

Obama's legacy, racism, and Trump's victory in America

Police's strange demand

Torture and custodial death must stop

We are perturbed and confused by the demand made by the police for a repeal of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act that makes torture in custody by law enforcers or government officials a punishable criminal offence. Such a request is unbecoming of an orderly force as no form of torture, in and outside the custody, can ever be tolerated in a civilised society. It is a word that is not found in our legal lexicon, and a society that believes in the rule of law and civility must not entertain such barbaric and brutal methods in maintaining law and order or investigating crime.

Such a demand is anathema to our ethos, especially to the supreme law of the land that prohibits torture. The Prime Minister has rightly conveyed the message to the concerned police officers that they should perish such thoughts.

As it is, the number of custodial deaths and cases of alleged torture in the hands of law enforcers has reportedly taken a grievous turn as manifested in the seven murder case in Narayanjanj, despite the 2013 Act. In this light, will we be remiss in asking why the police want immunity against torture and custodial death, especially when confessions extracted through such methods do not stand up to cross-examinations?

We appreciate that the police has to face many challenges in performing its tasks in our environment. But working under existing laws and producing results keeping within the norms of orderly behaviour is what separates a well-trained and disciplined force from a disorderly one.

Razing hillocks for stones

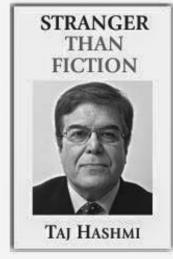
For how long will authorities turn a blind eye?

The pristine beauty of Sylhet is in its hills and greenery. Unfortunately, the Shah Arefin Tila in Bholaganj under Campanjanj upazila is a typical example of how greed takes precedence over the environment.

Stone traders are merrily razing hills and hillocks in five nearby upazilas including Sylhet Sadar, Beanibazar, Jaintiapur, Gowainghat and Gopalganj, but as per a report in this paper on January 24, it is Shah Arefin Tila that is facing the brunt of unmitigated hill cutting. Unauthorised stone traders in connivance with local authorities and influential people have already destroyed more than 130 acres of hilly lands to extract stones.

The business of hill cutting has taken a dangerous turn as dredgers have been employed to cut hills in direct contravention of a High Court (HC) ban in 2012. Hence, we are perplexed as to how the authorities are allowing this violation. Although fingers have been pointed at locally elected representatives, the charge has been denied. But the fact remains that despite the occasional drive by the upazila administration to stop such activity; these drives do not deter the syndicate from returning to the illegal activity.

To be effective these drives against the coterie of vested interests need to be a concerted effort, one that is backed up by the political will to stop greedy traders from causing irreparable damage to the landscape and the environment. We are sorry to see that such determination to stop environmental degradation has not been forthcoming from the local administration and that allows room for parties to violate the HC directive with impunity.



STRANGER THAN FICTION
 TAJ HASHMI

AS there are multiple causes and factors behind most events, so is Donald Trump's election victory not attributable to any single factor. However, there is always the "most important factor" behind everything. Here, neo-fascist racism played the most important role in the election of Trump. One may attribute his victory to the so-called Obama Legacy or factor. We know Trump is "their" man; and the ubiquitous "they" represent white supremacists, the military-industrial, and Israeli lobbies who are committed to establishing an ultra-conservative, racist America.

Since Trump's own bigotry, racism, misogyny resonate with fascism, we have reasons to worry about the future of America. Under a proto-fascist administration, the US can destabilise the entire world. This isn't an imaginary scenario from science fiction. Ominously, the day after Trump's taking the oath, various neo-Nazi white supremacist groups held public gatherings across West Europe, in solidarity with Trump and his racist ideology. Neo-Nazi David Duke of the now defunct Ku Klux Klan has already celebrated Trump's victory: "Make no mistake ... our people played a HUGE role in electing Trump!" It wasn't hyperbolic, or an over-statement.

Francis Fukuyama, a leading neo-conservative thinker, asserts in his essay "America: The Failed State" in the January 2017 issue of *Prospect Magazine* that the world is living through a very turbulent phase of its history. "The triumph of the Trump brand of nationalism is arguably of a piece with authoritarian advances ... by making populist democracy an active threat to individual liberty", he affirms.

Until the last presidential election in November 2016, desperate Americans by turn were trying to improve their lot by electing a candidate from one of the two major political parties. Although Donald Trump was officially a Republican

candidate, he was actually an "outsider" (who previously had mostly flirted with the Democratic Party). Independent Senator Sanders was practically an "outsider" too.

The rise of "outsiders" signals something very significant: the average American's declining faith in organised party politics. What began with the election of film actor Ronald Reagan was re-enacted in Trump's victory, a reality TV actor was formally ushered in to the White House on 20th January. While individuals, rather than political parties have become the decisive factors in running and winning elections in America, sections of the alienated population, who think themselves as marginalised and powerless, are available for mobilisation by the loud mouth and demagogue, with racist, fascist, or terrorist ideologies.

Unfortunately, Trump's victory signals a new beginning in the history of America, which is most likely to be a turbulent and unsettling one.

Further degeneration of America began in the post-Lincolnan period, with the occupation of Hawaii, the Philippines, and unnecessary bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The unjust US invasions of umpteen numbers of countries – including Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia – further degenerated the political system, democratic and ethical values in America. "Might is right" re-emerged as the cardinal principle of governance in America. Thus the average White American continued to believe in White supremacist ideology as something natural, and even designed by God.

The degeneration of the average White American reached near its culmination point possibly after America had invaded and killed millions of innocent people in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Libya. The bulk of Americans knew their government was lying and invading countries and killing (non-White) people for the sake of glory, wealth, and power. Many of them – civilian and military – were beneficiaries of these unjust invasions. Sadly, in the wake of all these killings and the handful of counter-killings by terrorists, the average Americans have been desensitised to

killings; and thanks to the concerted government and media propaganda, have started believing themselves as the hapless victims of Islamist terrorism, and non-White invaders.

Since racism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia were fast moulding the American psyche, many Americans have started believing that Obama was partially responsible for the "unimpeded" rise of Islamism, which they believe poses the biggest security challenge to their country. Without giving any credit to the Obama administration for destroying al Qaeda bases and killing Osama bin Laden, thanks to the conservative demagoguery, many Trump supporters believe in undoing the so-called Obama Legacy.

Just as soon after Khomeini's ascendancy to power in Iran, people attributed it to the misrule of the Shah - "No Shah, No Khomeini" became the catch phrase - similarly, Trump's victory may be attributable to the Obama presidency; "No Obama, No Trump" could become axiomatic too! Despite his terrible foreign policy, which led to unnecessary wars, and deaths of tens of thousands of innocent people in the Muslim World, Obama's legacy is one of substantial growth, job creation, and declining budget deficit. In fact, he salvaged the sinking auto industries, banks, and financial companies in America. His rule was diametrically different from what George W. Bush delivered to his nation.

Yet, for all the wrong reasons, Obama was indirectly responsible for the rise of Trump and Trumpism. Obama's race and Muslim background were the catalysts in this regard. What White Americans couldn't reconcile with for eight years – a black man in the White House – which is the "We've lost America Syndrome" played the decisive role in the rise of white supremacist ideology and rhetoric in the country. No wonder, the bulk of white men – surprisingly white women too – not only condoned Trump's utterly vulgar assertions about women, Muslims, Mexicans, African Americans, and other non-White people, but also elected him to power.

Trump's rhetoric about creating more

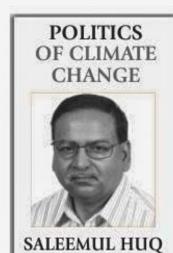
jobs in America, especially in the so-called rust-belts; and his building a wall across US-Mexico border – "to be funded by the Mexican government" – to stop illegal Mexicans from entering the US, who according to him take away American jobs, rape American women, and peddle drugs in the streets of America have been racial than economic in tone and by implications. His victory in short is the victory of White supremacy.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) – renowned human rights NGO in the US – believes Trump's victory has emboldened hundreds of active hate groups across America to verbally and physically attack Muslims, African Americans, Mexicans, and other non-White races across the country. The SPLC has documented 867 hate incidents in the US in the first ten days after the Election. Nearly 900 hate groups across America – neo-Nazis, anti-Muslim, Anti-Black, and anti-LGBT groups – are celebrating Trump's victory.

According to an SPLC report, while White supremacists are publicly asserting: "The white race is back in the game"; a White man in Colorado told a 12-year-old African-American girl: "Now that Trump is President, I'm going to shoot you and all the blacks I can find"; a little Muslim girl clung to her kindergarten teacher and asked, "Are they going to do anything to me? Am I safe?" Welcome to the new and "Great" America Trump and his cohorts represent today! If they are going to prevail, is altogether a tricky question! There is another tricky question for the women and men who are now protesting Trump's victory, and the 60 Democratic lawmakers who boycotted Trump's oath-taking ceremony last Friday: Did you guys ever classify the wars America fought, killing more than four million people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the last 40-odd years, as illegitimate wars, and the perpetrators as war criminals?

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Bringing global climate finance to Bangladesh



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
 SALEEMUL HUQ

UNDER the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), developed countries have agreed to provide developing countries with USD 100 billion per year, starting from 2020 onwards, to help tackle climate change through both mitigation and adaptation.

They also created a new funding body called the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to channel the money through. The GCF is an independent entity with its headquarters in Songdo, Korea, and its own board with half of its members belonging to developed countries and the other half to developing countries. Bangladesh has been a member of the board for a number of years on behalf of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) group but will be stepping down soon to be replaced by Malawi.

The fund is already up and running, and has received about USD 10 billion already, which it has started allocating to developing countries.

The GCF Board has decided to allocate half their funds to support mitigation actions to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and half for adaptation, which will in turn be prioritised towards the LDCs, the small island developing states (SIDS) and Africa.

The GCF has also introduced two modalities for receiving applications for funding, one is through Multilateral Implementing Entities (MIEs), such as UNDP, FAO, UNEP etc, and the other is through National Implementing Entities (NIEs), which are selected entities from each developing country. Both MIEs and NIES have to apply for and receive accreditation by the GCF Board before they can then apply for project funding. The accreditation process is quite time-consuming and cumbersome, and requires the applicant organisation to demonstrate that it has good fiduciary, governance, gender, and monitoring rules and procedures. Each developing country government also has to appoint a National Designated Authority (NDA) who will approve candidate organisations for applying for NIE accreditation. Such entities can be from the public or private sector, or also from NGOs.

The government of Bangladesh appointed the Economic Resources Division (ERD) of the Ministry of Finance (MOF) as its National Designated Authority over a year ago, and since then, the division has been engaging with a number of public and private sector entities and NGOs to encourage them to consider applying to the GCF for accreditation to become National Implementing Entities. So far six public sector entities have started the process of applying for NIE status, but this is taking a long time as the GCF requires a lot of documentation, and

while the GCF Board has approved approximately USD 40 million as grant with some matching funds from the government.

The second project has been submitted by the Ministry of Women's And Children's Affairs (MOWCA) through UNDP for nearly USD 80 million for providing safe drinking water to women and girls in coastal areas suffering from saline intrusion in their drinking water. This project was sent back by the GCF Board from its last meeting with advice to revise and resubmit it later with better justification as to why it is a climate

bottle will not work. The second lesson is that having transparent and robust systems to both track where climate finance is flowing and also monitor whether it is being used effectively is extremely important. As Bangladesh will have to compete with other vulnerable countries to get climate funding, merely asserting our high vulnerability to climate impacts will only get us sympathy but no money. In order to get funds over a period of time, we will have to demonstrate absorption capacity with transparent and robust monitoring systems as well.



Bangladesh has been one of the worst victims of global warming, with thousands of people being killed by cyclones in recent years that have become more frequent and deadlier.

PHOTO: AFP

there is a lot of back and forth with queries. It is to be hoped that at least a couple of entities should be able to get the NIE status soon.

In the meantime, some ministries and agencies of the Bangladesh government have also applied for projects through MIEs, which had already been accredited by the GCF. The first such project was for enhancing the resilience of small-scale infrastructure projects by the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), which was submitted through the German Development Bank, KfW,

change project and not just a development one.

Even though the experience of the GCF is itself new and evolving, and Bangladesh has been engaging with them for a relatively short while, it is still possible to draw some early lessons.

The first lesson is that we need to build the capacity of our own NDA, NIEs and public and private sector about what climate change is, and how a climate change project or activity differs from a normal development project. Thus, simply trying to sell old wine in a new

Given that it is still early days for global climate finance to start flowing, there is still time for Bangladesh to learn how to access the funds and build good transparent systems to track the funds and robust systems to monitor their use. In the longer run, our ability to get a reasonably fair share of these global climate funds lies in whether we can rise to the challenge of building our own capacity and systems.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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An illogical demand

Under no circumstances should torture be considered as acceptable. It has been argued and established quite clearly that it never produces any good results even when conducted by counterterrorism experts or any other special forces. Why do the police then want the law against custodial torture to be scrapped?

For what reason do police need to practice torture on civilians? Is it not the responsibility of the police to protect and serve the citizens in a friendly way, rather than be a force of intimidation? Already it is of concern that people at large are so reluctant to seek the help of police in fear of various forms of harassments and other reasons.

What is needed is for the police to act in a more friendly way with the citizens that they are supposed to protect. Not seek powers that would instil more fear in them. Our police need to be trained to be more helpful to the public. They should learn how to deal with people better in a way where people will feel confident and secure in interacting with them.

Right now we have a massive gap in communication between the police and citizens. While the police often look down at the average person with disdain, we have citizens looking at the police with distrust. This does not produce a healthy environment for either group. We strictly believe that not only should the police's latest request be rejected, but that the police themselves will refrain from making such ludicrous demands in the first place through the understanding that it is their duty to ease the sufferings of the public, not to inflict it themselves.

Tanvir Dhaka