

Our 'one-in-a-million' man



EVERY time a tragedy makes an unannounced entry, our lives turn into a pile of grieving memories. Once struck by loss, one moves on to a totally different

an unprepared man when it came to life. After having suffered bouts of dizziness in Dhaka ever since the beginning of July 2017, when we braved the trip to London and saw the doctors, all hell had broken loose. A relatively unknown disease, primary cerebral vasculitis, had struck him, and Dr Raj Kapoor, consultant at National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery at Queens Square London, upon MRI/MRA findings, confirmed this to us on August 1, 2017. He also said that this was a disease that one in a million have. He was indeed our one-in-a-million man. His blood vessels had shrunk and blood wasn't flowing into the brain.

From August 15 till November 30, Annis remained in a coma, leaving us wondering about his level of consciousness.

I watched a man, enamoured by life, suddenly fall from having a hyperactive mind to a level of minimally low consciousness in less than two weeks. Ironically, two and a half years back, he was the same man with whom we couldn't keep up when we walked or ran with him, while campaigning with the "Amra Dhaka" slogan for his election as mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation. He lay there, in Queens Square in London, for three straight months, and another in Wellington, while my children and I looked for signs of his awareness. At that point, I began to wonder whether consciousness was an all-or-nothing phenomenon or whether it could be present in scales. A quick reading of *Into the Gray Zone: A Neuroscientist Explores the Border Between Life and Death* by Adrian Owen helped. I read the story of Adrian meeting Kate, a young teacher from Cambridge, England, who, although had sleep-wake cycles, was not consciously aware. For years, Adrian tried communicating



Late Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Annisul Huq, (October 27, 1952 – November 30, 2017).

with her, assessing her through fMRI (functional MRI), prompting her brain to take commands in order to function. This gave me hope. Processes like caloric vestibular stimulation, which helped patients in comatose state by

irrigating water through the ears, became music to my ears. I read up on deep brain stimulation, along with other random miracle drugs like Zolpidem, a sleep medicine that woke brain-injured patients. The

absurd had become the obvious while my journey for neuro-rehabilitation stretched from Germany, London, Kent, Surrey and finally to even Singapore...

Annis often admired Suchitra Sen for having avoided the camera in order to make people remember her only as the star from the past. I, too, knew that he wanted to remain in public memory as a handsome hero... a real-life hero who never wore any designer clothing, never had any expensive watches, who relied on the factory to sew his *kurtas*, and yet somehow managed to look very impressive. The only aspiration that he had was to die in glory. His wish was granted. He left me and my children with the richest heritage ever of being the wife and children of a man-in-a-million who tried his hardest to serve the constituency that had elected him, with utmost passion and commitment.

November 30 marks the first anniversary of his crossing over. For us, he's just in the next room, preparing to make a re-entry. Meanwhile, we draw from his strength and will to move on with a goal to make tomorrow a better day for as many lives as we can, with whatever little or more we have. Life cannot be tragic; it must be measured qualitatively and by that standard, Annis's physical departure has gone down in the pages of history as an episode not of regret, but of celebration.

Thus, on November 30, my children and I don't plan to mourn, rather, on that day, we plan to reminisce about his only passion that mattered the most: work.

Life, after all, is too precious to be laced with regrets.

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plane where laughter is almost immediately followed by a fear of an unknown tomorrow. Yet life goes on and continues as scheduled and as infantile egomaniacs, we continue deluding ourselves with promises to last forever. And finally, when people closest to you evaporate into thin air, one wonders if they've turned into shadows.

It was just the other day I conversed with a shadow. That shadow, I believe, was of my husband. I believe that he watches us, talks to us and continues being with us through all we do. He sits opposite me in my office, tucked away in a corner where a knitted jacquard version of his portrait occupies the sofa...

Watching him evolve from a TV anchor persona to a businessman and business leader, and then a full on public servant was the biggest joy in my life. I take pride in his making, just because I was right by his side while all of this happened. True, our holidays were the shortest; true, we spent most of our time working and preparing for the future, blissfully ignorant of the immediacy of tragedy. My warnings to him about not having lived life enough had gone in vain. While I watched him sign piles of files till late at night, and fussed about his health, he chose to ignore all of that and reminded me that his work was important. Work always is important. But in a scale of comparison, where would you rate life to be, I asked. He never had good answers for those kinds of questions that I would throw at him. Even he was

Too big, too fast, too dangerous

JOSE MA. MONTELIBANO

RIDING on a wave of newfound desire for individual expression and explosive technology catering to that desire, various social platforms barged into societies, first in the West, and now globally. The advent of the internet in the 90s opened up instant linkages between people and businesses. It was not long ago that social media found its opportunity, slowly first through email and websites, then a big bang through social media platforms. Facebook comes to mind, not because it was first, but because it effectively devoured those who preceded it.

