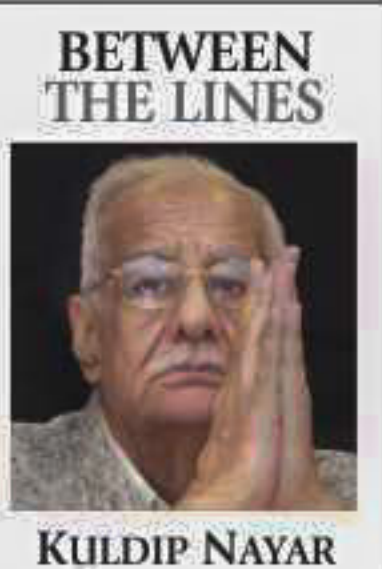


KULDIP NAYAR'S TRIBUTE TO FARAAZ HOSSAIN

Death be not proud



KULDIP NAYAR

BETWEEN THE LINES
AS the memory of the massacre at Dhaka recedes, examples of bravery are coming to the fore. One of them is that of Faraz Hossain. He was on a

vacation in Dhaka from his college in the US where he was pursuing higher studies. He spent less time at home, but used the opportunity to meet his friends from foreign climes at a popular Spanish restaurant in Gulshan, the Holy Artisan Bakery.

When terrorists struck, Faraz was having food with his friends at the restaurant. The killers were singling out and separating Bangladeshis from the others, before using their weapons. They came to the table where Faraz was sitting. They then asked him whether he was a Bangladeshi, and when he said yes, they pushed him aside before asking others about their nationalities.

When the others said that they were non-Bangladeshis, they were separated and Faraz protested saying that he was a part of his friends' group and would not leave without them. The terrorists then told him that he too would be killed if he did not stand aside. Faraz decided to stand with and by his friends. And he knew that the price he would probably pay with his life for this disobedience. As could be expected, the terrorists showed no

mercy and killed all of them. Today, when the massacre at Dhaka is recalled, people talk about the courage of Faraz. This is probably the only compensation for his parents and grandparents whom I know well; in fact, I have often had dinner at their house when I am in Dhaka. I met Faraz at his grandparents' house. I recall exchanging notes with him about the US, where I had attended the North Western University to earn an MSC in journalism. He was raw in his attitude but steadfast in his views, even though he belonged to a very wealthy family. There were no airs about him. He was curious to know about India, which he said he would visit at leisure. He was impressed by our composite culture, something which he wanted Bangladesh to cherish because it too had a large number of Hindus, nearly 12 million, making Bangladesh the third largest Hindu state in the world after India and Nepal.

I have tried to pick up every detail about the killings. There is no doubt that Faraz sacrificed his life for his friends (one Indian and the other a US citizen) who were the real targets of the terrorists. This does not make amends for the brutal killing, but it does tell a saga of unbelievable bravery. True, he is mentioned with great respect in every Bangladeshi home and cited as an example of courage, but his distraught parents and grandparents can never be consoled. Their family lost a child who had a lot of potential and promise. Such examples of self-sacrifice are by no means unique in the East. They are typical of value systems in the East which do not weigh individuals on the scales of wealth, as is often the case in the West. Mahatma Gandhi is an example. He preferred to be known as a naked faqir, as he was characterised by the West, rather than be known for either wealth or erudition, even though he had access to both. The West cannot understand or appreciate the non-violent movement of Gandhi. Hundreds of volunteers went to the sea at Dandi to break the law by making salt and they suffered police lathi charges but never hit back because of the ideals of their movement.

Faraaz may not have been a Gandhi follower, but he did represent his spirit and discipline. In India, wherever Faraz's name has been mentioned, people bring in Gandhi's name. Had Gandhi been living today, I have no doubt that he would have travelled to the victims-stricken Dhaka, just as he went to Noakhali after the fierce riots between Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta. And he would have lauded a person like Faraz, who truly represented a figure of noble ideals, decency and self sacrifice. Just as statues of Bhagat Singh have been erected all over India, Faraz should also be remembered in the entire subcontinent and I am confident that people would name their sons and statues after him, not only in Bangladesh but also in India and elsewhere. At least school textbooks should have a chapter on him, not for the purpose of accelerating the idea of

Hindu-Muslim unity, but for making the youth feel proud about a young man like Faraz. They should be able to tell their elders that a person like Faraz has given an example of the true spirit of the youth, as well as a demonstration of the East's culture and its value system.

