



Police arrest a pro-Palestinian protester at the University of Texas in Austin, US on April 29, 2024. FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Lessons from a Palestine solidarity encampment

Sarah Eleazar and Shafaq Sohail are graduate students at the Department of Anthropology in the University of Texas at Austin.

SARAH ELEAZAR and SHAFaq SOHAIL

Throughout the 1980s, thousands of university students across the United States participated in anti-apartheid protests on campuses to demand that their universities divest from companies operating in South Africa. They held sit-ins, took over campus buildings, and set up symbolic shantytowns on campuses. These protests had roots in the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s.

There is historic precedence of students demanding more than symbolic gestures of solidarity with oppressed populations across the globe. Over the last several weeks, students at US university campuses have joined a global wave of student-led movements and demonstrations demanding ceasefire and an end to the war in Gaza. These demands have translated into increasing pressure on universities to divest from weapons manufacturers profiting from Israel's onslaught on Gaza, and disclose fundings received from Israel and the ends to which they have been used.

The Israeli defence industry has long been a key player in orchestrating and militarily supporting repressive regimes across the world. Historically, weapons sold by Israel—and made with US aid and investments—have sustained the apartheid state of South Africa, supported Rwandan and Rohingya genocides, and aided “counterinsurgency” forces in El Salvador, Guatemala and Costa Rica, to mention a few examples. The current demands of divestments are echoes of historical and transnational calls against this structural complicity, impunity, and annihilation of entire regions for the sake of economic and political domination of a few.

It is this unified call for “divestment from death” that university administrations have been trying to curb and silence every time they have called in law enforcement agencies to crack down on protesting students and labelled them as violent agitators and trespassers on their own campuses.

However, with every abhorrent accusation of anti-Semitism and violence, the resounding response of protesters chanting for the freedom of Palestine reminds us of solidarities that transcend the convoluted media propaganda and official state narratives. They remind us of the rights to life and liberation that can only be

collectively gained from simultaneous demands for ceasefire, decolonisation, and divestment.

It is within the context of this systemic, historical, and transnational violence that current protests in the US and their malignment by the state and media alike must be understood.

While the deployment of police and state troopers in campuses from Columbia to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) continues to be justified as a de-escalation measure, the absence of any force against pro-Israeli supporters brutally attacking protesters at UCLA in particular reveals the hollowness of the rhetoric of law and order behind which university administrators continue to hide.

Such selective crackdown on pro-Palestinian encampments and silence over pro-Zionist violence aim to drive home as well as outwardly project the country's official line on the ongoing war in Gaza. The state of Texas, for example, has twice sent law enforcement teams in riot gear and assault rifles to round up students, with the president of the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) proudly proclaiming in an email that “our campus will NOT be occupied” (emphasis ours).

However, despite the police repression against encampments last week, students of UT Austin, most of them undergraduates, have continued to reclaim the campus as a site of their protest. This week, protesters on campus announced a full day of teach-ins at the camp. Around 11am, we saw 50-60 students sitting on blankets in the lawn, a teach-in in session. The camp was set up on a big lawn facing south of the university tower. At 1:23pm, the UT Police Department (UTPD) sent out an email with a warning to disperse. Though intended to deter a congregation, even more people started showing up on the lawn.

Around 1:30pm, amid shouts of “You are being violent, we are being peaceful,” police officials marched onto the lawn and formed a circle around the protest camp.

Later, we saw three men in state trooper uniforms carrying packs of Gatorade for their colleagues who had encircled the camp for several hours in the scorching sun. Meanwhile, voluntary medics pleaded with the police to allow them to access and treat

protesters fainting from dehydration and heat. It took protesters chanting en masse to have the police, sipping on their Gatorade and biting into neatly sliced cucumbers and carrots, let medics retrieve and treat collapsing students.

Intermittently, we heard protesters shouting “Let them go!” in unison, indicating that the police had started arresting students again. Those being dragged and carried away shouted “Free Palestine,” joined by swarms of protesters echoing their chant.

Amid cries of “Off our campus” and “Hands off our students,” the police slowly took away all those encamping, leaving behind an assemblage of torn tents, scattered blankets, and overturned tables.

It was not long after the police evacuated the lawn that the students reconvened at the same location—cleaning the mess the police left behind and settling back in on the lawn, making it their own once again. One student picked up a cardboard placard to write “UT divest \$45 billion from the machine of death.”

While the state of Texas erroneously believes that it has one-upped the protesters and shown their allies whom they support, demonstrations countering the state's stance keep swelling and the momentum continues to build up. Since the campus protests began, the actions of the police in military gear have been met with chants of “APD, KKK, IDF are all the same.”

The equating of Austin police with the US's ongoing legacy of the Ku Klux Klan and Israeli Defense Forces is a powerful statement from the protesters—one that must be thought through by the state and those supporting the crackdowns on students. To equate these three institutions is to reveal the interconnectedness of our oppressions and thus our struggles, both locally and transnationally. To call upon universities to divest from the Gaza genocide is to call for an end to the prioritisation of profits over life—theirs and ours.

The students at US campuses are thus joining and echoing the demands of liberation struggles across temporal and geographical divides. We are reminded, once again, that none of us can truly be free until we are all free.

One, two, three of social deceptions

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza is a professor of English at Dhaka University.



SHAMSAD MORTUZA

One: Milton Samaddar was nabbed by Rab for allegedly running a clandestine organ harvesting and human trafficking racket under the guise of his philanthropic organisation, Child and Old Age Care.

Two: An author of children's thrillers and horror stories, Tipu Kibria, was arrested for the second time allegedly for possessing and uploading pornographic images of underage street children.

Three: The wife of former Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) chairman Ali Akbar Khan was arrested allegedly for procuring fake academic certificates with the help of a system analyst at BTEB.

Just as the human body relies on its organs to function properly, so too does a nation depend on the integrity and efficacy of its institutions to thrive. Imagine that our collective body politic suffers from a damaged kidney, unable to filter out the pollutants of corruption, deception, and perversion that threaten to poison our societal bloodstream. How do we protect ourselves from the toxicity that pervades different organs of our society? Where can we look for a cure? Should we sign up for a surgical intervention, seek a replacement in the illicit market, or advocate for a healthy lifestyle to address these needs before they escalate? The situation gets murky when monsters hide behind great names like the English epic poet Milton, the rebel leader from Mysore Tipu Sultan, or Mughal Emperor Akbar. Great names are compromised through great deceptions.

Let's begin with “one,” Milton Samaddar. He turned out to be a social media celebrity with 1.6 crore followers for his charitable shelter for children and the elderly. After the Covid pandemic exposed our species' vulnerabilities, a renewed urge to support our fellow beings emerged. Inspired by his wife's nursing profession, Milton, a smart entrepreneur, started a shelter and appealed for donations. Money kept pouring in. He started inflating the number of people under his care. Abruptly, the number of individuals under his care began to either die or vanish. The mosque nearby, where the deceased were taken for the ritual bath, noticed cuts on the bodies. The existence of a makeshift operation theatre inside a nursing home sparked the idea of organ harvesting.

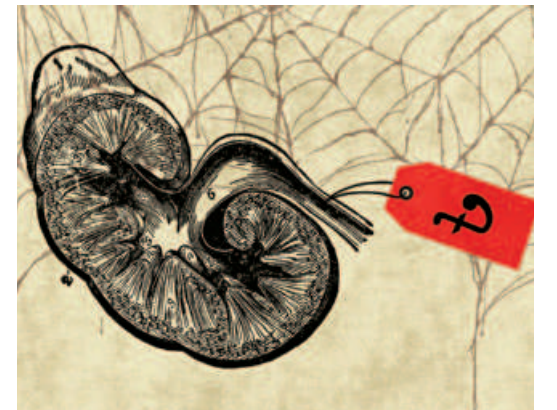
For those of us who viewed the horror of organ trafficking and illicit operations as dystopian sci-fi plots such as that of *The Island*, the harsh light of reality suddenly pierced through the veil of complacency, jolting us awake to the horrifying truth lurking in the shadows of our society. Milton has supposedly scripted the satanic racket that extracts organs from live human bodies, buries the victims secretly under the cover of night, and forges death certificates to conceal its heinous deeds. Within the confines of Milton's shelter home, a two-tier deception unfolds. On one level, he promises shelter and care to the visibly abandoned or marginalised residents, only to ensnare them in a web of exploitation. A lucrative black market trade turns their vulnerability into a commodity, turning their bodies into vessels for organ harvesting. On another level, social media platforms with paid boosts propagate a polished veneer of charity, shielding the public from the atrocities occurring behind closed doors.

Ironically, social media, often dismissed as a mere conduit for frivolous entertainment and superficial connections, alerted the police. The whispers of citizen journalists revealed the truth, forcing authorities to confront the grim realities.

It's a nightmare scenario straight out of a

thriller. I don't know whether Tipu, number “two,” wrote any such thrillers while working for the popular young adult magazine *Rahasya Patrika*. He spent seven years in prison for child pornography. Now he is at it again, say police. He entices street children to participate in his nude photo shoots for a small fee, then proceeds to sell the captured images for a substantial sum of money. The renowned Tipu Sultan launched rockets filled with swords, showering the British colonisers with destruction. The Tipu here sends images to the cloud for dissemination to pervers across the world.

