

Somewhere someone should resign

SHAHNOOR WAHID

IT is a case of abject inefficiency. The conspicuous failure in deploying and coordinating a skilled rescue operation team with appropriate equipment to pull out little Jihad alive from the Wasa water pump hole should have

device. It is evident now that had the amateurs been given the responsibility five hours before they might have rescued the boy alive. It was indeed a slap in the face for our civil defence bigwigs who take home fat salary and perks end of every month but cannot even rescue alive a little

from the beginning. Firstly, they did not go to the spot with a powerful camera and light to locate the trapped boy. Secondly, they could drop one or two thick ropes and guide the boy to grab and hold on to it so they could pull him up. Thirdly, along with oxygen they should have sent in moderate hot air with blowers as it must have been very cold down there for the almost naked boy, which was sapping his strength. Fourthly, there was veritable lack of discipline and coordination among the civil defence people at the site. There was apparently no chain of command on the ground. All these observations are of course from a lay man's point of view as we are at a loss at the level of chaos that prevailed all along at the site.

Talking of resignation by responsible people in such cases, there are hundreds of examples to learn from. In all civilised countries people at the helm take the blame of a man-made disaster in areas under their watch and resign. Ministers in various countries have resigned following train accidents or ship capsizing. There is no such example in Bangladesh. No one tendered resignation after the collapse of the Rana Plaza in Savar that killed over one thousand people or the devastating fire in a garment factory that killed hundreds. No high-up volunteered to resign when the cargo carrying crude oil went down in a river near the Sundarbans. There have been many other incidents in

the past following which ministers or responsible officials should have resigned. But they did not. There was an opportunity yesterday for the bigwigs to set an example. But they could not do it. Nothing can really provoke them to take the blame on themselves and resign.

Rescuing trapped children from such narrow and deep holes is not rocket science. It is indeed down to earth business. Careful strategy and prompt action are the two things required, which only well-trained professionals can undertake. To be very frank, there is no room for amateur people to play any part in such operations. We have read hundreds of stories and seen many videos of such rescue operations undertaken successfully by specially trained teams in various countries.

Now the question is, do we have such people with proper training and logistics to go into action immediately when disaster strikes? From what we have seen we are not convinced at all. One wonders what kind of training and regular drills the Fire Brigade people and those working under the ministry of disaster management go through. The cold realisation comes up, what will happen if a big earthquake hits the city and we have hundreds of collapsed buildings all around?

The writer is Special Supplement Editor, The Daily Star.

People deserve better service

ZAHURUL ALAM

THERE are always genuine reasons for whatever happens. It would be naive to imagine that something happened by chance or by luck. All good things happened because people made those happen. Likewise all bad incidents took place because those were created by some people. The causes are eliminated once those responsible for harmful acts are punished. This is rationale for the need for rule of law, which is one of the most important cornerstones of good governance. Rule of law reduces the probability of repetitions of similar crimes, offences and inefficiencies.

The culture of impunity that flourished during decades was introduced by the authoritarian regimes following the 1975 killings. Indemnity to the killers of Bangabandhu and other martyrs prompted widespread impunity for crimes in the society and the tradition of cultivation of violence and corruption by the power capturers.

All the above have made bureaucracy an inefficient tool that had been overwhelmingly used by some as a platform for living comfortably and accumulating wealth at the expense of the people.

We could free ourselves from some of the obscurantists, but those with vested interests have rooted themselves so deeply and the culture of 'not working and taking benefits' has become so common a feature that it has become a real challenge for the government to cure the malady overnight. The beneficiaries of misrule and injustice have now become advocates for good governance.

The death of Jihad, a four year child in a Wasa pipeline yesterday is yet another demonstration of lack of accountability, responsibility and responsiveness of those working in the government offices and also reflects the culture of 'doing nothing and grabbing everything.' To make this point simpler, we may pose a simple question to the Wasa authorities: can a 600 feet deep tubewell pipe under the ground be kept open for months or years in a place where children play, people walk, which students use go to their schools! Does this show even a little bit of concern for the safety of the people? Can that organisation claim that it works for the fulfillment of the aspirations of the people?

Next question; the people have the right to ask whether or not anyone will be held responsible for this incident and punished as the society wants or law suggests? Certainly, there will be an investigation committee and a report will be submitted with vague findings and recommendations. There may be some departmental actions which will only mean that the concerned persons will be transferred to another place, where they will continue to behave in the same manner, and thus it will go on and on.

