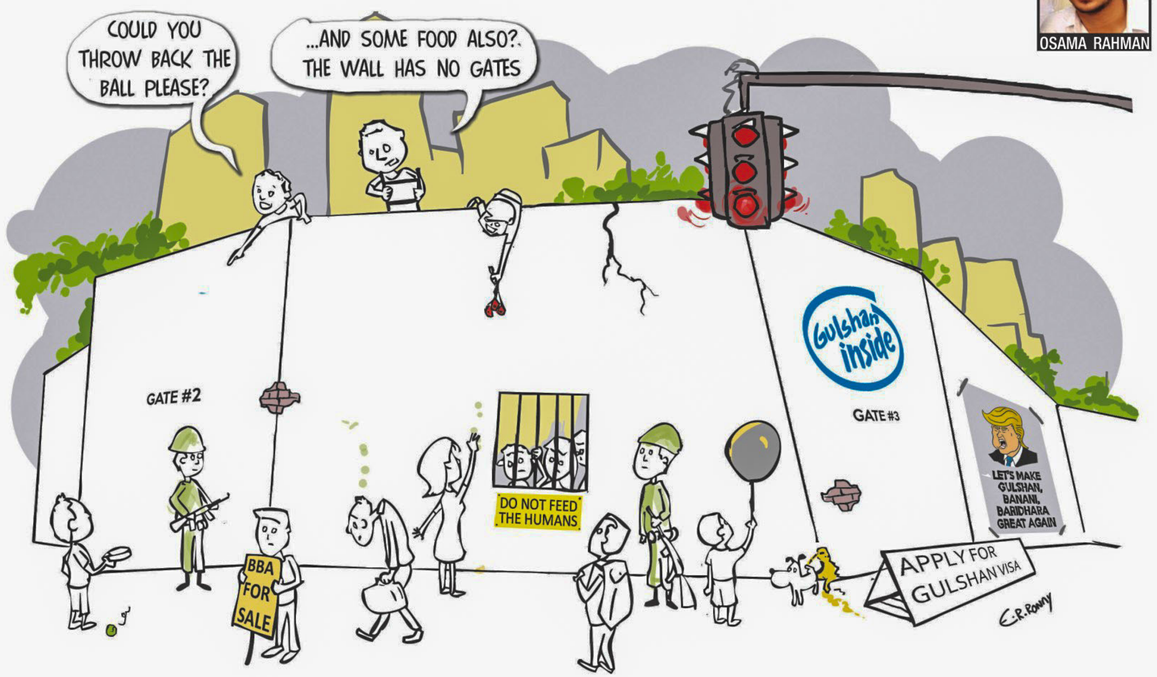
#RealTalk

OSAMA RAHMAN



THE GREAT WALL

"We are gonna build a wall. And we are gonna make the terrorists pay for it," Debaish Taran, Builder of Cities.

A big, sturdy fence, topped with barbed wire and CCTV cameras, separates the 'them' from the 'us'. Armed guards stand guarding every entry point, a horrifying fate awaiting those who dare to trespass. This is Gulshan, formerly a highly-protected area, now turned into a human zoo, filling the coffers of those who managed to seduce a few to sell their freedom out of fear of the opposition, fear of the terrorists and finally fear of each other. Welcome to the Great Wall of Bangladesh. Israel has nothing on us.

It all started in the most innocuous of ways. The depraved conditions of the animals in Mirpur Zoo forced the government to rethink their position and ultimately led to the closure of the country's biggest zoo. The Hippopotamus-Goat friendship story, that had helped the zoo survive longer than necessary, could not help further. However, knowing that the people of the city had for too long been starved of entertainment, the government needed to make a hasty decision. And hence, all eyes turned towards the wall in Gulshan, an area Dhakaites love visiting when bored, especially now that Zia Uddyan is closed off to the public after dark, Dhanmondi Lake shuts down by 6:00 pm and Ramna is especially kept opened for drug dealers, prostitutes and muggers (they are people too!). Add the fact that the government shut down every restaurant because they had all obviously become illegal despite having the government themselves collect taxes from them, the people of the city needed something to do. And thus was born, The Tri-State Zoo and Safari Park.

"In the 16th Century, Cardinal Medici had a large menagerie containing different people from all over the world. This zoo was right in the heart of the Vatican and hence shows that human zoos aren't all bad. Plus, the people in the zoo hardly know it's a zoo, although we do discourage feeding the foreigners in the area," a spokesperson for the Tri-State Zoo and Safari Park explained. The last such human zoo was in Europe, but this one comes with a twist. Whereas before the Caucasians would gawk and throw stones on Africans and Asians, here the roles will be reversed. Local Bangladeshis, 'the uncultured savages', will not be allowed to enter The Tri-State Zoo and Safari Park, but will be offered the chance to stand atop watchtowers placed on the top of the wall to observe the foreigners conduct their day-to-day business while hopefully learning how to behave and conduct themselves, the bloody fishermen.

As a further cautionary note, Bangladeshis are strictly advised to not mingle or interact with the foreigners, unless they are from the Big Brother country, comrades with whom we fight wars and destroy forests. "We have also asked the Bangladeshis outside the Tri-State area to specifically not feed the foreigners as the foreigners will then begin to associate Bangladeshis with food as they have associated Bangladesh with rampant terrorism, and Iraq with oil," a zoo official explained, in the condition of anonymity. He further added that since Gulshan has zero restaurants, residents are only fed a steady diet of state-authorised drab and should not be encouraged to stray outside for different food.

In order to ensure security, only 200 Safari buses will be allowed to ply the sate-of-the-art area, making this the first Safari Park in the country, because no one cares about the other one. "Locals will eventually be relocated from these areas and by relocated we mean tossed out because everyone isn't an immovable tannery. Native species will not do well with these invasive ones but both will have much to teach the other," a beaming employee of the Tri-State Zoo and Safari Park claimed, claiming this too is all for social harmony. ■

| AWARENESS |

WITH A HEART OF GOLD

Actor Quazi Nawshaba Ahmed talks to NAZIBA BASHER about her dedication towards helping the children of the country.

PHOTOS: COURTESY

Quazi Nawshaba Ahmed is a popular Bangladesh actress- known and admired dearly by her fans for her spunky attitude, superb acting prowess, and friendly attitude. She has done many a notable role to secure permanent places in the audiences' hearts.

But there is a side of Nawshaba that many have yet, unfortunately, not witnessed-- that of a socially conscious mind and heart, that of a simple girl with big dreams for her country, that of a mother.

"When I was young, my father would take me to many different places to meet people of all kinds- from all walks of life, from all backgrounds. I had a soft spot for people, especially children since then," says Nawshaba. While she worked at Sisimpur with children with autism, her longing to work with children increased ever more. "Since then, I don't know if you would call it 'activism', but was determined to be socially conscious. I need to ensure a good life for others. Because my number one question is- *eka bhalo theke ki laabh* (what is the point of living well alone)? *Shobai ke niye bhalo thakte hobe* (we all must try to live well together)."

Nawshaba had never planned on becoming an actor, but she never planned on stopping working with children, helping them realise their dreams, helping them grow a pair of wings. "I have a group of underprivileged children living with me. We call ourselves the 'hibijibi dol'. We all live in my house as a family. I help them to do their work, their studies, I help them plan a future, and until they are off to achieve their dreams, they have my home as theirs. There were many children staying, most of them have gone off to secure the future they had planned with me, two are still here. We all get together on Eid and other occasions and spend time together, planting trees or sharing a laugh."

Recently, Nawshaba heard of a 'Sponsor a Child' campaign and she wanted to take part. "But I was very uncomfortable with the fact that I have to 'choose' a child. How does one choose a child? How is it even possible? When you know for a fact that all these children need your help, how do you choose one?"

She found Upen Devi, who does not have a mother. A mother of a child, Nawshaba says, "I think it was my motherhood that pulled me towards her.

But I could not be a parent, even a sponsor parent, without making her feel like I'm her parent. I had to go see her, I had to learn about her, learn her dreams, her hopes. So I travelled to the hill tracts to meet her."

"After going there, it hit me harder. While I was acquainting myself with Devi, I saw so many other eyes, thirsty for love and care, looking at us. Every time I go to visit Devi, whether to celebrate her birthday or to deliver some new books to her- I see them all, I feel for them all."

To at least help the other children's' dreams come true, Nawshaba created a video for JAAGO to raise awareness, where she talks about the importance of these children's dreams and their education. She inspired her friends, one of who is famous director Khijir Hayat Khan, to come and sponsor children.

"I believe just sending them money is not enough. If we really want to help, we have to do it with heart. There are children there who dream of becoming pilots, doctors, engineers; it is our job to help them on their paths. Devi wants to grow up to be a nurse, so I send her books on nursing. I was the first parent who actually went and visited! Others should come forward too. The more the sponsors, the higher the rate of literacy amongst such a beautiful people. My video was made in haste, it was made with no real production value- but it was done with heart. This video is my plea to every able person to come forward and help these children. We need them as much as they need us."

To watch Nawshaba's awareness video, please follow this link- https://www.facebook.com/JaagoFoundation/videos/10154408840650809/?__mref=message_bubble