



INTERNATIONAL DAY TO END IMPUNITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALIST

"NO ONE HAS BEEN FOUND"

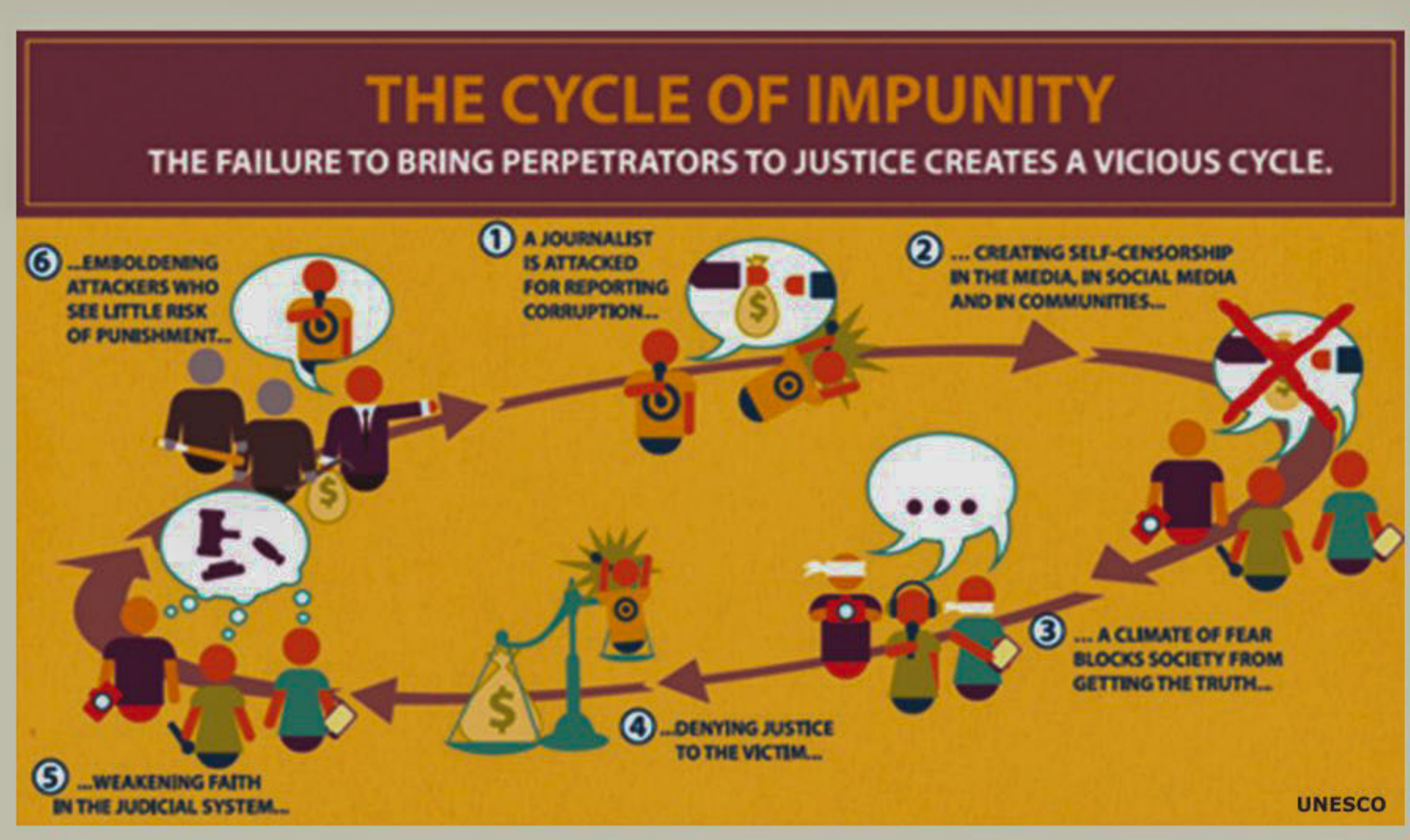
MANJURUL AHSAN BULBUL

THE International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists was declared by the UN to recognise the violence against journalists and media workers who are targeted for exercising their right of freedom of expression, and to provide a platform to collectively challenge the existing culture of impunity. Unesco's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) has prepared a guideline to ensure the safety of journalists. According to the UN and other international media related organisations, the number of journalist deaths is increasing worldwide, particularly in some parts of the Middle East. Within Asia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have had high rates of journalist deaths for a long time. Over the last two decades, at least two dozen journalists have been killed for their professions, but no justice has been meted out. Of the 24 cases, only the case of Samakal correspondent in Faridpur, Goutam Das, has been resolved in the lower court, although it is still pending in the higher court. The police has given a report in the Harunur Rashid murder case in Khulna, but we can hardly call that justice. We journalists and media activists have consistently maintained that it's not enough for the police to give a report that states "no one has been found" when there is a family that is still mourning his death. To say that nobody could be found is a failure of the state and proves that there is a culture of impunity.

