

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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Kerry's short trip to Dhaka

A notch-up in bilateral relations

US Secretary of state John Kerry's short visit, only the second by a US Secretary of State to Bangladesh in four years, we believe, has taken our bilateral relationship one step further. It is good to see the US being more appreciative of our development efforts and our role in the international arena, especially in the battling of extremism and terrorism, despite many hindrances. We are reassured by the Secretary's comments that the US will assist Bangladesh on all important sectors related to our development. However, that notwithstanding we are surprised that the issue of GSP and duty free access was not even broached during the Secretary's talks with Bangladeshi leaders. This comes as a deep disappointment to us.

We are glad that the US considers Bangladesh an important development partner and that our two countries will engage more deeply in the fight against terror that threatens to engulf countries in the region. And like Secretary Kerry, we believe that terrorism can be combated more effectively through better governance and democracy.

However, one of the preconditions for Bangladesh to continue its march towards development is through enhancing our trade, particularly our exports. And the US being a major destination of our principal export item readymade garments, continued suspension of GSP facility hinders our efforts to enhance our volume of trade, particularly export. To make our development more robust, it is not 'aid' but 'trade' that we would like to depend on for our economic development. We would hope that in the wake of this official visit, where we have been assured of all assistance in all spheres including our counter-terrorism efforts, this particular issue of GSP will no longer remain a stumbling block in our even closer engagement as development partners.

JnU students under BCL attack

Merits stern action

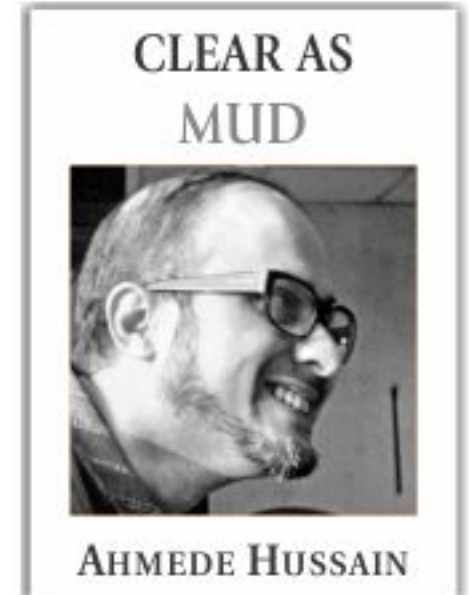
WE strongly condemn the attack by a section of Bangladesh Chatra League (BCL) on a peaceful procession demanding residential halls for the general students of Jagannath University (JnU). It is indeed disquieting to note that the BCL launched the assault, reportedly led by the President of its university unit, because the students did not participate in the protest under its banner. That these so-called leaders have no respect either for their fellow students or the rule of law is rather evident from the display of force that they have exhibited in the campus. Are we to believe that the BCL leadership thinks it is acceptable to coerce others into believing its cause? Through what else but engagement, we ask, can a student body win the hearts and minds of their fellow students?

This is not the only occasion on which we have witnessed such action involving the BCL. In point of the fact, the latest assault merely adds to the list of the BCL's rowdy behaviour in many educational institutions across the country.

We are shocked that no disciplinary action has yet been taken against the errant BCL cadres. The authorities should also understand the sufferings that the students are going through because of lack of accommodation and solve the problem quickly. It must find ways to repossess the properties it has lost to the encroachers and also find alternative arrangements.

On its part, the BCL leadership needs to dissuade its members from carrying out such violent and self-destructive activities. The organisation should try to live up to its past glory. We also believe that the Awami League central leadership has a role to play in this regard.

Saving our girls



AHMEDE HUSSAIN

CLEAR AS MUD
STABBED by her alleged stalker at the entrance to her school, Suraiya Akter Risha, a student of Willes Little Flower School, Dhaka, succumbed to her injuries last Sunday. The murder adds to a long list of female victims of stalking and other forms of sexual harassment that have been going on unabated in the country for a long time. The most recent in this line is the murder of Shohagi Jahan Tonu who was killed in the confines of Comilla Cantonment, which is supposed to be the safest place in the area. The case, which has drawn headlines in national dailies and has given birth to a string of protests across the country, unfortunately, hasn't seen much headway.

However, Risha's predicament is unique - unlike Tonu, her family, prior to the assault, had lodged a general diary as her alleged attacker was known to them and had been harassing her for a long time. It is indeed shocking that

mere sexual object and confines her to the four walls of the house. On top of it all, it deprives her from being considered as a human being, an individual that contributes to the growth of the society as a whole.

