

# I am happy today

KARIM WAHEED

THOSE who were fortunate enough to know you, are familiar with the phrase “I am happy today”; it’s omnipresent in your Facebook posts. Some of us even referred to you as “Happy Ishrat”. In a city that keeps topping the “most unliveable” list, you’d find reasons to be happy about ideas/objects/places we often overlook — a piece of sky that has become a canvas for the sun and clouds, a perfect *Kamini* flower, a particularly impeccable plate of *fuchka* after a theatre performance on Bailey Road and so on. Those who didn’t know you might perceive this as contrived, but those of us who did, knew that your stubborn happiness was 100 percent organic and infectious.

A year ago, it took me days to fully grasp the reality. On July 1, 2016 evening, as I was turned away from an establishment [the management said they had been asked by the law enforcement to close right away] not far from Holey, I thought it was strange but the severity of the situation still hadn’t hit me. Roads in the vicinity were being closed as well. As I waited at a friend’s place, for things to calm down, details started to emerge. What some thought to be a case of robbery turned out to be a full-blown



Ishrat Akhond

terrorist attack. None of us slept that night. Around 2 or 3 am, I learned that you had gone to Holey that evening with some friends. I earnestly hoped that you didn’t and that the friend who shared this information was wrong. I prayed *Fajr* to calm my nerves and probably got a couple

of hours of sleep.

On July 2, 2016, as news started revealing names of the victims, it was announced that you didn’t make it. Some said you were murdered at the onset of the whole episode; some said you were defiant in the face of imminent death and argued with

the terrorists in defence of your friends. I couldn’t believe you were gone; a year later, I still find it difficult to believe that you had met a brutal, untimely death. And for what?

I was angry, so angry, for weeks. Angry at the loss of a friend; angrier at the murder of one of Bangladesh’s truest and best promoters.

You were a different kind of patriot. Your patriotism didn’t shout slogans at rallies. Your patriotism was the quiet love that nurtured and enriched every sphere you stepped in. You were a walking encyclopaedia when it came to Bangladeshi art and promoted local artists at every possible opportunity. You were a steadfast defender of Dhaka any time you felt someone was being unreasonably harsh about your beloved city. You familiarised your many expatriate friends living in Bangladesh with the best our country has to offer.

Your radiance remains undimmed despite your physical absence. It remains in everyone who had the opportunity to know you, to befriend you, to love you. I am happy today, Ishrat Akhond. Happy to have had you as a friend and learn that happiness is a choice.

