

Lost home, abandoned nation: Fighting for a Bangladesh for all



SEUTY SABUR

I have been feeling unwell since October 13. After the mayhem in Cumilla, I knew it wouldn't be the last. With a broken heart, my father-in-law and I, along with my son, decided to continue with our tradition of puja visits and mandap-hopping, yet we were all deeply disturbed, witnessing the carnage unravelling with a helpless rage. This is not 1964, the Hazratbal incident in Kashmir, nor is it 1971 or the 1992 Babri Mosque demolition; it is not even election season yet, but we know that the sickness is always lurking, under the charade of "communal harmony."

I grew up in a middle-class neighbourhood in Bagerhat. Most of our neighbours were either lawyers or educators, with equal numbers of Hindus and Muslims. As children, we grew up in houses without boundary walls, free to enter and exit any house at any time of the day, and no one stopped us for being born into a different faith. All the *kakimas* who did not have *dudh-jui* togor, *joha* or wood-apple trees would come to our house to collect flowers and leaves at the break of dawn for their morning puja. We inherited two old and huge *dudh-jui* trees when my father bought the land and house from its previous owner, Mukundo Laal. My parents were too lazy to make any changes, and so it remained in many ways a "Hindu" house, with a swastika painted on our front door. Their secular-left lineage also made this arrangement look almost perfect, and normal.

Of course, the world was not perfect. Growing up, there were always some annoying kids who called red ants "Hindu" and black ants "Muslim," who would tease each other as "*mechcho*" and "*malu*" and mock each other's eating habits. But then again, we would all sling mud and swim in the river together. We sang *hamd naat* during Eid-e-Miladunnabi, and I would do the *arati* dance during Sarashwati Puja. I remember Durga Puja especially vividly: there used to be four to five puja mandaps from

subsequent years. The biggest shock came when my favourite primary school teacher Foni Sir left during the 90s. With him, my childhood disappeared. How vulnerable must one feel to leave everything behind at the end of his career?

Between the 1980s and 90s, the landscape of my neighbourhood started to change. The *kancha* houses next to veteran advocate Moti Laal Basu's home, empty plots, and a few other abandoned Hindu houses at the back of the nurses' quarters were soon claimed by

my father and left the country for good. My father, a sub-sector commander of the liberated zone who had been responsible for the safe passage of countless compatriots during 1971, could not help him in a free Bangladesh. My great-grandfather, who had been instrumental in stopping the spread of the 1949 Kalshira riot in Chitalmari (even after hearing the rumour of his son's death), remained a fable to us.

I recount all this now not as nostalgia for some "golden past," but as stories of survival through personal and political struggles. These are reminders of how every political transformation created an "enemy"—how citizens were pitted against each other in the name of religion and ethnicity, and the material conditions that enabled such atrocities. As a member of the dominant class and religion, it is not the time for me to feel ashamed and helpless; nor is it the time to blame the disgruntled "mob." This mob has face, motives, and possibly ample funding. It is crucial that we see the recurring patterns, the organisation of such atrocities, and question the role of the state and political parties—not only the one in power, but all that are still active in the field. A blanket accusation of a non-existent opposition might not save the boat this time. It's time we accepted that even though our constitution promises equal rights to every citizen, some are more equal than others. The combination of zealous Bangalee nationalism, the eighth amendment proclaiming Islam as a state religion, and draconian laws like the Vested Property Act institutionalises the status of the marginalised—non-Bangalee and non-Muslim. The constant reminder of "otherness" and casual discrimination is something they live with 24/7.

Silence has often been the recourse for those trying to simply get on with life, and unsee the realities of violence and abandonment by the state. Nationalism and dominant religious sentiments carry material value; Bangalee nationalism might have emerged as an articulating principle of resistance against exploitation and violence, yet it also carried within it the potential to legitimise new hierarchies, and the oppression of those who happened to fall on the wrong side of an ever-changing equation. Every political formation creates countless beneficiaries and promises; let's not allow the beneficiaries to tear this nation apart. Bangladesh belongs to every atheist and believer, Bangalee, non-Bangalee and indigenous, and people of every gender and sexualities. Let us translate our privileges to emancipate, to resist, to defend our rights as fellow citizens, and reclaim the state that is rightfully ours.

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The fatigue on the face of this woman, during a protest in Dhaka against the latest spate of attacks on Hindus last week, is not just because of the stress caused by recent events, but also years of having to live in fear of losing everything to senseless hate.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Muniganj Kali Bari to the bazaar, and we would hop from one to the other, comparing *thakus* and *proshad*. From Durga Puja to Lakshmi Puja, we would make sure that we tasted all the different *narus* and had enough for the whole year at my favourite Shyma Didi's, Timir Kaku's and Narayan Dadu's places. We as kids thought we would live like this forever: free!

