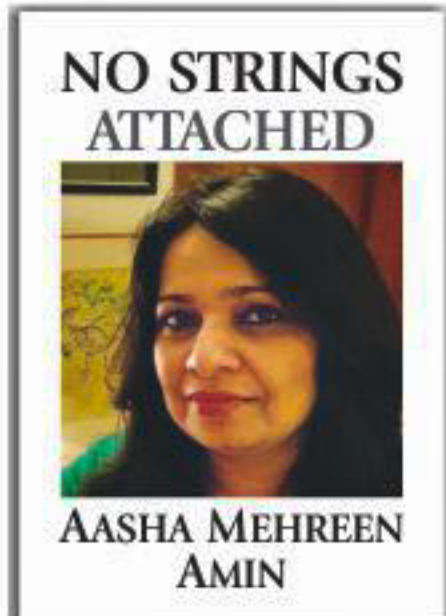


Facebook for escapists or escapees?



NO STRINGS ATTACHED
AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

HERE is no doubt that Facebook represents an alternate reality that many of us like to escape to. It gives one a glimpse into the day-to-day lives of people we cannot see face-to-face—because they are thousands of miles away; because they are only a few miles away but the traffic makes sure that you reach them in the same time as it would take you to fly to another country; because although the person is right in front of you, you just can't look them in the face and say anything. It makes one wonder why married couples must declare their unquestionable adoration for each other on Facebook. Do they not see each other every single day of their lives? Perhaps they are just too shy.

Certainly shyness is the last thing you see in a Facebook post. And why not? Have you ever seen anyone post an unflattering picture of themselves? Yes other people may put up unflattering photos of you—pictures in which they look like glamorous actresses and you look like a tornado took a pit stop on your hair before moving on. But be frank, if you had to do it wouldn't you put the best shot of yourself, standing at an angle that perfectly camouflages those love handles, hair perfect, make up perfect, skin airbrushed and face contoured with that special app that is so less painful than plastic surgery? If not, then perhaps you just don't belong to this world of the happy, bold and beautiful where everyone "likes" everyone, and "loves" everything they do. It is a place to "share" your accomplishments with your friends—awards, trophies, recognitions, degrees, marriages, anniversary celebrations, etcetera etcetera etcetera.

It is not a place to tell your friends you are in the middle of a messy divorce, that you are



practically bankrupt or that your husband fancies your best friend and always has. Which is how it should be perhaps since Facebook is a public forum—like a party where you try to put up your best face and socialise with only those you want to mingle with while judging others about their clothes, looks, partners, even the way they spell (lol)—a magical place where you can just vanish unceremoniously without saying a single goodbye.

Hence the complacency of some delusional fools, who think they can kill (yes murder) people, even be convicted in court and then post pictures of their birthday party in Malaysia on Facebook. A report in this paper has found that four convicted killers of Zubair Ahmed, a university student who was brutally killed, did exactly that. To make things a little clearer, Zubair belonged to a faction of the Chhatra League and his killers were from an opposing faction of the same organisation.

Let's not get into why members of the same league have factions and what motivates them to kill each other or why—pray why

must they pretend to be university students when they are aspiring to be Kala Jahangir? No, let's ask why they would think that they would not be exposed if they posted theirouting pictures on Facebook? This is surely a mystery. After all, these young men have been convicted of murder, had escaped from the lower court and reported as absconding. And now they are posting their New Year pictures in nightclubs, commenting what a pity it was that his fellow countrymen in Bangladesh could not even hold a rooftop party because of the government ban. In case anyone had doubts about whether the four were "friends in deed"—one of them even posted a group photo of all four at a Cineplex in Kuala Lumpur. How they disappeared (willingly of course) from the lower court, got to the airport, went through immigration and boarded a plane to Kuala Lumpur completely undetected, we do not know. Neither do we know why there was no arrest warrant for two of the killers who had been sentenced to death in court or why the police have not made any effort to bring back the murderers from Malaysia, a fact everybody seems to know,

thanks to social media. In another eerily similar story, five of the 13 convicted killers (members of Chhatra League) of the ill-fated young man Biswajit Das who was mercilessly hacked to death by them, also posted on social media, even though they had been awarded death sentences or life terms by the court. At least four of them had social media posts from places in Dhaka.

So are people so caught up in the virtual reality of social media that they forget that this media is also connected to the real world? That people will know that you were partying away at Westin when you said you had an E Coli poisoning from a misguided enthusiasm for street side *chaltar achaar* and hence could not make it to the wedding reception. Or that people, maybe even the police, will see that even though you are a

fugitive convicted of murder, you are taking a selfie at the mall in Dubai.

So what's going on? Have people lost all their grey matter? The answer to that question is pretty obvious, don't you think? Well not exactly. Yes those ordinary fools who post pictures of every second of their lives are perhaps not the most brainy of individuals since they do not realise that they are providing vital information to "certain powerful groups" who take surveillance to pathological levels so that even an innocuous "share" can become case for sedition/defamation/blasphemy.

But what about the other group—those hormonal hooligans who seem least bothered that they are exposing their hideouts even though technically they are fugitives from the law and face death or life imprisonment if they are caught? Are they really that pea-brained? One would think not. Perhaps they belong to a group that enjoys unusual diplomatic immunity that allows them to extort, maim or even kill, not be held accountable and guaranteed a free pass to a foreign safe haven. Perhaps even the fact that they are gleefully active on social media will not make much of a difference to the protectors of law who have the capacity to trace them and bring them back to face justice.

