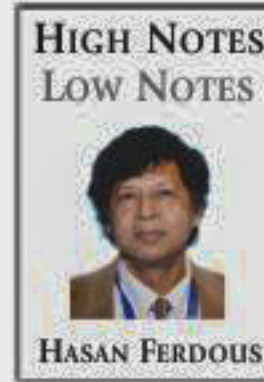


# Remembering Sydney Schanberg



HASAN FERDOUS

**B**ANGLADESH'S war of independence had many unlikely heroes, some of whom lived outside of Bangladesh and had no formal connection with the country and its people. Sydney Schanberg, an American journalist working for *The New York Times* (NYT), was one of them.

My first contact with Schanberg was in June 1994. Mafidul Hoque, a well-known author and publisher, was planning to bring out a collection of reports sent by Schanberg for the *Times* on Bangladesh's struggle for independence. Mafidul bhai asked me to contact Schanberg and get his permission to publish the book in Bangla. By then Sydney had left the *Times* and was working as Associate Editor for New York's alternative tabloid, *Daily Newsday*. I sent him a brief note requesting his permission and a foreword to the book. Within days, a letter from Sydney arrived with his consent.

The following year, I met Sydney at a mid-Manhattan restaurant. The book was out and Mafidul bhai had sent me a few copies for him. "That was an important part of my experience," he said as I gave him the copies. He caressed the book's cover with the eagerness of a man who had just recovered a long-lost treasure.

In 1970, Sydney became the South Asian bureau chief of *The New York Times*. He visited Dhaka many times to cover the tumultuous events preceding the 1971 war. When a devastating cyclone hit Bangladesh's coastal districts in November 1970, he spent days chronicling the stories of men and women who perished in the disaster, and the loss and pain of those who survived. He covered the historic December 1970 elections and came to know Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib quite well. In those fateful weeks of March 1971, he spent many patient evenings and late nights, speaking with Bangabandhu about his negotiations with General Yahya and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

On March 25, when the military crackdown began, Sydney was at

Dhaka's Hotel Intercontinental. From his darkened hotel room, he saw firsthand the brutal massacre unleashed by the Pakistan army. He was forced out the next day. From Bombay, he filed his first report, "In Dacca, troops use artillery to halt revolt," which was published on March 28. In it, he captured the trauma of the Bengalis under military crackdown with the simple quote of a student trying to keep back his tears, "My God, my God, they're killing them. They're

Unhesitatingly he said, Sheikh Mujib. "We had become quite good friends," he said. In February 1972, on his way back from the Pakistani prison, Bangabandhu stopped over in Delhi. Sydney, with thousands of others, was at the airport to greet the Bengali hero. Bangabandhu spotted him from a distance and almost screamed, "Schanberg, is that you?" With encouragement from him, Sydney crossed the security rope and rushed to meet Bangabandhu. They embraced

trying to find the body of his father. He was among those killed during the final days of the Liberation War. Sydney, almost whispering to himself, said, "I still see that little boy. Just like Hamlet and the gravedigger. How tragic, lonesome and absurd." One day after our meeting over lunch, I received a large packet from Sydney, hand delivered to my office. It was a framed copy of the first page of *The New York Times*, detailing the Bhola cyclone. An accompanying note

present his testimony at a formal trial, if required. He also agreed to sit for an interview with Onindo Atiq, a young filmmaker. This never happened due to scheduling conflicts and his failing health.

Sydney spent the last few years of his life in his rural home in Upstate New York. He stayed in touch, mostly through e-mails. Several times I tried to invite him to the annual Bangla book fair organised in New York by members of the Bangladeshi community. He always responded enthusiastically, but was unable to attend due to failing health. The Bangladesh Liberation War Museum also wanted to honour him with a special event in Dhaka. Again, poor health prevented him from traveling to Bangladesh.

