

Shame the rape and the rapist, not the victim

Victim blaming encourages rape culture

THE rape and death of an O'level student by an 18-year-old has been yet another shocking example of how entrenched rape culture has become in our society. The head of the forensic department at Dhaka Medical College has confirmed that the student was raped and died of haemorrhagic shock and excessive bleeding due to severe injuries to the private parts. These details of the brutality with which the victim was assaulted is heart wrenching and leaves us outraged and shocked. But what is also disturbing is the misogynistic comments made in social media after this horrendous crime became known.

Instead of showing empathy for the victim and outrage that such a crime has occurred, instead of outright condemnation of the rapist we see distasteful, even abusive comments by people. Aspersions on the victim's character and even on her parents expressed in the most crude and unsavoury terms point out to the tendency of victim blaming that actually encourages sexual violence and is very much part of the rape culture. According to Ain o Salish Kendra, at least 1,627 women were raped and gang-raped across the country in 2020. Of them, 53 were killed after rape and 14 died by suicide.

As human rights activists have pointed out, it is the crime that must be condemned and shamed, not the victim. Whether the rapist was the victim's boyfriend, what she wore and her sexual history or lifestyle in no way justifies rape which must be considered a heinous crime that must be stopped. Sex without consent is rape. In the current case, the grievousness of her injury and that she died after excessive bleeding is enough proof that this was a violent rape. We are chillingly reminded of the 14-year-old child bride who died of excessive genital bleeding after her husband continued to force her to have sex despite her injuries and pleas. Rape has to be considered a crime that demands punishment of the rapist regardless of the relationship between the rapist and the victim.

We have just started the new year and already cases of rapes are piling up—and this excludes the ones that will never be reported. News reports come out only when the victim dies or when a case has been filed. This is not just because of the legal system but also society's perceptions—both tilt in favour of the rapist and against the victim or survivor. Does that make sense at a time when women's participation in development is being celebrated and encouraged? The government, the courts, educational institutions and society must all work together to protect our girls and teach our boys the meaning of consent and respect for women and girls. The culture of victim blaming must be eradicated.

A syndicate issuing fake NIDs busted

EC must have strong monitoring mechanism to stop fraudulent activities

A recent police investigation has found that a syndicate of brokers and Election Commission (EC) officials have been forging national ID cards for years for people who would use them for fraudulent activities, such as getting bank loans and grabbing or selling other people's land. Apparently, this has been happening due to the absence of proper monitoring by the EC and loopholes in the system. The DB officials have evidence that different people are in the process of collecting around Tk 14 crore as bank loans from different private banks using these fake NID cards which were sold to them for Tk 1.2 lakh to Tk 1.5 lakh.

Reportedly, the forgery took place in two ways. In the first kind of forgery, the syndicate kept the names and photos of the card-holders the same, while changing the rest of the information that was in the card. And in the second, the photos of the card-holders were changed, while the other information was the same. The syndicate has already faked around Tk 1.5 lakh NIDs in these ways.

While we appreciate the police for busting the syndicate involved in such a dangerous crime, we would urge them to identify each and every person involved with the process—not only the EC officials but also the brokers working with the banks. And all of those who took bank loans or grabbed land using these fake NIDs should also be identified and punished according to our law. Bangladesh Bank should help the police by providing them the Credit Information Bureau (CIB) report so they can identify the people who have forged their documents to get loans.

It is good to know that the EC has already sacked some 42 employees of the NID wing for their involvement in the forgery. But that is not enough. Those involved should be given exemplary punishment, which will also serve as a warning to others. They should also develop a strict monitoring mechanism so that such fraudulent activities can never take place.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Good news on the vaccine front

On October 5, Globe Biotech, a Bangladeshi company announced that its first vaccine candidate had passed the pre-clinical trial on mice. And on October 17, Bancovid, along with two other vaccine candidates developed by the Globe Biotech Ltd, were included in the draft landscape of the World Health Organization (WHO).

It is rather reassuring that the local company got the licence to produce the coronavirus vaccine for human trial on December 28. Given the global demand for vaccines against Covid-19, it is a rather reassuring that we are not lagging behind in our attempts to produce a vaccine against the disease.

Samiya Rahman, Dhaka

Brexit, the EU-UK agreement, and the economic impact



AN OPEN DIALOGUE

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

SOME politicians promise an El Dorado if you vote them into power. Others tell stories, some true and some not so, to get the voters to believe them. In modern times, we've seen how charismatic leaders

cast their spell on the electorate and lead them to an unknown world as did the Pied Piper of Hamelin. One can relate to these fables by looking at the recent history of the United Kingdom.

On January 30, 2020, the UK left the EU after 45 years, having been influenced by the leaders of the "Leave" movement, including the current British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Previously, on June 23, 2016, the voters in the UK decided in a referendum to leave the EU. Those who wanted to leave believed that the benefits of belonging to the unified monetary body no longer outweighed the costs of free movement of immigration. The vote was 17.4 million in favour of leaving versus 15.1 million who voted to remain. After UK officially left EU on January 31, 2020, both sides agreed to keep many things the same until December 31, 2020, to allow enough time to agree to the terms of the post-Brexit rules to define how the parties would live, work, and trade together.

Since the Referendum, known commonly as the "Brexit" vote, there has been much speculation on the shape of trade and economic cooperation between EU and UK in the post-Brexit era. Negotiations had been going on since March 29, 2017, and the final treaty, known as EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), agreed upon on December 24, went into effect on 11 PM GMT on December 31. The House of Commons overwhelmingly endorsed the post-Brexit pact by 521 votes to 73, including the overwhelming majority of the Labour Party.

From the 1200-page treaty we can glean the outline of a future of the European landscape. As with any trade pact, there is something for each of the parties, and it is too early to determine who the ultimate winner is. For the British public, rather the 52 percent who voted for it, the main benefit they foresee is jobs, freedom from the rule-makers in Brussels, and ability to get away from the "newcomers". When Britain joined in 1974, it was a small group and the British were comfortable hobnobbing with their fellow Europeans. After the Eastern European countries joined the

bloc, public sentiments shifted. There was much debate whether UK would gain financially after leaving, but there was an expectation that it would do better if it was free from Brussels.

The TCA will enable UK to have, as before, zero-tariff and zero-quota access to the European single market. We have already seen reintroduction of border controls and an end to free movement of labour and capital between the UK and EU member states. Brexit would hurt

for goods and health, and safety checks. The "vast amounts of new paperwork, administration, checks" and certifications will cost businesses time and money. But the PM was upbeat. "There is some bureaucracy and we're trying to remove it," Johnson said when asked about the red tape. "We have a massive opportunity to expand our horizons, and to think globally, and to think big," he said.

Officials expect thousands of trucks bound for EU countries to stack up in the

remained in EU. Regardless of the relatively favourable trade agreement in place, the GDP is still expected to grow more slowly over the coming decade as a result of Brexit.

On the positive side, the Tory government is hoping to use the levers of taxes and subsidies to boost trade with the rest of the world, draw more foreign investment, and promote economic sectors that have lagged. "Leaving the European Union is an opportunity for the UK to use taxes and subsidies to encourage companies to step up spending," Johnson said. He plans to use the UK's new autonomy to boost science and "level up" the struggling economies of the deprived parts of the country.

In addition to regulatory change, "you can use tax systems and subsidies to drive investment," he said in an interview with BBC television on January 2. The PM has to tread very carefully since the question of state aid proved to be a sensitive issue during the Brexit trade negotiations. Under the terms of the deal, either side can impose tariffs on the other if it is clear that any country is aiding its own businesses at the expense of the others'.

UK is expected to work to boost trade and foreign FDI. The EU is Britain's biggest trading partner, accounting for 47 percent of its trade in 2019. However, it had a trade deficit of 79 billion pounds (USD 104.86 billion) with the EU, a surplus of 18 billion in services outweighed by a deficit of 97 billion pounds in goods. The government expects that Brexit will be a boon for the exporters. It has been in negotiations with the USA, New Zealand, and many others to promote trade. The UK could make better deals with the US, Japan, and other countries, said Professor Ellen McGrattan of the University of Minnesota. "If they did that, they could gain overall from Brexit."

The main investment partners of the United Kingdom (in terms of FDI stocks) were the United States, the British offshore islands (Channel Islands and Isle of Man), the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium, Japan and Germany. UK expects to increase FDI from the US, Japan, and Switzerland. "We've taken back control of our laws and our destiny," Johnson said last week. "For the first time since 1973, we will be an independent coastal nation with full control of our own waters." It needs to be seen if all this talk from the PM means much for the coffers of Her Majesty the Queen or her subjects, or the outcome will be as disastrous as those for the people of Hamelin.

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PHOTO: REUTERS

Britain's younger workers. Germany is projected to have a labour shortage of 3 million skilled workers by 2030. Those jobs will no longer be as readily available to UK's workers after Brexit. The massive British financial services sector will still have access to the EU market, but it will no longer be unfettered. Many UK firms will need to open affiliates in the EU to continue doing business there.

Other aspects of the relationship, including foreign policy, defence, and development still remain to be negotiated.

With TCA both parties have agreed to some identical rules for now to define how the parties would live, work, and trade together. But they don't have to be identical in the future, and if there is a dispute, each side can resort to using tariffs. And British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has openly talked about using taxes and subsidies to encourage companies to step up spending, as well as to draw foreign direct investment (FDI).

The first and immediate impact of TCA will be some tailbacks at ports where trucks enter from EU and more red tape: customs processes, certificates

southern English county of Kent, with delays of up to two days. Many of the officials are hopeful of a smooth start to the new era but are braced for possible delays with government estimates suggesting that more than half of smaller businesses have not yet prepared for the end of the free movement of goods and services. Some businesses, particularly in the manufacturing food business, will be hurt by the non-tariff barriers.

Many economists expect that more paperwork and barriers to trade will hurt economic growth just as the coronavirus pandemic damaged output. This slowdown will be felt in the first quarter of 2021, and linger throughout the year. However, the public probably will not notice much difference nor blame it on Brexit because the UK economy contracted by 20.4 percent in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the previous three months, as coronavirus-induced lockdowns hammered activity.

Economists at the American research group at Citi estimate the disruption will reduce UK's gross domestic product in 2021 by about 2 percent, compared with what it would have been if it had

Democracy Debased in the District of Columbia



SHAMSHER M CHOWDHURY, BB

TO write off the acts of anarchy and insurrection that was being played out live inside the Houses of the United States Congress on January 6, as that of a few deranged, rabid, racist individual

Americans would be a disastrous mistake. It was in effect, the reflection of the toxic mindset of a growing number of Americans who see Donald Trump as the torch bearer of their version of America and what it should look like. These anarchists, all waiving Donald Trump flags, are part of the seventy-four million Americans who voted for him on November 3, believing firmly in his bellicose narrative that "their" country is being stolen away from them and it must be regained at any cost.

The acts of terrorism happened shortly after Donald Trump himself addressed this very crowd not far away from the US Capitol, openly instigating them to march to the Capitol to force, or at least, intimidate the lawmakers who had assembled there to certify the results of the Presidential elections held more than two months back, an outdated and redundant step in itself, to overturn its result. In other words, repudiate the will of the people. In the process, four people lost their lives. It was, in the end, an abortive bloody coup. But then Trump was not alone in this. The likes of Senator Ted Cruz and Senator Hawley, along with a whole lot of Republican Members of the House of Representatives were openly and unabashedly complicit in this criminal act, as were members of Trump's own family. And then there was the caricature of an attorney, Rudy Giuliani, who actually called on the anarchists to launch a "trial by combat". While the violence was on in full swing, Trump publicly expressed his love for the anarchists, calling them "patriotic and beautiful people and very special".

If such acts are not considered acts of treason and their perpetrators do not face legal actions, one wonders what does? In this particular instance, Donald Trump stands as the number one accused and the prime instigator of actions that verged on sedition.

I do not feel it necessary to recast here the graphic acts of anarchy; the whole world witnessed with horror all of that first hand. What perhaps would be more relevant here is to take stock and try to

Trump is not allowed to govern for the remaining days of his term. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has formally called on Vice President Mike Pence for invocation of the 25th Amendment to the US Constitution, which will enable the Cabinet to declare the president unfit to govern. She has also kept open the option of impeachment, although that may be too far-fetched. However, legal actions against the perpetrators of this anarchic act need not be hindered by



Trump supporters clash with police outside the US Capitol Rotunda.

PHOTO: AFP

assess and analyse the deeper reasons behind all this and what it can mean looking into the future of America's body politic. Donald Trump maintained after the Joint Session of the US Congress reaffirmed Joe Biden as the next President of the United States and Kamala Harris as his Vice President, that although he did not accept the result, there will be an orderly transition of power but warned that "it's only the beginning of our fight to 'Make America Great Again'". He reiterated this very line at a recorded more sober message in a more formal setting subsequently, implying that he does not intend to leave the turf anytime soon.

There are already talks on Constitutional ways to ensure that

any statute of limitations; Trump and his cohorts can still face legal actions after January 20.

The weakness of the American Constitution when it comes to true accountability is that it is applied more in its letter, and much less so in its spirit, and the absence of accepting moral and ethical responsibility when things go wrong. In developed democracies, heads of government had left office for far less. In the 1960s, British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan resigned after the Profumo scandal broke out although he had no role in it himself but took moral responsibility. In 1974 Willy Brandt of Germany, one of the greatest political leaders of our time, had the integrity

to resign as the chancellor on ethical and moral grounds at the height of his popularity after allegations of there being an East German spy in his office. In 2016 British Prime Minister David Cameron stepped down from office after taking responsibility for the outcome of the Brexit referendum, even when the Conservative Party under his leadership had won a thumping majority in the House of Commons just a year back. The list goes on. None of them needed any written Constitutional article to act with courage and integrity even when not pressed to do so.

It can be said with certainty that Donald Trump feels no such compunctions because it is himself who had instigated this insurrection, one that President-Elect Joe Biden rightly described as an "assault on democracy". Trump's belated condemnation of the violence sounds hollow when seen in the broader context.

Donald Trump also does not seem to care what his act of insurrection has done to America's image and its standing on the global stage. It stands seriously damaged and the stain may remain for long. Not surprising that world leaders, including close allies of the United States, have rushed to strongly condemn the traumatic events.

The big question that remains unanswered is how deep will be the impact of Donald Trump's toxic and sharply divisive political narrative, that took on a violent shape on Wednesday, on America's polity. Can the Republican Party take a hard look at the dangers of a continuity of Trumpism as their political platform from here on? Will there be a serious post-mortem of the results of the Senate elections in the State of Georgia as a case in point of the harm that Donald Trump has done to the party and its politics? Only time will tell. To quote Edmund Burke ad nauseam, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing".

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