

MY DHAKA

Mental trauma is real, counselling can make all the difference

RBR
Recent tragedies in Bangladesh has brought to our attention the urgency to recognise the need for mental trauma healing.

Psychological trauma is an instinctive emotional response to any disastrous tragedy you have personally experienced or witnessed; you cannot just snap out of such emotional trauma. These are intangible feelings that are difficult to put into words.

The undercurrent of emotional upsets leads to depression, anxiety, reckless and self-destructive behaviour, often leading to major problems if not addressed via proper psychiatric treatments, interventions, and counselling.

Today, I just want to zero in on the mental trauma aspects of mental health. The recent major catastrophe that is the Milestone jet fighter crash, as well as the July Uprising from last year, have left many of us – young, middle-aged, and old – in severe emotional and psychological distress, affecting our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in profound ways.

Building on the experience

gained from the July Uprising trauma counselling initiative by SAJIDA Foundation, with the help of the government, the foundation has started to give trauma-focused counselling support to those injured during the plane crash at Milestone School and their bereaved family members.

The children who survived the Milestone tragedy will remain emotionally scarred for life, unless they can process the tragic event. "It is crucial to seek support from mental health professionals like psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists, and primary care doctors for these students and witnesses trying to recover from the tragic incident. Professional psychological support can prevent mental trauma. This is exactly where the on field experience of health care centres like Sajida Foundation comes in handy," says Farjana Sharmin, head of programme, Mental Health, Sajida Foundation.

The foundation has already set up a trauma counselling programme on the Milestone school premises.

While sharing their counselling experience and the outcomes of the July



Uprising in a roundtable titled "Healing Pathways: SAJIDA Trauma Counselling Initiative" in Dhaka recently, they emphasised the necessity for trauma counselling.

National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR) Deputy Director SK Muhammad Atiqur Rahman, at the roundtable, explained that while he can nurse and operate upon a physical wound, he has no expertise to help the patient with trauma counselling.

"It is the job of a mental health care practitioner, and it shows how important their job is for the well-being of the patient," he points out.

"It is time to reinforce our

resolution to take mental health into serious cognisance and allow it to be integrated into the mainstream healthcare system of the country," says Professor Kamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury, of Dhaka University's Clinical Psychology Department.

McKinsey Health Institute (MHI) analysis shows that each US\$1 invested in scaling mental health interventions could have an economic return of US\$5-6; this statistic was one of the most discussed parts of the panel discussion. This should encourage policy makers to invest in mental health care.

The need for allotting a governmental budget, specifically for mental health

care, building an adequately skilled workforce, and engaging community leaders to promote an attitude in people to seek help regarding mental health care came under scrutiny as well.

"After July, came the Milestone tragedy, reinforcing and reminding us how important it is to set up trauma counselling initiatives in all medical colleges and hospitals across the city and country, irrespective of whether it is a government or private initiative," says SK Muhammad Atiqur Rahman.

Upsetting political developments, tragedies resulting from violence, accidents, and natural disasters can compound our distress, leading to unresolved emotions that can be hard to work through. And healing from any such disturbing episode is as important as nursing any of your physical injuries.

So, if you go to a counsellor seeking help, it is not because you are going mad but because you want to cure your mind of traumatic sufferings.

Dhakaites are on edge now, and we need to learn to cope with the mental exhaustion and trauma in our evolving new normal.

Khaleda's birthday to be observed in low-key manner

UNB, Dhaka

The BNP will observe the birthday of its Chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia today in a low-key manner with only prayer programmes.



The party's Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said they would pray for their leader's good health and speedy recovery through doa and milad mahfils, instead of celebrating with cake-cutting or other events.

He said the doa and milad mahfils will be held at BNP offices across the country, including the headquarters in Dhaka, and in mosques after Juma prayers, seeking Khaleda's good health and long life, as well as eternal peace for those martyred during the 1971 Liberation War, the 1990 democratic movement, and the 2024 mass uprising.

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Man stabbed to death at Banani shisha lounge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man was stabbed to death early yesterday while leaving a shisha lounge in the capital's Banani.

The deceased, Rahat Hossain Rabbi, 31, a resident of Mohakhali, was attacked around 4:30am on the staircase of the second floor of a shisha lounge in Banani, said Russell Sarwar, officer-in-charge (OC) of Banani Police Station.

Rabbi was leaving the establishment when six to seven men, led by a suspect identified as Munna, attacked him, the OC said.

"He was taken to Kurmitola General Hospital in critical condition, where doctors declared him dead."

Police are conducting drives to arrest the attackers, the OC added.

Govt forms body

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Secretary Shafiqul Alam disclosed the development while briefing the media at the Foreign Service Academy yesterday following a weekly meeting of advisers.

"What is clear from the reports is that the past autocratic regime used surveillance equipment and spyware to illegally conduct surveillance on citizens and violate their constitutional right to privacy."

According to the press secretary, the committee will investigate how much money was spent on surveillance, which countries these supplies came from, and how they were used.

Shafiqul asserted that the government's surveillance mechanism is not being used unlawfully at the moment.

In addition, the government has also launched an investigation into the procurement of lethal weapons for the police and how they were used, he added.

This decision also follows a report by The Daily Star on how the police stockpiled seven times as many lethal weapons as non-lethal weapons.

246 more reform proposals

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Reform Commission; 33 from the Health Reform Commission; and 23 from the Media Reform Commission.

Meanwhile, another 316 proposals remain under review.

Shafiqul also highlighted the success of Yunus's recent visit to Malaysia.

He said Bangladeshi workers there will now enjoy social protection benefits similar to those of Malaysian nationals and will be able to lodge complaints in Bangla.

Calling it a "landmark tour", he added that Bangladesh requested employment opportunities for private security guards, caregivers, and students in Malaysia.

The Malaysian authorities responded positively, and discussions also covered free trade agreements and defence cooperation, he added.

China offers help in Thai-Cambodia row

AFP, Beijing

Beijing yesterday offered to help Thailand and Cambodia patch up relations after their deadliest border clashes in decades, as the three nations' foreign ministers met for talks in China.

Last month, a long-running border row between the Southeast Asian neighbours boiled over into conflict involving artillery bombardments, air strikes and infantry clashes, killing at least 43 people and forcing over 300,000 to flee their homes.

The two sides struck a ceasefire after five days of violence – following intervention from US President Donald Trump – and agreed last week to extend the deal after talks between defence officials in Malaysia.

50 years since Bangabandhu's assassination

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The day is taking place, marking a break in tradition that had been maintained since 2008.

August 15 was introduced as National Mourning Day in 1996, following the the Awami League's rise to power for the first time since the tragedy.

From 2002 to 2007, the day went unobserved at the state level after the then BNP-led four-party alliance government cancelled the observance of National Mourning Day and the August 15 public holiday.

However, a High Court order in July 2008 revoked the cancellation.

On August 13 last year, a week after assuming power, the interim government decided that there would be no national holiday on August 15.

Since yesterday morning, police have tightened security on and around Dhanmondi Road 32.

Speaking to this newspaper, Kyashinyu Marma, officer-in-charge of Dhanmondi Police Station, said they are on high alert. "A team is always stationed there. However, an additional police platoon has been deployed at the site since this [yesterday] morning so that no kind of sabotage can take place. The deployment will remain in place throughout August 15."

During the AL's tenure, besides

top government and party leaders, AL supporters, activists, and the general public would gather at the site to pay tributes to the architect of the nation's independence.

The building, deeply entwined with Bangladesh's political history – having borne witness to the Six-Point Movement, the 1969 mass uprising, and the 1970 general election – was set on fire on August 5, 2024 and torn down on the night of February 5 this year.

THE CARNAGE

In the pre-dawn hours of August 15, 1975, tanks rumbled down empty roads toward their targets – then-president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's residence.

A contingent of security personnel composed of police and army was on duty there. Nurul Islam Khan, the then deputy superintendent of police, was supervising the guards that night.

Inside the house, everybody was still asleep: Mujib, his wife Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib, his sons Sheikh Kamal, Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russel, daughters-in-law Sultana Kamal and Rosie Jamal, and his brother Sheikh Naser.

A few tanks stopped at the entrance to Road 32 while others went in, coming to a stop at the gate of the residence.

Within minutes, a barrage of bullets shattered the windowpanes and hit the wall of the office room. The gunfire continued for a while as a group of disgruntled army officers carried out the assassination.

A few of them went up to the first floor.

As they reached the landing of the staircase, they saw Major Mohiuddin and his soldiers leading Mujib down.

"What do you want?" Mujib asked. Nobody answered. Then suddenly, two of them fired at him.

The president collapsed on the stairs.

After killing him, the soldiers ran riot throughout the residence, hunting down and killing the other family members, including Sheikh Russel, who was only 10 years old.

The same day, Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni, nephew of Mujib and founding chairman of Awami Jubo League, was killed with his wife Arzu Moni in their Dhanmondi residence.

Also, Abdur Rab Serniabat, former water resources minister and Mujib's brother-in-law, along with some of his family members, was killed in his Minto Road residence.

Col Jamil Uddin Ahmed was killed while on his way to Bangabandhu's house.

Besides, 14 people died in mortar fire in Mohammadpur.

LDC graduation now will be 'suicidal'

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severe fallout of the pandemic, the Ukraine war, the high bank interest rates and currency flight, said BAPI President Abdul Muktedir.

So the private sector needs another six years of LDC graduation deferment, said Muktedir, also the managing director of Incepta Pharmaceuticals.

Once Bangladesh graduates, it must comply with the World Trade Organisation's intellectual property (IP) rules (TRIPS) including 20-year patents on new medicines, said Sanya Reid Smith, legal advisor and senior researcher of The Third World Network (TWN), in her keynote paper.

If a new medicine comes out after Bangladesh graduates, the insulin prices in Bangladesh could be 11 times more expensive so 'the poverty rate among households needing insulin could increase by between 15 and 200 percent'.

According to a UN report, some of the implications of LDC graduation for Bangladesh include a reduction in preferential export market access such as the EU, the country's largest export market.

