

The world to the rescue



CAVES capture the imagination like no other feature of the natural world, perhaps because they tap into our deepest, atavistic fears of darkness—and our insatiable

curiosity for the unknown. From Plato using the "allegory of the cave" to depict the human condition to Gollum lurking in subterranean streams, the archetype of the cave is so ingrained in our cultures that most of us can imagine what it feels to be trapped inside one.

It comes as no surprise, then, that when the news of a young football team lost in a cave in Northern Thailand emerged on June 23—just as the World Cup was going underway—it instantly gripped the world's attention. Similar such incidents also made headlines, as in 2010, when 33 miners were trapped in a northern Chilean copper mine and rescued after an incredible 69 days underground. What made the Thai story compelling, moreover, was the fact that most of the protagonists were children. In a world of discrimination and prejudice, children are among the few categories of people that still enjoy the presumption of innocence. Indeed, at a time when we celebrate the beautiful game of football, the thought of those youngsters who should be watching Kylian Mbappé's dazzling moves instead of battling for survival rightfully drew widespread sympathy.

The children's rescue is an encouraging sign that, despite our differences, people remain capable of working together for a just cause, and that there remains undebatable good that we can all rally behind.



The rescue operation of the 12 boys and their football coach who disappeared on June 23 in northern Thailand was a success.

PHOTO: AFP/LILLIAN SUWANRUMPHA

The international response to the incident was swift, with various countries and individuals pitching in the search and rescue effort. Hampered by heavy rains and floods, the first week was marked by slow progress, and no sign of the missing team. But just when people were beginning to expect the worst, came the miracle: On the ninth day, all 12 boys, aged 11 to 17, and their 25-year-old coach were found alive.

Yet there remained the conundrum of how to get them out safely. Caves,

after all, are fraught with danger: In a retrospective study done in 2012, researchers found that there were an average of three caving-related deaths in the United States alone, and many of them due to falls and drowning. Lack of oxygen is an additional peril in Tham Luang cave; that Saman Gunan, a former Thai Navy officer, died inside the cave while delivering air tanks underscored the risks of the entire operation.

Great was our relief and joy, then, when the daring rescue succeeded. One

by one, the kids emerged from the cave safely, with the last person—the coach—seeing the light on Tuesday, 17 days after they entered. What could have been a tragedy became, instead, a story of success built on trust, teamwork, solidarity and sacrifice.

At the beginning, we did not know who the 12 boys were, although now we know that many of them are poor, and some belong to stateless ethnic minorities. Neither did we know who their coach was, although now we know that Ekapol Chanthawong was

orphaned at a young age, grew up in a monastery, and treated the boys like his own family.

Regardless of their backgrounds, however, the world came to their aid. And when the news emerged of their discovery and eventual rescue, the world rejoiced with them.

Surely, after the euphoria dies down, there will be other stories to provoke our emotions. Even as the rescue was unfolding, there were suicide bombings in Afghanistan; extrajudicial killings in the Philippines; thousands of children in the US-Mexico border still separated from their parents. Our capacity for empathy, however, is contingent on distance and desensitisation; only when the stories are new, extraordinary or close to our homes and hearts are we still moved.

Perhaps if children are trapped in caves everyday, we will not pay as much attention. Perhaps if people are trapped in slavery dens or refugee camps for the first time, such stories will make big headlines.

Even so, the children's rescue is an encouraging sign that, despite our differences, people remain capable of working together for a just cause, and that, in our postmodern age, there remains undebatable good that we can all rally behind. As we grapple with the darkness in our own world, may the young football team and their heroic rescuers remind us of a simple truth: People are worth saving simply because their lives matter.

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Our unwarranted fixation with foreign sportsmen

CHINTITO SINCE 1995



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

A 40-year-old Argentine supporter wanted to raise the blue and white stripes atop his building in Dhaka. His hand-held

dreadful illness. Four years on, the thankful farmer sold yet another patch of land. This year he made a 5.5km-long flag. Hector, Khedira and Ozil may not be in the team in four years, but Hossain plans a 22km-long flag for the 2022 World Cup. I believe he does not have enough land to sew up to Berlin.

Such euphoria and more is common in Bangladesh (and even neighbouring India) during FIFA World Cup. Processions with

ranked footballing nation.

Before Bangladesh became a world power in cricket (I wish I was writing this before its being 43 all-out and a heavy innings defeat to a resurrecting West Indies), our stadiums and the faces of some shameless people were tainted with Indian and Pakistani flags as an expression of their admiration for foreign players. They could be making a political statement too. The issue was raised in this Chintito column under "Of flags,

even before they could alight from their horses they discovered that this was a welcoming and hospitable people, ready to hand over land, flag and pride, only to undermine and suppress domestic adversaries. Armed unnecessarily to the nose, our visitors found readymade cots and plots (pun not intended), houses and spouses. That inferiority complex takes over some thoroughly confused Bangladeshis (and even Indians for that matter) every four years. Since

bow out in silence. A Bangladeshi expatriate recently uploaded a video of streets and buildings at Brazil's São Paulo during the current World Cup; there was not a single Brazilian flag flying. The Bangali narrator lamented that 700 Bangladeshi workers had asked permission from their employer company to fly the *lal-sobuj pataka* on March 26; permission NOT granted initially. After much persuasion, they were allowed to fly the Bangladeshi

Did we ever see one West Indian sporting his portrait on a t-shirt, or a Bangladeshi flag flying atop an Australian house in recognition of his achievement? Or ours, when we beat the giants in the game?

Let me give you two more examples from my Chintito column of April 4, 2014 titled "A National Flag is a Political Property". One, Pakistani speedster, World Cup winner, and now commentator Wasim Akram is always full of praise for Sachin Tendulkar, but he does not say that with an Indian flag painted on his cheek. I have checked both. Two, World Cup hero and later TV pundit Ravi Shastri always has flowery appreciation for Shahid Afridi, but you will never see him wave a Pakistani flag from the commentary box. It would be so demeaning for both of them.

We have perhaps three options to overcome this debauched *phoren-preeti*. We can try to qualify for 2026 North America Finals where there will be 48 countries, graduating by region. Not possible, eh? Alternatively, we can request FIFA to have 200 countries in the 2030 finals. Our best bet, however, is to invite players from Africa to adopt Bangladesh as their home. I get the idea from the current French team at Russia, which comprises (would you believe?) players mostly of African descent.

On a more serious note, and taking cue from our success in banning wanton English New Year's celebrations on our streets and public places, flying foreign flags should be prohibited as per existing law, and this should be implemented voluntarily by valuing nationalism, and by civil vigilance, by Qatar 2022.

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Amjad Hossain made a 5.5km-long German flag to show his support for the country in the World Cup.

PHOTO: AFP

Supporting world-class sports personalities in admiration of their skills is fine. But to let emotions run haywire to defy our own gazetted Flag Rules is a question mark on patriotism.

they are not in it (the WC finals), they pick a horse and rejoice its colours. Up to that point perhaps it is acceptable, but to fly the flag of another country on a building, tree or car is the working of a debased mind.

Not many Bangladeshis are aware that we do play in the FIFA World Cup qualifying round on a home-and-away basis. There is never a single red-and-green flag flown anywhere in the world, and the stadium at Dhaka is barren. We

flag in Brazil for five to six hours. And here, for months on, some of us are giving up lunch, dinner and property to paint the country yellow and blue, black and white.

Supporting world-class sports personalities in admiration of their skills is fine. But to let emotions run haywire to defy our own gazetted Flag Rules is a question mark on patriotism. For instance, Shakib Al Hasan has been the world's no.1 all-round cricketer for several years now.

respective team headscarf, jersey, and painted face to the music of *deshi* band party are traditional in the capital and remote villages. Then there are the pathetic cases of warring factions; Bangladeshi extremist fans are making rival supporters bleed when, in actuality, Brazil-Argentina-German-Russian fans are hugging each other at the actual venue. Extensive trolling on Facebook gains notoriety as the tournament progresses. All this, by the 194th-

fans and fanaticism" on April 20, 1996. Now all that has passed. There is pride for our cricketers, there are expectations, and there are occasional rewards too.

Hardly any land in the world can boast of historically being host to such a bevy of foreigners, who, uninvited, conquered most often by local connivance, lesser by battle and more by betrayal. Initially, they entered our towns in convoys with some understandable trepidation, but

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visited Magura and bestowed Hossain with lifetime Germany fan club

membership, a football and of course

a German flag, but many times

smaller. A humble farmer, Hossain sold a 50-decimal land to raise Tk 1.5 lakh (almost USD 2,000) for three tailors and the many metres of black, red and yellow fabrics. Hossain was in fact repaying a debt. In 1987, a German medicine cured him of a

warning sound

29 Commerce

30 Hype

32 Aphrodite's son

33 George Lucas

creation

35 Cry loudly

38 Opera song

39 German sub

41 Highland families

45 Roulette bet

46 Kevin of "The Big

Chill"

47 Had a banquet for

48 Small island

18 Plane fixture

19 Hawaiian dance

20 Spoken

21 Computer safe-

guards

24 Scarlett's home

25 Freshener target

26 Lawman Eliot

28 Changed

31 Golfer's goal

34 Lake of

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35 Ride the waves

36 Reed instrument

37 Boxing match

40 Get older

42 Feel ill

43 Dir. opposite SSW

44 Ready to go

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