

# The Daily Star

Founder-Editor : Late S. M. Ali

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## Highly Condemnable

PRE-hartal bomb blasts by unidentified quarters snuffing out constable Farhad's life and inflicting different degrees of injury upon ten others including seven cops represent a new facet of violence targeted at policemen. Earlier, it was during a hartial and not on the day preceding it that a policeman had been wounded, so badly that he eventually succumbed to his injuries. Infliction of injuries on policemen when a hartial is in progress is something we are getting familiar with; but this is for the first time that a mayhem has been deliberately committed on them just before the day of hartial.

There is a horrific set of messages that we must be prepared to absorb from the mind-boggling incident in order that we can take guard against such an eventuality in the future. While being focused on policemen falling prey to dastardly acts of violence by cowardly and irresponsible quarters we cannot lose sight of the highly reactionary excesses the inmates of the Mirpur police barrack committed by going berserk in a hundreds-strong procession through the streets and damaging cars they came by as if they were a pack of youngsters on an overkill. Even allowing for their shock and resentment over the lethal attack on policemen as a perfectly natural expression of human emotion under the circumstances we wonder how those initially sombre feelings at Mirpur police barrack could aggravate into that extremely unruly behaviour unbecoming of the members of a supposedly disciplined force.

**We find no words adequate enough to condemn the dastardly bomb attack on policemen detailed for prevention of violence as a standard law enforcement practice. Similarly, we decry the no-holds-barred violent police outburst, especially when it is reflective of a new ominous trend of intolerance set by the lawmen. It also comes as meaningless shadow-boxing when the perpetrators could not be identified by the policemen themselves, let alone onlookers.**

The bombing itself was totally unprovoked in that the policemen were not chasing or baton-charging anybody but merely moving towards a lorry to get on it after a Chhatra Dal procession had visibly terminated. At Golap Shah Mazar with the cops some distance away near the zero-point. It was most probably a pre-meditated act performed at the instance of person or persons calling the shots from behind. The incident cannot but give rise to some speculative theories about who could have been behind it and with what motives. Normally, in such things, the attribution goes against pro-hartial forces; but in point of fact, the JCD procession having had its back to the police posse was not evidently eye-balling each other.

Some planted people most probably did it, and depending upon who they were assigned by, the motives, of course, were different. Whatever the motivating factor behind the bomb blasts it is the opposition's relationship with the police that seems to have been affected. In the worst case scenario one may not rule out the possibility of some people trying to foment discord and destabilisation to angle in troubled waters. We would, therefore, like to see an investigation promptly ordered into the whole affair to ferret out the frontman culprit and then work our way into those who masterminded it. No half-way house can do here.

## Friday Mailbox

### Kashmir full circle

Sir, It is encouraging to note that the western powers have decided to take active and keen interest in resolving the half-century-old Kashmir dispute. The despatch of a US General to Islamabad and New Delhi (in addition to diplomatic overtures) has sent the Pakistani PM rushing to Beijing.

Beijing's options are limited, but China is also interested in having a slice of the South Asian market of one billion people, once it is made seamless from the trade point of view, including cross-border commerce, so long confined into water-tight compartments, despite SAARC, SAPTA, Farakka and what not.

Both Islamabad and New Delhi have been neutralised by the big powers as far as political leverages are concerned; and the caretaker government in India may be feeling rather helpless on how to contain the situation (Pakistan is practically bankrupt). One aspect of the situation is clear: the Kashmir problem cannot continue for decades to come; the western have decided to see to it.

Perhaps we are going to see a new configuration in the SAARC region in the near future. Change is a sign of progress: the very basis of life. The coming changes will affect Bangladesh, however indirectly. It is prudent to be in tune with the changing times.

A Husain

Dhaka

### The sensitivity of history

Sir, Are we hypersensitive to current history? The history of Bangladesh since 1971 has not yet been compiled independently to serve as an official source, due to historical incidents of political sensitivity, influenced by the successive regimes in one way or the other.

Many participating groups and personalities are still active, and due to changing or rotating regimes, it is not possible to settle down with the drafting of the version acceptable to one and all, for the future generations; because facts are neutral, and do not take sides, but the interpretation of which do take sides. The severe bipolarisation in politics today does not bode well for the nation. It can only be hoped that it is a passing phase.

The status quo of masterly inactivity continue to halt us. Stalemates are not situations of achievement. How do we proceed and push the project forward towards completion? There are clashes in conflicts of interest, because both the head and the heart come in when dealing with contemporary issues. Public platforms to sort out the issue are leaving us nowhere. What to do?

An encyclopedia of Bangladesh is also coming up with substantial portions focused on the political history of Bangladesh. Who are vetting these contributions, guaranteeing continuity when other regimes come into power? The text-book versions for the schools should be acceptable by now. The latest position needs confirmation from authoritative sources.

History is not a passive issue, and the writing of it cannot be postponed for indefinite periods. This is a gentle reminder to the players to come to the fore and place their

# Will Bangladesh Become a "Pivotal State" by the Year 2020?

by Khurshid Hamid

*When China will replace the erstwhile Soviet Union as the other superpower in a bipolar world, the geostrategic theatre will have come closer home, and Bangladesh's strategic importance will have increased manifold. She may even metamorphose into a geopolitical prima donna to be ardently wooed by the higher gods of the pantheon.*

ONTRARY to popular perception, according to most accepted formulas of socio-political and economic indexing of the world's nations, Bangladesh falls within the 40 or 50 nations which in any serious assessment have some say on international affairs and determine the pattern of the world balance of power any time. The rest of the countries weigh so little in realistic power terms that they can be disregarded. A careful look at the size of the economic development of the nations of the world would make one realize that the majority of them have relatively little impact on international affairs or even on important developments in their own regions. I had quietly anticipated that the brows of some of my readers would furrow at this tallpiece, and it did. The justification I muster is that the socio-politico-economic indexing numbers I had researched and computed the graduating marks for Bangladesh into the club of 50 more than a decade ago and the notes have been lost in my peripatetic career.

Today I intend to meditate on more overarching ambitions for my beloved country in the geopolitical arena, setting my Nostradamus sights more than two decades hence in the year 2020. For through history — earlier as village or cluster of villages, later as tribes, and in modern times as nations — all aggregate units of political force have nurtured aspirations to be counted for something beyond their parochial confines, even as they engaged in their day-to-day chore of hunting their daily bread and some butter.

Most geopoliticians reckon they can draw up a list of the world's great powers — the United States, China, Japan, Europe, and Russia. But ah! there's the rub arises on how do you work out which of the rest of the world's 190-odd countries matter more than the others, especially if you are a big power guru who has to take tough decisions about foreign policy.

Editors Robert Chase, Emily Hill and Paul Kennedy, in a recent book *The Pivotal States: A New Framework For U.S. Policy In The Developing World*, have expanded on the idea of "pivotal states" which they came up with in a 1996 article in *Foreign Affairs*, by collecting 17 essayists to write a book on their meditations on their nine selected pivots. But as with all over-simplifications to fit theoretical moulds on such big sweeping subjects, they discovered as they honestly admit that matters were a bit more complicated than they had thought. Nonetheless theories provide sturdy springboards for coherent and useful speculation.

"Pivotal states" can mean two quite different things. First there are the pivots that move up and down, and whose plunging can make other countries plunge. *Ampli gratia*, the collapse of Mexico's finances rattled all of the Americas, and corruption and political blindness in Indonesia have enveloped most of South-East Asia in political smog.

But it is the second sort of pivot that matters more: the kind that moves from side to side. The authors identify both India and Pakistan in South Asia in this different category because, in addition to the sub-sidence-effect they share with the piston pivots, they can also change the pattern of geopolitics by shifting their allegiance; by choosing to side with one big power against another, or just standing idly by when help is needed. Mexico tucked away in the Americas or even relatively remote Indonesia would generate nothing so geopolitically pattern-changing, and may safely be consigned to lesser gods.

Bangladesh as usual is not discussed in the book either studied or through oversight and is left completely out in the cold. I feel the learned authors sadly mistake. For the trouble is that, to work out which the truly pivotal states are, it is necessary to recognize what big powers they may be pivoting between. In this signing-off year of the mistaken millennium (in view of Pope Gregory's bloomer with the date of birth of Jesus Christ mankind has stealthily crept into the new millennium four years ago!), it is becoming

abundantly clear which will be the two macho superpowers indulging in braggadocio nuclear stand-offs in the high noon of a new-fangled cold war twenty years from now.

The United States is for the nonce the only really global power, and being the unchallenged "champion" in the block is engaging in sundry scuffles round the globe, some morally justified. It will be with almost juggernaut certainty that she will be joined in about two decades by China, whose need for energy and food will turn her foreign-policy and military eyes, now directed mainly at her Pacific periphery, westward to central Asia, and maybe northward to Russia as well. Japan, on whom I had placed my bets about a decade ago, has fallen by the wayside, but may yet make a perilous bid for a distinct superpowerdom of her own. Europe, despite her intended union, is likely to remain a collection of separate states, most probably allied to America. Russia is unlikely to be a serious contender for some time.

If the above is roughly the big-power pattern of the 2020s, it inexorably points to the premise that the United States' and Europe's geopolitical activities and derring-do will hone in on China and the surrounding regions, particularly South Asia in view of a weak Russia on the north. In the event there will be categorical-imperative need for the list of pivotal states to be both sharpened and lengthened. After all it is an eternal geopolitical axiom that where you sit in the world de-

cides, to no small extent, how much impact you have on it.

