

Why was MP Anwarul Azim murdered?

Investigate the suspicious circumstances of his death and disappearance

We are shocked to learn of the murder of Awami League MP Anwarul Azim Anar from Jhenaidah-4 constituency, who was reported missing for over a week in India. According to a general diary filed in Kolkata on May 18, the MP went to India for medical treatment on May 12, and was staying with a family friend named Gopal Biswas. At around 1:41 pm on May 13, he left Biswas's home, apparently to visit a doctor, saying he would return in the evening. However, a WhatsApp message was sent from his phone later that evening saying that he was going to Delhi and that there was no need to call him. Another message was sent on May 15 to Biswas reiterating that he was in Delhi with "VIPs," urging not to call him. Since then, neither Biswas nor Anar's family heard from him. Although the Kolkata police have confirmed his death, his body is yet to be recovered, as of writing this editorial.

This is a highly unprecedented incident; never before has a sitting Bangladeshi MP been found embroiled in such a deadly affair in a neighbouring country. The mysterious circumstances surrounding his disappearance and death have raised a number of questions in the public mind. Why was he murdered? What could be the motive behind it and who could be involved? Why would he suddenly take off for Delhi if he really was visiting for medical treatment, and why would he refuse to speak on the phone? Where was he during the missing period? Was the MP somehow involved in any unlawful activity leading to his murder?

Azim, who has been elected three times, stood accused in 21 cases between 2000 and 2008, according to his affidavit submitted to the Election Commission before the January 7 national election. Three of those were murder cases, while the rest involved smuggling arms, explosives, drugs and gold, extortion, tender manipulation, and sheltering extremists. He was even on a "wanted" list of the Interpol. Though he was subsequently cleared in all 21 cases during the AL regime, allegations of his involvement in various illegal trades have surfaced from time to time. Given his checkered past and the suspicious activities in India before his murder, we cannot help but be wary of the possibility of his involvement in some serious crimes across the border.

While we condemn the killing of MP Anar, we must say it would be unfortunate—and a matter of shame for our nation—if he was found involved in unbecoming activities, that too in a neighbouring country. We demand a proper investigation into the murder and full disclosure of the circumstances that led to his death. Three people have already been arrested over what Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan has called a "planned murder." The authorities must be forthcoming about any detail they might unearth in the days to come. Only full transparency can allay the rumours and speculations that are currently proliferating on and off social media about the MP.

Accidents waiting to happen

Lift maintenance in Dhaka's public hospitals is severely neglected

The recent death of a 53-year-old patient who got stuck inside a malfunctioning lift at a Gazipur hospital has brought to light an understated but dangerous issue that plagues our healthcare facilities. According to a report in this daily, rundown, old, rickety lifts are the main mode of transportation inside major state-run hospitals in the capital these days. In some places, the lifts are in such dilapidated conditions that even the lift operators don't feel confident to ride them.

Lift maintenance seems to be one of the least prioritised concerns of hospital authorities in the capital. This daily investigated 13 big state-run hospitals, where complaints of lift malfunctioning and breakdown are commonplace. Lift operators and staffers at these hospitals spoke about horrible experiences of lift failures, some of the incidents causing lifelong trauma.

In one hospital, no one can tell how old the lifts are, but here is a hint: they have collapsible doors. A liftman in that hospital said the walls of the lift he operates sometimes gets electrified, creating a life-threatening risk. He further added that several lift-related accidents had taken place in that hospital over the years, with a patient dying while trapped in the lift in 2014. Overcrowding is a major problem as well, causing the lifts to malfunction, said an engineer at another hospital.