I wonder how his non-Bangladeshi friends are recalling his memory. They should propagate the example of Faraz

being an example to the world, has become a prey to the propaganda of the fanatic fringe. Since the advent of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's regime, his fringe party is trying to represent the whole nation.

Taslima Nasrin, who was ousted from Bangladesh for having written on the oppression of women, has asked the followers of Islam to introspect and find out how some of them have strayed

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in their own countries so that people of different religions and race feel proud of how an ordinary young man stood by his companions when he could have easily escaped from death.

This has nothing to do with a particular religion to which you belong, but represents the core of every religion: the faith in people to rise above parochial considerations and think of humanity as a whole. Unfortunately India, instead of rising above petty parochial appeals and

from the real content of the religion. Faraz would have approved such an approach. Come to think of it, this is the only approach that is cogent, logical and human. The fanatic fringe among Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians should be made to realise that India is a tolerant country and those who are trying to disturb the equation among the communities are disfiguring India and all that it stands for.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

"It could have been me"

C. RASHAAD SHABAB

THESE words that are so few and so simple, have weighed heavily on my conscience since the tragic events of July 1 this year. For, just as they are a solemn expression of empathy towards the innocent victims of an unspeakable act of violence, they are also a graphic illustration of the shamefully narrow limits within which that empathy has been applied.

This senseless massacre at Holy Artisan Bakery did not happen in a vacuum. It was part of a persistently escalating series of killings, which started with secular bloggers who were summarily, and often publicly, executed, in the aftermath of the Shabbagh protests. But despite the ferocity and frequency of these killings, the reaction in many of Dhaka's social circles could, charitably, be described as grudgingly sympathetic. The 'religious sensibilities' of a country that is - ironically enough - often reported to be among the most corrupt in the world, was the stated reason for our shocking lack of empathy with these 'secular bloggers'. In other words, what happened to 'them' could not have happened to 'me'.

The same is true for attacks against ethnic and religious minorities, or indeed against expatriates working in Bangladesh. The bombing of the Ashura procession, the Italian aid



PHOTO: STAR

Privilege and power go hand in hand. Those who were most affected by the murder of the elderly Buddhist monk, who was hacked to death in May, did not have the power to influence national policy. Those of us who 'could have been' at Holey, do.

worker gunned down while jogging home, and even the Hindu priest who was killed while gathering flowers for his temple, on the very morning of the Holey massacre: the list goes on and on, and it is a heart-breaking testimony on our country, that there are too many dead to mention here.

To the best of my ability to keep track of these events, between the Shabbagh protests and the Holey massacre, no fewer than 40 separate,

lethal attacks have been allowed to occur. And if I am honest, I must admit, none of them, 'could have been me'. So what is it about Holey that strikes such a chord with 'us'? One could argue it is the location - that it happened in Gulshan, where many of us live or work. Another possibility is that some of us may have gone to similar schools as the victims. But in my opinion, such similarities are incidental, and it would be disingenuous to attribute the full

force of our empathy to them.

The simple fact is that the July 1 massacre happened in a place that was created to serve those of us who are within Dhaka's nexus of power and privilege. Holey was a space for us to eat safe food, breathe clean air and feel the green grass under our feet, in a city that affords few of its citizens such luxuries. It was a space for those of us who can afford to spend more on one meal, than many of our countrymen

spend on food in a whole month. Such spaces cannot exist without concrete walls and iron gates, manned by private security guards. And as these horrendous events demonstrate, even these fortifications cannot protect us from our own callous disregard for the deaths of our less privileged countrymen.

Privilege and power go hand in hand. Those who were most affected by the murder of the elderly Buddhist monk, who was hacked to death in May, did not have the power to influence national policy. Those of us who 'could have been' at Holey, do. We use that power every day - to lobby for our businesses, to preserve our properties, and to give our children the very best this country has to offer.

If we had used that power to demand that the government seriously address terrorism after the elderly Buddhist monk was butchered in May, we might have saved the Hindu priest who was killed on July 1. We might have prevented what happened later that day, at Holey. But instead, we retreated behind the apparent safety of our concrete walls and private security guards, as people continued to be killed.

We have spent far too long, doing far too little to demand that our government protects the lives of our countrymen, who, in the society we have created to enrich ourselves, have been left without the power to demand it for themselves. And now our futile walls have fallen. Our countrymen have long paid the price for our lack of empathy with the victims of persistent and escalating terrorism. But on July 1, at the Holy Artisan Bakery, 'it could have been me', so maybe we will finally do something about it. Perhaps we will finally see that we are all in this together.