India catapults right to the top, for she would provide the only viable and valuable counterweight to the emerging superpowerdom of China. She is big in her population, her politics, her democracy, her economics, her culture, her technology and her military. India's own big power yearnings and ambitions will continue to remain in timeless and boundless contradiction with those of China. The United States' and Europe's top priority in the coming years will be not only to cajole India into working more closely with the West but also to draw her into some sort of strategic partnership. India's democracy is likely to right itself from its present temporary wobble. I am almost tempted to succumb to the conspiracy-theory sirens that whisper that the United States actively connived with and illicitly pushed India to go more nuclear about a year ago. For after all her atomic tests were primarily directed at the perceived threat from China, and despite the media hype not at Pakistan. And it is certainly in the United States' interest in the long term to have a nuclear counterbalance to China in the region.

Pakistan has been cited as another pivotal, if Turkey goes under, to be a useful ally of the West in coping with the turbulence of the Muslim world and to keep Muslim, energy-rich Central Asia open to the West. But Pakistan's now almost forty years of hobnobbing and intimacy with China renders her an unlikely candidate

for being a reliable Western pivot against superpower China. Furthermore, given Pakistan's Taliban predilection of going wildly Islamist, her slither towards being foolishly military-authoritarian, thus regressing from becoming a civil society, she becomes an unstable partner for the West to embrace, much less to share a conjugal bed with.

And herein Bangladesh enters into the picture as a coy lover. Please bear in mind that in some circumstances apparently non-pivotal states can suddenly become pivotal ones. Bangladesh ranks third in South Asia in terms of the critical mass of population and economic power to wage warfare. Bangladesh is inevitably moving closer to India, for the creation of an interdependence matrix of economic and commercial relations through substantially increased cooperation is a sine qua non for her security against her overweening neighbour.

The United States and the West should prudently envisage a second counterweight to superpower China conveniently located in her backyard. Bangladesh admirably fits the bill. It would of course stand the traditional friendly relations and goodwill between Bangladesh and China on its head, but in a geopolitical waltz it is historical to be promiscuous in changing partners. Given the space Bangladesh will have to shuffle and manoeuvre between the two reigning superpowers, the West's dire alternative scenario would be to see Bangladesh nesting up under

China's wings.

During the last Cold War Bangladesh was located far, far away from the main theatres of conflict of interests of the West and the Soviet Union. She was of no strategic worth to the West at all, and their interest in Bangladesh in view of her desperate poverty was confined to handing out humanitarian doles. When China will replace the erstwhile Soviet Union as the other superpower in a bipolar world, the geostrategic theatre will have come closer home, and Bangladesh's strategic importance will have increased manifold. She may even metamorphose into a geopolitical prima donna to be ardently wooed by the higher gods of the pantheon.

Bangladesh will, of course, have to slog to become a creditable future pivot. Just as Oliver Cromwell aimed to bring about the kingdom of God on earth and founded the British Empire, so our once and future Prime Ministers should they embrace a coherent democracy and good governance, transparent, corruption-sanitized, law and order imbued, and people's welfare oriented.

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The author is the former Bangladesh Ambassador to Italy and Switzerland.

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Some points about the driving standard. The steering is erratic — the destination is missing, or is tilted or ignored; hence it is easier to concentrate on the ambitions ahead. The turning indicator lights are not to shocks, which of course occur frequently on our bad roads of political culture. The shock absorbers come in three types: oil, gas, and spring. Oil leaks, gas evaporates, and the spring loses springiness. Better not to use shock absorbers for sometime — get used to the jerking.

Environmentally speaking, since the vehicle is air-conditioned, the riders have no idea of the air outside, which the *janata* breathe. The glasses are tinted, adding to the illusion or delusion, resulting in communication gap between the top and the bottom levels. The horns (of leadership) are blaring all the time (like our buses and trucks), but we do not

mind, as we have developed cultural deafness. Very few citizens bother that empty drums sound much.

The rearview mirror is missing, or is tilted or ignored; hence it is easier to concentrate on the ambitions ahead. The turning indicator lights are not to shocks, which of course occur frequently on our bad roads of political culture. The shock absorbers come in three types: oil, gas, and spring. Oil leaks, gas evaporates, and the spring loses springiness. Better not to use shock absorbers for sometime — get used to the jerking.

The political vehicle is always over-loaded, reducing the life span. Periodical overhauling is neglected, lowering the performance and increasing the maintenance budget (including rent-seeking). Wheel alignment is never carried out, as it is never suspected, so the party vehicle drags on one side. No attempts are made to eradicate the bad driving habits. Due to half clutching, the clutch plate is worn out and needs earlier replacement (more power through better

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The recent purchase of eighty shiny MiG warplanes simply reinforces my cynical view that the powerful ones in Bangladesh are jealously guarding their self-interest here. Might you ask, how? Well, let me try to answer this as briefly as I could. The ruling politicians need the backing of defense establishment that was politicized very badly by two generals who ruled the nation from 1975 through 1991. The defense departments will siphon the valuable foreign currency year-in-year-out to buy weaponry from their shopping lists. So, the politicians will support the whims of the military, airforce because they all think that it is a small price to pay to govern Bangladesh. Therefore, between politicians and defense establishment they have Bangladesh pretty much wrapped up in their tiny fingers. The less powerful common people always ends up getting the raw end of the deal.

I appeal to the conscious of our educated people to start a vigorous debate justifying whether a country as Bangladesh needs defense capabilities the army, airforce, etc. are asking for. Like everyone else in the nation, why can't they make do with less? Our next door neighbor, India, has agreed to the political boundary

## Driving the Political Automobile

by AMM Aabid

OUR politics is in an interesting state. Let us hope there will be no miscarriage — of the baby, or of justice to the innocent voters. On the other hand, any issue can quickly change into another issue, as frequently observed. Our national labour is only labouring, and not producing any fruit. Our souls have to be resolved, thanks to the national pastime of walking on the streets in processions; and our souls need some moral detergent to remove the black spots on man's inhumanity to man. We have to become super white in intent, deed, and action. The market is not in tune with the demand.

Our politics is like an automobile. Something wrong with the gears? We seem to be very fond of the reverse gear — going back into history, instead of creating history forward and onward. We can hardly use the fourth gear for long periods.

We are of the opinion that our respectable MPs must draw their daily allowance after proper record of his/her attendance in the Jatiya Sangsad. In case of their monthly remuneration it is a separate matter as it does not require any record of attendance.

We totally agree with our PM Sheikh Hasina when she says that it is unethical for an MP to receive daily allowance without attending JS sessions.

We are however surprised why did not the PM admit at the same time that it was unethical for her and her party MPs (while in opposition) to receive remuneration and allowance for 18 months without attending a single sitting in the House when they boycotted the fifth Jatiya Sangsad.

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**Is it the 'education' stupid?**  
Sir, Dr Jaffor Ullah's "In Search of Leadership" (DS-June 25) and our ongoing JS session have raised questions in my mind (between conscience and common sense) about our style of democracy.

In our democracy, any prospective candidate for JS seat requires no specific minimum educational qualification to contest a poll. Even his/her name as a voter in the voter's list, in the contesting constituency, is not also mandatory. That's why, anyone can contest for seats in more than one constituency and can retain one in any constituency where he/she won (not a voter of that). So a legislator whether he/she is half-educated or one-fourth educated as mentioned by Dr Wazed Mia is a paradox.

Moreover, it is seen that few are over-qualified than the most. Naturally, they have broader outlook as such, others having myopic vision, fail to comprehend witty remarks/analogy/comparison cited by their elite colleagues in the House or outside.

Generally, a butcher won't understand the angle of dissection of a surgical specialist.

Similarly, Doctor of Literature would unlikely to comprehend the analogy cited by a Doctor (physician). Since, education of our leaders to educate us, is the bone of contention in and outside the House, then instead of barking up a wrong tree, the House should amend the Constitution to fix the level of educational qualification and other eligibility needed of JS seat candidature, to iron out all differences.

AR Choudhury  
Uttara-Dhaka

One can see it, count it, and perceive it. But, how about Bangladesh's investment in defense related matters? Yes, the nation is employing a good number of our youths. But for what purpose? What is the impact the military, air force, and the navy are making to make the country self-reliant in agriculture, energy extraction, communication, flood relief, and a myriad of other fields?

When Bangladesh came into existence in mid-December 1971 after a brutal nine-month period of subjugation, wanton killing, and savagery by Pakistani soldiers. We all would like to see our motherland come out of the rut and move in stride with the rest of the world shoulder to shoulder heading for better days. I do understand that this is a far cry from the existing condition back home. There are other choices, of course. However, they are not palatable to our taste and temperament.

Why am I now in a state of vexation? Just last week Bangladesh government had decided to place an order for eight MiG-29s warplanes from Russia. The price tag for the MiGs is placed at \$115 million by the government. But another write-up in *The Daily Star* of July 5, this time from the Air Force, placed the price around \$122 million. Take any of the figures — \$115 million or \$122 million — and you will see this is too high a sum for a disadvantaged country like Bangladesh to spend for modernizing her weaponry.

Just think for a moment. Does Bangladesh really need those warplanes? Please consider the fact that the price for those MiG planes alone will drain 10 per cent of the total budget of Bangladesh. Do you know that a peace-loving country of ours spends about 15 per cent of its annual budget in defense? Whereas, the education sector receives about 24 per cent. Most