

# 'Licensed to kill'

**STRIKING A CHORD**

**ELITA KARIM**

Glance through Abrar's social media handle says a lot about him. He was a critical thinker—a compassionate person who spoke up against discrimination; a political analyst—posting his two pence about the recent

Kashmir issue; an achiever—rejoicing over the completion of his first project at BUET as an Engineering student; and just another fun loving young man—posting amusing pictures and videos of friends after a lecture or simply recording himself, holding his breath underwater at the swimming pool. Clearly, he was a proud young man, of his history, heritage and also the institution where he was studying.

In the dark hours of the night, when Abrar was called away from his dorm room to the notorious room number 2011, he was in the middle of solving equations, or as any other meritorious student of science would term it—practicing math problems. A group of young Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) members, who were also students of BUET, were waiting for him, probably getting ready to perform one of their routine activities—beating up a junior for some reason or the other. And that is what exactly happened.

Abrar was questioned and physically assaulted about the last Facebook status that he had posted on his wall. The public post, which is still there for all to see, reflects his thoughts regarding the recent official deal that took place between Bangladesh and India. Clearly, Abrar's opinion about the deal did not match that of the BCL activists, who at one point began to beat him up with cricket stumps and bamboo sticks, eventually killing him—caused by internal bleeding and excessive pain. Abrar was beaten for hours together and not once, but thrice. According to a TV news report, a second group of BCL students joined the first group, later on, and decided to give Abrar yet another beating for



**Abrar Fahad**

his "offence". One wonders if students residing in the other rooms could hear Abrar's screams. Maybe they did hear him scream, but it was probably taken for granted that yet another poor soul was being punished at the notorious "torture cell" for one of his deeds. One will notice the calm composure of the boys on the CCTV footage where they are seen carrying Abrar's body through the hall. One might even say that their easy pace showcases their nonchalance towards the brutal crime they had committed a while ago

and it was probably just all in a day's work. The second footage that came out two nights ago was all the more chilling. While Abrar Fahad is seen entering a room, he looks a little scared, maybe expecting a beating from the BCL goons and nothing more. Nothing is more heart-breaking then the scene when he comes out as a lifeless body. Images have surfaced on social media which show how the general students of BUET had to face several challenges just to acquire the CCTV footages mentioned above. They had to detain two police officers

and the hall provost so that they could gain access to the footage. Several police officers in helmets were seen charging through the students to reach the hall office and rescue their officers. It was only because of these students who stood up to the authorities that the footage was in fact released to the media and issues became clearer. One wonders why the students had to go through all this trouble, when in fact, the authorities should have released the videos without any question. Clearly, the students felt that the CCTV footage could have been otherwise

tampered with. And clearly so. In the second CCTV footage, the Provost (who resigned yesterday) and the Director of Students' Welfare are seen conversing with the BCL murderers in the middle of the night, while Abrar lay lifeless on the stretcher covered with a cloth. One wonders what they were talking about.

The country is in an outrage. Abrar Fahad, today, has become a symbol of free speech, and his wrongdoers, the very opposite. The murder of Abrar Fahad has opened up the Pandora's Box. He had to die because of a social media status message. He was tortured to death by the student wing of the ruling party because he merely shared his opinion which was different from theirs.

Surely, this was not the first time that the young BCL BUET students beat up or tortured one of their mates at the torture cell. Surely there have been other victims who have their stories of torture, perpetrated by the BUET BCL goons. According to many newspaper reports, each of the halls at the institution has rooms used by students belonging to the BCL where they beat up juniors upon suspicion of them belonging to different political ideologies and other issues. In a nutshell, these young goons seem to possess an unofficial license to torture and even kill. In Abrar's case, the young goons simply did not expect him to die, thereby creating a chaos and raising questions.

How is it that the VC, professors and the authorities, at one of the most prestigious institutions in the country, not know about the existence of such torture cells? Is it possible that everyone was aware of what was happening in the rooms, which the authorities simply chose to ignore? Do these torture cells exist in other education institutions as well? The ultimate question remains unanswered: who gives BCL such enormous power, exceeding that of the VC or the authorities of an educational institution that allow them to do whatever they want to do?

