

Influentials behind Thakurpara violence

They must be held accountable

WE are outraged by the fact that the violent attacks on Hindu houses in Thakurpara, Rangpur, over a Facebook post that may well be fake, were instigated by influential locals who have been spreading communal hatred in the village. Reportedly, this includes an imam of a mosque from a nearby village and a trader who first filed a case against a Hindu accusing him of uploading a post on Facebook that apparently hurt religious sentiments. We cannot help but ask: Is this what our imams are supposed to do, spread bigotry and instigate violence on helpless people?

It is a positive sign that the police have arrested 60 people including the imam who had started this campaign of hatred. A case has been filed accusing 2,000 people. But whether this means that these helpless victims of this shameful attack will get justice, is something that is not guaranteed. We say this as almost identical attacks have taken place in Ramu and Nasirnagar. We do not know the disposal of the accused in these two cases. In the Thakurpara case too, there was plenty of warning that an attack was about to take place yet the police did not take any preemptive action. What were they waiting for and why?

We fervently hope that Thakurpara's fate will not be as bleak and disillusioning as that of Ramu and Nasirnagar. Since one of the main instigators has been arrested along with others who took part in this deplorable act, let the law take its course and mete out exemplary punishment to these bigots. Unless that happens the minority community of Thakurpara will continue to live in fear and insecurity.

Poisoning of Uttara Lake a devilish propensity

Bring the crooks to justice

MATTERS like food security, wildlife preservation and conservation, marine conservation, etc., fall low on our priority list. Recent news published by a leading national daily on November 12, 2017, reported numerous dead fish floating on the lake on the southern side of the connecting bridge of Uttara 3 and 5. While if the above-mentioned incident was a result of water pollution, it would still have been deplorable, what makes the news shocking is that it seems to be a calculated act.

Apparently, the incident occurred due to the lessee's rejection of a proposal from the local ruling party leader to engage in a joint farming project with his friends. The lessee claimed that the estimated value of the fish was about Tk 12 lakh. Dhaka is an urban jungle with little wildlife. For some time now, aquatic life in the Uttara Lake, one of the few large water bodies in the city, has been threatened. Reports of encroachment, population boom and water stress have been surfacing over the last few years.

While some of this disregard of the environment can be due to urbanisation, corruption and uneven power dynamics have been to blame for much. This deranged politics, that destroys livelihoods, is unacceptable. Stronger legislative measures to protect urban fish farmers and marine life must be ensured. We strongly condemn this action and hope the authorities will take appropriate action against the perpetrators.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Danger of taking medication without doctor's advice

Many people in our country are not aware of the dangers of taking medication without a doctor's advice. If they have a fever, they go to the pharmacy and buy paracetamol. If they feel pain, they buy painkillers without any diagnostic test or prescription. This practice has become very common in our country.

Taking medication without a doctor's advice may be dangerous. People's strength and physical condition vary from one person to another. What is effective for one may cause a problem to another. Some people even stop taking medication as soon as they start feeling better, without consulting with their doctors.

It is high time we took measures to increase public awareness about the importance of taking medicine as prescribed by the doctor.

Sajal Chandra Das, Barisal University

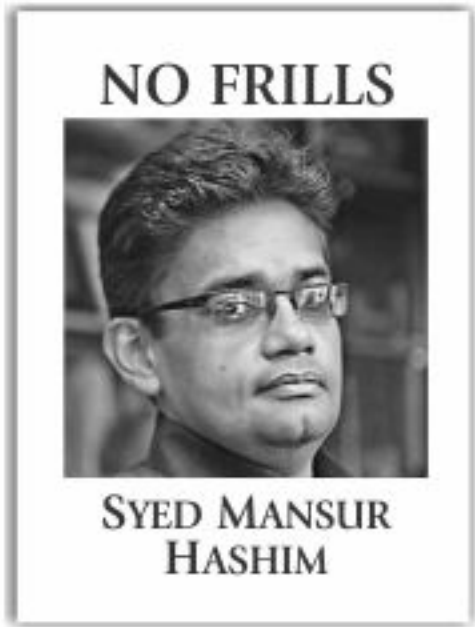
Stop child abuse

We often see news reports about incidents of child abuse and harassment. A few days ago, a four-year-old named Pias was tortured in Raipur, Lakshmipur because he allegedly stole a mobile phone. The report was so disturbing that I could not read the full text.

Many children are tortured in their own home. Those who work outside are also sometimes treated harshly. Despite the fact that the apex court banned physical punishment of the schoolchildren, the cruel practice continues, and not just in schools. For our children to grow up properly and lead the nation in future, we must show love, affection and compassion towards them.

