

# Monuments of Greed



NO STRINGS ATTACHED  
AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

**G**REED is an ugly thing. To see just how grotesque it can be, just look up from your vehicle and try to get a broad view of the city as it spreads out in front of



PHOTO: STAR

you. The first thing you will see are billboards, scores of them. You will feel like one of the minuscule protagonists in the Land of the Giants (a popular series in the 70s). A gigantic woman is eating a humungous shashlik and grimacing menacingly while oceans of green soda tempt her from the backdrop. There are chanachur packets the size of your front door pouring out what they claim to be the ultimate socializing snack. A team of giant doctors pose confidently promising health miracles of 'international standard' - though the billboard housing them is hanging on a dilapidated building where anything but healthcare can be expected.

Then there are those billboards lining the VIP roads extolling the tremendous successes of the government. What is impressive is not the accomplishments that are being disseminated to the poor, ignorant, clueless masses but the jaw-dropping levels of unimaginative photography and graphics that can produce such eyesores. Was there a constraint in the budget for the posters

on these billboards that had been rented by other enterprises? Had some pesky sycophant who religiously failed in art class throw a tantrum unless he had been given the job?

But let's not bother our pretty little heads over such trivia. Let's talk about the upcoming polls that have given hoardings a whole new status. About a week ago if you were going by under the Mohakhali flyover, you would be greeted by larger than life billboards of AL mayoral candidate (before he with-

drew from the race) Haji Selim and Annisul Haque, the current favourite of the ruling party. Billboards sporting the smiling faces of other larger than life candidates were looming down on us all over the city.

Providence, however, has always had a way to teach us lessons, the hard way. All it had to do was send a little nor'wester to blow away many of the precariously constructed, illegal, hoardings that landed on the street, on cars and on people.

Was it to tell us to stop this nonsense - this odious sight pollution created by these billboards that have complemented the ungainly, chaotic, unapproachable city with its spaghetti of cables for channels and internet connections, broken roads and unattended heaps of garbage strewn about intermittently for the passersby's olfactory pleasure? Ironically one of the billboards fell on one of the former mayoral candidate's car; he was unhurt but two rickshaw pullers were

wounded - of course. But what were we talking about again? Oh yes, about greed being an ugly thing. Billboards require permission from the city corporations who get quite a hefty sum for such authorisation. That's not enough obviously, so some officials and cronies of the ruling party, whichever one happens to rule, decide to turn the other way, to make some extra cash, when those scraggly men put up those rectangular metal sheets over flimsy metal structures. The billboard ad business is the golden goose of many a CC official promising an endless supply of gold eggs as every corner and inch of this city can be covered with billboards, and more billboards. If there ever was a sliver of greenery around Bijooy Sarani it is hard to tell, now that it is laced with those rectangular structures to obliterate the fact that once upon a time we had real live trees lining the road. Or maybe they are still there and the city fathers desperately need to hide them.

Yes, billboards are an undeniable accessory of cities all over the world. But in most countries the rules and regulations regarding the construction and display of billboards is closely monitored by the city authorities. For us, that's the biggest problem. Those in charge of monitoring have gone a little carried away. They have cluttered the entire city with poorly constructed, illegal hoardings that can fall on people and kill them at any time. And that is really ugly.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Op-Ed and Editorial, The Daily Star.

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# Impunity undermining justice

C R ABRAR

**I**T has been three years since the tortured body of labour organiser Aminul was discovered in Chatail, Tangail, about 100 km away from his work place in Ashulia. He was abducted a day before and was last seen with one Mustafizur, a resident of the area.

Aminul, 39, was a plant-level activist, organiser of the Bangladesh Centre for Workers' Solidarity (BCWS) and leader of the Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers' Federation. For his union activities he incurred the wrath of the local industry leaders, Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) and the police administration. On occasions he was detained by the authorities and was subjected to torture. In 2010, the registration of his organisation, the BCWS, was revoked. It was subsequently restored the following year. His colleagues note that prior to his killing, Aminul was fearful of this life, his movement was under constant surveillance and his cell phone tapped. His family and workmates firmly believe that Aminul was liquidated for his labour activities, and BEPZA and a particular intelligence agency are responsible for his abduction, torture and subsequent murder.

Aminul's killing created a furor in various quarters. Labour and rights activists and organisations both at home and abroad were agast with the killing, and demanded impartial investigation and immediate action against the perpetrators.

Initially a fair degree of progress was made in the inquiry. Within months the Detective Branch (DB) identified Mustafiz as a major suspect. He was found to be a non-working employee of a hospital run by the BEPZA, receiving a monthly salary of Tk 7500. The Investigating Officer of DB, Humayun Kabir, unearthed Mustafiz's links with three officers of the National Security Intelligence. Before the case was fully uncovered, in November 2012 it was handed over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for unknown reasons. The Investigating Officer of the case was changed three times. The police submitted the charge sheet to the court in November 2013. To the dismay of the family and the group 'Justice for Aminul', the investigation report was fraught with inconsistencies and failed to address some of the most pertinent questions.

The final report named a total of 25 wit-



nesses. Included among them were four investigating police officers, one police official who arranged for the transfer of the body of the deceased, two doctors who conducted the autopsy on the body, the concerned magistrate, the associates and landlord of Aminul as well as the accounts officer of BEPZA who processed Mustafiz's salary.

Supporters of Aminul fail to understand why the charge sheet did not include names of officers of an intelligence agency whom the investigators found to have been in touch with Mustafiz, the principal perpetrator of the heinous crime, on the night of April 4, 2012. They are perplexed that the charge sheet did not name senior BEPZA security functionaries, Lt. Col. Mustafizur Rahman Khan and Major Shahjahan Kabir, as suspects. The duo were neither arrested nor named as witness although their names appear in the report.

A leading Bangla daily quoting the charge sheet reported that officers of "an intelligence agency" and senior officials of Dhaka EPZ were in contact with the suspected killers several times on the night before Aminul's body was recovered. This corroborates the CID's submission to the 71st meeting of the Sensational Cases Monitoring Cell of the Ministry of Home Affairs of November 3, 2012 in which the agency reported that the alleged killer, Mustafiz, had several phone conversations with NSI Assistant Director Mamunur Rashid and Field Officer Lutfor Rahman.

In that context, they justifiably ask, whose

support did the perpetrator/s receive? At which site was Aminul tortured? In which vehicle was he or his body taken to Tangail? The investigation report does not address any of the above, nor does it provide any clue about the contents of phone conversations of the intelligence agency functionaries and senior security officials of BEPZA with Mustafiz, the low level informant on the fateful night.

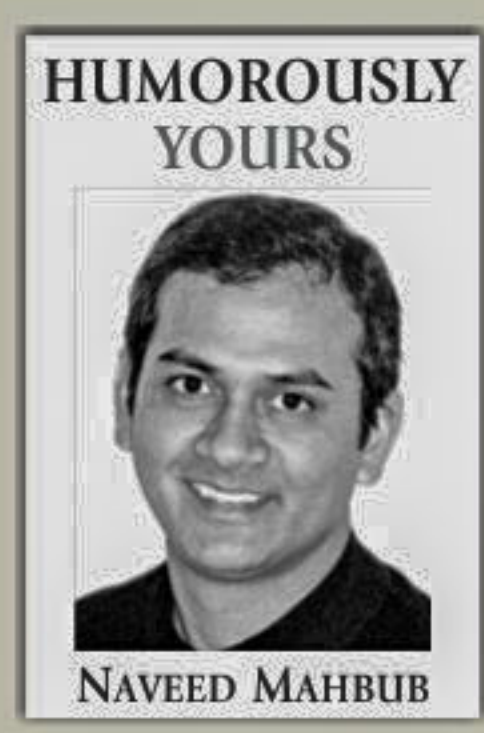
Aminul's case has thrown a major challenge to those at the helm of the State. Inordinate delay and arbitrariness in the investigation process, failure to clearly identify the executors and abettors of the crime and to apprehend a single person even after three years of the occurrence, and the questionable findings of the final investigation report all point to the fact that a powerful interest group is at play to protect the real perpetrators. The current administration has shown its resolve in ending impunity granted to the wrong-doers in the past that subverted the due process of law. Time has come for it

*The family and supporters of Aminul have raised some important issues that the law enforcement agencies need to clarify. They argue that the sequence of events amply demonstrate that the crime could not have been committed by a single person.*

to reiterate that this applies to the wrong-doers of the present as well. It must institute a re-investigation of the case by a credible, impartial and independent body to bring all perpetrators, including those in state security agencies, to justice.

