

The Daily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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For Better Ties with India

Calcutta Book Fair '99, which adopted Bangladesh as the theme country and occasioned Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit there to inaugurate it, has served to catalyse Indo-Bangla relationship into a fresh focus. There has been an enlightening degree of rumination and looking ahead to the future horizon of ties. Inputs came from West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, a respected name in Bangladesh, as well as from Vajpayee government's representative in the person of Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh who met our PM. The Indian central minister Singh's meeting with the Bangladesh leader and her foreign minister Abdus Samad Azad has raised the prospect for a Dhaka meet at the foreign ministers' level some time in March to address 'transit, trade and energy sale' issues.

The new outlook, welcome as it is, needs to be put through a reality check if we want to make a sense of it, in the ultimate analysis. It had been a smooth sail for Bangladesh with the preceding minority governments in India, shortlived they might have been. The Ganges Water Treaty and the CHT Peace Accord bear testimony to that fact. However, with the BJP-led coalition government coming to power and losing no time to affirm its support to the Ganges and CHT accords notwithstanding, issues like 'illegal Bangladeshi immigrants' in India and barbed-wire fencing cropped up to nettles us. The quality of signals somewhat depreciated.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's call for 'stronger ties' with India is well-taken because she is a geographically-adjacent neighbour of Bangladesh, but such improved relations cannot be at the expense of Bangladesh's self-respect in any way. The point made by the Bangladesh PM in her interview with the Anandabazar Patrika that 'India pay more attention to her smaller neighbours' has gone down well with us. She must have had good reasons to say so.

Combating cross-border insurgency is an issue that looks settled enough, but India has sounded somewhat positively keen on transit to North-East, transport of goods through Bangladesh and energy sale etc., matters that evoke a pretty tough reaction from us: first, we are positively disposed towards these so long as they promote and protect our national interest; secondly, these are far-reaching issues on which neither India nor Bangladesh should jump their guns. In fact, it falls on India as the bigger neighbour to show patience on a proposition that sprang from her in the first place. It would be a grave mistake on the part of Indian leadership to mount pressure on the Hasina government to yield any quicker response on the subject than the pace at which it is coming now.

Last but not the least we would like India to realise that so long as our huge trade imbalance with that country persists all the talk about 'improved ties' would fall like a lead balloon. How does it matter to her, if India with its vast middle class dominated market-place gives Bangladesh just a tiny niche in it. That slender access could work wonders with the Bangladesh economy. This aspect of the big Indian economy being required to create an environment for the Bangladesh economy to flourish at no cost to herself seems lost on Indian political leadership, her bureaucracy and business community. It is time India came out of the shell, with a long term vision befitting her size.

From Killing Fields to Grain-bowl: Learning from Farmers in Cambodia

CAMBODIA has been a land of dark tragedy for almost three decades. Decaying under foreign invasion, torn apart by internecine conflicts, maimed and killed by millions of unexploded mines, shells and bombs littering jungles and rice-fields, people have looked at dark pools of horror and despair in the eye. Not too long ago, the people in the countryside were turned into a race of human ants, toiling for long hours in rural rice communities on starvation diet of rice gruels under the guns of stern ideologues. The golden glitter on sunlight vibrating on rumpled waters of Mekong turned into flames of funeral pyre.

Now that peace reigns again, the farmers are tilling the soil, the fisherfolk filling the ponds and the forest dwellers are alive with the humming of the cicada.

Last December, I traveled in rural Cambodia. It was a unique learning experience. I thought I would share that with my readers, because, as the Chinese saying goes, we learn from each other.

Trapeang Chhoueul is a placid village today in Chres commune, Chumkiri district, Kampong province. The lowland plains nestled by hillocks up above along the rather difficult terrain that links with Route 3 sparkle with grain-laden paddy stalks. Like a tapestry of green and gold crisscrossed by water channels and the field dykes. The wet-season rice is about to be harvested.

Walking down the slope beside the intake channel of Mech reservoir constructed during the Kehr Rouge period, we walked through the paddy fields along the field dykes. A 3 to 4 kilometer walk and we come to a shed of palm thatch in a courtyard. This is the place where farm women and men meet once a week for the season-long Farmer Field School. That day 10 December, 1998 was the review session for wet season rice. The participants 9 women and 15 men had in the morning went through the fields around them along with agronomists and hydrologists of the province and the district. They reassembled at around 11 in the morning and divided themselves into five groups.

The about-to-be harvested crop looked good though some of it in the lower reaches were inundated for 4-5 days due to flooding. The main dam had given in at vulnerable spots due to heavy rains. Fifty-seven households got together and repaired the breaches with large number of polythene bags of mud and earth. The over-all damage was estimated at around 20 per cent. But by and large the harvest, they thought, would be better than last year's.

The preponderant variety was a locally improved variety with a sprinkling of late maturing IR variety in between. They have all used anywhere between 3-5 tons per hectare of cow dung and farm-yard manure. A basal dose

of DAP was ploughed in with split use of urea as top-dressing particularly at the time of panicle formation. The timing and management of integrated soil and plant nutrient has been based on the soil manual prepared by CIAP (Cambodia Irr Australia Project). The access to mineral fertiliser has been mainly through the provincial department of agriculture. They got the certified seed from the seed trial and verification stations. Much of the locally improved variety was through farmer to farmer exchange. Some members of the field school are already learning about multiplication of quality seed as specialised seed-growers.

Participating Farmers have formed a Water User's Group. They will collect 50-60 kg. Per hectare as water fees for operation and maintenance of field channels and small hydraulic structures. They need to build a grain storage immediately. For they would like to collect the grains as soon as harvesting was completed. They will however need some support, approximately \$250, to buy wood and other material for the storage. Land and labour are theirs. Provincial and district authorities will, hopefully, provide the material support. The main canal will also be rehabilitated through government support and their own labour before the dry season planting. The outside support is for materials like cement, gravel, steel etc. for the subsidiary intake structure. Rest is farmer-managed and farmer-operated.

Incidentally, even till the end of 1994, the Mech irrigation scheme was not accessible to the farmers due to mining. Now that demining has been done 750 ha is irrigated in the dry season and 500 ha through supplementary irrigation for pre-monsoon rice and vegetables. Although major irrigation rehabilitation works will be necessary to upgrade the system to its full potential of 6000 ha, minor investment by the farmers themselves has already seen expansion of the command area at a nominal cost. The average cost of such investment for tertiary and field channels is estimated at no more than \$200 per hectare, compared to estimates of major multi-lateral lending institutions for irrigation sector projects at \$5000 per hectare. And as much as one half of that investment of \$200 per ha in farmer-managed system is borne by the farmers. The operation and maintenance cost comes from the water-fees collected by the Water Users' Group.

Another problem that came up for discussion in the review-session was regarding sporadic infestation by stemborer. This is the first time in last three years that this situation has emerged. However, as an elderly farmer-leader explained, the percentage

of tillers affected in case of local varieties is no more than 2 per cent. Since the emergence of the pest was visible after flooding, he thought it might have something to do with proper water-control and management in the field. His solution was two-fold, first weed out the affected tillers and burn those along with the pest; second to plough in a bitter plant (i.e. locally available botanical pesticide) that they know about through generational experience, before the next planting. It may be added here in parenthesis that wet season rice in Cambodia has generally been isolated from pesticide-use, though the precursors are appearing along with water-seed-nutrient technology package. It provides integrated pest management with more space to concentrate on growing a healthy crop and treating farmers as experts.

In fact the elderly farmer in the farmer field school taught the agronomists present there about the botanical cure they have been using through local knowledge. Hence the importance of coalescing modern science and technology with local knowledge to create common wisdom.

Incidentally, farmers are using more of organic fertiliser, cow-dung and farm-yard compost. The increase is double, from

2000 kg/ha to 4000 kg/ha. The mineral supplement has accordingly been reduced from 150 kg/ha to 100 kg/ha today. And production has increased to 300 kg/ha by improving the timing of use and application methods.

With better water-management on farms, the farmers are also growing relay crops of spinach, cabbages, chillies etc. And in the sandy soil with better drainage, water-melon. The problem there is availability of good seed. Bare-foot veterinarians as a farmer said, resulted in ever smaller size of water-melon.

Another two groups worked with the veterinary technician on back-yard poultry, pig-rearing and animal feed. Again, as decided by the village association, certain households have received five live chicken each. The mortality rate earlier of scavenging back-yard poultry was as high as 60 to 70 per cent. Now the chickens are vaccinated and properly housed. Bare-foot veterinarians have been trained. The price of the vaccine is collected through the village fund. When the requirement is there, new batch of vaccine is brought from the province where cool-chain is available.

A sort of revolving fund is managed by the group with training support from provincial and

district technicians. Also in a recipient household there is a shallow water-body with the bottom of the pit covered in polythene. Duck-weed is grown there. The chicken get supplementary feed of rice bran mixed with duck-weed. The mortality rate has gone down drastically and the original 5 in a household have proliferated into 40 or 50. The market-value of the five chickens initially provided is given back to the village association for advancing the same kind of loan to other households.

The same sequence is followed in case of the pig which is an important emergency cash reserve for Cambodian small farmer. For each pig received, the recipient gives back to the village association two piglets. For a clean pig-sty, the authorities have provided one bag of cement to build the floor-bed for each recipient.

Importance of such diversification for a small farmer's household income is illustrated by Mr. Em My. He is the village chief and has a family of seven. He farms only 0.4 hectare of land. With proper management, the yield is above 2.5 tons per hectare. So, although the family was food-deficit earlier, the situation is different now. In fact in a good season the family can store some for reserve.

Two-thirds of the families' income come from the poultry and the duck and of course the pigs. At the moment Mr. My's poultry-enterprise is flourishing and

he has around 260 numbers of ducks and ducklings. The household also has four heads of cattle, healthy and well-looked after. Rice-straw is an important feed-material. So although in dry season rice the farmers go in for IR varieties, they prefer longer staple improved local variety of rice-paddy for the wet-season or main-season rice.

The economic rationale is obvious in as much as the value is costed not in terms of grains alone, but in terms of the entire bio-mass. Recommendations by the experts are important but in a way secondary to the weekly agro-ecosystem analysis by the farmers themselves, where they monitor crop growth; record many correlated factors (water, fertiliser, insects, weather etc.) and discuss in peer-groups their findings for making management decision themselves. What happens then is farmers' own research and experimentation on soil-texture, balancing the monogamic with composting and green manure and growing of different varieties with quality seeds so that intensification does not lead to more and new pest.

Another field school in Thnot Te village of Samraong district in Takeo under flood recession scheme. The field school that day was working on soil texture and

composting. Thnot Te reservoir recently rehabilitated by ADB, irrigates an area of 5000 hectare. The irrigated area is totally inundated in the monsoon period. As flood water recedes rice is planted. Supplemental irrigation is provided during the dry season between November and March. The reservoir itself is planted with recession rice and requires no supplemental irrigation.

Incidentally, Khemr farmers have been growing rainfed rice for at least 2000 years. Irrigated rice production technologies were introduced 1500 years ago. Some historians contend that Angkor Kings gained their power through dramatic and widespread innovations in their irrigation technologies. The farmers developed over generations specialised rice production systems for growing deep water rice, upland rice, flood-recession rice and rainfed low land rice. Within each farm-unit, fields of different water availability (high, medium and low fields) were planted to varieties of different duration (early, medium, and late) as a means to spread risk.

That brings me to the impressive reservoir built by the Angkor Kings 1000 years ago. Not too far from the majestic splendor of the temple complex of Angkor Wat and Angkor Thomis this massive body of water.

This reservoir and the canal network irrigating 8000 hectare has been rehabilitated with support from Cambodian partners in development. The lower part of the command area is flooded during the monsoon season and planted with paddy on the receding flood-waters. Supplemental irrigation is provided from the reservoir. The upper and more sandy part of the area are cropped during the monsoon season with irrigation-supplement. In a limited area dry season irrigation of vegetables is practiced. Again beside the intake-structure and the main canal, the rest is operated and managed through the organisation of Water Users' Groups.

Another lesson that I learnt from the Cambodian farmers is that the virtually all rice-farming households in much of the flood plains regularly collect fish and other aquatic products from the fields. Some farmers establish trap-ponds by the side of the fields. Brush-branches are put in to attract and provide shelter for the fish. Rice-fish culture in Cambodian flood-plains is becoming more and more robust. I recall how in our own childhood we enjoyed catching fish from the rice-fields. With widespread use of the poison of chemicals, the fish have disappeared and the health of the farmer is also endangered.

Those who till the soil have generational knowledge of practice. Let us, self-ordained experts, enrich ourselves by participating in their endeavours in most difficult and sometimes hostile circumstances.



Do It Dare!
A Z M Obaidullah Khan

Last but not the least we would like India to realise that so long as our huge trade imbalance with that country persists all the talk about 'improved ties' would fall like a lead balloon.

OPINION

Opposition Demands: Is There Any Merit?

by Dr. Mozammel H. Khan

If the democracy persists, the backlash of any scathing political agenda will be too strong for any political party to absorb. The earlier the political leadership realise this plain truth and take the lessons from the most recent history, the better it is for the country, and more so for the political parties themselves.

THE opposition parties in Bangladesh have put forward a 4-point demand, in the form of an ultimatum, as preconditions for their participation in the forthcoming local government polls, even though it does not have official party standing. The candidate's party identity is not supposed to be known to the election commission and they are not allocated the election symbols of any political party. The foremost among their demands is the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and the reorganisation of the Election Commission.

From BNP's perspective, this demand is nothing new. Because of their victory in the Manikganj and the Barisal by-elections, it took the back stage and has again resurfaced due to their candidate's defeat in the Pabna by-poll. BNP propelled a lot of effort on winning the Pabna by-poll to drum up justification for their demand of mid-term election. Their demand would have been strengthened on the fact that the ruling party had lost the seat in the Pabna by-poll. Due to their failure in the Pabna by-poll, the demand for the mid-term polls has lost steam and they have decided to achieve their goals.

decision, who will win the election commission. Whether the admittance of such an 'admirer' of the independence of the EC, in the opposition squad acts as a liability or an asset to the opposition movement is yet to be gauged.

BNP's own record of election fairness vis-à-vis the performance of their appointed CEC was not any brighter either. The party had to pay a heavy price for their improper cognizance of the reality. They lack the moral authority to demand what they themselves have failed to do. However, they possess all the legal right, just like any other citizen or group, to expect absolute neutrality and fairness from the CEC and the EC. The foremost accusation against the CEC has emanated and is still emitting from the Leader of the Opposition and her lieutenants. However, if her accusations have to be honoured with any degree of credibility, she would be still holding the crown of the Premier, not the title now she is officially enduring with. In her words, "people have voted for my party to govern, not for the Awami League. The victory has been snatched away from us through conspiracy." This was done naturally in contravention with Justice Habibur Rahman, the Chief of the Caretaker government and Abu Hena, the Chief of the EC. Did anyone, except for her followers, either at home or abroad attach any degree of credibility to her assertion? The answer is a flat NO.

Following the defeat in the Pabna by-election, the BNP chief has, once again, come up with a list of allegations against the CEC, none of which has ever been substantiated with any proof. CEC is the Chief Election Commissioner, not the Chief Martial Law Administrator. The EC works under the laws which are framed by the government, not by the election commission. The last reform of the election laws was carried out by the BNP government, which did not vest any legal authority to the CEC to bar the PM or any other members of her cabinet, nor the Leader and the Deputy leader of the opposition, both of whom enjoy the rank of ministers, to visit any part of the country, albeit there could be availed reason. Probably, the same handicap dissociated Justice Rouf even to advise the

former PM and her entourage of Cabinet Ministers not to set up camps in every by-election that was held during his tenure. Under the tenure of the present government, both the PM and the CEC deserve a great deal of admiration from the nation as the PM complied with the advice of the CEC by not visiting the by-election constituency. If the BNP ever gets to power again through the vehicle of democracy, the nation will certainly, expect from it a reciprocation of the ethics as exercised by the present PM.

The reports of vote-rigging and irregularities in any polling centres by any candidate is mere allegations, not attestations. Allegations are not supposed to trigger the appropriate action if they are not substantiated by absolute corroboration. The fact that a BNP candidate fails to bag more than a few percentage of votes in a particular centre does not constitute a substantiation of irregularities. I know a few centres in my own constituency, where the BNP even does not have any one to act as a polling agent and this is not really an exceptional situation. This could happen for all other political parties as well in any other part of the country. However, unlike the AL, the Jama'at-Islami and the left-leaning political parties, BNP is not an ideologically-based political party. Press report indicated that the BNP candidate even failed to show up to the returning officer with his polling agents to submit their deposition regarding the alleged irregularities. This action indicated that the BNP did not even have a strong case to start with.

Any institution thrives on the excellence of its multifaceted components. Harvard would not be the Harvard if it were not for the excellence of both of its educators and learners. Likewise, the success of the CEC depends largely on the democratic training and exercise of the political leaders. T. E. Sheshan was able to command the admiration of all because in the Indian political arena, in spite of very little formal education of many of their political leaders, there exists a vast degree of maturity among politicians in grasping democratic values. They have learned to accept defeat with magnanimity

in a democratic exercise. I have yet to hear about a politician in India who, before an election, would make an utterance such as, "there is no question of my party losing the election" or who would invent the involvement of her neighbour in the outcome of a general election. In the absence of a basic education on democracy and the willingness to accept the democratic norms and principles, even an angel would not be in a position to satisfy our political leaders, let alone the present CEC, a modest human being.

Since the last general elections, the main opposition party along with its letic heads have tried in vain to create political instability through a number of issues which hardly possess any significant allegiance of the general mass. Unlike in an established democracy, in Bangladesh, there exists no well-accepted credible issue-based statistical polling system that could reflect the wishes of the people. A few polling organisations that resorted to that exercise before the last general election proved to be quite effective in forecasting the result of that election. If the effectiveness of those organisations are assumed to be credible, the results of many of their polls do not bring any good news for the opposition either. The day the leader of the opposition declared in a public meeting that, "people are in favour of tougher program", a polls result indicated that 87 per cent of the city dwellers are vehemently opposed to "it", a key tool of the opposition's 'tough program'. The results of a recent poll disclosed not a very enchanting news for the main opposition either, as their chief was even trailing behind her once arch-enemy and newfound ally, the JP chief in popularity contest.

The opposition parties have threatened to ouster of the government if their demand is not met by their deadline. This may prove to be too much wishful thinking. The present government is a duly elected one, like the BNP government in 1991, through an election which was participated by not only the largest percentage of the citizens in our history, but has been widely acclaimed at both home and abroad, notwithstanding an altogether different pronouncement of the former Prime

Minister. They may resort to the most abhorrent tools of keeping the people and the economy hostage through the weapons of unabated hartals, but that will not diminish the ruling party's moral and legal strength to reign and rule and would rather accelerate the people's support for the administration. In their movement against BNP in support of the caretaker government, the AL alliance's indiscriminate use of the tool caused the people to incriminate the AL. Albeit an overwhelming percentage of our people were in favour of the concepts, and knowing very well, that for all practical purposes there was no mechanism to change the government through ballots under a partisan government. Nevertheless, the combined opposition's all out efforts, including the incrimination of their MPs from the parliament, proved futile as they even failed to shiver the Khaleda Zia administration, let alone bring it to the brink. Only the farcical election of February 15 reversed the fate of the BNP government, and the rest is history.

The present government has both successes and failures to its credits or discredits. Which of the two weighs more is a matter of critical analyses and the political pundits might differ. Nevertheless, their failures are not critical enough to warrant a fresh mandate. Moreover, it is very much known to the people that the provision for the formation of caretaker government for conducting the general election was very much a part of the constitution and they would be free to exercise their mandate, be it reward or wrath for the political parties they trust or detest. People of the country are not the slaves of any political party, be it the BNP or the AL. It would not be easy for any one or group to allure them for their vested interests. If the democracy persists, the backlash of any scathing political agenda will be too strong for any political party to absorb. The earlier the political leadership realise this plain truth and take the lessons from the most recent history, the better it is for the country, and more so for the political parties themselves.

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Friday Mailbox

Award for BTV

Sir, I fully support Mr A Husnain's proposal (his letter captioned "Whither professionalism in BTV?"). DS : 09.01.99) that the *chamcha* Award of 1998 is to be given to BTV. I must add that the BTV is the all-time champion in *chamchani* (flattery) and the *chamcha* award (if any) must be reserved for BTV every year (not only for 1998).

Ding autocratic Ershad period it was known as the box of Golam and Bibi. Even in national days like the Independence Day, Victory Day etc., the premier officer of the Liberation struggle was kept chemouflaged.

Later, during the democratic BNP period, BTV tried its best to make us believe that Zia was the main person behind our Liberation struggle and all development activities began from 1991.

Sheikh Mujib and other national leaders, who were they then?

during the reign of democratic AL, all BTV programmes are for Bangabandhu. Other national leaders, like *Chauupatis* and Zia was none but a traitor! The country has been sinking for last 21 years and the present government has started salvaging the drowning Bangladesh from 23.06.96. Now the Bengalees of BTV are "teaching Bengalees how to be Bengalees".

When the Hon'ble President visited Dr Abdullah Al-Muti Sharfuddin in his deathbed in BIRDEM Hospital, the BTV made only verbal news (without any photo), but when a minister visited, it came with photo exposure!

We all are awaiting anxiously to enjoy the *chamcha* Award giving ceremony (to BTV) on the BTV screen itself!

M A S Molla
Member, BAAS, Dhaka

Reward and punishment

Sir, The successive regimes in Bangladesh have kept in abeyance, unwisely, one of the basic principles of good administration, namely, reward and punishment; thereby introducing indifference, lack of motivation, inefficiency, dissatisfaction and encouragement to indulge in unethical practices.

The good workers feel discouraged, and the black sheep amongst the officers and staff cease to work in public interest. The very core of good management is shaken up, and erosion penetrates deeper and deeper into the foundations of institutions built up after decades of hard work.

The longer this period of official callousness, the greater is the time required to bring operation and maintenance back to normal. *Evil practices have to be nipped in the bud, to save time, money and energy.* The human system loss is staggering. This loss is rather invisible, hence the apathy on both sides; the service providers, and the clients.

Internally, this corroded system cannot cleanse itself, unless pressed from the top authority. The regulatory side has become dormant, adversely affecting the inspection and prosecution. The law cannot work unless it is made to work (cannot walk remaining at one place, or without stepping forward).

In a turbulent nation, the governance is too busy with day to day ad hoc problems, which never cease to crop up—because the rhythm of routine work through the institutionalised systems are missing. Procedures have no meaning unless the same run smoothly (no induction flow). A new nation has a lot of daily inputs; therefore to get proportionate output, the speed of processing must match the workload.

Political instability and lack of consensus at the national level saps the energy of a nation

Change: The moral whiffs

Sir, The whiffs of moral change is sweeping over the United States of America. The people and the politicians are doodling or fondling the pangs of conscience. The Monica affair has opened the Pandora's Box, American model.

Open unlawful sex is not casual like the innocent act of brushing the teeth. Some germs and the yellow coating remain in the sour mouths.

Western cultural mores are up at the microscope. The time had to come of the micro-assessment, by the defending cults, of the violations of the divine relationship between man and woman — one man and one woman at a time — regardless of the wide democratic canvas, simply because democracy is not permissivity or licentiousness.

The sacred tool of procreation was being used as an end to a means. The medium was the message. Now the right message is coming through, via the Clinton affair. High offices carry high prices; which could even shake up the future destiny of a superpower. That means the rumblings of global changes could be heard during next century just round the corner. Is the beginning of a new world order?

A new epoch of civilisation is now in the offing? It is not a wait-and-see game, because the catalyst is speeding up the processing, however unpleasant, or foreboding. Good comes out of evil, but the errant societies have to bear the cost of the cleansing and salvaging operations.

New order changes yielding place to the old (not the other way round in the case). Old is gold, as far as the limits to moral laxities are concerned. Break up homes, and the society and the nation break up. It is lonely at the top. Listen to the jingle bells of Christmas, and make the New Year more holy.

Nearer home, there are other kinds of lapses in moral conduct, visible more publicly, but the covert exhibitions continue as the deterrents so far are confined only to general identification and mere condemnation, and not followed by prosecution. Here also the long hand of divine justice will make its appearance when the timing is right. This timing cannot be predicted, as otherwise this would forestall deterrent action. Why throw a net with holes in it?

It is time for stock-taking, and to set the houses in order. Many believe in second and third chances. There are many events in life that any option. Duality has its limits. The right sensation has only one path. The others are simply diversions. Diversions are temporary and illusory. Dream with the eyes open or closed?

A Husnain
Dhaka

Views expressed in this column are the writers' own. The Editor may or may not subscribe to those views. The Editor reserves the right to decide which letters should be published.