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PHOTO: REUTERS

# Silencing the messengers



A CLOSER LOOK

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TASNEEM TAYEB

For Al Jazeera journalist and cameraman Samer Abudaqa, December 15 was a day like any other. He tagged along with his colleague, Al Jazeera Arabic correspondent Wael Dahdoh, to report on the devastation and massacre committed by Israel at a UNRWA-run refugee shelter at Farhana School in Khan Younis.

After covering the story, as the journalists were trying to get back to their transport—since the area could not be reached by car—they came under Israeli attack, with Samer Abudaqa receiving critical injuries to the lower part of his body. He could only manage to crawl some 200 metres for help. He lay there, bleeding, for more than five hours before succumbing to his injuries. An Al Jazeera statement condemned Israeli forces for preventing medics from reaching Abudaqa on time. Wael, who had also received injuries to his upper arm, survived.

Abudaqa—a father of four—is one of the more than 90 journalists and media workers killed in the ongoing Palestine war. This particular war has been termed by both the UN Human Rights Office in Occupied Palestinian Territory and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) as the deadliest for journalists and their families—and for obvious reasons. While many of the journalists have perished in the carpet bombing of the densely populated strip by Israel, there is mounting evidence that Israel is deliberately targeting journalists to prevent the stories of genocide and devastation leaking out from Gaza.

To coerce journalists into docility, Israel is also killing their families. Take the case of photojournalist Yasser Qudih, eight members of whose family were killed by Israeli strikes targeting his home only days after he had been exposed to death threats after Israeli media advocacy group, HonestReporting, speculated if Qudih, along with some other journalists, had prior knowledge of the October 7 Hamas assault.

Mohammad Abu Hatab, a Palestine TV correspondent, was killed along with 11 members of his family in what is being called a targeted Israeli strike on their home in Khan Younis—a locality considered safe from Israeli attacks. Wael Dahdoh's family, killed in an Israeli attack, was also taking shelter in southern Gaza's Nuseirat refugee camp, considered a safer area.

However heart-wrenching and blood-curdling they are, these killings do not come as a surprise because the current Israeli regime has been very vocal in supporting and even provoking the killing of journalists. For instance, after the baseless speculation by HonestReporting, many of the Israeli officials and politicians openly called for the killing of journalists who took photos of the October 7 attacks. Israel has developed a tendency to suppress journalists, with spillover effects going outside Palestine.

Just a few days ago, footage emerged on social media showing Israeli forces torturing Anadolu photojournalist Mostafa Alkharouf, who was on duty in the occupied East Jerusalem, covering a story near Al-Aqsa Mosque. His injuries were so critical that he had to be taken to a hospital for medical care. Instead of holding to account the police officers involved, Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir expressed his explicit support for the one officer who had been suspended as a result of the attack on Alkharouf.

Israel's intention in Gaza is clear: carrying out genocide and completely taking over the besieged strip for Israelis. This is how Benjamin Netanyahu plans to dodge the corruption charges facing him, safe in the knowledge that his "ironclad" ally the US will back him up as always.

But, in the face of the unabashed atrocities

being committed by occupation forces in Gaza, pressure is mounting on the White House to force Israel to agree to a permanent ceasefire. The last US veto of a humanitarian ceasefire resolution at the UN Security Council (UNSC) has garnered the country scathing condemnation from various quarters, including its traditional Middle Eastern ally the UAE. Thousands have been killed and injured in Israeli attacks since the US veto on December 8. In the face of a worsening humanitarian catastrophe, the UNSC is set to vote again, this time on a milder call for "cessation of hostilities," which the US is negotiating for an even softer approach of "suspension of hostilities" so that it can support it.

The vote has been postponed by a day to December 19 for negotiators to find common ground. With a growing divide within its own administration over its approach to the Palestine war, the country might as well relent this time to abstention instead of an outright veto, despite Netanyahu and Eli Cohen's extremist rhetoric, and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant servicing visiting US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

Palestinian journalists exposing Israel's barbarism have added to the pressure on both Israel and the US. As a result, these resilient journalists have become Israel's arch-nemesis.

But Israel must understand that journalists cannot be silenced. Journalists know that they are historians in their own right—documenting facts for the future generations to study and use to shape their opinions regarding the past. Journalists are the defenders of truth. They are the messengers who hold all parties to account, especially in times of war since during these precarious times there are no parties that will tell one the entire truth. Journalists know the significance of their work, and will not be silenced—till the very end.

Israel obviously fears journalists and wants to stop this flow of information, which is why it has frequently targeted communication channels and caused blackouts during intensified operations.

Unfortunately, Israel has now assumed the licence to kill journalists due to the silence of the international community over decades in reaction to it doing so. Between 2001 and October 7, 2023, around 20 journalists were killed by the IDF; 18 of them were Palestinians and two were Europeans. This includes the targeted killing of veteran Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in 2022, whose funeral procession was also attacked by Israeli forces. No party ever held Israel to account for these crimes, resulting in its daring that we are witnessing today.

Israel has committed war crimes by killing journalists, their families, and unarmed civilians in Palestine, and must be investigated and tried by the International Criminal Court (ICC). Samer Abudaqa's son and Al Jazeera are preparing to lodge complaints with the ICC. While that happens, based on the complaints lodged so far and the referrals made—including the referral by Bangladesh and four other nations for investigating Israeli war crimes—the ICC should take prompt action to prosecute Israel. If the ICC feels hesitant in prosecuting Israel, it must come out with that truth. Special Prosecutor Karim Khan has been accused of not doing enough. If that is the case, his actions should not be considered above the law. If the ICC is being coerced by Israel or its allies, then it should be investigated for obstruction of justice. The case should also be brought before the International Court of Justice; Israel has committed more than enough crimes over the last seven decades, killing civilians and journalists alike, to warrant this.

