

LIVE FROM THE INTERNET

The articles, or "posts" (to use Internet parlance) published in this page come from the Bangladesh Internet news group called "soc.culture.bangladesh," or SCB. In this newsgroup, Internet users from around the world, mostly Bangladeshis, discuss issues relevant to Bangladesh. In "Live from the Internet" the Daily Star reprints these posts verbatim (complete with English language errors) — just as they would appear on your computer screen. They have only been edited for size and relevance to the subject matter.

Democracy, Politics and the Issue of Economic Development

Abul Anisuzzaman
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Student violence must end...upliftment of the economy should be our priority not DEMOCRACY. I don't think the poor are benefited from the Democracy. They just want food in their stomachs and some dignity for a change.

Even if there is TRUE DEMOCRACY in Bangladesh, the food will still end up in the stomachs of a few. You see, the mentality in Bangladesh is that the poor don't matter, they are subhumans, they are to be exploited. This is a shame. Do you really think any politicians of the Elite classes give a hoot about the poor? Grant it, there are a FEW people who take the plight of the poor into consideration, but common. If the country is not allowed to function, how will Bangladesh tackle its prob-

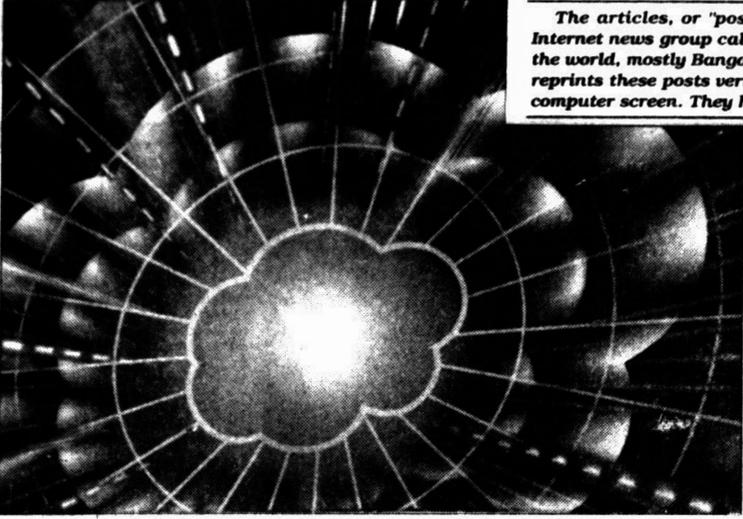
vided are unjust and favors one class of people over another (in relative terms). This is one of the reasons why the labor class in the U.S. did better than their counterparts in erstwhile socialist countries.

Stylized electoral democracy (of the multi-party variety) is likely to do a better job of dispensing economic justice than a pure dictatorship but it is not necessarily true. It depends on the character of underlying social institutions and the particular forms of democracy and dictatorship in question. It is possible to have outrageous levels of social and economic inequality within a electoral democracy, and it is possible to have better equality within a dictatorship if the people in power have the appropriate political persuasions.

A few other observations are in order. Depending on

For countries like Bangladesh, the issue of economic development is not a trivial one, to be traded off with other goals. We need to keep the wheels of economic development turning, while concurrently carrying out movements for democracy and economic justice.

— Mohammad Harunuzzaman, USA



History of the Internet How it began

Edwin Diamond and Stephen Bates

THE Internet seems to be such a common thing these days, that its devotees might find the circumstances of its birth hard to grasp. More than anything else, the computer network connecting tens of millions of users stands as a modern — albeit unintended — monument to military plans for fighting three wars. Specifically, the Net owes its existence to Allied battle strategies during World War II, to the geopolitical pressures of the Cold War, and to preparations for the postapocalypse of nuclear holocaust (the never-fought "brawl war" with the Soviet Union).

This is not a lineage the cyberenthusiasts dwell on. An effusive profile of the father of the Internet in The New York Times in September 1994 skipped entirely the circumstances of his cyberpaternity, while an extended account of the birth of the Internet a month earlier in Newsweek mentioned US military sponsorship in one tangential clause but side not a word about why the Pentagon funded the project in the first place. Perhaps these strange omissions are understandable. Internet boosters have created an instant mythology, featuring a fiercely libertarian "hackers' ethic" and the "freewheeling, untamable soul" of cyberspace (to quote a recent paean in Time magazine). The GI — government issue — stamp seems to let some of the hot air out of the Internet story, however, still leaves room for individual medals all around, while affirming how once upon a time, government universities and industry worked together to produce what the late Ithiel de Sola Pool of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) called "the largest machine that man has ever constructed."

As with most great advances in the history of ideas, there was no one defining Internet event. No apple fell on a cyber-Isaac Newton. Nor did any visionary set out to build a new communications medium. Rather, it began with a modest analytical system, devised early in World War II, that set the stage for the supportive research environment and the key technical developments that produced today's global network.

The analytical system, called operations research (O.R.), applied scientific modeling principles to military planning. The first O.R. was done for the Allies by military scientists and civilian technologists. These boffins (as the British called them) conducted statistical studies of antisubmarine tactics that showed how the Allies could increase the U-boat kill rate by setting the charges to explode at a different depth. O.R. also devised a way to coordinate radar-operated antiaircraft batteries with the flight patterns of friendly interceptor aircraft, to avoid shooting down Allied fighter planes. Modern warfare, it became obvious, was too complex to be left to intuition; measurement and mathematical analysis were required. (Hitler, relying on a dream he had in which he learned that no German V-2 rocket would ever reach England, critically delayed the Nazi missile development program. Many Allied troops and British civilians owe their lives to his unscientific decision.)

To conduct such analyses, the military sought more-powerful calculating devices. In 1944, Howard Aiken, a Harvard physics instructor, unveiled the Automatic Sequence Controlled Calculator, which he nicknamed the Harvard Mark I. Almost immediately this immense machine — more than 50 feet (15 meters) long, containing 750,000 parts, and weighing 35 tons — was put to work factoring ballistics tables for the Navy. Meanwhile, Army-funded engineers at the University of Pennsylvania worked on a machine to calculate artillery trajectories. Their handiwork, ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer), represented a major development in computing technology, though not one that helped the Allied effort; it was delivered just weeks after the war's end.

Following the victories in Europe and Japan, American military planners turned attention to their new Cold War adversaries,

primarily the Soviet Union but also China (known then as Red China). The three US military services contracted out OR work to universities and nonprofit corporations. This produced, among others, the Center for Naval Analysis, administered by the Franklin Institute, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Army-backed Operations Research Office, run by Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland; and, perhaps the most effective of all, the RAND Corporation, the Air Force's principal advisory organization. Initially a technical adjunct of the Douglas Aircraft Company, of Santa Monica, RAND separated from the plane maker in 1948 and was incorporated under California law as a nonprofit company (the name is an acronym for Research and Development). Its initial budget of \$3 million came largely from the Air Force. According to Bruce Smith, a Harvard-trained political scientist who worked at RAND in the 1960s, the Air Force, the newest and least tradition-bound service, was able to "experiment more easily with novel organization forms."

On Friday evening, October 4, 1957, RAND's analysts, along with Pentagon officials and the American public, were jolted upright by Sputnik I. The Soviet Union followed Sputnik I with another satellite carrying the dog Laika. No matter that Laika blasted into orbit on a one-way ticket; America had expected to be first into space. The nation's image as a technology superpower and its perceived in the Cold War were badly shaken. Most frightening of all, its cities suddenly seemed vulnerable to Soviet attack. One of the authors of this article was a young hotshot reporter covering the Pentagon for the International News Service during the Sputnik frenzy. He still remembers the overheated lead of his Saturday "follow story," played prominently by newspapers around the country: "The same Soviet rocket that sent a satellite into orbit Friday can deliver an ICBM warhead on New York and Washington...."

Everything went on the table for panicky review. In hopes of producing graduates who could out think the Soviets, high schools and colleges boosted their math and science requirements. The president of Harvard University, James Bryant Conant, told parents to admonish their children, "For your own sake and for the sake of the nation, do your homework." The "space race" (also called the "missile gap") also affected university budgets. The Defense Department created yet another O.R. group, the Advanced Research Projects Agency, and charged it with doling out high-tech research funds.

Among ARPA's first priorities were projects on command, control and communication, known among war planners as C3. The Defense Department wanted to use computers not only in the Pentagon but also in the field. Bulky, balky mainframes of the era were ill suited for the battlefield, so ARPA sought a communications solution. For signals sent from a battlefield terminal to reach a headquarters-based computer, they would have to be translated from wire to radio to satellite and back. Nothing like it had ever been done before. In fact, most computer time-sharing then involved transportation rather than communication. Computer scientists keyed their jobs onto paper taps or punch cards and then shipped them to the closest computing center.

At the same time, America's command posts were burrowing underground in the name of C3 and "nuclear survivability." NO RAD, the air defense headquarters carved a control center into the side of a Colorado mountain. In Washington, nuclear war plans called for evacuating the president and key officials to supersecret reinforced shelters in the Catoctin Mountains in nearby Maryland, while all 535 members of Congress were supposed to hole up in an elaborate complex under the grounds of the Greenbrier Hotel in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. From these subterranean hideouts, federal officials would govern the nation — that is, the parts that survived.

WHY DON'T MY CHILDREN SPEAK BETTER BENGALI?

It seems today that most Bangladeshi kids choose english as their ONLY medium of communication, which is a shame.

—Abul Anisuzzaman, USA

Kaberi Chakrabarty
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USA:

How many times have we heard this lament? Parents say, "I don't understand why my child seems to dislike so much the idea of speaking Bengali at home. He is beginning to acquire an American accent, and never speaks it unless I insist. Ar Bhogoban jano o ki likhite porte shikhbe ki na. What did I do wrong?"

I am not a parent myself, but I am a trained language teacher, and I do have the experience of trying to learn the language while being raised in a country where it is almost never spoken except at home. I am in total agreement with those who feel that North American culture and values are insidiously creeping into countries all over the world, and that it would be a detriment to lose what cultural and linguistic diversity still exists to an age of mass communication and other technological advances. But how can one living in this part of the world ensure that a comparatively little-spoken language like Bengali can survive the next generation?

I think we have to start by acknowledging the power of the forces that are working

know, and sometimes they forget to speak Bengali to their children. It should be remembered that children cannot be expected to learn Bengali if they do not hear it consistently. If children can hear music in Bengali or watch movies or other programs in Bengali on their VCR, that provides them with much-needed supplemental exposure.

Parents who speak in Bengali at home, or enjoy listening to Bengali music, or reading Bengali literature, or writing in Bengali to family members back home, are more likely to convince their children to want to learn Bengali, because it is something adults enjoy doing themselves, and not something they make their children do. Children of those parent are more likely to want to speak, or to learn to read and write, than children who do so gritting their teeth, with their parents looking over their shoulders. Children who learn a fair amount of Bengali will be more likely to appreciate other elements of their parents' culture, and to cultivate those elements in this society. If a generation of children can be raised here who are familiar with the

ONLY medium of communication, which is a shame.

Shahed Aziz
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USA:

It can be taken to some absurd lengths. I've known kids say "Dhanm_a_n'di" (like an American expat. would) instead of "Dhanmond'i". On the other hand, I've had some of my expat. friends (Aussies no less!) say it the Bangla way!

The humor of these absurdities pale when one realizes that not only are they mono-lingual in English (on face value, not an uncommon-occurrence, even though that means they do not "speak" their own tongue) but they are pretty bad at it. Some of these people actually can't spell correctly or use correct grammar -- in English.

Can't really blame the kids going to the "cool" schools alone though. I have had the "immense pleasure" of working with bangla-spea-king bangladeshis who cannot write or speak good bangla -- yes these people actually have University degrees.

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USA:

I was actually looking for

Children who learn a fair amount of Bengali will be more likely to appreciate other elements of their parents' culture, and to cultivate those elements in this society. If a generation of children can be raised here who are familiar with the Bengali language, they can keep alive the aspects of Bengali culture that their parents treasure so much.

—Kaberi Chakrabarty, USA

against our children learning Bengali. Those of us who would like to see the next generation grow up to be fluent in both English and Bengali should be aware that one should not allow the fact that many children speak Bengali very well when they are two or three years old lull them into believing that the problem has so easily been solved. They will surely find that teaching children to speak smoothly at that young age is only the first step in a long process of maintaining that ability and improving upon it as years go by. Eventually, properly teaching older children the language starts to involve borrowing a number of strategies from classroom language teaching.

Most parents understand on a basic level how important exposure is to language learning for young children. They understand that, if the child is to learn to speak Bengali fluently, the child must hear the language frequently from its parents. However, it is difficult for parents to combat the natural tendency they have when living in America to speak English frequently. Some parents are very proud of their English speaking skills and like to demonstrate them to the people they

Bengali language, they can keep alive the aspects of Bengali culture that their parents treasure so much.

Danial Islam
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Canada:

And what about kids in Bangladesh who use English instead of Bangla in their vocabulary? I know some examples... I remember when I went to Bdes last time, some guys made fun of me for saying the word "eengraje" instead of "english"!!!

Abul Anisuzzaman
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Good point, Danny...when I went to visit Dhaka, it seemed that most "modern" kids spoke English. My cousin introduced me to a friend who wanted to take me around Dhaka, but when I spoke bengali with him, he got annoyed and told me to speak English, because he thought it was "cooler". Personally, I love to speak Bangla, and I credit my parents for helping me retain my native language. Its really up to the parents to instill pride of ones native culture in their children. It seems today that most Bangladeshi kids choose english as their

some suggestions from American-Bengali couples who have children. I would like my children to be able to converse in Bengali, as this would be helpful in trips to Calcutta. I am not particularly insistent on reading/writing. My wife could learn along with the children. She only speaks/understands a few words, and is interested in picking up a working knowledge of the language. Ms. Maimun N. Khan/ AmarChaad@aol.com USA:

Yes, "children" need to take responsibility for their own actions at some point, but what I think is most tragic (But, thankfully, I rather seldom see this) are Bangladeshi parents who think their prestige comes from their children's ability in English.

I've met a few second geners who can't understand Bangla. If a child grows up hearing Bangla, they will at least understand it. It's a sad thing when the parents don't take the time and effort to maintain the heritage, but it's the kids who end up losing. Plus, it's usually these very parents that complain that their kids aren't interested in their heritage....

lems?

You got rid of a dictator and ended up with a prime minister who cant run the affairs of her country because she is too busy defending herself. About the infrastructure in Bangladesh why are we NOT developing the infrastructure of Bangladesh? Because Hasina wont let the country move forward. Khalida is no better. Kind makes you regret you even participated in them student movements dont it? All your hard work and Bangladesh is no better off then it was then.

Pasha
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USA:

It makes everybody (at least people who knows what does a country mean) laugh when you say you want food for everybody but don't want democracy. You can give a shit to Hasina, Khaleda (may be at some point you will give a shit to everybody in Bangladesh), we can't do that, we need to think twice. May be both Hasina and Khaleda failed (I agree with you at this point, they both just failed), does that mean there is no democratic way to get rid of bad politicians, does that mean we did not get anything from our fight against Ershad (At least follow Naeem Moahemen's post, you could get some hint).

Mohammad Harunuzzaman
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The Ohio State University, USA:

The relationships between political institutions, economic development and economic justice (and its correlate social justice) are complex. To use a common metaphor, economic development has to do with the size of the pie and political institutions define the rules by which the pie is divided.

In general, everybody is better off (in absolute terms) with a bigger pie even if the rules by which the pie is di-

working of political forces, the movements for democracy, economic development and economic justice may have either mutually reinforcing or mutually destructive effects. For one example of the first kind, more democracy would tend to broaden economic opportunities, expand the scope and magnitude of entrepreneurial efforts spurring economic development, and realign political and social power structures in the direction of economic justice. For another example of the first kind, economic development, by pulling the poorest out of the poverty threshold (even with unjust distribution of wealth), frees up human resources for political activism and helps both democracy and economic justice. I leave other netters to construct examples of the second kind, which are more abundant.

For Bangladesh, all of the above discussion is essentially moot. The two major political parties, with support from satellite parties and groups, are simply and nakedly haggling for power, with almost invisible difference between their political outlooks and agendas. Their concerns for "constitutional" (BNP), "fair elections" (AL) are self-serving, hypocritical stances, and their political actions will not materially contribute in any way to a more democratic, a more prosperous or a more equitable society.

For countries like Bangladesh, with a large segment of the population under the poverty threshold, the issue of economic development is not a trivial one, to be traded off with other goals. We need to keep the wheels of economic development turning, while concurrently carrying out movements for democracy and economic justice. In other words, we need to make the pursuit of the three goals mutually reinforcing, rather than mutually exclusive or destructive.



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Please send or fax your Internet posts to: M.Shamimuzaman, Page Incharge, "Live from the Internet", Daily Star, House 11, Road 3, Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka-1205. (GPO Box no:3257) Fax: 863035.

Rafay Khan
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USA:

The word "sorry" is pretty easy to say, the important question is to ask whether they are willing to admit that they were wrong. All nations have committed evil and will commit evil, so whats new!

It is easy to apologise for a previous generation - american indians/hawaii but do the americans apologise for vietnam, nicaragua but then you most probably think that they were in the right!

In essence pakistanis will apologise for east pakistan but later next generation.

Sumon Shahed
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USA:

..BANGLADESHIS WERE

The Pakistan Apology Series...

An apology means ownership, acceptance, and regret of a mistake/crime/atrocitiy and it also means a commitment not to repeat it. Its the strating poing of moving on. Therefore in my mind, it means everything for what is yet to be.

—Ginni Dhindsa

QUESTION OF GENERATION (ofcourse in my opinion)

Mahesh Yadav
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USA:

Very nicely put. Apology is a starting point for the friendship between two communities or nations. Technically it is an official statement but reflects much on the mentality of the people. To give some examples,

Americans are apologetic for dropping of nuclear bombs and killings of Native Americans. The gesture is reflected upon the fact that Smithsonian decided to remove Angola Gay(?) the plane which dropped the nuclear bomb. Additionally a postage stamp was removed which depicted expoding of the nuclear bomb. Americans are also helping to rebuild the Native American com-

munities. I think, it is true greatness of Americans of this generation.

Unfortunately I do not see similar apologies from Japanese. Japanese had thousands of Korean and Chinese sex slaves. They killed 20 million Chinese! Initially they never admitted and now they have given only mild Omar Alavi, USA:

It aint gonna happen...not because it shouldn't but,

because it hasn't happened in recent history. Most importantly because it is unrealistic to assume that the next generation is gonna take responsibility for the actions they had no say in. INMHO, the only way Pakistan and Bangladesh will ever get closer is if there are bilateral dialogues between the two countries addressing economic issues of the latter.

Apologies are the things of the past and they don't mean anything especially in the plains of politics. Apologies for political actions against political actions of another region knowing full well that both are corrupt is at best a token gesture. It don't mean natta. The governments have to look elsewhere for achieving closeness.