

Aniruddha returns

But many questions remain!

ANIRUDDHA Roy, a businessman who went missing nearly three months ago has returned home. However, it would help everyone to know the identity of his 'benefactors' who took the trouble of dropping him home in the very early hours of the morning. But Aniruddha's return, although a great relief for the family, and his subsequent written statement to the media, have raised several questions in our minds, as has the disappearance of all the others.

Aniruddha is among the fifty nine people who have disappeared since August 22 this year under doubtful circumstances. Of them eight have returned. Two of them are political figures who were shown arrested seventeen days after they had gone missing.

The circumstances of these disappearances are suspicious. Some of them were picked up in broad daylight from the streets like Aniruddha, or from home at night. And almost all the victims' relatives point to the law enforcing agencies as the abductors.

It is strange that most of those who are lucky enough to return are absolutely tightlipped about what had happened to them in the interregnum. We wonder why? Is it a loss of memory or fear of greater retribution should they open their mouth? Is there a correlation, or is it mere coincidence, that the two arrests and one reappearance, happened soon after the very self-assured statement of the home minister that the law enforcers would find those who had gone missing or they would return?

Abductions and disappearances engender a climate of fear in the public mind. Aniruddha has pointed fingers at some people. And the matter must be investigated thoroughly, most of all for the credibility of the system and public confidence in it. Furtive actions, as a matter of routine, is counterproductive, and may be replicated by criminal gangs.

Decay of Hatirjheel project

Protect Dhaka's largest fresh water body

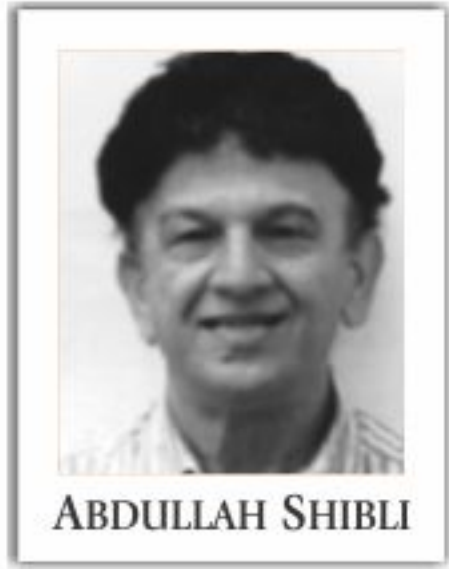
FOR several years now, the Hatirjheel project has been slowly declining in character from what was considered a classic example of environmental restoration to another urban wasteland. A photograph published in *The Daily Star* on November 18 depicts a dismal picture of the polluted, sewerage-ridden water body near Tongi Diversion Road.

When the project was inaugurated in 2013, it was an admirable step taken to resolve the drainage problem of the city. But only a few months after inauguration, the project began to lose its charm because of Dhaka's poor waste management system. Dumping of solid waste and outflow of sewage into the lake have created environmental hazards for the residents of the area for quite some time now. The waste management system in a growing city is a challenge that must be planned well in line with the city's expansion. The current state of the Hatirjheel project is yet another example of poor urban planning.

What was originally the largest surface freshwater body in the capital is fast becoming the largest polluted water body of the city. There is no time to waste on deliberations anymore. Urgent action must be taken to control the situation before it gets further out of hand. We urge that this matter be treated with serious concern and appropriate bodies i.e. WASA and Rajuk, immediately take all necessary measures to arrest the situation.

ROHINGYA CRISIS

Diplomacy and economic sanctions must go hand in hand



ABDULLAH SHIBLI

THE US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, sent mixed messages at the news conference in Naypyidaw, Myanmar, at the conclusion of his brief visit to Myanmar on November 15. While he indicated that the US was deeply concerned by reports of atrocities committed by Myanmar's security forces, he was lukewarm about economic sanctions against the country. This will undoubtedly muddy the waters further since it is evidently clear that the country's military can only be persuaded away from its past policies and behaviour towards the Rohingya minority by a combination of diplomacy, sanctions, and universal condemnation.

It is time for the international community to use the various instruments available including individual and collective sanctions. In the press conference where he stood alongside State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and expressed his reservations about "broad-based economic sanctions," Mr Tillerson endorsed a parallel strategy. "If we have credible information that we believe to be very reliable that certain individuals were responsible for certain acts that we find unacceptable, then targeted sanctions on individuals very well may be appropriate." Unfortunately, all these "ifs" and "buts" can only prolong the crisis and cause further suffering to the more than 600,000 refugees. The whole world can see what is happening and has happened since August 25 when the security forces in Myanmar unleashed their wrath on an innocent and defenceless population.

In this context, one could ask Mr Tillerson, when credible sources such as the UN, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have documented the murders, persecution, and other forms of brutalities committed against the Rohingyas, what further credible information are needed before the US government can take further actions? Matthew Smith, head of Fortify Rights, the advocacy group, did not mince words when he said, "These crimes thrive on impunity and inaction. Condemnations aren't enough. Without urgent international action towards accountability, more mass killings are likely."

In the past, the military of Myanmar has defied international pressure during its tight grip on its political system, and its policy towards Rohingyas. Like North Korea's leaders, the military rulers of Myanmar have a big ego. They also enjoy the support from some regional allies including China, India, Japan, and Singapore. Why? One only needs to review the data on Foreign Direct Investment by these countries in Myanmar that might be at stake. So Bangladesh and other friends of Rohingyas also need to influence Myanmar's trading partners who have an influence over its military.

Myanmar's largest trading partners are China, India, Japan, Indonesia, Germany and Hong Kong. Myanmar is a net importer of oil, and a net exporter of natural gas. Its firms require refined crude oil products to produce natural gas, and while the current low oil prices are aiding the country's export revenue, an economic threat to its access to international markets will have the desired effect. Unfortunately, China torpedoed a UN Security Council "resolution"

proposed by the UK and supported by all members barring China. The Council subsequently approved an alternative version, known as "presidential statement," which became part of the council's record but "does not have the legal clout of a resolution."

On the positive side, the recent rounds of international condemnations and threats of economic and targeted sanctions against Myanmar's generals have shown modest results. Its government recently announced that it has removed Major General Maung Maung Soe from his position as the head of Western Commands in Rakhine, and replaced him with Brigadier General Soe Tint Naing.

Bangladesh and its allies could also consider, in the absence of broad economic sanctions, resorting to other measures that can target the military, its personnel, and its ability to fund its anti-humanitarian activities.



PHOTO: REUTERS

A group of Rohingya refugees, who fled from Myanmar by boat, walk towards a makeshift camp in Cox's Bazar.

Earlier this month, some US legislators including Senator John McCain introduced a legislation that would re-impose a ban on jade and rubies from the country. Congressman Eliot Engel said, "Lawmakers wanted to send a clear message with the targeted sanctions, both to the military and the civilian leadership, about the violence that has left hundreds of people dead."

Similarly, 60 human rights organisations have written to Secretary Tillerson for the US to impose sanctions under the JADE (Junta's Anti-Democratic Efforts) Act. This act empowers the US president to issue travel restrictions and financial sanctions against Burmese officials and their families in case of "gross violations of human rights in Burma or in the commission of other human rights abuses."

Another existing legislation, the Global Magnitsky Act, originally passed to punish individuals involved in human rights violations in Russia, is being considered

to provide the legal framework to target officials in Myanmar. These sanctions can take the form of asset freezes for funds held in US banks and bans on visas for coming to the US, and are applicable for senior officials, low-level officers, and even non-government associates.

Senators Ben Cardin and John McCain have asked President Trump to investigate cases involving 20 individuals or entities from nine "geographically diverse countries" for gross violations of human rights and seven individuals or entities from six different countries for acts of significant corruption. Last September, HRW and others separately submitted the names of 15 individuals from around the globe with detailed "evidentiary dossiers" on acts of barbarity perpetrated by them including torture, kidnapping, murder, sexual assault, and extortion. To allow for full

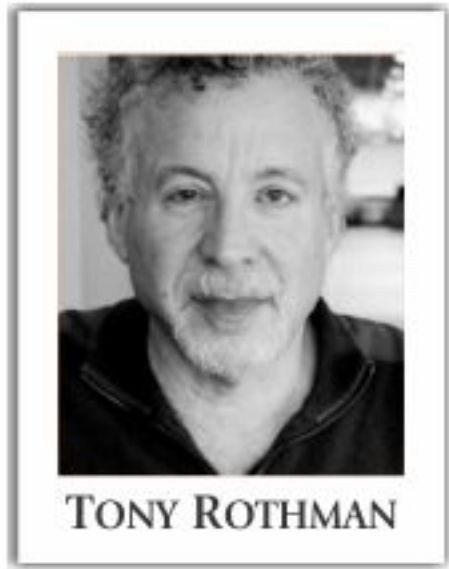
and complete vetting, the names of the individuals and entities recommended for sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Act remain confidential throughout the review process. However, this process can be applied to bring the generals of Myanmar to see the pernicious effect of their heavy-handed response to the current Rohingya crisis, and more importantly, act as a deterrent against any future acts of barbarity against Rohingyas.

On February 21, 2017, the United Kingdom passed its own version of the Global Magnitsky Act. Both the Canadian Parliament and the European Parliament are considering bills to target international human rights violators. Other countries can, and should, act along the same vein to respond to the crimes committed by Myanmar.

