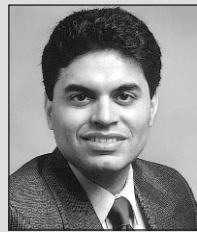


# Guns, butter and the deficit



**FAREED ZAKARIA**  
writes from America

Whether you like or dislike specific aspects of George Bush's foreign policy, there's no denying he has outlined an ambitious role for America in the world. Except that within a few years this policy is likely to collapse.

Waronly the cuts this time are likely to be much, much deeper and the resulting chaos far greater.

An open, globalised world needs a leader. And the United States can easily afford its world role thanks to a \$10 trillion national economy. In fact, as a percentage of GDP, America's nonmilitary overseas expenditures are now low. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, foreign aid was almost 2 percent of GDP. Today it is 0.2 percent. Even military spending remains moderate by cold-war standards. Today it is about 4.5 percent of GDP. During the Eisenhower presidency it once veered toward 9 percent.

But America is an empire without an imperial culture. Foreign affairs is seen as the most dispensable part of the budget. President Bush's \$87 billion request for Iraq had little support among most Americans. Even military spending, protected because it is a series of jobs programmes, has always been easy to pare down. The commitments that make up America's world role are tolerated as long as the economy is growing and the budget is large enough to accommodate everything. But if there were a choice between guns and butter, there's little doubt what Americans would choose.

With intelligent fiscal management, such a choice would not

present itself. But intelligent fiscal management is not what we have in Washington these days. Much has been written recently about the out-of-control federal budget. The tax base has been eroded at the very moment that a massive new entitlement programme, prescription drugs for the elderly, has been added. Increased funding for security measures is inevitable and yet there is no effort to tighten nonsecurity spending. Congress is always irresponsible, but President Bush has not vetoed a single bill since he took office, the first president to show such laxity. He now beats all presidents but Lyndon Johnson at domestic spending. Journalist Mickey Kaus recently spoke with a senior federal official who said, "I've never seen an administration spend money like this ... The money's flying out the door. I can barely keep up with it ... They give money away on phone calls. No documents. No budget. It's the worst I've ever seen ..."

The real problem is that America cannot afford this orgy as it approaches the retirement of the baby-boom generation. When he was treasury secretary, Paul O'Neill asked two economists at the Federal Reserve Bank in Cleveland to estimate what changes it would take to actually be able to pay for the government's commitments, including Social Security and Medicare. Their answer: either increase

income taxes by 69 percent, increase payroll taxes by 95 percent or cut Social Security and Medicare by 56 percent. No wonder O'Neill was skeptical about tax cuts. Many things about the future are uncertain. But demographics are not.

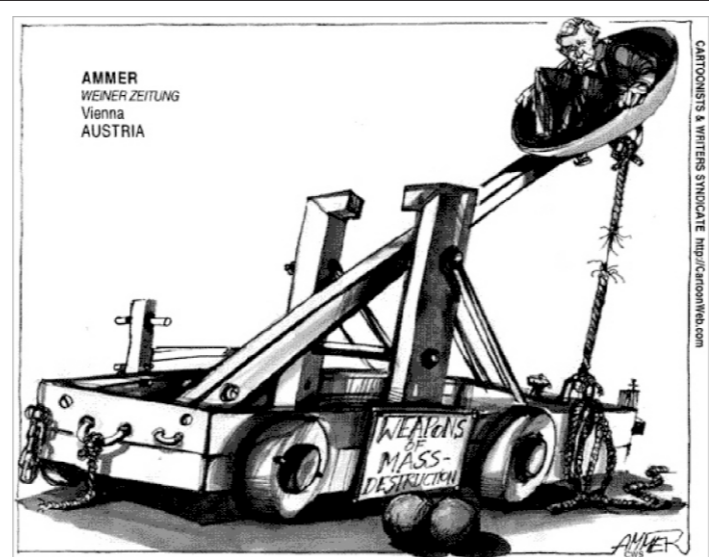
The baby boomers will age and these bills will come due starting in 2008, four years from now. In fact, it's a puzzle as to why the bond market has not reacted to this deep

and certain crisis. Ferguson says the only possible answer is that "the magnitude of the problem is such that most Americans find it quite literally incredible. The main reason why America's crisis remains latent

is precisely because people refuse to believe its existence."

At some point denial will stop working, the markets will react, interest rates will rise and the budget will be under severe pressure. Then Congress will begin searching for cuts, and spending on foreign affairs, even military spending, will get the ax. And America's grand new engagement in the world will turn out to be short-lived indeed.

