

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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DHAKA SATURDAY APRIL 22, 2017, BAISHAKH 9, 1424 BS

Deaths of aqua-life in haors

Determine the actual cause quickly

FOR the last fortnight the haors, in greater Sylhet particularly, have been in the news. First for the plight of the nearly quarter million people who are dependent on the haors for their livelihood. On that are the shocking pictures of large numbers of deaths of aqua-life following the flash floods. The argument that the un-harvested crops that went under water haverotted and might have caused the deaths holds no water since this is not the first time that these areas have been visited by flash floods. But we do not recall such deaths in the past.

It is also true that the waters of the haor areas have been contaminated to such an extent to have caused severe depletion of oxygen in the water affecting different species of fishes of that area. But this state of the haors have been there for quite some time. So why the deaths, and more so immediately in the aftermath of the flash flood caused by water from upstream?

In this regard we feel that the report in this paper on Friday suggesting that uranium might have something to do with the deaths should be taken into cognizance. Reportedly, the open uranium mines in Meghalaya, overflowed by rain, might have contaminated the water of the upstream rivers, and eventually our rivers.

However, we would like to put our faith in the statement of the Meghalaya deputy chief minister that uranium has nothing to do with it. And that makes the need for a quick analysis to preclude the presence of uranium and determine the real cause of the deaths. If need be a joint investigation can be launched with the Meghalaya government in this regard since marine life has been similarly affected in Meghalaya also.

Unbridled BCL men

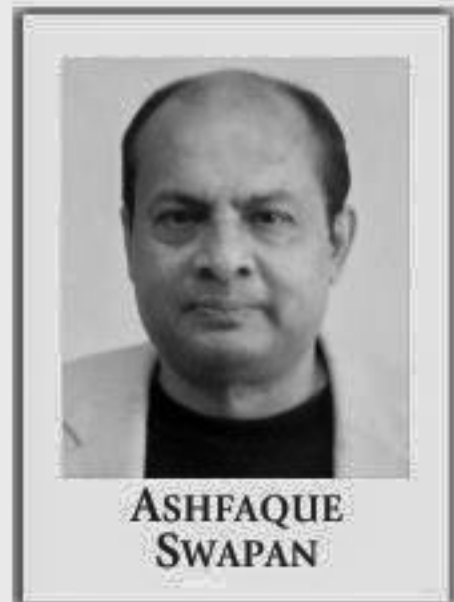
When will they be reined in?

THE Chittagong University authorities were forced to postpone a graduation test for journalism students on Thursday when activists of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) refused to allow examinees to enter the exam hall. And this because the university authorities did not allow one of their men to sit for the exam.

The activist in question was barred from taking the exam for assaulting another BCL leader with a deadly weapon. Is this type of behaviour acceptable on a university campus, or anywhere else, for that matter? Following such behaviour, did the authorities not have full right to bar the BCL man from sitting for the exam? Yet, BCL men have made it a routine to cause such disruptions on university campuses and in other places, causing all sorts of problems for students and the public in general. And there has been little remorse or shame, and no punitive action at all, for the lawlessness of some of these cadres. There are numerous other similar examples in regards to BCL men disturbing or manipulating university activities, government tenders, etc.

It would not be wrong to suggest that things have gotten to this point because of the impunity that has been afforded to BCL men over the years. We are pleased to hear that on this instance the Chhatra League central executive committee has reportedly suspended two of the activists involved for "breaching discipline of the organisation". But is that enough for an act that is a cognizable offence? We hope that the errant party cadres will be exemplarily punished to send a message that no one, regardless of political affiliation, is above the law.

The demographic catastrophe that launched Trump



ASHFAQUE SWAPAN

WHEN Donald Trump won, American pundits were baffled and political analysts were stumped. How could this mendacious, tacky, narcissist win? (He didn't,

actually. Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by three million. Trump managed to use a quirk in the US election system and squeaked through by winning four states with barely a 100,000 majority. But that's a different story.)

To understand why Trump won, you need to know what happened to people like Ryan Johnson. Johnson, a high school graduate in Erie, Pennsylvania, had dropped out of a two-year culinary programme and worked part-time jobs. He grew disillusioned with his future. One day, his mother found him in his room, dead, following a heroin overdose. He was 22.

The Bloomberg news service which reports Ryan's death quotes his mother Sue: "He just saw his life as not what he wanted it to be, and he didn't know how to get it there."

