

Dowry related violence on video!

Make people take the law seriously

THE news of inhuman treatment of a girl or woman at the hands of her husband and in laws has become a regular phenomenon. But the story of in laws taking a video of their torture of a woman in Rugganj (DS February 6), takes this kind of sadistic behaviour to a different level. The woman was beaten, her hands and feet tied, hair cut off and forced to wear a garland of shoes to complete her humiliation. All this for dowry which her family could not provide. What is most sickening is that this barbaric treatment was carried out not only by her husband, but by her in laws as well as by the husband's first wife.

The depravity of these acts should ring alarm bells for every one of us, for what kind of society are we that we allow entire families to inflict humiliation and injury on helpless girls and women because they failed to meet dowry demands? Such demands, moreover, are illegal as proclaimed by the Dowry Prohibition Act 1980, amended as the Dowry Prohibition Act 2017, that punishes offenders with 14 years imprisonment for instigating the victim's suicide and 12 years for serious injury. But despite such stringent laws, cases of dowry related violence and death are abundant with no sign of abating. Does this mean that people are not aware that the demanding, taking, even giving of dowry is unlawful and punishable? Or is it because they don't care because the law is seldom enforced?

The answer is both. The government with the help of its citizens must publicise that demanding dowry is unlawful and shameful. Law enforcers and the entire legal system must diligently and promptly punish the culprits who are responsible for dowry related violence.

Infighting among AL members

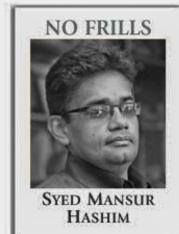
Put a leash on errant cadres

WE are deeply disturbed by an Ain o Salish Kendra report, according to which as many as 59 members of Awami League (AL) were killed in factional feuds in the last two years. If that is not gruesome enough, we have noted with serious concern that the party in power has been involved in about 400 incidents of violent clashes involving its own members that have left a few thousands more injured. We cannot even recall natural disasters or terrorist attacks that have claimed the lives of so many in the said time.

While gleaming from the press clippings of such incidents, we see some recurring themes that have reportedly plagued some local AL leaders. Of them, tender manipulation, influencing government's development work, and extortion, to name but a few. It clearly shows that the criminals in the fold of the ruling party are taking full advantage of a situation where there is no effective opposition political party to protest their nefarious activities. These incidents and the culture of impunity surrounding them deal a body blow to the very foundation of rule of law, the ultimate casualty of which is democracy itself.

This is also unbecoming of the AL, the country's largest political party that has led the nation and its people through thick and thin. We believe that, the ruling party leadership needs to assess the extent of damage some of its members have already done to its image. The only way to resolve internal feud in a political party is through the establishment of democratic values and principles. Party forums need to function well to smoothen out differences of opinion or conflicts of interest. The AL leadership has to weed out hooligans from its fold. Errant cadres must be disciplined, and those involved in criminal activities have to be brought to book.

A mixed bag of challenges



NO FRILLS

SYED MANSUR HASHIM

BA NGLADESH has, over the years, been hailed as a potential economic powerhouse. The challenges are multifarious. Whilst some are mid to long term like infrastructure development, many are current problems that are not being addressed for multifarious reasons. For instance, the cost of doing business in the country remains high despite reform programmes initiated by the government in an effort to cut both red-tape and address the issue of graft. Progress has been a mixed bag. Another major challenge remains the quality of our workforce which has a direct impact on productivity. These are some of the issues dealt with in Asian Development Bank's (ADB) latest issue of 'Development Effectiveness Brief'.

It is interesting to note that the ADB is stepping up with infrastructure financing for Bangladesh, particularly in energy, transport and urban infrastructure. The scenario has changed drastically over the last few years, especially since the advent of the Chinese-led financial institution Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) burst on to the scene that aims to concentrate on one issue only: "AIIB is a new multilateral financial institution founded to bring countries together to address the daunting infrastructure needs across Asia". While AIIB will undoubtedly play an important role in providing much needed finance for developing countries like Bangladesh, it is to banks like the ADB we will have to turn to for concessional, long term loans.

While we are now set on a trajectory to finally address infrastructure needs like energy and mass transportation, the Achilles heel remains education. Our system does not really prepare graduates with skills that many sectors need, like manufacturing. But if we are to take advantage of the demographic dividend, the "challenge is to transform the vast youth population into a trained human resource base through better education and the development of skills needed by industry." Thus increased budgetary allocation in education is in the national budget at a government level, because despite what financial institutions like the ADB can do, the State has to step up in bringing about qualitative changes to education. It is not about increasing the CGPA threshold, rather it has everything to do with making education work for people by imparting requisite skills that can help graduates enter the workforce at a much more proficient level than today; it has to do with arresting dropout rates and promoting gender equality so that more women are educated alongside men to make their contribution to the national economy.

