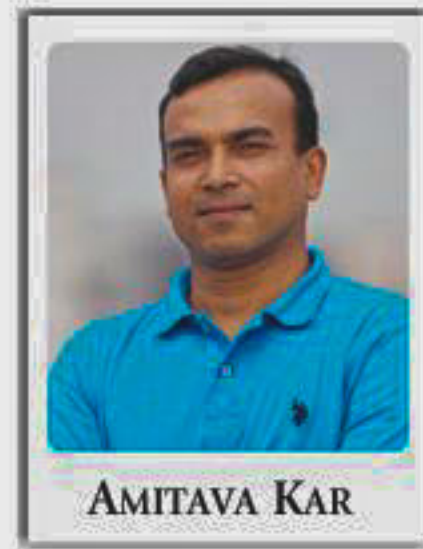


Grief, Over Easy



AMITAVA KAR

WE see a continuous display of grief and sorrow in the media—bodies lined up after car crashes, young boys and girls with their faces charred by Molotov cocktails.

Like a slideshow, these images appear between commercials and family drama serials, news of important people addressing meetings and round-the-clock, inexplicable dancing and singing on the Indian TV channels.

It's hard to grasp all this sadness. When it is shown for public consumption, we should know what to make of it, what to do with it, what it is good for. Is it shown to create empa-

thy for the victims? If that's the case, is it working?

When we see a bad guy on TV, our first reaction is: Lock him up. When we see a hero, we think: Praise him, give him medals. When we see a war—as the Iraq War wrongfully started by Bush or the Israeli war machine unleashing massive firepower on Palestinian civilians—we understand that we are not in favour of that war.

But grief is different. When we see images of family members gathering around the dead bodies of their loved ones and wailing, we are like children watching grown-ups in despair. We know something has gone terribly wrong, but we do not know what to do. We are helpless, helplessly watching. We cannot know grief for someone else, we can only recognise it.

Television channels and newspapers appear

to deal with sorrow, personal loss, agony and suffering. But they are not our sufferings. We do not care about someone else's child being killed in a car crash or someone else's daughter being raped. We just manage the automatic reflex of a slice of grimace, letting out a glint of a sigh. Then we go back to doing whatever we were doing.

And since we do not care, all these people are turned into characters from a piece of fiction, or a film. They may suffer for themselves but for us they become entertainment. Bad news dominates the headlines.

Grief is not cheap. Grief is loss, permanent loss. What we see on screen or on the pages of newspapers is not loss. They are simulations of loss, at best. They are the pictures of loss broken into flashes of images, like chips of broken glass reflecting off a facet. But it is not the whole. I see the picture of a mother drowned in tears who has just lost her son, or a man who has lost the love of his life. I cannot know their pain. The picture is all I got—the picture of their pain.

Television wants us to buy things, including news. We see people who have experienced a deep grief and we buy their suffering, just like we buy a microwave oven or a bottle of anti-septic, advertised for whatever it purports to be.

On TV, grief has a shelf life. Time to move on. Time to seek closure. We should talk, walk, eat, shop and go on a vacation. Get on with our lives. But we fail to calculate that the pain increases even as we get on with it. Grief comes to us all at once, so we think it will be over all at once. Wrong. It is our guest for a lifetime. There is no real, final closure, no end to the loss. When something wrenching happens to us, trying to find closure would be like willfully blocking our memory, refusing to give it a chance, not to work itself out, but to work itself in the marrow of our memories.

We see all these images everyday in the morning as soon as we switch on the TV or get the newspaper. We hear their wailing. We hear them cry out to you, to me, in the distance, every morning, every evening.

But do we really see? Do we listen?

The writer is an engineer-turned-journalist.

IN MEMORIAM AKM Jalaluddin: A scholar and mentor

AKHTAR HUSAIN KHAN



IF he had been alive now, he would be 72. However, fate ordained otherwise. AKM Jalaluddin died last year after three-decades of protracted fight with Parkinson's disease (PD) leaving admirers to mourn his qualities as a rarely-gifted student and attributes of a promising civil servant. For most of the last 30 years of life, he was either in a wheelchair or bed-ridden. Yet how different it was in those first four decades!

In the fifties of the last century, Faridpur Zilla School could take pride in being the alma mater of quite a number of stalwarts, like the singer-orator Asafuddowla and the prolific writer Hasnat Abdul Hye. AKM Jalaluddin along with his class mates ATM Shamsul Huda (former Chief Election Commissioner), painter Mohiuddin Munshi and actor-engineer Abul Kasem fell in the same category. The idyllic and integrated district town of Faridpur used to go abuzz with each feat of these brilliant people.

However, in case of Jalaluddin, who was six years our senior, the pull was made stronger by his younger brother, Sarwaruddin, a class-friend of ours at the Faridpur Zilla School. We swallowed with eagerness and appetite every scrap of information that he -and Ahmed Kamal-later-day professor of history - brought about our idol.

