

THINKING ALOUD

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In a city where life never slows down, some memories refuse to be forgotten. Memories, it seems, are timeless treasures of the heart.

They remind us of valuable moments, of cherished bits of life and the faces of our beloved. As Bob Dylan would say, one needs to take care of all your memories, for you cannot relive them.

However, there are some memories that we long to forget and wish that they had never happened. They become fragile, flickering but extremely precious, as they become painful reminders of people we love, after we have lost them. The month of July is filled with such tumultuous moments, that it might take the nation years to recover from the traumatic experiences from the last few years.

It has been 9 years today, but the memories of the tragedy that unfolded on road 79 in Gulshan 2, still haunt us and probably will do so for years to come. This long stretch of road, just wide enough for two cars to cross each other from opposite directions, is perpetually semi-lit. Almost a decade ago on this day, the road was filled with journalists from all over the world—waiting for hours for updates. The Holey Artisan attack, that had stolen the lives of so many, including tourists, friends and young university students, is now a memory that we cannot and should not shrug off as just another incident.

The attack resulted in the deaths of 22 people: 20 civilian hostages, and two police officers. Among the civilian victims, 18 were foreign nationals (nine Italians, seven Japanese, one US citizen, and one Indian). The attack involved a 12-hour siege before commandos stormed the cafe, killing the six gunmen and arresting one. Not only did the Holey Artisan attack forever change the lives of the families of the victims, but also

added a dimension to the evolving and changing political narrative of Bangladesh.

Even today, a certain feeling of restlessness and distress looms over road 79. The residential buildings and the massive gates built in the early 90s, seem to exist indifferently. The ache of loss is sharpened by how vividly we remember. In fact, one is reminded of the famous song by the Eagles – programmed to receive, but one can never leave.

“I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.” – Mother Teresa. And amidst these ripples, often emerge young leaders and doers who end up sacrificing their lives for their nation. July will forever be etched in the minds of most deshis, especially the ones belonging to generation Z – who fearlessly stood against oppression, marched towards a groundbreaking revolution that led to the fall of the authoritarian government, in the process losing a thousand lives and more. Today, many are looking back to a year ago, remembering the revolution that had taken place in the streets of Bangladesh. Based on deaths reported by various credible sources, a United Nations

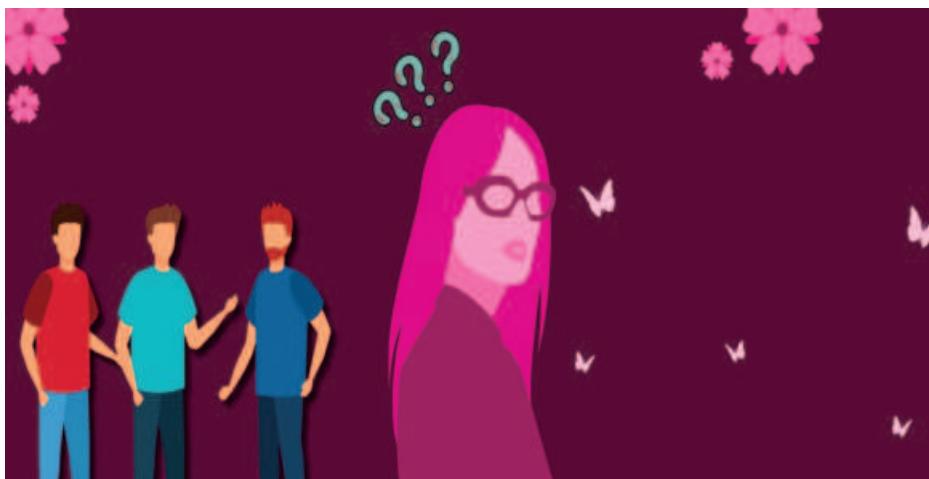


report estimates that as many as 1,400 people may have been killed between July 1 July and August 15, in 2024. Thousands were injured, the vast majority of whom were shot by Bangladesh's security forces. Of these, the report indicates that as many as 12-13 percent of those killed were children. Bangladesh Police reported that 44 of its officers were killed.

The slogans and the young voices have been reverberating for some time now and once again today, they come alive, while families of the martyrs of all ages try their best to bear with the pain of losing their loved ones in the face of the atrocities that were committed. Bloodstains still fresh and hearts still aching, the scars would surely stay alive for generations to come.

Loss changes us. It teaches us that memory is both wound and balm. And in a world that keeps moving forward, remembering becomes a form of resistance—a way of saying: they mattered. They still do. May the sacrifices be remembered and honoured forever – of young fighters, changemakers, people leading regular lives, those trying to voice out and the supporters of freedom – simply for a stronger and a peaceful Bangladesh.

Photo: Collected



“So, what kind of boy are you looking to marry?”—The first move is made. The room goes silent. The girl in question, who was quietly minding her own business a minute ago, looks up and smiles. She knows how this goes; how this conversation ends. She doesn't want to be rude so she indulges anyway. With every requirement she states, the frown on everyone's forehead gets deeper and deeper. She almost feels bad for how hopeless they look at this point.

Because you see, it's never about actually listening to her preferences and perhaps finding a potential someone according to it. No, it is about ‘settling down.’ Neatly, quietly and above all, quickly. They are just waiting for her to finish talking so they can start.

“Don't you think you're being a little unrealistic? “Life is no fiction! You can't expect someone to come knocking at your door. You can't really expect a 10 on 10!”

And all she can think is, why not? How do they get to decide her fate while theirs was decided by the divine?

Society has a strange way of giving women *just enough* freedom to choose, but only within boundaries that keep everyone else comfortable. She is encouraged to be independent, build a career, grow. However, if she remains unmarried after a certain age, not because she's against marriage, but perhaps hasn't found the right one, all her life choices are put on trial.

Her ambition becomes a liability. Her self-respect gets mistaken for ego. Her standards are seen as stubbornness, and her desire for a meaningful relationship is labelled fantasy.

Perhaps, the most disheartening experience is dealing with those who come off as allies.

These people are different from the loud ones. They listen to her preferences

patiently, nod with approval, even echo back her thoughts, “You're doing the right thing, don't settle.”

And for a moment, she believes she's understood. But then, one day, they casually drop a “suggestion”—a marriage proposal that checks none of the boxes she had clearly outlined. Worse, it comes wrapped in sugar coated pressure: “He's a good man. He comes from a good family! Will keep anyone happy.”

As if happiness is a one-size-fits-all promise and her voice was just noise to be politely tolerated until a “better” idea came along. It's not just disappointing; it's a heartbreak.

Here's the truth though. She's not rushing because she knows what happens if, God forbid, the ‘ideal match’ goes south at any point.

Wanting a kind, compatible partner is not asking for too much. Wanting to be seen and respected in a relationship is

not unrealistic. A girl who knows what she wants is not a liability. She's someone who has grown through experience, and she deserves to wait for someone who meets her there.

So, the next time you meet an unmarried girl who is secure and self-assured, don't pity her. Don't probe. Don't pretend to support her just to later present a life she never asked for. Listening to her, only to ignore everything she said, isn't kindness — it's erasure.

She's not waiting for just ‘anyone.’ She's waiting for something compatible, something aligned, something that doesn't ask her to shrink. Her choice isn't delusion; it's clarity. And in a world that constantly tries to rush, dismiss, and negotiate her worth, the quiet strength of standing her ground deserves respect, not reform.

By Nusrath Jahan
Photo: Collected

#READER'S CHIT

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