

Construction workers' safety

Must be accorded top priority

IT is mind-boggling that 30 percent of workers' deaths in all sectors occur in the construction sector alone and that on average one hundred construction workers die every year from accidents that are preventable with a little bit of attention to workers' safety. The figure is culled from the reported cases only. One cannot venture a guess as to the number of workers that suffer injury every year. That was what emerged from the roundtable discussion on the subject of construction safety in Bangladesh organised by *The Daily Star* and Sheltech, a construction company, on Saturday.

It was rather disheartening also to learn that there is by and large a feeling of complete disregard amongst the workers themselves for their own safety; and it was abundantly clear too that the Building Code 2006 is observed only in its breach, there being no central authority with the power to implement the Code.

Given that the government is woefully short of manpower to implement the building code, it should be up to the construction firms to comply with the Code rather than make savings by cutting cost in the "safety" head. After all, it is no more than one percent of the outlay. Investing in safety in work sites, enhancing awareness and constant monitoring by the employers, would save a lot in terms of money, and on human lives on which one cannot put a value.

As for the government, it should set up a building regulatory body immediately with the power to enforce the Code as well as the authority to punish errant builders/contractors. There is also need to reform the labour law where the status of the construction workers should be specified.

Hospital dumping toxic materials openly

A threat to public health

WE are appalled at the way medical wastes were dumped by a street near the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation, as shown in a photograph published by this newspaper yesterday. The hazardous objects that were dumped need proper disposal and surely the hospital authorities must have known that. Such haphazard dumping of potentially toxic materials is utter disregard for public health and the environment and is in clear violation of law.

Under such circumstances, how is it that these materials have ended up on the roadside? The only explanation is that it must have been the hospital staff who had disposed of them in such manner. And given how openly and noticeably they are piled up by the wayside, it is literally impossible for the hospital authorities not to have noticed it or to have mistaken such careless disposal of medical wastes for anything else.

What we would like to know then is, what action did the hospital authorities take in this regard? And if the answer is none, then, why not? And what about the government authorities, those responsible for maintaining the city and the safety of its inhabitants?

The photograph in question shows only one such incident. But when government authorities are so apathetic to such clear dangers, one should not be surprised if this is, indeed, the norm. We hope this will serve as a wake-up call for the authorities and that they will, from now on, take appropriate measures against such carelessness which, in reality, is a culpable act.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Teachers, like everyone else, deserve safety

Recently, we came to know that a primary school teacher in Barguna was gang-raped on her own school premises. This is a heinous incident that has raised several questions. If a teacher is not safe in her own school, where will she be? If the authorities concerned cannot ensure security of a teacher, how can they give security to the female students? It's shameful that the teacher community is still silent about that.

One rape may lead to another, if the perpetrators are not held accountable. It's also disgusting that police could not arrest the perpetrators in the latest case.

I hope all the teachers, sooner or later, would raise their voice against this heinous crime. The government should do everything to provide security to the victim's family and bring those responsible to justice.

Pradip Das
By email

Aerial survey of flood sensitive spots

Flood has affected the country twice this year. As a result, bridges, roads, railway lines, crop fields, villages and towns have been severely affected and damaged. I think we need to locate those damaged areas through an aerial photographic survey and keep the photos as records for future. In order to make a strategic plan to prevent the damaged spots from being affected again by future floods, these mapping and photographic survey will help immensely.

Shafkat Rahman
BIAM Model School and College

The tragedy of August 21



STRAIGHT LINE
MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

REMEMBERING the mayhem of August 21, 2004, we have to agree that the horrendous crimes committed on that day have left an indelible impact on the course and character of

constitutional politics in Bangladesh. What should cause grave concern is the deadly contour of our confrontational politics. We may have to admit that extreme actions leading to annihilation of political adversary, though reprehensible, were a sad reality of our society in the not-too-distant past.

To recollect, the grenade assault of August 21, 2004 was clearly a manifest attempt to wipe out the entire leadership of Bangladesh Awami League. The damage that was caused and its far-reaching ramifications cannot be brushed aside. The double-figure deaths and crippling injuries of hundreds should make us wonder if the state organs investigating the incident and the then political authority realised the enormity of the dastardly attack.

We may also recollect that the investigation of the above incident was not taken in the right earnest that it deserved and the first indication of that was the unpardonable failure to protect and preserve the scene of occurrence. There was allegation that physical evidence was tampered with and destroyed. The field units did not act with desired speed and circumspection. The question is, did this happen because of a so-called instruction from above? The culpability of all concerned, high and low, needs to be established.

Violent incidents that include murder of politicians are symptomatic of deep polarisation in society and weak institutions. The quantity and quality of violence characterising Bangladeshi society at all levels today mostly has an irreducibly political context. Overt and visible violence co-exists with invisible violence that destroys the identity of human beings. The visible violence, being situational and physical, can be dealt with through law and order solutions.

In our parlance, politics did enter a phase in which hired thugs who perpetrated violence were assured of



The gruesome grenade attack on an Awami League rally on August 21, 2004 left at least 24 dead and more than 300 injured.

PHOTO: STAR

protection from prosecution. Very few felt ashamed as politics acquired a pejorative connotation by the fact of its manifest association with conflict and violence. The civil society was undermined by the stimulation of politics based on division and acrimony.

Cynical observers of our social scene are of the view that there is a functional utility of violence for politicians. Such opinions point an accusing finger towards the suspected state complicity in the perpetration of organised acts of violence and the inordinate delays in securing justice for the victims. This delay is alarming as it sends a clear message to potential criminals that no harm will come to them in the event of repeated performances of criminal activities.

In Bangladesh, we need to seriously acknowledge the significance of authoritative approval or condoning of violence because such action is construed as social approval. The so-called political circumstances have often

obstructed accountability of the culpable individuals. There is a good reason to believe that a considerable number of officials abnegated their responsibility to protect all citizens regardless of their identity.

The disturbing reality in Bangladesh is that with the change of political regime, the faces of the criminals and their sources of patronage change. At times the same criminals who had terrorised the community under the patronage of the outgoing ruling party continued their depredations with a renewed mandate from the incumbent ruling party.

Quite often, the disconcerting socio-political reality is that the source of deterioration in crime and order situations originated in the continuing patronage of criminals and bullies by the incumbent ruling party. Practically, what the people see is the end result of a cumulative process of patronised crime, practiced over successive regimes.

The premonition is that if criminals continue to enjoy immunity from law

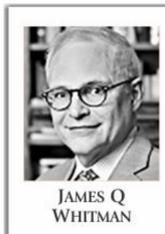
enforcement over successive administrations, then we have a systemic crisis at hand, and a serious one at that. The manifestation of that crisis relates to the allegation of selective law enforcement scenario wherein state functionaries hesitate to enforce the law, on their own.

The suspicion is that the systemic deficiency is located within the political parties and machinery of law enforcement. The desired corrective actions cannot be taken unilaterally by the ruling party, which calls for a bipartisan approach with active involvement of the civil society. Demobilisation of criminal elements by the ruling party demands a reciprocal response from the political opponents. The remedy lies in cleaning our politics through a decriminalisation policy, backed by the de-politicisation of law enforcement as well as the administration.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Are Nazis as American as apple pie?



JAMES Q WHITMAN

the home of the University of Virginia, founded by Thomas Jefferson, white nationalists, separatists, neo-Nazis, members of the Ku Klux Klan, and other likeminded groups rallied behind Swastika banners and marched in a Nazi-style torchlight procession. By the end of the next day, there had also been tuggish violence. One white

IS the United States threatened by Nazism? The short answer is no, notwithstanding the frightening events in Charlottesville, Virginia.

In Charlottesville, the home of the University of Virginia, founded by Thomas Jefferson, white nationalists, separatists, neo-Nazis, members of the Ku Klux Klan, and other likeminded groups rallied behind Swastika banners and marched in a Nazi-style torchlight procession. By the end of the next day, there had also been tuggish violence. One white

Grand Wizard David Duke publicly backed him, Trump was scandalously slow to reject Duke and his followers. Trump also repeatedly incited violence during the campaign, while evincing a bottomless affection for authoritarian leaders such as Russian President Vladimir Putin.

After the events in Charlottesville, Trump initially offered a bland statement that condemned hate "on many sides," thereby drawing a moral equivalence between the racists and those who gathered to oppose them. Two days later, under intensifying pressure, Trump issued a more forceful statement, in which he explicitly condemned the KKK, neo-Nazis, and other white supremacists, only to revert the following day to blaming "both sides" for the violence.

All of this is abhorrent. But any sober

leader of a political party with a paramilitary arm. There are no facilities such as Dachau, Auschwitz, or Treblinka under construction. Even Trump's planned border wall with Mexico remains stuck in the planning stage, with no funding from the US Congress. And Congress is not about to pass an Enabling Act conferring dictatorial powers on the president, as the Reichstag did for Hitler in March 1933. Last but not least, the American press is more tenacious and energised than it has been in years.

Trump's yearning for authoritarian rule is clear for all to see. But he will not achieve it. There will be no Nazi dictatorship in America.

But whether America is threatened by such a dictatorship is not the right question. American democratic

jurisdiction in the world in the early twentieth century. An obvious example is the Jim Crow South, where white legislatures passed laws imposing racial segregation and reversing many of the gains of the post-Civil War Reconstruction period. But that is hardly the only example. Those on the far-right in Europe also admired America's early-twentieth-century immigration policies, which were designed to exclude "undesirable" races. In his manifesto *Mein Kampf*, Hitler singled out America as "the one state" that was progressing toward the creation of a healthy race-based order.

Indeed, during this period, 30 US states had anti-miscegenation laws intended to safeguard racial purity. America's democratic institutions did not stand in the way of such policies in the early twentieth century. On the contrary, anti-miscegenation laws were the product of America's democratic system, which gave full voice to many Americans' racism. And US courts upheld these legal innovations, using flexible common-law precedents to decide who would acquire the privileged status of "white."

The Nazis paid close attention. As they concocted their own racial statutes—the Nuremberg Laws of 1935—they pored over American race law as a model.

So today, instead of asking whether American institutions will survive the Trump presidency, we must ask how American institutions can be put in the service of wrongful ends. After all, while America's early-twentieth-century race laws are gone, it still has the same overheated democratic order and common-law flexibility that it had back then. These institutions might no longer produce Jim Crow laws; but the American criminal-justice system, for example, remains a poster child for institutionalised racism.

Americans should be ashamed that their country's institutions laid the groundwork for Nazi race law. But they should not be worrying about the threat of renaissance Nazism, despite Trump's clear ambivalence in condemning white supremacists. Rather, Americans should worry about the potential of their institutions to facilitate evils that are, as loath as we are to admit it, as American as apple pie.

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(Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)



White nationalists carrying tiki torches were heard chanting the Nazi slogan "blood and soil" during a march on the campus of University of Virginia the night before the Unite the Right rally.

PHOTO COURTESY: TWITTER

supremacist went so far as to drive a car into a crowd of counter-protestors, killing one and injuring 19 others.

The groups responsible for the violence in Charlottesville revealed in US President Donald Trump's election last November. And Trump has often hesitated to disavow them; during the election campaign, when former KKK

observer can see that the US is still a long way from the nightmarish atmosphere of Germany in 1933. American democratic institutions are holding up, just as they did in the crisis years of the 1930s. Opposition parties have not been banned, and the courts have not lost their independent authority. Moreover, Trump is not the supreme

institutions might be holding up, but history has taught us that they are not immune to the machinations of racially virulent political programmes. In fact, the US produced some of the laws that would later serve as a foundation for the Nazi movement in Germany.

America, with its vibrant democratic institutions, was the leading racist