# Youth depression is a symptom of broader societal malaise



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The surge in depression among today's youth is a complex puzzle, with pieces scattered across the intricate tapestry of our swiftly changing world. While I lack the expertise of a psychiatrist or therapist to dissect the intricacies of brain functionality, my aim is to unravel the societal dimensions that contribute to this concerning upward trend.

In the vast panorama of human civilisation, societal evolution unfolds through both material and non-material culture. Material culture encompasses the tangible—from technology to consumer goods—while non-material culture comprises beliefs, language, ethics, and social standards. The challenge arises when the relentless march of technological and material progress outpaces the evolution of ethical and ideological frameworks, resulting in what sociologists term a "cultural lag."

This cultural lag spawns a mental dilemma, echoing throughout society. As technological advancements soar,

Individuals feel disconnected, alone, and unable to cope with the breakneck pace of societal advancement.

In traditional settings, specific demographics—such as married women with strong religious or family bonds—historically exhibited a lower propensity for suicide. Despite being labelled as "unsuccessful" by conventional standards, their resilience stemmed from the support structures embedded in religion, family, and cultural affiliations. The crucial factor lies in the sense of belonging within these social organisms.

However, in contemporary Bangladesh, a departure from historical profiles is evident. The youth, usually part of families, find themselves disproportionately affected by the rising tide of depression. This shift raises questions about the evolving nature of stressors in society, necessitating a nuanced exploration.

Current research attributes the soaring youth suicide rates to several factors, with lack of motivation taking

spaces intensifies the mental health challenges faced by the youth. The culture of physical movement—once a source of enjoyment—has withered away, leaving a void detrimental to mental well-being. Economic constraints further compound the issue, limiting physical activity options for those without financial means.

The weight of expectations extends beyond familial aspirations and to personal ones. Young people growing up physically inactive, coupled with their own expectations and those of their parents, grapple with the realisation that achieving lofty dreams is improbable. The spectre of nepotism and contemplation of disadvantages faced during upbringing further contribute to a sense of hopelessness.

A prevalent issue exacerbating mental health challenges is the societal rejection of ideas that deviate from the norm. The vilification of dissenting opinions creates an environment where individuals grappling with thoughts of disconnect become targets. Social trials, taking various forms across online platforms, social settings, and institutions, intensify one's sense of isolation.

This societal intolerance is not confined to individual spheres but permeates the collective consciousness. The role of the state in stifling dissent trickles down to the individual level, hindering the expression of thoughts and, coupled with the inability



VISUAL: REHNUMA PROSHOON

our non-material aspects (particularly ethical and ideological understandings) struggle to keep pace. This dissonance gives rise to societal issues, reflected in the collective mental health challenges we witness today.

In the race for societal progress, marked by rapid infrastructural development and the accumulation of wealth among the few, a pervasive pursuit of success ensues. Success, often defined by the acquisition of material wealth, ushers in a dichotomy. A minority races ahead, acquiring cars, houses, and material abundance, while the majority, yearning for

centre stage. In addition, the absence of a driving force to pursue goals is a pervasive issue among the youth. In the context of Bangladesh, concerns about post-education employment prospects act as a significant demotivator, casting a cloud over young people's mental well-being.

Simultaneously, the lack of physical movement and mobility compounds these challenges. Sedentary lifestyles, that are devoid of exercise or engagement in physical sports, contribute significantly to the youth's declining mental health. Moreover, a lack of trust in conventional success—

to achieve conventional success, instigating a profound existential crisis.

As a society, we've inadvertently set the wrong standards, particularly for the generations following ours. The narrow definition of success—rooted in wealth accumulation, untouchable power, overconsumption, and materialism—has stripped away the emotional aspect of being a good human being.

Furthermore, relationship standards have been skewed. Relationships, whether familial, friendly, professional, or romantic, should not be predicated on gains and losses. Normalising the idea that a connection with someone should be sufficient for a healthy relationship challenges the prevailing norms.

To reverse this disconcerting trend, a paradigm shift in societal values is imperative. Ideals that transcend material gain, emphasising living for others and contributing to humanity's and the planet's betterment, should be at the forefront. The dearth of role models showcasing alternative paths to fulfilment and success, beyond material accumulation, needs to be addressed.

The surge in youth depression is a symptom of the broader societal malaise. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to recalibrate societal values, fostering a holistic approach that prioritises mental well-being, interpersonal connections, and contributions to the greater good. Only through such comprehensive measures can we hope to stem the tide of rising youth depression and pave the way for a more compassionate and understanding society.

As told to Monorom Polok of The Daily Star

similar goals, finds itself lagging behind in an unforgiving rat race. The resulting feelings of inadequacy and insignificance cast a shadow over the majority, fostering a breeding ground for mental health struggles.

This disparity extends beyond material pursuits, seeping into ideologies and ethics. The rapid success of a select few triggers self-reflection among the rest, making them question whether their ethical or ideological beliefs are hindering their progress. This internal conflict spawns a new form of societal alienation.

particularly among students fearing unemployment after completing their studies—serves as a potent force driving mental distress.

Amidst these challenges, family involvement—rather than playing a supportive role—often exacerbates the negative effects. Expectations, whether real or perceived, add to the burden. Families, perhaps unknowingly, may be setting unrealistic standards and pressuring their children from a young age to excel beyond their capabilities.

In urban settings, the lack of accessible sports centres and open