Amdadul H Sarker, Comilla

Hariri's bombshell resignation



LEBANESE President Michel Aoun has not formally accepted Saad al-Hariri's (who also holds Saudi citizenship) sudden resignation which was televised from Riyadh recently. Indeed, the "resignation" of ex-PM Saad al-Hariri while on official visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has been touted by the Lebanese president as a kidnapping. Hariri's broadcast on November 4 is widely suspected in Lebanese political circles to have been made under duress and as stated by Aoun, "does not reflect reality". Indeed, the president went on to state that whatever Hariri says now "is the result of the dubious and mysterious situation that he is living in the kingdom."

We live in interesting times to say the least. Last week Hariri launched a tirade against Iran and its principal ally, Hezbollah, for trying to destabilise the region. Hezbollah for its part has rallied round Hariri stating that Hariri was being "detained in Saudi Arabia" and "banned from returning to Lebanon". The Hariri incident, if we may call it that, has brought together Lebanon's diverse political landscape behind Hariri. The situation in the country remains tense. But the bigger picture of course is elsewhere.

The game being played out today has everything to do with the epic struggle between Sunni and Shia Islam. For years, KSA has watched Iran's growing influence from the sidelines. It has watched Hezbollah's ascendancy as not just another militia in Lebanon, but one with brawn that has taken on the military might of Israel, all the way to Iran's dominance in the Syrian conflict. Today, Iran is consulted by great powers like Russia on the future of Syria in a post-ISIS scenario.

There is a new crown prince in town. He means business. The recent shake-up netted some of the biggest and most prominent names in the Saudi establishment and has thrown the KSA into the world spotlight. Here is a man who is willing to break with the past and forge a new beginning for his kingdom. His policies, both domestic and international, are bold. Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman is not afraid to take off his gloves. The campaign in Yemen is a mixed bag of challenges and opportunities (depending on who one talks to), but precisely what can be

change" do not always bring the desired dividends.

Lebanon remains divided along Sunni-Shia lines. The Hariri-Sunni camp is deemed pro-Saudi whilst Aoun is squarely allied with Hezbollah and, ultimately, Tehran. Regardless of what other countries in the region want, the Lebanese do not want instability. Having lived through decades of civil war, one can understand why peaceful co-existence is so appealing to the Lebanese people.

That said, the prominence of Hezbollah, a group that operates largely

As for the KSA, should the crown prince be able to ride out the storm he has brewed, we can look forward to a much more aggressive Saudi foreign policy. Contrary to popular opinion, the Syrian conflict is anything but done. With the removal of the Kurds, the Shiite militias are very emboldened. It will be interesting to see whether Assad grants Iran's wish i.e. whether Iranian-backed militias are allowed to set up base in the country. And we must not forget the State of Israel, which, according to media reports, has unilaterally launched several cross-border raids into Syria that include



The Hariri incident has brought together Lebanon's diverse political landscape and the situation in the country remains tense.

PHOTO: TIZIANA FABI/AFP

gained by the Hariri experience is unclear. Hariri's sudden resignation and equally sudden change of heart is perhaps not exactly the sort of response KSA policymakers were prepared for.

While many in the Sunni heartland may be beaming at the statements coming out of Washington regarding the US-Iran nuclear treaty, the prospect of the re-imposition of UN sanctions on that country remains a far cry. What is clear however is that the pendulum-like actions of Hariri in recent weeks tell us that not everything is going as had been envisaged and that attempts at "regime

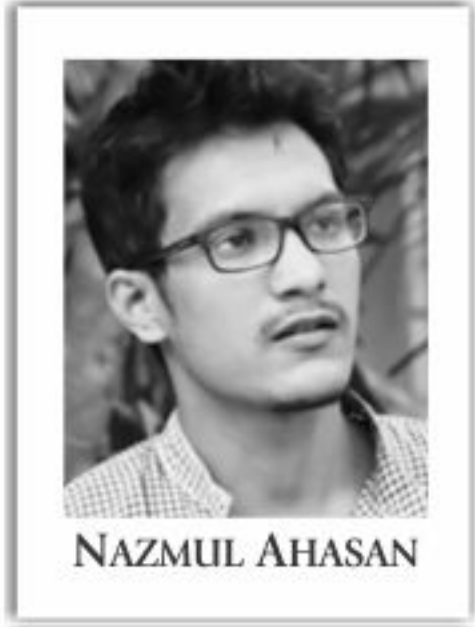
above Lebanese law, has been an actor on the ground, fighting alongside Assad's forces throughout the Syrian conflict. Hezbollah does not answer to anyone except Tehran and it certainly does not answer to Hariri. The Lebanese president has stated on record that he is waiting for Hariri to return to Lebanon to explain his actions give the Lebanese people hope. That the Shiite and Sunni policymakers are willing to set aside their differences for the time being to forge national unity in the face of external pressures is a reassuring sign for its citizens.

assassinations and assaults on "arms catches" belonging to Hezbollah.

Lebanon under the current leadership has managed to steer clear of the Syrian civil war despite Hezbollah's involvement there. A destabilised Lebanon will bode ill for everyone including the Lebanese themselves. It is a country where power-sharing has become the norm and its leaders, both Shiite and Sunni, would be wise to preserve the peace despite goading from abroad.

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China embraces possibilities as Trump looks inward



DONALD Trump, the leader of the capitalistic world. But here we are, getting accustomed to a scenario that would have seemed impossible only a few years ago.

In a way, Trump's "America First" policy signifies the United States' voluntary retreat from the global stage—in this case, the Asia-Pacific or the "Indo-Asian" region, where it has dominated for decades. For China, extending influence in the countries in Asia, which Trump's America is poised to leave in the lurch, is a part of its grand vision to become a "global leader in terms of composite national strength."

Trump's five-nation tour of Asia, his first as a president, was primarily intended to address two major issues: North Korea's nuclear threat, and trade. Trump sounded solicitous when he urged the world to back the United States in its effort to confront North Korea. "The longer we wait," he said, "the greater the danger grows, and the fewer the options become." When it comes to trade, however, he made it clear that no one should expect America on their side.

His contradictory messages have left allies, adversaries and even observers scratching their heads over his true motives. From the Qatar crisis to the North Korean threat, Trump appeared to contradict his own State Department. His diplomats are aware of the ground reality and want him to go about it more diplomatically. His political advisers, on the other hand, are pushing him to take

a solid economically nationalistic or protectionist stance, which they believe will revive jobs and industries that the Americans lost. For a superpower like the US, sadly, trade is integral to its unified role in the world. Therefore, Trump's approach towards Asia, which many called "transactional" and pragmatic, is caught in the crossfire between two opposite forces.

Trump's strategy to push different policies for different nations, instead of a unified one, has already shown signs of weakness. In a bid to convince China to pressurise its ally North Korea, Trump momentarily had to tone down his trade rhetoric that casts China as the villain. While he blamed China for all the

world." China perhaps outdid everyone else in terms of welcoming him. But when it came to flattery, in China, it was not the host country that flattered him—let alone calling him the "leader of the world"—but the other way around.

Trump not only offered personal praise for Xi Jinping and played a video clip of his granddaughter singing in Mandarin, but also refrained from making remarks about China's poor human rights records, a customary criticism from US presidents. *The New York Times* called it "a remarkable moment" when Trump "projected an air of deference to China that was almost unheard-of for a visiting American president." In Vietnam and Philippines,

Asia-Pacific nations agreed to press ahead with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) treaty, from which President Trump had withdrawn his country shortly after his inauguration, fulfilling a campaign promise.

In defiance of Trump's protectionist position on trade, the 20 remaining APEC members also denounced efforts to create new trade barriers in a joint communiqué that excluded the United States.

China clearly seeks to take over some of the ground that once was under American influence. Right after Donald Trump finished his speech at the APEC summit, Xi Jinping came to declare that, "Opening up will bring progress, and those who close down will inevitably lag



US President Donald Trump appeared deferential to Chinese President Xi Jinping during his visit to China, dropping his accusatory campaign rhetoric.

PHOTO: AFP

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miseries of the American people during his election campaign, he now concedes, saying: "After all, who can blame a country for being able to take advantage of another country to the benefit of its citizens?" He had once branded China an enemy perpetrating "the greatest theft in the history of the world." Now, he seems optimistic about the possibilities of a partnership between the two nations, saying, together, they could solve "almost all" of the world's problems.

Trump's Asia tour also exposes another of his weaknesses as a leader. Every country in the region seemed to have resorted to the most effective strategy to please him: flattery. In the South Korean legislature, for example, he was introduced as "the leader of the

too, he stressed the importance of their independence and sovereignty, glossing over their questionable human rights records or state of democracy. That's the cost of Trump's pragmatic and transactional approach that only cares about deals, not about exporting the American values.

In Vietnam, he went back to his "candidate" mode and unloaded his vociferous rhetoric, saying the US would never sign any region-wide trade treaty under his presidency, and America would no longer be taken advantage of.

The Asian countries, on their part, did not hesitate to make it clear that they would go ahead with or without US support. At the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum's summit, 11

behind." He discussed issues like innovation and climate change—things that, in the past, would have come from the visiting American leader.

The South East Asian countries need more than strategic security as a buffer against China's growing influence. They also need trade incentives from the West. In the absence of America's assurance with regard to trade, they may be driven further into China's orbit, which is not necessarily a bad thing altogether for the countries in the region.

Yet, that is unlikely to bar Trump from claiming that his visit was a massive success. Many agree, but it's a pity that the success is not necessarily America's.

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