

# A nightmare recurs

SHAHEEN ANAM

ON a clear spring night in April 23, 1998 we rushed to the residence of Latifur Rahman, Shamim Bhai as we call him, hearing that their youngest daughter Shazneen had been murdered in her bedroom. The 15-year-old was brutally murdered by domestic members of the household. For days, months and years, the memory of that macabre night continued to haunt us and that had left the family to mourn forever the untimely and tragic death of their youngest. We knew her well, a young bubbly teenager full of life just getting ready to step into adulthood.

Apart from the unthinkable tragedy, the family since then has suffered innumerable disappointments and frustration over the progress of the murder case of their daughter. After 18 years, the case is still pending. But who is this family? Latifur Rahman and his family have set up a well reputed industrial house like the Transcom Group and has partnered in establishing many institutions providing much needed employment to thousands. Latifur Rahman has been instrumental in the setting up and success of such a prestigious newspaper as *The Daily Star*. Together with his wife, their daughters and a son, they make up one of the most eminent families of the country, known for their ethical business standards, their amicable behaviour and above all their generosity towards people.

When many sent their children abroad to study they insisted their children study in local English medium schools in Dhaka. Although the older ones went abroad for higher studies, they all returned to Bangladesh, following the footsteps of their parents, to build their future here and make a contribution to the country of their birth. Fate, indeed dealt them a cruel blow in taking away their youngest cherished child.

But how did the family survive this huge tragedy. Did they dissipate, give up, leave the country, collapse and become immobile in the face of such a tragedy. No, on the contrary, they rose

from the tragedy, more firm and resolute not to be defeated by the evil forces and continued to contribute by setting up the most highly circulated Bangla newspaper *Prothom Alo* in the country and expanding their business. They did not allow the cruel murderous hand of fate to destroy them, they stood up, they rose and fought back. However, during this time, their world revolved around their children and most importantly their four grand children.

Then came July 1, 2016; the next day was Shabe Qadre the 26th day of the holy month of Ramadaan. For Muslims, it was the "night of all nights", many doing last minute shopping for Eid, festivity in the air, restaurants busy serving Iftar. Like other restaurants, Holey Artisan bakery was busy. Some people had come for iftar and lingered on, others for dinner. As we know by now, all hell broke loose around 8:30 as 6-7 gunmen stormed the restaurant and took the guests hostage.

We heard in shock and dismay that Faraaz Hossain, grandson of Latifur Rahman and son of their eldest daughter of Simeen, MD of Eskyef pharmaceuticals was among the hostages. Suddenly the tragedy the family had endured nearly 20 years ago seemed to be coming back. We prayed with our heart and soul, begging and pleading with God not to let this happen to them again.

But Alas!, that was not to be. Faraaz along with 19 others was brutally murdered by a bunch of de-humanised young men, indoctrinated to believe that killing of Jews and Christians would land them in heaven.

This incident in many ways has no parallel in Bangladesh. The brutality of the murders, the motive, the choice of victims are all alien to our society which we believe is tolerant, humane and believes in living together in peace and harmony.

There are hundreds of unanswered questions. Who are these young men, how did they become radicalised, what prompted them to this act of cruelty, what is their motive, why? Too many



Faraaz Ayaz Hossain

questions and few answers as slowly we are trying to make sense of it all. Can it be at all possible that Bangladesh is moving towards the kind of radicalism that we see in the Middle East and other places? But how can this be? We liberated our country in 1971 on four principles, one of which was secularism!

However, this article is not about finding answers to these questions. It is about the family of Latifur Rahman,

about Shazneen and about Faraaz.

And who was Faraaz? A young innocent boy of 20, so handsome that seeing him one had to ask "who is that good looking boy?". Well mannered, polite and a good student. The apple of the eyes of this parents and grandparents and brought up with the same values and principles that is the hallmark of the family. What was his fault? He had just gone to Holey for a meal with two friends, Tarishi and Abinta.

He along with his friends were brutally murdered that night.

Many of us know by now that he could have saved himself if he wanted to. But, imbued with the values given to him by his parents and grandparents, he stood up, defied the murderers and paid the price with his life. He refused to leave his friends to die and by doing so showed us that there is still hope left in this country.

As already published in *The Daily Star* this morning, he did not fail us. He showed courage in the face of death and stood tall. When the nation failed our foreign guests, were not able to protect them, this young boy of only 20, showed a rare kind of hospitality and responsibility. He just could not leave them and save himself. One wonders how many among us could have done the same.

On one side is the immense personal tragedy traumatising family and friends and on the other, the million dollar question "where is our country heading towards?" Will it be branded as another "terrorist country", will the threat of extremism and radicalisation continue to expand, if yes, do we have the means, expertise and will to deal with it.

Only time will tell, but what we do as a nation from now onwards will determine the future of this beloved country that we call Bangladesh.

Finally, I want to pay my personal tribute to the 9 Italians and 7 Japanese murdered so brutally, conveying my heartfelt regret, sorrow and shame that we failed to protect them. Our hearts go out to the loved ones of the two brave police officers who gave their lives to save others.

To the families of Faraaz, Tarishi, Abinta and Ishrat. Please know, they were our children, our sons and daughters. We mourn their deaths as if this has happened to our families, to our children. We stand beside you in this hour of immense pain and tragedy. May their soul rest in peace, may the angels themselves take them to their heavenly abode. With deep sorrow, love and respect.

The writer is Executive Director of Manusher Jonno foundation.

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## The story so far

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

THE story so far: four of the assailants went to English medium schools or top notch private universities and one went to a Madrassa in Bogra. All of them had a pretty much normal teen life until they went missing in or around the same time earlier this year. All of them surfaced with a common mission—killing foreigners in an exclusive eatery popular among expats in one of the most secure locations of Dhaka city. They brutally killed our Japanese friends who came to develop the country's first ever Metro Rail system, our proven Italian partners of the garments sector, three young women and one chivalrous Bangladeshi young man who stood out for his female friends. In all probability, there were collateral damages when the rescue operation took place—the pizza chef is perhaps a case in point. We are yet to learn how these young men got to the cafe, or the type of vehicle they used. Did they walk from a nearby safe-house? Where are the CCTV footages of their first entry not only to the Holey Artisan Bakery but also to the global terror map?

Several international channels covered the incident live, with newsfeeds from our local ones, exposing the fallacy of our government's 'home-grown' theory. The government so far has attributed this series of killings of non-Muslim religious priests or machete hacking of free thinkers including bloggers, baul-

lovers, university teacher or LGBT activist to a vested quarter interested in destabilising the country. Following the mysterious murder the wife of a police officer, the uniformed men went on a large-scale manhunt rounding up about fifteen thousand 'anti state' cottage terrorists. Yet a group of unassuming assailants surfaced in the least expected location.

The portfolios of these young men are very interesting. The IS based SITE has identified them with their Arabic names, the local police have dubbed them with 'homegrown' nicknames and their friends have linked them with their Facebook profiles. I can't be a Shakespearean and say, 'what's in a name?' The shadow lines of nomenclature have turned these individuals into mutants with hybrid identities.

Well, the social media are full of blame for the parents of these 'spoilt rich kids' who had gone astray. I received a call from a former Scholastica teacher yesterday who used to know one of them. She was telling me how her friend, use to go beyond her means to sponsor her child's education. There was no dearth of time or love and no abundance of wealth. The son from a middle class family finished his O' Levels with flying colours. Then what went wrong? The theory that terrorism is striking its roots in absence of familial love does not hold much water.

I was reading the IS recruitment manual that somebody posted on Facebook. The dawee (The one who

invites) gives dawa (invitation) to those who are not very religious. Interesting! The pre-January social media activities of some of the assailants fall into this category. Once you have a strong religious basis, you have a better understanding of the Creator and his creation. You cannot opt for destruction. Hence, IS goes after young minds that are frustrated, confused and vulnerable. Talking about jihad and the wrongs done to the Palestinians is their Step number 1. Then they start demonising western culture, and the rest we all know.

It is interesting how much I have learnt about these things in the last few days. I learnt from another post, how our Prophet himself warned of a group that will be unleashing terror in the name of Islam. They will have Islam in their throats and not in their hearts. They will be using black flags and claiming themselves as part of a daula (State). Then there are reports that these groups are now in search of new locations as they are being driven away from the Asia Minor. It is very easy to claim that we have thousands of years of history of being secular, and these forces will not be able to cause any harm. I will just ask them to read "I am Malala," and find out how Swat valley changed simply by sheltering one man and entertaining his extremism.

Just yesterday, one of my professors was telling me about the origin of the word 'assassin.' The history of the words goes back to a murdering cult from the 12th century. During the crusade, a Syrian Shiite leader Sheikh al Jabal,

translated as "The Old Man of the Mountain," gave hashish to young men and then exposed them to an Edenic landscape with handmaidens from Harem. They were sent to the battlefield with the promise of being returned to that trance like erotic pleasure. Sounds familiar? Some things in the world have never changed.

