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Forty years of change

Forty years ago (in the 1960s) life was simpler and had more routine in Dhaka, compared to today's belligerent but empty political poses, destroying political, national, social, cultural, personal and private stances. Why our leaders (politicians and the rest) are so keen to introduce changes, when they do not have the playing field for such noble aspirations? Cheap imitation, to maintain bank balances!

In the late 1960s, I was posted in Islamabad. In early 1971 I got stuck up in Dhaka (on an official tour). When I

went back after a couple of months. I was hurriedly transferred back to Dhaka (to my parent central department), as I was carrying a sample of the Bangladeshi flag (which was officially recognised after the 1971 war of liberation).

Mixing with the then West Pakistanis all over the province for four years, (my VW clocked over 50,000 miles), I got the impression that there was a huge communication and cultural gap between the two wings of Pakistan, and the partition on religious lines was

somewhat artificial (there is one Lord for all, anywhere in the globe, and human nature is not much different—in fact we are 99.9 percent the same, as quoted by Clinton in his book).

Now look how we have tried to reassemble the jigsaw puzzle known as Bangladesh game during the three decades. I need not build up the asset and liability list, as our vicious pastime is to indulge in unnecessary debates about non-issues. Our gift of the gab is magnificently misused. Why we cannot produce real national leaders (different

from political leaders) during the Bangladeshi period? The cultural hatchery is contaminated! Why the politicians feign to stand apart from the rest of the society, at least in their private lives and avocations? Divided loyalty is our bane.

The post revolution 1970s were turbulent, and we are still paying the price and the compound interest. The nation has been turned into a loan-defaulter, and nobody is taking responsibility for the liabilities, while credit-mongering has scaled up in the black market. When dedication in public activities is suspect, there is no end to troubles and problems. Cynically speaking, we have learnt to live with problems and issues.

In the 1980s, the political leaders went to sleep. Somnambulism? They woke up in 1990, but the sleepwalking symptoms continue. There is an indirect side effect: the drug addiction of the young generation, which will tell when this age group come to rule the country. The future is bleak, without moral shields.

The leaders are suffering from loss of direction, or loss of vision? One is dependent on the other. The political horizon is very limited. No height for foresight and judgement. The standing is sedentary. We are grovelling in the dust. Political sanitation problem. Hanging politics, like hanging latrines! (Sorry for the offensive simile, but it came to mind so easily!)

Forget about the end of the road, and have a closer look at the start of the journey. Flirting in the midstream with infantile pursuits and flirting with destiny. When the time comes, the leader appears. We are very patient while waiting, waiting, and waiting. We are enjoying a holiday for 33 years! Which group should report first for duty? The bosses.

A Mawaz, Dhaka



PHOTO: AP

No room for optimism?

People call me a pessimist, I don't mind that. But I have a vague conception of optimism and pessimism. When you think of Bangladesh as the most corrupt country in the world, that is a pessimistic thought. The irony is it is a truth at the moment. At least two people are murdered daily. So today if you read of four murder reports in your newspaper and hope the number goes down (as it is quite absurd to think a day without a single murder); would you say that this is

optimism?

At the moment people will support your thoughts and plans. Finally when you start working people will be there back biting on your each step. You are bound to find an infinite number of critics but not a single to offer a suggestion that would motivate you. When you ultimately finish the job, people will notice all your drawbacks and you will not find anyone praising what you have achieved. We are conscious or else we would not discuss about our misfortunes.

We know ourselves; we know why we are making ourselves suffer but instead of rectifying, we carry on. This is surprising, often we could make a difference. Still we never fail to surprise ourselves.

We hope that the future will be a better one and draw the conclusion that our next generations will have a better life. Sorry, they won't unless we start to change ourselves.

