

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

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## Controversy over CCTV footage

### Police dithering inexplicable

OF the 19 CCTV cameras that were positioned around the various spots where the sexual assaults took place on Pahela Baishakh, the police have so far only released footages of nine cameras. It is beyond our comprehension why, six days on, the police are yet to release the footage of the Suhrawardy Udyan entrance near TSC, the spot where reportedly the worst incidents of sexual assaults took place. Even though this spot has been highlighted in the accounts of eyewitnesses from the first day, the Police Commissioner is now claiming that he is not aware that there was any camera covering the particular area! We find this claim, six days later, baffling, especially as police sources had previously confirmed that CCTV 16 was installed to monitor this very spot.

We are further aghast that, despite being in possession of the footages which clearly depict multiple instances of women being assaulted, the police refused to admit that they had any evidence of sexual assault on Pahela Baishakh for the first five days. If women being ganged up on, groped and molested does not seem like sexual assault to our law enforcement agencies, we are deeply concerned about what they think constitutes violence against women.

Additionally, there are allegations that the police released at least two youths caught by the Chhatra Union activists on April 14. There seems to be confusion as to whether the sub-inspector, who purportedly released them, has been closed or not. This needs to be clarified by the authorities without delay.

We urge the law enforcers to release the remaining footages and handle the case with the utmost urgency and sensitivity that it deserves.

## Congrats on an inspiring win

### Challenges to keep it up

IT is indeed heartening to see a spirited Bangladesh cricket team emphatically beating Pakistan in two consecutive matches by a huge margin and winning the One Day series with a match to spare.

Bangladesh's series victory also marks the return to form of its charming opener Tamim Iqbal who hit back to back centuries to single-handedly build the team's batting backbone, a ton aptly supported by Mushfiqur Rahim and other middle-order batsmen. Not only in batting, in these two matches we see a transformed and confident Bangladesh side that outshone its opponents in all the departments of cricket. Bangladeshi batters, bowlers and fielders rose to the occasion and had delivered to present the nation with this moment of glory.

We believe that Bangladesh's winning streak against Pakistan is well deserved, especially after its making it into the quarterfinals by beating much-fancied England. It can only be hoped that Bangladesh's series win against Pakistan will usher in strings of victory for the national side and it will become a team to be reckoned with in the world cricketing pecking order.

# Belt and road initiative



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THE Chinese leadership has embraced the Belt and Road initiative to be built in parallel with one another. According to the action plan of the National Development and Reform Commission, a joint body under

the ministry of foreign affairs and ministry of commerce, unveiled in March: "The Belt and Road Initiative aims to promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent sea, establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road...The connectivity projects of the Initiative will help align and coordinate the development strategies of the countries along the Belt and Road, tap market potential in the region, promote investment and consumption..." The list is an exhaustive one, but it is safe to say that China wishes to create a modern day version of the ancient Silk Road.

Indeed, looking at what is planned, the new initiative hopes to connect Asia, Europe and Africa and tap into vast economic opportunities that will encompass three continents by means of road and maritime connectivity. Visionary to say the least, some headway has already been made. What has the Western pundits worried is the success with which the Chinese have utilised financial diplomacy to make inroads into the mineral-rich Central Asian region. The same diplomacy has been used to great effect in Africa and is being replicated in Asia. With China sitting on a foreign exchange reserve of an estimated US\$3.8 trillion, much can be achieved.

While infrastructure woes can be addressed if resources are made available and China has committed considerable finances to that effect to countries in Central Asia, the problem lies elsewhere. That there will have to be seamless policy coordination with dozens of countries, i.e. intergovernmental policy coordination to negotiate and settle on large-scale projects will be one of the biggest stumbling for the venture. For a trade bloc of this magnitude to function, trade barriers will have to come down which have traditionally been resisted by developing countries.

The whole idea can only work if the governments of participating nations get onboard with their respective bureaucracies to implement the billions of dollars that will go into building the facilities in terms of infrastructure, both land and sea. Beyond infrastructure, there is a whole gamut of other issues that will have to be addressed in

## Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road



Source: xinhua

terms of developing a "unified coordination mechanism for whole-course transportation, increase connectivity of customs clearance, reloading and multimodal transport between countries". A similar set of rules, procedures and standards have to be set up for use of port facilities, coordination and maritime logistics which will go hand-in-hand with infrastructure development to handle land and sea movement of bulk goods. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation will have to become the building blocks if this initiative is to get off the ground.

Needless to say, the 'Belt and Road Initiative' is by far the most ambitious trading block of the new century. So why is China hedging its bets on the new silk road? According to Fitch Ratings, Chinese foreign trade with the resource-rich but relatively economically backward Central Asia stands at a mere US\$24.1 billion in 2014, which is about 1% of China's total exports. Yet if one looks at trade volume, that has risen 680% over the decade 2004-2014 which is more than the 654% increase in trade volume in Africa over the same period. It makes sense for China to invest in this region which is rich in mineral resources, i.e. gas, coal, oil, gold, copper, uranium, etc. Central Asia was the bread basket of the now defunct-Soviet Union. No wonder Chinese FDI is pouring into the region with a new highway connecting Kashgar with Osh in Kyrgyzstan and another between Urumqi and Almaty, Kazakhstan.

The new Silk Road's journey has already commenced and is now being moulded into the new Initiative. With wages on the rise

on mainland China, the country is hoping to export some of its manufacturing base abroad to countries like Bangladesh (for garments). While Bangladesh is moving ahead with special economic zones for countries like China, the finished products will have to be transported back for sale in the domestic Chinese market. This is where road and sea connectivity, as envisioned by China and participating countries in the proposed economic bloc will come into play.

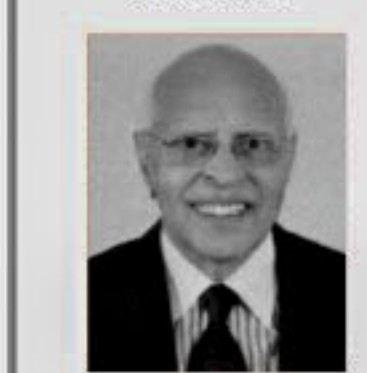
Despite what appears to be a win-win situation for all, there will be considerable obstacles to making the new initiative work. To what extent geopolitics will play a role in derailing this multinational effort is of course open to question; how will, for instance Russia, view increased Chinese presence in Central Asia, which has traditionally been considered the Russian sphere of influence. True, today's Russia is a mere shadow of the Soviet Union and given the warm relations that exists between President Putin and Xi, the Chinese largesse that will come along with the proposed economic bloc can only work to Russia's advantage in the near term. Looking beyond Russia, China will have to contend with a wary Turkey and upcoming regional power Iran. For the Belt and Road Initiative to stay its course, the political climate in the region will have to remain relatively stable which has not been one of the strong points of the Central Asian region.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

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# A new era in US-Cuba relations

## BOTTOM LINE



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

CUBA is only 90 miles from Florida. It is even closer than the US state of Hawaii. Although so close to each other, the diplomatic ties between the US and Cuba were frozen more than

five decades ago.

Obama came to office with a simple message for his country's foes: "We will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist." He believes that "engagement," combined with meeting core strategic needs, could serve American interests far better than endless sanctions and isolation. He believes that America, with its overwhelming power, needs to have the self-confidence to take some calculated risks to open important new possibilities in international relations.

Diplomacy is the first line of offense of the foreign policy of any country. President Obama understands better than most that diplomacy has always been important, if not vital, in dealing with the current dangerous and unpredictable world.

A hint of change in policy toward Cuba was first indicated on November 8, 2013 when President Barack Obama reportedly said at a fundraiser in Miami that it might be time for the United

States to revise its policies toward Cuba. "We have to be creative and we have to be thoughtful, and we have to continue to update our policies," he said.

Thereafter in December 2013 the first handshake between President Obama and his counterpart Raul Castro of Cuba took place at the memorial service for Nelson Mandela in South Africa. A senior American official Edward Alex Lee of the US State Department insisted however that the handshake was not pre-arranged, but reflected what he called the "innate graciousness" of President Obama.

In December 2014, President Barack Obama and President Raúl Castro thanked Pope Francis for helping to broker a historic deal to begin normalising relations between the United States and Cuba, after 18 months of secret talks over prisoner releases brought a sudden end to decades of cold war hostility.

In December 17, 2014, U.S. Obama said the US and Cuba have chosen "to cut loose the shackles of the past", and Castro called for the embargo to end.

High-level diplomats from Cuba and the United States met in Havana in January 2015. While the talks did not produce a significant breakthrough, both sides described them as "productive", and Cuban Foreign Ministry official Josefina Vidal said further talks would be scheduled.

At the summit of the America in Panama, US Secretary of State John Kerry met with his Cuban counterpart Rodriguez on April 9 before an encounter between Obama and Castro.

A formal meeting between Obama and Castro took place in Panama on April 11 at the summit of the Americas and they shook hands in the first substantive face-to-face US-Cuba talks in more than 50 years.

President Castro reportedly said "In my opinion, Obama is an honest man ... I admire him. I think his behaviour has a lot to do with his humble background, we are willing to discuss everything but we need to be patient, very patient," the Cuban president said to his counterpart in their first formal encounter.

Obama struck a more upbeat tone during what he called a "historic" meeting. "We are now in a position to move ... toward the future," he said. "Over time, it is possible for us to turn the page and develop a new relationship between our two countries."

Though a formal end to the US trade embargo requires legislation in Congress, both Obama and Castro said they believed such executive action was sufficient to significantly open up relations between the two countries and allow travellers and trade to flow relatively freely.

On April 14 Obama informed the US Congress that he intended to remove Cuba from a US list of state sponsors of terrorism, clearing the main obstacle to restoring diplomatic relations and reopening embassies in each other's country. Moreover for Americans, Cuba would be an attractive tourist destination.

The thaw in relations with Cuba, however, brought fierce criticism from

Congress, as many senior figures from both the main political parties believed that Obama struck a poor deal with few concrete commitments toward political reform from Havana.

"The White House has conceded everything and gained little in return," said Florida senator and Republican presidential hopeful Marco Rubio (Cuban roots). "We are getting no commitment on freedom of the speech, elections, no binding commitment on opening up the internet or even the semblance of a transition to democracy. This entire policy shift is based on a lie and illusion that more access to money and goods will translate to more political freedom."

In response to his critics, Obama reportedly said, "I'm not expecting a transformation of the Cuban society overnight. But we can't keep doing the same thing for five decades and expect a different result...We will continue to have strong differences, particularly on democracy and human rights ... but engagement is a better tool than isolation and nowhere is that more clear than Cuba."

Many analysts believe that for decades, American policy towards Cuba has been hijacked by a small cartel of politicians in Florida and their wealthy benefactors. Alan Gross, a long time American prisoner in Cuba reportedly said, "Two wrongs don't make a right. I hope we can move on." He thinks that President Obama's decision is courageous, and long overdue.

The writer is Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## COMMENTS

### "The beasts in the midst of beauty" (April 17, 2015)

Iftekhar Chy

I wonder if those girls were their mothers and sisters what they would do. This time they took advantage on the girls' helplessness but it may happen that the victims would be their relatives. It's a shame for us that we could not protect our mothers and sisters. Some critics will criticise the victims commenting why they had gone there in the first place. But forbidding our wives, daughters, mothers and sisters to observe this festival is not the solution of this shameful activity. We should protest against this heinous crime and ensure their punishments under the jurisdiction of law.

Muhammad Mustafa

Bangladesh police always serve the mighty political elements in power although they live on tax-payers' money. Police, Rab and other enforcers are kept busy for protection of these elements; that is why they do not see the killings or molestations occurring just in front of them. Police also try to be away to avoid risk of catching anyone close to the rulers. We must therefore address our system and set it right with no more delay.

### "Nothing' found in footage" (April 17, 2015)

Dev Saha

There should be zero tolerance for such animals. Please stay above the political patronage. These scoundrels are no good for any party.

### "12 killed as house built on marsh caves in" (April 16, 2015)

Habib

Who'll be responsible for the incident and why don't the authorities prevent the construction of such illegal and risky structures for housing?

Md. Alamgir

Everyday we are watching huge number of deaths. May Allah keep us safe.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Condemnable assault

It's very unfortunate that many women were sexually harassed by miscreants during the celebration of Pahela Baishakh in Dhaka University area. At the same time, it proved law enforcers' utter failure to protect the female visitors from hooligans.

We demand stringent action against the perpetrators. Men must understand that women should be respected. And law enforcers should be more vigilant to secure people from such heinous incidents.

**Md. Imran Hossain Molla**  
Assistant Manager (Industrial Relation)  
Mongla EPZ



The incident of harassing and assaulting women on Pahela Baishakh is very alarming and despicable. We

are speechless and words are not enough to express our anger to this barbaric and loathsome incident. It showed us how insecure our sisters, mothers, daughters and wives are even when they are in the heart of the city.

Prior to the Pahela Baishakh, the law enforcement agency assured the city dwellers that they had taken full-proof security for visitors in the respective area but the barbaric incident proved that all that was just big talk. Police were present there but they acted like spectators. We hope that at least they will be able to bring the culprits to book.

**Md Zonaeed Emran**  
A banker