

Suicide and irresponsible speech



IN the aftermath of someone's suicide it is inevitable that those left behind will comment. The business of life is to do all we can to prevent death from being thrust upon us and those we hold dear.

Self-preservation is a natural instinct. What could be more alien to our thinking than the idea of someone abandoning this instinct, and in fact being the instrument of their own demise? It is no wonder that cultures have historically seen suicide as an unusually significant cause of death—to be condemned or even required but never ignored.

This week two musicians have taken their lives, sending shockwaves throughout Bangladeshi social media. Chester Bennington was for many the voice that guided them through adolescence. Zeheen Ahmed was someone people knew and loved personally. Their untimely ends have produced a natural outpouring of love, remembrance and genuine grief. This is natural, it speaks for itself, and it is unnecessary to comment further. However, that they died through suicide has produced a range of specific reactions that would never have appeared for most other causes of death.

The first, and most benign, is the offer of help and support. Many of us know people who struggle with depression, feelings of inadequacy or self-loathing that we fear may lead them to consider suicide. Many of us have had suicidal thoughts also. These recent deaths have produced a moment of clarity and fear in many: they don't want their loved ones, and even acquaintances, to suffer the same fate. Hence "I'm always ready to listen", "You're not alone", and the setting up of a series of suicide helplines. If this sounds like a dismissive description, in



truth it is. I have personally been far down the dark road that these messages of solidarity seek to guide people out of. In my experience they achieve little even when people genuinely mean that a suicidal person can message them at odd times to pour out their souls—and, let's face it, very few people actually mean that. However, it is still a fundamentally positive reaction. More importantly, it is a necessary reaction. Even if some words prove ineffectual when it comes to the moment of truth, that people care enough to even express the sentiment can make all the difference in stopping someone's downward spiral.

What is problematic is the question of the suicide's courage.

Despite the sense of alienation or worthlessness that at times instigates suicide—and there are many, many reasons why people kill themselves—only a vanishingly small number of people leave this world with no one who will miss them or need them. There are parents who find themselves outliving their child. Siblings who lose a role model. Lovers who are left alone. People who fell out with them, who are left wondering if they were culpable. And there are responsibilities: co-workers who have to carry on without them, creditors

who will never get what they were owed, people who counted on the person now gone. To think of the sum of people hurt, scarred or even inconvenienced by a suicide, we often judge harshly. We condemn. How selfish, no, to put one's misery over the pain of so many others? And so the word "coward" is thrown around.

Understand this: to call the dead cowardly is an act of disrespect. It is a valueless comment that only adds salt to the wound. They are gone beyond your criticism of their actions. Only those left behind will see your condemnation of someone important to them. Do you

imagine that a father wants to be told that his dead son was a coward? That a daughter wants to know her parent took the easy way out? Perhaps you will say that you are speaking for them, that your harshness is motivated by your sympathy for their pain and loss. That is presumptuous. If you are one of the many, many people whose lives have been truly worsened by a suicide—if you are someone who really needed them to stay on in this world—you earn the right to insult. Call them whatever you desire. Most of us are not affected. We are bystanders in the peanut gallery. We must show respect in consideration of those bereaved. We must offer love and company where appropriate.

And for heaven's sake, be careful when accusing a potential suicide of cowardice. You don't want to add that ingredient of shame and self-loathing to an unpredictable and volatile cocktail. This is just as bad as the flipside, those who try to glorify and support the act of suicide itself. I have seen this. It's natural to try and sympathise with those who are gone, but sentiments such as "Suicide is the bravest thing you can do" do not help. Yes, the act requires a perfect loss of self-preservation, however momentary, and these are the traits our languages and cultures do glorify as "selflessness" and "bravery". But merely disregarding the value of your own life is not a commendable thing in itself. We cannot afford to romanticise this. Vulnerable people can be highly susceptible to influence.

These are tragedies that victimise more people than just the deceased. We must exercise discretion in what we say and to whom. To do otherwise invites consequences we may not be prepared to take responsibility for.

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HSC RESULTS-2017

What it says about the state of our education

HUSSAIN IMAM

THIS year's HSC results saw a significant fall both in the pass rate and achievement of the highest grade. Compared to the previous year, the overall pass rate of the 8 general education boards has dropped by more than 5 percent to 66.84. If we add the other two equivalent exams—Madrasah and Technical Education—the overall pass rate has dropped by more than 7 percent to 68.91. The number of GPA-5 holders has dropped by more than 20,000. Out of the 11.63 lakh students who appeared for the exams this year, only 8.01 lakh came out successful. The pass rate in English has been disappointing. More than 2.71 lakh students failed in English causing a significant fall in the overall pass rate.

The worst was the shocking difference in pass rates between the different boards. Sylhet Board, with a 72 percent pass rate, is at the top of the chart whereas Comilla Board, with 49.52 percent, is at the bottom and Chittagong board with 61.09 occupies the second last position. The figures of the other boards like Dhaka, Rajshahi and Jessore are around 70 percent.

The Education Minister, Nurul Islam Nahid, identified the improved method of evaluating answer scripts that has recently



PHOTO: STAR

the rural institutions are many. These institutions seriously lack quality-teachers and educational equipment, not to mention infrastructural facilities. Many of them do not have properly trained English teachers. Most of the students of these institutions are from low income group families. They cannot afford private coaching or a good private tutor. They have to depend mostly on the lessons given in their classrooms. It is time for the policy-makers in government, educationists, as well as the affluent members of society to take the situation seriously and do all that is necessary to reduce the gap before things take a turn for the worse.