Elita Karim is Editor, Arts & Entertainment and Star Youth. Her Twitter handle is: @elitakarim

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

## Whither nuclear-arms control?



**BENNETT RAMBERG**

IS nuclear-arms control unravelling? The 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) has collapsed, the 2015 Iran nuclear deal is teetering, and North Korea has continued to expand its nuclear and ballistic-missile arsenal. Worse, it is unclear whether the United States will stick with the New START Treaty when it expires in 2021. That agreement limits (at 3,000) the number of strategic weapons Russia and the US have pointed at each other. Fortunately, history offers some solace. During and after the Cold War, periods of arms-control breakdown were typically followed by phases of reconstruction. But reversing course is never easy. When it comes to bringing Russia, Iran, and North Korea into compliance, past experience shows that there are limits to what can be accomplished by leveraging alliances or pursuing military action. The remaining options are economic sanctions—which are effective only up to a point—and a further arms buildup, to induce renewed negotiations.

dialogue with Iran, their efforts have yielded no results so far. The use of force in nuclear-arms control has long been contemplated, but rarely pursued, owing to the risks of retaliation or radiological fallout. When these risks are absent, military action becomes attractive. In 1981 and 2007, Israel bombed suspected Iraqi and Syrian nuclear reactors under construction, without blowback. In the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the US Air Force struck Iraq's concealed enrichment plants with impunity. But this is not an option against Russia and North Korea today. A strike on Russia's contraband intermediate-range missile arsenal or on North Korea's nuclear programme could bring about the very scenario that arms control is supposed to prevent: nuclear war. Iran's situation is different. Fearing further Iranian enrichment activities, the US could, in theory, fashion a limited strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, on the assumption that the threat of further US action would deter an Iranian response. But Iran is not Iraq or Syria. Either directly or through its various regional proxies, Iran could unleash a wave of aggression against US interests, as demonstrated by the recent attack on Saudi Arabia's oil infrastructure. US policymakers

North Koreans by returning to South Korea the nuclear weapons that it removed in 1991. But given that Kim associates the bomb with his own survival, such a move would likely ratchet up tensions on the Korean Peninsula and raise China's ire. The better way to prevent nuclear war on the Korean Peninsula,

*The question now is whether brinkmanship will lead to a conflict or a mutual drawdown that would allow for renewed arms-control talks, as in the earlier US-Soviet cases. In these unsettling times, it is natural to wonder whether arms control has run its course.*



Although most nuclear nonproliferation and test-ban treaties remain in place, the global arms-control regime is under strain. PHOTO: AFP

To be sure, alliances historically have played an important role in nuclear nonproliferation. In Europe, the US-NATO nuclear umbrella prevented the bomb from spreading beyond Britain and France. When US intelligence agencies learned in the 1970s and 1980s that South Korea and Taiwan had secret nuclear-weapons programmes, America threatened to withdraw its military and economic support, and the programmes eventually were shut down.

But intra-alliance pressure has no role to play with respect to loners like North Korea, Russia, and Iran. Despite China's military alliance and occasional summitry with North Korea, it has little influence over Kim Jong-un's nuclear ambitions. And while Britain, China, France, Germany, and Russia may yet be able to pressure the US into renewing

would have to weigh this risk seriously. Barring effective alliance pressure or military action, another option historically has been to build up one's own arsenal. In the early 1960s, America resumed nuclear-weapons tests in response to the Soviet Union's violation of the 1958 test moratorium; and this paved the way for the 1963 Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Similarly, the INF was agreed after the US deployed intermediate-range missiles in Europe in response to Moscow's introduction of such weapons. In each case, both sides concluded that tit-for-tat buildups had only increased their insecurity.

But in today's climate, using nuclear escalation to induce another round of arms-control negotiations would yield only mixed results. The US could try to intimidate the

then, is classic deterrence, leveraging America's offshore nuclear umbrella and onshore conventional weapons. At the same time, continued North Korean-US diplomatic dialogue—if not relations—would reduce the risk of a conflict arising from some miscalculation or misunderstanding.

By contrast, the recent US test of an intermediate-range land-based cruise missile, together with US plans to develop an intermediate-range ballistic missile, fits with the historic pattern of using an arms buildup to refocus the Kremlin's attention on arms control. By the same token, the US may see fit to introduce land-based intermediate-range nuclear weapons in East Asia to temper China's nuclear expansion.