Things started to change in the 1980s, or at least that was when I became aware of it. I remember Baba was underground at the time, and we went to meet Narayan Dadu to get updates about Baba. Dida was unusually calm and was talking in hushed tones with her neighbour Bokul Pishi, a schoolteacher who had taken care of his father for as long as he had lived. When I was passing by her small but beautiful house the next morning, I saw a huge lock hanging on the front door. She had vanished into thin air, gone without a trace. As a nine-year-old, I felt the sting of losing a familiar face, but she was only one of many that we lost in the

influential local leaders—some bought them, others "acquired" them. For the first time, party politics was reinforced with muscle and money, but this was also just a continuation of what was already happening post-1971. Our original landowner Surendra Babu was in the print business and used to live in Khulna. He had bought the land under his wife Nonibala's name, which used to be looked after and was later inherited by her nephew. They survived both 1947 and 1971, but almost lost everything in the 1980s to the Vested Property Act. A member of the Peace Committee not only occupied a three-bigha house soon after 1971, but also claimed all the adjacent property as enemy property, including Surendra and Nonibala's land.

This battle went on in court until they won the case in 1984, but under constant threats by the interested party—helped by the local administration—they just couldn't keep it safe any longer. Trauma and cancer devastated Surendra completely, and he sold the property to

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NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY DAY

A plea for safer travels



DEBRA EFROGMSON

TODAY, on October 22, we celebrate National Road Safety Day. But why? Not why we care about safety—the devastating toll of accidents makes it clear why it is important—but why call it Road Safety Day? If we are using roads to travel from place to place, and we want to be able to do so safely, why not call it Safe Travels Day?

The problem with the current name is that it normalises travelling by motorised vehicles, and implies that other ways of movement are fringe, be it walking, cycling, taking a tram within a city, or a train out of the city. When we talk about safe travels, the automobile becomes just another—and remarkably dangerous—mode of transportation.

The term Road Safety Day implies that we can clog our roads with motorised vehicles and still improve safety. Another trick to distract attention from the inherently dangerous character of large motorised vehicles—vehicles weighing over a tonne and moving over 30km per hour—is to refer to traffic fatalities per 10,000 vehicles instead of per 100,000 people. Well, that is a strange way of doing it! With everything else, we measure the problem against the population of people. We don't refer to malaria or dengue cases per 100,000 mosquitoes, or rates of lung cancer per 100,000 cigarettes. By doing so, countries like the United States, which rely heavily on the automobile, look better than countries like Bangladesh.

According to Jatri Kalyan Samity, a platform advocating for passengers' welfare, up to 18 people died per day on the roads on average in Bangladesh in 2020; the number was 21 in 2019. In Dhaka alone, almost one pedestrian is killed in road crashes daily on average. For each death there are far more injuries, including serious ones. According to Wikipedia (citing WHO data), Bangladesh has 1,020.6 deaths per 100,000 motorised vehicles, whereas the United States has only 14.2, making Bangladesh look truly dreadful. But when you compare deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, suddenly the two countries are almost equal: 13.6 deaths for Bangladesh and 12.4 for the United States. Certainly, Bangladesh needs to improve the condition of its roads, but if the authorities believe that by doing so they will eliminate its road traffic fatalities, they would be dead

wrong. Another term that is used to mislead is "accident," which implies that if only people paid more attention, if only the traffic police were more active, if only the transport owners and drivers were more compliant with rules, if only it didn't rain or the roads were better maintained, if only pedestrians didn't do stupid and careless things like try to walk in cities, then accidents wouldn't happen. The truth is that motorised vehicles are dangerous by design. People are not meant to be hurtling along in heavy vehicles at great speed. There is no way to make it safe. Hence, many of those working

vehicles as the norm, instead working to shift people to gentler, lighter modes that are much more compatible with preserving life and limb.

There is no need for trucks to be the de facto way to move freight; trains could play a much bigger role to that end. Sure, trains do occasionally derail or slam into something, but those incidents are extremely rare compared to the daily toll of highway crashes. Within cities, much of the freight can be moved by rickshaw vans. Intercity travelling by train is vastly safer than by bus or car. Travelling within cities by foot and bicycle would improve the health of the traveller and increase safety.



FILE PHOTO: STAR

It is not too far-fetched to assume that taking motorised vehicles out of the streets would drastically reduce road fatalities.

in the field of safe travels refer to crashes, not accidents.

What would make travelling on the road safer is if we could switch people out of those heavy motorised vehicles (and off of motorcycles) and into trains, trams, bicycles, or to walking. Cities that have made progress towards Vision Zero—no deaths on the roads—have done so through a variety of means that focus on the true nature of the problem. They have limited speed to 30km per hour in the city, since we know that it is nearly impossible to kill someone unless you are travelling faster than that. They have created great systems of public transit and built convenient, safe, attractive infrastructure for walking and cycling. They have refused to accept the use of motorised

Why do we not hear much about such approaches? Alas, the car, fuel, and road-building lobbies have an immense amount of money and power that they use to lobby governments and international agencies. They benefit from the mirage of "road safety" and a denial of the readily available alternatives. But we don't have to continue to allow those corporations to dominate the conversation. Knowing what is at stake, we can raise our voices and demand that our need for safe travel be met, in large part by reducing reliance on the motorised vehicles that are the true source of the problem.

