



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza  
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

We just came back from a trip to Lake Ohrid in North Macedonia. The boat driver was surprised by our over-insistence on wearing life jackets, despite the water appearing shallow and calm and the imported boat being highly reliable. We told him about the number of deaths by drowning over the last few days that had us concerned. The tragic end of two friends at a lake in Ontario, Canada, one being a seasoned pilot of a 787 Dreamliner in Bangladesh and the other a trailblazer in the sustainable textile industry, was fresh in our minds. Then there was the heartbreaking news of a father who died along with his teenage daughter while giving her swimming lessons in their village pond during the Eid holidays. And then there are people washed away by the treacherous waves at Cox's Bazar: six people in a day. Then came the big news of an Air India Boeing crashing in Ahmedabad soon after its takeoff. The plane slammed onto a medical hostel where some intern doctors were having lunch. Death visited them like a giant bird from the sky, carrying 242 passengers and crew with it.

Just when we thought a long holiday would give us a respite from everyday mayhem, sparing an opportunity for us to unwind and reconnect with our near and dear ones, these news reports of unrelated incidents reminded us of the dire threat of leisure turning lethal. With the benefits of hindsight, we can utter the ignored truth: some of these accidents were preventable.

The idea dawned on me while watching the disciplined driving during our trip to the Balkans. The number plates of the cars suggested that they have come from all over Europe. Yet, driving through the cliff-hugging narrow roads, they followed a particular protocol for overtaking. It was never like in our country, where a trail of vehicles are seen rushing together for lateral passing when there is no vehicle visible on the other side. The cars overtook one at a time, almost like the cyclists in the Tour de France. I think the combination of common

sense and rule-abiding reduces the chances of accidents. Applying the same principle to the recent deaths makes sense.

The death of six tourists in Cox's Bazar over the Eid holidays would have been a national scandal in another country. The beaches would have been marked unsafe, and visitors would have been instructed to stay ashore. Here, our lack of common sense and defiance against safety directives stall any such initiative. Indeed, the authorities have marked some areas of the beach as danger zones. However, while thousands of people congregate in Cox's Bazar to enjoy the seaside sands, only a small number of them heed the warning signs. The lifeguards are posted on the designated beaches, and they don't have the manpower to patrol the longest natural beach in the world. According to a *Prothom Alo* report, 25 lifeguards and 25 beach workers, along with 70-80 tourist police officers, are deployed to oversee 100,000 tourists on a daily basis. The lack of institutional safeguards is further evident in the incident where two parasailers fell as their belts got unfastened. There is a complete lack of supervision. Vacationers unaware of the tricky water currents, hidden channels, and quicksand of the sandy shore often get overly enthusiastic and adventurous. In the absence of proper directives, implementation of rules, and common sense, tourists are left to rely on instinct, or worse, luck.

The *Prothom Alo* reports 49 deaths in the past six years. The actual number of deaths may be higher as many such incidents go unreported. We lament these deaths only when they get a human face through media. How do we justify that there is no sea netting system to curate a safe zone for swimming? The billion-dollar industry is operating independently. There is no collective strategy for inarguably the most famous tourist spot in Bangladesh. For instance, unplanned growth is visible by the presence of hotels on the beach itself, in a flagrant violation of rules. When those responsible for enforcing the rules

violate them, we must be concerned about the general welfare of the location we wish to promote as a site of national significance. We can engage the hotel owners as stakeholders in the city's beautification and landscaping efforts. There are now 600 multistorey hotels and resorts that can share the cost of making the sea safe for their visitors.

The alarming number of deaths gives Cox's Bazar the bad press that no PR campaign can override. There is no comprehensive,

stakeholders. Local community members should be engaged for beach patrol and rescue efforts. Digital apps can be used to inform beachgoers of conditions in real time. The hotels need to establish their emergency protocols.

The entire system must prioritise safety. There has to be coordination between first responders and the hospitals. We need a trained workforce that knows what to do when things go wrong. This will require

Our policymakers must ensure a national audit of leisure-related deaths in the era of big data. The categories of location, activity and cause can help us determine the nature of an intervention and the requirements for tourist safety certification. Giving local leaders the autonomy to make decisions can streamline bureaucratic processes and bring decision-making closer to the issue at hand. The deaths of the father and daughter in Moulvibazar, for



Given the large number of tourists that visit the beaches in Cox's Bazar every year, treating beach safety as a national responsibility is crucial.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

# Why we need more ‘angry’ Greta Thunbergs



Zeenat Khan  
is a contributor to South Asia-based journals and magazines.

ZEENAT KHAN

The Western world, except for a few European countries, has largely been silent over the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Two million people are living under extreme duress, the majority of them camping under the open sky, in the Gaza Strip. Since March 2 this year, all aid has been blocked from entering Gaza. Hunger has been weaponised. Children are dying not only from bombs, but also from hunger. In the face of such a grave humanitarian crisis, a few brave pro-Palestinian protesters, such as 22-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, headed for Gaza on a civilian vessel with aid. US President Donald J Trump mocked this effort and labelled Thunberg as “strange” and “angry,” recommending “anger management” for her to learn techniques to change “unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.”