One cannot help but wonder what will happen with the introduction of the specialised police unit which will employ more than 500 skilled personnel and includes a sophisticated software that will be able to detect cybercrime through a single incriminating word—say, "atheism" or "fascist". Will these super cybercrime-busters catch those who have killed people and disappeared only to reappear on social media? Or will they do an even better job than their predecessors by weeding out troublemakers who dare to express opinions that do not conform to the current politically elite school of thought? That indeed, is the question.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

India's lost fisherfolk



AWAKENING INDIA
SHASHI THAROOR

LAST month, a devastating cyclone swept the southern tip of India, causing immense damage to parts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Lakshadweep. Most victims of the oddly named Cyclone Ockhi were fishermen from the districts of Thiruvananthapuram (in Kerala) and Kanyakumari

(in Tamil Nadu) who, owing to the lack of a timely cyclone alert, had ventured out to sea, unaware of the danger. Their tragedy highlights the extreme vulnerability of India's poor coastal communities to the vagaries of nature.

So far, Ockhi is known to have taken 245 lives, with 661 still missing, many of whom were lost at sea and are unlikely ever to be found. Moreover, nearly 3,500 homes were damaged in Kerala alone, with 221 completely destroyed. The storm was so powerful that its winds even shook parts of Maharashtra and Gujarat.

For me, Ockhi was no distant headline. As the Member of Parliament representing Thiruvananthapuram, I witnessed firsthand the disaster and its terrible toll on some of India's poorest and most marginalised people. I have visited the homes of the bereaved, and lit incense sticks and candles at makeshift shrines. As I mourned with these beleaguered communities, trying to share their pain and grief, I vowed to do all I can to secure help for them.

So far, the national and state governments have focused largely—and quite appropriately—on providing immediate relief to the affected families. But, to protect India's coastal communities, policymakers must urgently undertake a comprehensive review of the reasons why the cyclone was so devastating, and how the impact of a future disaster could be mitigated.

No cyclone alert was issued by the India Meteorological Department until Ockhi had already struck, and the initial rescue efforts were grossly inadequate to the scale of the challenge. By the time the Coast Guard and the Indian Navy had brought enough ships and planes to the affected area, a full 24 hours had passed since Ockhi capsized numerous fishing boats. It was too



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The fisherfolk are not alone in criticising the ineffectiveness of the rescue efforts. India needs a detailed official inquiry into the various elements of disaster prediction, management, and relief, guided by the experience of Ockhi. Would better institutional arrangements, such as closer cooperation with international typhoon monitoring bodies, have ensured a timely forecast? How can relief operations and overall emergency management be improved? Should search-and-rescue aircraft and

vessels be stationed in the vicinity?

One way to strengthen India's disaster-response capabilities would be to create the marine equivalent of our Territorial Army, training selected fisherfolk in how to carry out search-and-rescue operations. Such training, together with students' affinity for their fellow fishermen and their expertise in braving turbulent seas, would make for a highly effective reserve unit, to be deployed when disaster strikes.

Another issue that risks being overlooked by the focus on urgent and immediate financial relief is coastal communities' long-term economic needs. To be sure, immediate relief is vital: Ockhi

decent living, they risk their lives to venture farther and farther from shore. Some of my constituents have been arrested as far afield as the British Indian Ocean territory of Diego Garcia, which they reached in their hunt for unexploited fishing grounds.

As it stands, members of India's fishing communities do not have any alternative skills that would enable them to pursue other occupations. Offering them and their children skills development and vocational training courses in other fields would transform their lives for the better.

Ockhi has starkly demonstrated that all is not well for India's fisherfolk. To prevent the next natural disaster from causing so much damage and

To be sure, immediate relief is vital ... But perhaps it is time to consider whether it is fair to condemn these communities to long-term dependence on fishing.

QUOTABLE Quote

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS, TRISTES TROPIQUES
French anthropologist and ethnologist (1908–2009)

The first thing we see as we travel round the world is our own filth, thrown into the face of mankind.

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 Make extremely dry
- 6 Small nails
- 11 Verdi creation
- 12 From the country
- 13 Dallas native
- 14 Plain silly
- 15 Dove calls
- 17 Sleep spot
- 18 "Lola" band
- 22 Had on
- 23 Church sights
- 27 Stage comment
- 29 Backer of the Bulldogs
- 30 Tie down
- 32 Soda choice
- 33 Talkative pet
- 35 Dieter's no-no
- 38 Matching

DOWN

- 1 Cooking vessel
- 2 Gorilla or gibbon
- 3 Mystery writer
- 4 Laughed out loud
- 5 Vietnam city
- 6 In a quick and lively manner
- 7 Use the track
- 8 Saudi native
- 9 Copenhagen native
- 10 Downhill glider
- 16 Stop — dime
- 18 "— brillig..."
- 19 Garden waterer
- 20 McCormack of "Will & Grace"
- 21 Like planes at a busy airport
- 24 Lotion additive
- 25 Irritate
- 26 Perch
- 28 Pencil ends
- 31 Long time
- 34 Wrong
- 35 Lose color
- 36 Amongst
- 37 Zesty flavor
- 40 Last letter
- 42 In the past
- 43 Possessed
- 44 Iron source

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

WHY DO WE HAVE SO MANY ANTIQUES IN OUR HOME?
I LIKE ANTIQUES
GEE—NOTA WALKER

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

HAMMIE, EAT YOUR PEAS.
CAN'T. DOGS DON'T EAT VEGETABLES.
YES, THEY DO AND YOU'RE NOT PART DOG!
PRETTY SURE I AM.
OH, AND DOGS CAN'T LOAD THE DISHWASHER, EITHER.
I'M STARTING TO FEEL A LITTLE CANINE-Y, MYSELF.