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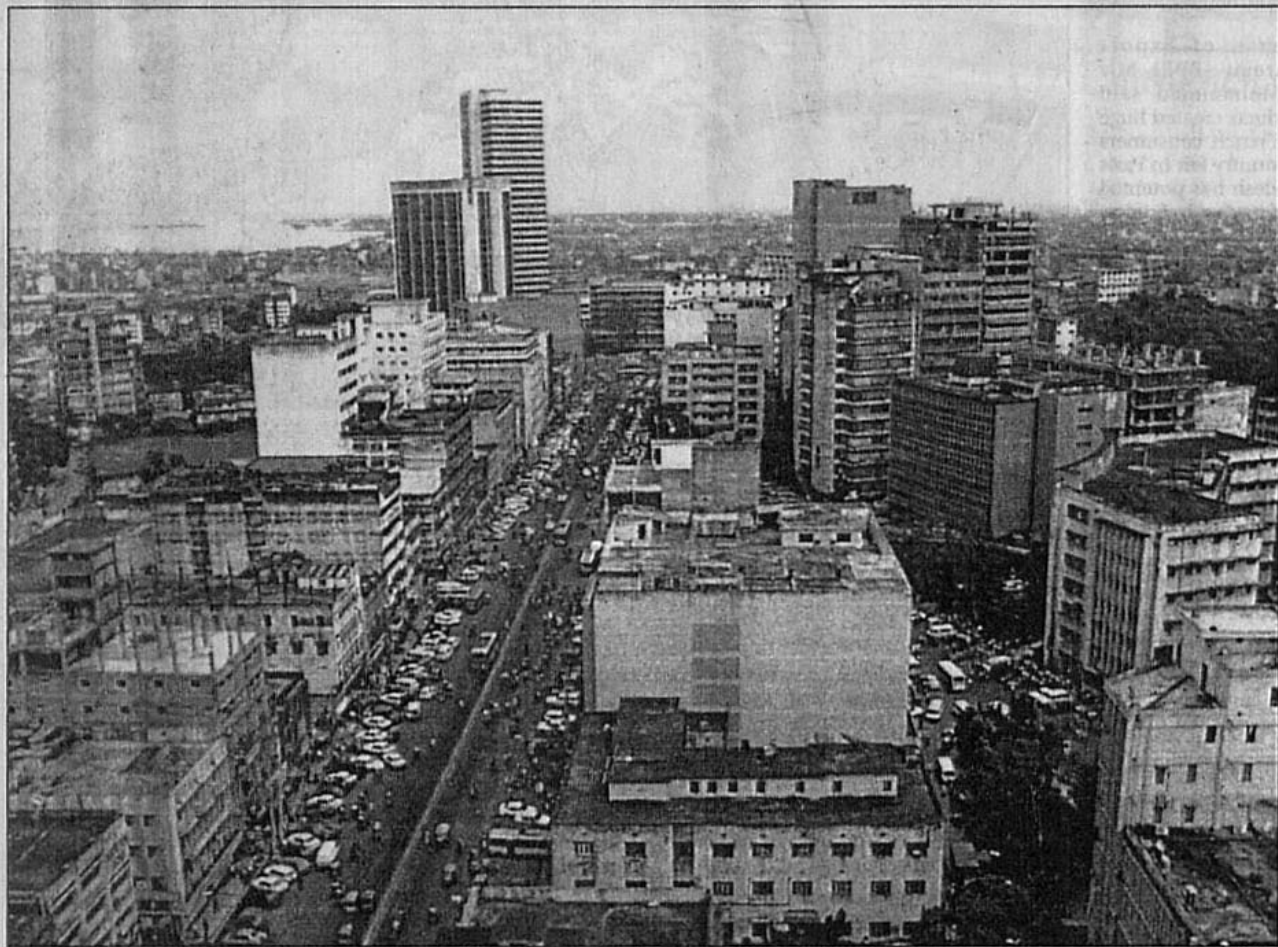


PHOTO: STAR

Unkind words

It was really worrying to read Communications Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda's comment on the security of Sheikh Hasina. Of course, 'death lies in the hands of the Almighty' but that does not mean the government would not do anything to stop bomb attacks. It is also true that the leader of the opposition escaped the grenade attack by Allah's mercy. That does not mean that there is no need for Sheikh Hasina to get Special Security Force (SSF) protection. It is the government's duty to protect everybody and the leader of the opposition is no exception. There is no doubt that our lives are in the hands of the Almighty. But does that mean that the law enforcing agencies will sit idle and leave everything to luck? There is no doubt that Allah saved Sheikh Hasina's life on Aug 21. But is it not the government's duty to find the culprits and bring them to justice?