The writer teaches International Relations at the University of Dhaka. He researches and writes on migration and rights issues.

# Dumb's the Word



HUMOROUSLY YOURS  
NAVEED MAHBUB

**A** closet Muslim US President strikes a nuclear deal with the Shia Muslim President of Iran that enrages the Jewish Prime Minister of Israel.

Meanwhile, the Evangelical Christian US Representative Michele Bachmann says the outwardly Christian Obama is for the 300 million predominantly Christian (Protestant and Catholic) souls of the United States what the Christian pilot Andreas Lubitz was for the 159 souls on the Germanwings flight.

You are correct - the second paragraph sounds rather odd. Ok, what has happened is that all the words denoting all the religions on this planet have somehow evolved from being proper nouns to being full-fledged, highly descriptive adjectives. The adjectives (formerly known as nouns) in the second paragraph are deemed unnecessary and totally irrelevant to the habitual reader of the 21st century to whom the first paragraph is perfectly fine. And so, if facts would have mandated 'Muslim' to be the choice of adjective for Andreas, not only would that part of the second paragraph be grammatically and syntactically relevant, but would have also allowed us to rekindle the rhetoric on terrorism. Oh, and of course, the notorious underworld would have scrambled to figure out who would claim responsibility for the big 'score'.

But thank God that is not the case. Moreover, the name of the co-pilot doesn't sound Middle Eastern either. Thus, a billion normal human beings are spared of being plunged into a relapse of the post-9/11 clinical depression stemmed from a collective guilt. With the 'M' type adjective missing, the terrible loss is now labeled as an 'isolated', 't' type incident. That is 't' for 'tragic', not 'terrorist', though I, the black and white engineer, can't fathom the difference between the two. Hence, the discussion of depression is perfectly kosher.

The passengers boarding the ill-fated airliner never had the right to know about the first officer's bouts of clinical depression. He is protected by the doctor-patient confidentiality. Uhm, I don't think his medical record is all that confidential at the moment. That means, the code of secrecy is not totally impregnable - 'all' it takes is an Airbus jet to be disintegrated into smithereens with the loss of 159 innocent (note, I didn't say 160) lives to break that 'confidentiality'. Mum's the word? Not always. It can sometimes mean dumb's the word, as in the case of the Germanwings tragedy.

Open the door, and flies come in. Open the cockpit door, and bigger flies come in, as had happened on 9/11. Close that door, and the rotten fly, rare as it may be, can remain within.

Not sure what the ultimate test of cerebral fitness is when it comes to manning the controls of an aircraft. But aviation regulators in several countries have been quick to implement a minimum two-person presence at the flight deck, something the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) mandated a long time ago. And no, that doesn't mean putting an air marshal inside the cockpit or just plain have both the pilots wear diapers...

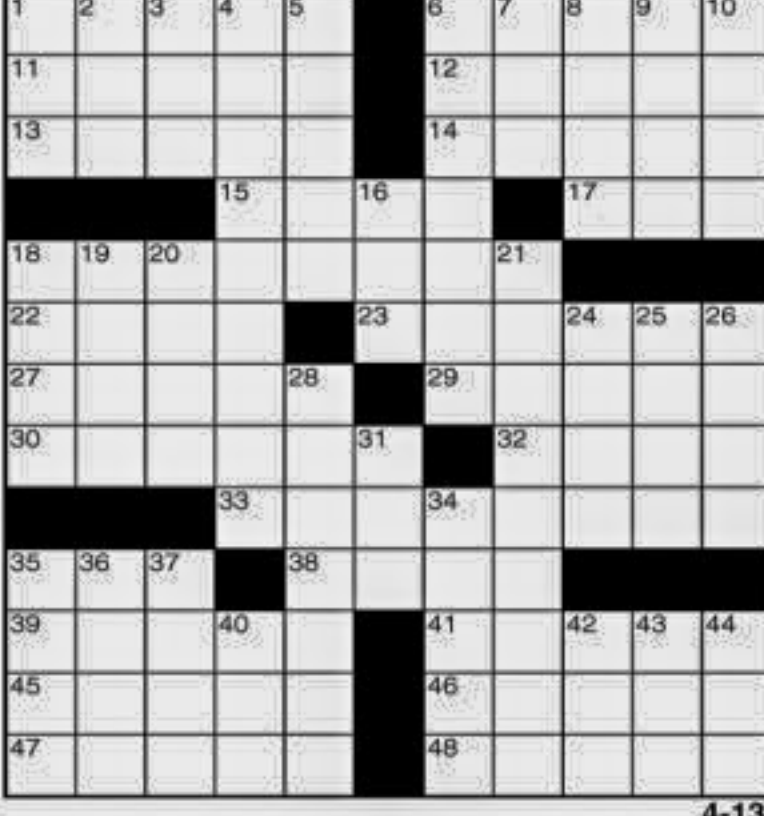
Tragic, that it takes a tragedy to push people into a trajectory to action. I just hope that regulators, both aviation and healthcare, don't work at the speed of the International Cricket Council. For once, let's make foresight, instead of hindsight, a 20-20 vision.

The writer is an engineer & CEO turned comedian (by choice), the host of NTV's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and the founder of Naveed's Comedy Club. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

**QUOTABLE Quote**  
To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

## CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- Respond to stimuli
  - Title for Vader
  - Snow house
  - Scarlett's last name
  - From the Arctic
  - "Be quiet!"
  - Edinburgh native
  - Sock part
  - London airport
  - Wicked
  - Makes blank
  - Army healer
  - Abs strengthener
  - Bride-to-be's agreement, for short
  - Mystery writer Woods
  - Atomic orbiter
  - Pub drink
  - One of the Beatles
  - Ring figure
  - Obama's veep
  - Island off Naples
  - Deeply impressed
  - Derivative sound
  - Surrendered
- DOWN**
- Tear
  - Sense of self
  - Everything
  - Country's edge, often
  - Flashlight, in Britain
  - Clinic group
  - "That's it!"
  - Crazy talk
  - Half a sextet
  - Loathe
  - Mine rock
  - Cordage fiber
  - At any time
  - Staff member
  - What weight watchers watch
  - Flag feature
  - Continental coin
  - Reach across
  - Poodle party
  - Pod item
  - Of volume
  - Basics
  - Bank offering
  - Trade fair
  - Make mistakes
  - Mom's mate
  - Ram's mate
  - Homers neighbor



## Yesterday's answer

C	I	T	E	S		S	A	M	B	A						
E	N	E	M	Y		O	D	O	R	S						
A	T	T	I	C		D	O	J	O	S						
S	O	R	T	O		P	E	S	E	T						
E	T	A				P	E	S	E	T						
S	O	S				H	A	Y	M	O	W					
						M	A	R	C	O						
						C	R	E	N	N	A					
						P	H	A	N	T	O	M	E	R	A	
						L	A	T		T	O	M	C	A	T	
						A	C	H	E	D		R	A	I	S	E
						C	H	E	E	R		E	L	D	E	R
						E	A	R	L	Y		S	E	E	D	Y

## CRYPTOQUOTE

KJTIYXGDOW DG KDZDTK SYXJ OAMT WYH BMT, MTU VXDUJ DG OMFDTK QJGG OAMT WYH TJJU. -- FAMQDQ KDNXMT

**YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE: BEING COOL IS BEING YOUR OWN SELF, NOT DOING SOMETHING THAT SOMEONE ELSE IS TELLING YOU TO DO.**  
-- VANESSA HUDGENS

## A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

## BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



## HENRY

by Don Trachte

