

# The tale of two women

NASIM FIRDAUS

TWENTY-three year old Jannati Hossain is not a household name. She was a young woman with a passion for cars. Jannati was the unfortunate driver of a vehicle that met with a tragic accident killing her co-passenger, who was also her business partner. The co-passenger was not wearing the seat belt that is mandatory for all front seat passengers. The vehicle Jannati was driving rammed into a police van that was parked off the descent from the Mohakhali flyover that perhaps might not have been there. Perhaps Jannati was driving at high speed and lost control of her vehicle, ramming into the parked vehicle. One doesn't know whether the vehicle was parked in a no-parking zone dangerously close to the descent from the flyover.

Could the accident have been planned to kill Jannati's passenger? Well, the police vehicle, not just any vehicle, was parked where Jannati would descend full speed from the ramp and hit it in a manner that would kill only the passenger and not the driver! Interesting, for Jannati controlled her vehicle so well that it killed only the passenger in the front seat! And why was the passenger without the seat belt? If he were wearing a seat belt he could have been saved. By the reckless act of not putting on the seat belt he was defying the law, or could he, inconceivable as that might have been, have wanted to murder himself? The police filed a case of reckless driving. Months later, Jannati has been sued by the family of the dead man for murder. She has been denied bail and is now languishing behind bars in a jail somewhere in Bangladesh. Even worse, she is probably interned with real murderers and killers.

Jannati's businesses have no doubt taken a dip as she remains behind bars, her business partner is dead, and other partners are absconding because of the murder case filed against all of them as well. They were not in the car at the time of the accident but that does not matter in the case of a planned murder! They are Jannati's business partners. Therefore, they must be involved in the planned murder and are liable as well! They could not be sued as accomplices to murder if it was involuntary manslaughter or murder by negligence. In a country where law can be taken into the hands of a few, people are afraid to remain available for the law to take its own course.

Shamarukh Mohiuddin is not a household name. Reportedly, she might have been murdered but her death could have been staged as a suicide. The burning question being asked is how a more than five feet tall woman could hang herself by the grill of a toilet window where the ceiling is so low. Shamarukh's family has filed a murder case against her husband and in-laws but only the husband has been arrested. The other accused remain free to roam around freely. Shamarukh was a bright young woman who graduated as a doctor only recently. Why would she want to kill herself? She happened to be the daughter-in-law of a former member of parliament.

My layman's understanding of murder is that it is willful killing of a person, innocent or otherwise. It could also be murder by negligence. Again, in my layman's view, willful killing can be of two kinds: pre-mediated or carried out in an act of rage. Other than murder there is the case of manslaughter. Then again there is the case of involuntary manslaughter, which is, killing without intent to kill. One wonders if Shamarukh's death was intentional. There are revelations from her family that point to such a possibility. In such an event it would be "murder." On the other hand, could Jannati's case be that of a pure accident and therefore it was not a "murder"?

Big dreams of two young women have been blown to pieces, one with a murder case hanging over her head while the other actually being killed. Shamarukh's parents have sued her in-laws for murder, most of whom still roam the streets in complete freedom. In the meantime, Jannati Hossain remains under custody real time. She is only twenty-three years old. Even if she gets reprieve from the charges which, on the face of it sound ludicrous, it will be very difficult if not impossible to get back to her passion. Her life will remain in ruins for a long, long time to come.

Shamarukh's dreams of becoming a famous doctor have been shattered by death at such a young age. Jannati's opponents are people with influential connections who hope to avenge the death of their boy. They named a long list of witnesses who were not physically present at the accident site at the time of the crash. How can they be called upon to condemn another young life as witnesses to a crime they did not witness? Shamarukh's opponents are influential people too. Their strategy, in all likelihood, would be to have no witnesses at all. Two young women lost in the woods of trammels that may never favour them if the influential get their way.

The writer is a former Ambassador, and Executive Director, Bangladesh Alliance for Women Leadership.



SINCE TAZREEN

## Has fire safety improved?

SRINIVAS B. REDDY

IT was two years ago this week that fire swept through the Tazreen Fashions factory on the outskirts of Dhaka claiming the lives of over 110 garment workers.

