

Address boro growers' concern

Turn the power back on

HUNDREDS of farmers from three villages under Mauha union in Gouripur upazila demonstrated on Saturday, for the restoration of power supply to a deep tube-well used for boro cultivation in the area. Farmers said that they are already late for transplantation of saplings and that yield will be seriously hampered this season if power is not restored immediately.

In spite of making several attempts to contact the officials of Mymensingh Palli Biddhut Samity-3 at Shambhuganj Bazar in Mymensingh sadar upazila, the farmers could not do so. As around 400 farmers are dependent on the deep tube-well for their land and their livelihood, the decision by the authorities to shut down power like this and not respond to the farmers' queries, is quite appalling.

Boro farmers are understandably upset with the situation as without timely transplantation, they may have to incur severe losses. The deputy general manager of the Biddhut Samity said that they had stopped power supply because of a case lodged over the ownership of the deep tube-well. Upon investigation, however, it was found that it was the present manager who ran the deep tube-well and so power is expected to be turned back on shortly.

We hope that this is indeed the case. However, why the farmers had to do without power all the while, when the authorities clearly know that they and their families completely depend on this one deep tube-well to water their land, which is their sustenance, is quite baffling.

Benevolence of a Japanese woman

Let it shine

WE wholeheartedly thank Hiroko Kobayashi, an 88-year-old Japanese woman who has been financially supporting secondary and higher education of about a hundred impoverished girls in Jhenidah and Panchagarh. She has taught them how to dream: Jhumur Khatun of Jhenidah is pursuing a Master's degree while Soma Das is studying civil engineering in a polytechnic institute thanks to her generosity but for which these girls would have no other option than to drop out.

Kobayashi lives in Japan and comes to visit these children every year, the first time being in 2003 when she came to know of a girl from Kaliganj who had killed herself for not being able to take the HSC exam for want of money. As we emphatically acknowledge her altruism, what to make of an act of compassion so complete that encompasses even those she had never met or known nothing about? For most of us that's where the difficulty lies—in feeling a part of our shared humanity that transcends national boundaries, colour and creed.

Feeling compassion is one thing; acting on it is another. Kobayashi not only showed a moment's sympathy to suffering in a faraway place or doled out money, she made a connection with a group of young women who needed a helping hand to realise their potential. That is the abiding message of this story. But positive emotions like helping others, studies show, are subject to changes brought about by environmental output. Children who have compassionate parents tend to be more altruistic. Parents would do well to take the example of this octogenarian Japanese woman and foster compassionate behaviour in their children.

Why so many deaths on roads?

NO FRILLS



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

WE are used to seeing the death toll rise in road accidents during the two main Eid holidays when hundreds of thousands of people travel to their village homes. But as

pointed out by a leading Bangla daily on February 12, we have been forced to witness the death of 25 people in the last 24 hours. The most horrific of these accidents is the one that occurred in Faridpur's Nagarkanda area, where a reckless bus slammed into a cylinder-carrying covered van which resulted in an explosion; the fire from that accident caused the death of 13 people. This single incident injured 33 people in total and looking at nationwide data, we have another 12 deaths on our hands over the same period.

Police data tells us that there have been 2,000 casualties due to road accidents over the last three years, but unofficial data puts the number of fatalities at more than 4,000 in the year 2016 alone! The Director of Accident Research Institute (BUET) has blamed Saturday's accident on excessive speeding. When one takes into account the reckless driving of heavy transports like buses coupled with the fact that a large majority of these drivers do not possess valid licenses, we have on our hands a recipe for disaster.

Where the mantra remains 'time is money', getting to a destination in the shortest possible time for bus drivers translates into these buses constantly trying to overtake one another on highways, often overlooking oncoming traffic. Just because they happen to be the largest vehicles on the road means that it is the responsibility of oncoming traffic to get out of the way. What a joke! Unfortunately for the ill-fated bus in Nagarkanda that crashed into the cylinder-carrying van, we now have 13 dead and more than 30 injured. Going by the statements made by those who were lucky to survive the accident, the bus driver was speeding heavily after

crossing the ferry (where the bus was stuck for an hour) and overtook 7-8 buses before hitting the covered van at high speed. As this was a head on collision that engulfed the bus in fire, passengers had to break the windows at the back to escape the deadly fire.

Reckless speeding remains the main culprit. So what is to be done? Yes, it is understandable that there cannot be a traffic police manning every nook and corner of every highway in the country. This is where technology can and does play a part in traffic management and

shelf, somewhere? Is it not time that authorities start formulating a plan of action that would actually be implemented (in phases if necessary) so that these avoidable accidents do not occur in such predictable frequency.

When we look at the information available, the major culprits may be inter-district bus drivers, but there have been instances where truckers are taking their toll on commuters. Indeed, such an incident has occurred in Rajendrapur of Gazipur district where a Rajendrapur bound truck crashed into a passenger-

We have even had to listen to ridiculous statements over the years from one or two very powerful people in positions of power that as long as a driver can interpret road signs, he is qualified to drive such vehicles. The sad reality is that these incidents go on happening over the years and no constructive steps are taken, either to bring the culprits to justice, or, setting up physical barriers to minimise the casualty rate. Human life is not cheap, as some would like to think. Every person who dies on the road belongs to a



At least four people were killed after a truck fell into a roadside ditch in Narayanganj's Sonargaon on February 8, 2017.

PHOTO: STAR

monitoring in other countries. Speed calculating cameras have been around for decades. Why can't we install them at critical junctures on our highways that are known to be accident-prone areas? Then errant drivers breaking the speed limits could be booked for violating the law. The data is available with the authorities. Is it not time we did something constructive that could lessen these unnecessary deaths instead of issuing lame statements about forming a probe committee that will publish some report that will gather dust on some

loaded easy bike (battery operated three-wheeler) killing three former army personnel and injuring another five. What all this points to is that a sense of impunity rules over drivers of heavy vehicles. Now why is that? Authorities have been very reluctant to take on these roaming 'death-on-wheels' because the government appears to be powerless to confront the powerful trade unions, which threaten to shut down road links every time one of their fraternity members go on an 'unintended' killing spree.

family. Beyond the loss of a loved one, or taking care of a seriously injured one, road accidents do not distinguish between the voiceless multitudes or the well-placed in society. Today, we sit and express sympathy and outrage at the lives lost in Faridpur or some other place. Tomorrow, it may be one of us and we would want justice. So, how many deaths will it take for authorities to wake up from their slumber and do what needs to be done?

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Navigating the Trumpscape



MICHAEL MANDELBAUM

TO say that US President Donald Trump's administration made waves in its initial weeks would be an understatement. Large protests across the United

States and around the world attended his inauguration, and have continued since. Meanwhile, Trump has already declared war on the adversarial American press, and held acrimonious telephone conversations with friendly countries' leaders.

But to make sense of the new administration's overall performance, worried and perplexed observers inside

administration consisted of just a few aides rattling around in the White House. Like its predecessors, the Trump administration will settle down and settle in – unless it doesn't.

A second guideline is to keep a close eye on foreign policy. Owing to the checks and balances built into the American constitutional order, presidents have much wider latitude in how they engage with other countries than they do in steering domestic affairs.

To be sure, Trump's first weeks portend disturbing changes to US foreign policy. For 70 years, the US has maintained global security through its network of alliances, and kept the international economy humming through free trade. During the campaign,

not following the example set by its predecessor. During Barack Obama's presidency, senior officials were marginalised, and foreign policy was generally determined by an inexperienced president and his even less experienced young White House acolytes.

A third fact to keep in mind is that Trump's most serious opposition will not come from his noisiest opponents. Public demonstrations will not throw the Trump administration off course, and they could even steel its resolve to pursue the policies that have raised the most objections. It is worth remembering that the protest movement against the Vietnam War was even more unpopular than the war itself. Like President Richard Nixon, Trump may try

Congressional Republicans, many of whom will frustrate any effort he makes to abandon America's long-standing alliances.

Trump may also have to deal with opposition from business leaders, who have remained largely silent, but could grow tired of his wrathful tweets. Ultimately, business leaders have a duty to their companies' health, and they will try to block any policies that threaten it. Multinational corporations with expansive international operations will resist initiatives that could spark trade wars. At the end of the day, no Republican president – not even Trump – can afford to ignore the captains of American industry and finance.

A fourth lesson to take to heart is that American democracy will survive. Fearful pronouncements about the rise of incipient (or actual) fascism are misplaced. The basic institutions of American governance have survived greater challenges than any that Trump may pose.

Although America in 2017 is deeply divided, Americans remain committed to the central tenets of democracy: free, fair, and regular elections and the protection of political, religious, and economic liberty. It is unlikely that Trump will attempt to overturn any of them; and even if he does try, he will fail. When he leaves office, the US will essentially be what it was when he entered it: the world's most powerful democracy.

Finally, a key question to consider is whether the Trump administration will be "normal." A normal president pursues predictable policies that are generally supported by those who voted for him, and opposed by those who did not. Trump's cabinet and Supreme Court nominations fit this description.

An administration operating outside the bounds of normality will pursue policies that even its supporters and well-wishers oppose, and which could do serious damage to the country, and the world generally.

Will Trump's presidency be normal? At this point, we must defer to the twentieth-century Chinese communist leader Zhou Enlai's purported response to André Malraux's question about what he thought of the French Revolution: it's "too early to say."

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the US and around the world should follow five general guidelines, rather than focus too much on discrete events.

First, all new US administrations are messy at the beginning: they stumble, create confusion, and say and do things that they later retract, or at least regret. Some officials will not be up to the job, and will leave the government after a few months.

Many of the missteps that occur early in a presidency stem from a flaw in the US political system. New presidents take office without a full team in place, and must wait for their cabinet nominees and other officials – the people who actually run the government – to be confirmed. During Trump's first two weeks, his

Trump attacked both of these crucial roles. Should his administration abandon them entirely, the world will become a poorer, more dangerous place.

And yet most of the new president's principal foreign-policy appointees inspire confidence. Secretary of Defense James Mattis is a sober, experienced, and widely respected former general with an internationalist outlook. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, while never having served in government, gained extensive experience working with other countries when he was CEO of ExxonMobil, a large multinational energy company.

In fact, the new administration's ability to maintain continuity and international stability will depend on it

to exploit the public's distaste for disruptive and occasionally violent protests to bolster support for his policies.

Another loud source of opposition is the mainstream press, which has attacked the Trump administration earlier and more forcefully than any new presidency in memory. Still, the press's capacity to stymie Trump is limited, because it lacks credibility outside of the coastal states and large metropolitan areas where people already oppose him.

Meanwhile, Trump's formal opposition – the Democratic Party – is weak, demoralised, and divided. But his administration could face formidable opposition from different quarters. For starters, he cannot govern without

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Who will take care of the children?

Bangladesh, and Dhaka especially, is teeming with underprivileged children with no parents, or any source of food, shelter and clothing. Many of them are even made to work with heavy metal and other hazardous equipment in workshops. Others can be seen begging for alms or worse, getting involved in gangs.

Bangladesh has several laws in place regarding child rights protection, such as the Bangladesh Labour Code 2006 and The Child Act 2013, neither of which are implemented effectively.

We, the responsible and privileged sections of society, cannot avoid our duties towards these children who deserve our help and protection.

Mobarak hossain

By email

Sound pollution in Lalmatia

The streets of Lalmatia are full of hawkers advertising their merchandise using incredibly loud microphone announcements. It was tolerable even a few years ago, but the noise level has now become unbearable, especially for the children and medical patients living in the area.

I would like to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to look into this issue immediately.

Zubair Khaled

Dhaka