There was a debate when the day was first proposed on whether a UN day was enough to eliminate this culture of impunity. But the argument we gave was that different incidents take place in different parts of the world, and although there are various organisations that work on this issue of violence against journalists, it is important to have a day where we can collectively raise our voices to demand justice. In addition, national and international organisations can put the issue at the forefront of their programmes. When a culture of impunity is established, justice cannot be served. We need to give a strong message to the regimes of different countries of the world that the culture of impunity must end.

Thus, by introducing the day the unity of voice has only been strengthened.

Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul is CEO of Boishakhi Television and president of the Bangladesh Federation Union of Journalists.



End impunity

TAHMINA RAHMAN

IMPUNITY for acts of violence remains a significant problem for the safety and protection of journalists and online activists in Bangladesh along with inadequate protection offered by the state and media houses.

Violence against journalists involve killing, serious bodily injury, unlawful arrests and destruction and damage of their equipment and properties. 61.62% of violence involved bodily injury including 78 sustaining serious bodily injury and 89 subjected to minor assaults. 4 journalists and 1 online activist were killed. Significant numbers were affected by the destruction and damage of their equipment and properties. 12 were harassed with vexatious cases and 8 implicated in criminal defamation cases.

Over 40 journalists and 1 online activist have been killed since 1995. The perpetrators in only one of these cases have so far been convicted. In many of these cases the trials are yet to commence because of delays in investigation, notable amongst them are the murder cases of the journalist couple Sagor Sarwar and Mehrun Runi. A similar pattern emerges from other acts of violence against journalists.

A worrying pattern appears to be the insufficient legal actions taken against this violence; we have found that legal action has been taken in only one out of every four incidents, which include refusals by the police to register cases when victims have approached them. In most cases victims themselves do not come forward to file cases, this sense of insecurity seems to be compounded in the case of mofussil (local district towns) journalists.

It is equally alarming that the victims of violence have expressed their frustrations on the efficacy of our system; they suffer from complete apathy when it comes to filing criminal cases, especially against those belonging to the

party in power. Media houses are very reluctant to take legal actions against attacks on journalists affiliated with these houses. Free-thinking bloggers are too often labeled as 'atheists' and are attacked with online hate speech. Along with this and the lack of awareness of bloggers of their right to Freedom of Expression under international standards make them especially vulnerable, leading to self-censorship.

Clearly, those responsible for attacks against journalists and online activists enjoy almost de facto impunity. This climate emboldens would-be perpetrators to violate the safety and security of journalists and online activists with little legal consequence. Faced with this reality journalists often purposefully avoid many newsworthy stories.

Bangladesh must make serious efforts to fulfill its Universal Periodic Review commitment for the safety and protection of journalists and online activists made at the Human Rights Council, and work toward ending the climate of impunity so that each and every attack on journalist and online activist is fully, effectively and speedily investigated and those responsible brought to justice.

Tahmina Rahman is Director, ARTICLE 19 Bangladesh and South Asia.



The virtual world of "what if"



MILIA ALI

ONCE we cross the mid-life point most of us go through a "what if" phase. The moment of deep introspection and self-questioning about how far we have veered from the dreams of our youth, even of our childhood. This is quite natural, since in our lives we all nurture aspirations of achieving some self-defined goals -- a career landmark or making an earth shattering discovery or something personal like meeting that special "somebody" who dwells in our fantasies. Somewhere down the line when we are faced with the reality...we discover that life's twists and turns have taken us on an entirely different path. Its then we ask "what if" we had made other choices, would we have realised our dreams?

The truth is that many pivotal events in our lives, both good and bad, are ones that we least expect. Does it mean we have taken a wrong or impulsive turn along the way, one that steered us toward an unpredictable journey? Or is it destiny or serendipity, or even karma? Some argue that life is made up of conscious choices and that we alone are responsible for our destiny. For example, I often wonder what if I had chosen to spend my life in the spiritual environment of Tagore's ashram in Santiniketan, would I be a different "me" from what I am today. I will never know because that will always be a "what if" question.

