

Dreams flew over the cuckoo's nest

That group of 1971 college students is now in the mid-fifties. We see with utter frustration, a diametrically opposite Bangladesh. With the passage of time, all those little dreams vanished, as the children's rhyme says: "One flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo's nest."

ULFAT HUSSAIN

In a democracy, a citizen votes for one party hoping that the party's promised Aladin's lamp would bring social and economic happiness. Immediately after the landslide victory, the majority party behaves in such a manner that the voter feels left out and his dream is tarnished. He waits for another cycle and shifts his stand for the other. The new party behaves in a like manner, more vigorously than the previous one. The voter is again disgruntled with their activities and his dream is again tarnished. Yet in another election, he swings to the other party with the hope that things will definitely change this time. Again, utter frustration! By the time he is totally disenchanted.

Three decades have elapsed, and in Bangladesh we have witnessed the repetition of the same style of politics pre-election tall talks fall flat in post-election period; terrorism increases with new dimensions; and more than anything, the amassing of wealth by every coterie increases leaps and bounds. The rulers turn a deaf ear; see no evil, hear no evil.

On the platform, demagogues promise everything for the public to the extent that is humanly and economically impossible. Sycophants shout thunderous slogans and the general people clap as a mark of their appreciation. Our leaders become highly pleased and profoundly happy with the response from the gathering. Unfortunately, the real ball game they missthe rule

of law and good governance that the majority of the population dearly want.

What our lawmakers fear most of all are the journalists. Journalists report the facts. Lawmakers hate the journalists because the journalists bring their hidden desires to light. Plain truth. So what must be done? Subdue them by any means. They are easy prey. The reason is simple. They have no weapon, no musclemen. Further to their misery, they have no money to buy judicial favour.

Hence, they have been targets of brutality, killing, hacking, lynching, terrorising are a few of the many examples that we saw in the recent past. Browsing through the newspapers, one would have the impression that the politicians have

declared war against the news reporters.

A very recent example is the Kushtia episode where a small gathering of the reporters was dispersed by the all too powerful local musclemen. TV news telecast showed a very senior journalist, among many others, standing helplessly and profusely bleeding. As reported, the local lawmaker had a hand in it. Protests from different corners were raised, but the state machinery has done nothing to bring those responsible to book. The government's complacency is a naked example of favouritism for a party man who is an individual more precious than the party and more sacred than the country. Gresham's law seems to be working in our country as in the circulation of currency; bad money tends to drive good money out of circulation. Noble deeds must be annihilated while the wicked must persist.

Let's take the example of the rise of the tyrant Bangla Bahi. The news media portrayed the truth with evidence of his reign of terror. We

haven't forgotten those gruesome photographs of Bangla Bahai's torture victims that were published in the newspapers.

Let's revisit a few samples of the published reports: a) men kidnapped, beaten to death in front of villagers, and then hung upside down from a tree; b) while they tortured they even amplified the victim's cries using a loudspeaker; c) Khejur Ali, a helpless victim's body was cut into tiny pieces; d) some were murdered after day-long announcement that public must attend the "ceremonial" killing; e) a recent media report states that some people are still maimed and Bangla Bahai still haunts them in their nightmares.

One could write volumes after volumes about the atrocities committed by the so-called ultra "jihadists." Their acts are barbaric by all standards and irreligious by all religions.

However, it is very sorrowful to note the negative reaction of the government at that time. While Bangla Bahai was brandishing his

weapon in a broad day-light procession at Rajshahi, the government termed him a "fictitious character," creation of the media, no Bangla or English Bahai, etc etc. The Government found the media reports very hard to swallow. They termed it a cooked up scheme aimed at tarnishing the "ever increasing popularity" of the ruling alliance.

Thus the so-called "fictitious character" lived free and ran a parallel government in the northern districts much to the shame of our government. The fact that the JMJB remained uncontrolled for so long gives rise to serious doubts and questions in the public mind. The issue of collusion, sponsorship, and blind support from a certain section of the party in power obviously comes up, viz. people have serious doubts about their trial; sceptics believe nothing will happen to them.

To combat these national ailments all we need is honest politicians and no demagogues. The definition of honest politician is a simple one. I will quote from

Bertrand Russell's Sceptical Essays: "One whose political actions are not dictated by a desire to increase his own income; ... whose political actions are not dictated by desire to secure or preserve his own power any more."

The politician must have appropriate knowledge and strong goodwill to manage the affairs of the state in an honest way. We do not have any dearth of knowledgeable and honest people in the country, but they must be heard. Again in the words of Bertrand Russell: "Knowledge exists, and goodwill exists; but both remain impotent until they possess the proper organs for making themselves heard."

The above snap-shots bring forth one question: did we want a Bangladesh like this? Yes, everyone has his own words and interpretation. I would like to take the readers back to 1971 when a group of college students (all teen-agers including this writer) discussed in a remote village how should an independent Bangladesh be. Socialist republic, communist economy,

secular treatment to all citizens, presidential form, parliamentary form, all came up in the discussion.

However, the discussion drew its conclusion with very simple ideas for an independent Bangladesh: a) liberal social environment; b) tolerant political atmosphere, and c) secular treatment to all citizens. Economic emancipation for all citizens was a hot discussion but not considered, as it was not an easy task to attain in the shortest time.

On the other hand, the enumerated ideas were simple social tasks that only needed political goodwill of the politicians. That group of 1971 college students is now in the mid-fifties. We see with utter frustration, a diametrically opposite Bangladesh. With the passage of time, all those little dreams vanished, as the children's rhyme says: "One flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo's nest."

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Oil and the four-letter word

In the end, can we keep up with such insatiability? Historically, no developed nation or political heavyweight has ever contemplated self-imposed austerity. That is possible neither in developed nations nor in emerging markets like China and India, which take up two fifths of the global population.

MATHEW MAAVAK

Oil prices are rising again, with analysts wondering if the all-time record of \$75.35 per barrel notched on April 21 will be surpassed this week.

All the usual earth-shattering parameters are missing in this latest episode. International infants terrible like Iran and Venezuela, with their nukes and threats of supply cut offs, remain looming in the distant yet fearful market horizon, causing a semi-permanent markup in global crude prices.

In the absence of such immediate "grave threats" to international peace, there are no "surprisingly larger" US gasoline reports this time either, along with their helium-like psychological ability to relief market jitters each time a critical mass is reached somewhere. There is a stalemate on the Iranian front, and in the case of Hugo Chavez, his polemical repertoire has already run out of gas and originality.

So, what gives now? For a glimpse into our overstretched global supply lines, think of seven tankers blocked by an oil spill at Louisiana's Calcasieu Channel last week and refineries that couldn't process the crude trapped in their hulls for 10-odd days.

This sent enough ripples across the equator, and they are returning in time for the big bang, gas-guzzling July 4 rides today.

Was there ever a time when the American Independence Day gifted million-dollar cheques to its nemeses?

One nemesison another frontis China. Its economic expansion of 10.3 per cent for the first quarter this year is only adding fuel to simmering oil prices. Greater demand from China will intensify a fatigue-immune resource competition, and expect some ugly geo-political maneuvers alongside ballooning prices in the months to come.

There is more bad news. China is plunging headlong into energy efficiency, and those who think this will save planet earth of some of its precious, dwindling natural resources should do some real hard thinking again.

Greater efficiency in the production and consumption processes should naturally lead to decreased demand and competition over raw materials. Unfortunately, this is not the case. More fuel efficient cars, streamlined industrial production, and creature comforts paradoxically spark greater demand for anything encapsulated in the four-letter word: more.

In an age where cell phones have a lifespan approaching that of a mosquito-repellent or a toothbrush, our industries are revving in tandem with the fuel fed into it. More fuel for more industries for more products. This is known the Jevons paradox.

It is not just China that wants more. The developed world wants more too. The accoutrements of the modern world keep aggregating in a manner that results in greater demand and throwaways. The days when autoclaves were used to

sterilize surgical instruments are slowly disappearing; in its stead are disposable plastic suturing tools and knives, all because one industry lobby pounced on a sterilisation incident turned tragic. Aren't humans prone to mistakes? Perfectionism leads to wastage. Sanitised trade regimes lead to starvation.

The latest round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks, aimed at removing agriculture tariffs and opening global trade, recently broke down due to resistance from the Third World. The Third World wants the European Union and the United States to dismantle agricultural subsidies for local farmers, and in the process render products from developing nations cheaper.

The Indian Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath reportedly walked out in disgust. India and China though have little to fear. With their huge markets, expertise and geopolitical clout, they are in far better position to lock and secure vital raw materials.

No questions were asked at the WTO over how impoverished nations will cope with crude oil over \$70. This will not be a problem for China, which has stocked \$1 trillion in US Treasury securities instant petrodollars that can grease its sweatshop industries while bankrupting rivals abroad. When competition intensifies laissez-faire trade regime or not - impoverished nations will be further disadvantaged. Oil, copper, zinc, and other raw materials are finite resources.

Energy security somehow doesn't blip on the trade regime radar when it should in fact have fluttering red flags lodged on it. All we get are tangential arguments that miss the bulls' eye.

The prodigious energy expended on ethanol efficiency debates at research insitutions are not matched by a primary school curricula on energy savings. There is no EQ that reads energy quotient. Don't blame the kids when adults chug along CO2-belching jalopies instead of public transport. And adults go on to elect leaders who keep the energy quotient at status quo ante, and who promise more.

In the end, can we keep up with such insatiability? Historically, no developed nation or political heavyweight has ever contemplated self-imposed austerity. That is possible neither in developed nations nor in emerging markets like China and India, which take up two fifths of the global population. The sales pitches here, that can run into exponentials of billions, do not make this a possibility either.

In the end, when energy supply ceases to be commensurate to demand, a resource war begins. They will be couched in quasi-nationalistic or religious overtones; all of which mask the inability to balance supply with demand.

Resource wars of course lead to outright conflict, as anyone with a historical quotient can testify.

In the meantime, those seven tankers have already made it to their Citgo destinations in Louisiana. The July 4 strain on gasoline will be over in a day or two.

So, what's next to rattle our global energy bank?

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WORLD POPULATION DAY Can we win the race?

If the situation is not objectively studied and appropriate actions taken, one might find the prospect of survival very remote. Against such a backdrop of population situation, it is imperative to make an evaluation of the existing population control programme in order to locate the most pernicious problems and take appropriate measures to solve those so that positive result in this sector is ensured.

DR M ASHRAF ALI

It seems that the race between population increase and economic growth in Bangladesh is in full swing and perhaps the result has already been decided. When Malthus propounded his theory that population increases at a faster rate than food production and that food production would never catch up with population growth, he was ridiculed and branded as a false prophet. His theory was proved totally unsond as the Industrial Revolution in the West revolutionised and modernised agriculture to such an extent that huge surplus of food was produced using the newer technology. As a result Malthus's theory was proved wrong for the developed countries.

But what about countries like Bangladesh? It has been proved beyond doubt that Malthus was very right. The gap between food shortage and population increase has been widening at such a great scale that it may never be possible to bridge the gap at all. At least in the case of Bangladesh, it appears that we have already lost the race and the consequences are staring at us with grave results. Poor in natural resources, Bangladesh is never going to be able to feed with its own produce the 150 million people it already has. And yet the population increase is in full swing.

How is that the population situation has come to such a pass even

with 40 years of family planning programme? After all these years, there is only a negligible fall in the rate of population increase. Huge funds have been invested in the programme throughout all these years but yet the result has been minimal.

The reasons for failure are many. However, the major reason appears to be a general lack of awareness among the people mainly due to lack of education and widespread illiteracy. The technicalities involved in birth control presupposes a minimum of education. In Bangladesh, this problem has been wilfully neglected by the various governments that came to power since the Pakistan days. However, other reasons such as management and control, supporting services, follow-up programmes, etc., are no less important than the lack of awareness on the part of the people.

There is a feeling among the authorities that once the money is allocated, the programme will have no problem. Huge sums have been spent on family planning programme since the days of Ayub Khan, but what has been the result? If things were managed a bit better, we could have better results. An annual increase of 1.8 percent is still very high and the rate circulated by the government may be underestimated to some degree.

It goes without saying that while efforts must be made to increase

food production by all means, the family planning programme has also to be geared up with all seriousness. No particular research has been done so far to find out the rates of acceptance of family planning in relation to educational level of the acceptors, but it is my feeling that only the educated has accepted family planning with seriousness. The unlettered couples are yet to understand the virtue. This phenomenon also has some genetic implication for the future of the country. It is very likely that within the next few years, the quality of generation will keep becoming poorer if only the educated practice birth control and have fewer babies. This may even lead to a national disaster.

In order to gear up the family planning programme, certain measures have to be accepted without further delay:

(1) The management and control system has to be improved substantially. There has been reports of abuses of all kinds in the family planning programme. This has to be stopped.

(2) Consciousness building about the need for family planning should be taken seriously and appropriate schemes should be undertaken in this regard to carry the beneficial message of family planning to every nook and corner of the country.

(3) The delivery system of the family planning materials should be

Global warming and the EU

LETTER FROM EUROPE

Against this backdrop of the EU's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the recent (June 28) announcement made by the German government to give exemptions to all new power plants, including coal, has come as a shock to the environmentalists. The German government is in effect allowing the power industry to opt out of the emission control program until 2022. Besides undermining the EU's efforts to fight global warming, I am afraid that this decision will send a wrong signal to other member states of the EU.

emissions over the next three years.

Under the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, the fifteen pre-expansion member states of the old European Union (the EU), agreed to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 8% during the period 2008 to 2012 from 1990 levels. Probably no other geographical region of the industrialised world has taken the dangers of global warming more seriously than the EU.

It has not only reduced its total gas emissions by 1.4% during the period 1990 to 2003 but also, according to its environment commissioner, earnestly working to reach a goal of between 6.8% and 9.3% reduction from 1990 level by 2010. Germany and Britain with reductions of 18.2%

and 13% already achieved during the period 1990 to 2003 have done particularly well.

