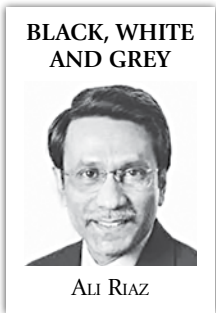


US Election 2020: What Biden Must Do



BLACK, WHITE AND GREY

WITH the national conventions behind, Democratic Presidential candidate Joe Biden and Republican candidate incumbent Donald Trump, are now on the campaign trail. The election is front and centre of media coverage, while the death toll from the coronavirus pandemic is on the rise again. The national opinion polls show that Joe Biden is ahead of Trump, but the election is eight weeks away. Whether Biden can manage to hold on to the lead and defeat Trump is contingent on various factors, but Biden's camp needs to be cognisant of two things: avoid the Trump Trap, and win some of the battleground states, particularly the three Midwestern states Democrats lost to Trump in 2016.

In the past days it has been evident that the battle line between the two candidates has been clearly drawn—the battle is between restoring “law and order” in the face of “chaos and mayhem” and an “incompetent presidential record” exemplified by the death of 180,000 American citizens and over six million infections. The former is the central platform of Trump's campaign, the latter is of Biden's. For Biden, the most difficult task is to balance two aspects—to show that he is not condoning violence, yet underscoring that the problem today America is facing is not the absence of law and order but a pandemic which is a result of mismanagement. Republicans have always portrayed Democrats as soft on crime and sympathetic to law breakers. Trump has amplified the message like Richard Nixon did in 1968. For Trump it is not new, in the 2016 election his message was the same—“I am the law and order president”, he declared in July of 2016 at a rally and

tweeted on July 12: “This election is a choice between law, order & safety—or chaos, crime & violence. I will make America safe again for everyone.”

Trump and the Republican Party has decided to ignore the pandemic and entirely focus on their message. They think that “fear mongering works”. At least it worked in 2016. Biden cannot ignore the ongoing popular protests as he and the Democratic Party have supported the demands of the Black Lives Matter movement, promised to reform the criminal justice system, and address institutional racism. But he must condemn the violence as well, however sporadic these incidents may be. Biden has done so on Monday in Philadelphia while starting his in-person campaign. He challenged Trump to condemn violence of both the left and right, which Trump not only declined to do, but openly supported Kyle Rittenhouse of Kenosha's violence. Seventeen-years old Kyle Rittenhouse is charged with killing two protestors and injuring one with an AR-15 assault rifle during a protest on August 25. Protests ensued after police killed Jacob Blake, a black youth, on August 23 in front of his children when he was trying to get into his car.

Trump has also spread fringe conspiracy theories without any evidence that a plane full of agitators travelled to DC during the Republican National Convention. He was suggesting that a group of “radical left” agitators are traveling to places to create “chaos”, and implied that the Democratic Party is behind this. Interestingly, Trump has ignored the fact that Kyle Rittenhouse travelled from the state of Illinois to Wisconsin, unlawfully carried a lethal weapon, and engaged in violence while offered justification for Rittenhouse's shooting.

In the past week, especially since the Republican Convention, Trump has exclusively focused on this message. Trump is banking on its success. Kellyanne Conway, the outgoing advisor to President Trump, said on August 27: “the more chaos and anarchy and

vandalism and violence reigns, the better it is for the very clear choice on who's best on public safety and law and order.” Conway was the campaign manager of Trump in 2016 and knows what their supporters like.

For Biden, the challenge is not to walk into the “Trump Trap” of shifting the focus to Law and Order, abandoning the strong case he and the Democrats have so far made against Trump's re-election. It is imperative for his

They are Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas and Wisconsin. It is the first time in a long time that so many states are considered as “battleground states”. It is interesting that the number of battleground states has increased when the country seems to be more polarised than ever before. The number has grown this year because some of the previously solid Republican states are now being considered as

Michael Moore, who correctly predicted the Trump victory in 2016, has already warned about Michigan. In 2016, Hillary Clinton ignored Michigan and lost by 10,704 votes, a 0.23 percent margin, the narrowest margin of victory in Michigan's presidential election history. The same is true for Wisconsin, a state Hillary lost by 0.77 percent of votes, 22,784 votes, a 0.23 percent margin, the narrowest margin in a presidential election for the state in 176 years.

With the pandemic raging through the country and the situation becoming increasingly worse, the question is how to reach out to voters? Unlike Trump, Biden cannot be reckless and organise large gatherings; it will undercut his campaign message that the voters are still unsafe. On the other hand, if he does not show up, it will be considered as a repeat of Hillary Clinton. Besides, invisibility will hurt Biden badly. Trump has remained on the trail and will garner coverage—as the incumbent president and by making outrageous statements—either in person or on twitter. Trump will portray Biden as weak and hiding in his basement. The Biden camp has already bought a significant amount of ad time on television and social media targeting these battleground states. But yet, Biden-Harris will need to show up. A two-prong strategy, to bring back the states Hillary lost to Trump, and expand the presence in the battleground states are imperative for Democrats.

British Prime Minister Harold Wilson once said, “a week is a long time in politics”. We are eight weeks away from the election and it is an unusual time. Predictions have been wrong in 2016, early indications gave way to last-minute surprises. Avoiding the surprises this time requires avoiding the Trump trap and winning back the battleground states.

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Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden and his running mate Kamala Harris.

PHOTO: MANDEL NGAN/AFP

campaign that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris stay on point and continue to press on the president for his incompetency.

The second thing the Biden campaign must do is to reach out to the voters in battleground states, but not at the expense of its bases. In the US elections, there have been a few states which are neither solidly Democratic nor Republican. In the previous elections they have shifted from one party to another. These states tend to emerge as the deciding factor in a tightly contested election. They are called “battleground states”. Previously they were only a handful. This year the number is quite large. By one account it's 11.

Rage, rage against the ragging in the campus



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

ENGLISH professors are known for being sticklers for rules. Even if I try to disassociate myself from the grammar Nazis, there are times when I have to wonder about the usage of certain words. The word “rag”, for instance, is a fine example, which, in our local context, has “seen a different pulse” (“dekhosh nari”) in Satyajit Ray's “dictionary”.

Oxford English Dictionary offers a long list of meanings under the entry “rag”. The ones that I am interested in involve, as verbs: a) Make fun of (someone) in a boisterous manner; b) Rebuke severely; and, as nouns, a) A programme of stunts, parades, and other entertainments organised by students to raise money for charity, e.g. “rag week”; b) A boisterous prank or practical joke. None of them are appropriate in the sense we use it on a daily basis.

I guess my colleagues at the University of Dhaka could not decide on the meaning of the word either. On Wednesday, a meeting of the university's Academic Council decided to ban celebrating “inhuman, brutal, and unethical” festivals in the name of “rag day”. The following day, “the authorities issued another press release claiming that the information regarding banning rag day was misrepresented inadvertently in the press release that was issued yesterday” (DS, September 3, 2020).

Surely the authorities did not think it through before imposing such a ban. Even the sudden withdrawal is tagged with the formation of an

“ethical committee review” clause, suggesting they are still mulling over it. Judging from their quick response, it is obvious that they backtracked sensing that the student search engine went into overdrive, and social media was becoming heated.

Students, both present and former, did not like the “reactionary” move. Why would one deem the graduation party, or the celebration of the end of academic life, as “inhuman, brutal

Jokes apart, these men and women had their first brush with the campus with an unsavoury phenomenon that involves another denotation of “rag”. Ragging is a term used probably in the subcontinent (and Sri Lanka). Its US equivalence is hazing or the initiation ceremonies that you see among fraternities and sororities. It is argued, that hazing in the US institutions were introduced by the army men who returned to campus after WWI. It was

asked to sing an obscene song); dress code ragging (e.g. cross-dressing or stripping); funny introductions; sexual abuse; drug abuse; or playing the fool. There is another kind involving political emasculation: the death of a Buet student Abrar is still being tried at court. To some extent, Abrar was a victim of hazing as his seniors wanted to teach him a lesson for writing something on Facebook that went against the party line or narrative.

The moment a student enters a campus, she or he has to seek the blessings of whoever is in power either to get a seat in the dorm or to live a peaceful campus life. Sometimes, these students even have to pledge that they will join all political rallies, no matter at what ungodly time they are being organised. When our students attend classes, little do we realise that there is an alternative world in the dorms, where these students often maintain (or are forced to maintain) a secret life! We hear about it only when something goes terribly wrong. Abrar is a case in point. Many known instances of suicide, derangement as atrophy of ragging has made the idea a menace.

The public universities are yet to take a strong stance against ragging. In January, the High Court even summoned UGC to take steps against campus bullying. There have not been any visible measures. Some campuses have broad brush sexual harassment policies, but ragging is a unique culture that requires proper legal attention. In India, the Supreme Court has given some strong directives that allowed many of the states to curb ragging. The definition of ragging used in *University of Kerala v Council of Principals College in Kerala* is quite useful in our context. I quote it in its entirety: “the form of systematic and sustained physical, mental and sexual abuse of fresh

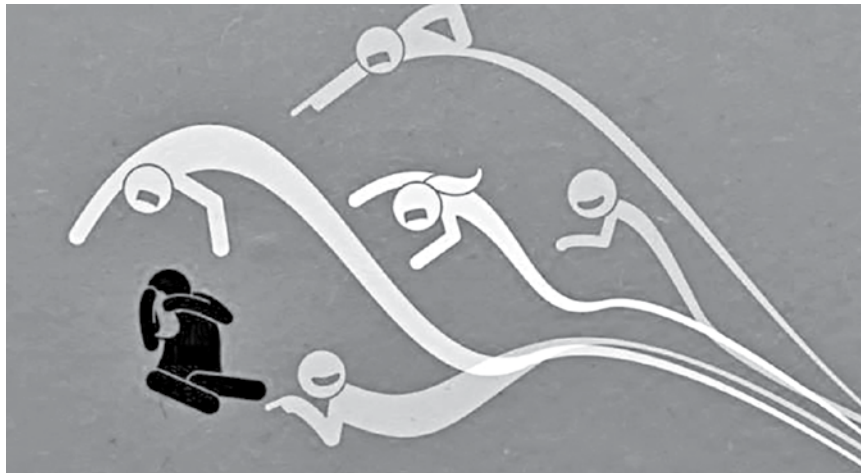
students at the college/ University any other educational institution at the hands of senior students of the same institutions and sometimes even by outsiders. It also means causing, including, compelling or forcing a student, whether by way of a practical joke or otherwise, to do any act which detracts from human dignity or violates his person or exposes him to ridicule or to forbear from doing any lawful activity, intimidating wrongfully restraining, wrongfully confining or by injury or by using criminal force to him or by holding him any threat of such intimidation, wrongful restraint or confinement or injury or the use of criminal force” (Sinde 2017).

There is a fine line between practical jokes and intrusion of privacy. Students, pumped up by their adrenaline rush, often fail to separate the two. Earlier this year, when a student of Jagannath University became ill after ragging, even the education minister said that the time had come to change our mindsets. There were even demands that the parliament should pass laws to stop the menace of ragging.

Ragging should be stamped out because it is “inhuman, brutal, and unethical”; rag day is a different kettle of fish. There can be guidelines to control the celebration so that the mirth making does not cause nuisance like the use of band parties or vuvuzela while classes or exams are being held. The brouhaha should be aimed at ragging, not rag day. Now that the DU academic council has moved away from its rigid stance, maybe it will finally analyse the many shades of ragging, and translate the rage against it in a productive fashion.

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and unethical”? It's true that students bring out rowdy rallies, raise funds to hold parties and concerts, and want to leave the campus with a bang. They do not want to “go gentle into the night” (Dylan Thomas). Only a hollow man would like to leave the world “not with a bang but a whimper” (TS Eliot). But these are young men in their prime youth—why restrain them from enjoying their last few hours in their protected world before they enter the jungle out there. You never know, maybe some of them will rule the jungle and get featured on newspapers, claiming, from rags to riches.

prevalent in the British army and public schools during the colonial era. In India it took a serious form, involving verbal, physical and sexual abuses, in the 1980s. *Holi* (1984) and *Three Idiots* (2009), both featuring Aamir Khan, gives us rare insights into the problem.

Ragging is an institutionalised emasculation mechanism to enfeeble and debilitate the incoming students, usually by their immediate senior batches. What started as a rag, “a boisterous prank or practical joke” has devolved and spiralled into something preposterous. These rituals usually include: verbal torture (e.g. a newbie

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



SEPTEMBER 5, 2001
Evidence provided for black hole theory

At a scientific conference in Washington, DC, this day in 2001, scientists described an observation of energy flares that provided strong evidence of the theorised black hole at the centre of the Milky Way Galaxy.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Musical phrases

6 Complete

11 Knuckle-head

12 Depart

13 Power provider

14 Saudi Arabia neighbor

15 Harbor boats

17 Stop

18 Hodge-podge

22 Opposed to

23 Wild ones

27 Racing boat

29 Slow mover

30 Postponed

32 Thin coin

33 Tripped

35 Energy

38 Bangkok native

39 Rust, for one

41 Not match, color-wise

45 Harpoon

46 “Seascape” playwright

47 Brass section members

48 Film prize

DOWN

1 Crater part

2 Wedding words

3 In shape

4 Mountain range's edge

5 Play, as a banjo

6 Homer hero

7 Player's peg

8 Not wild

9 Flat

10 Tear

16 Yak it up

18 Schooner pole

19 Machu Picchu native

20 Ticket souvenir

21 Fliers

24 Go to sea

25 Clock reading

26 Winter glider

28 Word components

31 “Well, that's obvious!”

34 Hong Kong neighbor

35 Swanky

36 Trade fair

37 Docking spot

40 Dapper fellow

42 Jackson 5 hit

43 Cruise setting

44 That woman

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

P	E	A	T	S	B	A	B	A	R
O	L	L	I	E	O	H	A	R	E
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BEETLE BAILEY



BABY BLUES