Debra Efrogmson is executive director of the Institute of Wellbeing, Bangladesh, and author of "Beyond Apologies: Defining and Achieving an Economics of Wellbeing."

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| ACROSS | 30 Scout's base | 5 Rider's horse |
| 1 School group | 33 Munich lang. | 6 Francois has one |
| 6 Plotting group | 34 Bar bill | 7 Brighton brews |
| 11 Custom | 36 "The Matrix" hero | 8 Not good enough |
| 12 Kagan of the Supreme Court | 37 Market concern | 9 Battery ends |
| 13 Got up | 39 Dapper fellow | 10 Highway sections |
| 14 Actor Alain | 40 Characteristic | 17 Coat rack part |
| 15 Gun, as a motor | 41 Get up | 22 Verb for you |
| 16 Series unit | 43 Pilgrimage site | 24 Compass trace |
| 18 Poem of praise | 44 Like Poe tales | 26 Check the addition |
| 19 Singer Shannon | 45 One of the Kennedys | 28 Concealed |
| 20 Director Anderson | 46 European viper | 29 Block up |
| 21 Nick Charles's wife | DOWN | 31 Nasty guy |
| 23 Tumbler, e.g. | 1 Styx ferryman | 32 Think about |
| 25 Mess up | 2 City on the Rio Grande | 33 "Understand?" |
| 27 Curator's concern | 3 Perfect | 35 One way to travel |
| 28 Ignore the limit | 4 Bro's kin | 38 Pleasant |
| | | 42 Slugger Williams |

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

A	N	N	O		T	A	P	E	D
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QUOTABLE Quote



EDMUND BURKE
(1729 - 1797)
Irish statesman

Religious persecution may shield itself under the guise of a mistaken and over-zealous piety.

Cha Bagan Shromik Bhoishsho Tohobil

PF Administrative Building, Sreemangal, Moulvibazar

Request for Expressions of Interest (EOI) for the Selection of Software Firm

Ref. No. CSBT/Sree/Mou/Computerization/163/17-21/498	Date: 17/10/2021
Ministry/Division	Ministry of Labour and Employment.
Agency	Cha Bagan Shromik Bhoishsho Tohobil (CSBT).
Procuring entity name	Cha Bagan Shromik Bhoishsho Tohobil (CSBT) Trustee Board.
Procuring entity district	Moulvibazar.
Expression of Interest for the Selection of	A Software Development Firm.
Title of Service	Selection of Software Firm.
EOI Ref. No.	CSBT/Sree/Mou/Computerization/163/17-21/498
Date	17/10/2021
KEY INFORMATION	
Procurement sub-method	Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS).
FUNDING INFORMATION	
Budget and source of funds	CSBT own fund.
PARTICULAR INFORMATION	
Project/programme name	Automation of Cha Bagan Shromik Bhoishsho Tohobil (CSBT).
EOI closing date and time	23/11/2021 (up to 03:00pm).
INFORMATION FOR APPLICANT	
Brief Description of Assignment:	The following components and tasks may be considered as primary scope for the proposed software solutions but not limited to:
	1. Accumulation of Provident Fund from Tea Estate, 2. Investment of Accumulated Fund, 3. Encashment of Investment and Withdrawal of Provident Fund, 4. Entry of Backlog Data. Detailed Terms of Reference (TOR) is available in our website www.csbt.gov.bd .
Experience, Resources and Delivery Capacity Required:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The firm must submit the up-to-date trade licence, incorporation certificate, current bank solvency certificate, up-to-date tax payment certificate, VAT registration certificate, and current audit report. The firm should be a member of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services. The firm will confirm that they will be able to complete the work within the required time period from the issuance of the work order. The firm must have a minimum of 5 years experience in design, development and implementation of customized Provident Fund Management Software Solutions with Accounting. The firm must have adequate experience and expertise in the state-of-the Art Technologies. The firm must identify the team leader and proficient contact person for the job. The firm should have experience of developing at least 3 (three) web-based software in last five years. Preference will be given to firms experienced in Software Development with Government. The firm should have experience of Software Development valued not less than Taka 50 (fifty) lac in a single work order within the last five years. The firm should have experience of developing and designing cloud base software. The firm must have minimum of 20 in-house staffs including system architects, software developers, training specialists and other relevant staff members having experiences in developing applications with web-based latest technologies. The firm should submit the CVs of the Technical Experts (Team members) to be assigned for the assignment with photograph and original signature.
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS	
Name of official inviting EOI	Shaikh Qamrul Hasan.
Designation of official inviting EOI	Controller (Deputy Secretary).
Address of official inviting EOI	Cha Bagan Shromik Bhoishsho Tohobil PF Administrative Building, Moulvibazar Road Sreemangal, Moulvibazar.
Contact details of official inviting EOI	E-mail: csbt.bd@gmail.com Telephone: 08626-71430 Mobile number: 01709-399649
The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders.	
GD-1888	Shaikh Qamrul Hasan Controller (Deputy Secretary)