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PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

The Upgrade Myth



TONY ROTHMAN

FROM the pocket calculator to the Prius, I've always been what they call an "early adopter." I was a technology enthusiast, a lover of progress, eager to move into the

future. No more. With the wisdom of age, I now concede the maxim of the occasional software engineer: motion is not progress.

Any engineering process involves a series of compromises between opposing, even warring, forces: performance versus efficiency, quality versus convenience, functionality versus simplicity, cost versus everything. What decides the outcome? The marketing department. An interesting, if pointless, diversion is to imagine how our world would be different if the creators had not surrendered to the advertisers.

Marketers tell us that endless iterations of word-processing software or smartphone apps are taking us forward, by "adding new features" and "improving the user experience." More often than not, each new update and upgrade represents little improvement over the last.

Instead, new versions merely devour more memory—a tendency that has spawned the term "bloatware"—as they attempt to fix problems introduced by their predecessors, all the while creating new problems, to be addressed the next time around. The axiom "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," has been abandoned in favour of "Release today, debug forever."

The auto-upgrade mentality has also subverted what is certainly the foundational principle of engineering: "Form follows function," tested over millennia, is now all but irrelevant.

Consider the modern public washroom, outfitted with automatic hand dryers, soap dispensers, toilets, and faucets. The marketers claim that these

apparatuses are more environmentally friendly than their predecessors. While preserving the environment is a fine goal, squirming on a self-flushing toilet as it is triggered once, twice, or three times in a row fuels doubts about those efficiency claims. Likewise, sensor-operated faucets make it impossible to fill a water bottle—an eco-friendlier alternative to purchasing a new one. And the exclusive reliance on hand dryers complicates efforts to wash anything else, in particular, faces.

And it's not just washrooms. It has been about two decades since

whiteboards cannot even claim a victory in convenience, the traditional bottom-line criterion of American design.

Convenience should be a choice, not a commandment. Ballpoint pens are more convenient than fountain pens, and infinitely cheaper, but they do not write as well; word processors are faster than both, but leave little space for precious contemplation. A Gillette cartridge may seem like the most convenient shaving option, but its double-edged predecessor shaves closer, lasts longer, and ultimately costs less, given the huge mark-up on cartridges that last but a week.

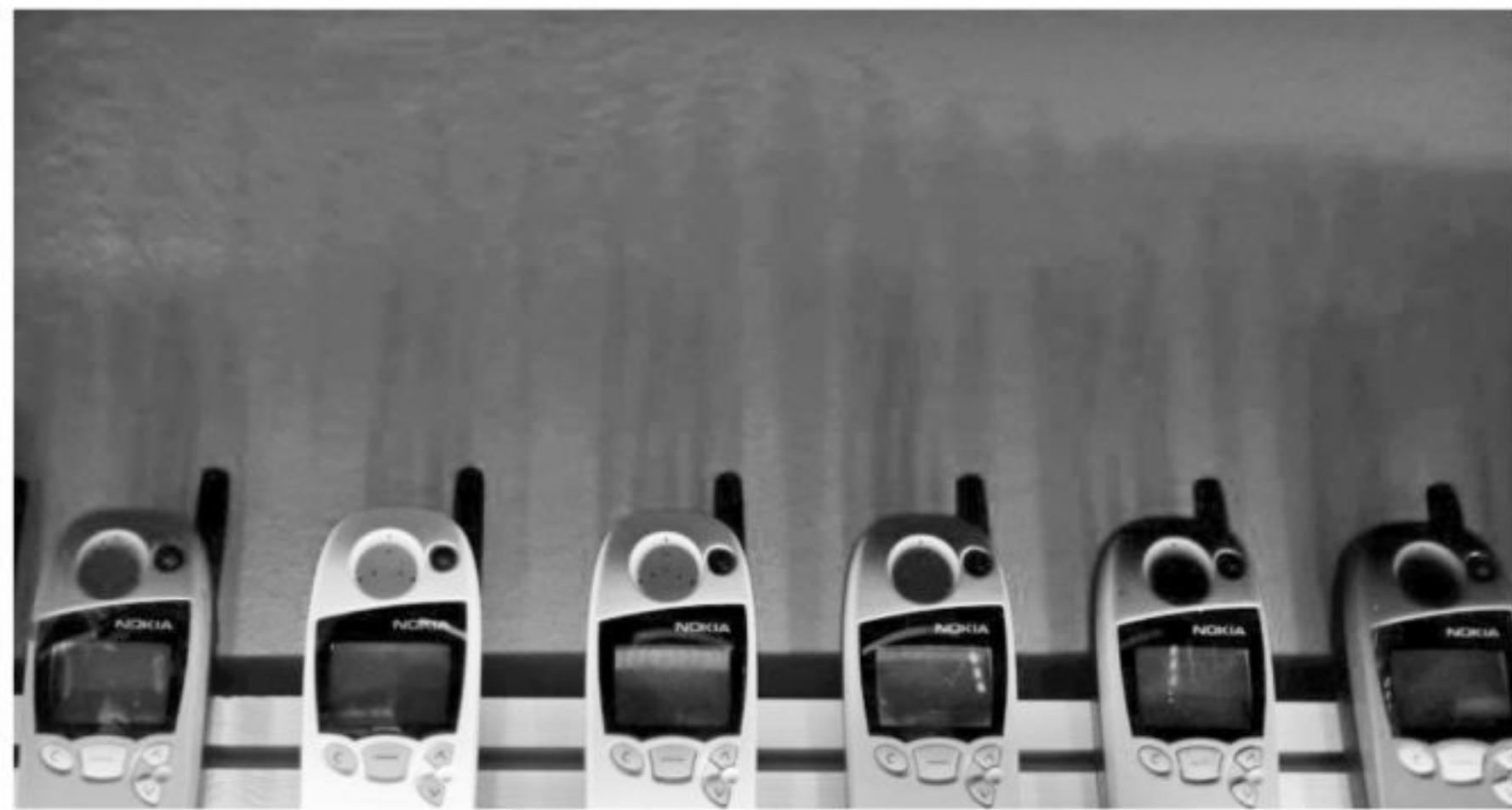


PHOTO: REUTERS

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whiteboards became *de rigueur* at universities. They were, we were told, supposed to address the danger that chalk dust posed to computers. That threat was hardly grave, and whiteboard markers are inferior to chalk in myriad ways. They are ten times more expensive, run dry quickly, and cannot be refilled. When the room temperature drops below about 12°C (or 53°F)—not as rare an occurrence as one might think—whiteboards can be erased only with a special board-cleaning agent. Replacing lecture time with erasure time,

No wiser than sacrificing all to convenience (real or marketed) is equating convenience with functionality. Devices designed for a single job virtually always do that job better than a multipurpose contraption. But the once-exalted principle of simplicity has been superseded by a new credo: the package deal.

Word processors are no longer just word processors; they are one-stop shops for creating all manner of content, from graphs to webpages. They are not the best

at anything, except perhaps dysfunction.

The process of setting up a home-theatre system is enough to drive a person to madness. Receivers come with hundreds of pages of documentation, multiple remote controls, and too many options. There are a dozen functions for each knob—functions that most users will never need. A nine-year-old might master the labyrinthine process; a physicist might not. The counterargument is that the cost to the manufacturer is the same for a complicated device as for a simple one—the chip does not change—which only goes to show that customer care has ended.

The triumph of functionality over simplicity is most apparent in the mobile phone, a product that has transformed how we do just about everything—except talk on the phone. My mother's century-old house contains several generations of telephones; the best audio quality is found in a 1960-vintage wall phone with a dial. By comparison, modern mobile phones offer abysmal audio quality. Add to that a tendency to heat up over the course of conversation, and it seems that the mobile phone's main impact on voice communication has been to discourage it.

Turning, finally, to death, the AK-47 has been the world's most popular weapon for some 50 years. New generations of rifles simply can't beat its reliability, resilience, and, yes, simplicity. This is not to say that it would be impossible to improve upon the weapon's design, just as it isn't to say that a wall phone built in 1960 is the best phone that could be built. But we will never do so if we allow ourselves to believe that newer, shinier, and more complex necessarily means better. The truth is that it often means just the opposite.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Ethnic cleansing indeed!

There is a general consensus among human rights experts that the Rohingyas are the most persecuted community in the world. Many countries have expressed their concerns about what the UN called "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing" in Myanmar.

However, the US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has recently said that he needed more information to determine whether the Rohingya persecution constituted "ethnic cleansing." This is disturbing, given that there is already mounting evidence showing that ethnic cleansing has indeed been committed against the Rohingya minority.

There are endless satellite images and video clips that can prove the case, as well as testimonies of thousands of refugees who described the horrors—killings, rapes and arson attacks—that the Myanmar army and Buddhist mobs inflicted on them.

I wonder what stopped the US from calling it what it is: ethnic cleansing. What more proof do they need before they take any action?

Akib Sumon, *By email*

Non-cadre conundrum

Despite being qualified to be a BCS cadre official, many candidates are appointed as non-cadre and even second-class officers due to a "shortage" of cadre posts. After the 36th BCS exams, for example, about 60 percent of the successful candidates were recommended for non-cadre or second-class officer positions.

It is a well-known fact that there are thousands of cadre and non-cadre posts lying vacant in various ministries and departments. But the Bangladesh Public Service Commission cannot fulfil the posts even after BCS exams, in the absence of requisitions from the departments concerned, hence the appointment of qualified candidates in lower-ranking posts.

I would like to urge the respective authorities to send requisitions for their vacant posts, so that justice is done to those who deserve a cadre position.

Md. Alerasul, *By email*