



VISUAL: STAR

Catch me if you can



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at
Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

A pre-teen has been making news for boarding a Kuwait bound flight from the Dhaka airport without any documentation. He slipped through a number of security checks to board a flight that was completely booked. He was only discovered to be an unaccompanied extra passenger during the final headcount, forcing him to be ejected from the aircraft.

The civil aviation authority has suspended 10 employees as a result of the security breach that occurred on Tuesday, just hours after the French president left the airport. I saw the CCTV footage of the kid sneaking into the airport and confidently and deftly navigating through different barriers while blending in with the neighbouring travelling groups to pass for one of them. He showed a family who were passing through a security check in front of him when he first arrived via the departure terminal gate. Then he hid himself behind several pilgrims to get through at least three layers of immigration screening. Finally, he stayed close to a family with young children to enter the boarding bay. He kept waiting for the right opportunity and learnt to improvise by watching his surroundings.

A local news station interviewed the 12-year-old, who had fled his hometown in Gopalganj around five days earlier and travelled to Dhaka to see a relative in Bashundhara. He admitted that it was only after coming to the airport that he had the sudden impulse to take a ride in one of the aircraft. "It was fun, but it would've been more fun if I could've flown," he confessed. "Flown where?" the interviewer asked. "I don't know," said the boy in a yellow T-shirt with a bicycle on it.

He has the typical characteristics of a boy his age, including big, expressive eyes that sparkle with curiosity, a set of jutting front teeth that seem to have their own growth cycle, and a face that conceals his

inner struggles and ambitions with an air of inscrutability. You wouldn't know from the way he acted that his parents were estranged and that they even turned down taking him back from the police after the airport incident. His uncle enrolled him in a madrasa, and by this point, the young boy had proven his propensity for getting into mischief of all kinds. Yet, he always made it back home. His family did not inform the police even though he was missing for days.

I've been thinking about several things unrelated to the official probe into airport security. They spring from the image of a runaway child looking for a new life. It brought to mind all the heroic adventures we encounter in fiction. Why do we admire and approve the adventures of Sarat Chandra's Srikanta, the fictional flight of a young boy in Tagore who wants to be one with a palm tree's leaves, Oliver Twist's escape from a London workhouse and transformation into a stowaway on a ship in Charles Dickens' novel, or Holden Caulfield's escape from boarding school in Pennsylvania in JD Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*? We endorse these imaginative flights and hail them as heroes. Why do we forbid this child from undertaking such a flight, then? Does his attempt to overcome the obstacles not resonate with us?

The psychology of orphans or children in terrible situations who try to elude shelters and go on adventures or dangerous excursions is complex and varies from person to person. With the exception of what I have read or seen in the media, I am unaware of this kid's predicament. But there are some psychological explanations for his behaviour.

He escaped from a madrasa, a place well-known for its strict rules and where students have limited freedom. Running away and going on adventures can help people reclaim their sense of independence

and control, because doing so allow them to make decisions for themselves, even if those decisions are risky. We cannot rule out the possibility that a child is subjected to trauma and abuse while attending school or living in a shelter. The journey might provide solace from their emotional suffering.

The quest for identification and belonging is frequently the driving force behind adventure writing. Many orphaned or abandoned youngsters have a strong desire to fit in and discover their identity. A person may try to run away in an effort to learn more about who they are, where they are from, or to find a sense of belonging.

The child got on a bus and travelled to the airport. Did he have any unrealistic ideas about the outer world? Did he experience any peer pressure for taking this risk? Perhaps the aeroplane represents a journey from his hard life to somewhere more thrilling, gratifying, or safe. Children are naturally hopeful, in contrast to adults like us who lack motivation. Some people believe that fleeing will lead to a better life or fresh chances. They are able to act in this way because they are unaware of the perils connected to their purported bravery. Or was he just trying to find out?

The child can be a case study. He has demonstrated extreme tenacity and resourcefulness. His ability to manoeuvre through difficult circumstances and outwit authorities might elicit admiration and sympathy. His background as a member of a disadvantaged group appeals to our sense of fairness and causes us to support the underdog. For people who feel constrained by conventional rules, he becomes a relatable figure. His experience serves as a testament to the belief that everyone can overcome challenges and follow their instincts.

While the civil aviation authority will enhance its security measures, I believe we need to give this incredibly smart and resourceful youngster extra care. Who knows, with the correct training and guidance, he may someday become our asset abroad! You only need to watch con man Frank Abagnale in *Catch Me If You Can*, who later became a secret service agent, to interpret my hint.

EDUCATING EDUCATION

School choice: Celebrating, not eliminating, variety



Rubaiya Murshed
is a PhD researcher at the Faculty of
Education, University of Cambridge.
She is also a lecturer (on study leave)
at the Department of Economics,
University of Dhaka.

RUBAIYA MURSHED

Both studying for our PhDs, my husband and I have adjacent study tables. One glance at our tables would tell you how different our studying styles are. His table is more organised than mine. My notes are more organised than his. His foundation (or "basics") for the subject in which we were trained is stronger than mine. These differences are a reflection of our different journeys up to this point. Although we've ended up in the same country pursuing our doctoral degrees, our educational backgrounds – and the related experiences while growing up – could not have been more different. You see, I studied under the Bangla-medium stream in Dhaka, and he

so in the belief that this will lead to better quality of education. This is, unfortunately, an unverified notion. Above everything, it overlooks the question: who are we to eliminate the separate existence of an entire education stream when there is public demand for it?