In the Matriculation Examination of 1958 under undivided Dacca Board, he secured the seventh place. He came first in the Intermediate. All these might sound meaningless to a generation that is accustomed to grading. He missed first class in economics for graduation but then changed his subject for masters and secured first class first with record marks in International Relations.

A resident of the Salimullah Muslim Hall, he was elected Assistant General Secretary of the hall students union from the EPSU panel in the very first year. Brimming with the cream of the country's youth, SM Hall opened new horizons for him. He entered journalism. He won the Dacca University Chancellor's Gold Medal for his brilliant essay titled 'Responsibility of Leadership'.

He wrote in an incomparably lucid idiom with effective insight. He applied his dexterity in English to great effect at the now-defunct Morning News where he served as a correspondent for about three years before joining the Department of International Relations as a lecturer. His pieces on topical issues and interviews with leading personalities were smooth reading bearing the hall-mark of his wit and delicacy.

In the Central Superior Service Examination of Pakistan in 1965, he came first among the Bangalis, and was placed second overall. Life at Lahore Academy beginning in 1966 marked a watershed in his career. It was a cherished address for him as also for his SM Hall friends like Mohammad Farashuddin (later Governor of Bangladesh Bank), and ATM Shamsul Huda. There were also Alamgir Faruq Choudhury, AHM Mofazzal Karim, Faizur Razzak, Rafiul Karim, ASM Shaikat Ali, Abdullah Harun Pasha, Safiur Rahman and others.

He served as sub-divisional officer in Chandpur and Vehari in Multan, where he also served as additional deputy commissioner. As deputy commissioner in Mymensingh, he worked tirelessly for the establishment and official opening of the Zainul Abedin Art Gallery on the river Brahmaputra on the Bengali New Year's Day of 1382 BS. Later, he was made governor of Rangpur district under new administrative set-up. After the traumatic events of 1975, he joined the Ministry of Local Government. Then he went to Australia for his PhD.

While at the Australian National University, the first symptoms of PD surfaced. His marriage broke up. He came back to join the Foreign Office. He had a posting in Paris, headed the Foreign Service training academy and served as Ambassador to Nepal. However, these were not fruitful by his standard. In the last years of service, he also worked at the Industries Ministry and at PMO.

Questions can be raised whether he did the right thing by succumbing to the charm of civil service. An academic pursuit for him or maybe the life of a full time writer or journalist would have been more beneficial to society, some would argue. In Jalaluddin's case, it did not matter. Since the despoiling PD was to come anyway, a life in the civil service was possibly congenial to a more fruitful treatment regime. Apart from consulting doctors at home and abroad, he had collected a comprehensive dossier on PD. "I am doing my PhD on PD," he used to quip.

If he had been in shape, he would have definitely completed his PhD. Now only the website of the ANU in Canberra bears passing mentions of his name and the new demographic theory he espoused. With no illness, he could dedicate his retirement years to writing books with his honeyed English and brilliant Bengali. Universities would have benefited from him. With his body in a grave now, such assumptions would appear pointless.

Akhtar Husain Khan is former secretary of the Government of Bangladesh and a former student of Faridpur Zilla School.



PHOTO: STAR

Governance and the politics of Islamic militancy

GHULAM MUHAMMED QUADER

SO far there has been no concrete evidence that Islamic militancy of considerable dimension has been developed in Bangladesh as yet. But, there seem to be elements which suggest that Islamic militancy is in the formative stage and is spreading, especially among the young generation.

The basic reason is lack of good governance resulting in the absence of rule of law which precipitates all social evils like violation of human rights, corruption, discrimination, deprivation etc. These anomalies are creating a sense of frustration in the society, upsetting the public and making the youth desperate for a change in their future.

Similar views have been expressed on the universal cause behind the formation of violent extremism by John Kerry, Secretary of State of the United States of America, in his article 'Our plan for countering violent extremism,' published in the Wall Street Journal on February 18, 2015:

"The most basic issue is good governance. It may not sound exciting, but it is vital. People who feel that their government will provide for their needs, not just its own, and give them a chance at a better life are far less likely to strap on an AK-47 or a suicide vest, or to aid those who do."

In a broader perspective grievances against the government and loss of faith in the system are the root causes. People who feel the government will not do anything good for them and the system will not allow a smooth and peaceful means to change the government are more likely to look for an alternate way. When a considerable number of people lose confidence in the government and the system, a breeding ground of extremism is most likely to be formed.