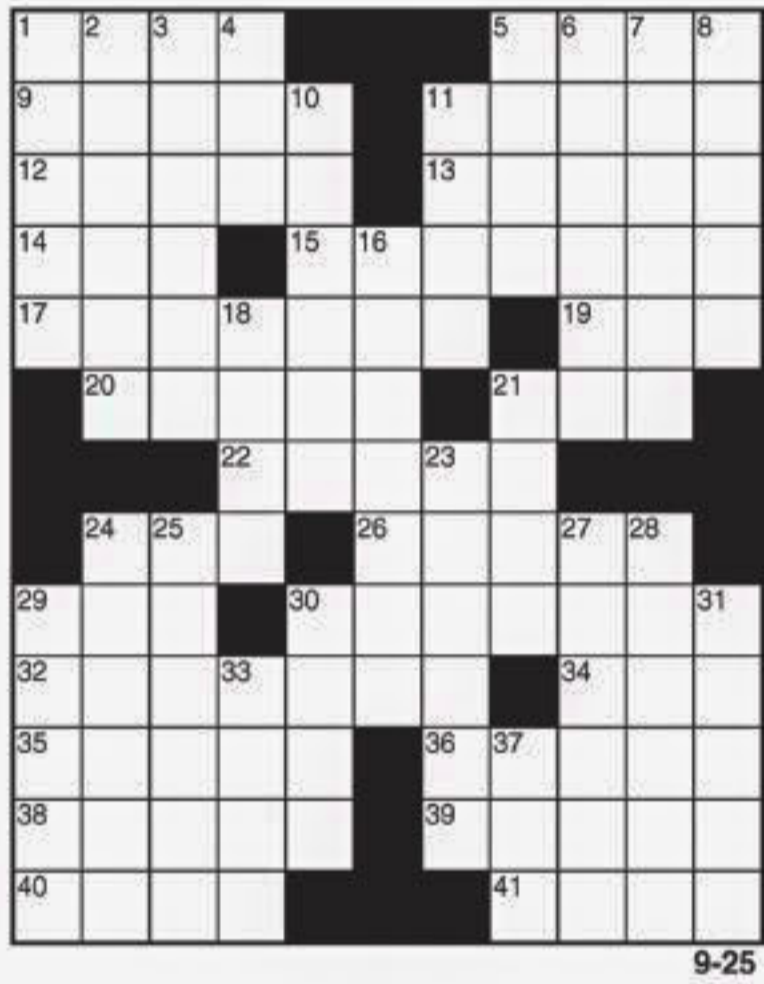
Iran, by contrast, has no nuclear arsenal to ramp up or bargain down. Rather, it has a nuclear-enrichment breakout capacity that the US wants to eliminate. Hence, the US is tightening sanctions, increasing its military presence in the Persian Gulf, and launching cyberattacks to break Iran's will. In response, Iran has increased enrichment, disrupted oil shipping in the Persian Gulf, attacked Saudi oil infrastructure, and threatened US interests and allies across the Middle East. The question now is whether brinkmanship will lead to a conflict or a mutual drawdown that would allow for renewed arms-control talks, as in the earlier US-Soviet cases.

In these unsettling times, it is natural to wonder whether arms control has run its course. Although most nuclear nonproliferation and test-ban treaties remain in place, the global arms-control regime is under strain. Nonetheless, in its many iterations, it has shown remarkable resilience over time. That resilience will be tested repeatedly in the months—if not years—to come.

Bennett Ramberg, a policy analyst in the US State Department's Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs under President George HW Bush, is the author of *Destruction of Nuclear Energy Facilities in War and Nuclear Power Plants as Weapons for the Enemy*. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2019. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

- ACROSS**
- 1 Chowder chunk
  - 5 Cornfield pest
  - 9 Took on
  - 11 Square or circle
  - 12 cheer up
  - 13 Greeted, in a way
  - 14 Fragrant tree
  - 15 Getting close
  - 17 White-hot
  - 19 Originally called
  - 20 Boost
  - 21 Slugger Williams
  - 22 Suspect's story
  - 24 Nap sack
  - 26 High-level execs
- DOWN**
- 8 Cheese buy
  - 10 Refutation
  - 11 Loot
  - 16 Pep up
  - 18 Peruse
  - 21 Layer
  - 23 Snoopy, for one
  - 24 Paging device
  - 25 Classroom item
  - 27 Sea rover
  - 28 Sound sleeper?
  - 29 Wrinkly fruit
  - 30 Top ten records
  - 31 Book category
  - 33 Wine list section
  - 37 Sch. subj.



**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**

C A R E S S    C H E W  
 A L A S K A    H I Y A  
 P E N C I L C A S E S  
 O N T O P  
 W A R S    V E S T  
 P A N T    B E L L O W  
 E G G    P A T    O N E  
 P E E R E D    E P E E  
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