

# Tribute to Rupa (or someone like her)

"We will remain unwritten through history, no X will mark us on the map; but in books of prose and poetry, you loved me once, in a paragraph."

— Lang Leav, *Memories*



BADIUZZAMAN BAY

ALONE on the bus, after the last passenger had disembarked from it, the girl looked to a quiet, undisturbed ride home. It was dark outside. There was still some distance left to go, so she concentrated on what lay ahead. Her family would be surprised to see her, if a tad irked by her preference for night travel, but they would be ecstatic to hear what she was going to tell them: news of her pay raise in office. She knew how much it would mean to them.

She looked outside, waiting longingly for her turn to get off the bus. Nothing, however, could have prepared her for what was about to happen soon. The bus entered a deserted road, near a forest, when she saw one of the associates of the driver approach her. Before she knew it, he attacked her. Soon he was joined by others who dragged her to the rear of the bus where she was beaten, robbed of her belongings, and gang-raped. As if that was not horrific enough, they killed her and then dumped the body in the jungle.

Who was this girl? Was it the 25-year-old law graduate identified as Rupa—whose story probably generated more response than most rape stories do in Bangladesh? Was it the 18-year-old raped on the Eid

day in Bauphal? Or the 17-year-old raped in Savar's Bomka area? The increasing frequency of rape incidents in Bangladesh sometimes makes it harder to separate one incident from another, but as far as end results go, it doesn't really matter. All were scarred for life, although not all were lucky enough to survive.

The circumstances of what happened to these women were starkly similar: they were outdoors during the time of the incident, caught off guard by conniving men in groups of three, four or more, and tortured in the most brutal way imaginable. Unlike Rupa, however, the other victims didn't receive more than fleeting coverage.

If the account of Rupa's death, as provided by our oh-so-vigilant newspapers, seems a bit graphic, it's because, frankly, we like it graphic. The more graphic the description and dramatic the circumstances, the more newsworthy it gets, the wider its appeal to the public. Rupa had to be the face of middle-class struggle before she could draw our attention. The two university students in Banani had to be a story of courage in the face of fear and shame to provoke a firestorm of protests. The schoolteacher in Barguna had to appeal to our sense of respect for teachers to be catapulted from the shadows.

The rapists, on the other hand, had to go to extraordinary lengths to jolt our collective conscience. The nation's psyche and even the justice system seem to have become less receptive to stories with an insipid plotline.

The fact is, our response to rape incidents is often conditioned by



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our notions of priority. We need to feel connected to the particular circumstances of an incident and backgrounds of the perpetrators/victims for it to be worth our attention. The Rupa incident drew parallels with the 2012 Delhi gang rape involving a 23-year-old female physiotherapy intern, who was beaten, tortured and left for dead by a group of men. Some people were shocked to see that Bangladesh could stoop so low as to repeat India's crime, conveniently forgetting that rape on a vehicle is

not without precedent in Bangladesh. It's just that the previous incidents didn't have the elements necessary to tap into the popular imagination.

Like it or not, such selective public outrage over rapes, especially in social media, is doing us more harm than good. It promotes bias in favour of certain victims. It also takes pressure off the authorities to act on the less discussed incidents, thereby promoting uneven execution of the law and even denial of justice in some cases. Whether such outrage should be factored into legal and security considerations is a

question worth asking.

I think it's important that we pay attention to all rape incidents in equal measure, irrespective of the circumstances of a rape, the background of a victim, and whether a perpetrator is just a random guy or someone with tentacles reaching all the way to the highest echelon of society. More important than "exemplary punishment" is evenly, regularly meted out punishment, which has a better chance of working as a deterrent to future rapists.

What's happening in Bangladesh is a clear manifestation of a nation unable or unwilling to confront its rape crisis. According to Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, over a thousand women and girls were raped in 2016. Between January and June this year, according to Ain o Salish Kendra, 280 women were raped, 16 killed after rape, 39 suffered rape attempts, and five committed suicide after rape. This figure—comprising only reported incidents—may more than double before the year's end.

If rape is a crime, we all are complicit in it: the government that failed to adopt a zero-tolerance policy on sexual violence and prioritise ending the impunity for rape; the people that failed to teach themselves to respect their women; the legal system that failed to make effective interventions; the media that failed to provide proportionate coverage of all incidents of gender-based violence. The result is the creation of an environment in which no place now feels safe enough, no transport friendly enough, no one impervious to the threat of violence.

As we grope in the dark for a solution that can actually deter men from forcing their lust on unwilling women, let us remind ourselves that creating a safer, more humane environment for the society's most vulnerable groups is in our best interest. We can start working towards that goal by recognising the importance of approaching all incidents of violence with objectivity and an unbiased mind.

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## PROJECT SYNDICATE

# Optimising decision-making in a dangerous world

GRAHAM ALLISON and ARIANNA HUFFINGTON

THE United States and China have reached a precarious moment in their relationship. Ensuring a peaceful outcome will be the greatest geopolitical challenge of the twenty-first century. Are our leaders up to it?

As things stand today, the risks seem only to be escalating. US President Donald Trump's administration has imposed economic sanctions on Chinese entities with financial ties to North Korea, because it does not believe that China has done enough to constrain the North Korean regime. And, as Trump has said bluntly, if the Chinese don't deal with North Korea, he will. As North Korea inches closer to developing a nuclear-tipped missile that can hit the continental US, Trump has threatened the country with "fire and fury like the world has never seen."