To better understand the dynamics of social media today, it has always helped me to go through the history of societies and how people related to one another. After all, in its essence, social media is an expression of human thoughts and sentiments. If people are reserved or inhibited, they will not want to speak out. In that environment, social media will not be a dynamic force. In fact, it may never have been born in the way we know it now.

Recorded human history shows just how submissive and mute suicide has been as far as social communication is concerned. Except, and this is a very big exception, for the rulers of communities and countries. Only they could speak out, and any other speaking out meant insubordination and merited severe



SOURCE: JEFFBULLAS.COM

punishment. For thousands of years, people were mute. Not only mute but generally ignorant as well. There were no schools then, only wise men who mostly were recruited by the royalty to be their advisers. In other words, knowledge and subsequently open discourse were not for the people, only for their kings.

Imagine then the kind of public silence that had characterised all society. There must have been more wars than public debates for millennia. Existing then was more physical than verbal. The advent of democracy, though, signalled a major shift in human perspective and behaviour. Democracy tried and still tries to promote equality among members of society. It is going against what humanity had been

used to all its life and it will take more generations for democratic principles to find global application. What will push it, though, is technology and the ordinary human being finding its voice and expressing it.

After what seemed like forever, people all over the world now want to speak out. In varying degrees, with the United States taking a leadership position, societies have taken to the internet and social media to give democratic expression. There was always censorship in all societies but democracy discourages that. Freedom of expression has become a democratic mantra, but those who govern often believe it has gone too far in the other extreme. With the fake news phenomenon, the spirit of

general population and how susceptible people are to believing what they read. Facebook may have population, participation, and profitability but it also has the equivalent of a virtual herd of sheep ready to be used by wolves.

Facebook had been trying to reverse the odds against the exploitation of its population, their actual unwitting participation, without losing its profitability. Actually, it is the one with the greatest capacity to censor because of its massive and specialised database. Unfortunately, censorship is not its mandate and core purpose. Facebook cannot sustain censorship without becoming a different animal altogether. Maybe this is why Apple CEO Tim Cook has come to the conclusion that free market forces and self-restraint cannot work anymore, and that regulation appears to be the inevitable way to go. Free market forces are not objective. Profit is a prime value, as is power. When greed overtakes the simple economics and when lust for power overtakes governance, the best of theories collapse.

Democracy presupposes a certain level of maturity where the common good is largely understood, where respect is a revered value and civility the norm for social behaviour. But the path to democracy is burdened by its dominant past which has yet to be exorcised. If history had shown the dominance of a few over the rest of the people, that same history is

dominant in our present social genes whether we like it or not. The same people who want to be free are the first to accept authoritarian governance when fear more than aspiration drives them. Democracy becomes totally inefficient when the climate is fear and violence. There is no time for objective dialogue and consensus, only firm or even dictatorial decisions by a central authority or personality.

Those who wish to govern in an authoritarian manner must generate fear among the populace or already inherit an atmosphere of fear. Or, they must stoke prejudice and hate against an enemy, promising to be the great protector and defender of their lives and survival. Otherwise, the people will not give their support. Fear and hate are powerful factors that can make reasonable people become narrow-minded. Thereafter, it is a matter of partisanship going to work—we against them, good against evil. Democracy is the first to be sacrificed, as in war—willingly by most.

That is why we must drive ourselves and our communities to look for and then accept a common vision. Only for something higher will we call on our better selves to transcend the provocation of fear and hate. We must never stop dreaming for our children and a better life for them. That dream will see us through.

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Jose Ma. Montelibano is a columnist for the Philippine Daily Inquirer. Copyright: Asia News Network/Philippine Daily Inquirer

A WORD A DAY



CORNUCOPIA
NOUN
An ornamental container shaped like a goat's horn overflowing with flowers, fruit, and corn

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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| 13 Deck extra | 35 Museum focus | 9 Aviator Earhart |
| 14 Karaoke needs | 36 Imitating | 10 Behind |
| 15 History bit | 37 Wallet bill | 17 Friendly |
| 16 Injury soother | 38 Eye drops | 23 Phone bug |
| 18 Quarterback | 40 A lot | 24 Retired jet |
| Manning | 42 Bert's buddy | 26 Draws air |
| 19 " -- a Rebel" | 43 Golf feat | 27 On the agenda |
| 20 Peas' place | 44 Extinct birds | 28 Corrida star |
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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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