Let us get one thing clear. This death is a result of negligence of duty. This is not an accident. This has happened as a result of inviting an innocent four year child to the death trap created by the employees of concerned organisations. That open 600 feet deep pipe was supposed to be covered. People, including the father and family of Jihad, also paid for the maintenance of that death trap in terms of their contribution as tax. Wasa employees received their salaries and benefits in time and without any disruption. The issue of doubling the salaries and benefits of the public servants has already come up. The father of the dead child and his relatives will pay taxes to ensure increased packages for the public servants, including the Wasa employees. They and all other citizens and tax payers of this country can certainly ask for an explanation from the concerned department, ministry and the employees, whether or not they could justify their action and whether their pay increase is justified! People will pay for good services only.

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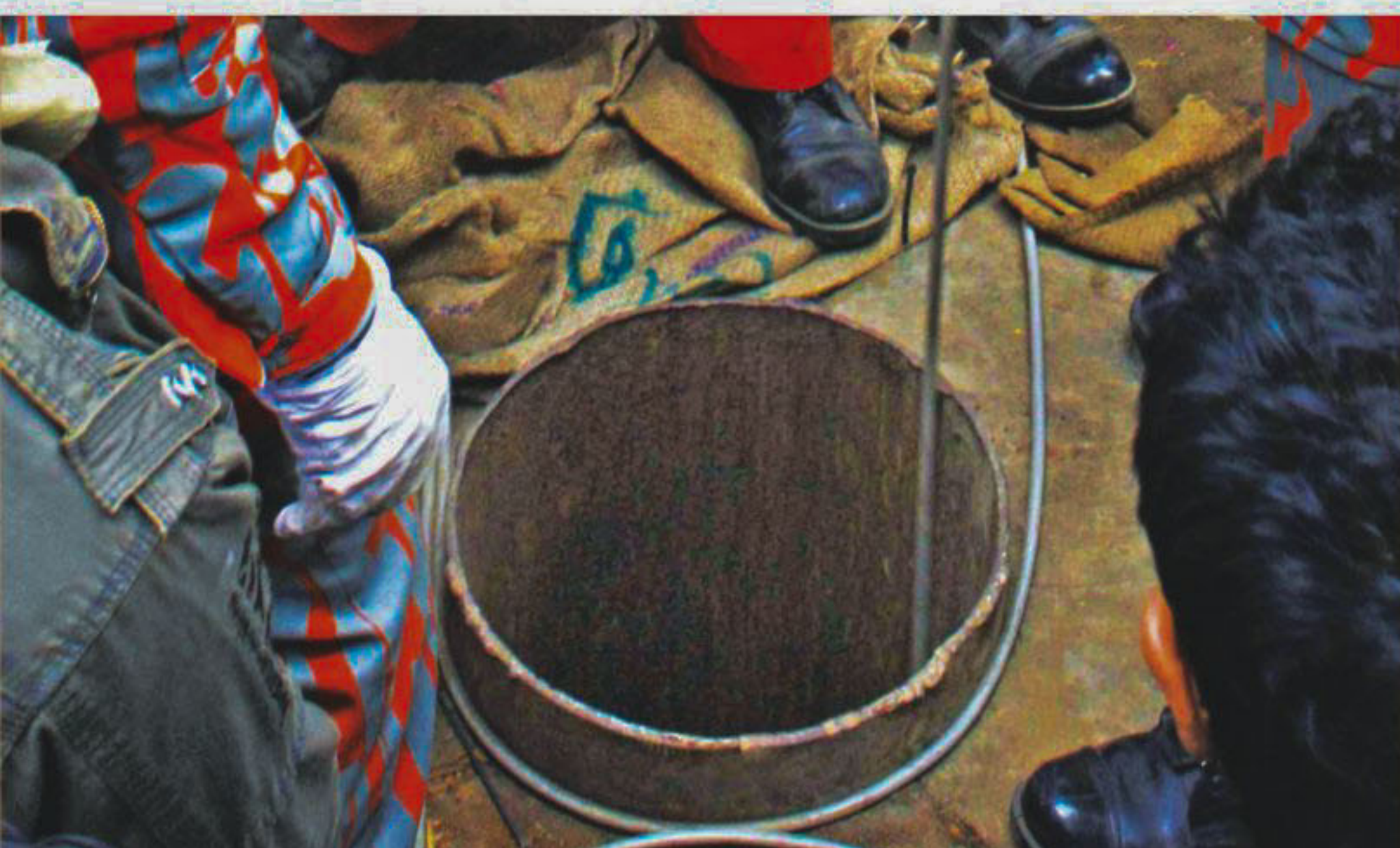


PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

prompted some bosses in the Fire Brigade, the police, and the ministries concerned to tender their resignation. In fact, they should have hastened their submission of resignation letter when some amateur rescuers could finally lift up the child's lifeless body with a home-made

boy from a hole in the ground. This undoubtedly leaves a gaping hole in the state of things in these departments.

The entire painful drama was a fiasco of crudest proportion that has numbed the nation. The responsible authorities have committed a series of faux pas right

11TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY Remembering Salma Sobhan

ZEENAT KHAN

SALMA Sobhan, a pioneer of human rights activism in Bangladesh, passed away on December 29, 2003. On this day, it is vital that we do remember her, pray for her, and pay our respect to her -- while we reflect on the social changes that she had brought through her activism.

Salma Sobhan came from a prominent family in Pakistan. She was a graduate of Westonbirt School in England. She studied law at Girton College in Cambridge. In 1959, she was called to the Bar and at age 21 she became the first woman barrister in Pakistan.

I got a glimpse of younger Salma Sobhan from a letter that her maternal uncle Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy wrote to her from jail before her marriage, in which he described her as someone who was "preternaturally transcendently intelligent."

Suhrawardy's elegant letter gave me an insight into Salma Sobhan's personality. He called her a 'humble little creature' who dreaded to hurt people. In the letter, he praised her humility and felt that she would be able to reach out to people and live an exemplary life.

Salma Sobhan started her teaching career at Dhaka University at age 25. She taught jurisprudence, a tough aspect of

law. Her students remember her fondly. After her death, one former student wrote in a eulogy about a conversation that she had with her professor. Salma Sobhan had confided that she regretted living abroad for years. As a result, she felt she had a late start in doing important work.

Because of her sobriety and seriousness, she was well-liked and respected by her students. She often encouraged her female students to undertake activism. She counseled them on how to fight for their place in our patriarchal society.

Salma Sobhan worked at Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs till 1988. She served as editor of Supreme Court Law Reports for several years. In 1986 she co-founded the Human Rights organization, Ain O Salish Kendro (ASK) and served as its executive director until her retirement.

Though Salma Sobhan came from a very privileged background, she symbolised a new spirit against the established elitism of that time. She was very interested in politics, yet her activism wasn't ignited by political ideas. With her passion and commitment for social activism, she set out to bring change for the ignored women in our society.

Salma Sobhan was troubled by the way Bangladesh's unseen and excluded women and children were trapped in society's shocking and enormous wealth gap. She saw how the underprivileged



were separated and were left without any legal representation. Until this feminist lawyer with a brilliant legal mind emerged, the deprived women in Bangladesh hardly had any idea about their legal rights.

Salma Sobhan was a voice for the people who had no voice, and stood up and gave those women a status. This champion of human rights also played a very prominent role in the development

of 'Women Living under Muslim Law' network. She wrote and spoke against religious injustices and extreme religious beliefs. She strongly felt about women's equal rights to inheritance.

Salma Sobhan knew that repressing women by denying their rights and by ignoring the 'disenfranchised communities' would be counter-productive for the progress of our nation.

Her background did not distort her perception about the conditions of the poor. With her passion and hard work, she brought the inequities around her into focus. Because of her sensitivity and dedication to her mission, their lives became better.

Activist Hameeda Hossain said: "She was a wonderfully warm person, with a great sense of humour. She had a lot of friends all over the world and used to spend time mailing to them. She was a very keen in swimmer and loved sight-seeing."

Her husband Rehman Sobhan said: "Salma Sobhan considered her subordinates as friends and always believed in collective efforts to achieve success." He revealed that more than anything his wife wanted a 'tranquil' family life.

Salma Sobhan touched many lives; she changed the fate of many. On the anniversary of her death we salute her for her service to our country.

The writer is a freelancer.

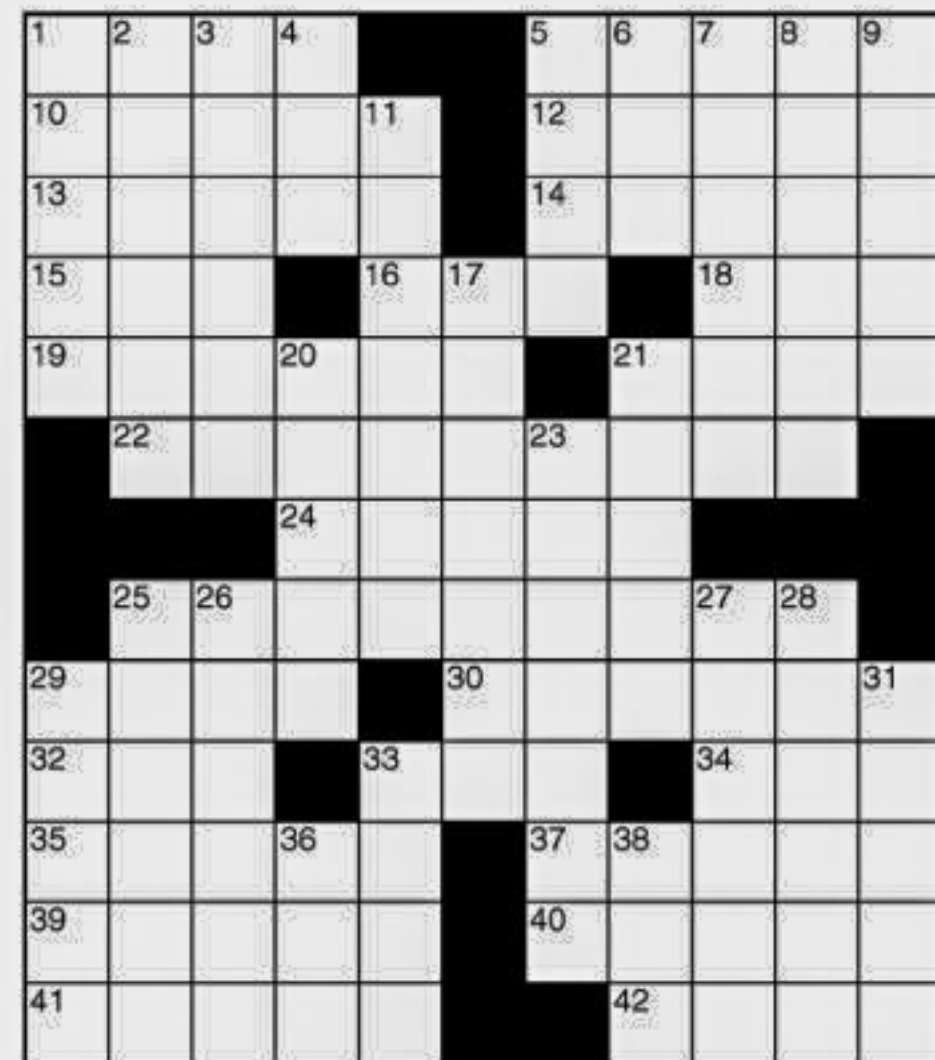
CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Believers
- Goes downhill
- Opera's Callas
- Runway worker
- Conspicuous
- City on the Mohawk River
- Pres. Day mo.
- Chick holder
- Kayo count
- Wall art
- Type-setting choice
- Place to go downhill
- Sad sack
- Machine at 22-Across
- "-- Gone" (Hall and Oates song)

DOWN

- Parting words
- Thrifty folks
- His job's in "Jeopardy!"
- Knight's title
- Self-satisfied
- Auction buy
- Paper worker
- Respectable
- Bias
- Admitted an error
- Cracks up
- Farm sights
- Setting items
- Natural seasoning
- Act the usher
- Make void
- Spring holiday
- Best for picking
- Barbershop offering
- Harp's ancestors
- Without basis
- Zodiac animal
- Discoverer's cry



Yesterday's answer



NOTICE

THE DAILY STAR, LIKE EVERY YEAR, WILL BRING OUT NEW YEAR SUPPLEMENT - 2015 ON JANUARY 1. THE SUPPLEMENT, AMONG OTHERS, WILL INCLUDE ARTICLES AND INTERVIEWS OF INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED SCHOLARS AND PERSONALITIES LIKE KOFI ANNAN, JOSEPH STIGLITZ, MIKHAIL GORBACHEV, ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI, ETC.

QUOTABLE Quote

If you want to know what a man's like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals. --J.K. Rowling

CRYPTOQUOTE

JMWQZOW AKZ OZPGM'N SMZA NKJN RZBTNTHG TG HETCP KJG VZN J IPA GHEPAG BZZGP. -- ZJCPG PBBEZW

YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE

THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN EAGER MAN WHO WANTS TO READ A BOOK AND A TIRED MAN WHO WANTS A BOOK TO READ. -- G.K. CHESTERTON

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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Orientation:

Wednesday, 21 January 2015 at 5:15pm

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