Such comments passed by our politicians are nothing new to us. But we did not expect it from the honourable communications minister. Mr. Huda's remark really touched me and being a supporter of the BNP, I feel embarrassed. I have a question for Mr. Huda, isn't the prime minister's life in the hands of Allah? Then what is the need for SSF for the prime minister? The rules cannot be different for the leader of the opposition who is also an eminent politician.

Arafat Islam

Texas, US

"Ohio has failed the world"

Many Americans have responded angrily to the Point Counter Point

article by Mr. Ali. They have argued that the majority of Americans voted for values. It appears that the only value that was of concern in this past election was the issue of marriage between same sex couples (gay marriage). My question to them is, is the issue of gay marriage the only trait that is unacceptable in the American society? Gay people comprise an insignificant portion of the population (According to US census, file SF1, Table PCT14, www.census.gov, there are less than one million same sex households in the US out of a population of 260 million). There are more drunk drivers, alcoholics, child abusers, than the number of gay people in the United States. Additionally, premarital sex, teen-age pregnancy, extra-marital affairs are a disturbing trait of the American society.

Why didn't Americans vote against such unacceptable behaviour? What about the aggression in Iraq? Is the bombing of a country that was already reeling under 10 years of sanctions, during which over 1 million children died, a value?

Shomit Chowdhury
One-mail

Spiderman tickets

I appreciate the joke about the Spiderman ticket prices on the cartoon published in connection with the 'Top criminals prefer jail to bail for Rab' on your Friday front page, but I do not agree with the comparison to Tk. 4 lakh for two in jail. Spiderman 2 movie tickets at Star Cineplex sell for only Tk. 100 / 150 each before 5:00pm on weekdays and for only Tk. 175 / 225 after 5:00pm and on weekends for

general and premium seats respectively.

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Everything is bad!

Through the last five and a half years, I have had the opportunity to have invitations to and attending

'Urbanization has so far been unplanned, 'education system lacks proper planning,' roads, bridges, culverts and highways are ill planned, 'this industry is suffering due to absence of a good planning,' 'there is no population planning,' 'building construction in this country is going on without any planning,' 'we are going to suffer a lot more in the future due to absence of proper planning,' so on and so forth. Thus it appears that the nation

is a good planning in all spheres.

But alas! What do we hear from these same gentlemen (ladies are still rare) when there is murder, acid throwing, hurling of grenades or the decadence of an industry? They inform the nation immediately that this murder is preplanned, perpetrated in a cool and calculated way, or that a certain industry is being choked to death through a devilish machination (which is

To the US and Israel...

The United States is called the superpower and we think it would be appropriate to call Israel the 'adviser' to the superpower. It is controlling everything in America, it's wish is the command. To please Israel the US administration will go to any length. Israel was afraid of Saddam Hussein so he had to go, an immoral and unjust war was waged on Iraq which created a very shocking situation, people all over the world are deeply upset and condemning this action.

Palestine is bleeding, not only are they deprived of their homeland, they are dying in scores due to the ruthless actions of Ariel Sharon, a devil in the guise of human being. The atrocities are committed and not a word of disapproval from the United States, the reason is that America is the puppet and the strings are in the hands of Israel.

But lessons of history must not be forgotten. No power ever sustained the ability to continue its atrocities. The US and Israel will be no exception.

Nur Jahan, Chittagong



PHOTO: AP

about seventy five seminars, symposiums and workshops on issues which usually affect our national life. In these congregations, I have noted with increasing dismay and a sense of surprise that while usually we are factious and quarrelsome on all national issues, speakers, in expressing the following opinion, have been unanimous:-

has been moving at someone's or at a few people's whims and sweet will. The impression given by these speakers perhaps is that the nation has not been intelligent enough to recognise the talent of these speakers and put them in the centerfold of society, so that they could serve the nation by their merit, vision and superior intelligence through giving the

perfect planning) by a known face or group.

What a fantastic discovery! No police investigation has taken place, no information has been obtained and nobody has been apprehended and only a few hours have elapsed since the occurrence and yet they have the sagacity to confirm that this is a pre-planned and well-planned murder!

Leisure-hour society

Why we are still a leisure-hour society, after the valiant sacrifices in 1971? We are still *adda-baaz* and *phaki-baaz*, looking for excuses all the time for personal gains. Take the long Eid holidays for six days. Where to deposit safely Tk. 1,000 crore earned during Eid shopping, while



PHOTO: AP

Bush's win and the future of world

The dramatic win of Bush over Kerry in the US presidential election startled the world. Bush's war against terrorism is at last appreciated by his countrymen. On the other hand, Kerry's Iraq strategy failed to take into account the existing situation and American stakes in the war.

Finally, Bush has succeeded in convincing his countrymen of the importance of war against terrorism. He has followed a strong and strict foreign policy like preemption, conditional multilateralism and spread of democracy to contain terrorism. I think in his second tenure in the White House these policies will get much more prominence and more swing. His victory poses a real threat to countries like Iran and North Korea which may further aggravate the armament process in those countries. The Bush administration may also take tough measures against Sudan, Syria and Lebanon on charges of assisting the terrorist groups.

Bush is also keeping a watchful eye on the much talked about election in Iraq that is held in January. Although it is reported that

the UN would oversee the electoral process but I think the fate of Iraq would be much like that of Afghanistan. A puppet regime would rule Iraq and the US under Bush administration will carry out its duties to serve its own interests.

Moreover, the US may add new names to the list of 'Rogue States' in order to ensure its so called 'Security'. Establishing American hegemony all over the world is the ultimate goal of the Bush government.

Motasim Billah
Zia Hall
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Although as a global citizen like many other fellows, I was also in the opinion camp for a change in the American presidency, still president George W. Bush has been re-elected by the Americans. That's the choice of the majority Americans and we have nothing to say except to expect President Bush to change his policies and to work

genuinely for ensuring peace and security, not only for the Americans but also for the people of the whole world.

Whatever the election result is, I would like to extend my sincere appreciations to Sen. John Kerry for keeping the democratic morale high. We very much like the way he accepted his defeat in the election. Of course a huge number of Americans had also voted in favour of Kerry which confirms Kerry's standing as a leader par excellence! I think Kerry and the Democrats must have now got the point (s), why most Americans didn't vote for Kerry--perhaps on some socio-religious points, I guess.

Meanwhile our political parties in Bangladesh, particularly the defeated ones, should learn a lesson from the present American election--how to accept defeat or acknowledge victory in election by keeping the democratic values and national interests above personal/petty gain or loss!

Zahidul Haque
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How to look at Pakistan?

Many Bangladeshis today are not sure how to look at Pakistan after more than 30 years of the creation of Bangladesh (one generation has passed).

Some are still demanding apology publicly. How war decides an issue? How the mental and physical and mental fall-outs are sorted out? It is a perennial question in history.

What are the tools of arbitration, politically, philosophically, and at public, private and personal levels? These are recurring questions, whether in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Vietnam or Bangladesh. There are many perspectives--international, national, personal, communal, spiritual etc.

What has permanency in this mortal life? The whole mankind belongs to one human family, with only one Lord at the top, and He knows what's happening in his kingdom. We tiny humans try to arbitrate, and set up interim and ad hoc solutions. It is the recurring Game of Life.

This is the Preamble. It needs energy and patience to go into details, and perseverance to hold on to it.

Ajana
Dhaka

Future of shrimp cultivation

It is needless to mention that shrimp cultivation in the southern part of our country plays a vital role in earning foreign exchange and has generated employment for thousands of people. If we consider catching of fish fry (Pona) from natural sources like rivers and sea-shores as the beginning, the whole process ends with export of frozen shrimps to foreign countries.

Still the cultivators in our country are in primitive stage and solely dependent on nature and we often see the news item 'virus attack' which may be in an epidemic form that can destroy the whole farming. But if you ask the fisheries department for any help against such 'virus', you will seldom get any positive answer and thus a poor cultivator loses everything, leaving behind a huge amount of loan taken from banks, NGOs or Mahajans. These group of cultivators have no association, no forum, nor can they ask the government for any help to cope with an unexpected situation. The entire government machinery is helping only the factory owners who have got a strong association; they can sit with high officials and ministers, MPs and so on for their cash subsidy, interest waiver etc. on the plea of incurring heavy losses.

Then what will be the fate of those cultivators who are working at the field level and earning foreign exchange?

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Daulatpur, Khulna