Akbar, the “third,” gives love a bad name by buying his wife a fake certificate. His associate's arrest for possessing hundreds of forged academic certificates brought his name to light. One such certificate belongs to the board chairman. Maybe he felt that gifting a certificate to his wife would teach her a lesson or two. We don't know what the motivations are, but from the associate's confessions, it is clear that there is a common practice of managing officials from various probing and monitoring agencies. The failure to seal a negotiation in dollars exposed the issue of forged certificates.



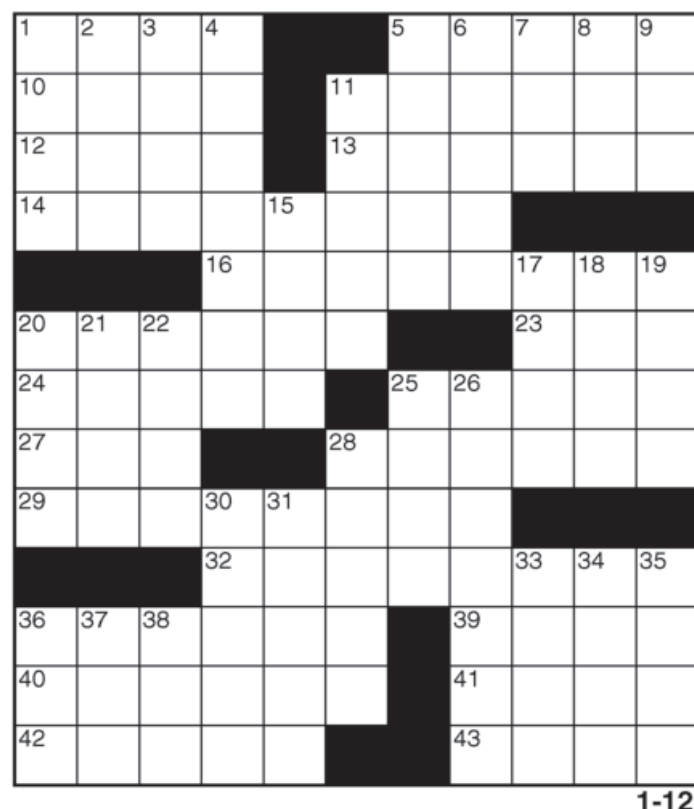
VISUAL: STAR

Frustration simmers beneath the social surface. The frustration stems not only from the perpetrators of these heinous crimes, but also from the systemic failures that allowed them to flourish unchecked. It's a frustration born of the realisation that our institutions, meant to safeguard the welfare of society, have become complicit in perpetuating the very injustices they were designed to prevent. The rotten system requires dialysis because corruption runs deep, permeating every layer of society. From complicit officials turning a blind eye to the exploitation of the vulnerable to apathetic bystanders content to remain passive observers—the roots of this insidious malaise are far-reaching and entrenched.

Occasional actions of whistleblowers or police sometimes give us hope. But hope alone is not enough. It must be coupled with more preventive actions. We don't want homeless children and abandoned elderly people sleeping in the streets who can be preyed upon. We need action against the predators who prey on these vulnerable beings. We need actions to hold the institutions accountable. We need social campaigns to foster a culture of vigilance and empathy, where the rights and dignity of every individual are respected and upheld. The raids of exploitation have turned trust into a casualty. To restore trust, there has to be a concerted effort by government agencies, reputable NGOs, and grassroots organisations that would filter out the pollutants of corruption, deception, and perversion that threaten to poison our societal bloodstream.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Across | 39 Follow orders | 17 Gymnast Korbut |
| 1 Neatnik's opposite | 40 Conjured up | 18 Genuine |
| 5 Small porch | 41 Single | 19 Rank above |
| 10 Casserole staple | 42 Luke-warm | Viscount |
| 11 Painter's place | 43 Owner's document | 20 “Like that'll happen!” |
| 12 Brighton brews | DOWN | 21 1920s art style |
| 13 Take care of | 1 Flag feature | 22 Lockup |
| 14 1998 Wes Anderson film | 2 Humdinger | 25 Joker, e.g. |
| 16 Weary from walking | 3 Wallet bills | 26 Freezing |
| 20 Modify | 4 Doc's friend | 28 Yawning, perhaps |
| 23 Pasture | 5 Set off | 30 Uniform material |
| 24 Elite Navy group | 6 Melodies | 31 Crippled |
| 25 Corona, e.g. | 7 Strange | 33 Clarinet cousin |
| 27 Here, in Quebec | 8 Gusher flow | 34 Painter Magritte |
| 28 “Key Largo” co-star | 9 “The Gold-Bug” writer | 35 Took in |
| 29 Legends and such | 11 Photo session | 36 Ready to go |
| 32 Dyed-in-the-wool | 15 Terrarium growth | 37 Genesis name |
| 36 Tahini base | | 38 Soak up |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

