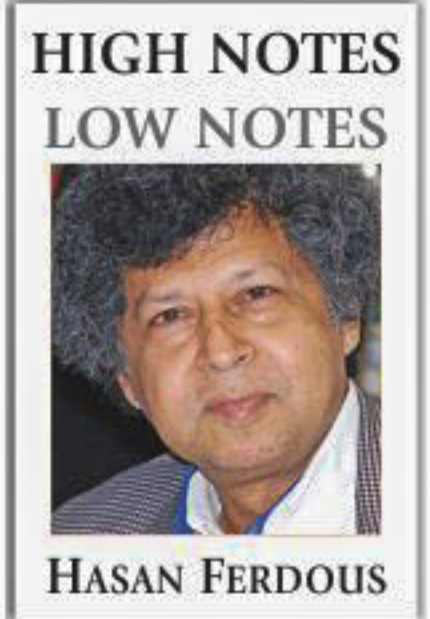


The Face of New Fascism



HIGH NOTES
LOW NOTES
HASAN FERDOUS

I always thought of Donald Trump as a poor entertainer with bad hair and an over sprayed tan. He still is, but he is also the presumptive Republican nominee and could very well end up as the next president of the United States. He is also the face of 21st-century fascism, a phenomenon largely fueled by demographic anxieties of white America and nearly eight years of a black President.

Race remains a constant in American life and culture. Nearly 150 years after slavery ended officially, the country remains divided into two stark colours: white and non-white. In every inner city, the most blighted sections are inhabited by the black and increasingly brown. They hold the most degrading jobs; their children go to the worst performing public schools; most of those sent behind bars are people of colour, and lead-filled water supplied by the State is delivered to those who are predominantly non-white. Yet, the angriest people in today's America are white, who feel their grip on power and privilege slipping away.

The first rude awakening for white America was the election in 2008 of Barack Obama. While one-half of the country rejoiced in the euphoria of electing the country's first black president, the other half – the white America – was seized by panic. The first reaction came from the Republican lawmakers, who vowed to do everything not to let this happen again. Obama would be a one-term president, declared the Senate's Republican leader. It was soon followed by an avalanche of assaults on Obama's presidency that included every conceivable attempt to delegitimise him. They questioned his American birth, dismissed his faith, and called him a communist and

sympathetic to terrorists. Even after seven years of his presidency, one-third of America remains convinced that Obama is a Muslim. Using anger as a tool and aided by a slow economic recovery, the Republicans were able to take control of the Congress. In the name of resisting Obama, this legislature would not hesitate to obstruct every move Obama made, including shutting down the government, a spectacle inconceivable anywhere else in the world.

But the ultimate gift to white America was the ascendance of Donald Trump, a billionaire who made money through shady real estate deals and borrowed wealth. With Obama (read non-white leadership), America does not win anymore, he declared, and white America heard in those words its own heart-beat. For seven years, the Republican leadership had slowly built a turf on which stepped in Trump with a swinging bat. When they finally realised it was a monster they had allowed to grow, it was already too late.

Trump had a simple strategy: inflame the white anger by assigning blame for all ills facing America to the "others." Sensing America's vulnerabilities to growing extremism, he called for banning all Muslims from entering the US; he called Mexicans – in effect, all non-white immigrants – rapists and drug dealers, and promised to build a wall with Mexico. He promised to rebuild America's military and bring back waterboarding, condemned by all as torture. He also launched a tirade against women and the disabled. While the rest of the world watched in horror the tragedy unfold, white America exhaled, finding its new messiah. Even the evangelicals, supposedly devout Christians, rushed to embrace him, a man who had publicly berated the Pope as "disgraceful," and claimed not to have ever sought the Lord's forgiveness.

The ultimate nod of approval for Trump came from the Ku Klux Klan, the notorious

criminal band of white supremacists. David Duke, its one-time leader, endorsed Trump's candidacy and asked his followers to do so.

The Republican establishment was initially embarrassed to call Trump one of their own, questioning his previous association with the Democratic Party and with many liberal issues. But, as the country's white segments rallied behind Trump, the leadership began courting a bigot. Chris Christy, the pugnacious

economic anxiety and continuing fear of terrorism. While those two elements are real, what these apologists fail to see is that they afflict all Americans, white and non-white. Why do only the whites seem to see in Trump their messiah? The answer has to be found in the country's huge demographic shifts. The white America, so used to their dominance in all sectors of life, have noticed the slow but inevitable demise of their power. In less than 25 years from now, America would no longer be a white-majority country. Aware of this reality, the Republicans have carefully redrawn the electoral map, giving the whites a decent chance to retain their control in much of non-industrial and non-urban America. But as far as national offices are concerned, of which the presidency is the top prize, the new demography poses a mortal threat to their continued dominance.

Enters Trump who almost overnight reimagines the American political reality. Everything in America is broken: its old glory gone, its military power depleted, its leadership cowers in front of the Chinese and its boundaries are unfenced. His promise to make America great again by building its war machine and fencing its borders rejuvenates those bemoaning America's supposed demise.

About 85 years ago, a man named Adolf Hitler had charmed Germany and its disillusioned citizens with a promise to make the country strong again. He would feed on the nation's fears, vulnerabilities, and dispossession following the defeat in the First World War. He vowed to tear up the Treaty of Versailles, smash the power of Jews and rebuild its military.

If you thought Hitler was dead, think again. He is alive and thriving in today's white America.

The writer is a journalist and author. His latest book, *Ektattor, Je Bhabhe shuru* ("1971, This is How It Started"), was published this year in February by Shomoy Publication, Dhaka.

Race remains a constant in American life and culture. Nearly 150 years after slavery ended officially, the country remains divided into two stark colours: white and non-white. In every inner city, the most blighted sections are inhabited by the black and increasingly brown.

Republican governor of liberal New Jersey, was first of the establishment elite to switch sides and hold on to Trump's coattails. He was soon followed by some Republicans best known for their vitriol against immigrants, Muslims, and blacks.

Many attempts have been made to explain Trump's emergence. Those on the Right have argued Trump is a result of the

Celebrating women leaders in urban slums

BLERTA CELA

KHADIIJA Begum—an independent woman from an extremely poor family living in the urban slums of Gopalganj—took over her new leadership role as a councillor for Gopalganj Pourashava. Khadija is the women in the middle wearing a grey scarf.

"I am very excited that the people trusted me with community leadership! I am now working for the poor to prove myself worthy of their trust. I am focusing on key challenges in my community, such as eliminating violence against women, preventing early marriages, supporting disabilities and promoting children's education. I am also a member of the Women Development Committee and I believe that unity among women can turn all challenges into opportunities."

Khadija succeeded over adversity through her hardwork and determination. Key to realising her potential was the availability of the right kind of support. Starting out as an extremely poor woman living in an urban slum that afforded no jobs or opportunities, she is now an elected councillor working to improve lives in the community and helping women and girls overcome poverty and gender-based challenges in Bangladesh.

"I always wanted to become a leader, but I didn't know how. Before joining the programme (Urban Partnership for Poverty Reduction), I was only a labourer with a seven-year-old disabled daughter. There was no platform for my voice to be heard. My husband and I worked as cooks in the Bangabandhu college canteen to support the family. However, our daily earnings were not enough to support our family. As an extreme poor household member, I was provided sanitation, footpath, drainage, latrine and tube-well support under the Settlement Improvement Fund of the programme. This programme also helped me to gradually gain leadership skills. This programme gave me the opportunity to speak and be heard and the skills and confidence to do more for my community. And in order to do more, I decided to run for the local elections. With the support of the local community and the leadership skills gained from the



PHOTO: COURTESY

programme, I have become a leader. I work towards shaping a society free from poverty, hunger, discrimination and violence against woman and to become a role model for discouraged women in poverty."

Khadija's story is similar to that of many extremely poor women in Bangladesh who are rising above challenges despite limited opportunities. These women are working to lift every member of their community out of poverty. Impoverished women who have typically been pushed to the background of most conversations are now embracing the chance to express their opinions and collaborate on ideas for poverty reduction and community development.

UNDP, in partnership with the Local Government Division and UKAid in Bangladesh, has been working to support women like Khadija, focusing not only on jobs and livelihoods, but also on women's leadership. Since 2011, the programme has supported 83 community development committee leaders' participation in local elections; 32 percent of them have won elections. Through the programme, poor women in urban slums across 23 cities and towns have joined Community Development Committees and Federations

they can rise above all challenges. Having more women like Khadija become empowered will have long-lasting impacts on families and communities throughout Bangladesh.

Despite progress, however, more needs to be done to support their leadership. There are significant gaps at all levels in the public and private sphere. Women make up only 20 percent of representatives in the Bangladesh National Parliament, and women lead only 1 percent of information and communications technology companies. Women's participation is affected by limited resources, assets and opportunities, especially compared to men. For example, women's land ownership in Bangladesh is estimated to be around 2 percent. According to the World Bank, only 25 percent of women have an account at a formal financial institution. It is not surprising, then, that women account for only 8 percent of entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. Further, women's labour force participation rates are less than half of men's.

Having more women in leadership positions will contribute to increased productivity and will support Bangladesh to advance its middle-income country trajectory. A February 2016 global study by the Peterson Institute for International Economics showed that having women in corporate leadership leads to increased profitability. Another study from McKinsey highlights that if women participate in the economy identically as men, it could add up to \$28 trillion (26 percent) of global growth by 2025. Such a development goal is truly feasible for Bangladesh—as long as women are economically and socially empowered to contribute their full potential to this great national objective.

The International Women's Day 2016 theme was 'Planet 50-50 by 2030.' On the occasion of International Women's Day, let us unite to promote women's leadership.

The writer is Head of Partnerships, Results and Resource Management, UNDP Bangladesh.

WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY REALLY ALL ABOUT?

ZARINA NAHAR KABIR

TO mark the International Women's Day, social networks over the last few days have been inundated with personal tributes to wives, sisters, mothers, aunts, basically all possible relationships with a woman. Husbands openly declared their wives as the 'best woman' of their life; daughters their mother as their favourite woman, sons acknowledging their mother's contribution in their upbringing, and so on. Opinion columns in newspapers made space for personal tributes to mothers, daughters, and in one case even to the columnist herself, as exemplary women on personal levels. Some have highlighted how much more the woman in the relationship has done for the family compared to her spouse, thus charitably admitting his own deficiency in the area. The day was marked by many seminars and events to acknowledge women's feat in various professions. We have seen series of photos of female awardees being recognised for their entrepreneurship. Women have been celebrated with flowers, chocolates, gifts.

Despite the ludicrous remark by the nation's Shipping Minister on this special day that the sexual harassment of some women on Pahela Baishakh was "inconsequential", March 8 was the day to hail women for being women. This is where my confusion begins. Are we, women, being celebrated for being individuals taking our share of responsibility? Are we to be pleased that our contributions at home and in the professional domain are finally being conceded? Are we to be content by the generosity of the patriarchal society for indulging us with our rightful space for our existence? This is the impression I am left with from all the love, respect and honour we women are being showered with. While all these accolades leave me warm inside, I can't help but feel a chilling nervousness about the implications. Are we forgetting the injustice and the struggle that International Women's Day is marked for? Do we run the risk that the flashy celebrations of the day will leave our younger generation ignorant of its core value of promoting equal rights for women?

We are still a nation where almost 85 percent of women's rights are not the same as that of men in the eyes of (Muslim) law related to inheritance, marriage, child custody, or simply as a witness. We are a society which must maintain a few congested seats for women in the front part of a bus and on the hot engine by the driver to keep them away from men's uncontrollable lascivious behaviour. We are the people who cave in to social pressure and possibly financial hardship by marrying off three or four of our girls before they reach adulthood. We have allowed an environment of rampant rape on the streets, and sexual abuse of girls remains a regular but silent household affair. The list of gender inequality and injustice against women in Bangladesh is yet to see a limit. Although Women's Day saw its first observance in New York in 1909, over the following years it gathered momentum in Europe where it is still marked as a day to make demands for a gender balanced equal society. My fear is lest we, men and women, forget to make the demands for a healthy, balanced society with equal rights and respect for both genders in Bangladesh.

The writer is Associate Professor, Department of Neuro Biology, Karolinska Institutet, Sweden.

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott



Our customers speak for us...
"We take immense pleasure in being a valued customer of bti. We realize it is not easy to get proper services from many organizations these days but bti in this aspect managed to impress us with their excellent customer service. Thank you, bti."

Eng. Delwar Hossain & Family
The Rainbow
Sector: 13, Uttara, Dhaka

The Rainbow
Sector: 13, Uttara, Dhaka



REHAB MEMBERSHIP #001
ISO 9001:2008 CERTIFIED
www.btibd.com

in pursuit of excellence...