

# Israel's 'right to self-defence' and the Palestinians' fate to be slaughtered



THE THIRD VIEW

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"Israel has the right to defend itself"—after Hamas' horrendous killing of 1,200 Israelis—is the overriding justification under which 11,320 Palestinians have been killed, as of Wednesday, according to the health ministry in Gaza. This includes at least 4,650 children, who have been killed at the rate of one every 10 minutes. Women are being forced to give birth amid debris and dust, pregnant women in advanced stages are out in the streets with nothing over their heads—not even water for a sip—to say nothing of the relentless carpet bombing of the open-air prison called Gaza, now turned into a death camp because people have no option but wait to be killed.

The sick and infirm are being left to die. Babies in incubators are being suffocated to death as oxygen runs out due to no electricity. Why did these children have to be born to Gazans? Shouldn't they have known better?

**The West—which regularly claims the moral high ground—must understand clearly that, with every Palestinian killed, its credibility erodes. All its talks about rights and freedom ring hollow when its application of these is so discriminatory. Its global standing is being corroded by Israel's flagrant violation of each and every international law. And the way Israel is being treated only proves that there is no international law, no universal principles, and no human values that are applicable to all.**

But, of course, Israel has a "right to defend itself."

Of the 2.1 million inhabitants of Gaza, more than a million from the north have been shovled to the south because Israel decided to invade that area to eliminate Hamas. These people are now homeless, penniless, without shelter and, of course, without food. From a life of humiliation and being

Meanwhile, the critically wounded are all dying because hospitals don't have any medical supplies.

On October 9, Israel announced a total blockade of the besieged enclave, including a ban on water and food supply. Two days later, it cut off power. November 10 marked a month of this deprivation. A human being can live only for three to five days



A dove flies over the debris of houses destroyed in Israeli strikes, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip.

controlled, they are suddenly refugees of the worst kind—sitting around the streets, parks, and open spaces in southern Gaza to be shot at because Israel has a "right to defend itself."

Since Israel started carpet bombing that small strip of land (equal in area to Dhaka city, at about 650 sq km), the world has become used to seeing footage of totally demolished buildings. Everyday, it also sees survivors searching among the rubble to save those who are still alive and trapped underneath. There must have been hundreds, if not thousands, who were alive and could have been saved with the slightest bit of assistance. Imagine the fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and even children who witnessed their loved ones die in front of their eyes because no assistance could be provided to save them. (To put things in perspective, a total of 2,438 people were pulled out alive from beneath the rubble after the Rana Plaza building collapse.) Maybe just some shovels, a contraption to pull the

without water. Do those who have cut off the water supply want all 2.1 million Gazans to die? We really want to believe in a different possibility, but what? Digging tube wells could be one option for Gazans. But in such a geological location—with proximity to the ocean—well yielding portable water is unlikely. So resorting to drinking sea water is one of the few options.

According to experiments by the French Navy, reported in *Natural History* magazine, a human being can survive for six days only drinking sea water. But obviously the Israelis are not bothered that many may have died of dehydration and those still alive could eventually pass away from severely damaged kidneys and the failure of other organs. And what about babies, children, and the aged? But never mind all that, because how can Gazans be allowed to drink water when the "right" of Israelis to defend

themselves has not yet been assured, right?

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stone up, some rudimentary machinery—a crane or a bulldozer—could have saved thousands. But with no electricity or fuel, nothing of the sort could operate. Perhaps a glass of water could have smoothed the dying hours of a child.

In the occupied West Bank, where Hamas does not exist, Palestinians are killed on a daily basis by Israeli soldiers and settlers, with the latter having been fully armed to kill those whose land has been expropriated, because every one of the natives is supposedly either a terrorist or a terror instigator.

The hatred, the injustice, the cruelty, the barbarity, and animal-like treatment meted out could only have come from a long-term dehumanisation of the Palestinians. Over the years, it must have been ingrained in the minds of Israeli soldiers and settlers that the Palestinians are of a lower species

than them and, as such, are not entitled to the rights that a regular human being is guaranteed by international law. Even babies born to Palestinian mothers must not have been considered human babies. Otherwise, how could the electricity to incubators have been switched off?

Today or tomorrow—we would rather it be today—the fighting will end and the butchery will cease. But then, the world will stand with its conscience severely compromised. There will be widespread hatred, suspicion and scepticism. Idealism will have been further eroded, and in more and more countries idealists will be replaced by hatemongers. Belief in values will be replaced by dependence on brutal power. More and more elections will be determined by populism and ultra-nationalism, which in turn will breed militarism. We will see more and more resources being spent on equipping national armies. In the name of security, citizens will be put under surveillance and the space for dissent will be further squeezed. The final result will be the shrinking of democracy.

The West—which regularly claims the moral high ground—must understand clearly that, with every Palestinian killed, its credibility erodes. All its talks about rights and freedom ring hollow when its application of these is so discriminatory. Its global standing is being corroded by Israel's flagrant violation of each and every international law. And the way Israel is being treated only proves that there is no international law, no universal principles, and no human values that are applicable to all.

Are we entering an era where actions will only be guided by the barrel of the gun, and not be based on the values and principles which are the hallmark of our civilisation? Israel's worship of power over principles is what it is reiterating each day.

But then, we must stop this blabbering, because Israel must have the "right to defend itself."

127TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF RANADA PRASAD SHAHA

## A philanthropic visionary and secular icon

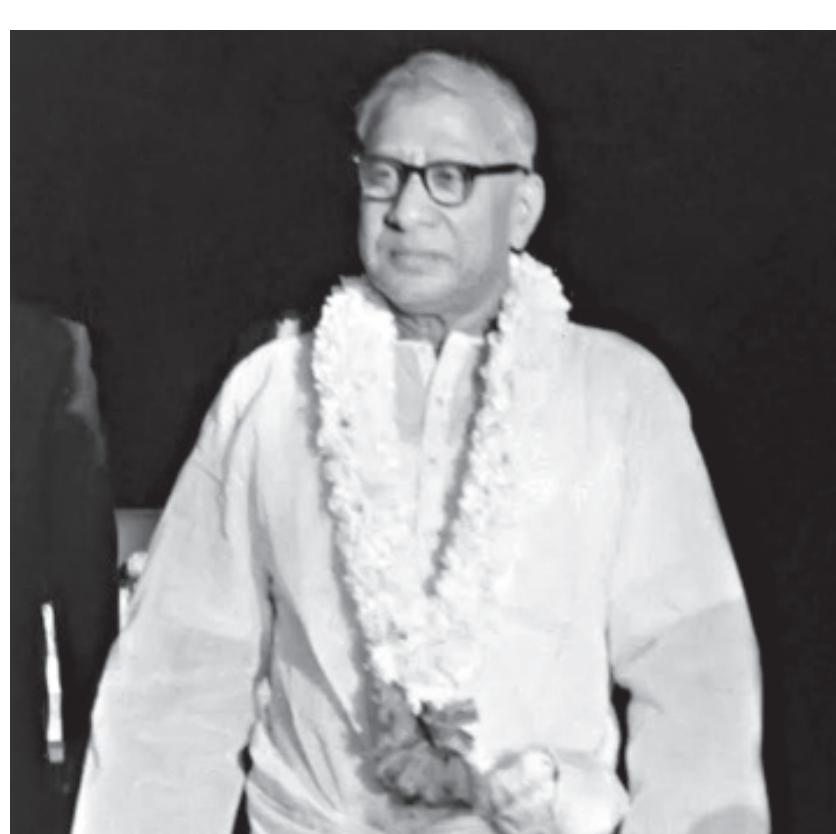
Priyam Paul  
is a journalist and researcher.

In the aftermath of World War I, Bengal bore witness to the transformative contributions of two remarkable individuals. Kazi Nazrul Islam, the iconic "rebel poet," breathed new life into Bangla literature, using his verses to challenge societal norms and champion freedom. Concurrently, Ranada Prasad Shaha (1896-1971), a pioneering entrepreneur, not only navigated economic uncertainties but also laid the foundation for a philanthropic legacy that transcends generations. Interestingly, both of them actively participated in the Great War, forging a lifelong friendship that endured from that point onward.

In the tumultuous 1930s, as Ranada embarked on his entrepreneurial journey, he faced significant uncertainties and lacked external support, relying solely on his determination and efforts. He initiated a small-scale venture trading coal to households. Overcoming challenges, he strategically invested in a declining shipping company, transforming it into a profitable venture. Ultimately, it was his foray into the jute business that elevated Ranada to the status of an influential industrialist.

Ranada Prasad Shaha, a true trailblazer in public health for Bangladesh, dedicated himself to philanthropy from the inception of his economic success. The poignant memory of his mother's untimely death due to a tetanus infection during his childhood fuelled his commitment to charitable endeavours, particularly in healthcare. His pivotal role in the health sector began with the establishment of the Shovashundari charitable dispensary in 1938, a period when Mitford stood as the sole hospital in Dhaka, the capital of then East Bengal.

Undeterred by the limited medical facilities, Ranada's vision expanded in 1944 when he founded the Kumudini Hospital in Mirzapur, his village, as a free hospital with 20 beds—a tribute to his mother's legacy. The Kumudini



Ranada Prasad Shaha (1896-1971)

COURTESY: RAJIV PRASAD SHAHA

Trust, managing the hospital since its inception, has grown the facility to house 1,050 beds, steadfastly providing free healthcare to the community.

Ranada's commitment to healthcare extended beyond local boundaries. In 1954, he contributed significantly by funding the construction of the maternity ward at the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka. By 1949, Kumudini Hospital achieved another milestone: introducing the first ever cancer treatment in East Pakistan.

In 1943, when famine ravaged Bengal, Ranada Prasad Shaha demonstrated exceptional compassion by establishing *langar khana* (open kitchens) that

provided food to the starving population for several months. These humanitarian efforts extended to various locations, including Kolkata, Tangail and Mymensingh. In 1944, recognising the global impact of World War II, Ranada contributed 250,000 rupees to the Red Cross fund, supporting the welfare of those suffering from the war's devastation.

A pioneer in female education and

provider of healthcare and education, particularly focusing on marginalised communities.

Ranada Prasad's philanthropic endeavours stand out for their sustained impact. His approach blended institutionalism with personal empathy, as reflected in his three-fold philanthropic motifs: serving the destitute, educating the masses, and empowering women. His enduring commitment to these principles made his charitable efforts both sustainable and consistent over time.

Ranada's fundamental belief found clear expression in his words, "Serving humanity is not charity; it's my duty." It echoes the sentiments of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, who once remarked about Ranada, "A poor man became a millionaire, and a millionaire voluntarily became a poor man, spending his all in the service of humanity."

In the wake of the 1947 partition, life for the minority community became notably volatile. Despite these challenges, Ranada Prasad Shaha steadfastly maintained his secular outlook during critical moments. Opting to remain in his homeland, he returned from his business centre in Kolkata to Tangail, encountering hostility from the government of East Pakistan. Undeterred, he intensified his engagement in philanthropic endeavours, extending his support indiscriminately across religions.

On a personal level, Ranada was known for his amiable nature, having a deep appreciation for literature, music and theatre. His progressive values were evident in his endorsement of widow remarriage and his approval of interfaith marriage for his daughter.

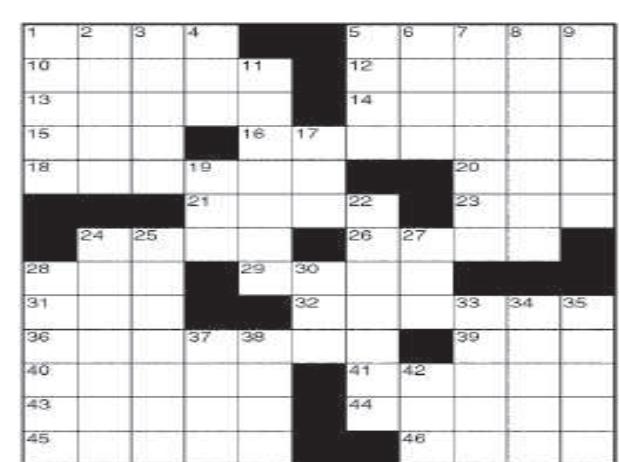
Tragically, on May 7, 1971, amid the Liberation War, collaborators of the Pakistani occupation army abducted Ranada Prasad Shaha and his son, Bhavani Prasad Shaha. What their fate became remains shrouded in uncertainty to this day.

As contemporary society grapples with the accumulation of wealth and the pursuit of material success, Ranada Prasad Shaha's legacy serves as a beacon of inspiration. His philanthropy, grounded in enduring principles and a commitment to social welfare, continues to shape the activities of the Kumudini Trust. Ranada's secular and humanist ideals, tested during times of adversity, persist in his charitable works, ensuring that his vision for a better, more equitable society endures.

## CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	36	Sequoia's kin	8	Landscaper's
1	Tennis star	39	Pont	work
Nadal, to fans	40	Sobbed	9	Horses
5	Complains	41	Hatch on the	11
10	Borders	42	Hill	Flows
12	Turn aside	43	Correct, as	17
13	Space sighting	44	text	Cochlea
14	Scoundrel	45	peso	setting
15	Genesis name	46	(Mexican	22
16	Merlot, e.g.	Central	currency)	Checked the
18	Suez outlet	20	45	fit of
20	26	Parliament	24	Sicilian port
21	Component	members	25	More
23	USN rank	46	prepared	prepared
24	Brit's baby	Perfect place	27	2 Plus
carriage	19	28	Artist	Artist
26	Chimed	Indy entrant	Duchamp	Duchamp
28	Writer Rita —	2 Superior to	30	Old hand
Brown	21	3 Was furious	33	33 Got along
29	Go around	4 Dined	34	34 Martini
31	Imitating	5 Joker, e.g.	garnish	garnish
32	Henhouse	6 Declare	35	Odorless gas
raider	7	Exercise	37	Meander
	46	program	38	38 Track figures
			42	42 Deplore



10-27

## YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

G	O	D	S	O	N	A	M	O	S
U	N	I	Q	U	E	B	I	L	E
M	E	D	U	S	A	A	L	E	X
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