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AZAD TO AVIJIT

Deadly cost of freethinking

Verdict over DU professor's murder due tomorrow; families of slain bloggers yet to find closure

SHARIFUL ISLAM, ASHUTOSH SARKAR, EMRUL HASAN BAPPY

Both of them championed the causes of freethought and secularism. And both met the same fate.

They came under machete attacks by extremists near the Bangla Academy while returning from the country's biggest cultural and literary festival, Amar Ekushey Boi Mela.

Scholarly writer and academic Prof Humayun Azad was fatally wounded in a machete attack on February 27, 2004.

Exactly 11 years later, on February 26, 2015, writer-blogger Avijit Roy was hacked to death. His wife Rafida Ahmed Bonya suffered serious stab injuries when she tried to save her husband.

Militants also launched fatal attacks on at least six other secularist bloggers and freethinkers in a similar manner in Dhaka and Sylhet between 2013 and 2016. Four of them were killed within just seven months in 2015.

The motive of the attacks, as police investigation revealed, was to muzzle their secular voice, views and freethinking.

None of the families of the victims have yet got justice as four cases filed over the murder of as many secularist bloggers, including Bangladeshi-American Avijit Roy,



Commuters boarding a water taxi in the capital's Gulshan area yesterday. The water taxi service in Hatirjheel is becoming popular as commuters can travel between areas, including Gulshan, Rampura and Karwan Bazar, in a short time, without having to suffer in the perennial gridlock on the streets.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

‘I forgive my students, will return to classroom’

Hriday Mondal, the teacher who spent 19 days in jail on charges of hurting religious sentiment, tells *Star*

ZYMA ISLAM

“I will go back to the classroom and continue teaching my students. Forgiving them for their mistakes and helping them differentiate between right and wrong is my job.”

This is what Hriday Chandra Mondal, maths teacher of Munshiganj's Binodpur Ram Kumar High School, told The Daily Star yesterday, after spending 19 days in jail.

“There are some young, impressionable students who are being led astray. It's my job to tell them what is right,” he also said.

Just weeks ago, Hriday was thrown in jail “for his own safety” after a crowd of locals hurled rocks at his house and beat the door down with stakes.

His son still cannot go to his school. He is being

continuously taunted and bullied. Hriday's wife recently told this daily that they were passing days in fear.

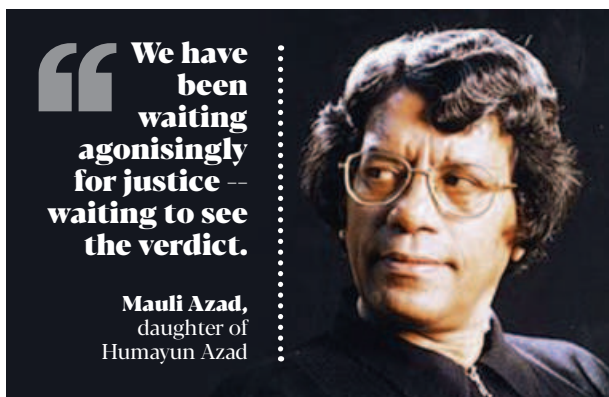
Having suffered so badly, Hriday refuses to step back from his role as a teacher, which he has performed for 25 years.

“I faced similar things in the past. Some locals, probably students, threw brick chunks at my house. One day, some boys hurled abuse at me as I was walking by them. As I confronted them, they denied speaking anything abusive.”

There were several instances when he found the lock of his cupboard in the school broken. “I used to keep students' fees and the receipts in the cupboard. Now, I take the receipts home.”

Hriday believes he had to face all these because he did not agree to students' request to pass them

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remain pending with different courts.

Prof Azad's family didn't even get the lower court verdict though 18 years have gone by.

“We have been waiting agonisingly for justice -- waiting to see the verdict,” Mauli Azad, daughter of Humayun Azad, told The Daily Star on Sunday.

Finally, a Dhaka court is set to deliver a verdict in the case tomorrow.

According to the police probe, Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) operatives swooped on 56-year-old linguist Azad, an acclaimed writer and Bangla professor at Dhaka University, as he was trying to catch a rickshaw to go home from the book fair.

He suffered critical stab wounds to different parts of his body. A day after the attack, his brother Manjur Kabir filed an attempt-to-murder case with Ramna Police Station against some unnamed people.

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NID may be required for advance Eid train tickets

Sale starts April 23
HELEMUL ALAM

The Bangladesh Railway is likely to make National Identity Cards or any other valid identity card mandatory for buying advance train tickets -- the sales of which will begin on April 23 -- ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

It is also considering an only-women compartment in each inter-city train during the Eid rush.

Advance tickets would be sold from counters at four spots -- Kamalapur Station, Old Station at

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A school rickshaw-van carrying children going against the traffic in the middle of a busy street in the capital's Mohakhali area. Drivers of such vans often put lives in danger this way just to reach their destination in time. The photo was taken a couple of days ago.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BTRC failing to stop hatred on Facebook

HC blasts the regulator

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday blasted BTRC for its failure to prevent the spread of hateful contents on Facebook, which has caused disruptions in social and communal harmony in the country.

The HC bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Khizir Hayat said if the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission had taken measures to stop the spread of fake news on Facebook, the communal attacks, militant activities and chaos during the Durga Puja festival last October would not have happened.

“There are specific provisions under Section 8 of the Digital Security Act, 2018 based on which the BTRC can regulate Facebook and remove or block publication and dissemination of hateful contents from the social media platform.”

“But why does the BTRC need order from this court each and every time to remove such content from

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‘Evil has been defeated’

Says Shehbaz after being elected new Pak PM, announces raft of populist measures

AGENCIES

Pakistan lawmakers yesterday elected Shehbaz Sharif as the country's new prime minister following the weekend ouster of Imran Khan, who resigned his national assembly seat -- along with most of his party members -- ahead of the vote.

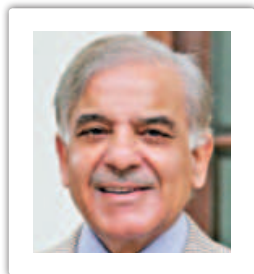
Khan was dismissed Sunday after losing a no-confidence vote, paving the way for an unlikely alliance that faces the same issues which bedeviled the cricket star-turned-politician -- a weak economy, rising militancy, and soured relations with the West.

Shehbaz immediately announced a raft of populist measures, including a new minimum wage of 25,000 rupees (around \$135), pay rises for civil servants, and development projects in rural areas.

He also said he wanted better relations with neighbour India, but a solution needed to be found for Kashmir -- the contested Himalayan territory at the heart of decades of their conflict.

Shehbaz, leader of the centrist Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N), was the only candidate for premier

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BUSINESS

NOTICE
Don't miss today's special issue on Cashless Shopping & Dining.