We rarely think about the fact that individuals studying under different education streams may have different perceptions of what being educated means and may have different educational goals and aspirations. Instead of focusing on improving the basic standard of education provided across the streams and appreciating the variation in schooling options, it is perhaps easier to eliminate what

creative. Instead of standardising education by eliminating variety in school choices, we need to standardise the enablement of education, regardless of streams, all across. We can no longer overlook the important questions we need to answer to better understand the states of education in our different educational streams.

I try to unearth some of these answers through my PhD, where I focus on the differences in outcomes later in life across individuals who studied in different educational streams. One message that is shining through strongly already is that any comparison between streams should be made with the acknowledgement that there may be differences at the root, which, in turn, drive the differences in the purpose for gaining an education. These differences should be respected because there are histories behind these roots – histories tied to the purpose of each educational stream. It's important for us to understand these trajectories.

Consider, for example, the birth of English-medium schools in



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FILE PHOTO: STAR

studied under the madrasa stream in Chattogram. Our educational journeys intersected at Dhaka University, but the journeys leading up to that point differed. It's one of the reasons why I became interested in the differences among schooling streams in Bangladesh.

Basically, at the brink of starting education, a parent in Bangladesh can send their children – depending on the availability of educational institutions, of course – to a Bangla-medium school (often with Bangla and English versions of the same curriculum to choose between), an Alia madrasa, a Qawmi madrasa, or an English-medium school. This madrasa categorisation is mainly based on the magnitude of prioritisation of Quranic studies (higher in madrasas) and the main language of learning (either English or Bangla). Without going into the differences in ownership – that is, public and private schools – there are, in general, several ways of thinking about differences across these educational streams. In my own work, I particularly focus on two. Firstly, what leads to choosing one of these educational streams? Secondly, are there differences in the outcomes later in life between individuals who study in the different educational streams? Additionally, there is a need to investigate how the educational streams differ in terms of textbooks, curricula, exam question patterns, pedagogy, and students' learning outcomes.

Worryingly, without much criticality or evidence, we often talk about eliminating certain school streams or combining non-mainstream routes with mainstream education. The intention behind this is perhaps somewhat misplaced. In most cases, someone supporting the elimination of separate educational streams – and the consequent integration of the different streams into one – does

some think is redundant as a stream. Instead of trying to bridge the gaps in access – in terms of information as well as availability of educational institutions – to different schooling

Bangladesh. While madrasas have a history stemming from the reign of Muslims in our subcontinent, it may be argued that English-medium schools stem from a more colonial

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streams, we let the narratives framed by the more elite construe our better judgement and reign strongly over us. We forget to think critically, and this is sadly common across all the educational streams in Bangladesh. Another reality, as Dr Niaz Asadullah – a living legend in educational research in Bangladesh – says, is that the quality of education remains low across all educational streams.

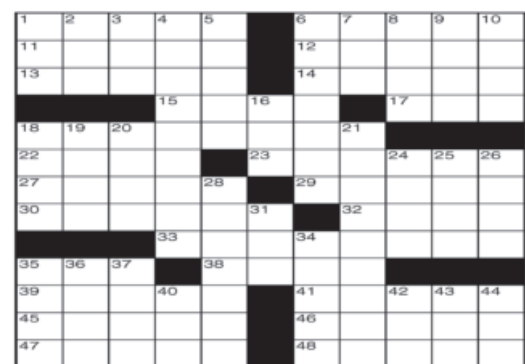
Our national debates and discussions on schooling options is stuck at the point of integration of the different educational streams – to integrate or not to integrate. We need to shift focus from this to more important issues: the need for proper educational resources in all schools regardless of them being madrasas or general schools; teachers being trained to not just educate but also to care about students' well-being; and all educational streams equipping students with a coherent basic standard education that enables them to think critically and be

past. It's not that we do not need competency in a universal language like English. We do. However, it's also important that we clarify our priorities as a nation and pass on a strong sense of culture – of which language and history are pivotal parts – to the next generations because, otherwise, any identity crisis that they experience is partly our fault, too.

Deeply entrenched narratives not backed by research or critical reflection have tremendous potential to cause harm, and this is already evident in the untold stories around us in our society today. Those of us who have a unique educational background on our CVs – that is, something not mainstream – are often stripped of the opportunities that our counterparts are given, despite having the same, or often better, talents and capabilities. What does this mean for our rhetoric, our initiatives, and for inclusive development? Isn't inclusion, and the absence of bias, a prerequisite for such development?

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Bends out of shape
 - 6 To any extent
 - 11 Sneeze sound
 - 12 Irritated state
 - 13 Depicted
 - 14 Music's Abdul
 - 15 The Emerald Isle
 - 17 Swiss peak
 - 18 Grilling need
 - 22 Flock member
 - 23 Misdeeds
 - 27 Group of top players
 - 29 Used four-letter words
 - 30 Confines
 - 32 Pennsylvania port
 - 33 Freeway
 - 35 Go for a run
- DOWN**
- 1 Used to be
 - 2 German cry
 - 3 Pi follower
 - 4 Politician's loyal supporters
 - 5 Boom type
 - 6 Seems
 - 7 Aunt, in Acapulco
 - 8 Blue hue
 - 9 Break in the action
 - 10 Spring
 - 16 Join the crew
 - 18 Applaud
 - 19 Loathe
 - 20 Hymn ender
 - 21 Like most of these letters
 - 24 Director
 - 25 Bleak
 - 26 Ooze
 - 28 Befuddles
 - 31 Veto
 - 34 Choir member
 - 35 Pokes roughly
 - 36 Spoken
 - 37 Heredity unit
 - 40 Consumed
 - 42 Football's Marino
 - 43 Mamie's husband
 - 44 Uncooked



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