The tariff rate to the EU will increase to 9.6 percent (under developing country preferences or 12 percent at the general rate) once Bangladesh graduates (and the



ICC-B President Mahbubur Rahman speaks at a seminar titled "LDC Graduation: Some Options for Bangladesh" at Sheraton Dhaka yesterday

three-year smooth transition period is over) from zero at present.

It will increase to 18 percent from 16 percent for Canada and 12.8 percent from the existing 7.4 percent for Japan, she said.

Bangladesh can demand deferment for three more years but the case should be very strong, said Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network for Economic Modelling.

However, the two other graduating countries, such as Nepal and Lao PDR, are not demanding deferment, he said.

The Maldives and Guinea fell into trouble after their graduation from

LDC status, said Taskeen Ahmed, president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The government's preparation for LDC graduation is far less than it should have been, said M Masrur Reaz, chairman of Policy Exchange, Bangladesh.

Bangladesh can request a deferment from the UN, said ICC-B Vice-President Naser Ezaz Bijoy.

"This is not a good time for graduation – it will be a challenge for the survival of the businesses," said Abdul Hai Sarker, chairman of the Bangladesh Association of Banks.

Commission to press

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Prof Riaz told The Daily Star that discussions were held on how to implement the July Charter and give it legal backing, and that various proposals were presented.

However, he added that the pledges for the charter's implementation and legal basis have not yet been finalised, and the discussion is ongoing.

The July 2024 mass uprising, led by students and the public, toppled the Awami League government. On August 8, an interim government headed by Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus took office.

After the Prof Muhammad Yunus-led interim government took charge following the fall of the Awami League regime in August last year, six commissions were initially formed to recommend basic reforms. Later, Prof Yunus formed the consensus commission with heads of the reform commissions. Under Prof Yunus, the consensus commission is tasked with preparing the July Charter through dialogues with and consensus among political parties, to serve as a blueprint for future governance.

In March, the commission held its first round of talks with 32 political parties and alliances on 166 proposals, reaching consensus on 62. In the second round, agreement was reached on 20 issues, while BNP, Jamaat, NCP and others placed notes of dissent on nine.

The preliminary draft of the charter, based on the 82 agreed proposals, was sent to the parties on July 28. In that draft, the commission asked parties to pledge to recognise and "enshrine the historical importance of the 2024 anti-discrimination democratic movement and popular uprising in the constitution with due prominence".

That version, however, made no mention of constitutional and state recognition for the broader democratic struggle or of ensuring justice for the killings.

Clause 3 of that draft proposed implementing the recommendations within two years after the next general election, which is now slated for February 2026. BNP and like-minded parties supported this, but Jamaat, NCP, Islami Andolan, and others demanded full implementation and legal backing within the tenure of the current government, threatening to withhold their signatures otherwise.

In response, the commission began preparing an outline for swift implementation. The integrated draft now being developed will include the background of the uprising, the formation of reform commissions, the 82 agreed proposals, and the nine-point pledge for implementation, according to commission sources.

The pledges state that jurisdiction over the charter's interpretation and legality will rest solely with the Appellate Division. They also state that the charter will be fully legally effective, and that no court may question its legality, necessity, or authority.

They also stipulate that necessary ordinances will be issued to ensure its provisions prevail over article 93(2) of the constitution or any other law or judgment.

One of the pledges, if approved by the parties, will allow amendments to the constitution, judiciary, electoral system, public administration, policing, and anti-corruption measures, as well as the enactment or revision of laws, rules, and regulations, to implement the charter's recommendations.

Reforms before polls

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committed by the ousted regime and holding a free and fair election.

Asked what his priority was – elections first or reforms first – he said that holding elections without reforms would change nothing.

"Imagine holding an election without carrying out the two other things. Then you would go back to the same old problems," said Yunus.

However, the chief adviser vowed to restore democracy and deliver a credible election.

"There's no point in having elections if it's not legitimate. My job is to make sure that an acceptable, clean, enjoyable election takes place," he told CNA on Wednesday.

"We are coming close to achieving the goals that we have set for ourselves. There were lots of things to be reformed because the political system that we had was rigged, misused and abused."

On August 5 last year, an uprising ended Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule. She fled to neighbouring India following her ouster and has been put on trial in absentia.

Ties between India and Bangladesh have been strained since, as Bangladesh seeks her return. India has not responded to the extradition requests.

Dhaka also urged New Delhi to stop Hasina from making "false and fabricated" statements after she urged supporters online to resist the interim government.

Referring to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Yunus said, "He explained that India could not control social media."

"We are not going to kind of get into a battle trying to get Hasina out of India. We said, 'You can keep her. Our trial will go on'."

"But in the meantime, she should not be given any chance to destabilise Bangladesh. She still has many followers within Bangladesh – they will follow the same thing that they did before to destabilise the whole country."

The 85-year-old said he does not plan to stay on in government after the elections.

Amid his decision to step back from politics, Yunus said he hopes his leadership leaves a lasting legacy.

"I would hope that from now on, Bangladesh will be on the right track, it will not be derailed again," he said.

Yunus spoke to CNA in Kuala Lumpur during his three-day official visit to the Malaysian capital, where he met Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.