(Actually, most of us are confronted with the "what if" question at every major decision point in our lives. Some exultate, some ponder, some hesitate over the choices while others follow their intuition and take the first leap of faith into an unknown territory. Some of us take the path of least resistance while others choose the road less travelled. We may never know exactly how things will turn out, until things actually crystallise. (This repetitive and can be deleted altogether)

The question is: whether we are masters of our fate or slaves to determinism? In my view, it's randomness that leads each choice to the next and before we know we find ourselves where we wanted to be or far from where we had planned we would be. Whatever the answer, one thing is certain that there will always be moments when we will pause and ask "what if." And, posing this question could make us appreciate what we have and move forward knowingly. There is after all no way of turning the clock back. So why mope and lose the pleasure of "living the present," fully.

While going through these reflections I was reminded of a movie I watched several years ago: Sliding Doors. The story is about an ordinary girl Helen whose life alternates between two parallel universes. In an intricate cross-referencing the film juxtaposes two alternative scenarios based on the chance event that she misses or catches a train. In Scenario A she catches the train and meets her dream man, James, but ends up in a complicated relationship with him, and finally dies in an accident. In Scenario B, she misses the train, goes through a tumultuous life with her unfaithful boyfriend but ultimately leaves him. At the end, the divergent paths re-converge and a metaphysical twist leaves the protagonist meeting the dream man (James) accidentally in an elevator. The viewer is left with a thought-provoking question: will she meet the same fate -- that is die in James' arms or will this be a happy ending? The movies message is clear: no matter how well we strategise there are external forces beyond our control that guide the trajectory of our lives.

If indeed this is true then why worry or exultate over the "what ifs"? Easier to sit back and say: It's all written in the stars. But the human mind will always try to find answers to the mysteries of life, because that is part of growing or maturing. It may seem to be the most benign of all processes but it's a reality -- all things age, ripen and perish. Trees turn green, then brown and the leaves fall, flowers blossom and wither and fruits ripen and are plucked. But for humans the cycle of life is more organic since we emote, reflect, feel and question. And the process entails reflections about the many experiences of our lives. Just as we celebrate the joyous moments of our lives and are grateful for the gifts that fortune blesses us with -- we also have regrets, feel remorse and carry the burden of our guilt. Its a balancing act, really!

But at the end of the day we must "endure" and play the hand we are dealt with the best we can. It is what it is, for "what if" will always remain a virtual reality. Therefore, I allow myself to rejoice in the present and trust that my life is unfolding the way it meant to be!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank. E-mail: shiftingimages@gmail.com

Let's not lose another Reyhaneh Jabbary

FAHMIDA ZAMAN

AS I was reading the heartbreaking last message of Reyhaneh Jabbari, who was executed in Iran for murder of 'her attempted rapist,' I couldn't help revisiting my lessons from various gender studies and politics classes.

Are we truly doing enough to ensure gender equality? Are we truly protecting women from the various forms of violence that they encounter globally on a daily basis? Gender-based violence highlights the relationship between females' subordinate status in society and their increased vulnerability to violence. Violence is manifested in many forms, including, economic, sexual, physical, and psychological. Two of the most common forms of gender-based violence are rape as a weapon of war and domestic-based violence.

Violence, in its various forms, presents itself differently across certain parts of the world. For example, rape is often employed as a weapon during times of conflict and war. Rape as a violent social and political tool was evident in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War, and South Sudan to mention a few.

Rape during war has been recognised as a tool of war by the United Nations. The

soldiers or rebel groups rape women not just for sexual satisfaction but rather to demoralise the opponents as well as to establish power, as witnessed in 1971 in Bangladesh. Alana Jeydel and Sarah Henderson in their book *Women and Politics in a Global World* say: "Rape during war and in refugee camps is about the display of power and is a way of letting one's enemy know who is in control."

Moreover, women are victims of rape as a form of punishment or means of establishing power over a community. For example, in the Congo, in the Northern Kivu province alone, there have been 14,000 cases of rape since 2004. Most of these attacks were made as part of a broader attack on a village, designed to terrorise local communities into accepting the aggressor's control; and in other instances rape has been used to punish a village for allegedly supporting an opposing militia (Henderson and Jeydel). These incidents indicate how women are becoming victims of political "power play" executed by men.

