

# THEIR OWN LIVES so endangered....

NASIM FIRDAUS

THESE were the words of Devandra Kumar Pathak, DG, BSF, at a press briefing defending killing of unarmed Bangladeshi civilians by the BSF at the border. The quotes from the press briefing said: "It was necessitated because their own lives were so endangered if they did not open fire...they would have been killed." If this quote is correct then it is scary. If BSF men, armed with weapons the likes of which the Bangladeshi villagers have never seen before, feel so vulnerable then imagine what the Bangladeshi villagers who cross the border every day feel. Imagine the risk they put their lives into because of cattle smuggling. Smugglers bring goods that help the Indians become richer and are attractive to Bangladeshis. Imagine the small traders who engage in exchange of small things of everyday use with their Indian counterparts. They must all be hiding arms that are deadlier than those used by the BSF men!!! For how would these cow traders, small scale border traders and smugglers be more threatening than the BSF men if they are not carrying heavy arms, mortars and shells? One wonders how many heavy weapons Felani and her parents carried while walking across the border in the hope of getting a good groom for her. How many of the BSF men would have been endangered by Felani? Could Felani, an unarmed innocent girl of tender age, be so dangerous that she could have put the lives of these brave men of the BSF in danger?

The civilised world would shudder at the border killings even if it were just one. Yet heavily armed BSF men felt threatened enough to shoot and kill 106 people in 2007 only. Add up all the killings by BSF, recorded or unrecorded, through the forty-three years of Bangladesh's existence, and the numbers would defy commonsense. How can groups of heavily armed men who



patrol the borders or stand guard at the check points with means to call up backup support in an instant feel their own lives to be "so endangered, if they did not open fire...they would have been killed."

Borders are after all imaginary lines that were, in the case of India and Bangladesh, drawn by a man called Radcliffe with a red pencil on a map. It is said that before putting his red pen to the paper Radcliffe hadn't set his foot in this part of the world. Yet he dared to divide a people of whom he knew nothing, giving the stronger an upper hand to kill the weaker. The villagers living along that red pencil line are the marginal farmers and cattle traders who are constantly in search of a living needed to sustain dear life. The cattle traders know one truth, and that is, India has excess cattle. Letting the smugglers trade them across the border while the BSF looks the other way is obviously profitable for all and therefore acceptable. The people who get killed are those who cannot

see the red line and don't know or don't believe in the danger they put their lives in when setting their foot across Radcliffe's red line. Borders are porous with or without fortified walls, barbed wires and armed check points.

It would have been a more decent and acceptable remark if the director general had said "sorry" for the past killings, which can in no way be justified, and left it at that. It would have provided ground for respect of Bangladeshis for the delegation leader, the BSF, and their countrymen. Gulliver could not be put down by the Lilliputians; armed BSF men should not fear unarmed marginal farmers, cattle traders and smugglers who are no more than Lilliputians that cross the border every day in search of a better living. The real smugglers, the big fish, are wiser and don't get killed at the border.

The writer is a former Ambassador.  
E-mail: ambnfid@yahoo.com

How can groups of heavily armed men who patrol the borders or stand guard at the check points with means to call up backup support in an instant feel their own lives to be "so endangered, if they did not open fire...they would have been killed."

## Leave the undergrad admission tests to academics

MD. RIZWANUL ISLAM

NEWSPAPER reports state that the Ministry of Education has issued a directive to all universities to admit students at undergraduate level on the basis of results in secondary and higher secondary examinations. The ministry says that concern for saving time and money of the guardians has propelled this directive. As well-intentioned as it may be, the directive in the current state of affairs is fundamentally flawed. While it would save time and money, it would mean expediency at the cost of quality of the admission process.

The political desire (it has much to do with politics only) for taking numbers as a surrogate for quality in education has made the examiners extremely lenient in marking, and the country is fortunate (!) to witness such an explosion of 'talent' that probably we are on track of being in the record books for producing the highest proportion of young talents on earth. But the problem is, as teachers in the tertiary level, we often find that the 'talents' do not possess the attributes of the highest achievers and shockingly are not always groomed for higher education. The exponential growth of the number of full grade point average (GPA) achievers in secondary and higher secondary examinations over the last couple of years is simply unrealistic. Dispensing with the stardom-centric so-called merit position and division based result and introducing GPA system was a very good move but over-emphasis on projection of progress through positive results without any real concern for quality is pushing it to the brink.

This directive of the ministry, if followed, would make the already stretched and corruption-prone public examinations even more so. Though integrity in medical college admission tests has been an issue and occasionally even admission tests in public universities have not remained unscathed from the same question marks, the corruption in public examinations has been much bigger an issue than in admission tests. As there is an influx of 'talents,' it is not clear that when students with identical grade points apply for admission, which factors would determine who gets admission. It can be assumed that age and other merit-neutral subjective factors would kick in. Our bureaucracy will devise innovative mechanisms for dealing with it but the problem is that we cannot be so upbeat in believing that such mechanisms would be able to protect the quality and integrity of the admission tests.

