

The night that changed everything

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

It was the last Friday of Ramadan. A day when, Muslims believe, peace and compassion reign on earth. Ironically, this was the night when several

armed Islamic militants attacked the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka where guests were dining – many of them breaking their fasts. The attackers started the mayhem by invoking Allah's praise. The greater irony was that the Quran was then used as an instrument for killing – whoever could recite its verses was spared while the others were brutally tortured and hacked to death.

After the initial trauma, grief and shock, Bangladesh is reeling with a deep sense of guilt: how did it come to this? How could a country that fought a war for secularism and democracy become radicalised within a span of 44 years? Were there signs on the horizon? Were we in denial ... or were we too complacent, thinking that the soft and tolerant religious culture that most believed in could not be tarnished by an extremist ideology? Whatever the answers, one thing is certain: Bangladesh has lost its innocence and the future is clouded in uncertainty. The question that is running through everyone's mind is: "Are we prepared for what will come next?" The truth is: Do we even know what is next?

The past isolated, targeted militant attacks in the country have been followed by public outcry, a few political statements condemning terror, some perfunctory investigations and the matter was shelved both in the official archives and people's minds. The offenders thus enjoyed a degree



PHOTO: SESY/ARTLIMITED.NET

of impunity that may have served as an encouragement. People are now wondering: Will the Holey massacre suffer the same fate?

While many of the broader challenges arising from terrorism need to be addressed politically and globally, as a community and society we must bear some direct responsibility. The time has come for action rather than venting frustration through OpEds, seminars and talk shows. It's not enough to mourn and shed tears; we need to go through some deep introspection to understand what we have learnt from this tragedy. Only then can we move

forward.

Social media and news articles are emphasising the importance of good parenting to prevent teenagers from being drawn into extremism. However, parents must be cognizant of the fact that focusing on religion alone or the ritualistic aspects of religion may not be enough. They need to persistently emphasise the core human values of compassion, tolerance and respect for diversity. For, religion can only provide a moral compass – one cannot expect children to fight their ethical battles unless parents provide some universal guidelines of "right and wrong".

Many modern parents are reluctant to probe too deep into their children's lives since they believe that intrusive parenting curbs initiative and independent thinking ... ingredients of success in life. But a six-month disappearance of a child from the radar screen should raise red flags for both the family and the law enforcement agencies. If there is a lesson to be drawn from Holey, it is that the parents and authorities need to collaborate assiduously to track the whereabouts of missing children, who could be in the process of being trained as terrorists.

On a global and national level, it's

time for the "silent majority" of peace-loving Muslims to find their voice and register their protest against obscurantism, bigotry and sectarianism. It's true that they feel helpless because they fear reprisals, even death. Hence governments must provide the security as well as space for free speech and contestable politics. There is no denying that a political vacuum where there is no room for healthy debate and where there are cracks in national unity provides opportunities for extremist subversive activity. It is time that the political parties and civic society came together to fight the threat of terrorism.

As we hang down our heads in shame because the militants were homegrown, we can also be proud of the Bangladeshis who demonstrated exceptional courage and empathy even under threat of death. Faraaz Hossain, having passed the Quranic test, could have walked out to freedom. But he refused to abandon his friends Abinta Kabir and Tarishi Jain who were held hostage because of their nationality and/or religion. He lost his life, but his compassion and courage will be an inspiration for future generations. Reportedly, Ishrat Akhond declined to be dictated by the misguided, misogynistic Islamic extremists and paid a heavy price with her life. They are our heroes whose memory will remain etched in our minds and they will live in our hearts forever.

We pray for all the victims whose lives were lost in this brutal, mindless act of terror. We salute them with the humble realisation of how, as members of the community, we failed them. But let us promise that we will not forget the message they left behind for us: that all of us must resolutely stand up against terrorism and fight for humanity.

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

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A STRANGER'S TRIBUTE

HASANUZZAMAN

OVER the last four days, I picked up a pen and closed the MS-Word document many times while writing this tribute to Faraaz.

Every time, the same stomach churning feeling comes over me, with the same haunting question: how do I write about someone whom I never knew?

Thus, another question that also haunts me is whether I would have the same courage as Faraaz, or what would I expect from a friend, a relative or even worse, my yet to be 20 year-old-son, faced with the identical, hostage situation? Surely, his parents embedded some values of loyalty, trust and kindness, which have little to do with any rich or middle-income background.

It is time to look into our family's structure and the role of a father and mother. It is urgent that we take care of our young in this age of the internet, which has such a large and often unpredictable influence on their behaviour. After all, we cannot expect everyone to be a Faraaz, a young man who has surely set the highest standards for measuring the strength of humane values in recent times.

Values are not goods but are expressed in behaviour. Values are not owned by any particular class or group of people. For all students of economics, Faraaz's sacrifice will surely turn the dominant rational choice, profit-maximising selfish behaviour model upside down. Faraaz's sacrifice has a broader implication: it is about our national integrity and it underlines the choice of our

independence and freedom, in a world where our friends are also as safe as us.