This is a proven tactic of brainwashing. The first step is isolation (no wonder all these assailants went missing earlier). During isolation, the targets are cut off from their social network that acts as reality checks for all of us. The targets are forced to see the faults in their friends and how they should not be like them. Their perceptions are monopolised with simultaneous indulgence and threats. Imagine, the boy who found the most beautiful moment of his life while dancing with a celebrity could become a cold-blooded butcher. Even in a prison, among so many convicted murderers only a handful could have the nerve to become a hangman. So what happened in those near six months in which these fine young men had become gruesome monsters? I think from now on, police must take these 'missing reports' more seriously than ever.

Indeed, we need counter terrorism cells for surgical interventions. We also need a system of 'reverse brainwash.' The first step is to break the isolation trap; family and social network need to be the source of positive energy. The second is to educate ourselves of different types of abuses. There is a tendency to think all bad things are

happening in English medium schools and in our madrassas. The first group get frustrated with the life in the fast lane and the latter are disappointed that there is no lane designated for them excepting in the afterlife. In our Bangla medium schools, I remember, our Islamic Studies teachers acted as 'comic relief'. The teachers were friendly; it was easy to score grades compared to, say your Chemistry class. They in a way neutralised our fear for religion, and helped us become secular. Today's religious doctrines are coming through cable TV and the internet. With the infiltration of global agendas, we cannot afford to be nonchalant. Our needs are different. Our goals are different. We want to succeed at an international scale. The stakes are higher. The amount of frustration is equally high. The society is becoming highly polarised: the gap between the haves and have-nots is greater than ever. There are international actors to take advantage of this situation. Some will do it to dent our national interest (hampering our Metro Rail or garment sector). Others will do it to find a shelter for the parasitic ideology. The government must come forward with a national consensus about who we are and what we want to be. It must revamp our education system that is adding to the social discrepancy and making us vulnerable to the predatory parasites. My heart goes out for all the fallen. We are sorry for the cruelty. This is not us. This is not what we want to be!

The author is Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka and Advisor, DEH, ULAB.

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### QUOTABLE Quote



**LEWIS CARROLL**  
ALICE IN WONDERLAND  
If everybody minded their own business, the world would go around a great deal faster than it does.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
- 1 Blueprint number
  - 5 Throw away
  - 10 3D image, for short
  - 11 Alpine home
  - 13 October birthstone
  - 14 Italian cheese
  - 15 Alfresco
  - 17 Ukraine once: Abbr.
  - 18 Dot
  - 19 First aid case
  - 20 Squeak stopper
  - 21 Stalactite setting
  - 22 Word separator
  - 25 Ice cream scoop holders
  - 26 "The Caine Mutiny" writer
  - 27 Building wing
  - 28 UFO pilots
  - 29 Holds protectively
  - 33 Fitting
  - 34 Like some aspirin
  - 35 Steering system part
  - 37 Bear in the stars
  - 38 Peaceful
  - 39 Pack tight
- DOWN
- 1 Chases off
  - 2 Batter's high hit
  - 3 Gladden
  - 4 Knock unconscious
  - 5 Papyrus document
  - 6 Task
  - 7 Lamb's father
  - 8 Nome native
  - 9 Thoughtful
  - 12 Rich cakes
  - 16 Tom Joad, for one
  - 21 Sparkling wine variety
  - 22 Gym wear
  - 23 Chicken dishes
  - 24 Lacking luxury
  - 25 Lobster part
  - 27 Wears down
  - 29 Genetic copy
  - 30 Peter of "M"
  - 31 School paper
  - 32 Clothing joins
  - 36 Mystery author Stout

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41

### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S C A L E S M I L O  
T O L I D O A N O N  
U N I T E D S I Z E  
C A B I N T O T E D  
K N I T L I N I N G  
G O A T A G E  
A D O R K A B L E  
S I R D E N Y  
C R A Z E S W A S P  
O F F E R M A L T A  
F A T S B A Y L O R  
F R E T O T O O L E  
S E E S W A F T E D

### BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

THE GENERAL GAVE US AN UPDATED CALENDAR FROM THE PENTAGON

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT IT?

IT SHOWS ALL THE PREDICTED FINANCIAL CRISES WHEN WE MIGHT NOT GET PAID

### BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

AWWW!

AWWW!

AWWW!

AWWW!

HOW WAS YOUR AFTERNOON TOGETHER?

AWWW-SOME!