Moreover, if the directive is implemented the whole dynamics of the admission process would change, since the admission process would then ultimately depend on the results of public examinations administered by education boards which are controlled directly by the Ministry of Education. The university administration, which is almost entirely beyond the control of bureaucrats, would lose their control on the admission process. The result will not just be loss of academic freedom or discretion but, given the way Bangladesh works, students from under-privileged sections of the community may lose out.

Although the directive, at least in the current scenario, is in the opinion of this author grossly flawed, there is much to be done for saving the time and money of the guardians. Radical reforms of the existing admission process are possible and may be desirable but they have to be undertaken by academic administrators who understand academia. Eminent writer Muhammed Zafar Iqbal has for quite some time advocated radical overhaul of the system. He has quite cogently presented that multiple admission tests in public universities (which can often be for individual subjects within the same faculty) is a source of revenue for public universities. His calls for a unified admission test for multiple universities have fallen on deaf ears. For a start, the university administrators may endeavour to take as few admission tests as is possible within a university.

In this regard, the unit based system followed in Dhaka University, Jagannath University, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, etc., is commendable.

If the ministry wants to save the time and money of the guardians, it must first ensure that the secondary and higher secondary examinations can distinguish the best students from the rest. In the meantime, the bureaucrats in the ministry would do well if they invest their resources in improving the quality of education in secondary and higher secondary levels and leave tertiary education to the academic administrators who can do it much better than the bureaucrats. For centuries, academic matters have been left to the academics for good reasons; let our bureaucracy not intrude on this sphere.

The writer is an Assistant Professor of Law, BRAC University.

## What makes a bomb hurler



NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

WHEN a gunman shoots people down in a movie theatre we attribute it to mental health conditions of the gunman in question. When a cop pulls a trigger on an un-armed man we call it self-defense. When a foreign man sits in a plane with explosives in his underwear we call it terrorism. In trying to identify a causal mechanism we spin words and politics to find an explanation that fits our pre-conceived narrative, based on race, religion, and income. But think about this: Is it possible that they all have mental health issues? Is it possible that they are all acting in self-defense? Is it possible that they are all terrorists?

As social scientists we can appreciate the causal link between acts of cruelty and mental health issues (such as lack of empathy), but to ascribe all of the world's cruelty to psychiatric disorders is to assume that a complex mix of environmental risk factors, genetic risk factors, social learning, other afflictions and malaises of the human mind -- such as greed, hunger for power, need for control, misguided ideologies, religious extremism -- have not afflicted mankind, have not affected the actions of people, particularly people in power and the people they have control over.

We need to look above and beyond psychiatry -- without negating its role -- and how normalisation of violence may play a role in the use of violence; there is considerable evidence, including my own research, of the importance of the intergenerational transmission of vio-

lence suggesting that witnessing violence, including inter-parental violence during childhood, is associated with a greater likelihood that they either perpetrate or experience violence themselves. The basis of this concept comes from Bandura's studies examining aggression used by children which suggested that children develop violence as a habitual response to conflict through "observational learning." However, not all children who witness violence as children use violence as adults. This is because children are able to distinguish between positive and negative outcomes, such that, if they find that violence is an effective way of conflict resolution or a means of gain-

released from the study early" (Mintz, 2008). The remaining prisoners gave in to the degrading demands made on them by the guards but became "zombie-like" and "listless" as the guards unleashed what can only be termed evil on the prisoners (Mintz, 2008). As such, Zimbardo, by conducting this experiment, created a recipe for evil that Mintz identifies as: an imbalance of power relations, anonymity (deindividuation), demonisation of victims, severe stress, oversight of abusive practices, absence of self-reflection, and boredom juxtaposed with unhygienic living conditions in a chaotic environment. This lethal mix made the guards of the experiment become who

lute truth, but all and any of the aforementioned factors may as well apply to him.

Let us also think about that very moment when the act of violence is committed. Who does he think about when he raises his hand to hit someone or hurl a bomb? Maybe he thinks whether his handler would be happy enough with his work to give him another job. Maybe he thinks about his mother at home safe and away from the scene of action. Maybe he is pleased by the fall of the "enemy." Maybe he feels sense of power for the first time in his life. Maybe he feels he has control. Maybe it is just another act of violence. Maybe he isn't thinking at all.

Or maybe this is his war and he's fighting the good cause, as he has been brainwashed to believe. And like two Pakistan army officials from 1971 that Yasmin Saikia interviewed, Amin and Alam, he perhaps has a banal approach to violence, as Arendt (1963) would say; he is doing his "duty," not thinking about it (p.220). Much like them, he perhaps has no choice within the institution in which he operates and has been "persuaded to join the horrific activities" to the extent that he does not even accept that his actions are wrong, or worse, pretends that his actions did not kill innocent people, because he is killing the enemy.