We want to know why such a major issue has not been addressed yet, even though it has persisted for years. Why are the old lifts not being replaced with new and more advanced ones? Why are more lifts not being installed where overcrowding is an issue? This is yet another example of complete disregard for public safety and sheer negligence towards a vital component of a hospital's operation. We urge the health authorities to make safe lift operation at hospitals a priority immediately. After the Gazipur hospital incident, the health directorate has issued a set of directives to ensure safe and smooth lift service in all hospitals. We urge them to follow up on it regularly to ensure that the directives are being followed to the dot, so that no such accidents occur again

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Roman Emperor Constantine I baptised

On this day in 337, Constantine the Great, who had practised Christianity since his youth and sparked its growth into a world religion, became on his deathbed the first Roman emperor to be baptised in the Christian church.

FREEDOM VS PROSPERITY

A rehash of the development vs democracy debate



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ZILLUR RAHMAN

The Atlantic Council, a US-based think tank, recently published a report that poses the question: does freedom lead to prosperity, or does prosperity lead to freedom? In the findings of the research, it is stated that there is strong evidence that increasing freedom in a country eventually leads to prosperity in the long term.

The report also indicates that even though Bangladesh has become one of the more prosperous nations among neighbouring countries, the freedoms enjoyed by its people have gradually declined over the past 22 years. In the context of the report, "freedoms" refer to political freedom, economic freedom, and legal freedom. Meanwhile, prosperity is quantified through indexes of education, income, health, inequality, environment, and minority rights. The data in the report showed that economic freedom in Bangladesh grew to an extent in the early 2000s but is now relatively stagnant, while political and legal freedoms have been declining since 1995. The clear implication of this data is that the current level of prosperity that Bangladesh is enjoying is not sustainable.

Although the report uses broad definitions for what it counts as "freedom" and "prosperity," the argument brought forth is essentially the same one we have been having in Bangladesh for a very long time: the argument of development versus democracy.

The declining freedoms identified in the report once again give a clear indication that the consecutive governments of Bangladesh, from multiple political parties, have repeatedly failed to empower the country's people. The inequality in society keeps growing, corruption runs rampant, and certain beneficiary groups have hijacked the trajectory of development in Bangladesh, ensuring a fundamentally uncompetitive market, where the only ways to success are through underhanded violations of the rule of law, unethical exploitation of the poor, and undermining of the promises of democracy and social justice underpinned in our constitution.

Apologists of the current

government's shortcomings have, as usual, resorted to using the age-old talking points taken by undemocratic actors. They will argue the opposite of the data, stating that it is the development that eventually leads to democracy. Therefore, development should be prioritised first, even if it comes at the expense of democracy. They will, of course, not answer the questions of how development can be kept inclusive and sustainable if the process of development is not democratic.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

Other undemocratic talking points include indicating how exploitation, inequality, and breach of human rights were once a norm hundreds of years ago, which allowed Western nations to accumulate wealth in a brutal fashion in the form of colonialism, and their current development is a direct result of the harsh reality of early era capitalism. This line of argument is particularly absurd, as it readily admits that the method being taken by the current government is similar to the colonial

of Lee Kuan Yew, then perhaps this comparison could have a leg to stand on. All current data indicates that Bangladesh will not be turning into a first-world country any time soon. In fact, the failures of the government to reduce inequality and ensure freedoms are now actively driving away foreign direct investment. On the other hand, if Bangladesh had an abundance of raw material resources like China, which it could use to become a worldwide manufacturing powerhouse, then perhaps a

strengthen democracy in Bangladesh, and it is failing to provide economic, political and legal freedom for its people. It is relatively easy to receive funds and technical expertise from foreign friends when building roads, bridges, and power plants. However, by stating that democracy will come later, they repeatedly pass on the responsibility of the truly difficult and important tasks of nation-building to future generations, who will ultimately have to shoulder the cost of this so-called development.

What could the recent ICC warrants mean?

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ALIZA RAHMAN

The arrest warrants by the International Criminal Court (ICC) are the latest development in the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Karim Khan, the chief prosecutor of ICC, has stated that there are "reasonable grounds" for regarding Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant as having "criminal responsibility" for "war crimes and crimes against humanity." Also implicated in the case are Hamas leaders Mohammed Diab Ibrahim al-Masri (better known as Mohammed Deif), Yahya Sinwar, and Ismail Haniyeh.