The writer is the Editor of SHOUT. E-mail: karim.w.25@gmail.com

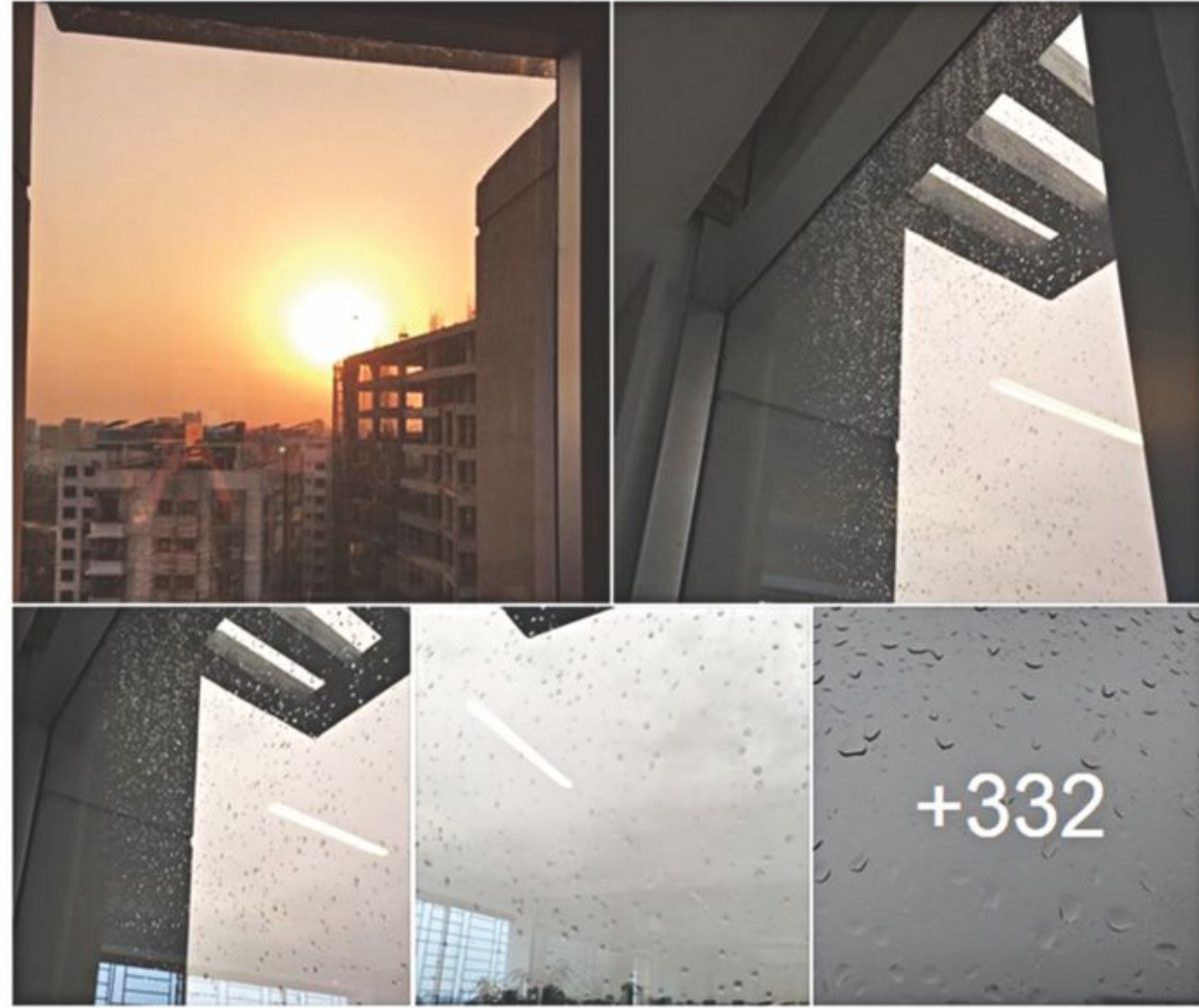


Ishrat Akhond shared her album: আমার একলা আকাশ — feeling entertained at Gulshan-2, Dhaka.

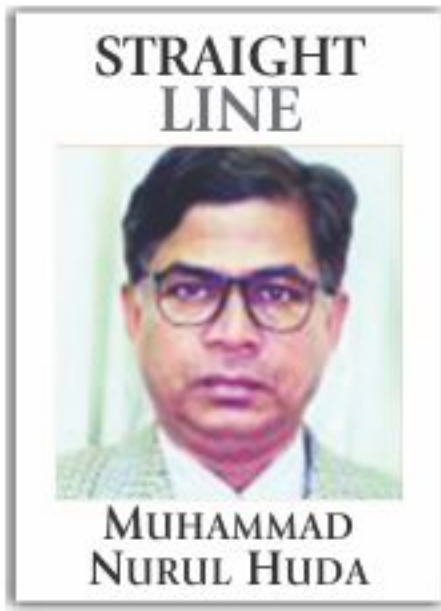
June 24, 2016 · 3

I am happy today to share the pretty sky of Dhaka...in different time, different mood...

Provide translation to Bengali



# The long battle against militancy



STRAIGHT LINE

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

that even the pragmatic objective of marginalising religious militancy would actually be an awesome task, not to speak of eliminating religiously motivated violence. The reasons for such a view are grounded in reality.

One has to note that the fearsome Bangladeshi youths of the Gulshan Holey Artisan Bakery attack who did not carry the communally driven 1947 partition luggage, resorted to unprecedented violent actions to allegedly realise political and perhaps divine goals. The unsettling dimension of the gory incident at Gulshan is that the attackers and their guides and the masterminds reportedly have had the benefit of better education to enable them to grasp the realities of power equation and the compulsions of international geo-politics. It is thus puzzling as to why should Bangladeshi Muslims, howsoever small in number, commit themselves so completely to carry out the ISIS agenda. Does the suffering of coreligionists in near or distant lands propel them to such repulsive zealotry?

The external factors supposedly causing the militant actions are, practically speaking, beyond our competence to effectively engage in. However, to fruitfully undertake de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation processes, one needs to understand the Muslim mind. The so-called militant Islamist groups look at the underdog position of Muslims in various regional conflicts as a direct result of western policies presided over by Washington. The concentration is on public policy operating in the domain of relations between the Muslims and the West that are considered as the source of militancy.

A predominant part of the so-called Islamist militant view is that the military power of the West is the key to its perceived arrogance, its aggression against Muslim societies and its connivance with Israel for occupation of the West Bank and its

complacency about Russia’s oppressive policies towards Chechnya. The radicals argue that if power is the way in for the West, power is the way out for Muslims. The focus is on the use of power in pursuit of policy. The suspicion is that a section of Bangladeshi youths have been converted to this approach in varying degrees.