The writer is a PH.D. student at the University of Sussex, UK.

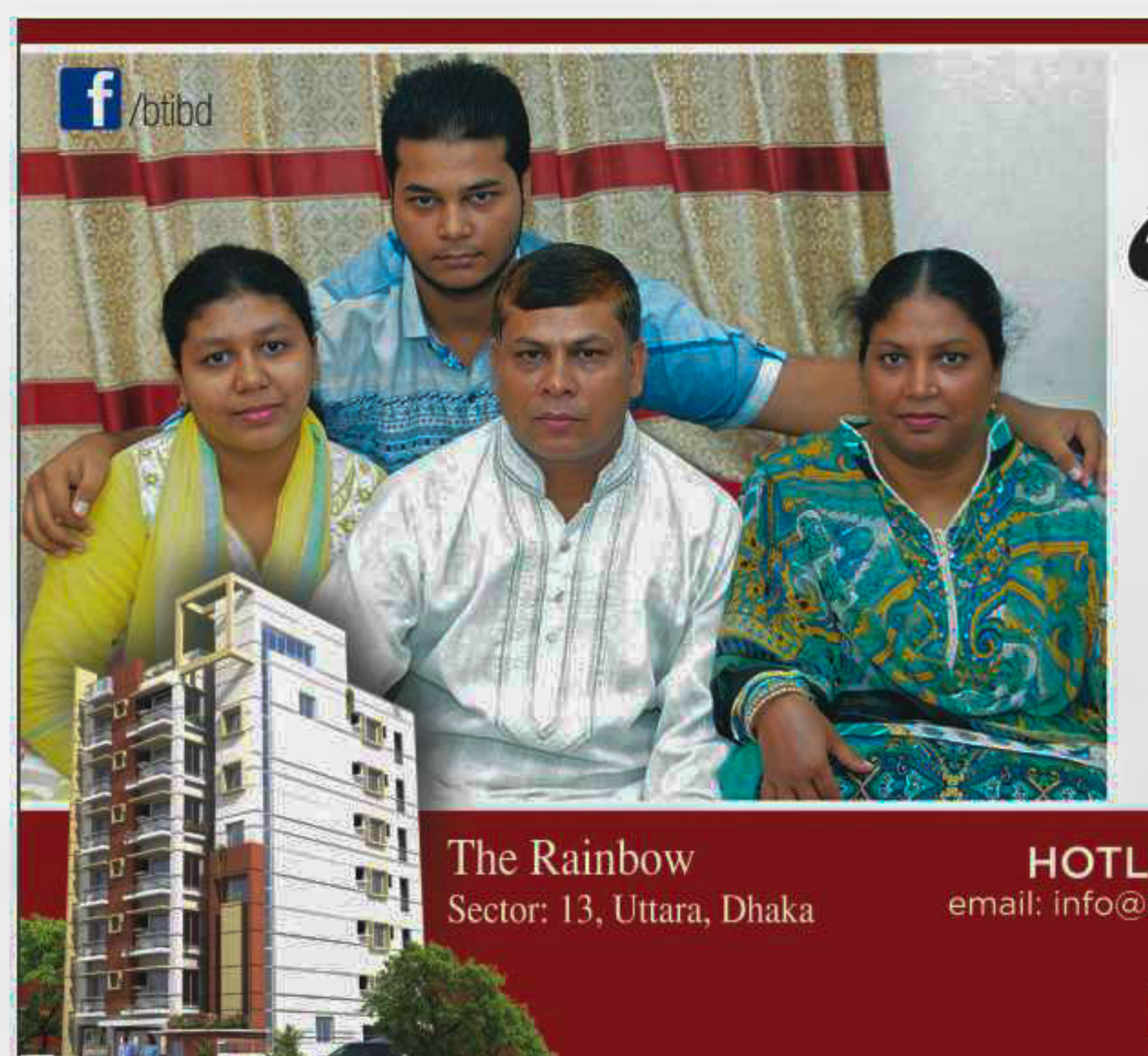
BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott



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Eng. Delwar Hossain & Family
 The Rainbow
 Sector: 13, Uttara, Dhaka

The Rainbow
 Sector: 13, Uttara, Dhaka

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