Nevertheless, rape victims are often ostracised by their families and communities. Moreover, some women are forced to serve as sexual slaves after they are violated. Additionally, lack of specific legislation criminalising rape and sexual assault makes it increasingly difficult for women to seek

legal retribution. This is amplified by the lack of legal access available for women, legislation articulating provisions regarding rape and, at times, uncooperative police.

Domestic violence is another leading cause of injury to women. Women are being treated as servants, beaten, tortured, and cheated. Domestic violence occurs among all racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic groups. Sometimes, in countries like India, Bangladesh, or China, girls are not welcomed when they are born because of the dowry system. They are considered as financial burdens to their family because the girls' parents have to give money when they marry off their daughters.

Dowry is expected to help with the running of the family, and is given through cash settlement or other valuables to contribute to the groom's family. However, this system is not only insulting, but also a curse for women. If the girl's family fails to give the money, she gets tortured, or becomes victim to an acid attack, and faces other forms of violence by the husband and her in-laws. In extreme cases, she commits suicide.

Moreover, women face physical abuse for bearing daughters. Even though there are laws against these kinds of crimes, they are not implemented. There is no social security for women, which makes it very hard for them to seek justice. The

patriarchal society of certain cultures does not allow women to speak up against domestic violence. If they do so, most of the time they are socially excluded and thrown out of their homes.

Since there is no social, financial, or security protection for them, women choose not to talk about the violence they face in their homes. Consequently, they are socially powerless and continue to be victims of gender-based violence. Women all over the world face different forms of violence, which results in the "inferior" or insecure status of women in society.

While there has been a significant amount of effort put forward to end violence against women, there is a long way to go in actually changing the mindset of our societies, which can only be achieved from within. Through education, correct implementation of laws and, most importantly, making both women and men aware of this brutality is critical for helping to ensure the security of women both inside the home and outside.

With tears in my eyes, I hope we all, men and women, work together to end violence against women all around the world and that we don't have to lose another Reyhaneh Jabbari.

The writer is graduate from Asian University for Women.

QUOTABLE Quote

If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter.

George Washington

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 Resorts for the pampered
- 5 Dagger handle
- 9 Back biter?
- 11 Moon-based
- 12 Fester, to Morticia
- 13 Bicker
- 14 Carnival city
- 15 Spell caster
- 17 Horse's leg joint
- 19 "Misérables"
- 20 Feed the fire
- 21 Gangster's gun
- 22 "Otello" composer
- 24 Toronto-to-DC dir.
- 26 Old poets
- 29 Shark's home
- 30 Shuttle compartment
- 32 Nuptial knot
- 34 Supply with crew
- 35 Ice cream parlor choice
- 36 Banish
- 38 Brawl
- 39 "Walk Away"
- 40 Midmonth day
- 41 Puts in turf

DOWN

- 1 Blue character
- 2 You can bet on them
- 3 "Little Women" writer
- 4 Pitcher Maglie
- 5 Fling
- 6 Namibia neighbor
- 7 Tap
- 8 Hard journeys
- 10 Came to again
- 11 Escapade
- 16 Biting
- 18 Valentine word
- 21 Young woman
- 23 Gloomier
- 24 Removed pits from
- 25 Riding need
- 27 Spotted tile
- 28 Climbed
- 29 Wise teacher
- 30 First-rate
- 31 Patellae places
- 33 Tall tales
- 37 Marks a ballot

CRYPTOQUOTE

VVN INFV VCON VD RKHGV H VANN YHF VYNGVE ENHAF HZD. VVN FNXDGT INFV VCON CF GDY.

— XWCGNFN RADQNAI

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: I ATTRIBUTE MY SUCCESS TO THIS: I NEVER GAVE OR TOOK ANY EXCUSE.

— FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

Yesterday's answer

A PHIDS HIRE
BEATIT ORAL
CRICKET BATS
HEMIN
VEES MOAT
LEND DEBRIS
INS JAR IDO
POURED READ
MEET TALL
ALARM
VAMPIRE BATS
ALOE MALLET
TIER STEADY

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

DID YOU MAKE ANY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS BEETLE?

YES!

I'M GOING TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH MY PILLLOW!

HENRY by Don Trachte

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

CRYPTOQUOTE

VVN INFV VCON VD RKHGV H VANN YHF VYNGVE ENHAF HZD. VVN FNXDGT INFV VCON CF GDY.

— XWCGNFN RADQNAI

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: I ATTRIBUTE MY SUCCESS TO THIS: I NEVER GAVE OR TOOK ANY EXCUSE.

— FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE