

LIVE FROM THE INTERNET

Fundamental Changes Needed In Political Culture

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It seems to me that much of the recent discussions on SCB have been focussed on who is to blame for the current political situation. It is sad to see how in our current mode of politics of destruction, a handful of politicians managed to bring economic ruin to the lives of millions.

While we pray and hope that our country gets out of the present impasse, we also need to focus on long term issues that have contributed to the present state of affairs. Hoping and praying that our political leaders in the future are better than the current crop will not get us very far. We need to evolve a stable system of government that can withstand the vagaries of the particular person and party in power.

The first observation is that politicians in the opposition,

anybody else in power in some fundamental respects. The same police that was used against them while in opposition, is used now against the new opposition. They no longer talk about independence of judiciary and executive that they used to when they were part of the opposition. The radio and television are used as propaganda machinery for the government.

Against this backdrop, one needs to think about fundamental structural changes. While this is a time where everything is uncertain, the situation might also present itself as an opportunity to press for changes along these lines.

First, we need to think about ways to place checks on the party in power so that their authority in police matters is not unrestricted. Prosecution should be a job left to an independent police organization. Problems with this concept is in determining what

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all behave the same way. They engage in the politics of confrontation and opposition for the sake of opposition, regardless of the specifics and merits of any issue at hand. Indeed, this has become so routine that your credentials with your party faithfuls is at stake if you are unable to deliver fiery speeches demonizing the party and leader in power. It seems that for the most part, they are trying to mobilize the small crowd of student faithfuls that form the backbone of most parties. Important issues such as the specifics of how you are going to improve law and order, control corruption, remove bureaucratic control that discourage investment and business and hundreds of similar questions are hardly ever discussed. I suppose, these are not issues that will excite your most faithful followers to go out and burn private cars and public transportation. If one takes the viewpoint, that political leaders on the overall are no more or less patriotic than an average person on the street but are into politics for the lure of power, then it is not very difficult to see why a strategy of confrontation and agitation brings them closer to their dream. After all, we haven't had a single case of peaceful transfer of power resulting from the loss in election of a government party. Street agitation, hartal and disruptions may not be popular with you and me; but certainly make it more probable that the current government will be booted out and hence a chance for them.

The second observation is that a politician in power is generally no different from

kind of oversight on the police itself will be appropriate in the Bangladesh context. Some fear that crimes will be prosecuted, regardless of your party color or connection might help in the concept of rule by law.

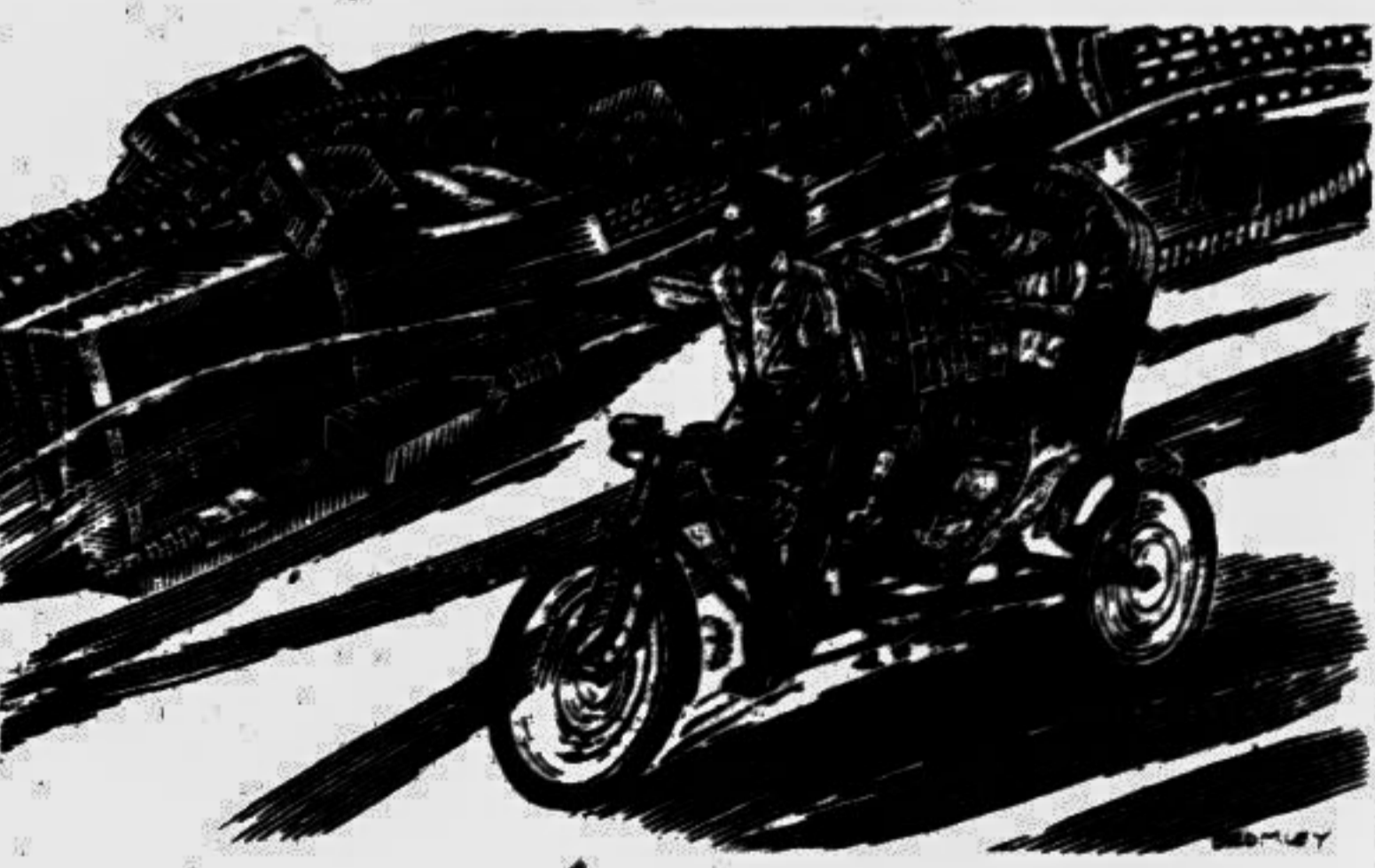
Second, the same point I have made about Police above can be made with respect to the judiciary. In the USA, as you may well know, judges at the higher level are appointed life-time by a president. The president does not have the power of firing him/her. I wonder, if such a policy might not be suitable for BD as well.

Third, we need to think of getting rid of government control on press and media. For TV and Radio, some sort of independent commission needs to be created to oversee them. If the opposition can make its view heard, it might help to change the mode of opposition politics. Some of you may say that this is not going to work in BD regardless of any changes.

Street agitation will remain the preferred mode for opposition politics. This may be so; but on the otherhand, media attention could be focussed on the sensible views of new political leaders nobody has heard about. Perhaps, our people will see an alternative from the present crop of well-known politicians. The hope is that the potency of street agitation as well as the importance of student politics might wane if there are such avenues of political expression.

It seems to me that our energies in the SCB are better focussed by debating long term strategies for change than engaging in bickering along partisan lines.

Live from the Internet, Financial Times and the SCB



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USA

Last Monday's Financial Times (March 4, 1996) has a story about Daily Star publishing some of the exchanges in SCB. There is a sort of a cartoon which shows a man in a rickshaw hanging on to a wire (I am assuming optical fiber) and the author makes the point that it is quite difficult to be part of the information superhighway. The author further mentions that Bangladesh and Nepal are the two coun-

tries without hard connection to the internet. I have not checked the web site for FT <http://www.usa.ft.com> for the electronic version of the story.

Hasina's contacts

Ahmed Riaz Osmani
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USA

Could someone please post the office phone number of the chief opposition leader? I believe Hasina's office is in Road number 32, Dhanmohdi

Disclaimer

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The Daily Star is not responsible for the opinions expressed in these columns.

— Editor

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.

ANALYSIS: Opposition Strategy, Is It Working?

Asif Choudhury
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USA

The opposition strategy is truly confounding, especially Hasina's. Talks between the govt. and opposition broke down because Hasina would not agree to a caretaker government headed by President Biswas (because she questioned his neutrality). Now after the elections, she is suggesting a caretaker govt. headed by the president to hold another round of elections?!! If she doesn't have a problem with Biswas heading the caretaker government now, why such a hue and cry about him 2/3 months ago??

IMO, neither the govt. nor the opposition has any vision or strategy of how to proceed with this crisis. They are taking their decisions on an ad-hoc, whimsical manner and thus playing with the lives of 115 million Bangladeshis.

are moving and taking all their orders to Vietnam, at least better than our stupid, bloody, unimaginably corrupted country. What will happen to us, does anyone think about it, will we exist as a nation after twenty years. I am sick of explaining to people that Bangladesh is not the poorest country in the world. Why

Bilayet Hossain, USA: What is the basis of this conjecture? What can AL show against 7 or so Ex-Gen./Cols. in the BNP cabinet --and some 20 Ex's in the parliament? Gen. Shafulah--who joined AL a few months back--is the only visible army connection. So does its ally JP. In fact, A presumption or you have some insider

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— Asif Choudhury, USA

don't we do something, we have the potential, and we know that we can do it, but why the fights.

Nevermind my friend, got really agitated. I am only twenty years old, don't have that much of a knowledge, doing my undergraduate here at the Houston University, and dreaming to have a better future in my own loving country. We can't live here (USA) forever, this is not where we belong, we want to have an identity just like any other good identities, we want to raise our head and walk under the bright blue sky...

If there was a little bit sense of morality among the parties, we would have been somewhere else today, quite not developed, but free of poverty.

Yasir Simon Islam, USA

day, quite not developed, but free of poverty. I would curse all the political parties that has trapped the innocent people of our country within. I would on the other side also blame the people for acting so indifferently at such a crisis. Where are our bright lads who fought and saved us from the bloody Pakistanis, where are they today?

We don't want leaders who doesn't have any sort of public feelings, ashamed of myself and my country. I wish I could do something. Economy...huh, it sounds funny to talk about economy in such a crisis, but does anybody think about long term effects on the countries economy? Does anyone think about the poor rickshaw-pullers, and how will they survive with their over populated homes. Garments industries are at such a risk, that buyers

Mohammad Harunuzzaman, mharunuz@magnus.acs.ohio-state.edu, USA

Good analysis! Recommended reading for all SCBers. I want to add the following points.

Bilayet Hossain, mbhossain@aardvark.uoknor.edu, USA

Most of your points are directed against a particular party/leader--or their doings. If it all came from the unconscious--let me show you some of them.

Mohammad Harunuzzaman, USA

1. AL has good rapport with the army too. AL may be hoping for military intervention because it has less to lose than BNP if that happens.

BLIND SUPPORTERS

Akhtar Hossain
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USA

While India and several other south-east nations, in our backyard are forging ahead to shed the "one of the poorest countries" image. Bangladesh appears to be taking pride in sliding into the other direction.

Hasina in one of her recent interview with "INDIA TODAY" says she wants people's right at any price. I guess what she means is she wants "people's right" even at the cost of the life of people she is getting right for. Why can she be more straight and say I want power at any cost.

Niaz Rahim Pavel
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USA

I disagree with you. Its shame for us all of us, Hasina alone is nothing. Why shall we attack her? Or even Khaleda. How she alone (an innocent lady) can create such an agitation.

Don't you think we are too bias to support or oppose. Don't you think most of us forget when supporting BNP/AL that the country we love is more important than the parties or leaders. Cannot we be less bias?

Are not we supporting their every action without question. Do we think what we should do now. Why do we say "oh, hasina did not let us progress" or "khaleda is rigging the votes and keeping the power for ever"... Because we have three brands of people.

1. who opposes what hasina and his father does and in order to keep hasina out of power supports whatever the other powerful party does

2. who supports whatever Sheikh muzib or any of his family does and that's why hates zia and khaleda

3. Who looks at despair, sometimes supports a third party and sometimes becomes hopeless of all these and sometimes just become ignorant (or avoids)

Most of us are in number 1 or number 2. What it give us? It made a Hasina. It made a Khaleda. It made two leaders and their crazy supporters who just fight for their madam/apa. Whatever happens

Can a supporter of khaleda even support hasina on an issue. Can a supporter of hasina ever reject whatever she says? Or howabout rejecting BNP's decision (for a BNP supporter)?

Or, rejecting an AL decision for an AL supporter? Don't say whatever BNP does is ok and whatever AL does is bad. Or don't say whatever AL does is ok, whatever BNP does is bad. If you don't stop thinking in this way we will never have democracy.

Bilayet Hossain, USA: You could have emphasised the positive side of it. Only in a healthy political condition an underdog can win.

Mohammad Harunuzzaman, USA

3. Khaleda may have followed the same strategy or an equally destructive strategy if she were in Hasina's shoes.

Bilayet Hossain, USA: Just to emphasise the point that Hasina's objective is destruction!

Mohammad Harunuzzaman, USA

4. The opinion that the current crisis is the result of family/feudal claim to leadership (it is a problem of "two ladies" does not stand up to close scrutiny.

Before we had these two ladies as leaders, our leaders demonstrated the same lack of respect for democratic institutions (one party rule, inviting the army into politics, political assassinations, etc) and rational political discourse (unfair demonization of Sheikh Mujib and AL, attempts to polarize the country between "pro-liberation" and "anti-liberation", or "pro-indian" and "anti-indian" forces). Disclaimer: I am alone responsible for the above opinions.

Bilayet Hossain, USA: I agree.

GLOBAL BANGLADESHIS EXPRESS CONCERN

Criket and Politics

Asif Saleh
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USA

Please stop the cricket material on rec.sport.cricknet.net here. What do you want to see in SCB? Only topics with dirty politics? Topics on racism? Topics on gender discrimination? AND NO SPORTS? Or sports only on Mohamedans and Abahani in SCB?

The overall standard of SCB could not be raised any further if we have such mentality. At least sports is far better than politics of Bangladesh. If BD were in World Cup Cricket 1996, NOW THE POLITICAL SITUATION WOULD HAVE DIFFERENT LOOK!!

We have NO Good Foot ball NO better Cricket but have HARTAL and a peculiar mentality!!

terminated to fight to the end, but they seem hardly to care for the economy bleeding to death.

Ekoda bangladeshay Kiada abong Hans namok duiti ajob jib chilo. Uhara rokto pan korio jibon dharon korito. --Fifth grade essay writer from year 2000

KHALEDA HASINA-FREE BANGLADESH..

Ms. Shahtul Islam
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UK

Last week one professor here in the UK told me that a society lead by any woman should live in peace because women are the symbol of peace.

Thanks to our Hasina and Khaleda as peace keeper in Bangladesh!

Once I was proud to say that in Bangladesh despite majority of people are muslim, we have a woman prime minister and Opp. leader. In a seminar I argued that in Bangladesh women are much better than many other muslim society. But our two so called leaders are our shame now in abroad

Democracy

Mohiuddin Abbas
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USA

Bangladesh doesn't need any democracy. Most aren't educated enough to handle democracy. Just need honest dictatorship for next several decades. Do you know, Hartals are taken as holidays? Just my opinion.

How long we have to tolerate that?

Zakaria Sohel
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USA

As it happens for our country. How many people can earn money enough to buy their food. One of the statistics shows that about two-thirds of the fellowmen in Bangladesh aren't able to feed themselves. Is it really true? But our politicians are still doing their business. How can we get rid of this? No way, man!

Political feuds take toll on Bangladesh economy

Kamal S. Quadir
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USA

News: "We see no indication that the impasse will end soon," one Asian diplomat told Reuters on Friday. "Both [Khaleda and Hasina] are de-

More on Politics...

I wish the politics in Bangladesh would sooner stop using a photograph on their platform and start putting plausible ideas and policies which are beneficial to our country.

Shabbir A. Bashar, UK

Shabbir A. Bashar
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UK

I wish the politics in Bangladesh would sooner stop using a photograph on their platform and start putting plausible ideas and policies which are beneficial to our country. Both Sheikh Mujib and Ziaur Rahman are dead - let them rest in peace - let's get on with building a prosperous Bangladesh - (those of you who support either of these two will agree that this is what both of them would have wanted - if its any consolation).

Saif Ahmed
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USA

It's strange the politics in the Bangladesh and other countries are so vastly different. In Bangladesh no one seems to care about issues, just about leaders. Also the leaders personal lives never affect anything. In the US personal lives of candidates are pried into and every single skeleton pulled out of the closet. In Bangladesh, Khaleda's son's corruption, Hasina's separation from her husband and all the other gossip never makes headlines. Both ways have their good and their bad, but the difference is interesting.

