

History is asking for an address change

No justice for Sagar, Runi

Will this turn into another cold case?

Megh's pain of not knowing why his parents were so cruelly snatched away from him is something we can only imagine. The ten-year-old's parents, Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi, both prominent TV journalists, were brutally murdered when the boy was only five. For five years relatives, the journalist community and indeed ordinary citizens of this country have been wondering what happened to the case; every year we revisit this day to vent our resentment at the lack of progress in the grisly murder. That the case was bounced around by different law enforcement agencies is now old news. It is heartening to know that a Dhaka court on February 8 directed RAB to inform it by March 21 the progress in the investigation.

We applaud the court for its direction, but we find it surprising that the various agencies that have been investigating the matter over the last five years have not been able to get to the bottom of this case. We say surprising because specialised units like RAB and the police, who have played a laudable role in containing the religious extremists in the country, have not been able to identify the murderers of this couple as of yet. We wonder whether this case will meet the same fate as many other sensational murders like that of Tonu's. Public confidence in the system is sapped by unresolved cases becoming the norm, and that does not benefit any society claiming to possess a fair justice system.

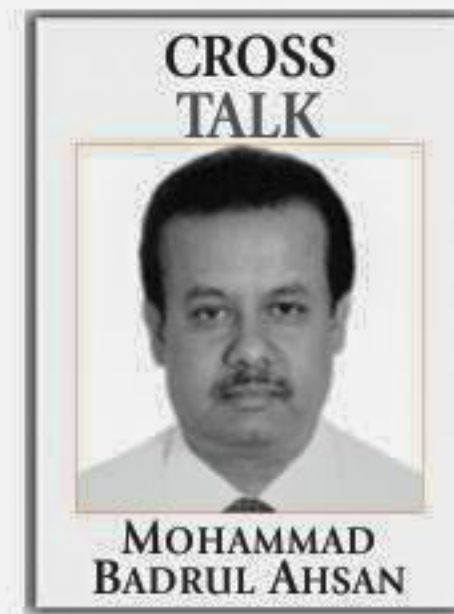
The hawker headache

Come up with a workable solution

STREET vendors—no one knows how many in this mega city's vast informal economy—have taken over the pavements, and in some cases the roads of the capital. It's not only the arterial streets, even the main roads and foot bridges are not free from their invasion, as pictures of New Market carried in this paper yesterday show. It has become so bad lately that the butterfly effect of a single cycle van, set up as a snack shop, parked illegally on a busy street, can trickle down to alleys shutting down for an entire area for hours.

The well-made pavement is a distant memory in Dhaka. Many parts of the city never had the luxury of having them in the first place; where they did exist, they have become an irregular procession of broken slabs and fetid little holes. A pedestrian's eyes must always search out his or her foot's next destination. And then there are the hawkers all over the pavements blocking the movement of people. Occasionally, authorities respond, with much noise and hype, to clear out the streets. The vendors, with nowhere else to go, return and, so does the chaos.

Hawkers cater to a demand. We cannot wish them away, nor can isolated efforts by the authorities rid our footpaths of them. It's more than a mere law enforcement issue. There should be designated areas in the city where they can ply their trade during certain hours. As long as there are vested interest groups, which include local influential people and unfortunately, some unscrupulous members of the law enforcement agencies, Dhaka's streets are not going to be free of hawkers anytime soon.



CROSS TALK
 IN my student days I worked as a bartender in a nightclub in downtown Washington, D.C., where my colleague was a bespectacled nerdy-looking Vietnam veteran. This man had a hard time carrying on conversations with the guests, an important requirement for bartenders, no less than occupational therapy is for mental health professionals. Someone advised him to improve his stock of jokes so that he could spice up the discussions, and he dutifully bought a few joke books. He showed desperate spurts of enthusiasm but soon realised that his jokes were falling awfully flat. One day he confided in me that telling a joke was more about how one said it than what one said.

That, in a nutshell, describes the Trump presidency of the last twenty-one days. The barrage of executive orders that he signed and the flood of tweets he fired have sent conflicting messages, as well as messages of conflicts, across a jittery world. Donald Trump in these three weeks couldn't open his mouth even once without kicking up some dust.

Maybe that's going to change someday. Maybe, someday the corporate coelacanth will learn to become a pragmatic president. Maybe, soon he will realise that being a president isn't just about what one conducts but also about how one conducts oneself.

Trump has already ruffled more than his share of feathers. He affronted the Australian Prime Minister on the phone over a refugee deal. He was mean to the Mexican President, vowing to send American troops to Mexico to take care of the "bad Hombres". He irritated the Iranians after tweeting that their country has been "formally put on notice."

When the students at University of California, Berkeley, violently protested against a campus speaking, he threatened to cut federal funds for the university. He also threatened to send federal troops to Chicago if the city failed to curb its high rate of crimes. He imposed a travel ban on the Muslims from a number of

countries against worldwide condemnation. He even fired the acting Attorney General of his country for refusing to implement that ban.

Thus the rambunctious US president within a short span of time has done enough to turn a bully green with envy. And if this should be the foretaste of his leadership, the world needs to brace up for more shocking things to come. Donald Trump is behaving like a kid in

lead the fight for democracy and freedom. The Cold War, military coups, assassinations, invasion of Iraq, and, now, the war against terrorism are American ideas for which millions have died in other countries.

Since World War II, much of the political and economic conclusions in the world have been drawn from the American premises. For many decades, the CIA has been installing and toppling

game. Free market liberalism has engendered its own law of natural selection: Survival of the fittest.

Donald Trump and his supporters are understandably upset over terrorist attacks on the American soil. But they should calculate at what rate their governments have unleashed death and destruction in foreign lands. During a recent interview with Fox News, Donald Trump, in a Freudian slip, confessed that



PHOTO: AFP

the candy store. The power of presidency has gone to his head.

For many Americans, Donald Trump is taking their country back for them. But who has taken America from the Americans? Who has made America last that it now has to be fervently made first again? Who has taken advantage of America as Trump complains? Who has created NATO, the UN, and the whole shebang of other international bodies in whose interests?

The United States isn't the leader of the free world at gunpoint. It's coughing up more money and resources than any other country, because it's committed to

governments in third world countries. For as many decades, streams of global trade and commerce have flown within the boundaries of American concepts. If the jobs went out of the United States, it was because the American workers, due to their high living standards, had become pricey. Outsourcing, the global village, the theory of comparative advantage, etc. have caught America like a spider in its own web.

For better or worse, today's world is largely an American creation. So is America's own distress. The American economy looks weaker, because other countries are beating America at its own

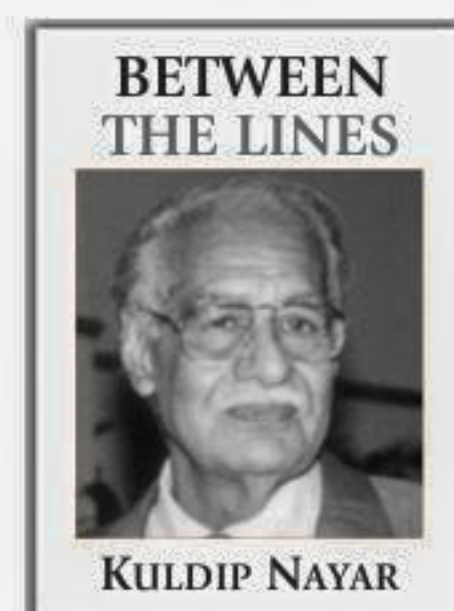
Russian president Vladimir Putin may be a "killer" but his own country isn't so "innocent."

Donald Trump may be just an emblematic figure of time's longing for itself. The rise of this clumsy politician in the heartland of democracy is screaming that history is asking for an address change. Whether America is made first again will depend on where that journey takes us next. In Donald Trump's America, the mind may have arrived before the train.

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V.K. SASIKALA vs. O. PANNEERSELVAM

Who will Tamil Nadu choose?



BETWEEN THE LINES
 POLITICS in the South is no different from that of the North. The personality cult dominates in both. People go mad over the leaders they prefer, and even go to the extent of self-immolating themselves in frenzy. The government has banned the practice but it has failed to stop it.

V.K. Sasikala in Tamil Nadu has become such a figure having been a close aide of former chief minister J. Jayalalitha. Today, she is the general secretary of the AIADMK and the party has elected her as the leader of its

at the instance of Union Home Ministry, is dragging his feet.

Even otherwise, this is not the opportune moment for a change of guard in the state as verdict over the disproportionate case against Sasikala and her mentor Jayalalitha is awaited. The apex court has already indicated that a judgment will be delivered within a week. Whether she wins or loses, her stock is already waning.

As for Sasikala, she has been a long-standing friend of the former chief minister and by virtue of being close to Jayalalitha, she wielded enormous power. But she was never nominated by her as successor. Sasikala's claim to fame can be attributed to her proximity with Jayalalitha. There were allegedly occasions when even the former chief minister was annoyed with her friend

Whenever Jayalalitha was either in jail or during her brief period of wilderness owing to cases in the court, it was Panneerselvam whom she depended on and foisted him on the chief minister's gaddi. And, as a loyal party worker, he had kept the seat warm all the time, and vacated it when she returned.

Not only that, Panneerselvam revered Jayalalitha so much that he would never sit on the chair which she occupied and instead would have another chair to sit. He had her photo in the chamber apart from the one he always carried in his pocket to express his blind loyalty to her. He became so dependable that every time there was a problem, Jayalalitha chose him as the "caretaker" chief minister.

Indeed, Jayalalitha was so tall that nobody else came anywhere near. This

state is an ideal situation for the BJP to make inroads, but the 37 AIADMK Lok Sabha members are crucial for it to get a bill or motion passed.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strategy seems to be keeping a close watch. Maybe, the Supreme Court verdict against Sasikala would end the speculation one way or the other. However, it will be their endeavour to register their presence in the state. Sasikala's husband Natarajan's confabulations with Congress leaders may also have triggered BJP president Amit Shah to take stock of the situation. He is said to be in favour of Panneerselvam, an affable man. The party hopes to ride on his shoulders to make a future presence in Tamil Nadu.

What seems to be going in favour of Panneerselvam is the public mood against Sasikala who was blamed for not allowing Jayalalitha's niece to visit her ailing aunt. She has already formed a party and has threatened to divulge several secrets soon. People, however, resent all this because of Sasikala's antics to rise to the place where she is today.

All this is familiar in politics in the North. Nehru wanted her daughter Indira Gandhi to be his successor. But Lal Bahadur Shastri was too popular to be ignored. Therefore, then Congress president K. Kamaraj settled the matter when he announced that it would be Shastri first and Indira Gandhi later. Morarji Desai never accepted that, and was the first to throw in his hat in the ring after Nehru's death.

Indira Gandhi preferred to split the party than to accept Desai. She even sidelined Kamaraj after he had put her in the gaddi. Learning from the experience, she combined the posts of Prime ministership and the party president. In the same way, the split in the AIADMK ranks seems imminent even though it is stage managed. The legislature members want Sasikala to be both party general secretary and the chief minister.

How this entire drama would unfold is difficult to say. But one thing is certain; Sasikala is a force to reckon with. So is Panneerselvam. Fortunately for the latter, the public is behind him. At least that is what it looks like at this juncture. However, the fate of Sasikala hinges on the court verdict. Sasikala is no Jayalalitha and DMK is waiting in the wings.

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Panneerselvam and V K Sasikala at the party MLA's meeting in which she was elected as AIADMK Legislative party leader.

legislature wing. The outgoing chief minister O. Panneerselvam was asked to put in his resignation. He was not even present when the decision was taken.

But the sudden turn of events in Tamil Nadu has sent everyone into a tizzy. Panneerselvam, the close confidant of the deceased chief minister, has come out strongly against Sasikala, accusing her of trying to usurp power. The swearing-in ceremony, which was to be held on Tuesday, seems to have been put off for the moment as the governor, apparently

and chose to keep her away. Considered part of the Mannargudi mafia, Sasikala rubbed people on the wrong side, which had on occasions embarrassed Jayalalitha. M. Natarajan, Sasikala's husband, was seen to be behind what she did and ultimately he was sidelined not only by Jayalalitha but also Sasikala later. It is an open secret that Sasikala rose to accumulate much wealth and was convicted, along with the former chief minister, by the special court.

was like Jawaharlal Nehru who, like a banyan tree, did not allow any other plant to grow near him. She, singlehandedly, carried the party and her government despite a strong opponent like the DMK with patriarch M. Karunanidhi still in party chair.

The ruling BJP at the Centre has very little following of its own in Tamil Nadu because it is considered a party of the North. In the last Lok Sabha, the BJP won only one seat as compared to 37 by AIADMK. The current turmoil in the

PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Who will bear the responsibility?

The news report of a young student meeting a tragic end on February 8, 2017 brought tears to my eyes, not just as a reader but also a parent. These gruesome incidents have been occurring with growing frequency in our country of late. The bus driver in this case has been sued, but equally responsible are the city planners and engineers who let the lamppost stand along the marginal end of a footpath where an accident could be imminent.

A loss of a blooming life in such a tragic way cannot be accepted at all.
 Nasseer Mahboob
 By email

Poorly managed recruitment process of the ACC

The Anti Corruption Commission published an advertisement for recruitment on January 6, 2015, but it is yet to complete that recruitment process.

At least two BCS written exams have been held throughout the recruitment process of ACC, and another one is in the offing. They have been complaining about the shortage of manpower in their organisation, but the faulty recruitment process is in fact proof of why such shortages are prevalent.

They should understand that most of these candidates are unemployed in their wait for the ACC to announce their decisions? It is creating financial burdens on many of their families. Who will we turn to for our miseries?
 An aspirant
 By email