Fared Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.  
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## In memoriam

# Eskandar Ahmed Chowdhury

A philanthropist with a difference

SYED AHMADUL HUQ



Late Eskandar Ahmed Chowdhury

ESKANDAR Ahmed Chowdhury was born in 1932 in the village of Betagi, Rangunia Thana, Chittagong in a respectable and educated Muslim family.

Eskandar Ahmad Chowdhury used to come to me for learning English while he was a student of B.A. Class. He had never forgotten it and always used to respect me as his teacher.

In 1964 I was sent to Export Promotion Bureau, Karachi, as Deputy Director on deputation.

There was a Govt. Secondary School for Bengali boys in Karachi. Eskandar Chowdhury was a teacher of the school. He was then a bachelor. He was very good in the art of cooking. He frequently invited me to his house to take meals with him. I wanted to get him married in Karachi; but he got a stipend from Japan for studies. I went to see him off at Karachi Airport. While he was boarding the plane, I asked him to get a Japanese girl for his wife. Actually, he did marry a Japanese girl in 1969. Her name is Fatima Kyo Yaegashi.

In 1977 I had been to Tokyo on an official work. There I was attacked with jaundice. Eskandar and his wife nursed me with utmost devotion. I soon came round. In fact, the marriage of Eskandar Ahmed Chowdhury with the Japanese girl was a turning point in his life. He mastered the Japanese language and established a society in Tokyo named "Bangladesh Society". During the war of liberation in 1971, he mobilised Japanese public opinion in favour of our liberation war. He raised fund for procurement of arms and ammunitions for the freedom fighters in Bangladesh. After independence, he came to Bangladesh with his wife and got an appointment as a teacher of Japa-

financial assistance to a charitable dispensary in Betagi out of the fund money.

Several teachers of Rotary Betagi Union High School and Kaukhali Anowara Begum High School were sent to Japan for learning Japanese language. More than 500 students of primary schools in the Betagi Union have been taken as foster children by the Japanese Rotarians and they are bearing their educational expenses. The Rotarians established "Eskandar Ahmed Chowdhury Stipends" for the students of Rotary Betagi Union High School and Kaukhali Anowara Begum High School. At present, the percentage of literacy in Betagi Union is 95. The remaining five per cent are octogenarians who had no opportunity of education in their childhood and the children below five years. The role of Eskandar Ahmed Chowdhury was quite significant in raising the percentage of literacy in Betagi Union.

On the 27th January last I fell unconscious because of high fever and dysentery. On 29 January, Eskandar Ahmed Chowdhury came to my residence to see me. We talked about death for about two hours. I discussed in details what have been said about death in the Holy Quran, in the Mathnawi Sharif of Moulana Jalaluddin Rumi, in the Bible, in the Gita and in the Upanishad. The purport of our deliberations was that there is no fear of death for the pious who do good works, believe in Allah and Prophet Muhammad (SM) and the next world. Eskandar Ahmed Chowdhury left my house in the afternoon and attended the condolence meeting of the illustrious son of Chittagong Prof. Khaled. He went to sleep at night and embraced painless death (Inna Lillaihe Wa Inna Elaihe Razeun). I am praying for the salvation of his departed soul.

# Where is home?



**KAZI KHALEED ASHRAF**

## ABOUT CITIES

Mobility seems to compound the complexity of hometown commitments, as is for the quasi-residents of Dhaka who leave during the Eids. My colleague tells me: Mobility seems important in mediating our affiliations to hometown, temporary and permanent departures make us aware of these affiliations, and the periodic and long lasting returns create a continually changing set of relations with hometown.

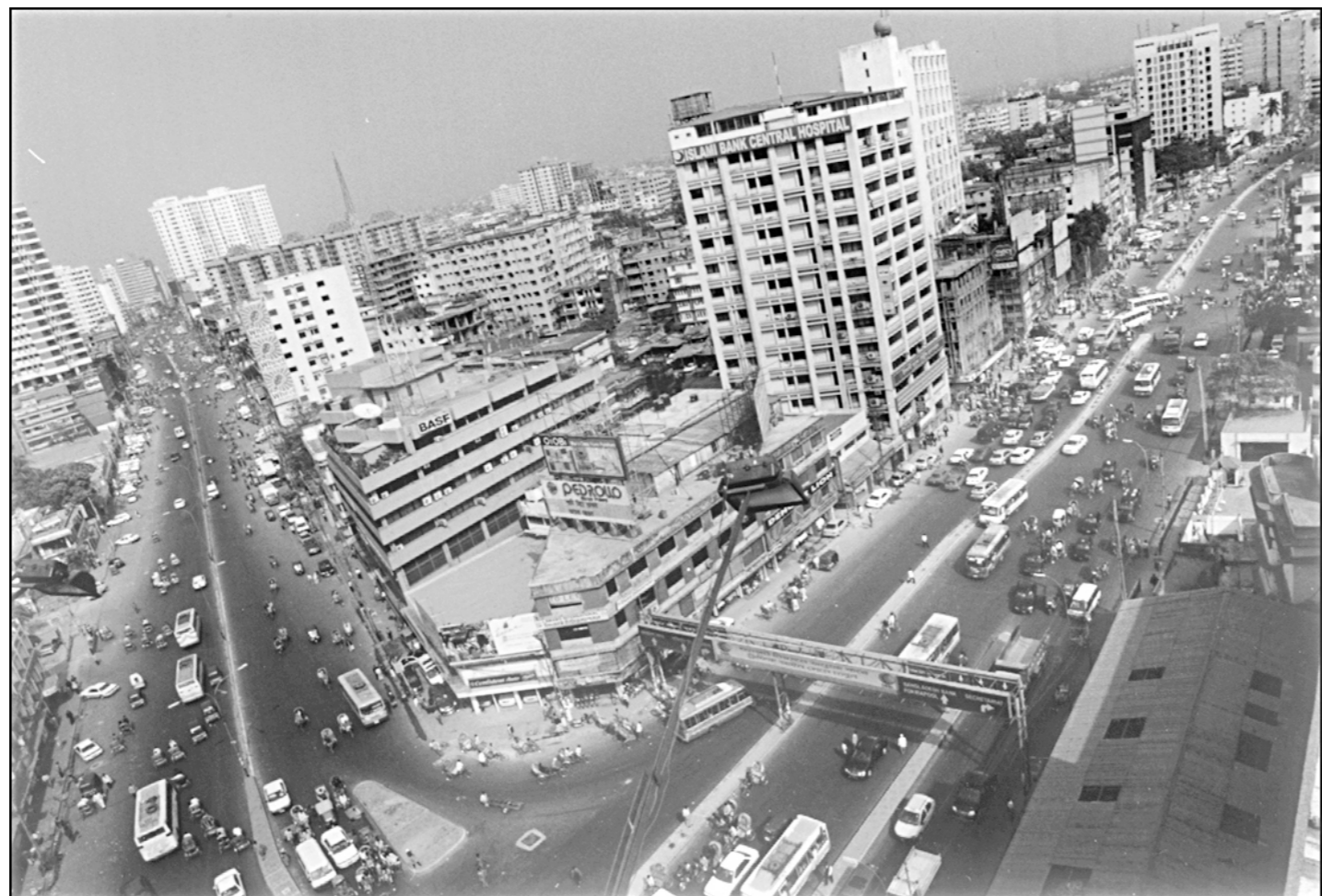


PHOTO: STAR

Dhaka during Eid holidays: Residents gone to hometowns!

WHERE is home? What makes a place a home, what makes a town a hometown? Recently, I have been working with a sociologist colleague to understand the latter phenomenon, what is that makes a place distinctive from all other places, and assigns it the attributes of home, even if home is a little difficult to define? It is the notion of hometown that especially intrigues us.

The November 29 editorial in the *Daily Star* identified a phenomenon that happens to Dhaka city during the Eid holidays: the eerie silence that descends on it as people leave town. The editorial made me think.

The editorial noted: "Life in the city changes in a very marked way during Eid holidays—the roads remain empty; people don't have to encounter the usual traffic jams; and the unbearable noise pollution also comes down to a tolerable level. All these happen because a huge number of people go back to their village homes, leaving the city in a state of relative tranquillity. But is it an unmixed blessing?"

It is a perceptive observation that unfolds a number of things on how our cities are developing and what we are doing about it, or actually not doing about it.

The editorial continued: "The exodus during Eid holidays is an indicator of the fact that many people live in the city, but have failed to settle down here..."

The poor and lower middle class people have their roots in villages and they rush back home whenever an opportunity presents itself. They celebrate Eid with their near and dear ones, which is how their ancestors celebrated the occasion. From the standpoint of family values, it is great, but from the standpoint of stable and steady urbanisation with fulfilment of citizens' needs, it is not quite so."

What the editorial pointed out to was crucial enough, that is, how unplanned urbanisation maintains Dhaka as the epicenter of urban development, drawing people in from all corners of the country, and yet unable to provide the most basic civic facilities. It is the latter issue, *The Daily Star* argued, that stops someone from becoming a resident in the truest sense creating a whole range of affiliations, from temporary, semi-permanent, and permanent city dwellers. And it is during the Eid, one finds out where one's true affiliation is. That to me is the critical matter: How does one really get affiliated to a place, especially when one has, for example, twin affiliations, one ancestral and another perhaps economic? How is that people can live in more than one place, consider more than one place a home,

and yet have a singular affiliation to a home-place or hometown?

The colleague asked me directly: Why am I attached to Dhaka? What is the nature of my affiliation? The question was in context to living in two cities. I have had arguments with my mother whether one can "reside" in two cities. To complicate matters, I currently live in three: Honolulu, Philadelphia, and Dhaka.

It would be too simple to characterise my attachment to Dhaka as nationalistic, even a subdued one, and after all one is talking about attachment to a town, a city. If it is not nationalism, a commitment of an ideological kind, it is still an affiliation, and it is these affiliations and commitments that make who we are. Measuring affiliation, calibrating commitments is not a science, yet we want to know when and how does that affiliation work.

This is what is emerging from the conversation with my sociologist colleague and friend: that hometown, or home-place, is something between home and nation. In fact, people actually live their lives in a real and concrete condition as a home-place or hometown; nation is too abstract and too much in a flux, while home is too slippery a notion. (Home is not just a house, although it starts from there, but home is

really a neighbourhood, and hometown is an extension of that neighbourhood.) Hometown is a geography-bound social matrix that is experienced on a day-to-day basis in a tangible way. In this way, hometown provides something real that nation-state cannot. There is now talk of "post-national" attachments: in Europe, when national perimeters are being loosened by the European Union, people are finding increasing bonds with smaller, experiential places.

The basic understanding of hometown or home-place is that of a place that is home due to ancestral reasons. You are perhaps committed there by dint of your being there, born there, or growing up there, a kind of commitment without choice, an unselfconscious commitment. Traditionally, one could speak of hometown as a generational continuity in a contiguous space, but that has now been challenged by a cosmopolitan possibility, new options of mobility creating a reorientation of affinities, commitments and even prejudices. In any case, commitment is at the centre of making hometowns.

That is where the complexity of hometown begins. There is hometown for someone who never left it, and there is hometown for someone who has made a departure and

then opts to return. The "returnee" (by definition also a "departee"), no matter who that person is, an emigrant, exile, persona non grata, pilgrim, migrant worker, etc., or a cosmopolitan, a "citizen of the world" as spoken of by Anthony Appiah and Amartya Sen, may have the privilege of choosing commitments, or be conflicted by them. The matter of choosing occurs when say you are away from hometown, and for a number of reasons, personal, emotional, professional, economic, nationalist, ideological, a combination thereof, you opt to be associated with hometown, to return to it.

Is the "returnee" just a displaced hometown? When they return, they return not to the country/nation, but to a degree of hometown, to what I describe as the "hometown fabric" or aura, a fabric made of connections and relations existing in real space and time. The fabric could be both "soft" and "hard," the former being the emotional affiliations, family, friend, mother, memory, etc., and the latter commitments of a professional, legal and economic nature.

In any case, mobility seems to compound the complexity of hometown commitments, as is for the quasi-residents of Dhaka who leave during the Eids. My col-

league tells me: Mobility seems important in mediating our affiliations to hometown, temporary and permanent departures make us aware of these affiliations, and the periodic and long lasting returns create a continually changing set of relations with hometown.

Another colleague poses the question whether hometown defines you, or you define hometown? This colleague does not seem to be able to hold on to a single strong hometown image or affiliation, having had a quick succession of residences, from Lusaka to Ahmedabad to Philadelphia with her parents originally from a town in Gujarat to now Madison, Wisconsin. She still "thinks" of Lusaka even if she has been residing in Philadelphia for such a long time. The former is a hometown by familial reason and the latter by choice. The question is: What is this hometown of choice? Is that a chosen identity distinct from an inherited one? How does one traverse both? Such is the perplexity of dual hometowns or home-places.

Kazi Khaleed Ashraf, an architect and writer, currently teaches at the University of Hawaii, Honolulu.

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