The standard of our education is certainly not at par with that at the international level. It is, in fact, well below it. We need to improve the quality of our education at any cost to compete in the international market. Reacting to this year's HSC results, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had rightly said that she was more interested in the improved quality of education than the pass rate or the number of GPA-5 holders.

Even if the introduction of the "standardisation of answer scripts" is the main cause for the fall in pass rate and grade, as the education minister claims, it still does not explain as to how this measure alone can improve the standard of education in the country. If we really are sincere about improving the quality of our education, we have to find answers to the other issues like improving the quality of teachers, training facilities, proper textbooks, suitable syllabus, private coaching, guidebooks and so on. We have to ensure that students are freed from the vicious clutches of coaching-centres. We have to ensure that teachers take their classes regularly and sincerely and do not lure their students towards private coaching. We have to remember that many of the students, especially those coming from the low income group, cannot afford the cost of private coaching.

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been adopted, termed as "standardisation of answer scripts", as the cause for the fall in pass rate. If that is the case, then we accept his contention with grace but that does not explain why there is such a big difference in the pass rates under different boards, especially that of Chittagong and Comilla.

Comilla Board, in particular, had a shockingly poor performance. Its pass rate of only 49.52 percent is less than the overall pass rate of the 8 boards by 17.32 percent. A little over 1 lakh students took part in the exams. More than half of them have failed. Only 678 of those who passed got GPA-5. The Chairman of the Board ought to find out the real cause

of such a disaster and take immediate measures to stop the recurrence of such a dismal picture.

Another worrying part of the entire scenario is the huge difference in pass rate and GPA-5 not only between the boards, but also between the urban and rural institutions. Whereas the number of GPA-5 holders in the entire Comilla Board is only 678, Adamjee Cantonment College in Dhaka city alone had 1,121 students getting GPA-5 out of the 2,156 students that appeared for the exam this year. The same is true for most other institutions of the country. The pass rate of Adamjee Cantonment College, and for that matter of many other institutions of

the big cities, is more than 98 percent, whereas the pass rate of Sujat Ali Government College, Debidwar, Comilla, for example, is only 24 percent.

The consequence of this disparity in the result pattern between urban and rural institutions is the deprivation of the students, coming from rural areas, from higher education and lucrative jobs. If the eligibility for admission test of the recognised public universities and colleges is GPA-5 (which is likely to be), most of the students coming out from the rural institutions will be deprived of the chance of even taking the admission test, let alone get admission.

The reasons for this poor performance of

QUOTABLE Quote



JAMES MCAVOY
Scottish actor

Our intellect, our awareness, and our consciousness is the most powerful form of life on this planet.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

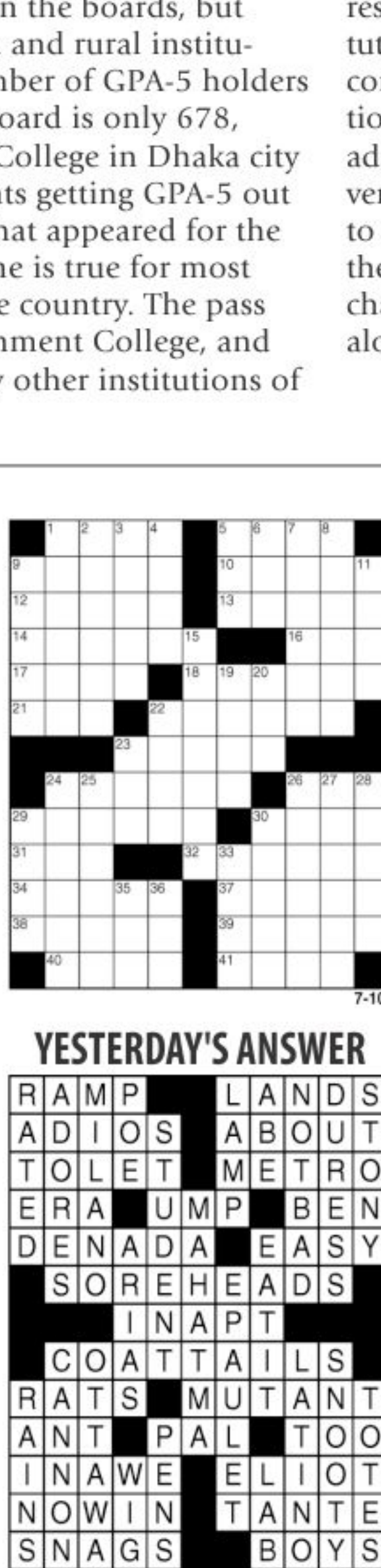
- 1 Washed out
- 5 Turn to slush
- 9 Circus worker
- 10 Quarrel
- 12 Mermaid's home
- 13 Protractor measure
- 14 Aisle alternative
- 16 High trains
- 17 Concludes
- 18 Spotted cat
- 21 Uno doubled
- 22 Pursue
- 23 Sir's counterpart
- 24 Battlefield shout
- 26 Fixed
- 29 Over, slangily
- 30 Hunting garb, for

DOWN

- 1 "Serpico" star
- 2 Changes, in a way
- 3 Main roles
- 4 Cube maker Rubik
- 5 Refrain syllable
- 6 Attila, for one
- 7 "Measure for Measure" role

- 8 Droopy tree
- 9 Took to impound
- 11 Bird abode
- 15 President Wilson
- 19 Potter's stuff
- 20 Shade tree
- 22 Almanac bit
- 23 X-ray's cousin
- 24 Reduce to only the best
- 25 Turkey's capital
- 26 Greet a general
- 27 Hams it up
- 28 Pisa sight
- 29 School member
- 30 Nearby
- 33 Swift steed
- 35 B&B
- 36 Rent out

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