At the time it was Bangladesh's worst ever industrial accident. It laid bare the lack of fire safety in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector and put in motion considerable efforts by local and international stakeholders to ensure such an event could not happen again.

Two years on, has fire safety in the Bangladesh RMG sector improved? The answer is certainly yes, although considerable challenges remain.

In the immediate aftermath of the Tazreen Fashions fire a National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA) was developed by government, employers and workers' organisations with ILO support. The plan identified steps needed to enhance fire safety in the RMG sector, efforts which were subsequently widened following the Rana Plaza collapse just a few short months later to include structural safety.

An immediate priority was to inspect each of the approximately 3,500 RMG factories throughout Bangladesh for fire and structural safety. To date, approximately 60% of this work has been carried out by the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety and the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology under the NTPA. All remaining factories should be inspected by early 2015.

Recognising the vital role of the Fire Service and Civil Defence Department (FSCD), emphasis has been placed on enhancing its capacity to carry out inspections and respond to incidents. The strength of the FSCD has been boosted. The number of fire service staff

working as inspectors has increased from 55 to 238, with plans to bring the total to 260 in the near future.

ILO, with support from the US Department of Labor, is supporting this process by providing comprehensive training. A core of master trainers is being created within FSCD to build the skills of their colleagues nationwide. Fire Service staff can now more effectively inspect factories, develop emergency action plans and carry out evacuation drills to that ensure that factory occupants evacuate buildings safely when the alarm sounds.

Inspectors from the Department of Inspections of Factories and Establishments (DIFE) as well as safety managers from within RMG factories have attended training sessions, helping them gain a better understanding of the steps and processes to improve fire safety. The international brands and retailers have also played an important role through the Accord and Alliance which have provided fire safety training to workers and employers, as have international agencies such as GIZ.

Yet despite the progress made, many challenges still lie ahead.

Response times remain a major obstacle to fighting fires. While Fire Service teams can leave their stations within minutes of receiving an emergency call, traffic may result in it taking hours to reach the scene of any fire. In response, the government has recently agreed in principle that nine new fire stations in RMG cluster areas will be built. Efforts are needed from the government and international partners alike to ensure that suitable land is secured and that these facilities become operational as soon as possible.

On the regulatory level, the implementation rules of the Fire Safety Act need further review to ensure compliance with internationally accepted standards. Factories needing to carry

out remediation measures require support to do so in an effective manner. To this end, ILO is working with the government, Accord, Alliance and industry partners to develop a remediation protocol that will help identify contractors qualified to provide factories with the correct guidance. Additionally, experts will collaborate on the most effective way to ensure that remediation equipment meets acceptable standards.

Support is needed from the highest levels of government to drive forward greater coordination between the regulatory bodies charged with oversight of safety in the RMG sector: DIFE, the Fire Service and Rajuk.

The regulatory authorities also need to be further empowered to systematically and effectively follow up on inspections while factory owners must understand that there will be consequences if they do not comply with inspection recommendations. In addition, we must all work to try to instill a stronger culture of preventative safety, not only in the RMG sector, but in the society as a whole.

While all these steps will help shape a safer RMG sector we must not forget the families and dependents of the Tazreen fire. Two years on, many victims are yet to receive full compensation. The mechanism used to provide and allocate compensation for Rana Plaza victims could be put to use without delay, and ILO welcomes the recent announcement by C&A Foundation, Clean Clothes Campaign and IndustriALL to provide support in this regard.

The fire at Tazreen Fashions took a terrible human toll. We owe it to the victims that, from this disaster, a safer RMG sector can emerge, to the benefit of the millions who work within it and Bangladesh as a whole.

The writer is Country Director, ILO Bangladesh.

## 'Student Politics' in Bangladesh

FAHMIDA ZAMAN

Once dreamed about and took pride in being a student of the University of Dhaka, an institution that unconditionally contributed to the Language Movement, Liberation War, and Democracy Movement of the country. However, reading the claims of a certain party of owning the campus, I can't help worrying about my younger sister as she prepares to start her dream journey in the university once known as "Oxford of the East."