Saiful
<Unknown>

I completely agree with you. People in Bangladesh are facing endless sufferings. Interesting enough, while they gave gun to son of ordinary people, they sent their son and daughter to USA, India etc. Now they are threatening for civil war!!!!!! Saiful, Cambridge.

Mahboob Rahman
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USA

It's true that the people of Bangladesh are suffering due to the political situation. How-

ever, don't you think that you were too quick to judge the politicians in that manner? Giving weapons to "son of ordinary people" (or I would rather say: students who are concerned for the country) becomes a survival issue for political parties today. Do you think a party can survive without any protection of their own? What would people do when they have to face an autocratic government? Also, what is wrong if they want to provide their children with the best education. Wouldn't you?

I don't believe that violence is the solution, but that seems to be the only way to get govt.'s attention these days.

TLS ALAUDDIN
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UK

How would you react if YOUR family had been massacred

Saif Ahmed, USA: Oh, so her family was massacred, so she's justified in ruining the lives and livelihood of the millions of poor people just to get power. Of course she has the right to be in power because her family was massacred. What about the people who are being massacred by her and her party.

TLS ALAUDDIN, UK: Anyone with any common sense must realise that this must have affected her

and that it is difficult, if not impossible to get over such an incident. Anyway, what's happened to the rest of the party? You can't expect me to believe that she, and she alone, is the cause of all this trouble! A party cannot be totally dominated by one person or can it???

Saif Ahmed, USA: Yes it can and it is. Every party in Bangladesh is a small dictatorship trying to pretend to support democracy. What you believe of course is your business.

Debate on Economics

Mo
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USA

The Economist this week showed the GNP per capita at PPP for the subcontinental countries as follows - India \$1190, Bangladesh 1260, Pakistan 2200 and Sri Lanka 3000.

India was doing well with over 6% growth in Rajiv's time but M's foolish experiments with monetarism doomed it to five years of low growth.

In fact a look at successful economies like Japan, Switzerland, Italy, Hong Kong, Singapore (GNP per capita higher than USA!) shows that the following ten point plan work well.

World of Oz (Vandit)
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USA

Good points - but w/o competition, they are all moot. The problem with India is NOT a lack of skilled labor, but lack of competition.

Mo, USA:

1. A high standard of education - pay the kids say 200 rupees a month provided they get more than 50% in all ten subjects. Educated people create their own wealth.

World of Oz, USA: This is, it is ok for a small country to institute that - for a large country like India, this is going to be HELL to run and monitor.

Mo, USA:

2. Very high deficits by borrowing from one's own rich and spending this on high tech defence, space and electronics to create demand for a skilled work force.

World of Oz, USA: In other words market economy India

needs to modernize its Stock Exchange and liberalize some of the capital-related laws.

Mo, USA:

3. Low direct taxes - max 20% top rate to encourage the high fliers to earn more and create more wealth. Its not worth the penalties of evading tax at 20%

World of Oz, USA: What about the drop in revenue? How will that be made up? (I am assuming #4 is not a viable plan)

Mo, USA:

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Good points - but w/o competition, they are all moot. The problem with India is NOT a lack of skilled labor, but lack of competition.

World of Oz, USA: Dude, Switzerland is a small country. Do you really think such a plan is feasible in India right now? Besides, we have decent rail infrastructure - need to modernize the locomotives and coaches, though.

Mo, USA:

10. Elections every three years to keep the politicians responsive to the needs of the people and proportional representation so that as initially, India has weak governments unable to impose harsh and retrogressive measures on the people.

erate demand and allow economies of scale.

World of Oz, USA: It would generate inefficiencies. Even well-off societies with small, stable populations like Sweden are finding high welfare spending hard to maintain. I shudder to think of the above kind of welfare spending in India. I'd rather see a more competitive market.

Mo, USA:

6. 300% write offs for new machinery as in Japan to encourage constant modernisation.

World of Oz, USA: Good concept - but again, opening the economy will force companies to modernize on their own.

Mo, USA:

7. A guaranteed tiny profit to the farmers for all they can produce the CAP is the most successful economic idea in all history. Similar guarantees can be given to other industries - America does this with defence related high tech ones.

World of Oz, USA: Yeah, this is a good idea.

World of Oz, USA: I agree - this is India's bane: people who tolerate inefficiency and corruption. As long as both-capturing etc are commonplace, clean govt. will remain a fond dream.

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