

## Online writers and activists must be protected

*An impartial, meticulous probe is crucial*

THE serial killing of bloggers in Bangladesh, with little development as far as catching and punishing the assassins are concerned, has compelled the Human Rights Forum (Bangladesh) to call upon the government to provide protection to online writers/activists, many of them still on the hit-list of religious extremists. Rajib Haider, Avijit Roy, Oyasiqur Rahman and Ananta Bijoy Das -- all killed by fanatics -- were on the hit-list of 84 individuals of the militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team as reported by a Bangla daily. Ominously Hefajat-e-Islam had given to the Home Minister, the same 84 names of people this organisation considered 'anti-Islam'.

Such 'coincidences' point to increasing threats to individuals who dare to post on blogs, opinions that might be construed as anti-religion. What is not palatable is the government's seeming reluctance to deal with such organised, serial killings, with a strong, full-proof strategy. The HRFB has demanded an independent commission to probe the murders because of its misgivings regarding the impartiality of law enforcement agencies.

The recent death threats by apparently the same organisation to Dhaka University's Vice Chancellor and nine other prominent people that include university professors and social activists should be more reason for the government to catch these fanatical, anti-state criminals and bring them to book. Terror and militancy can only be combated if the government steps up its counter-terror strategies with sincerity and zeal.

## Providing jobs for transgender community

*A welcome move*

WE are heartened to note that the government is taking active steps to integrate the marginalised transgender community into mainstream society. According to a Daily Star report, the Prime Minister's Office has instructed the social welfare ministry to rehabilitate this community, beginning with offering them various service-oriented jobs, including in the police.

This is undoubtedly a welcome move by the government, as currently a majority of the transgender community do not have access to regular employment. Shunned by society and discriminated against by state and non-state institutions, they often have no option but to make a living from seeking donations, sometimes aggressively. Giving them skills-development training and creating employment opportunities for them in different sectors, particularly in the police, would go a long way, we hope, towards incorporating them in the formal economy and enable them to lead a dignified life. In addition, it would help in changing people's discriminatory mindsets regarding the transgender community, and begin a much-needed conversation about the cruel way we treat people we find different.

The government has undertaken a few positive initiatives over the years to address the discrimination faced by this community, including recognising hijras as the third gender. In the current fiscal year, the government allocated Tk. 4.5 crore for distribution among members of the community in 21 districts. However, the distribution of meagre allowance would not significantly improve the plight of a historically marginalised community. Measures must be taken at the policymaking and societal levels to change the root causes of their deprivation and discrimina-

## Dhaka as a people-friendly, liveable city

RIDWAN QUAIUM

ONE of the primary tasks of the new mayors of Dhaka should be to turn Dhaka into a people-friendly, liveable city. In this regard, I would suggest the following steps that can be considered by the city's mayors to restore Dhaka's beauty and glory in the eyes of its residents.

**Restore parks:** Parks are one of the essential public places that make a city liveable. City dwellers gather in parks to feel refreshed and relaxed and the greenery around these areas help to cool down the city's temperature. The existing parks should be renovated, the parks that have been lost due to illegal encroachment should be retrieved and new parks should be built in every residential community.

**Pedestrian-friendly roads:** A pedestrian-friendly environment encourages people to walk to places that are within walking distance rather than using motorised transports. To provide a pedestrian-friendly environment, a continuous, spacious, clean, and well-maintained network of sidewalks and safe and convenient road-crossing facilities such as pedestrian foot-over bridges, underpasses or properly demarcated crosswalks at regular intervals should be provided.

**Public transport:** The city bus service should be monitored to ensure that the buses are fit and clean, the buses are operated with licensed drivers adhering to road safety and traffic rules and passengers are treated with care. Regular drives should be carried out to ensure that the auto-rickshaws and taxis are running by the meter and not turning down passengers.