Having a drastically different experience in my own universities, both in Bangladesh and in the US, I asked a professor in Bangladesh about the differences between 'student politics' in Bangladesh and outside. "What students in Bangladesh are involved in, known as student politics, was never the 'real' student politics," he told me. Moreover, he stated: "The political student bodies should be involved in that institution's activities, and they should bargain with the [university] authority to protect the students' interest. But unfortunately, our student politics is nothing but an extension of national politics. It is not student politics at all."

So I did my own research about such student bodies, popularly known as 'student government/Union.' Cambridge University Students' Union "represents all 22,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Cambridge; works by bringing together students from all colleges and departments to campaign for positive change, ensuring that you have a say in how you experience University; make sure that student concerns are at the centre of University decision-making, while providing entertainment, services and welfare support for the benefit of students."

The Associated Students of Stanford University (ASSU) "works to represent the interests, needs and perspectives of Stanford students at every level of decision making within the university. We advocate on behalf of Stanford students on issues such as cost of living, diversity, and student life and student activities space. Each year the ASSU strives to innovate new projects and create new services that will improve the quality of student life offered at Stanford."

The Asian University for Women (AUW) Student Government "represents and acts on behalf of the AUW student body to build a better community by creating a bridge of collaboration between the University administration and the student body, ensuring transparency and effectiveness of policies, and advocating for student voices."

In contrast, the student political bodies in public universities in Bangladesh do not serve the interests of the students at all. The top three student political groups of Bangladesh are the student wings of the Bangladesh Awami League (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and Jamaat-e-Islami. Thus, students who are involved in politics in public higher education institutions primarily serve the interests of Bangladesh's national political parties. These parties have been involved in extensive violence frequently in large public institutions.

For example, an article in an English newspaper (February, 2014), by a history professor at the University of Dhaka, stated: "Since independence, only the University of Dhaka has seen an average of two students murdered every year, prompting suggestions to de-link 'student politics' from 'national politics'."

A group of Chhatra League men wrongly identified a 24 year old tailor named Bishwajit Das to be an opposition activist and beat him to death in 2012. Another English newspaper reported that the very same day that the Bishwajit murder verdict was given, students of the same political affiliation had beaten up a non-political student at Dhaka University, suspecting he was from the opposition. Moreover, it is now common for institutes of higher education to be closed during strikes caused by student politics. In any academic year, a minimum of 20 days is usually lost due to student political unrest.

The aforementioned incidents are just a glimpse of how far out of control our student politics is. Would banning student politics rid universities of this situation?

Many tend to suggest so. But what do we ban? These student political groups are not formal bodies of the institutions. Moreover, there is no legal ground to ban student politics because it is one's political right given by the constitution to be able to engage in politics according to one's desire. Instead, we need to have fundamental changes regarding our mechanisms for nurturing young politicians. And this has to be multi-dimensional.

Cutting ties with national parties and institutionally encouraging students to form student bodies that serve the interests of the students are the two most significant steps that need to be taken by the institutions and political parties. Additionally, educational institutions should be held responsible for strictly enforcing academic rules and regulations regarding class attendance, examinations, and participation in other academic or extra-curricular activities.

At the same time, the national political parties must resist recruiting students in educational institutions and putting students' lives in jeopardy in order to serve party interest. If students practice leadership through different activities and finish their formal education in time, they will automatically be ready to take on leadership positions outside the campus.

Students of Bangladesh have played an important role in the most crucial moments of national interest and democratisation, such as Language Movement in 1952, Liberation War in 1971, and Democracy Movement in 1990. Yet, today, student-run politics in universities or such institutions are dominated by outside forces that do not speak for the students' benefit at all.

I am proud that my sister is going to go the most prestigious university in the country. But I pray for her and the thousands others like her so that their dreams are not smashed by the voracious inhuman political interests.

The writer is a Graduate of Asian University for Women.