A considerable section of our population is still poor. Lack of education, discrimination, deprivation, injustice, etc is widespread. Ordinary citizens feel neglected and harassed by bureaucracy. Institutions responsible to take accountability of the government are considered ineffective. Democracy is seen to be weak and dysfunctional. Transfer of power is getting

more and more violent and problematic. Religious sentiments and teachings play an important role in culture. Considering all these factors, it may be concluded that there exists sufficient elements in our society for growth and spread of Islamic militancy.

The violence in politics as seen today in Bangladesh is apparently a law and order situation. But its roots lie in the social unrest formed as a result of certain political moves, such as the amendment of the constitution to change the system of government during the national elections, and the subsequent running of a questionable election under the incumbent government, boycotting of that election by the main opposition led alliance, etc. The main demand now is to hold a mid-term election under a neutral government. The movement is not connected with implementation of an Islamic rule, and the leadership and most of the participating components of the alliance in the movement are democratic and not religious parties. So, it is still not a case of violent extremism as an outcome of Islamic militancy.

In case, it is dealt with as a law and order situation only and tackled accordingly with brute force sometimes allegedly beyond legal jurisdiction, social grievance will likely be further stretched. Radicalisation of politics and enhancement of the cause of Islamic militancy may find an encouraging push out of that dissatisfaction.

Even if the situation could be normalized, the relative calm may not last long. Because, a considerable segment of population would feel deprived of justice. As mentioned by Martin Luther King Jr., "Peace is not the absence of violence, but the presence of justice."

Terrorism or militancy cannot be eradicated by sheer use of force only. Even if each and every extremist is identified and eliminated physically, violent extremism will not end unless the seed of further growth is not taken care of. In the language of John Kerry, in the same article as mentioned above:

"Eliminating the terrorists of today with force will not guarantee protection from the terrorists of tomorrow. We have to transform the environments that give birth to these movements. We have to devote ourselves not just to combating violent extremism, but to preventing it. This means building alternatives that are

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credible and visible to the populations where terrorists seek to thrive."

As already mentioned, Bangladesh could be a fertile ground for the growth of Islamic militancy. Certain incidents as are being reported in media suggest the seed of militancy has already been sown. Considerable growth could take place in favourable weather. Dissatisfaction, political unrest, uncertainty and desperation can provide that environment.

In order to obtain sustainable peace and a stable social order necessary for human development and prosperity that counters the detrimental violent chaotic conflict prevailing in the country, corrective measures need to be initiated in the political arena to address the social gripes stemming out of that. An initiative for a meaningful dialogue among the feuding sides could pave the way for a resolution in this respect.

Conventionally, the onus lies with the government to initiate the dialogue. As per Professor Dr. Raunaq Jahan, a political scientist and academician, (in an interview published in The Daily Star on March 6, 2015) "One of the best ways to tackle extremists is to ensure space for non-violent and democratic opposition."

The writer is former minister and Presidium Member of Jatiya Party.

QUOTABLE Quote

Don't watch the clock; do what it does. Keep going.

Sam Levenson

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Suitable for a holiday
- Edible root
- Kindle
- Lena of "Chocolat"
- Singer Stevens
- Prop for Potter
- Periphery
- Cheese chunk
- Dick Tracy's love
- Skiing variety
- Atop
- Publicity
- Street sign
- Lot sight
- Forgo bidding
- Dumbstruck
- "Like that'll ever happen!"
- Soda bottle size
- Pageant topper
- Sacred bird of Egypt
- Protected, in a way
- Milk carton size
- Preposterous
- Witches
- Setting items

DOWN

- Dimond side
- Undermine
- Airs
- Prepares to play
- Tag sale label
- Shelter
- Castle part
- 1992 Disney movie
- Like some endorsements
- Waiting to bat
- Policy experts
- Org. that tracks Santa
- Origami need
- Neighbor of South Africa
- Using the soapbox
- Parent's reason, at times
- Islamic ruler
- Lemon rind strips
- "Cosmos" creator
- Singer Cara
- Grows dim
- Circus sight
- Towel word

CRYPTOQUOTE

SEV XUWHC KM QUITVWZVC DUWV JG RYVVRWRZNV SERZ WVRHKSVM MU SERS KS KM ABHHG RM ZVNVMMRWG SU MVVD SU FZUX MUDVSEKZQ RM SU FZUX KS.

— CRZKXVH XVJMSVW

YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE: SMALL OPPORTUNITIES ARE OFTEN THE BEGINNING OF GREAT ENTERPRISES.

— DEMOSTHENES

Yesterday's answer

TOPAZ STAID
OBESSE GAPRA
GLASS APRON
SIC TAR INC
UGH ICE CEE
PESTER WORD
CORONET
ASHE BOBBLE
VAN CAWRAN
ALA ATT ADV
TAPES HINDI
AMPLE EDDIE
RISKY NOYES

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.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

HOW DO I LOAD THIS INTO THE GUN? THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY. AND THAT ISN'T IT.

HENRY by Don Trachte