China, for its part, rejects what its foreign ministry has called the "China responsibility theory" regarding North Korea. A recent editorial in a Chinese state-run newspaper asserted that while China would stay neutral if North Korea attacked first, US strikes aimed at regime change would cause China to intervene. The Chinese also responded furiously to the passage of a US naval warship through disputed waters in the South China Sea last month, a move that the foreign ministry called a "provocation" that "severely undermines China's sovereignty and security."

While these issues are modern, the underlying political dynamic is not new. Describing a similar power

struggle in classical Greece, the historian Thucydides wrote that, "It was the rise of Athens, and the fear that this instilled in Sparta, that made war inevitable."

Across the ages, the so-called Thucydides Trap has appeared repeatedly, fuelling tensions between rising and reigning powers that caused otherwise manageable events to fuel cycles of action and reaction that ended in devastating wars. Over the last 500 years, in 16 cases where a rising power threatened to displace a ruling power, 12 led to war. The US and China should take note: business as usual is likely to

produce history as usual.

But, beyond dire warnings, history offers instructive clues for avoiding conflict. Consider the seemingly insurmountable dilemma faced by US President Franklin Roosevelt in 1940, when the United Kingdom was under serious strain in its fight against Nazi Germany. The UK's supplies and money were running low, but Roosevelt knew that the US Congress would never simply loan Britain the money it needed.

Roosevelt's problem "seemed insoluble," writes historian Doris Kearns Goodwin in her book *No Ordinary Time*. But Roosevelt did

something that would seem inconceivable in today's political climate: he took a ten-day break on a navy ship, and gave the predicament the thought it deserved.

Then, too, the idea of the US president escaping from the world at a critical juncture initially drew criticism. "I didn't know for quite a

while what he was thinking about, if anything," Roosevelt aide Harry Hopkins later said. "But then, I began to get the idea that he was refuelling, the way he so often does when he seems to be resting and carefree. So I didn't ask him any questions. Then, one evening, he

suddenly came out with it—the whole programme."

Hopkins was referring to the groundbreaking USD 50 billion Lend-Lease Act, which became the primary means by which the US provided military aid to foreign countries during World War II. Through that programme, the president could transfer defence materials for which Congress had appropriated funds to the government of any country whose defence was considered vital to US security, without requiring compensation.

Today, leaders are under extraordinary pressure to apply similarly inspired decision-making skills to an array of daunting challenges. Beyond deepening tensions between China and the US, they must confront Russia's growing assertiveness, the Middle East's continued instability, and the looming spectre of catastrophic climate change. How many have the courage to learn from Roosevelt's approach?

It is hard to imagine Trump following in FDR's footsteps. But to insist that the most certain path to potentially catastrophic decisions begins with an exhausted, intemperate mind is not a partisan observation.

The Stoics understood this. In his 19 years as Rome's emperor, Marcus Aurelius faced nearly constant war, a horrific plague, and a coup attempt. But instead of lashing out at those he presumed were against him, Aurelius calmly asked himself, "Does what's happened keep you from acting with justice, generosity, self-control, sanity, prudence, honesty, humility, straightforwardness, and all other qualities that allow a

person's nature to fulfill itself?"

Chinese wisdom offers another helpful perspective. Central to Taoism is the concept of *wu wei*, which can be literally translated as "non-action," but is really much more than that. In Taoism, when we are in a state of harmony and connection with ourselves, we operate in a kind of effortless, intuitive, and spontaneous way.

Looking back on his own presidency, Bill Clinton recognised the dangers of burnout. "Every important mistake I've made in my life, I've made because I was too tired," he once said. David Gergen, in his book *Eyewitness to Power*, detailed the costs of Clinton's undisciplined rest habits in the first period of his presidency. "Clinton was still celebrating the victory and loved staying up half the night to laugh and talk with old friends," he wrote. This had a visible impact on the president, who according to Gergen, "seemed worn out, puffy, and hyper," as well as "out of sorts, easily distracted, and impatient."

Creating the time and the space needed to recharge, refuel, and reflect is essential for the human operating system to function optimally. That is not a systemic bug; it's a powerful feature—one that leaders today should be using to its fullest extent.

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A WORD A DAY

GROUPTHINK

noun

The practice of thinking or making decisions as a group in a way that discourages creativity or individual responsibility.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Fissure

5 Makes a choice

9 Wistful one

10 Boggy areas

12 Elroy's dog

13 Wield

14 Tendency

16 Shooter ammo

17 Bible boat

18 In front

20 Depletes

22 Lyric poems

23 Politician

Kefauver

25 Bingo center

space

28 Anxiety

32 In need of bailing,

DOWN

1 Stair parts

2 Consumption

3 Forest plant

4 Cressida's love

5 Last letter

perhaps

34 Flowed into

35 Bruin Bobby

36 Car option

38 Flower feature

40 Baseball's Pee Wee

41 Sir, in India

42 Yorkshire topography

43 Titled lady

44 Cuts off

6 Films, slangily

7 Hesitant

8 Peaceful

9 Pacific island group

11 Antlered animals

15 Triton circles it

19 Rx info

21 Search out

24 Fencing cry

25 Broadway failures

26 Enjoy, as a favorite book

27 Singer Kitt

29 Off the beaten path

30 Detects

31 Periphery

33 "You don't say!"

37 Writer O'Casey

39 Objective

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT