



Millennium Medley

2000 starts the Third Millennium, some say, while others argue that 2000 is actually the last year of the Second Millennium. Amidst arguments, *The Daily Star* talks to those people who matter, and those people who don't about the year that was, the millennium hype and the future that awaits all.

The Sound of Music

Nilufer Yasmin (Nazrul Geeti singer): I welcome the new year, the new millennium with open arms. Greetings to all of you. I can speak for the music world only, I believe. Let the new year be the inspiration to dedicate yourself more to songs and music. Love the songs you sing, sing from your heart, make music an integral part of you and I shall try to do the same. I believe only then can we call ourselves true singers.

Papaya Sarwar (Rabindra Sangeet singer): The present generation is lucky in the sense that they have a lot of opportunities. Previously, unless someone was adamant about singing, no one could find out whether he or she would be a good singer or not. Today there are many music institutions that cater to the needs of the young to find out their talents. In terms of Rabindra Sangeet our Bangladeshi children are doing much better than their West Bengal counterparts. Even the *gurus* share this feeling. The reason behind this is the increase in opportunities. The new millennium will see us, the Bangladeshis, excel further.

Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya (Rabindra Sangeet singer): I welcome the new millennium. I am proud to say that Rabindra Sangeet and Nazrul Geeti proved that they have strong roots, and that they will not be swayed by fads or new trends. My message for the millennium is to make the best of whatever life has to offer. That way life has more meaning, more value and more appreciation.

Khalid Hossain (classical singer): It requires deep passion for music and knowledge of the basics to take music as a career. Therefore, those who want to pursue a career in music, should keep this in mind at the threshold of the new millennium.

Ayyub Bachchu (Band leader, LRB): It's very exciting, although I doubt whether the millennium will make much difference in our lives. Perhaps, this will be an inspiration for all of us to perform better; to work more sincerely. Of course I have dreams. I dream of the day when Bangladesh will be the best country of the world, not from my point of view only, but from the point of view of the world. I dream of the day when people will fight no longer. I dream of the day when a brother will not kill his kin. I dream of a world where there is peace and tranquillity. I dream on...but what's the use?

Rowshan Jamil: Determination and strong desire to pursue your dreams hold the key to the future. This is true for anybody of any age, of any time. Keep this in mind as we step into the new millennium.

Ferdousi Majumder: The millennium is the time to hope. I don't believe in foretelling the future. I like to deal with the present. I don't have any pre-conceived notions about the new millennium. I never thought that we would see robots around us in the year

2000! However, I would like to see some changes take place. Crime and violence is at its peak; pollution levels are high as well with people increasingly falling ill due to high concentration of chemicals in air; people are insecure even at home. I hope that the new millennium can lessen the ugliness around us. Let the millennium bring new promises.

Afzal Hossain: The millennium is not as significant as it is made out to be. We will just see an addition to previous years. I have no plans. Perhaps, there will be a lot of publicity, a lot of write-ups; new thoughts; new visions; new words; new promises; but I think all these will die down soon. Let's say, by the end of January, maybe even before that, we shall come back to

nadir. At the threshold of the new millennium, I renew my vows to create good, clean, social films for the people of this country. I feel it is my duty to repay some of what the industry has given me. I also take this chance to ask the people to come and watch our films. All Bengali films are not bad. We have a bad label. And we need you to come and watch our movies to remove that label.

Shabnoor: I am a person of the new millennium. I have to start thinking in a new way, work in a new way to make myself a worthy citizen of new time. On the first day of the millennium I will spend time with my family - parents, brothers, sisters - and chat away the day; eat together; go out together; have fun together and so many other things!

Tk. 50 to Tk. 100 per day. If I start business I will get at least Tk. 1000 a month and I can share this with everyone in my village.

I dream of the day when I will own about fifty rickshaws. The poor slum-dwellers of the country would rent rickshaws from me. Not only will I make a profit, but a few poor jobless people of the country will find employment, even one as little as this.

These are my wishes that I hope will be fulfilled as we enter the new millennium. **Mohammad Shaheen (22):** I started pulling a rickshaw about a year ago. I came to Dhaka a few months back in order to do a little better in life. I caught my whole family along: my parents, brothers, sisters, wife and son. I was in Barisal before. I drove a baby taxi there. But income was little. I also made a mistake by marrying early and taking on a family. I see nothing new in the millennium; my future is dark. Yet, like other people, I have dreams and hopes, although I know these spell futility.

I hope the new millennium will bring fewer hardships. Although we can charge more on hartal days, the risk factors are high. An accident may end my life. All I want from the government is to run the country well. It doesn't matter whether BNP or AL comes to power. Our country is my first priority. At the personal level, I have no future. I know it.

Mohammad Khoi Madin (25): I am an illiterate pulling a rickshaw for the past three years. I earn about Taka. 100 everyday. My wish is to go to my village and make a house of my own. The money I earn is not enough for my family and me. But in this country there is no way by which I can do something else during my free time to earn some money. If I could do that, it would be very helpful. At threshold of the new millennium, I hope for an odd job.

Mohammad Hamid Khan (35): I have been pulling a rickshaw from the Pakistani days. Today I have two sons and four daughters. Time has not changed anything. I am still what I was years ago, years that I have lost track of. All I care for today are my children. I still go on pulling a rickshaw so that my children can get an education. My days are numbered. I only hope that in my lifetime, I can see my family out of severe poverty. Millennium or not, I want a future for my children.

Mohammad Shwadhin (27): I am a victim of Jharkhand's river's cruelty. The river, not only broke away our land in the village, it took into its depths my parents. I live under strident, harsh conditions. No one in this Bengal saw my pain, understood my pain. In my life, I got no help from anyone; no one stood by me. Governments have failed me as well. Therefore my millennium wish is for a government that will take care of people like me.

Mohammad Harunur Rashid (29): I have completed Class 6. I have been pulling a rickshaw for the past 14 years. I hope for changes in my status in the new millennium. I plan to start up a business of my own. Either I will set up a grocery store or I will set up a rickshaw repair shop. Today my earnings range from

simple mathematics. What would the new millennium be like? It is really difficult to say, unless we have a crystal ball. We cannot predict what would happen in Dhaka University tomorrow. How can we predict the next thousand years? The present day problems are immense. With low literacy rates, low human development, high corruption, lack of administration and almost an absence of democratic values, we don't have much to hope for. The only positive thing is that our people are more aware today. They want to work provided there is the right kind of leadership. But where is that? Today, politics has been criminalised. Today, what we need is social mobilisation. That, perhaps, holds the key to a bright future.

Asadullah Khan (Controller of Examinations, BUET): The new millennium holds the cure to many a problem. Of course, new problems arise everyday, but science and technological progress promises to solve many of them. Diseases will find cures. Agricultural and biotechnological innovations will have a good impact on the people. Genetic modification in plants as well as animals will see changes in lifestyles.

Today soaring population and is a major problem. Added to this is the possibility of food crisis. Biotechnology itself can solve this problem. And this is only a small part. The possibilities are immense. The possibilities are reassuring considering the present day turmoil.

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Abdullah Abu Sayeed (professor, Dhaka College): Today's generation is becoming more materialistic by the day. They have no time to read beyond their prescribed texts. I started Biswa Shahitya Kendra with the aim to get people to read some good books, to provide quality teaching to the young. But the number of people who come here is a small percentage compared to our population. Often I see that children are excited to come here, but parents complain that this is a wastage of time. They say that their children should be sitting at home doing homework instead. I hope the next millennium will see a change in the mentality of parents.

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out of the pitfalls created by the elders. **Faiz Ahmed (gallery owner, Shilpangan):** The next millennium will not be the same as the yester millennium. The last millennium saw many wars, saw countries gain independence, saw struggle. The next millennium would be different. Gaining people's rights in all spheres will be the main task. Revolution, outcry and political awareness will take a new form.

Shameem Subrana (gallery owner, Gallery 21): I opened my gallery for the 21st century. At the time of its birth, I feared that I might have to close it down before the dawn of the next millennium. The love of my family, friends and mostly artists kept this gallery alive. At the threshold of the new millennium I take this opportunity to remind the artists that this gallery is theirs. A happy New Millennium to all of you.

Rehman Sobhan (Executive Chairman, Centre for Policy Dialogue): I would like to see a Bangladesh, say by the year 2010, where there is no household living in a state of nutritional deprivation, no child of school age not in school, no person without access to adequate health care, no old person without security in their old age. I would like to see women occupying at least one-third of the seats in the Jatiya Sangsad playing an active role in the local elected bodies where they now have representation, well represented in the professions, and bureaucracy at senior levels. I would like our women working not just at the garments industries but in a range of new areas such as infomatics. To enable them to do this we will need to focus our education system on educating and helping women to work in diverse occupations as well as in position of responsibility. I would like to see a system of justice where all are equal before the law, where the deprived segments of society have the full protection of the law and the law is not treated as a negotiable commodity.

I would like to see the emergence of a sustainable democracy where our political leaders both in government and opposition remember that governance is for the people and not for private or party aggrandisement. This demands respect for the opinions of your opponents and respect for the right of ordinary people. I would like to see a democratisation of representation in parliament where the less privileged segments of society can afford to enter parliament, where politics does not degenerate into a game for those with the money and muscles to contest elections. Our politics as much as our economic agenda will have to therefore restore a sense of justice and fair play to our people which was the motive force of our liberation struggle.

Can these hopes be realised in the next decade? You have to be an optimist to believe so. I have always been an optimist but recognise that civil society will need to become much more active in public life if such a vision for Bangladesh is to be realised.

Abu Abdullah (DG, Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies (BIDS)): In the next thousand years? We may well be under water! It is difficult to say what would happen.

Wahiduddin Mahmud: I haven't thought about the new millennium as such. At this point of time, I am concerned about what will happen to the politics of our country in the next few months.

KAS Murshid (Research Director, BIDS): At the world level, the new millennium promises to be one where women will take over the world. That would perhaps be a good sign, because men have botched up the past thousand years! The new millennium is all theirs. Bangladesh will still find itself struggling with poverty, but we may be able to come to terms with it in the next hundred years. We have a lot of potential, a lot of opportunities, which we shouldn't miss. We have a lot of natural resources that should be used intelligently. However, there is not much sign of intelligence being used. In utilizing our potential, our leadership has failed us very, very badly.

I hope that that in the new millennium, the countries of the region will be in peace and harmony, instead of fighting against one another. Economically there may be some improvements but we are likely to remain at the bottom in terms of social welfare and income levels, especially for the poor.

I am hoping for technical development that would make energy cheap. Nuclear fusion may make clean and safe energy a reality. This would also allow social and economical development. Globalisation is the trend of today, which, on the whole is good. To gain equal footing as other developed nations would be a major challenge. However, benefits of trade may not be equitable. It is bound to help the rich more than it does the poor.

Dhaka has all the promises to become a megacity with more apartments, more slums, more pollution. The slum people may get increasingly angry and frustrated as inequalities sharpen. The strategy of the next twenty years should be directed towards poverty eradication. Otherwise, there will be a lot of political unrest and violence.

Just because one particular day in the calendar happens to be significant does not mean that it will change everything overnight. Things will change, but at its own pace. In terms of production, management of sales we have a lot of catching up to do. We have succeeded in the garments sector but it is high time that we diversify as well. We need investment for which we need good entrepreneurial skills.

The key to the future is good political leadership combined with good economic leadership. I hope that over years we can become a respectable country in all respects.

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Asaduzzaman (Research Director, BIDS): The problems of the past fifty years are still prevalent today. There have been no improvements whatsoever. The only difference between the past days and today is that today we have the technology, the means for progress. However, problems arise in decision making, whether we shall do something or not. There are problems in the government sectors and they give a correct picture of ignorance and lack of know-how. People cannot see beyond their noses and they indulge in personal gains only. I am not at all hopeful about our future.

By Navine Murshid

the position that we were in before. There will be a lot of hype and excitement, but it will be short lived.

We are like that. We celebrate with great joy, but we cannot sustain that. Take a look at *Ekushey February*. The Shahid Minar is cleaned only the day before events start taking place. We cannot maintain the Minar everyday. This is rather saddening. The millennium is something like that. This certainly is not the time for change.

For me, personally, this will be a time for rest; a time to spend with family and friends. I don't want anything more.

Asaduzzaman Noor: I am not very excited about the new millennium. This is just another new year, with the addition that we shall complete a thousand years. We have celebrated the Year 1400 in the Bengali calendar. We have seen it all. I see no reason to get worked up. There will be changes as science and technological progress takes place. Life will move forward. But these changes would have taken place even if the millennium was not around the corner. The new millennium will not see any radical changes or development overnight. Yes, it is a historical event, but that's just that.

The problems of today will not dissipate because of the millennium. Life will go on as it did. For some people, this may be an opportunity to look at life afresh; to hope for the better, but I'm always an optimist. I don't need occasions to be hopeful! I always look out for changes, even radical changes!

Shomi Kayser: I really wanted to go to Egypt, mainly because Pink Floyd is doing a show for the millennium in front of the pyramids. We also wanted to do our honeymoon there. But, we didn't get any booking. So, instead I'll be going to Singapore, spend the 31st night there and then go to Bali. But what I like most is the fact that I shall watch the millennium's first sunrise with my husband, the love of my life.

Gleaming Film Stars **Razzak:** The film industry is undoubtedly at its

Moushumi: We are entering the new millennium on a holy day of Ramadan. This itself is something to feel good about. On the first day of the millennium, I shall take lots of photographs of my baby son. Shwadhin, although this day is meaningless to him, he understands nothing. I shall take the pictures so that he can feel proud when he grows up for being there at the turn of a millennium.

Ferdous: All of us who are here at the turn of the millennium are very lucky. This time will not come twice in a lifetime. So everyone should celebrate this day in his or her own way. In this century I received a national award. In the new millennium, I want to do something so that the people will remember me.

Pullers' Dreams

Mohammad Hamid Khan (35): I have been pulling a rickshaw from the Pakistani days. Today I have two sons and four daughters. Time has not changed anything. I am still what I was years ago, years that I have lost track of. All I care for today are my children. I still go on pulling a rickshaw so that my children can get an education. My days are numbered. I only hope that in my lifetime, I can see my family out of severe poverty. Millennium or not, I want a future for my children.

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Road Side Livelihood

Akkas Hawladar (27): I am a small grocery shop owner on the footpath and have been so for a while. My millennium wish is to set up a concrete, permanent shop and be able to look after my family well. I wish for the strength to pray to God for the rest of my life. I wish everyone a happy millennium.

Mohammad Shameem (26): I have been the owner of a grocery shop called Sattar Store for the last fifteen years. I was a student of Class Seven before that. I hope the new millennium will bear good luck for me. I want to be a great businessman. I want my name to be listed among big names of the country. I want to take this store to great heights. Inshallah, my store will be one of the great stores of the 21st century. I seek everyone's blessings in this endeavour.

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