If I am allowed to extend Faraaz's sacrifice to a national scale, it shows that as a nation, we are not willing to live a life, even if it is gifted to us by terrorists, where we will be guilty of leaving others behind.

Before concluding, as a Muslim, I must speak a little bit about the terrorists who killed the bold Faraaz and many others. Surely, Islam does not permit the killing of an unarmed citizen, let alone a woman and child, and bloodshed is especially prohibited during Ramadan. I cannot agree more than with the Prophet's (Peace Be Upon Him) description of such so-called Muslim extremists in Jami' at-Tirmidhi (Book 31 Hadith 2188):

"In the end of time there will come a people young in years, foolish in minds, reciting the Qur'an which will not go beyond their throats." The Prophet (PBUH) went on to say that they were the "worst of creation". It is hard to disgrace them any further.

Surely, Faraaz's choice of not walking free illuminates the highest values of Islam – of being kind, loyal and trustful. Who would not want to claim Faraaz as their son, as a brother and/or a friend? Then again, what would not many of us do to be 20-year-olds again? And yet Faraaz will never have this experience, to have the longing of a past memory. Maybe he deserved something more and better than most of us can imagine or long for.

Every time his photo appears in media or whenever I am thinking of July 1, the black day of Bangladesh which has so shocked us as a nation, I only ponder on my misfortune of never having had an opportunity to be more than a



Faraaz Ayaaz Hossain

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stranger and meet Faraaz, the Bengal Tiger, in this lifetime. Faraaz's sacrifice, along with the two policemen who ran into the scene without any hesitation, are reminders of those millions who sacrificed their lives in the belief of a Sonar Bangla,

for our freedom as a nation to talk and walk in our motherland, with our heads held high.

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QUOTABLE Quote



PATTON OSWALT

So when you spot violence, or bigotry, or intolerance or fear, or just garden-variety misogyny, hatred or ignorance, just look it in the eye and think, 'The good outnumber you, and we always will.'

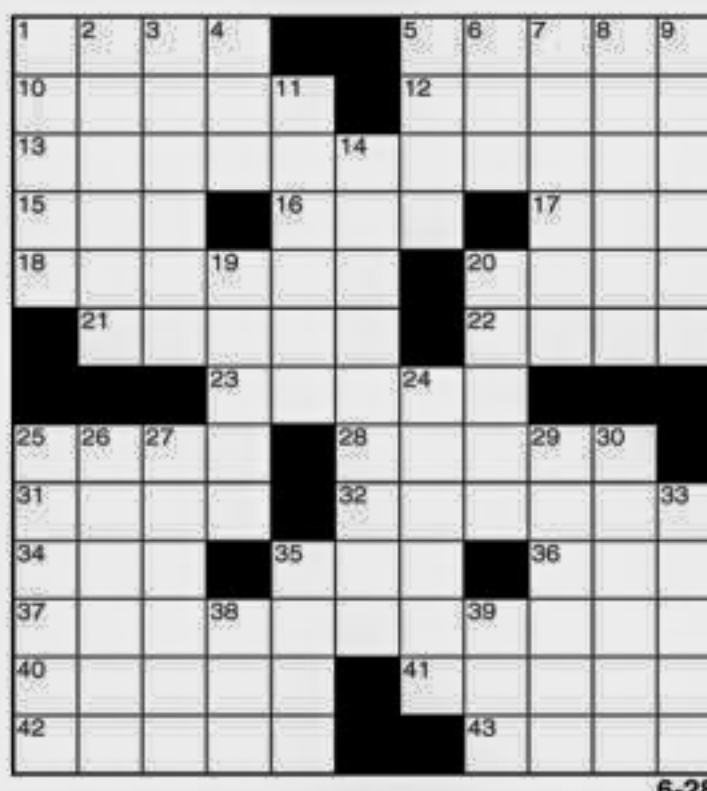
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Praise
- 5 Map division
- 10 Goads on
- 12 Warsaw natives
- 13 Curly punctuation
- 15 Light metal
- 16 Owned by us
- 17 "That's it"
- 18 Songwriter Neil
- 20 Low card
- 21 Rescued
- 22 Avails oneself of
- 23 Mistake
- 25 Burn a bit
- 28 Mimicking
- 31 Party holder
- 32 Some singers
- 34 The whole amount
- 35 Knight's title
- 36 Narc's org.
- 37 Nice but not formal attire
- 40 Singer Tucker
- 41 Party dip
- 42 Door sign

DOWN

- 1 Overwhelming desires
- 2 Warring groups
- 3 Kenya neighbor
- 4 German article
- 5 Boot attachment
- 6 Overly
- 7 Church sights
- 8 Giggling sound
- 9 Emerson works
- 11 "Dracula" writer
- 14 Algebraic equation
- 19 Turn away
- 20 2006 Olympics site
- 24 Verdi works
- 25 Pure
- 26 Basketball Hall of Famer Nat
- 27 Oblique
- 29 Small bump
- 30 Axle gunk
- 33 Light lunch
- 35 Asterisk
- 38 Reuben bread
- 39 Shop tool



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