## CROSSWORD

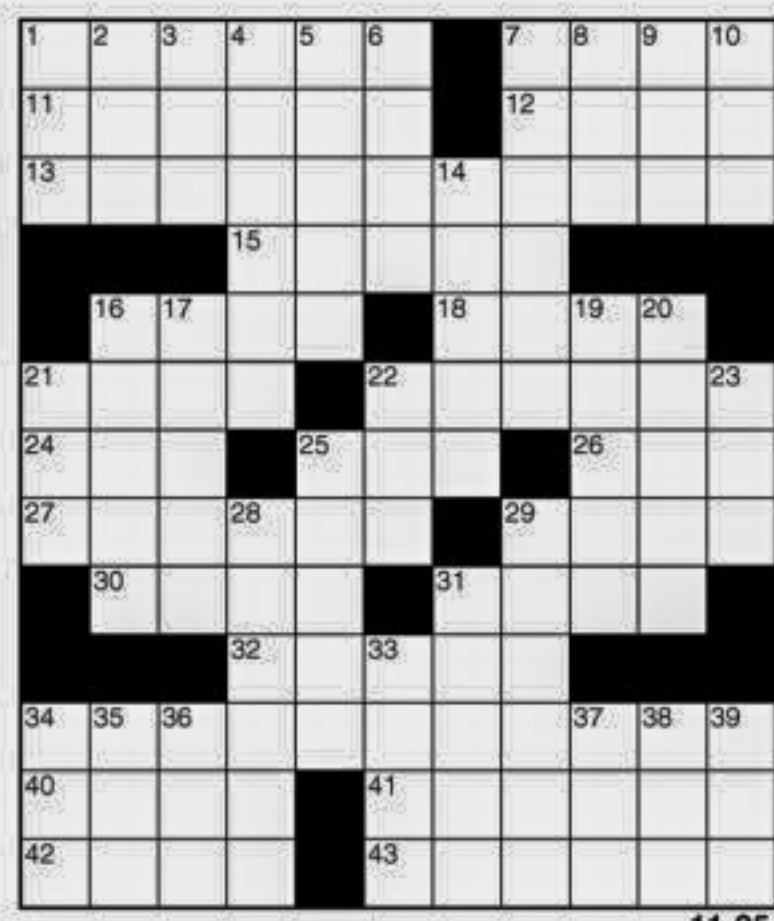
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Capital group
- 7 Price to play
- 11 Slanted type
- 12 Duo
- 13 Sociable diner
- 15 Apt
- 16 Saloons
- 18 One of the Mamas
- 21 Make over
- 22 Thanksgiving staple
- 24 In the past
- 25 Look upon
- 26 Common verb
- 27 Conditional release
- 29 Singer Redding
- 30 Notorious emperor
- 31 Restaurant star
- 32 Cobbler fruit
- 34 Game with paddles
- 40 Pop star
- 41 Serengeti setting
- 42 Techno music star
- 43 Did salon work
- DOWN
- 1 Take a place at dinner
- 2 Seventh Greek letter
- 3 Collar
- 4 Top NFL player
- 5 Strata
- 6 Canyon sound
- 7 Come into view
- 8 Afternoon break
- 9 Father's Day gift
- 10 Mess up
- 14 When expected

16 Kicked off

- 17 Find darling
- 19 Flat fish
- 20 Letter stroke
- 21 Grammys category
- 22 Casual shirt
- 23 Agreeable answer
- 25 Skiing spot
- 28 How some drugs are taken
- 29 "The Gift of the Magi" writer
- 31 Like some chins
- 33 Sch. orgs.
- 34 Singer McGraw
- 35 Brouhaha
- 36 Hope of comedy
- 37 Zero
- 38 Rink surface
- 39 Melancholy



### CRYPTOQUOTE

IHINO OPDTK XUT SPDQG GP SIQQ AP  
NIXIXVIN AJUA UQQ FDLIFFZDQ  
VDFMTIFF FAUTGF PT AJI ZPDGTUAMPT PZ  
XPNUQMAO. --JITNO SUNG VILJIN

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE ART OF LEADERSHIP IS SAYING NO, NOT YES. IT IS VERY EASY TO SAY YES. --TONY BLAIR

### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

BALSA FARM S  
ATALL EMAIL  
NEPAL DANKE  
POLE TED  
PASSWORD  
ASIT PARISH  
LEGIT LUSTY  
SANCHOMEAD  
KEROSENE  
IDA MEAT  
MERCISIMBA  
PLEASICIER  
SLANT SKATE

### A XYDLBAAXR IS LONGFELLOW

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.

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