Observers are of the view that what is required is a policy on the conflicts affecting Muslim countries and not a policy on Islam

‘Tablighi Jamaat’ that has substantial appeal and significant mass following in our society. This organisation is devoted to the non-militant activity of discussion and preaching. In practice, it aims at urging Muslims to observe the basic tenets of Islam, practice Islamic morality and do good things in life.

The Tabligh movement has attracted persons from the prosperous sections of the society such as retired armed forces officers, civil bureaucrats, wealthy businessmen and

It also provides a large pool of Islamic symbols, injunctions and sanctions which contribute to the discourse of difference from the West.

Under the circumstances as mentioned, it is an uphill task to make youthful minds understand that cultivating an inaccurate prejudice damages the tolerance, liberality, and compassion that are supposed to characterise the Islamic faith. It is also equally difficult to convince that Islam’s

slaughtering each other and keeping Muslims busy in internecine warfare, thereby, unwittingly implementing the sinister game plan of Western powers, has to be taken into account.

To the curious observer, it might be interesting to note that over the years, in Bangladesh, particularly since 1975, a quarter has quietly usurped considerable space from the State by creating an extensive network of schools, madrasahs, medical facilities, ambulance fleet and social welfare organisations. This has reportedly created enormous political and social capital for the said quarter which can, if it wants to, manipulate political gains.

The question is, has such a quarter created a parallel narrative of hope and strength in times of crisis, and thereby expanded its political capital? Does such narrative stand to gain in a climate of despondency resulting from political conflict?

The reasonable fear in our situation, as elsewhere, is whether religion has not only been utilised as an ideology but also as an insurrectionary strategy that can draw people of varying political convictions.

An important issue is whether the authorities have been able to agree as to the contents of a historically credible and religiously correct counter-narrative to confront the extremists. Should we not project Islam as being just as rational as any western system?

We need to project that Muslims have a vital mission to witness the divine dimension of life, not the retiring from the world to engage in contemplation or indulging in suicide-bombing, but by an activism that implements the social ideals of Shariah. We also need to realise that politics had never been a secondary issue for Muslims.

The counter-narrative needs to recognise that politics had been the theatre of religious quest of Muslims. Salvation for them does not mean redemption from sin, but the creation of a just society in which the individual could more easily make that existential surrender of his or her whole being that would bring them fulfilment. The polity for the Muslims was, therefore, an aspiration that required a jihad, a struggle that could find no simple outcome.

The task ahead is long and complex.

The writer is a former IGP and columnist of The Daily Star.



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as some interested quarters would like to hint at.

We have to admit that over the years while the Bangladeshi elite has represented the process of war against terror, significant sections of Bangladeshi society have been exposed to the radicalisation of Islamic thought and action.

Reference needs to be made to the

professional middle class in general. Its annual grand assembly at Tongi on the outskirts of the capital city attracts nearly two million people. The contribution of this movement is the cultivation of an Islamic idiom, which provides the overall philosophical framework for discussion of issues ranging from corruption and domestic violence to Western dominance in the world.

liberal principle cannot be defended by reviving a medieval prejudice.

The silent multitudes and potential sympathisers of violent action need to know that the violence of the so-called Islamist militants has actually served the strategy of their professed adversary to malign Islam by projecting the faith as a religion of violence. The scenario of Sunnis and Shias continually

## Quotable Quote

**ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN**  
RUSSIAN NOVELIST, HISTORIAN, AND SHORT STORY WRITER

*It's an universal law — intolerance is the first sign of an inadequate education. An ill-educated person behaves with arrogant impatience, whereas truly profound education breeds humility.*

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

28 Like a short play

32 Lab containers

34 West of Hollywood

35 Qty.

36 Oregon State team

38 Lawyer's workload

40 Parking pro

41 Coach Rockne

42 Ohio tribe

43 Reach across

44 Textile worker

**DOWN**

1 Medieval weapon

2 Finally

3 "Bring--!" (fighting words)

4 Newton cousin

5 Light wood

25 Guinness of film

7 Craps roll

8 Overhaul

9 Elevator lifter

11 Informative

15 Make good as new

19 Bike part

21 Pool tool

24 Losable, as data

25 By surprise

26 Auto race site

27 Relishes

29 Audrey Tautou film

30 Line of work

31 Batery makeup

33 Buddy of "Barnaby Jones"

37 Differ

39 Seventh letter

6-17

### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

### BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

### BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT