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PHOTO: REUTERS

Tucker Carlson and the murky state of US media



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Tucker Carlson, the recently fired US cable television talk show host at Fox News, was quite a force to be reckoned with. Carlson had built an on-screen persona that slayed all competitors on prime time US television. Not unlike his predecessor a few years ago, Bill O'Reilly, also of Fox News, he built a reputation as an ally of the little guy, who speaks truth to power. His rants against the elites who were shortchanging the average Joe gained enough traction to put him on a perch where he seemed invincible.

Until, he was fired. Ah, Murdoch giveth, and Murdoch taketh away. This is the crucial point to which I shall return. For a moment, let's focus on Carlson's extraordinary success as a talk show host. Day after day, as he chronicled the deprivations of the elites, he built a formidable personal following, evident from the colossal drop of viewership of the show after his exit.

His critics dismiss his fulminations, even his persona, as schtick – a character he plays. Given the vanishing line between entertainment and news on cable television talk shows, there may indeed be some truth to that. Authenticity on cable television reminds one of Groucho Marx's tart observation: "The secret of life is honesty and fair dealing. If you can fake that, you've got it made."

There is much about Carlson to give anyone a serious pause. His toxic brew of white grievance often spilled over to outright racism, and his penchant for using policy disagreements to foment vicious demonisation of the Democrats, his intentionally apocalyptic vision that bred blind hatred instead of attempts to understand and battle policy disputes – have permanently sullied the political discourse. Latest revelations show he didn't always believe what he so ferociously espoused. In texts made public in a lawsuit against Fox News, he lambasts

the very same Donald Trump whose false claims of "election rigging" he so heartily championed to gin up viewership ratings.

However, it is the circumstances of his dismissal that cast a dark cloud over how the US media functions. Why was Carlson fired at this particular time? The short answer, of course, is that we don't really know. Both Fox News and Carlson are absolutely mum.

However, there is an angle in Carlson's recent coverage that was novel. He was a bitter critic of the US role in the Ukraine-Russia war. This made for strange bedfellows. His new admirer, I kid you not, was the Russian media, which frequently regaled its audience with clips of his shows. Now the rumour mill has it that it was Rupert Murdoch, the owner of Fox News, who decided to fire Carlson. It is difficult to make a case that this was done in a spirit of civic duty, given Murdoch's dubious track record. Remember, this is the same Murdoch who cosied up to the Chinese and kept a disgraced editor of Britain's News of the World after a terrible scandal led to the closure of the tabloid.

The firing of Carlson raises broader questions about the freedom of the US media. While critics say that Western media is essentially a vessel for corporate interests, its supporters prefer to see it as a marketplace of ideas. One way it is supposed to work is that broadcasters ultimately back individuals or shows that draw the most viewers. In that case, why was Tucker Carlson fired at a time when his popularity was at its peak? This comes during a time when strange things have been happening in the US. There are reports of YouTube arbitrarily demonising or removing videos, and PayPal blocking those accounts. What these videos have in common is they are all critical of the US backing of the Ukraine-Russia war. Before the takeover by Elon

Musk, Twitter had taken to arbitrarily labelling individual accounts as backed by Russia or China.

We have no way of knowing whether Carlson's relentless critique of US backing of Ukraine proved to be the last straw on the camel's back. However, there are disquieting signs that there is a line that the US media is learning not to cross. A CBS news report on corruption in Ukraine was partially retracted. There has been a complete mainstream media blackout on Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Seymour Hersh's reports on possible US complicity in blowing up the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and corruption in Ukraine.

Now let's take a walk down memory lane. In 2003, the legendary television host Phil Donahue was fired from his prime time MSNBC talk show during the run-up to the US invasion of Iraq. The problem was not Donahue's ratings, but rather his views: an internal MSNBC memo warned Donahue was a "difficult public face for NBC in a time of war," providing "a home for the liberal anti-war agenda at the same time that our competitors are waving the flag at every opportunity."

This does not seem to be about ideology – MSNBC, after all, is the Democratic version of Fox News. The arbitrary reason provided for Donahue's dismissal makes even less sense in the case of Carlson. Regardless of competitors – the entire US media, truth be told – waving the flag, Carlson had apparently struck a chord with the viewing public. His viewers weren't going anywhere.

While we can't really know what exactly brought Carlson's downfall, here's what we do know. Half of Americans in a recent survey indicated they believe national news organisations intend to mislead, misinform or persuade the public to adopt a particular point of view through their reporting.

"The survey, released in February by Gallup and the Knight Foundation, goes beyond others that have shown a low level of trust in the media to the startling point where many believe there is an intent to deceive," Al Jazeera reported. Some of this can be attributed to partisan hostility – more Democrats trust the media – but not all of it. The US media has its work cut out – and it's going to be an uphill task.

How the fires and heatwave exposed our dead wetlands

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We seldom take into account the immense blessings of nature on this land and are only reminded of the consequences of destroying nature when disaster strikes. The usual response to such events is to express regret, grieve briefly, and continue on our merry way. But this failure to take lessons from adverse events, and not adopting future-proof actions, will hinder years of progress for us as a nation and obstruct our path to prosperity. Let us consider some recent events that have not only shocked us but also reminded us of the great dangers that may face us if we continue plundering our natural resources.

What was the one common thread connecting the Bangabazar fire, the New Super Market fire, and the unbearable heatwave that had Dhaka sizzling just a couple weeks back? The abatement of all three was

water. Wetlands provide a myriad of livelihood resources, such as fish, crops, vegetables, medicinal plants, and invaluable ecosystem services to aquatic and terrestrial animals. Almost 50 percent of the country's people depend on wetland resources. Nearly 80 percent of rural people in Bangladesh depend on wetlands for fish and other aquatic resources. They also have a crucial hydrological function. A vital part of the natural landscape, they are essential to preserving the delicate balance of the ecosystem on our planet. They are extremely useful for protecting biodiversity. Wetlands and their associated vegetation act as a natural air conditioner, helping to regulate the temperature of the surrounding area. They are known as the kidneys of the world. Other than that, they play a role in ecotourism and have substantial cultural and aesthetic value.

Despite their immense importance to our environment and economy, almost 45 percent of national wetlands have disappeared. A study by Buet found that the wetland in haor areas dropped by nearly 87 percent between 1988 and 2020 in seven districts, namely Sunamganj, Sylhet, Habiganj, Moulvibazar, Netrakona, Kishoreganj and Brahmanbaria.

must prioritise the agenda of wetland conservation and incorporate that as a mainstream environmental issue, not as an optional consideration.

A robust cooperation between Local Government Engineering Department, Bangladesh Water Development Board, district councils, city corporations, Bangladesh Haor and Wetland Development Board, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change will be effective in this regard. Stakeholders must design a solid wetland monitoring system and develop technical tools to protect and rejuvenate wetlands. A national wetlands conservation policy needs to be adopted in addition to existing policies, plans, rules and regulations. CBOs, NGOs, private and public institutions must also act against pollution and slow encroachment of wetlands. The potential of scaling up and re-excitation of wetlands can also be considered.

In addition, we recommend adopting a scientific and community-based management of wetlands. Many of our rural communities understand this value and have developed sustainable practices that allow them to use the resources without damaging the environment. For instance, floating vegetable gardens, or dhap,



Wetlands provide a myriad of livelihood resources, such as fish, crops, vegetables, medicinal plants, and invaluable ecosystem services to aquatic and terrestrial animals.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

affected by a scarcity of waterbodies and wetlands.

Firefighters struggled to douse the blazes due to water shortage and had to bring in water from a pond that was a significant distance away. Had there been ample waterbodies nearby, it would have aided the fire extinguishing process. Meanwhile, the loss of waterbodies and wetlands, particularly in urban settings, is a factor that contributed to the intensity of the heatwave. This is because water helps with regulating temperature in the environment. Studies have found that cities are unable to radiate the heat that it absorbs. As a result, our cities are becoming hot valleys day by day. There is evidence that on a hot day the temperature of Azimpur area is around three degrees lower than that of Farmgate area. This can be attributed to the presence of wetlands and vegetation near the Azimpur locality.

This just goes to show the enormous importance of our wetlands which is essentially an area that is covered or saturated with

This depletion of wetlands is resulting in a range of problems. In addition to the above issues, urban flooding has increased immensely in recent days due to the destruction of the natural water system. Huge loss of livelihoods is also associated with wetland decrease as many rural people are dependent on wetlands. The situation demands accelerating the dialogue on the conservation of our wetlands. We must understand the plethora of services our wetlands provide and address the concerns regarding their conserving. A plan of action is immensely important. It can be achieved in layers and is crucial from a policy perspective.

Policies must be urgently implemented to save wetlands from encroachment and pollution. Union and district-level committees do exist in this regard. They have the authority to tackle encroachment and pollution of wetlands. However, many of the committees are non-operational. There is a lack of capacity to create tools and take the right action at the right time. The associated officials and stakeholders

a traditional agricultural method of soil-less cultivation, is utilised in Gopalganj, Barishal, and Pirojpur. The use of rural wetlands along roadsides and water management embankments is also promising. By learning from these communities and spreading their success stories, we can encourage others to adopt similar practices.

While some areas are utilising wetlands, some are unaware of the various utilities of wetland. Many private owners consider the agricultural and settlement use of wetlands as more profitable. Promoting conservation education and educating on the use of wetlands can contribute to developing awareness of these communities.

Our wetlands are a precious resource that plays a huge role in ensuring food security and in climate change mitigation. If we do not act now, it won't be long before the country loses all of its wetlands and faces dire consequences. We have to work together to preserve these valuable resources and build a more sustainable future.

Opinion

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Wild party
6 Orange cover
10 Without assistance
11 Scents
13 Dull fellows
14 Ship's crane
15 Dawn goddess
16 Salt Lake City player
18 Mendes of movies
19 Road flattener
22 Lock opener
23 Stepped down
24 Flies high
27 Stretches over
28 Therefore

29 High card
30 Coat-applying tool
35 Play division
36 Game caller
37 Mine material
38 Andean animal
40 Airline prices
42 Party prep
43 Vote in
44 Supplies with turf
45 Body shop challenges

DOWN

1 Track events
2 Parcel out
3 Gander's mate
4 Stop
5 Begins anew
6 Roping contest

7 Writer Tarbell
8 Short book
9 Outdoor theater
12 Kicks off
17 Attempt
20 Ohio city
21 Jacket flap
24 Flower parts
25 Sources of answers
26 Restlessly, in music
27 Showed sron
29 Verb for you
31 Snares
32 Sophia of "Two Women"
33 Put up
34 Work breaks
39 Swamp stuff
41 Beer's kin

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

M	O	B	S	H	I	D	E
D	A	S	T	O	D	I	S
A	U	C	T	O	R	T	E
R	E	A	D	O	F	F	E
L	U	V	D	E	A	D	S
A	M	E	L	I	A	A	T
F	A	W	N	U	P	S	E
L	E	A	D	O	R	E	F
I	R	S	H	E	A	D	F
S	I	A	R	A	K	E	E
T	A	B	E	R	E	L	C
L	I	F	E	R	I	T	E

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

WHY DO THEY CALL THIS CHILLY WHEN IT'S HOT?
IT'S MADE WITH CHILI PEPPERS
SO THEY FREEZE THE PEPPERS BEFORE THEY HEAT THEM UP?

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WHAT DO WE GET FOR LUNCH TODAY?
LOTS OF YUMMY STUFF!
A TURKEY SANDWICH, CARROT STICKS AND TWO PLUNG.
SIGH! NOTHING BUT NUTRITION TODAY.
NO TRADE! NO TRADE!