Pollsters have pointed out that the strongest support for Trump came from a demographic cohort they describe as non-college educated whites. Predominantly rural and small town folks, these people have been left behind in the tumultuous economic changes over the last few decades in the United States. As manufacturing jobs have migrated en masse, non-college educated people have been hit hard.

Economic slowdown and rising inequality is killing them. Literally.

Scholarly research backs this. Nobel laureate economist Sir Angus Deaton and Anne Case, both economics professors at Princeton, show in a paper that white middle age mortality has gone up – yes, you read that right – between 1999 and 2013.

"This change reversed decades of progress in mortality and was unique to the United States; no other rich country saw a similar turnaround," according to an abstract of their paper, "Rising morbidity and mortality in midlife among white non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st century," published in the

Proceedings of the National Academy of the Sciences.

What's even more curious, "The midlife mortality reversal was confined to white(s)," according to the abstract. "Black(s) and Hispanics at midlife, and those aged 65 and above in every racial and ethnic group, continued to see mortality rates fall."

Scholars say one reason for the ethnic disparity may be that whites have seen a drastic decline in prosperity compared to their parents, and haven't handled it well, while other minorities are more resilient, having struggled with poverty for generations.

Researchers found the largest increases

of mortality among those whites with the least education. For those with a high school degree or less, deaths caused by drug and alcohol poisoning rose fourfold; suicides rose by 81 percent; and deaths caused by liver disease and cirrhosis rose by 50 percent.

All these numbers add up to a grim picture. White middle-aged Americans have seen overall mortality rates increase over the past 15 years, with the total number of lives lost comparable to the number of Americans who have died of AIDS, the researchers say.

Researchers found that causes of death were primarily suicide, drug and alcohol poisoning and chronic liver disease and

growth and growing inequality," said Deaton, the Nobel laureate economist.

Case and Deaton told Bloomberg about a theory of why mortality has risen for less educated whites. "High school graduates who go straight into the workforce have higher unemployment, weaker wage growth, and less chance of marrying than their predecessors and educated peers. Community supports have broken down, and as disadvantage snowballs, premature deaths rise," Bloomberg explained.

In community after community devastated by economic ruin and substance abuse, less educated whites are in despair and they are furious.

Mainstream political candidates failed to gauge the measure of their pain and fury.

Enter Donald Trump. Sure, he is a snake oil salesman and a hustler, so he promises to bring back jobs, make America great again and terrific health care while slashing taxes and cutting the deficit. He cunningly taps into their toxic mood of despair, and rekindles and exploits racial fears.

These non-college whites have had it with Washington politicians, who ignore their plight. At least Trump speaks to their suffering and promises them hope.

The terrible part is that on top of all the suffering this demographic group is going through, they are in for another



SOURCE: NEWCRITICON

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heartbreak, because Trump is going to let them down.

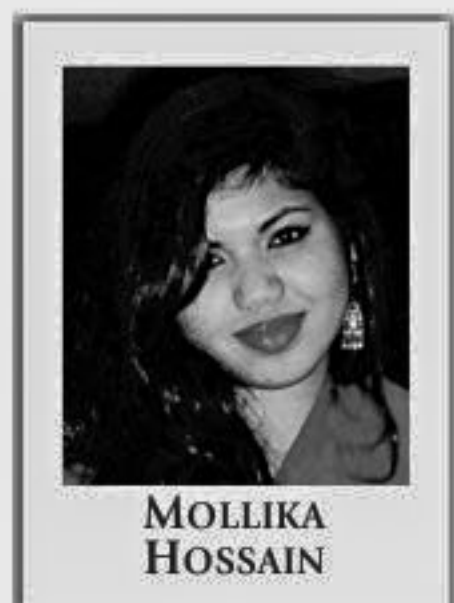
Trump isn't going to get any manufacturing jobs back, even if he ever meant to. As the US president nears his first 100 days in office, it has become abundantly clear that he has little understanding of policy, how laws are passed, or for that matter, anything of any depth or substance. And he appears blissfully unaware of it.

The man is not just clueless – he's also clueless about the fact that he is clueless.

The writer is a contributing editor for Siliconer, a monthly periodical for South Asians in the United States.

LET KIDS BE KIDS

The unrealistic pressure on primary school students



MOLLIKA HOSSAIN

I still vividly recall seeing the tired defeated look on my six-year-old cousin's face as he grudgingly huffed and puffed through his daily evening studies. At that time he was only in

kindergarten, and I was baffled with the amount of studying expected out of young children like him in Bangladesh. I

I have with education in Bangladesh is the excessive load of study materials and the high pressure applied on children to get the highest marks possible. It is time that we wake up and recognise that studying large amounts of information for a long period of time is not necessarily likely to yield the best results. A large study load and long study hours does not correlate to success in the true sense of that word. Studying, like many things in life, follows a statistical bell curve, which demonstrates that everything must be done in moderation and past a certain quantity, the efforts

their parents and teachers is unrealistic and frankly speaking, inhumane as they continue to rob these kids of their already fleeting childhood. We have to recognize that play and fun is an essential part of the mental stability and growth of all human beings. We must give children the opportunity to be silly and fully maximize the good times in their childhood in order to produce fully functional and well balanced adults.

Furthermore, I am disheartened by how in Bangladesh, memorization and the ability to regurgitate mere facts and details are given more emphasis and

useful function? For example, instead of forcing children to memorise poems, why not encourage them to experiment with poetry and create their own poems? Schools in America foster creative thinking and utilise theory based learning and analysis as a teaching method, focusing on broadening student's minds and places little emphasis on memorisation and regurgitation comparatively.

Moreover, I believe our schools would benefit from adapting some of the ways of the American education system. Teachers are usually revered by students in Bangladesh, but they are also feared. Inducing fear within students actually hinders learning, so I would recommend that Bangladeshi teachers play more of the role of a facilitator to learning rather than an authoritative figure. Using different modes of teaching is important, since, not every child learns just by watching the teacher speak or write on the board. Some children are more visual learners, while others are auditory learners. Some are tactile learners, and then again some are a combination of all three. We should be aware of these variations in learning abilities among children to help every Bangladeshi child reach their full potential.

There must be reforms made in the education system of Bangladesh to allow students to advance and compete with other countries in intellect and innovation. Fostering an environment of creativity while facilitating a reasonable study load is imperative for that to happen in the near future. Most of all, we should allow children to be children, giving them the creative freedom and space to find their own voice and passions, which is what ultimately leads to the creation of leaders within a country. Bangladeshi children have immense amount of talent, but the current education system is suppressing their unique gifts and instead producing a bunch of monotonous robots unable to think for themselves. These children need to be given the vessel to succeed on their own terms. Anything less is simply injustice done on the parts of educators and the education system.

The writer is a medical student of the Florida State University College of Medicine, US.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Out of control Chatra League

According to news reports the members of Chatra League were locked in a violent clash with the policemen in the Kazir Dewry area of Chittagong on Tuesday afternoon. Some of them were carrying machetes and sticks, all to protest the building of a swimming pool in the outer stadium. Such a show of power by the student wing of the ruling party is uncalled for. Why are they allowed to engage in such violence so often? When will this unruliness be disciplined? Zabed Wali Chittagong

Violence against women on the rise

Recently a young girl was brutally attacked and pushed from a rooftop by her husband in the presence of her mother. Another girl was tortured and killed in her in-laws' house for pursuing higher studies. It seems as if no woman is safe in our country. A large number of women victims do not report cases of violence.

Patriarchy is the root cause. Increasing the number of institutions for girls, which has thankfully happened in recent years, is simply not enough to change the existing mental framework. Sons need to be talked to, and fathers educated; young girls need to be encouraged and mothers should be empowered further. There is also a lack of sincere effort on the part of administration and the law enforcement agencies - often victims feel embarrassed and afraid to lodge complaints. We can only ask that the authorities continue to work to build a country where women need not fear violence in every step of their lives. Zubair Khaled Huq By email

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again noticed the same pattern with my other older cousins who were in 5th and 7th grade. It seemed bizarre to me that all these bright young kids would study most of the day every day after returning home from school and coaching. Yet, the kids were miserable and appeared to loathe learning.

To begin with, one of the main issues

become counterproductive. In fact, a Stanford University education researcher found that too much homework can negatively affect children by increasing their stress levels, affecting their health, and leaving less time for friends, family and extracurricular pursuits.

In addition, the high amounts of pressure placed on these children by

value than creativity and independent thinking. I see my cousins just memorising choras or poems and practically every other thing in every book of every subject. Memorisation does not equate to actual learning and intellectual growth. Why are we making children sit there and regurgitate useless material that will not truly serve any