The news may not come across as surprising to those who have kept abreast of the issue since October 7, 2023. The landmark hearing in January in the International Court of Justice involved determining whether Israel's actions in Gaza can be termed a genocide. South Africa brought the case forward with an 84-page document and allegations that the 1948 Genocide Convention had been violated by Israel. What this groundbreaking decision by South Africa made clear was that nations are now willing to hold Israel accountable in a way that is unprecedented. The state of Israel has long enjoyed the military and political support of the US, its strongest ally and the most powerful nation in the world. However, international reactions to

Israel have largely changed with the onslaught of violence directed at Palestinian civilians in Gaza over the past eight months. Now, with the ICC warrants, renewed pressure has fallen on the Israeli officials who have faced widespread condemnation across the globe.

Over the years, the ICC has had its shortcomings. Karim Khan's statements about a "senior leader" stating that the ICC was "built for Africa and thugs like Putin" and not Western nations and their allies brings to the fore a crucial criticism that has been levied against it for years: that it is not impartial, and operates in a manner more beneficial to the West and detrimental to the rest of the world. Among all the ICC investigations to date, all except one investigation took place in a country outside the African continent.

Moreover, while 124 countries have ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in 1998, powerful countries such as China, Russia, India, and the United States have not. This means that there are cases when the ICC's jurisdiction may not extend to these countries. For the US, there is a history of hostile reactions to the ICC—George W Bush pressured the governments of other nations to not prosecute US nationals under the ICC, Donald Trump refused to cooperate with ICC and stated in the UN General Assembly that it will neither support nor recognise it, and Mike Pompeo, the secretary of state under Trump, announced visa bans would be imposed on ICC officials.

Adding to the problems is that the recent arrest warrants may create an

impression that there is an equivalence between the aforementioned Hamas leaders and Netanyahu and Gallant. It bolsters the typical bothsideism that has been present in the arguments of many who have been unwilling to fully condemn the severe brutality committed by Israel against the population in Gaza. Not only does such an idea not take into account the unequal powers of the two groups, but it also pushes to the wayside the many actions of Netanyahu that may have helped in empowering Hamas.

It is imperative for us to remember that should arrest warrants against Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant come into effect, much more will still need to occur for a permanent ceasefire, and eventually, a liberated Palestinian state.

Netanyahu's own reaction to the arrest warrant has been inflammatory. He has called it an "outrage of historic proportions," and Benny Gantz, a member of Israel's war cabinet, stated, "Drawing parallels between the leaders of a democratic country determined to defend itself from despicable terror to leaders of a blood-thirsty terror organisation is a deep distortion of justice and blatant moral bankruptcy."

Moreover, if the harsh reactions of the US is anything to go by, it appears

that the arrest warrants may have an impact on the current Israeli head of state, and place further pressures on US-Israeli relations as deeper fissures between the public and the government's stances continue to widen in the year of an election.

It is imperative for us to remember that should arrest warrants against Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant come into effect, much more will still need to occur for a permanent ceasefire, and eventually, a liberated Palestinian state. Netanyahu is one piece of the puzzle. As noted by Mairav Zonszein, the senior Israeli analyst at the International Crisis Group, some of the problem lies in Israeli society—with significant numbers of people supporting Netanyahu's destructive policies against Palestinians. From Hasbara to campaigns by the American Defamation League, concerted efforts have been made over decades to convince both the Israeli population and the American Jewish population that the state of Israel is essential for the safety of Jews even as Israel's actions are, in fact, harming the Jewish community. The punishment of Netanyahu, Gallant, and the aforementioned Hamas leaders will not undo the irreparable damage caused by the 75-year occupation and settler colonial project.

We should, therefore, be cautious of an excessive focus on Netanyahu, as might once again be the case with the ICC's arrest warrants. The ICC's decision is part of a long line of beginnings holding Israel accountable for its actions over 75 years, for which it has not faced any consequences.