

## Media Monitoring Centre

### What is the purpose?

WE are concerned about the government's professed move to set up a "media monitoring centre" to keep an eye on news items published in different media. We are at a loss to understand the rationale behind it when there is a Press Information Department (PID) to do that. The Information Minister is suggesting that the monitoring centre would oversee that media houses do not create divisions in the society by writing against different religions and beliefs and/or create anarchy. But when, in recent times, has the mainstream media done anything close to denigrating any particular religion or religious group or "creating divisions" in society? How has it created anarchy, such that we need a cell to police it further? Has it not, rather, promoted religious tolerance, secularism and pluralism?

We would like to state that it is the extremists who are denigrating people and their faith, killing those who do not subscribe to their particular interpretation of religion or belong to a religion or sect different than their own. These are the people that the government should be targeting and monitoring, not the media, which has consistently played a key role in fighting extremism and intolerance and promoting democracy and good governance. We also remain sceptical about who would interpret what counts as "creating divisions" or "anarchy" and on what terms.

Would we be remiss in suggesting that the purpose of this move is to regulate the materials that are deemed unfavourable to the government? This is an attempt to intimidate the media, and will lead to self-censorship on the part of media houses and severely curtail freedom of expression. Let us not forget that a free media is not just important but essential to a functioning democratic society.

## Driving on the wrong side

### Stop it once and for all

THAT the High Court had to issue a rule, asking the authorities concerned to explain by two weeks as to why they should not be directed to stop vehicles running on the wrong side of roads in Dhaka, is an indication of the lawlessness that prevails in the traffic management of the capital.

This is not the first time the highest court of the land had to instruct the authorities in this regard. We wonder why a court has to ask the police to do something that it should be doing as a part of its obligatory task. A suo moto rule issued in 2014 directed the government and the police to explain why they should not be asked to strictly enforce traffic rules to prevent some VIPs and VVIPs from driving on the wrong side of roads that increase the capital's traffic congestion. Neither party has, reportedly, bothered to submit replies to the rules until now.

It seems that traffic rule is now observed in its breach. Private cars and public transports are also frequently found in violation of traffic rules, resulting in the death of innocent people. A couple of days ago, a bus travelling on the wrong side crushed a pedestrian to death and injured seven in front of the Gabtoli Bus Terminal.

Rules should be enforced and rule breakers should be dealt with as per the law irrespective of their social standing. The recent comment of the DMP commissioner is indicative of his helplessness to control the menace. The police should think hard about why and how they seem to have lost the moral authority to uphold the law.

## COMMENTS

**"Inflation edges down on lower commodity prices"**

(May 4, 2016)

Lihan Mothin

There is nothing to be happy about. As the month of Ramadan is approaching, inflation will increase pretty soon.

**"Kuwaiti PM accorded red carpet reception in Dhaka"**

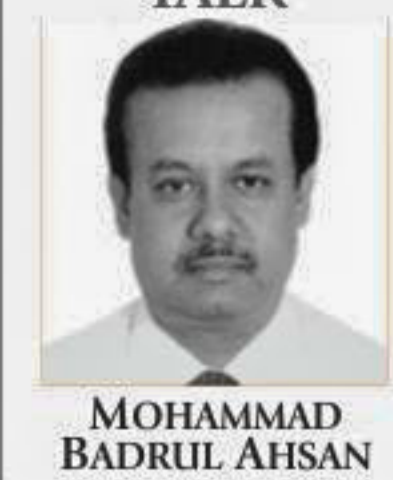
(May 4, 2016)

Liza Leonador Howlader

Hope the Kuwait government will ease the visa procedures for Bangladeshis soon.

# How much courage is needed to be cowards?

## CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

Never before has the crisis of conscience been so acute. We aren't worried because something is unfair or morally wrong. We're worried because we don't know if we should be worried at all.

Thus the biggest worry eating away this nation is worrying about worrying. If an octogenarian journalist has landed in jail, hand-on-heart not many of us know what to think of it. If a young woman was found dead, her body battered by the bestial wrath of her killers, we aren't sure if we will ever know what happened. When a university professor, two LGBT activists and a Hindu tailor are hacked to death, our minds swing like a pendulum between our gut feelings and the official versions of who killed them and why they must have been killed.

This nation is now stupefied with horror. We're afraid of what we see but don't have the courage to see what we're afraid of. We don't always know what's right and what's wrong. But the mind is akin to someone lying in bed, changing his position. It wants to toss and turn before it goes to sleep. If charity begins at home, clarity begins in mind. The mind needs its choice to enjoy that freedom.

Conscience is a lot like a skating rink, a given floor space where minds travel with roller skates. People like to engage in idle talks. They like to have discourses on relevant topics. They love to speculate, insinuate, calculate and dominate. This is how they're supposed to train their minds like flexing produces muscle gain.

How does a nation live when its people don't have the flexibility to flex their minds? These people must be able to see, think and speak, some more carefully and profoundly than others. Some of them can be uncannily accurate, some of them outrageously wrong, yet all of them must be able to express their minds without having to look over their shoulders.

Right now this nation is jittery and jumbled. Everyone walks a tightrope, and nobody knows what can get them in trouble. This country is a supermarket of cruelty, where hired hands and lunatics are free to pick

their choices arrayed on the shelves of depravity.

So the hunters are now as varied as the hunted. We have religious zealots roaming our streets, striking at anyone who draws their wrath. If these people are working like religious police, the police are religiously working to root out the rest. Dissenting minds and outspoken voices are endangered species, rest of us being covered into growing silence.

Thus our shrinking minds are shrinking our conscience. We are constrained like tenants shifting from a big house to a small apartment, forced to decide which items of value to carry with us under the space

What's happening in this country is comparable to the function of an hourglass, the sand passing from the upper to the lower bulb. People are incessantly passing from soul to body, spiritual pursuit and satisfaction depleted for physical safety and comfort. It has always been a struggle to keep the body and soul together. Only this time the body is getting all the attention, while the soul is being ignored.

Call it anything, this nation is undergoing a transformation. Rulers rule, killers kill, victims die, and the rest of us watch. We're heavy in the body but hollow in the soul. Our homes, streets and neighbourhoods are

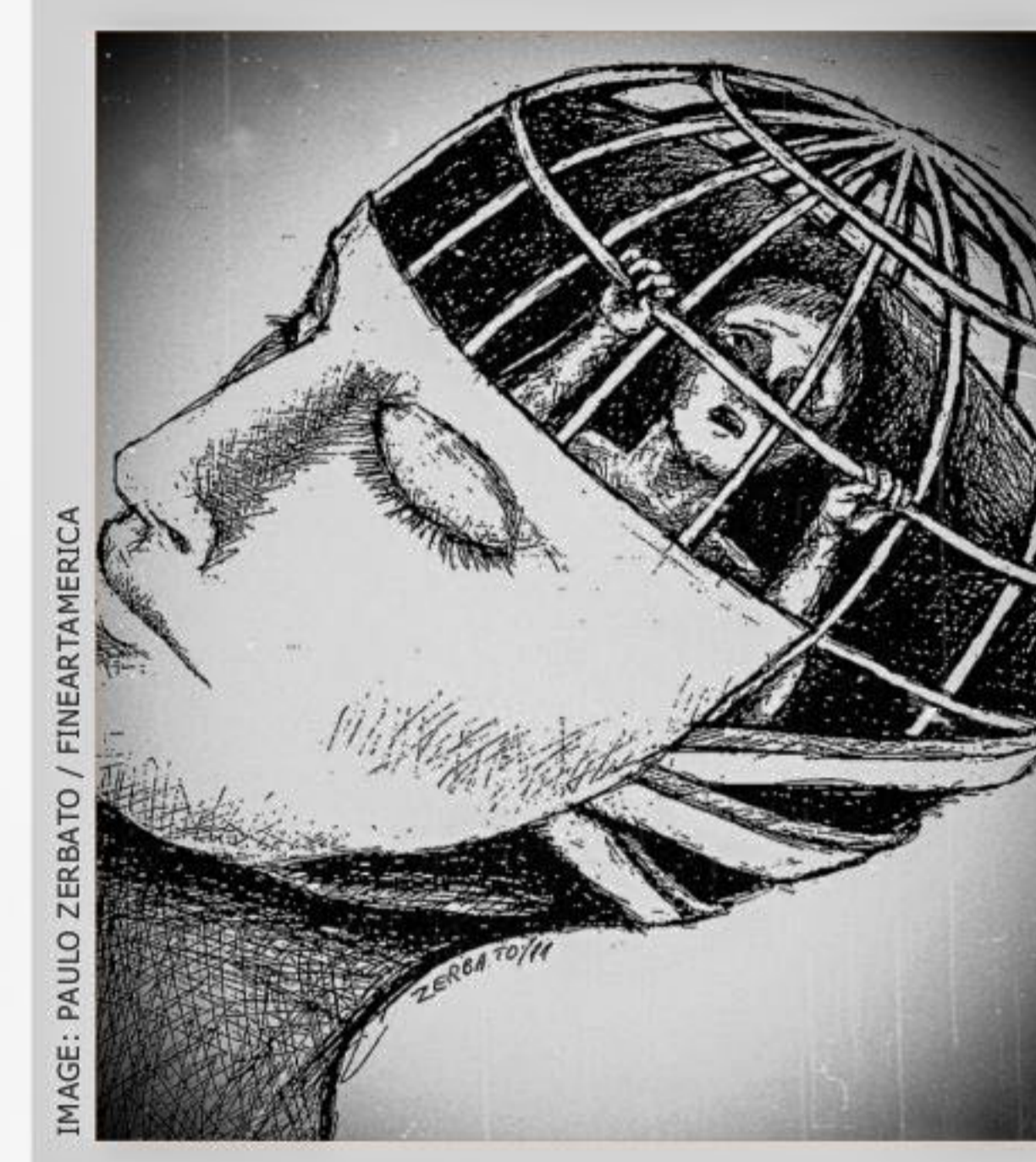


IMAGE: PAULO ZERBATO / FINEARTAMERICA

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constraint. Does it matter to be honest? Does one need to tell the truth? Is it essential to help our neighbours? Is it wrong to compromise for money and success? Which is more important between conviction and convenience?

Perhaps, the oldest trade in the world was born in the twilight zone between compulsion and convenience, between lust and lure, between guilt and gumption. In this instance, the body is the victim that may or may not torment the soul, depending on what's more important to an individual. The soul is the victim in a crisis of conscience. It may or may not torment the body for the very same reason.

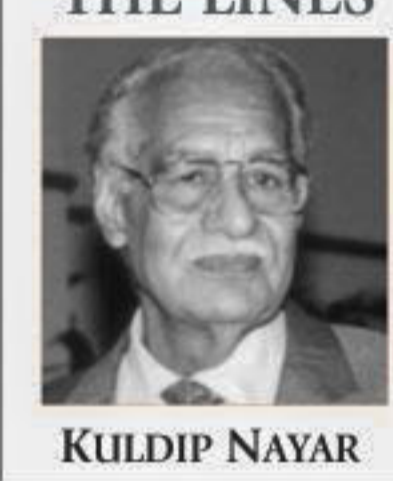
cramped with silhouettes anxious about being anxious. And in that anxiety, those silhouettes are hiding from each other.

Every country has its share of courageous people. Every country has its share of cowards. Funnily, in this country a quiet migration is taking place from one side to another. A growing number of us are getting convinced that it takes a lot of courage to be cowards.

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## Acts of commission and omission

### BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

used the money to contest elections. Babu Jagjivan Ram, the then Defence Minister, managed the funds, not letting the deals become a scandal.

The uproar today is over the kickbacks over and above the usual commission. Now, even the defence specifications are changed if the money paid is substantial. This happened in the case of the VVIP choppers' purchase. The flying altitude was lowered because AgustaWestland gave a large sum of money as bribe.

That Mrs. Sonia Gandhi has been named by an Italian court in Milan is not something conspiratorial. The judge found the eye of suspicion turning towards her. Accusations and counter-accusations will not serve the purpose. It is an open secret that Sonia Gandhi, a powerful person even at that time, was very much in the picture.

The best course available now is for the Supreme Court to constitute a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the matter de novo to know the truth, however late it is. At the same time, Parliament should appoint a committee to lay down procedures to buy defence equipment. The present committee does not have much of deterrence.

This again depends on how earnest and serious the political parties are. At present, the defence deals are the major source for the ruling political party to oil its electoral machinery. What surprises one is that the Central Bureau of

Investigation (CBI) did not have any clue as to the kickbacks and where they were coming from and going to. It is possible that the agency came to know about the truth but did not reveal it, because the "parrot is caged", to use a description given by a political party.

This only strengthens the plea, underlined in these columns earlier, that the CBI should be made an independent agency, directly answerable to Parliament alone. The fact that no major political party thinks on those lines indicates that all of them are aware of the advantage of having the CBI as a government

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department.

Retired CBI directors have gone on record saying that the pressure exerted by ruling parties is so relentless that the agency has no option except to yield to their demands. Even when the public outcry is against a corrupt chief minister, he can choose to appoint his wife in his

place, ignoring the protests.

Corruption in all the three neighbouring countries - India, Pakistan and Bangladesh - has become a way of life. A politician's standard of living is now so high that the emoluments which he gets are not adequate to meet his expenses. Ultimately, it is the money that makes the mare go.

Gone are the days when a Member of Parliament thought that his was a service to the country. A salary of Rs. 500 was the limit that Mahatma Gandhi had fixed. Even from this amount, a donation had to be given to the party. Once the generation of those who came through the fire of freedom struggle disappeared, questions were raised about the amount fixed as emolument for MPs.

The current demand of MPs to double their emolument has been discussed in the Parliament Affairs Committee when the members asked for a raise. It would be understandable and fair if emoluments were linked to the rising costs of living. But the media, particularly television networks, make such a hue and cry regarding this issue that no political party dares to suggest an increase in the salary of legislators. Therefore, they look for other avenues. It is an open secret that many get a regular payback from corporate and business houses, and even public sector undertakings.

When people are in power, they often try to add to their income from different sources. Legislators cannot overcome the temptation. Top retired government officials also take the same path. For example, former Air Chief S.P. Tyagi has apparently helped his family members in the chopper deal. The local bribe-takers have already been punished by the Italian court and they are serving the sentence. But in India, the guilty are yet to be brought to book.

It is interesting that as many as 20 journalists have also been named among

the bribe takers. Their names are with the government. Why has this list not been made public is intriguing. Did politics or personal equations come in between? Whatever the reason, the public has the right to know the names of the journalists because they preach morality all the time but are found wanting when it comes to practicing the same.

It is the duty of the Editors Guild to see that the names of the accused journalists are made public without delay. But then I recall that in one meeting, when it was suggested that editors should make their assets public, there was little response from the members of the Guild. Even the Press Council has not been able to lay down any rule whereby editors, when appointed, are made to declare their assets. Sting operations may be a new way to find the truth, but they are more sensational in nature than in content. This has also become another avenue to extort money.

Statements made by Defence Minister Manohar Parikkar seemed to uncover certain scandals but the purpose seems to be more political in nature than anything worthwhile. The problem of commission in defence is still a blatant one. The solution can be found only when politics is pushed into the background and the genuine intent of public good comes to the fore.

Even if all political parties adopt a code of ethics, they will not be able to adhere to it both in letter and spirit. The Central Vigilance Commission is of little use because it is influenced by the government in power. Now the only way out seems to be a permanent SIT-like outfit under the supervision of the Apex Court. Even RBI governor Raghuram Rajan, who raised expectations, has failed to fulfil them.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Sound pollution due to honking horns

The residents living around the Airport Road, Abdullahpur and Uttara have been suffering tremendously from sound pollution, created mostly by the honking of horns. It is almost impossible to sleep at night. Even children can't concentrate on their studies. From Airport Intersection to Abdullahpur, drivers honk horns almost all the time. There are schools and hospitals on both sides

of this busy road. So, most of the sufferers are students and patients. The worst sound polluters are the long distance buses as they love to honk horns without any reason. This practice must be stopped.

We earnestly request the traffic division, DMP to take immediate measures to stop this malpractice by the drivers.

Kazi Rafiqul Hassan  
Uttara, Dhaka

### Reschedule office timing, reduce traffic jam

Dhaka has been suffering from paralyzing traffic jam for the last few years. The existing roads are not enough to accommodate the huge number of vehicles. Continuous rise of the number of vehicles and increasing population have made the situation even worse. In order to reduce traffic jam to some extent, I think, the office timing of different organisations should be rescheduled. If the government can do this, the rush on roads during office hours will decrease. Thus commuters will get some relief.

Md. Ashraf Hossain  
Bashabo, Dhaka



PHOTO: STAR

### Israeli injustice

The world knows that Israel is being unfair in its selfish possession of Palestine, refusing to share the region with its original inhabitants. The whole world is telling them to do the right thing, but do they listen? No! Do they pay any attention to the United Nations? No! They don't care if the whole world says that they are wrong. It doesn't matter to them at all.

Ted Rudow III, MA  
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