The last message I got from Sydney was on May 10, 2012. He was writing to apologise for cancelling our planned meeting in New York, but it contained so much more. Sidney wrote:

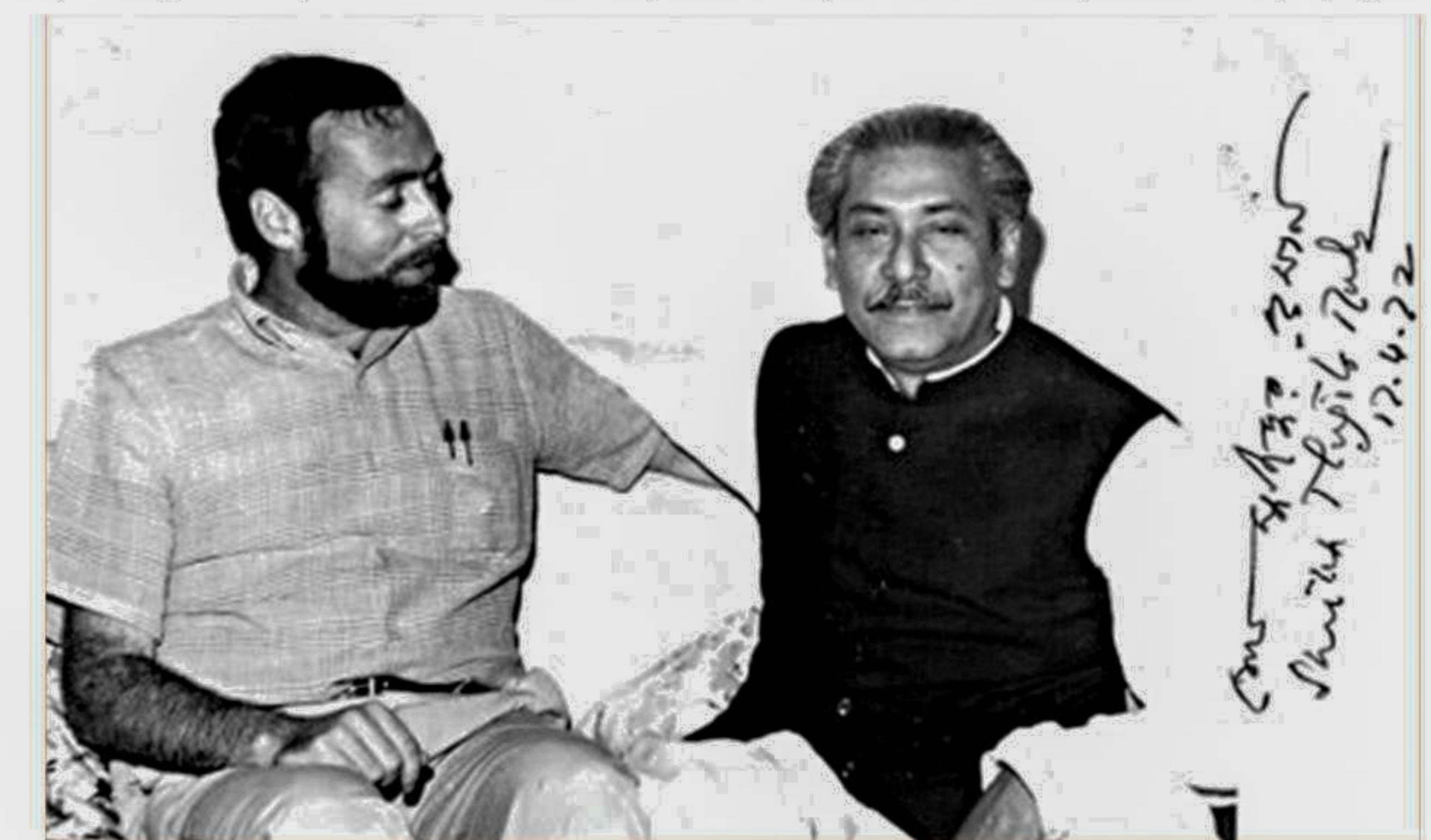
"My experiences in Bangladesh continue to be very important to me. The genocide was not covered well by the international press and I felt it my duty to tell the story as completely as possible. I admired Sheikh Mujib for his leadership and bravery and I was appalled that my government, the United States, supported the Pakistan army's criminal behavior. As you probably know, in my 2010 book *'Beyond the Killing Fields'*, I included a chapter containing 12 of my detailed stories from that period.

I wish I could come and discuss all these things at your event, but I must live my life now in the slow lane. I will never forget my experiences in Bangladesh and the suffering your people endured."

These were not empty words. Sidney genuinely felt a bond with Bangladesh and its people. He told me of a flag he had received from a young Bengali guerrilla in 1971 – the old flag, with the map in the middle. "I still have that flag in my study," he said.

On July 9, 2016, Sydney Schanberg breathed his last. He was 82.

The writer is an author and journalist based in New York.



Sydney Schanberg with Bangabandhu in Bangladesh on April 17, 1972. This photo has been taken from Schanberg's official website. PHOTO: WWW.BEYONDTHEKILLINGFIELDS.COM

slaughtering them." Over the next ten months, Sydney kept the world informed with his frequent reports, often from the refugee camps in West Bengal and the adjoining Indian states, but also from free zones inside Bangladesh.

As he leafed through a copy of his book, *Dateline Bangladesh*, 1971, Sydney seemed overcome with emotion. "It was a terrible time," he muttered. I asked him what he remembered most from his 1971 days,

each other like two old friends. Sydney was present at the Pakistan army's surrender at Dhaka's Race Course. He told me of a mass grave he had visited in Mirpur. There he saw a young boy, probably 10 or 11, running frantically back and forth with a pruning handsaw. At times, he was pushing his handsaw deep into the earth. This was a makeshift burial ground, with human remains still fresh. What is he doing? Sydney asked his interpreter. He was told, the boy was

said, "With appreciation and gratitude." That was the beginning of a wonderful friendship. Over the next several years, I turned to Sydney for all kinds of help, mostly to do with Bangladesh's Liberation War. When Sentu Roy, a Bangladeshi student from Howard University, planned to do a documentary on the 1971 genocide, I requested Sydney to give an interview. Unhesitatingly, he spent several hours at a makeshift studio, giving his testimony. He even volunteered to

*"My experiences in Bangladesh continue to be very important to me. The genocide was not covered well by the international press and I felt it my duty to tell the story as completely as possible. I admired Sheikh Mujib for his leadership and bravery and I was appalled that my government, the United States, supported the Pakistan army's criminal behavior."*

# Making character palatable again

**A**MITAVA KAR

**I**T is baffling that physical courage is so common in the world and moral courage so rare. It is hard to find people whose manner is infused with kindness, humility and integrity, in other words, character. The issue is relevant because it is timeless. In "The Republic," Plato connects the human

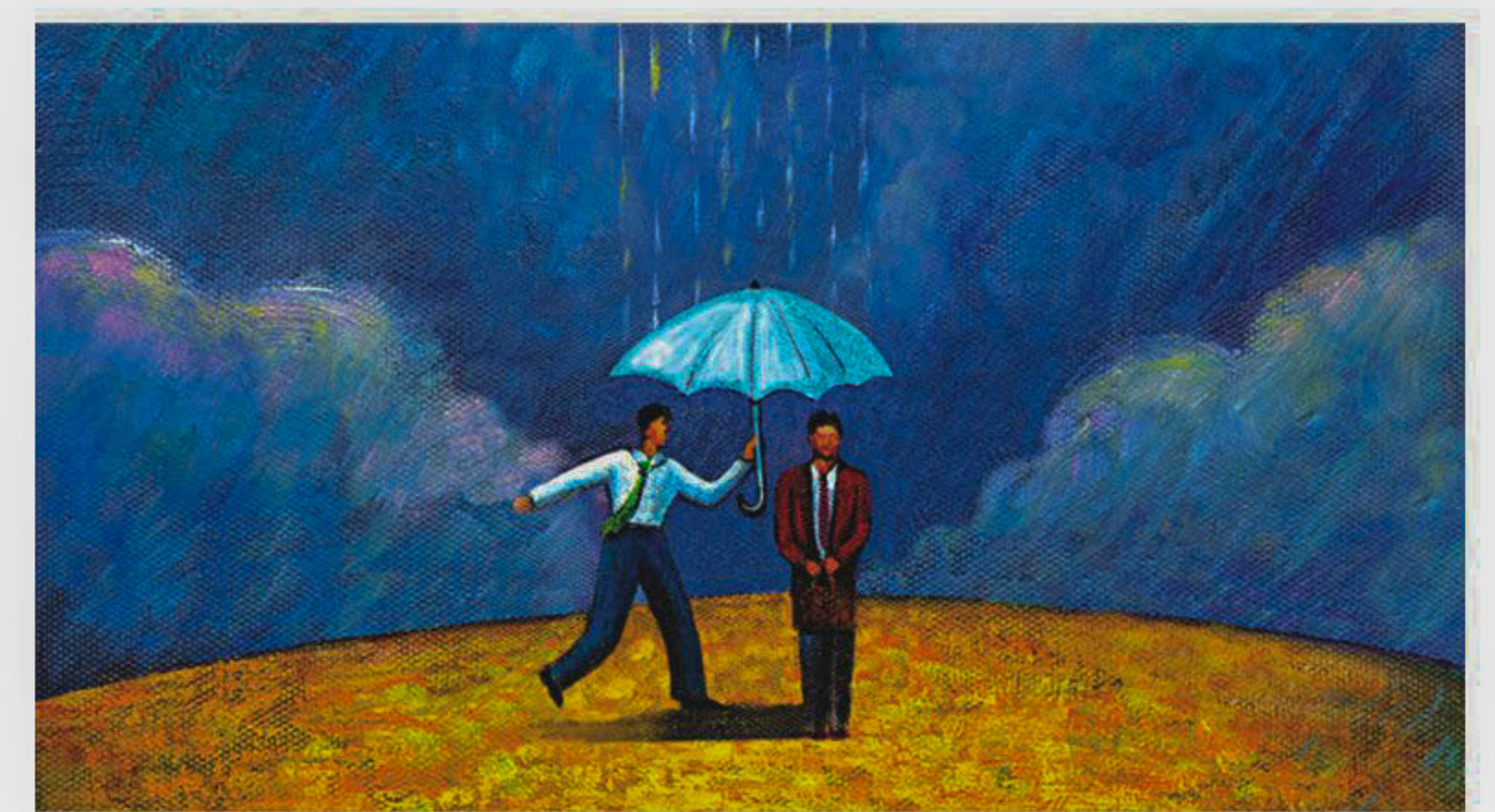


ILLUSTRATION: NPR

soul with the soul of the city. The soul's health correlates to that of the city. The soul of the city reflects the souls within the city. If there is order in the souls, there is order in the city.

A society is based on the everyday practice of civic virtues. Without them, it is difficult to promote public welfare. "Government can establish laws governing taxes or safe driving speeds but it cannot have an auditor for every citizen or a policeman on every corner and it must have the consent of the governed to impose such rules in the first place. Social norms are the private analogue to government rules and regulations," according to Isabel Sawhill, a fellow of the Brookings Institution.

We suffer from a lack of character both at the national and individual level. We have slipped into the quagmire of mediocrity. We figure that if the people around us seem to like us, we must be good enough. We fail to develop the integrity that can withstand popular disapproval. We find ourselves doing things that other people approve of even if they are wrong. In the process, a

humiliating gap opens between what we have become and what we could be.

But is character possible in a vacuum? Can it be built by following abstract rules? Can it be learned in a classroom with students mechanically taking notes? Can we email or tweet it? Do we have role models whom we can emulate and measure ourselves by? Are there institutions or resources to inculcate and nurture it? In his 2014 essay 'Character is Experience', Joseph Fishkin, Professor of Law at the University of Texas, Austin writes, "There is no such thing as inner ability or

character that sits separate and apart from experience. Every experience we have, every advantage or disadvantage, is filtered through the particular character and other traits of the person who experiences it. And all of those traits are themselves a product of what has come before."

How then do we develop kindness, humbleness and honesty? In a groundbreaking study titled 'Attribution, reinforcement, and altruism: A developmental analysis (1980)', psychologists Joan E. Grusec and Erica Redler showed that a group of children were much

more generous when their character was praised instead of their actions. Praising their character helped them internalise it as part of their identities. The children learned who they were from observing their own actions. The finding is reinforced by research led by US psychologist Christopher J. Bryan, who finds that for moral behaviours, nouns work better than verbs. Cheating was cut in half when instead of, "Please don't cheat," participants were told, "Please don't be a cheater."

One of the most effective ways to improve bad behaviour is to express disappointment. According to independent reviews by Professor Eisenberg and David Shaffer, parents raise kind children by expressing disappointment and explaining why what they did was wrong, how it affected others, and how they can correct the situation. This helps children develop standards for watching their actions, compassion and responsibility for others.

Unfortunately, we live in a world that has left many of us inarticulate about how to cultivate these human qualities. Is it possible to mainstream and address goodness in the public conversation? As preposterous as it may sound, Singapore did exactly that in 1997 when the country launched a Kindness Campaign aimed at encouraging people to make positive commitment to gracious living through simple acts of kindness in their daily activities.

Kindness, bring it on!

The writer is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

*We suffer from a lack of character both at the national and individual level. We have slipped into the quagmire of mediocrity. We figure that if the people around us seem to like us, we must be good enough.*

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

**CROSSWORD** by THOMAS JOSEPH

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	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**BOB DYLAN**

*He not busy being born is busy dying.*

**ACROSS**

- 1 Rich
- 7 Like some cheese
- 11 Audience cry
- 12 Opera star
- 13 Arrives
- 14 Kitchen sight
- 15 Pal of Pooh
- 17 Light touches
- 20 Striped grazer
- 23 Nutrition label abbr.
- 24 Soup add-ins
- 26 Sturdy tree
- 27 Writer Fleming
- 28 Baseball's Mel
- 29 2015 James Bond film
- 31 Vein contents

**DOWN**

- 1 Relay section
- 2 Small bill
- 3 Drama division
- 4 Prescription amounts
- 5 Niagara's source
- 6 Turn down
- 7 Found darling
- 8 Take part in a drive
- 9 Genesis name
- 10 Football's Marino
- 16 Thinning layer
- 17 Most writing
- 18 Modify
- 19 Cheer up
- 21 Stylishly quaint
- 22 Colorful flower
- 24 Blasting stuff
- 25 Crew tool
- 30 Official count
- 33 Scarlett's last name
- 35 Ballpark figures
- 36 Nanny or billy
- 37 Spring mo.
- 38 Zodiac cat
- 40 Neither follower
- 41 Yale backer
- 42 Bear abode

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

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

**Successfully handed over 3 projects on time and ahead of time in the Month of June**

- **BELLAGIO** 6 MONTHS AHEAD @ BANANI
- **ELAN** 2 MONTHS AHEAD @ UTTARA Sector 6
- **OENDRILA** ON TIME @ BARIDHARA J Block

**HOTLINE: 01755 66 24 24**  
email: info@btibd.org • www.btibd.com

Let's help the needy

f /btibd

**btib** building technology & ideas ltd. since 1984 in pursuit of excellence...

AA3 REHAB MEMBERSHIP #001 ISO 9001:2008 CERTIFIED