Stalking can also cause humiliation to such an extent that the victim might see no other option but to commit suicide. Take Simi Banu, a student of Fine Arts at Dhaka University. A few years ago, Simi, who lived in Narayanganj, committed suicide after being severely harassed by some local hoodlums on her way to the varsity. Such incidents are not rare: it is just that they make their way to the newspapers only after they become a national issue.

A lion's share of incidents of stalking and other forms of sexual harassments go unreported as families do not seek redress of the law fearing reprisals by the attackers and also because of their dwindling faith in the country's legal system. A cell comprising of female police officers can be formed at all police stations across the country to monitor cases of sexual harassment. It will encourage the victims, almost all of whom are women, to report abuse. We must not



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shows a decline in moral values: religious leaders should include the dangers of sexual harassment in their sermons so as to make people aware of this problem.

It must be admitted that stalking needs to be deterred through quick arrest and a speedy trial of offenders that should be followed by exemplary punishment. However, the existing laws seem rather inadequate to fight stalking. Article 76 of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance 1976 says, "Whoever wilfully and indecently exposes his person in any street or public place within sight of, and in such manner as may be seen by, any woman, whether from within any house or building or not, or wilfully presses or obstructs any woman in a street or public place or insults or annoys any woman by using indecent language or making indecent sounds, gestures, or remarks in any street or public place, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine which may extend to two thousand taka, or with both."

Article 509 of the Penal Code of 1860, says, "Whoever, intending to insult the modesty of any woman,

utters any word, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object, intending that such word or sound shall be heard, or that such gesture or object shall be seen, by such woman, or intrudes upon the privacy of such woman, shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both." Also, the law that awards five to ten years imprisonment for inciting suicide through sexual harassment, among other offences, is rarely used. These three laws can be reviewed in light with the gravity of the situation prevalent in our streets.

The mass media, especially cinema and television, has a pivotal role to play in the fight against stalking and sexual harassment. Portrayal of women as sexual objects in the electronic media, along with the advent of a perverted version of global capitalism, is one of the contributing factors behind the rapid growth of sexual harassment in this part of the world. Unless its proliferation is arrested, laws and social movements alone will not do.

The writer is an author, editor and journalist.
Twitter: @ahmedehussain

Risha's predicament is unique - unlike Tonu, her family, prior to the assault, had lodged a general diary as her alleged attacker was known to them and had been harassing her for a long time. It is indeed shocking that the police failed to trace him as he continued to harass his hapless victim.

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There is no denying that we have repeatedly failed as a society to protect the marginalised and the vulnerable. What such incidents of sexual harassment highlight is that stalking is a reality of our life and is a by-product of the feudal remnants that still pervade our society. Sexual harassment is a serious affair as it restricts the mobility of a woman, portrays her as a

forget that it is difficult, if not impossible, to prevent such incidents; the best way to fight is perhaps to nip it in the bud.

Also there is no alternative to launching a set of awareness campaigns that will help fight male aggression in the fold of our social fabric. Educational institutions can play a pivotal role in sensitising students about this menace. The prevalence of stalking and other forms of sexual harassment clearly

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Trump's train wreck



ELIZABETH DREW

DONALD Trump, the US Republican Party's presidential nominee, has again shaken up his campaign organisation. In doing so, he is revealing more about himself and his so-called management style than he may want people to see. Few presidential campaigns have featured such evident chaos and churn in personnel.

Two people who have never run a presidential campaign, and whose political instincts contradict each other's, are now running Trump's operation.

Kellyanne Conway, his new campaign manager, is a pollster who has been mining survey data from the mainstream Republican right for years (the party's right wing is its "mainstream," because its centre is essentially gone). During the Republican primary, she worked for the "super PAC" that backed Trump's bitter rival, Ted Cruz. Conway is a smart, tough partisan, who is expected to be a steady and sensible influence in the campaign. If she prevails - and Trump can stick to a theme - we'll see a more reasonable Republican candidate.

On the other hand, Trump's decision to appoint Steven Bannon as his campaign CEO foretells anything but steadiness and sensibility. Prior to his appointment, Bannon was the executive chairman of Breitbart News, a far-right, hyper-nationalist - indeed white supremacist - online publication. He is known to be a combative nihilist who will stoop to any depth to win.

Bannon's appointment caused mainstream Republican jaws to drop. Trump, trailing Hillary Clinton badly in August polls, has come under growing pressure to move closer to the Republican Party establishment. Unless he adopts a more mainstream approach, he will not be able to attract white suburbanites - a key constituency still up for grabs.

But Bannon is no fan of the Republican establishment. Under Bannon, Breitbart News routinely assailed Republican Speaker of the House Paul Ryan. Earlier this summer, it attacked Ryan for supporting an

omnibus spending bill that funds President Barack Obama's Syrian refugee programme, and for sending his children to a private Catholic school. It even backed Ryan's Wisconsin congressional primary opponent, a Trump supporter whom Ryan defeated in an 84-16 percent landslide.

Breitbart News also condemned the Republican Senate leader, Mitch McConnell, publishing a column that accused McConnell of being soft on Clinton to remain in the good graces of donors who oppose Trump.

What has the Conway-Bannon dichotomy produced? Early signs suggest that Conway is sanding down some of Trump's rougher edges. For example,

well with the constituency that Conway is trying to win over to Trump.

There is little reason to think Trump's new staffing arrangement will yield a new, more coherent candidate. Throughout the campaign, he has vacillated wildly between poise and pugilism, sometimes in the same day.

Trump's appointment of Bannon, in particular, suggests that he is desperate, scared, and lost. Although it still isn't clear how much Trump actually wants to be president, we know that he hates to lose.

And yet he doesn't seem to understand the basics of presidential politics, nor the difference between the primary season and the main event. He

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mainstream Republicans that he could manage the candidate. Even politicians without Trump's outside ego would bridle at such talk.

By the time Manafort was replaced, Trump was ignoring his advice, and Manafort had essentially given up. In the meantime, Manafort's past as an adviser to and lobbyist for unsavoury dictators around the world was catching up with him. In one instance, he had worked for former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, a proxy for Russian President Vladimir Putin, who fled to Russia after being driven from power in 2014.

The US Justice Department has now started to scrutinise Manafort's lobbying activities in the US on behalf of Yanukovich, which posed yet another threat to the campaign. While Trump's influential children had initially favoured Manafort, that changed when he started to attract the wrong kind of media attention, including questions about Trump's so-far inexplicable affinity for Putin. Manafort may be gone from the Trump campaign, but his Ukrainian ties will be a matter of press interest for some time to come.

The 2016 presidential election isn't over, so it's still possible that Trump could end up in the White House. His poor judgment in people, glaringly apparent in recent weeks, is yet another reason why that is a dangerous possibility for American democracy.

The writer, a regular contributor to The New York Review of Books, is the author, most recently, of Washington Journal: Reporting Watergate and Richard Nixon's Downfall. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2016. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)



PHOTO: AFP

Trump, who never apologises, recently expressed vague "regret" for offending people. More important, Trump has been moving away from his tough anti-immigration stance, such as his pledge to establish a special "deportation force" to round up all 11 million undocumented immigrants in the US. What Trump is moving toward, however, remains unclear, as is whether his supporters will let him get away with this shift.

By contrast, Bannon apparently wants to "let Trump be Trump." He seems to support Trump's refusal to "pivot" from the divisive rhetoric of the primary season to a more "presidential" approach. Presumably, he hopes to free Trump to follow his basest instincts, spewing vile invective against Clinton as the election contest heats up. That won't go down

still boasts that he defeated all of his Republican opponents, though, given how the primary process works, it's easier to beat 16 rivals than one or two.

Trump also confuses the enthusiastic supporters who attend his rallies with the presidential electorate. He seems not to comprehend that what he says to his ardent fans is heard by a much larger, and less sympathetic, public. This is a key reason why his poll ratings were plummeting by mid-August. And so he did what flailing candidates often do: he shook up the staff.

Bannon replaced Paul Manafort, who was close to the elites Bannon despises, and who had tried to strengthen Trump's ties to them. Manafort made the major misstep of trying to compel Trump to change, and of telling

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Protect the Sundarbans

The Washington Post on July 18, 2016 wrote an article which stated that the Rampal power plant could devastate the world's largest mangrove forest. Environmentalists are urging the United Nations to draw greater attention to the issue. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, mangrove forests and coastal wetlands may be able to store up to five times more carbon than the same size tropical forests. Damaging these ecosystems can both harm their ability to continue storing carbon, as well as release carbon that's already sequestered. Adding to this, the plant would require almost 13,000 tons of coal per day and would release an estimated 7.9 million tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year. We learned that environmental activists have even raised questions about the legitimacy of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for this project rejecting its findings for being biased, distorted and inaccurate. It is telling that the EIA for this project was approved by the Department of Environment (DoE) on August 5, 2013, but the land acquisition began two years earlier on August 23, 2011, and the joint venture between NTPC and BPDB was signed on January 29, 2012. So, that work on the project began long before the EIA was approved only goes to show that it was done as an eye wash to justify the project.

Therefore, considering the serious consequences of the Rampal power plant, we hope that the government will refrain from building it.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong