

ON POWER

A high unaccounted for

LITTLE MATTERS



SHAGUFTA HOSSAIN

LAST year, an English daily published a report that the police arrested at least 21,883 suspected drug-peddlers and addicts across the country between May 18 and June 21 as part of the anti-drug drives. An additional

6,794 suspects were arrested by the RAB between May 4 and June 24 and 4,891 drug peddlers and addicts were jailed and fined through mobile courts. A strong stance against drugs has been an integral part of this year's election campaign.

The "war on drugs" has been laudable. And yet, there is a much more potent, much more powerful drug that is often left out of the equation when we talk about addiction. Power has been known to produce the same high as drugs. It has been known to produce the same chemical reactions in the brain that drugs produce. Like drugs, power also releases dopamine i.e. happy hormones. An excess of dopamine, however, can impact cognitive and emotional functioning in a not-so-happy manner. It can reduce empathy, promote hubristic and impulsive behaviour, thus contributing to gross errors of judgment and unnecessary risk taking.

They say, power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Adam Galinsky and his colleagues at Northwestern University in their research found a correlation between power and ego-centric behaviour. Deborah Greenfield and colleagues in their experiments found that high-power individuals were more likely to contact others when they needed something from them. In addition, a recurring tendency where people, like objects, are treated as a means to an end were found. Means to an end, and hence, invaluable. This threat of being devalued to a status of less-human, is even more grim for certain groups who hold a devalued status in society, perpetually caught in a power struggle, by virtue of belonging to groups that are already socially and economically marginalised: women and children, sexual minorities, religious minorities, ethnic minorities etc.

So, what happens when a person or a group of people gain enough political power that enables them to force other persons to do their bidding, even when they do not believe it right to do so? Unchecked political power, then, it seems would inevitably lead to a moral weakness in the person who exercises that power. And who suffers most as a result?

During the last election in 2014, at least 18 people died in election day violence. In total 21 people died on the day and about 400 voting centres were disrupted. This year, right after the elections, an attack was carried out in Faridpur affecting several households including some within the Hindu community. A report by *The Daily Star* states that a three-member probe body visited four spots of Bhanga in Faridpur on January 3 and took statements from seven supporters of both the Awami League and independent candidates to verify the information. The same report cites some national media outlets reporting about a hundred houses in Bhanga and Sadarpur upazilas, including those of the minorities, were vandalised and looted allegedly by supporters of the independent candidate after the polling and the

ancient times the ruler of a country was often regarded as an object of devotion, because the ruler was taken as the symbol of the community. Good entities that abide by good principles, therefore, can be trusted with unlimited power. And as good citizens, guided by good principles, we must display unwavering faith in the power vested in the state. In fact, to posit a stance against absolute power when the ruler is fair and just, is to put on a shameful display of disloyalty.

I find the Confucian definition of loyalty quite interesting. The Chinese word *zhong* has two elements. First, although *zhong* often manifests itself through one's fulfilment of assigned duties or through services to one's superiors (e.g., to the ruler of one's country), it is primarily a commitment to one's community as a whole rather than to any specific person or assigned duty. Second, *zhong* is not an external moral commandment imposed from some outside transcendent or divine authority. It is culturally and historically rooted within, or has grown from, the "hearts/minds" of all individual members of the community.

I started writing this right after the 11th parliamentary polls in Bangladesh had taken



next day. In Subarnachar, Noakhali, an attack was carried out on a woman, mother of four, resulting in her home and body being violated. So far, ten people have been arrested on charges of the rape case.

As I read the headlines today, my attention is drawn to the following: "Subarnachar rape 'not linked to polls'" NHRC Chairman Kazi Reazul Hoque was quoted in *The Daily Star* saying the following, "To our investigation committee, it did not appear that the incident was relating to election. In the case, the complainant also did not mention that the incident has any link with election."

Eventually, people with too much power often lose their sense of reality and their moral bearings. Before they know it, they live in an echo chamber, believing their own press and imagining that they are infallible. It may take time for this weakness to become visible. In fact, its full extent is frequently left to the historians to record, but we eventually learn of it.

There may be some who argue, there is nothing wrong with power vested within a single entity, as long as that entity is one that is dictated by good principles. After all, in

place. News about ministers sweeping their office floors, making use of ride sharing apps, walking to their office and displaying a general sense of humility and integrity has been making rounds. Several ministers in the cabinet have been replaced with new faces and some very wise choices. It is an interesting time to be alive.

I fear, though, that this wisdom may also be short lived. Historically, attempts at combining wisdom and power have barely ever been successful. The greater the power, the greater the potential for abuse. Hence, given the addictive nature of power, no one is wise or good enough to be trusted with too much of it. And given the wisdom and farsightedness the government has so far displayed, surely it recognises the potential danger of absolute power.

They say, power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.

So the unwise laywoman wonders, what is our newly elected government's plan for curbing the addiction to power?

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PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

The leader the World Bank needs

HOMI KHARAS and ESWAR PRASAD

JIM Yong Kim's sudden resignation as president of the World Bank Group (WBG) offers an opportunity to reflect on the direction, legitimacy, and effectiveness of that 75-year-old institution. Like other multilateral institutions, the Bank in recent years has been criticised for its elitism and for championing outmoded models of economic globalisation that have failed to deliver broad-based benefits. It has also become another staging ground for the geopolitical great-power rivalry between the United States and China.

Recognising this, finance ministers and central bank governors from the G20 established a commission in April 2017 to recommend reforms to the global financial architecture and the international financial institutions. And at a G20 meeting in October 2018, the commission issued a report outlining steps "to create a cooperative international order for a world that has changed irreversibly."

The proper mission of multilateral development finance institutions is to help solve urgent, large-scale problems in the developing world. For example, we are currently witnessing the largest urban expansion in history, and managing it will require a doubling of the global infrastructure stock within the next 15 years. Multilateral institutions also have a role to play in addressing the great expansion of Africa's population, and in laying the foundation for sustainable, decarbonised economic growth across the developing world. Failing that, the world should expect to see more migration, unemployment, frustration, and anger in the years ahead.

This is the context in which the next WBG president will be selected. Not surprisingly, the organisation's Board of Executive Directors hopes to find a candidate who is capable of effective leadership and management, with a compelling vision, a commitment to multilateralism, and diplomatic communication skills (read: "politically savvy"). The candidate should be prepared to implement already agreed strategies, embodied in the WBG's previously published "Forward Look" and the "Sustainable Financing" papers.

But the most important criterion, in our view, is that the candidate should embrace the WBG's mission in all of its ambition and scale, and follow through on the recommendations in the recent G20 report. The WBG president's job was redefined in 2017, with the introduction of a Chief Executive Officer. Under this new arrangement, the president should be freed up to focus on strategy (for example, how best to deploy a recent capital increase), Board relations, and partnerships.

In the absence of a standard leadership-selection process, multilateral institutions have developed their own methods over time. For example, the Inter-American Development Bank has a double majority system, whereby the winning candidate must gain a majority of shareholder votes, as well as an absolute majority of votes from regional governors. In the United Nations, the General Assembly selects the secretary-general on the recommendation of the Security Council. For the newly created Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the president must receive 75 percent of the



PHOTO: AFP

votes. In each case, the process is designed to give the world's major powers their due say, while preventing any country from dominating the agenda entirely, thereby maintaining the spirit of multilateralism.

At the WBG, however, the winning candidate simply has to get the most votes. Practically speaking, the president has always been an American, thanks to an informal bargain between the United States and Europe, whereby the Europeans back the WBG candidate favoured by the US, while the US supports a European to lead the International Monetary Fund (which has a similar simple-majority voting system). To be sure, the US cannot veto a candidate for WBG president (as it can with a candidate for UN secretary-general). But it would be foolhardy for any candidate to campaign without at least an implicit US endorsement.

This leaves a range of options for choosing the next WBG president. The US could select an American who appeals to other countries: Kim, for example, touted his Korean origins during his 2012 campaign for the post. It could select a dual national or an immigrant, such as former WBG President James Wolfensohn, an Australian who became a US citizen. Or it could back a non-American candidate from an allied country. What is important is that the nominee enjoys the trust of the US and most other countries, and can reconcile countries' diverse interests in a true spirit of multilateralism. Nationality, *per se*, is not a prerequisite.

But gaining the support of other countries is just one requirement. The successful candidate should also have support from other stakeholders. At the UN, candidates publish vision statements and responses to questions from civil-society organisations, and participate in a global town hall event. A WBG presidential candidate should embrace such transparency and extend it to businesses and academia, in keeping with the institution's commitment to empiricism and fact-based solutions.

When the Board selects Kim's successor in April, we hope it does so in a way that contributes to the institution's legitimacy and effectiveness. The WBG needs a trusted leader who understands the urgency and scope of the organisation's mission. In fact, the WBG has never had a female president. There's no better time than now to usher in fundamental change.

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Eventually, people with too much power often lose their sense of reality and their moral bearings. Before they know it, they live in an echo chamber, believing their own press and imagining that they are infallible.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



January 19, 1966

**INDIRA GANDHI
ELECTED PRIME MINISTER**

India elected Indira Gandhi as its fourth, and the first female, prime minister.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Nice guy
- 5 Annoying ones
- 10 Bread spreads
- 12 Abate
- 13 Restricted section of a street
- 15 Play division
- 16 Help out
- 17 Acapulco aunt
- 18 Cisco kid's horse
- 20 Doe's mate
- 21 Use the gym
- 22 Reduced amount
- 23 Rodeo rope
- 25 Drudgery
- 28 Computer shortcut
- 31 Sprints

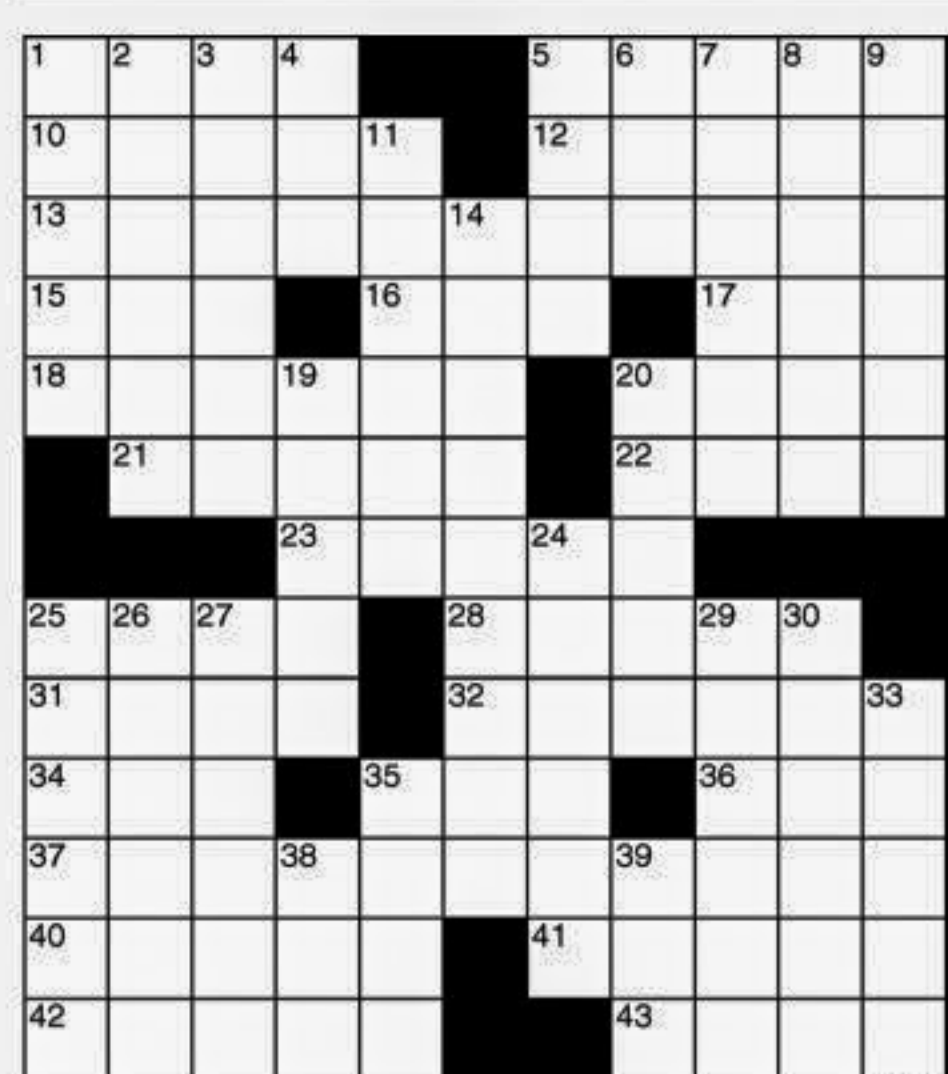
DOWN

- 1 Spoil
- 2 Draw out
- 3 Sweet drink
- 4 Gift from Santa
- 5 Begged
- 6 Snaky swimmer
- 32 Soak up
- 34 Money machine
- 35 Small bill
- 36 Ruin
- 37 Rooftop spinner
- 40 Caesar's language
- 41 Burn a bit
- 42 Shorthand pro
- 43 Like some dorms

7 Park art

- 8 Surcoats
- 9 Makes orations
- 11 Justice Antonin
- 14 Pride member's pride
- 19 Pool need
- 20 Voting groups
- 24 Fencing swords
- 25 Fishes with a net
- 26 Beat in a hot dog contest
- 27 Con
- 29 Italian cheese
- 30 Juice choice
- 33 Dog show category
- 35 "Dear me!"
- 38 Pie dish
- 39 Singer Damone

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



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