

BCL's wrath on a university correspondent

When will this hooliganism stop?

WE strongly condemn the brutality inflicted on our Rajshahi University correspondent by members of the Chhatra League while he was carrying out his professional duty. There is no justification for the student cadres of AL to mercilessly beat up Arafat Rahaman who had been taking photographs of them vandalising a bus. Even though he was wearing his press ID, the hooligans continued to hit him. The seriousness of his injuries speak volumes about the violent nature of these men and their total disregard for the law of the land.

What is more disturbing is that despite Arafat's cries for help the policemen present nearby did nothing to stop the attackers. The obvious impunity that BCL enjoys has resulted in this brutal attack which clearly is intended to intimidate journalists from reporting the misdeeds of some members of this organisation.

The misdemeanours and criminal activities of BCL members have been reported for years and yet it seems the parent party has been able to do precious little in terms of reining in their growing high-handedness.

It is a sad fact that an organisation which is part of Bangladesh's glorious history has members who resort to violence, intimidation and sometimes corruption, to establish their political supremacy.

In this latest incident, the reason why some BCL men were vandalising the bus was because the bus helper had objected to one of the men smoking inside the bus which was bothering other passengers.

BCL has posted on Facebook that it has suspended the two members who were primarily involved in the incident and we hope this is followed through. But our question remains: will the ruling party do something about the criminal behaviour of members of its affiliated organisations or will it continue to afford them impunity?

Default loan culture institutionalised

Restore good governance of the banks

IT is not without reason that the finance minister disclosed the names of the top 100 loan defaulters in parliament. When we look at the figure defaulted upon, we are talking about more than Tk 1 lakh crore siphoned off the state-owned banks which has basically ruined the discipline in the financial sector.

We have been highlighting the issue of parties treating the banks as a free ATM withdrawal system and the total lack of accountability of many of the public banks' top management. We have had several high publicity loan scams involving groups of companies with very dubious records and those cases have never been appropriately dealt with. We have been promised that boards will be reconstituted and basic banking discipline will be restored to tackle the issue of lack of oversight of management in these institutions, yet nothing ever happened.

This paper has over the years touched upon the need to stop putting people with political connections on the board of banks, a sentiment widely supported by experts and veteran bankers and, here too, we find an utter lack of action against nonpayers and selective policy of loan rescheduling of defaulters with clout and political link have contributed to the current sorrowful state of the public banks. The government has to go further than merely making public the names of bank defaulters. The time has come for the setting up of a separate commission to deal with the problem and prosecute those who keep bleeding state coffers dry year after year with impunity.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Korail slum

I commend Rashidul Hasan and Shaheen Mollah for their investigative journalism in Monday's edition of your newspaper. The feature is particularly impressive for its depth reporting. Clearly there are powerful vested interests at play in this siphoning off of national resources and exploitation of the wretched dwellers. I'm particularly concerned for the lack of safety in dispensing gas to these poor residents. The government ought to look into this potential tragedy immediately and take necessary steps to relocate these vulnerable residents. How could past and present governments allow this growth to mushroom despite past incidents of fire that many hoped would force the government to find these residents an alternative safe abode?

I sincerely hope that this thought-provoking report will draw attention from the concerned departments and help avert a tragedy that is inevitable.
Shaheen Hussain
Purana Paltan

Replace torn and soiled currency notes

Recent reports by this newspaper have informed us that the Bangladesh Bank has printed new currency notes worth Tk 25 crore, and also that new currency notes are being sold in the black market with Tk 20 charged for every Tk 1,000.

Much of the currency currently circulating is torn and in bad shape. It is surprising that most banks are still carrying out transactions with these old currency notes. They need to be phased out over a period of time. The Bangladesh Bank should help stop the sale of black market currency notes and start supplying new currency notes to banks immediately.
AKM Ehsanul Haque
Dhaka

What Modi's visit to Israel reveals

THE OVERTON WINDOW



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

NARENDRA Modi's recent visit to Israel garnered massive media attention and debate as it was the first time a sitting Indian Prime Minister visited the Jewish State. But what some of the coverage did was portray the visit as an indication of a tectonic shift happening in Indian policy towards the Israel-Palestine issue. This, however, is simply not true, as India, since establishing formal diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, has had excellent and rapidly growing economic and security relations with Israel which was intentionally left unpublicised, up until now.

India, for example, is Israel's biggest foreign arms market where it sells weapons worth more than USD 1 billion every year. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 41 percent of all Israeli arms exports between 2012 and 2016 were bought by India. This year alone, Israeli companies have signed arms deals worth an astounding USD 2.6 billion with India, much of it for advanced defence systems and technologies that India does not possess.

On the political and policy level, Israel and India both see each other as being natural and strategic "friends". Natural in the sense that Israel has the technology that India craves, while having deep economic ties with India provides Israel some diversity in terms of who it trades with (apart from the European Union and the United States).

At a time when China is rapidly moving forward, defence technology is what India is prioritising to counter what it perceives to be "the Chinese threat". Consequently, the momentum that the

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement has finally picked up means that it is becoming more and more difficult for Israel to trade with EU and other countries, making it increasingly desperate to look for other trading partners.

Strategically, India has moved more towards the US in recent times as Russian and Chinese ties have deepened to counter what they perceive as US hegemony. And as the saying goes in various political circles, "the key to the White House lies in Israel"—meaning that it is much easier for a country to have good relations with the US by improving its relations with Israel.

Moreover, 30-40 years ago, it was in some ways impossible for India to have good ties with Israel, as it was heavily dependent on Arab countries for its oil

find the more recent developments difficult to understand is because of India's history and historical position. Historically, India was, of course, once a colonised country. In that sense, some could argue that Indians may sympathise more with Palestinians who too are now living under one form of (brutal) colonial occupation.

Looking at it from a different historical angle, the most influential figure in Indian politics over the last few hundred years, Mahatma Gandhi, was strictly against Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. He once said that "Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the British", therefore, dismissing the claim of political Zionism that Palestine should be divided between Zionists and

at the expense of their relations with Palestine and of the fate of Palestinians) is clearly more beneficial—particularly in materialistic terms.

So after visiting Israel and not Ramallah (to meet Palestinian representatives), will Modi's (India's) stance on the Israel-Palestine issue change? No. India will continue to publicly promote a two-state solution like it has done for years, similar to many other countries. But in all reality, all these countries don't really see a way of ending the suffering of Palestinians under the current circumstances. And frankly, not many of them even care. Not in any way that requires any more of them than a few speeches from time to time at the UN, asking for a solution to the Palestinian crisis.

Because the truth is, Palestine and the



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on a stroll at the Olga Beach in Hadera.

PHOTO: AFP

It was primarily because of Gandhi's overwhelming influence over Indian politics during the 1940s that India was one of the first countries to vote against the UN Resolution that divided Palestine into two states. But those days are now long gone.

imports (and the Arab countries vehemently opposed Israel at least publicly). Today, most Arab countries have first and foremost, at least silently, accepted that Israel is a nuclear armed power which will continue to not only exist, but rather remain a dominant power in the Middle East (if not covertly have excellent relations with Israel themselves). And secondly, because of India's rapid economic growth (which is expected to continue in future) and the massive fall in energy prices in the international market, it is India, who, for the first time in history, has huge leverage over Arab countries today, meaning that it can now "publicly" have good relations with Israel which, in reality, India has had for quite some time now.

The reason, however, why some may

Palestinians. And it was primarily because of Gandhi's overwhelming influence over Indian politics during the 1940s that India was one of the first countries to vote against the UN Resolution that divided Palestine into two states.

But those days are now long gone. Indians, in all honesty, are not too bothered about its history with colonialism anymore (except for in some intellectual circles and especially not in political ones). The humanitarian aspect of it (which Gandhi prioritised) is no longer as relevant as those related to economic, security and other issues in the age of "realpolitik", where it is not only India, but also many other countries in the world who see that having good relations with Israel (even

fate of Palestinians were forgotten by world leaders (and public to an extent) a long time back. For decades their memories have been relegated to rhetoric alone. All that is happening today is that countries around the world are now openly admitting the fact that the material benefits from maintaining good ties with Israel mean more to them than the humanitarian ideals that were summoned by those who unequivocally supported Palestinians and, hence, refused to have any ties with Israel in the past.

So in case you were not aware, welcome to the age of realpolitik. Where Palestinians, of course, "matter"—it is only that they matter "the least".

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G20 becomes G19 on climate change

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

by 19 of the leaders, with the exception of President Trump who has decided to withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement.

This marks the effective split of the G19 from the US on the issue of climate change. It also marks the transition of

symbolically evident in the group photo where Chancellor Merkel stands out in her bright red outfit in the middle of the group of similarly dressed older white men in suits, where it is difficult to pick out President Trump from the crowd!

This is not the first time that the US has refused to join a global consensus on climate change as it happened once before in 1997, when the Kyoto Protocol was agreed at the 3rd Conference of Parties (COP3) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including by the US under President Clinton in the White House and Vice-President Al Gore who himself was in Kyoto. However, soon after that the Republicans won the presidential election and George W Bush became president and decided to withdraw the US from the Kyoto

withdrawing from the Paris Agreement and countries like China and India (the biggest and third biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, respectively) have even pledged to enhance their actions to combat climate change.

If this had happened only a few years ago it is likely that countries like China and India would have refused to abide by their commitments if the US decided to withdraw. However, that China is now in fact willing to become a leader in the field of renewable energy and in decreasing dependence on fossil fuels, especially coal, is a sign of greater level of understanding about the global nature of the climate change problem. An interesting, perhaps unforeseen, consequence of President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement is

This is not the first time that the US has refused to join a global consensus on climate change as it happened once before in 1997, when the Kyoto Protocol was agreed at COP3 of the UNFCCC, under President Clinton in the White House and Vice-President Al Gore who himself was in Kyoto.



US President Donald Trump prepares to give a speech during the panel discussion "Launch Event Women's Entrepreneur Finance Initiative" on the second day of the G20 Summit in Hamburg, Germany, July 8, 2017.

PHOTO: REUTERS/PATRIK STOLLARZ/POOL

leadership to Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany who was able, through pre-summit diplomacy, to get all 19 leaders to agree to not let the US derail their statement, which is what would normally happen to ensure unanimous agreement of all leaders. This was

Protocol. He also lobbied other countries to join the US and did manage to get Prime Minister Howard of Australia to join him in withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol.

However, this time around no other country has joined the US in

the upwelling of support from mayors of dozens of cities and governors of major states like California to pledge commitment to implement the Paris Agreement. The UNFCCC has responded by allowing provinces and cities to sign up on their own to

implement the Agreement. Thus, the implementation of the Agreement no longer depends only on heads of government but can also be done by each and every one of us from any country.

Another interesting development is the creation a few years ago of the V20 (Vulnerable 20) Group of the most vulnerable countries as a counterpart to the G20 to advocate for stronger action to tackle climate change by G20 and all other countries as well. This V20 Group, currently chaired by Ethiopia, was set up by the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) of which Bangladesh is a founder member and previous chair. The V20 has now become a leader in tackling climate change and is moving towards 100 percent renewable energy by 2050.

Bangladesh and the Marshall Islands are jointly responsible for developing the partnership strategy for the V20 and a delegation from the Marshall Islands is expected in Dhaka soon to hold bilateral talks with Bangladesh to develop the plan of action for the V20 countries.

Thus, China is now taking the lead on tackling climate change globally; Germany is taking the lead amongst the developed countries; and the V20 is taking the lead amongst the vulnerable developing countries.

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