People who care about the planet, except for a handful of cynics, are familiar with what Greta Thunberg has been doing since she took up activism. People have been impressed by her gentle, no-nonsense demeanour and

concern for the planet. She has inspired millions to change their perspective beyond here and now, and onto the future. She challenged many big-name politicians to open their eyes to see how climate change poses a danger to our very existence. Her campaign against global warming resonates with how she wants the world to be: clean, safe, and hazard-free.

The same determination took Thunberg and a few more activists en route to Gaza to assist with much-needed aid. Her voyage on a boat called Madleen was being operated by the Freedom Flotilla coalition. But on June 10, the Israeli navy intercepted and seized their boat. All the activists on board were arrested. To make matters worse, the Israeli forces were sarcastically calling it a “celebrity selfie yacht.”

Thunberg and three other activists agreed to an immediate deportation. They were put on a plane to Paris. The rest of the members refused to sign the deportation papers and

were taken into custody. Upon arrival in Paris, Thunberg expressed great concern about the safety of her fellow activists in detention.

Before Thunberg's deportation, she was offered a sandwich wrapped in plastic by a soldier of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), an image of which went viral on social media. The activist dismissed it as a mere “publicity stunt” by the IDF.

**When mass death from starvation looms in Gaza, mocking Thunberg will not solve anything. Being different most certainly doesn't mean one has to be characterised in derogatory terms. The world needs many more “strange” and “angry” Greta Thunbergs at this moment. Donald Trump here has an opportunity to be remembered on the pages of history books as a “do-gooder” if he can persuade Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to stop the genocide in Gaza. Otherwise, this systematic extermination of a nation will haunt us, our children, and grandchildren in the years that lie ahead.**

I just keep on praying that the killing of children and their parents in Gaza will stop. I start each day with my morning prayers, finding a sense of purpose and connection to the divine. A few mornings ago, my attention was disrupted by notifications of multiple texts on my phone. The text messages came in all at once. Instantly, I knew it was one of my family members texting from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. She knows this is when

I would be just about done with praying.

The text messages contained a series of thought-provoking questions about the starving children of Gaza. “What I don't understand is why God would let this happen. If he knows the suffering, why doesn't he stop it?” Read the first one. “Why would children die of starvation? This I cannot understand,” said the next. “Undoubtedly, this is the worst form of death,” was my instantaneous reply.

Then I added, “Thinking and rationalising that a human is less than a human does not justify all the murders of innocent people.”

By weaponising starvation, isn't Israel sending the wrong message to the world that the lives of the Palestinians do not matter? And they are not really people like you and me? Why doesn't the humanitarian law apply to the Palestinians? This dehumanisation is something we must refuse to accept.

Children are dying of hunger in Gaza. Their parents are getting killed by bombs and drones while trying to fetch food parcels for their malnourished and starving children.

The aid distribution centres have become death traps. Al Jazeera reported that an Israeli drone attack on the morning of June 11 killed 31 aid seekers near a food distribution point in central Gaza. Two hundred more were injured in the attack.

When mass death from starvation looms in Gaza, mocking Thunberg will not solve anything. Being different most certainly doesn't mean one has to be characterised in derogatory terms. The world needs many more “strange” and “angry” Greta Thunbergs at this moment. Donald Trump here has an opportunity to be remembered on the pages of history books as a “do-gooder” if he can persuade Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to stop the genocide in Gaza. Otherwise, this systematic extermination of a nation will haunt us, our children, and grandchildren in the years that lie ahead.

CROSSWORD BY  
THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Light pastries

6 Jazz genre

11 Be in accord

12 Visibly shocked

13 Andean nation

14 Game piece

15 Otherwise

17 Wallet bills

18 Throws in

20 Greedy

22 Go bad

23 Understood

26 Tusk stuff

28 Chef's need

29 Bad point

31 Ball support

32 Bard's river

33 Hourglass fill

34 Cost of a hand

36 Granny, for one

38 Planet circlers

40 Bakery output

43 Final letter

44 Calliope need

45 Stopwatch button

46 Rash

DOWN

1 Ocean off Cal.

2 "That's gross!"

3 Southern dish

4 Chops down

5 Drops in on

6 Ball club

7 Selfish one

8 Steak sides, sometimes

9 Door sign

10 Signing needs

16 Corn helping

18 Parched

19 Pigeon's cousin

21 Expansive

23 Pita sandwich

24 Tied

25 Title page

27 Vindictive one's quest

30 Printing need

33 In a way, informally

34 Monet's "—and Psyche"

35 Iditarod end

37 Bygone auto

39 Got off one's feet

41 Porch item

42 Author Tan

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

A	C	H	E		C	A	R	E	S	S
L	O	O	N		O	C	E	L	O	T
A	L	M	A		P	O	P	F	L	Y
S	T	E	M	W	A	R	E			
		P	E	A		N	A	F	T	A
H	A	L	L	S		S	T	I	R	S
U	T	A						R	E	P
G	O	T	A	T		R	I	S	E	S
O	P	E	R	A		A	C	T		
			A	L	P	H	A	B	E	T
D	O	U	B	L	E		R	A	V	E
A	R	M	I	E	S		U	S	E	S
D	E	P	A	R	T		S	E	N	T

Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to  
dsopinion@gmail.com