"Terror is meant to strike us dumb. Finding words with which to face it is an act of reconstruction" (Neiman, 2012). But reconstruction does not provide closure when acts of terror start to look like "new terrorism" with maximum destruction and marked religious underpinnings.

The author is Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, University at Buffalo, SUNY and member of the AlalOudal Editorial Collective.

*We need to look above and beyond psychiatry -- without negating its role -- and how normalisation of violence may play a role in the use of violence.*

ing control, they are more likely to use violence instead of other methods of conflict resolution such as negotiation, verbal reasoning, self-calming tactics, and active listening (Black et al., 2010). In assessing antecedents of violence, we also need to look at how evil can be created by positions and roles that individuals hold and/or are given. An example of that is the well known Stanford Prison Experiment by Zimbardo in which participants with no prior mental health issues internalised their roles as prisoners and guards to which they were randomly assigned "so completely that the 'guards' became cruel and sadistic, and half the 'prisoners' suffered such severe distress that they had to be

they became, much like the guards who committed the Abu Graib prison atrocities in Iraq.

So when we see a violent man -- the bomb hurler -- let us ask ourselves these questions: is it possible that he grew up in a violent environment and learned violent scripts from his surroundings? Is it imaginable that witnessing and perhaps even experiencing violence has made violence normative for him? Can we picture him thinking about violence as a part of life? Can we almost hear him say that if he doesn't inflict violence, it will be inflicted on him? Can we imagine him being turned evil by others in the way Zimbardo identified? Indeed. We will never know the abso-

**QUOTABLE Quote**

If you asked me for my New Year Resolution, it would be to find out who I am.

Cyril Cusack

### CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- |                            |                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Across</b>              | <b>DOWN</b>               |
| 1 Untamed                  | 1 Diminished              |
| 5 Dull pain                | 2 Portugal's place        |
| 9 Concerning               | 3 Like some pitches       |
| 11 Assistant in a con game | 4 Word on a bill          |
| 13 More original           | 5 Useful skill            |
| 14 Letter after rho        | 6 Greek x's               |
| 15 Historic time           | 7 Self-important          |
| 16 Not periodical          | 8 Writer Leonard          |
| 18 Go to a restaurant      | 10 Soldiers               |
| 20 Bible boat              | 12 Potato pancake         |
| 21 Make suitable           | 17 Squirrel's snack       |
| 22 Patella's place         | 19 Bring home             |
| 23 Hosp. parts             | 22 Composer Weill         |
| 24 Coffee, in slang        | 24 Tasty bit              |
| 25 Whirled                 | 25 Petty quarrels         |
| 27 Frosh housing           | 26 Came down in buckets   |
| 29 Poker prize             | 27 Game cube              |
| 30 Besmirched              | 28 Capitol group          |
| 32 Down Under natives      | 30 "We -- Start the Fire" |
| 34 African grazer          | 31 Sahara sights          |
| 35 Attempted               | 33 Actor Connery          |
| 36 Patriot Allen           | 37 Bar bill               |
| 38 Car type                |                           |
| 39 Coffee bar order        |                           |
| 40 Body shop challenge     |                           |
| 41 Tourney passes          |                           |

**CRYPTOQUOTE**

UEP UVOY MN UEP WMFPXD PFQSVUMX LO DMU UM SQU FMHD CQDBJPO, ZQU UM LXXLBVUP FPPOXUO. -- S.O. HPHLO

**Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:**  
SOME BOOKS ARE TO BE TASTED, OTHERS TO BE SWALLOWED, AND SOME FEW TO BE CHEWED AND DIGESTED. -- FRANCIS BACON

### Yesterday's answer

R	O	A	R	S	W	I	S	H	
I	S	L	E	T	T	A	N	T	E
S	A	L	V	E	E	X	T	R	A
E	G	O	N	E	W	E	A	R	
N	E	W	M	A	N	G	I	T	
A	N	D	S	E	N	S			
F	A	C	T	E	R	R	S		
C	O	W	S	U	V	A			
I	R	K		N	E	W	T	O	N
N	E	W	M	O	O	N	I	L	E
E	M	A	I	L	T	R	A	D	E
M	A	R	N	E	H	I	R	E	D
A	N	D	E	S		M	A	N	Y

### BEETLE BAILEY

GET READY TO GREET THE TROOPS VISITING FROM AUSTRALIA

SOLDIERS FROM DOWN UNDER? WOW!

GREG + MORT WALKER

### HENRY

SOOPER MARK

COURTEOUS, EFFICIENT SERVICE

SOOPER

COURTEOUS, EFFICIENT SERVICE

### HENRY

SOOPER MARK

COURTEOUS, EFFICIENT SERVICE

### HENRY

SOOPER MARK

COURTEOUS, EFFICIENT SERVICE