hear that some of these children may return home within a month. However, our authorities should investigate how these minors landed up in a foreign land by themselves in the first place. A minor, who was detained for overstaying, had entered West Bengal with a valid visa. How could a child obtain the permission to travel abroad alone?

Not just from the West Bengal, the High Commission in India should continue to look for—and eventually repatriate—Bangladeshi children detained in other places of India. In addition, it should build a dedicated monitoring cell to handle the issue with care and urgency. In the meantime, it should engage with the authorities to ensure that those children are treated well in correctional centres until their return.

## Act now to prevent dengue outbreak

### Do not repeat past mistakes

AFTER a few months of relative relief, a large part of Dhaka South City Corporation is again at risk of suffering a dengue outbreak, a survey found. Out of the 2,599 buildings and construction sites they visited to conduct the survey, officials found Aedes larvae in 938, thus raising the concern.

Till July 24, the disease had already claimed seven lives having infected some 898 people in Dhaka. And, as we can recall from only a few months ago, when mosquito borne diseases were again rapidly on the rise, it is quite likely that many more people could become infected or even lose their lives if the threat of dengue is left ignored and not addressed pre-emptively.

Unfortunately, during every such outbreak, the government almost always react only after the disease has already gotten out of control despite calls from the media and others to do otherwise. By then many are already infected, and bringing the disease under control becomes even more difficult. Thus, we sincerely hope that the government will not make the same mistake again, this time around.

Given that there is still time to prevent an outbreak, the government should immediately start social awareness campaigns that could reduce the risk of households harbouring Aedes larvae, thereby possibly reducing the spread of dengue. Moreover, the government should also ensure that mosquito repellents are regularly sprayed in different neighbourhoods in order to ensure that an outbreak is prevented.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Barapukuria's missing coal

We are taken aback by a recent exposé that revealed that 1.45 lakh tonnes of coal, worth Tk 227 crore, has "gone missing" from the Barapukuria coal-based power plant. This has forced the 525MW power plant to suspend its production for an indefinite period due to lack of fuel supply.

This case should serve as an indication of how deep the culture of corruption is entrenched in many areas of our society and administration.

The government has formed a committee to find out the perpetrators. But signs are not reassuring as a former managing director of the site, who was named as a suspect in the preliminary investigation, has been allowed to leave the country for performing Hajj. What's equally disturbing is the fact that some leaders of the ruling party have already started a blame game.

The final investigation should be impartial and thorough. Those who were involved in the heist should be brought to book and duly punished.

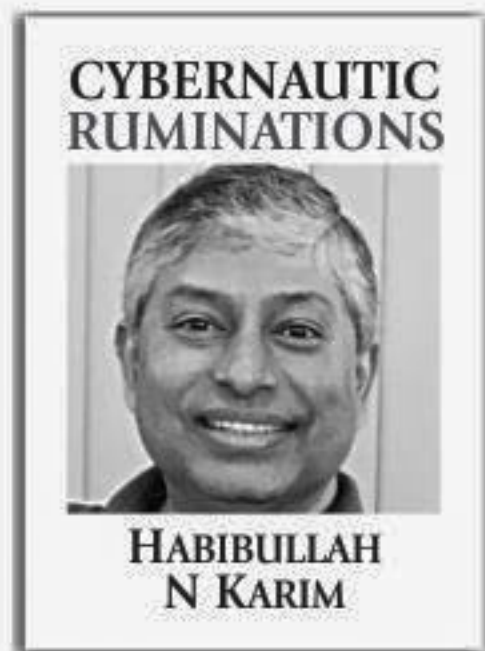
Mohammad Zonaeed Emran  
By e-mail



PHOTO: STAR

# NSU STUDENT'S MURDER ON THE HIGHWAY

## A case of moral decrepitude



**CYBERNAUTIC RUMINATIONS**

**HABIBULLAH N KARIM**

THE senseless murder of a young NSU student, Saidur Rahman Payel, at the hands of the operators of a private intercity bus has shocked the nation to its core. What have we become as a nation? The bus conductors, presumably not much older than their customer-turned-victim, instead of trying to help an accidentally injured passenger, perpetrated the most heinous of crimes by bludgeoning the helpless man to death and dumping his body in a roadside ditch. Why—so that they can escape punishment for leaving behind a passenger at a pit stop along the highway!

Our roads are already among the deadliest in the world. Between six to nine thousand people are killed on the roads every year, while thousands more are injured, many disabled for life. We now have to contend with wilful assaults by transport workers on hapless passengers like the murdered NSU student, or the woman who was gang-

*A murder is a murder whether it is committed with a gun, knife, hockey stick or a vehicle—strict enforcement of the criminal and civil law is a sine qua non in redressing this huge challenge.*

raped on the bus in Dhamrai a couple of months ago.

These transport workers are not alien creatures. They are very much part and parcel of our society. It is very difficult to digest that our society is producing men with no empathy for their fellow humans; we are producing men with psychotic tendencies who will not



Saidur Rahman Payel.

PHOTO: TAKEN FROM FACEBOOK/SAIDUR RAHMAN PAYEL

hesitate to kill others to save or please their own skin. How has this come to pass in a society that once prided itself on its hospitality and charity towards others? Presumably, boy recruits, some as young as 10 years old, join as conductors and they gradually take over as drivers without any formal training on driving, traffic rules or road etiquette. Thousands of bus and truck drivers are on the prowl every day, commandeering heavy vehicles without any license in clear connivance with the law enforcement agencies. No wonder we have so many accidents every single day.

We are the only country in the world where, instead of clamping down on such reckless driving, we actually encourage it by giving legal protection to the murderers. Manslaughter charge provision has been removed from criminal jurisprudence to protect bus and truck drivers from driving-related fatalities just because some politicians want to safeguard their vote banks. This in turn has incentivised more reckless driving and complete disregard for rule of law, as drivers and other transport workers have learned that they can literally get away with murder.

Apparently, all the hue and cry in the media has done little to bring back any

semblance of sanity in this area. Twenty-five years ago, movie star Ilias Kanchan lost his wife in a road accident and since then he has devoted his life to promotion of road safety. In 2011, when an internationally renowned filmmaker along with the son of a *shahid buddhijibi* and the head of a private TV channel got killed in a road accident, due to inept driving by a vehicle coming from the opposite direction near Manikganj, the whole community of electronic and print media was up in arms to force a change in the legal provisions to properly prosecute errant drivers. In that particular case, the driver was given life imprisonment by the High Court and the bus owners asked to pay more than Tk 4 crore as compensation, but thousands of similar cases never see the light of day.

A murder is a murder whether it is committed with a gun, knife, hockey stick or a vehicle—strict enforcement of the criminal and civil law is a *sine qua non* in redressing this huge challenge.

A bigger concern for us as a nation, however, is the issue of the decline in empathy leading to wanton disregard for other people's misery and even aggravating such misery to advance one's

own selfish ends. How do we address this and save our soul as a heroic nation that clinched victory from the clutches of a genocidal military regime nearly 50 years ago?

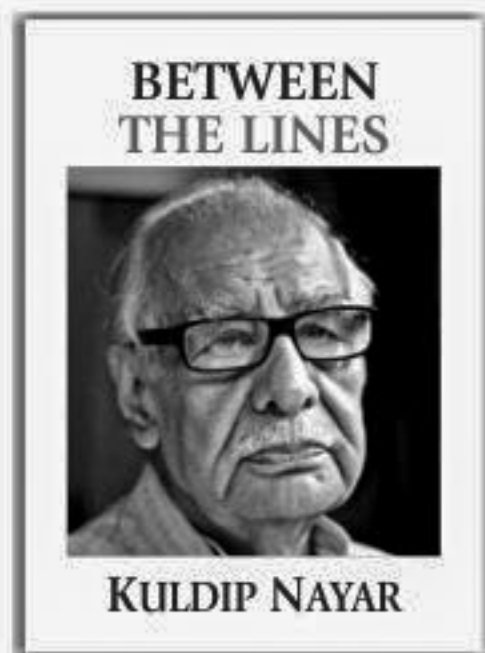
A few common-sense initiatives can drastically improve this situation, such as consistent application of the law, debarring law enforcement staff from owning and operating transport business, updating legal provisions to criminalise reckless driving, providing free training to transport workers, and mandatory road etiquette training to any traffic rule transgressors.

It's time we all sing and march in tune to Bidrohi Kobi Nazrul's call—"I, the great rebel, / Shall rest in quiet only when I find / The sky and the air free of the piteous groans of the oppressed"—and only then can we root out such dystopian anarchy on the roads and bring back empathy, i.e., help those in distress and not add to the aggravation or look the other way.

The very soul of our nation is at stake: can we afford to look away?