There must be changes initiated at policy level that will increase access to education, that is quality education. Yes, ADB and likeminded financial institutions have been providing loans that address reform programmes which have helped the government

build new facilities like classrooms, sanitation blocks and drinking water facilities. Some 19 million primary education students get new textbooks at the start of the school year (which is a major feat by itself), but much work remains to be done on the method of teaching, the manner in which students appear in examinations where the method remains 'learning by rote' and where there is little in way of analytical reasoning. Yes, there is resistance to transformation, amongst both teachers and students, but that has to change, period! Information and Technology is making its way in to the classroom but not fast enough, but it is a start.

As we move towards job creation, the agriculture sector, while contributing about 15 percent of the GDP, still accounts for nearly half the jobs (45 percent) of the

been financed by the ADB for the "installation of 64 km of a double-track railway and a signaling system from Tongi to Bhairab Bazar railway junction along the Dhaka-Chittagong railway corridor, connection to Chittagong port", we cannot but express exasperation at the slow rate of project implementation on several mega projects. It is no longer a question of lack of financing; rather it is the government's apparent inability to get projects off the ground, on time, that is holding back our potential growth.

The good news is that the ADB is onboard with development assistance. The World Bank has also recently stepped up and re-engaged with the government on major issues like infrastructure development. At the end of the day, whether the Bangladesh economy will fly



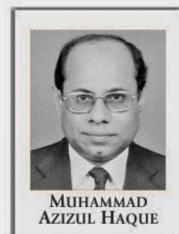
While Bangladesh is now set on a trajectory to finally address infrastructure needs like energy and mass transportation, the Achilles heel remains education. PHOTO: STAR

labour force and provides sustenance to 7 out of 10 people. A major hindrance in labour movement in the country and the urban centres like Dhaka remains inefficient transportation. The financing has been found with the aid of multilateral agencies that includes the ADB and JICA. We are now on track to seeing an overhauling of the transportation sector that includes overhauling of rail links, the introduction of rapid mass transportation systems like the MRT in the city and an elaborate network of flyovers. However, the slow rate of implementation on any number of these projects is mindboggling. Although we see that the ongoing USD 430 million Railway Sector Investment Programme has

or not depends on our ability to transform the infrastructure landscape where connectivity and power become available to both urban and rural centres of development; whether we are able to take advantage of the demographic dividend by transforming our human capital into a skilled labour force. These changes are incremental in nature and while no one is looking at a radical transformation within the span of a few years, the scenario will only change with commitment at policy level to make the required changes, which are often painful, but necessary.

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Trump's America – waning in greatness



MUHAMMAD AZIZUL HAQUE

DONALD Trump declared principle of "America first" implies that under him the US would pursue ultra-nationalist, protectionist and isolationist foreign policies. His policies and stances on different security organisations, multilateral agreements, trade deals, immigration, refugees and many other issues have sent waves of confusion to the saner quarters in the US itself, including in his own party, and across the rest of the world. Stringent implementation of his policies and campaign promises will create upheavals, disorder and instability, not only in America but also across the globe, which would cause varying degrees of damage, not only to US' rivals and adversaries, but also to its old allies and friends.

Trump and his cabinet members – who, like him, are political greenhorns and hawkish – would deal, it seems, a devastating blow to the prevailing liberal, global economic order; and to the ongoing process of globalisation by resorting to extreme protectionism and isolationism. Their belligerent policies are likely to generate countless scenarios of strife and armed confrontations across the nations of the world.

Defeating "radical Islamic terror groups" is a topmost foreign policy objective of the Trump administration. While Barack Obama fought those terrorists with cooperation from the governments of the countries concerned, Trump appears poised to alienate them out of mistrust.

The Trump administration's Iran policy is one of predisposed antagonism, and is in perfect alignment with Israel's view of Iran. Its initial reaction to Iran's ballistic missile test of January 29, 2017 was absolutely undiplomatic, out of proportion, ill-considered, tactless and aggressive; and strongly suggestive of possible military action against Iran in future, while it also betrayed the inherent contradictions in Trump's policies. On the one hand, Trump often condemned the nuclear deal with Iran and wanted to scrap it if he won the election, and now he is intent on punishing Iran for the missile test which he considered a breach of the deal. On February 3, 2017, Trump's administration imposed a new set of unilateral sanctions against Iran – unilateral, for they seemed not to expect support, in this regard, of the EU, China or Russia – all signatories to the nuclear accord. These new sanctions are a presage of a more aggressive approach of the US to Iran in the coming months. Trump's policy of indulgence to Israel

is already emboldening the country to more aggressively pursue Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank. Trump's decision to relocate the US embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem will stoke up the feelings of injustice and deprivation among Palestinians, and provoke more hatred and violence in the region. All this will deal a stunning blow to the planned two-state solution of the Palestine problem.

Trump's likely departure from the longstanding US adherence to the One China policy (the bedrock of any country's diplomatic relations with the

noble achievements of our time.

Donald Trump has to a large extent radicalised his supporters by his right-wing, populist and ultra-nationalistic views and policies towards immigrants in general and Muslim immigrants in particular, and by his views about the minorities in the US, its trading partners, and strategic allies. Implementation of his populist pledges would be a regressive action, resulting in rapid evaporation of America's democratic values, and cultural and civilisational glory. He would undermine America's long-standing relations with key powers of today's



IMAGE: MAYA SPIELMAN

PRC) could plunge the US-China relations, deemed most important for global stability, into a crisis. Trump's aggressive policy on disputed South China Sea is confrontational and is likely to become a flashpoint.

The US would forfeit, by implementing Trump's campaign pledges, the honour it enjoys as the greatest champion of the free world characterised by democratic governance, freedom of the press and speech, rule of law, human rights, dignity of human person, equality before law, inclusion, globalisation, and such other

world and cause commotion to the prevailing global political and economic orders and gravely destabilise the existing geopolitical equilibrium.

Trump's foreign policy, as perceived by the world from his utterances during the election campaign, is likely to destroy US' soft power (which is in fact the finer power) over the world; although militarily it might still remain the greatest power at least for the foreseeable future. In this era of connectivity and cooperation between nations for jointly addressing the scourges and challenges of our time and

for collective prosperity, US' policy of isolation and protectionism under Trump's presidency would render the country insular and reduce its soft power. Insularity, protectionism, and an overdose of nationalistic sentiments and actions could seriously strain or undermine the US' relations with other powers of the world and engender military confrontations with them. The resultant instability, chaos and conflicts across the globe could dash the hopes and aspirations of Trump's supporters to 'Make America Great Again'. On the contrary, America might witness an erosion of its greatness.

Global powers have to assume global responsibility. They have to concern themselves with the common good of mankind, and at times, are required to make sacrifices. Only economic and military might cannot make a country great; and leadership, which implies togetherness, inclusiveness and engagement with others, cannot be exercised in isolation. Countries like China, Japan and South Korea have not achieved socioeconomic miracles in isolation. China, for instance, is advancing towards becoming the largest economy and the greatest power on earth not by pursuing isolationism and protectionism. On the contrary, China is increasingly opening up its economy and engaging itself at every nook and corner of the world – across the regions, oceans and continents – in what the Chinese call "mutually beneficial win-win cooperation". So, how would isolationism, exclusion, and protectionism help the US sustain its leading global role? How would it ensure continuation of America's greatness? Instead of emulating China and leading America forward, Trump is poised to lead his country backward.

If America's global leadership shrinks into isolationism and insular protectionism under President Trump, the resultant void is expected to be filled by rising China. With its huge resources for investment abroad, immense capability of financing development projects in countries across the continents, and mega-connectivity projects called OBOR, which are underway, China is poised to supplant the US as the number one global power. America's isolationism will hasten China's ascent to that position.

We do not really know at this point in time where to the consequences of Trump's policies and actions will take the world, or how serious their diverse ramifications and domino effect could be for the entire humanity of our globalised village. One thing, however, looks certain: The Trump effects will enormously undermine the glory and greatness that America has achieved since its independence two and half centuries ago.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Donald Trump's flawed foreign policy

President Trump's ban on immigrants from seven major Muslim countries, his threat to come out of NAFTA, cut down US subscription to the UN Fund and NATO, and the US withdrawal from the TPP agreement speak volumes about his misconceptions over US' longstanding foreign policies.

They are bound to have negative impacts on global politics and will prove detrimental to US interest in the long run.

However, it is heartening to see the global protest against these decisions. The US cannot live an isolated life in the name of "America first." The President must understand the ground realities and act accordingly before it is too late.

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Dhaka

Save our teenagers

It is alarming to see teenage boys involved in crimes such as drug addiction, snatching, eve teasing and even murder. It is a dangerous signal for the nation at large.

Our education system, which has become more of a profitable business, is largely responsible for this. Students can't acquire knowledge or social values, and are easily misguided into committing crimes.

We must start guiding our future generations correctly. The education systems must be rid of corruption, and students should be equipped with moral compasses.

Biplob Biswas
On email