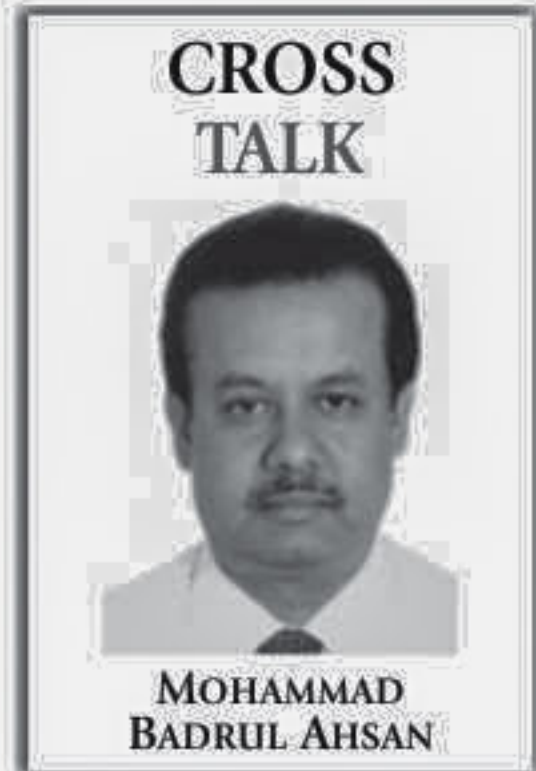
**Relocate factories:** Factories and warehouses require a lot of land-space and factories generally employ many people, thus adding pressure land and transportation facilities. It also causes pollution and safety threat to the city dwellers. This is why in liveable cities, factories and warehouses are located outside the city.

**Dustbins:** Placing dustbins at regular intervals in public places and emptying them regularly encourages people to discard trash in the dustbins rather than littering. This helps to keep the city clean and hygienic.

**Public toilets:** Public toilets are as critical as any other infrastructure to make cities liveable. Public toilets are even considered an integral part of civic amenities. The existing public toilets should be maintained regularly, and new clean and hygienic public toilets with proper sanitation should be provided across the city.

The writer is a transportation engineer working in Thailand.

# A dead man walking in far away Shillong



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

NOTHING of what happened to Rip Van Winkle has happened to Salahuddin Ahmed. The colonial British-American villager of Dutch ancestry in the short story by Washington Irving fell asleep after drinking moonshine in a mountain, whereas the BNP leader was allegedly abducted from his hideout in Uttara before being allegedly dropped to graze in an Indian town full of

frowns. Twenty years elapsed before Van Winkle woke up from his slumber, and Ahmed's ordeal lasted only two months. That difference makes all the difference because the former returned to a whole new world, and the latter to the same lame one.

Back in his village, Rip Van Winkle recognised nobody. His wife had died and his close friends had either fallen in a war or moved away. He got into trouble when he proclaimed himself a loyal subject of King George III, not aware that the American Revolution had taken place. He didn't even notice that King George's portrait was replaced with one of George Washington. Van Winkle was also disturbed to find his namesake, unaware the man was his grown-up son.

One could argue that Ahmed has also woken up in a new world of some sort. He has resurfaced in a new country where everything appeared strange to him except that his memories still connected him to the past and haunted him. It wasn't for nothing that he

looked lost, and the townfolks thought he had a mental condition.

To think of it, it has been a reverse journey for Salahuddin Ahmed. He landed in a foreign country instead of returning to his own. He is fortunate to be alive but also unfortunate at the same time because he wasn't gone long enough from his familiar world. He remembered he had a wife and wanted to talk to her. He remembered what happened to him, although one supposes he has left unspoken more than he has spoken already. That hope is dissipating fast as we hear that he may be suffering from memory loss.

Up until now, he remembers others as passionately as others remember him. There's no change of portrait to indicate a change of government in his country where he's still a wanted man. The circumstances surrounding his reappearance are still shrouded in mystery as much as those surrounding his disappearance.

The physical condition in which he was found has baffled many. He was reasonably clean-faced wearing decent clothes, and his shoes had near mirror shine. His face carried no marks giving the impression he was blindfolded for a long time. One couldn't have looked so fresh and foppish if one were detained against one's will for two months!

Then again, others wonder how a former state minister and civil servant could be so stupid to enter a foreign country without valid papers. Why did he take that infantile risk? How could a political heavyweight of this country allow it to reduce himself into the butt of a joke in a foreign land? The reddest of herrings, of course, is why an Interpol alert was so ostentatiously issued, not after he went missing but

after he was found.

These questions can be answered in as many ways as one likes. It could be that the former BNP spokesman didn't feel safe to return home. It could be that he wished to stay in the custody of Indian police instead of giving himself up to the police in his own country. It's also possible he was abducted and taken across the border before being dumped like an expired product. Those who held him captive may have dressed him purposefully, much like a performer costumed for his act.

At this point, the BNP leader should envy his fictional counterpart. Rip Van Winkle woke up in the natural process after the effects of the drink had worn off. But what determined the timing of Ahmed's return? Why did he choose to emerge from his hiding now if it was self-imposed? Why did his captors let go of him now if they had taken him in the first place?

Sherlock Holmes gives the hint in Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*. People reason either synthetically or analytically in order to solve a problem. The former kind is forward thinkers who put together the events in their minds and argue from them what the outcome will be. The other kind is backward thinkers who work out in their imagination the steps, which lead to the outcome.

Others are going back and forth in their minds, but the dead man walking in far away Shillong has this dilemma, which once ridiculed communist rule: You get free dental care, if the rest of the time you keep your mouth shut. He knows he has to walk in silence unless he wishes to drop dead.

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## READERS RESPOND

### "Thousands stranded at sea" (May 17, 2015)



PHOTO: AFP

If other countries don't care, Bangladesh government should send food and water by helicopter to save its own people.

**Afreen Azhari**

**Neela Haq**

Where is UNHCR? Are they sleeping?

### "I want to go back to my mother: Bangladeshi boy tells tale of horror" (May 17, 2015)

Local authorities are allegedly involved in this human trafficking nexus.

**Sam Abedin**

I am shocked at our government's silence on this matter.

**Shopnil Aakash**

Nobody from the government has so far uttered a single word about these unfortunate people floating in the sea without food and water.

**Shah Aziz**

### "Indonesian fishermen have been told not to save migrants" (May 19, 2015)

The Indonesian government seems so inhumane!

**Sakin Al Sad**

**Mohammad Kayum**

So they are letting them die before their eyes!

**Shakhawat**

Despite warnings against saving migrants from boats off the coast even if they are seen drowning, Indonesian fishermen have saved at least 1500 Bangladeshis and Rohingyas last week. It's very commendable. Their government might lack human qualities but they proved that ordinary people didn't.

**Pothik Jon Jibon**

Bangladesh government is not taking any initiative regarding this crucial

problem. I wonder what they are waiting for. Maybe they are waiting for the time when these people get jobs and send remittance!

**Shah Alam**

The stranded migrants should be rehabilitated by the concerned countries without delay.

### "Philippines offers refuge to boat people" (May 20, 2015)



PHOTO: AFP

At least, humanity is alive somewhere in the Philippines.

**Anis Rahman**

We appreciate your kind offer, Philippines.

**Abu Elias Sarker**

Lots of thanks to the Philippines government.

**Mokter Hossain**

This should be a lesson to the others.

**Abdus Sabur Babul**

At least they treated refugees as human beings, something that others didn't.

**Alam Mahmud Munna**

Philippines has set an example for other countries.

**Syeda Farjana Ahmed**

### "Bounty on Pahela Baishakh sexual assaulters" (May 18, 2015)

The police probably know each one of them but cannot take any actions probably because their hands are tied.

**Tutul Orko**

After giving them the opportunity to run away, now they are searching for the culprits. What a drama!

**Faruk Omar**

**Hero Hamada**

Who could recognise them from these blurred images?

**Salah Chowdury**

How many culprits got punished for rape and sexual harassment of women in Bangladesh? We don't want drama but action.

**Taru Takaddus**

Wow, awesome pictures! I believe, BD police had to do a lot of hard work to find these pics!

I'd, like to hand them over to the victims before turning them in. The police will probably help them to evade the law anyway.

**Arefeen Ahmed**

This generous announcement from the police after more than a month should be selected as the joke of the year 2015. We wonder why it took the police 33 long days to identify these perverts.

**Zaman Khan**

### "Uproar at city school over sexual attack" (May 17, 2015)

What a horrendous crime! I cannot imagine how a class one student could be sexually harassed.

**Abdul Hafiz Dewan**

We demand the harshest punishment for those who are involved in this heinous crime.

**MD Rasel Hossain**

The perpetrators should be given the highest punishment so that no one can dare to commit such crimes again.

**Richard Russel**

### "Sexual assault in school" (May 18, 2015)

Stern actions should be taken against the culprits.

**Shah Alam**

This is unacceptable.

**Rafiqul Islam Razu**

We need to introduce moral education in schools, colleges and universities. We must also ensure strict implementation of the law.

**Bashir Ahmed**

Our children are afraid of going to schools because of these beasts.

**Pranto**

Castration is the punishment that will send the right message to the potential perpetrators of such crimes.

**Aminul Huda**