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**BETWEEN THE LINES**

**KULDIP NAYAR**

THE army in Pakistan seems to have devised a way where a particular person is elected even without a valid cause. Imran Khan is a product of such phenomena. Long before the latest elections, his name was tossed around. One can now assume that probably nobody else fitted into the scheme of things which the army wanted. Nawaz Sharif had been elected in the past but was found wanting in the eyes of the army. Even the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf was not up to the mark.

Why then has the army come into the picture and destroyed the process of elections? The army seems to have realised that it should rule directly with a person who takes pride in being a stalking horse of the army. The cricketer-turned-politician, Imran Khan, has been there in politics for a long time but never made the grade.

General Zia-ul-Haq and General Musharraf were through and through the army's men. They ruled like martial law dictators and alienated the public. The army was visible all the way, and its chief was even seen sitting in the cabinet meetings apparently to guide the affairs according to its needs when Nawaz Sharif was the prime minister. The experiment which is now being made is to have such a civilian at the head who is the army's man in thinking and action. This, obviously, lessens the chance of the army's direct rule.

The democratic countries have said openly that Pakistan was under the army rule. Will Imran Khan's credentials be acceptable to the West? The next few months of Khan's rule will show this. It would depend on Imran Khan whether he can please both rulers—the army and the people.

As far as India is concerned, its role

now is that of a spectator. It can have surgical operations like the ones it had done before. Anything more can start a regular war. Imran has said during his victory speech, soon after his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party emerged as the single largest outfit in the elections, that he would like to have good relations with India. If India takes one step, he said, he would take two to further their relationship. Yet, Imran reiterated that Kashmir remains the core issue.

He is unmindful of the fact that the Kashmiris now want their own Islamic

To the Pakistani prime minister, the Kashmiri youth do not seem to be a party because, instead of two, now the three will have to sit across the table to solve the problem. The Indians would not talk to Pakistan, as foreign minister Sushma Swaraj had indicated, until the country stopped giving shelter to militants. If and when Imran Khan picks up the thread, would he be able to give that kind of assurance?

He is on such a weak wicket that even if he wants to give such an assurance, it would not be taken seriously until the



Imran Khan, chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

PHOTO: REUTERS/CAREN FIROUZ

sovereign republic. In other words, the Kashmiris are not looking up to Pakistan for support. Even separatists like Yasin Malik and Shabbir Shah have become irrelevant. Not long ago, when I was in Srinagar to talk to the students, I was astonished to find that they were no longer pro-Pakistan. For them, both New Delhi and Islamabad were on par in forcing their own rule. How would Imran now change their thinking when, in his views, there were only two parties—India and Pakistan—that are privy to the issue?

army chief openly supports his stand. At least, no such signs are visible at present. These are early days before Imran Khan settles down in his saddle. But there is no doubt that Khan will want peace in the region to prevail.

Indeed, by extending a hand of friendship to India, Imran has proved to be politically correct and has even managed to score diplomatic points. However, the real test for him would be how much freedom the army would give him to build an equation with India. This

has been the army's preserve so far. Delinking the army would mean another overhaul in the state administration because at present its rule goes deep down up to the village level.

A veteran South Asia analyst has taken a dim view of the election results in Pakistan, saying that the most dangerous country in the world has now got considerably more dangerous. According to the analyst, Imran Khan is an outspoken defender of the army and is closely aligned with the Islamist movement patronised by the ISI. This has ominous overtones. Understandably, the US State Department has offered a cautious welcome to the change of guards in Pakistan, a process that remains incomplete.

This may be because Khan has been a vociferous critic of America which, according to him, treated Pakistan like a "doormat." A former CIA analyst and White House official, however, indicated that the Imran Khan-army dalliance could be a short-lived one. The analyst feels that Khan has a reputation for independence and volatility and his political movement is almost a cult of personality. The army may find this as the real stumbling block when it comes to dealing with Khan.

A secular India may find Imran Khan giving more help to militants in Kashmir. Firstly because he thinks that Kashmir should be a part of Pakistan and, secondly, he has to prove to the army commanders that he would be fulfilling their tasks. India will have to face a situation where there is no war and no peace either. In that atmosphere, Khan's tilt towards Islam adds another dimension. It is, too, a confusing situation. Any tinkering can lead to disastrous results.

Imran Khan would have to do something more than a miracle to prove that he is with the people and when the chips are down, he would be on their side. At present, in their minds, he is the army's man. This is an impression that he cannot easily efface.

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Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.