

How about a VIP world?

Every person is important (EPI)

It is bad enough, as it is, for the ordinary citizens to be ignored, shuffled around and made to wait for hours with closed roads and clogged traffic. And now to be relegated to second-class citizens through a policy to cater to the VIPs is something that we fully reject. It reveals a most anti-people mentality as can be imagined.

The idea of a separate lane for VIPs is not only bizarre, and unrealistic given the density of vehicles on the roads, it is also reflective of an exclusivist mindset that is totally bereft of any concern for the public. We wonder if the snobbish and supercilious culture is not in conflict with the ethos of democracy in a people's republic. It is shocking that not the welfare of the people but of those that are there to serve the people, which is behind the ludicrous suggestion.

Admittedly, Dhaka is the largest city in the country. Forty percent of the country's economy is concentrated here. At least a hundred thousand vehicles hit the streets every year, outrunning the construction of roads in the Capital. Most of the city comes virtually to a standstill during a VVIP movement. But the rationale proffered in support of the idea of a separate lane for the VIPs, that it will curb the VIP tendency to use the wrong side of the road, is shallow. Curbing their bad tendency cannot mean more sufferings for the common man. As for the use of the "VIP Lane" by ambulances and fire brigade, provision for rapid transport and metro rail has been recommended in the Strategic Transport Plan which can be used by other service providers also.

Instead of spending money on accelerating the movement of VIPs, the government should dedicate both energy and money and give priority to speed up the movement of the working masses who need to get to their work places timely. They are the ones that keep our economy and the country moving. As of now, more than 3 million work-hours and billions of dollars are lost annually because of traffic jams. And we can follow our neighbour's lead where PM Modi had announced last year that not a few but every person is important.

No quarter being given to opposition

Is it democracy?

As we approach February 8, we find a toughening of government's position on the largest opposition party. The random on mass arrests of BNP leaders and workers at all levels, on the pretext of security, leave us wondering why the right to congregate is being violated in the name of preserving law and order. The pretext of ensuring security is in fact giving the law enforcing agencies the license to apprehend and incarcerate large numbers of BNP activists at will.

The forcible dispersion by the police of BNP supporters waiting on roadsides to greet Khaleda Zia on her way to Sylhet, throwing of things at her motorcade, all smack of a zero tolerance towards the main opposition party. And hostile words are being traded by both the BNP and AL regarding the verdict and post-verdict scenario; the former threatening to go for peaceful agitation while the latter threatening that violence would not be tolerated. Should the BNP resort to violence on February 8, there is the police who can and should take action to preserve law and order, but why the large-scale arrests before then?

As a political party, the BNP must not be impeded from carrying out political activities. And this being the election year, there must be a level playing field for all political parties when it comes to holding rallies or meetings. But not to allow any means of protest, or greeting the party leader on the streets or roadsides, or not even allowing public announcement of the impending visit to Sylhet of Khaleda Zia, are certainly violations of basic rights.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Stop question paper leak

The Daily Star published a report titled *SSC Exams: Question leak allegations surface again on February 2*. Although Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid had refuted the allegations, there can be no doubt that question papers have continued to be leaked. Instead of refuting well-grounded allegations, I think the government should identify the causes of leaks and find out ways to prevent these from happening. The quality of education is deteriorating gradually due to the government's failure to tackle this issue.

Md Zillur Rahaman, By e-mail

Wi-Fi to Li-Fi

Till now we have been using Wi-Fi as a means of wireless data communication within a fixed location. But the Wi-Fi has yet to gain desired speed for the users. Meanwhile, a very high-speed data communication system (nearly 224 gigabits per second) called 'Li-Fi' (Light Fidelity) has been developed in the recent years. Professor Harald Haas of the University of Edinburgh, after years of research, designed the system and coined the term 'Li-Fi' in 2011.

Both Wi-Fi and Li-Fi are wireless data communication systems and use electromagnetic waves for data transfer but Wi-Fi uses radio waves while Li-Fi runs on visible light. It will be interesting to have access to the newly devised VLC (Visible Light Communication) System aka Li-Fi.

Professor M Zahidul Haque, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University

Branding Bangladesh

How to deliver a promise



As global brands transcend borders by inspiring and engaging consumers through innovation and investors with the promise of higher turnover, sometimes rivalling that of some developing countries, it is no longer a question of how to compete with another nation. Now brands compete against nations for investment with higher ROI (return on investment) and top-of-mind for the consumers.

Comparing Apple's 215 billion GDP to a country's GDP, the International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook said that Apple would be equal to the country of Vietnam in terms of turnover.

Apple today is considered the world's most valuable brand, and has retained this position for seven straight years—worth USD 170 billion by Forbes' estimate, and 67 percent more than the second-ranked Google. Apple is heralded for its ability to produce massive profits through innovation, premium pricing and insatiable demand for its products around the globe.

What if Bangladesh could learn from Apple? What would be the benefits? What would be the challenges?

Apple is arguably one of the most transformative companies today. From the first Apple computer in 1976 to the 2016 iPhone 7, the company has been consistently moving forward. And it has founder and former CEO Steve Jobs, who died in 2011, to thank. The No 1 reason Apple has seen such extraordinary successes is its innovation and leadership.

Innovation is the process of translating an idea or invention into a good, or service, which creates value, or for which the consumers will pay. In the business world, often innovation occurs when ideas are applied by a company in order to further satisfy the needs and expectations of its customers. Leadership, on the other hand, sets the direction and elevates the leader and others to develop a business, service, or good. To succeed, leaders create an inspiring vision, motivating and inspiring internal teams to reach that vision which impacts external customers to purchase the goods.

The art of branding, marketing and sharing the vision through introduction of the brand, or product portfolio, is equally important for sale. Storytelling and branding around emotions deliver faster ROI than a cheap product can. Apple does not just sell a computer or phone. It sells design and innovation and the promise that you can change the world, and it can equip you for that with its products.

In the same way, a nation can also create innovation and leadership. The USA has branded and sold the American values like "Freedom" and "Innovation" globally, paving the road for its gigantic export worth USD 1.454 trillion in 2016. Germany exported goods and services worth 1.300 trillion euros in 2016 predominantly on the core value of "Technique and Quality," embodied by innovations by BMW, Mercedes, and other national flagship automobile products. Think about France, and you will most likely think of innovation in wine, food and fashion. "Best global lifestyle products to indulge in" as its core value has earned France an export of 500 billion euros, and the essence of France—wine, food, fragrance and fashion—alone delivered 30 billion euros to the overall export and keeps

wearing products that are "Made in Bangladesh" as opposed to, for example, those "Made in France."

Consequently, the added value of production in Bangladesh does not command a higher price point as no extra emotional benefits are associated with products made in Bangladesh. However, Bangladesh's export has come a long way since the 1970s. The question is whether a branding campaign with new positive core values can help GDP growth, take value creation in production in Bangladesh to the next level, and thereby attract investment and help the economy grow faster. Yes, this will indeed benefit the GDP, upgrade living conditions, help build relationships and ultimately create growth for entrepreneurial business that will take Bangladesh to the next growth curve.

referred to as country-of-origin effect.

Many countries uplift their positioning since the branding and reputation of a nation can dramatically fuel its economic growth. Think of the "Wirtschaftswunder" (economic miracle) which catapulted Germany into one of the richest nations only 10 years after World War II, and boosted morale in the country as a result of which Germany is still in the league of the richest nations on earth.

Countries seek to attract investment capital, increase exports, and attract a talented and creative workforce via branding of a nation, thereby increasing capital intelligence which drives innovation. Business reputation is worth more than gold. With review and feedback sites on Internet spreading the news about your brand faster than ever before, the question is, how to value



The clothing tag on a boy's shirt which is made in Bangladesh is shown after purchase.

PHOTO: REUTERS

branding its agriculture and luxury industry.

Once "Made in Taiwan" meant that the country made copies of other brands' products. Today, "Made in Taiwan" is the face of an export worth USD 300 billion, and has over the last decade meant that the nation is innovating around tech and machinery.

Taiwan has come a long way since its copying days, and is now driving innovation in technology. Conversely, the export of Bangladesh, with a much higher population, is merely USD 39 billion, and the apparel industry is the biggest contributor to its export. The values of Bangladesh are not as defined as that of some other countries. The branding of Bangladesh leaves a lot to be desired—it does not promote investment or pride in

A nation branding campaign aimed at western brands and consumers, rooted in the positive values Bangladesh would be known for globally, will deliver the promise for decades to come. Yes, innovation and leadership will have to be strategised, created and delivered. You need to deliver the promise. But the gains are not limited only to competing on price.

The practice of Nation Branding aims to measure, build and manage the reputation of countries. Nation Branding means the creation of the applications of corporate marketing concepts and techniques in the interest of enhancing the countries' reputation on the global stage, and thereby raising the awareness of the country amongst potential future business partners globally. This is also

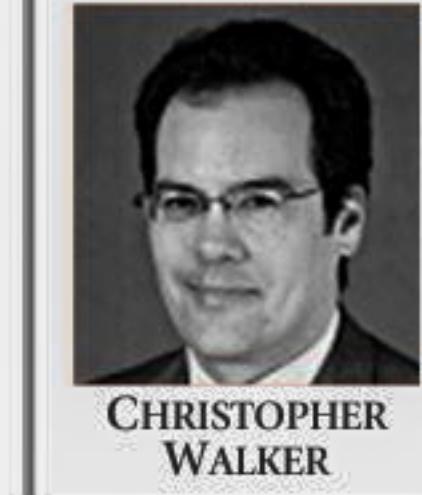
your reputation? A bad review could make your value decrease while a good review enables you to charge a premium price.

In order to create value assets that brand Bangladesh with pride and support the 2021 vision for Bangladesh, and to grow to be a middle-income nation, we really need to work on how we want to be viewed by other nations. This will require a smart, comprehensive branding policy involving the positive aspects of our nation. Here is an opportunity for Bangladesh to communicate positive branding values in a global competition against other countries and global corporations.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

The Point of Sharp Power



In recent years, Russia and China have poured considerable resources into arenas typically associated with "soft power," a term coined by the American political

scientist Joseph S. Nye and understood as the "ability to affect others by attraction and persuasion." Either directly or through compliant surrogates, these two countries have devoted billions of dollars to increasing their global influence through media, culture, think tanks, academia, and other spheres.

Despite these immense investments, however, observers—including Nye himself—have scratched their heads, wondering why these authoritarian regimes continue to suffer a deep soft-power deficit, even as they have grown more assertive internationally.

Russia and China tend to do poorly in global public opinion surveys and indices of soft power, reinforcing the notion that attraction and persuasion are incompatible with authoritarianism. Internationally, autocrats are not "winning hearts and minds." Nonetheless, Russia, China, and other well-resourced and ambitious regimes are projecting more influence beyond their borders than at any time in recent memory—and not principally through what Nye calls "hard power": military might or raw economic coercion.

To be sure, Russia has used military force

with some frequency in the last decade—in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria, for example. But Russia's fighter jets and tanks are not driving Moscow's global surge in influence. Similarly, China is flexing its military muscles in the South China Sea and along its disputed border with India. But, like Russia, China has been far more active using other forms of influence over the last

decade.

Theorists are therefore in a bind: these regimes are not relying chiefly on hard power, but are still able to project real influence abroad. Given the resurgence of authoritarianism around the world, it is an opportune time to reflect on this apparent paradox.

The Financial Times recently observed

independent culture, and civil society—all of which are crucial ingredients of soft power.

But such exhortations to Chinese or Russian authorities are bound to fall on deaf ears. Any significant liberalisation would contradict these regimes' own political needs and objectives to retain control at any cost.

The analytical trap is to assume that



A man walking past a poster for the China-US co-produced movie "The Great Wall" in Beijing.

PHOTO: AFP

that in China's "efforts to build soft power outside its borders," the country "needs to tread more lightly and take a more reciprocal and less authoritarian approach." In a recent commentary, Nye makes the similar observation that "China could generate more soft power if it would relax some of its tight party control over civil society." The same could be said of Russia and other countries with governments that prioritise state control over openness,

authoritarian governments, which suppress political pluralism and free expression in order to maintain power at home, would be inclined to act differently internationally. These regimes have shrewdly adopted some of the forms, but not the substance, of soft power. What they pursue is better understood as "sharp power," whose key attributes are outward-facing censorship, manipulation, and distraction, rather than persuasion and attraction.

While "information warfare" forms a part of the authoritarians' repertoire, it is by itself an inadequate description of sharp power. Much activity undertaken by authoritarian regimes—whether it is China in Latin America, or Russia in Central Europe—falls outside of this definition, as colleagues and I detailed in a December 2017 report, "Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence."

With hindsight, we can see the misconception that took hold at the end of the Cold War, when conventional analysis assumed that authoritarian regimes would liberalise and democratise. Nearly three decades ago, when the United States emerged from the Cold War as a global hegemon and the term soft power was introduced, political analysts did not take sufficient account of regimes like the ones in control of Russia and China today.

As my colleague Jessica Ludwig and I wrote in *Foreign Affairs* in November, "the democracies' complacency concerning the evolution of malign, sharp power has been informed by their reliance on the soft power paradigm." Analysts who view the authoritarians' behaviour in terms of efforts "to boost their countries' soft power are missing the mark and risk perpetuating a false sense of security."

A sound diagnosis is necessary in order to devise an appropriate response. Authoritarian governments are not playing by the rules governing democracies. Systematic repression is the autocratic regimes' calling card, and the "sharp power" they generate cannot be shoehorned into the familiar and reassuring framework of "soft power." Without more precise terminology, the world's democracies will have little hope of countering these states' increasingly multifaceted influence.

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