In order to achieve the overall target, the EU has imposed limits on emissions of carbon dioxide by thousands of power plants and factories particularly in the oil refining, smelting, steel, cement, ceramics, glass, and paper sectors. It has also introduced a carbon trading system which is designed to give incentives to businesses to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Under this system, factories that exceed their limits must either pay penalties for each extra ton of carbon dioxide emitted or buy permits from companies which emit less.

Against this backdrop of the EU's efforts to reduce green-

house gas emissions, the recent (June 28) announcement made by the German government to give exemptions to all new power plants, including coal, has come as a shock to the environmentalists. The German government is in effect allowing the power industry to opt out of the emission control program until 2022. Besides undermining the EU's efforts to fight global warming, I am afraid that this decision will send a wrong signal to other member states of the EU.

Unfortunately, France has already made a similar proposal, which will effectively add 20 million tons more carbon dioxide gases per year to what France emitted in 2005. During the period 1990 to 2003, France managed to lower its total emissions by 1.9% from the

1990 level. If France insists on the implementation of its new proposal, it will indeed be a blow to the EU's commitments to make further cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.

Spain is already the worst polluter in terms of percentage of all the industrialised nations. During the same period (1990 to 2003), instead of reducing emissions, Spain increased them by 42%. Yet the Spanish government seems to be completely oblivious of its responsibilities and commitments in this field. According to some unofficial estimates, over the last two years the greenhouse gas emissions by Spanish factories increased to reach 53% over the 1990 level.

In this context it is worth mentioning that during the period 1990 to 2002, the overall greenhouse gas emissions in the EU had fallen 2.9% below the 1990 level, but the situation worsened in 2003 because the energy companies used more coal for electricity production. So the recent German and French decisions on exemptions together with Spain's indulgent attitude on this issue will make it extremely difficult for the EU to achieve its reduction targets.

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Why some people cheat, and others don't

TIM HARFORD

If you want to be rich, you can try to build a brilliantly successful company. Or you can steal. The corruption watchdog Transparency International has estimated that Gen. Suharto embezzled up to \$35 billion while president of Indonesia, a figure that is in the same league as the entrepreneurial fortunes of Bill Gates and Warren Buffett.

On a humbler scale, we all face the same choice. We can try to earn money by doing something useful, or we can try to steal or extort it from other people. A society where most people are doing something useful has a good chance of being rich; a society full of corruption will be poor.

That is a glib enough explanation of wealth and poverty, but it is surely just the start of the story. What causes corruption? Many economists believe that corruption is a response to perverse incentives. For example, in Indonesia it takes 151 days to legally establish a small business, according to the World Bank's "Doing Business" database.

This is a large incentive to pay bribes or keep a business unregistered. It is not surprising that there is a strong correlation between red tape and corruption. In general, the harder it is to make money legally, the more tempting it will be to do so illegally; and if people are not punished for

stealing, then they will be more likely to steal.

The view that incentives are paramount suggests that if you take a person from a poor, corrupt economy and move him to a richer, less corrupt economy, he will live up to the new system that surrounds him. William Lewis of the McKinsey Global Institute has pointed out that illiterate Mexican workers on building sites in Houston are as productive as any construction worker in the world. The Mexicans are perfectly capable of living up to the potential of the American system.

That is a mainstream economist's view. An alternative view, popular among the common-sense crowd, is that corruption is a problem in Indonesia because Indonesians are crooks by nature. Poor countries are poor not because of their economic system, but because they are full of people who are lazy or stupid or dishonest.

I disagree out of faith, rather than because the evidence is compelling. But then, what evidence could there be? You would need to take people from every culture on earth, put them somewhere where they could ignore the law with impunity, and see who cheated and who was honest.

That sounds like a tall order for any research strategy, but economists Ray Fisman and Edward Miguel have realized that diplomats

in New York City were, in fact, the perfect guinea pigs. Diplomatic immunity meant that parking tickets issued to diplomats could not be enforced, and so parking legally was essentially a matter of personal ethics.

Fisman and Miguel discovered support for the common-sense view. Countries with corrupt systems, as measured by Transparency International, also sent diplomats who parked illegally. From 1997-2005, the famously incorruptible Scandinavians committed only 12 unpaid parking violations, and most of them were by a single criminal mastermind from Finland. But over the same period of time, Chad and Bangladesh, regularly at the top of the corruption tables, managed to produce more than 2,500 violations between them. Perhaps poor countries are poor because they are full of corrupt people, after all.

It's a very clever piece of work, but I will not be abandoning my faith in economic incentives just yet. In 2002 the Clinton-Schumer Amendment gave New York City much greater power to punish diplomatic parking violations: Cars were towed, permits suspended, and fines collected from the relevant foreign-aid budget. Unpaid violations immediately fell 90 percent. When it comes to parking violations, personal morality matters, but incentives matter more.

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