

The best companies

For a local company to earn respect as the "best place to work for," it needs to work on creating its own culture. A company must create an atmosphere where employees feel they are truly wanted, where there is a culture of sharing information and getting feedback, where there is a sense of camaraderie, and where its people learn more about fellow co-workers in an atmosphere that's fun and socially stimulating.

MAMUN RASHID

It is often said: "Many people quit looking for work when they finally get a job." Those who regularly read the business magazine Fortune will smile at my caption above. The difference is that instead of looking at the US giants, this write up looks more at our local corporations.

After almost 37 years of independence, with young people gradually entering the business world to take over from the old guard, it is worth looking at our local corporate houses -- is there a local brand in the offing? Is there any organisation people would be happy to join, and stick to for a longstanding relationship or career progression?

When we talk to the graduating students of the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) at Dhaka University, or any other university, they all express their strong desire to join only the multi-national corporations (MNCs), but not local corporations that need these bright young talents to help them in taking their companies

into the next trajectory of growth. I asked a number of graduating students from IBA and my colleagues in the financial as well as manufacturing sector, and came out with issues like "future," "career progression potential," "self esteem," "growth opportunity," "empowerment," "work environment," and, of course, "compensation package." A few of the brilliant ones also focused on "company's growth trend," "company's dynamic working environment," "challenging work," "bringing about a change," "similar line of thinking" and "sharing the same vision," while talking of a dream organisation.

We often find that the major drawbacks of many emerging local brands lie in their traditional management style, safeguarded by the old generation which still believes in company secrecy and in adopting a very conservative policy.

The owner may have come a long way by dint of his own hard work, saved each penny and built up his empire step by step. However, being penny-wise pound-foolish, they are not ready

to invest in people or eager to train people or pay any attention to an individual's growth. They neither want to develop leadership in the company nor do they believe in segregation of ownership and management. They still lack the idea of bringing global standards to a local company, investing on branding, and finding ways to retain or hire the best from the market. We may even find that some of the companies do not have a proper HR department, and the CEO himself plays the critical role in recruitment.

The finance department may still be running under an old clerk, who manages a few books of accounts and gets merely a couple of thousand takas. But if someone can invest millions of dollars in setting up an industry can he not invest a mere thousand dollars for HR management?

Are those totally absent in our national sector? Of course not. When I did a small survey in identifying a few successful local brands on the basis of the above, the list was quite encouraging.

I know of a local financial insti-

tuition where a CEO of a large European bank had to personally request them not to take any more people as well as clients from that bank. The managing director of a private bank had to request the central bank to intervene when most of its high officials were joining a new bank.

The most respected business house, even in Bangladesh, is not necessarily the highest paymaster. The same study identified a small cap manufacturer in the export sector, where employees consider their work place better than their homes, a pharmaceutical company where the executives play bigger roles than the owners, and a media company that is run more like a corporate business house than a newspaper.

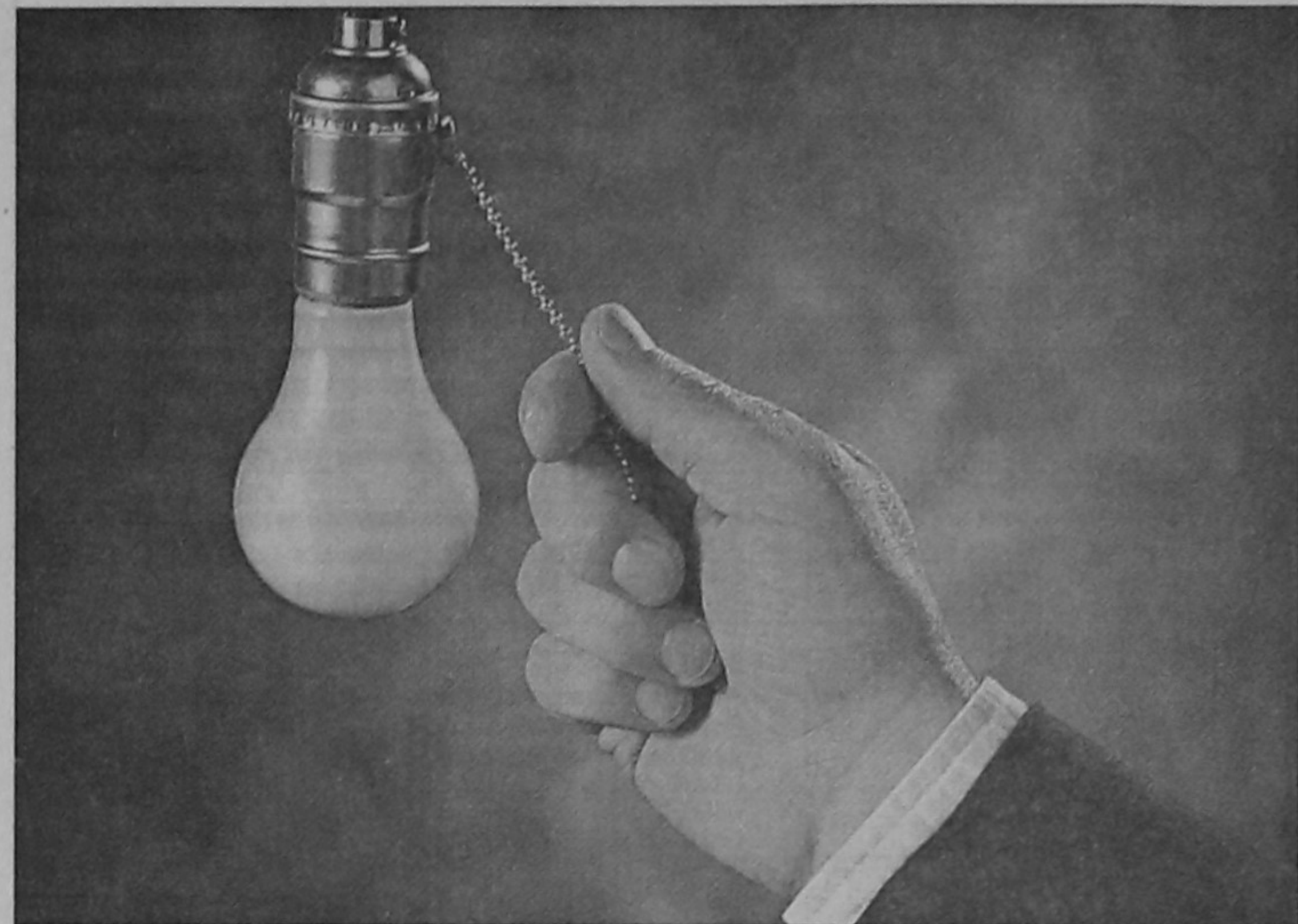
In the above companies, the employees found the organisations deeply involved in shaping their futures, creating space for them at every stage, and "committed to their individual success." Believe me -- none of the CEOs or owners of these organisations came from Harvard, Wharton, LBS, or Oxford. Mere survival, or awareness about the future, pushed them to increasingly pay attention to their people and organisational re-engineering.

For a local company to earn respect as the "best place to work for," it needs to work on creating its own culture. A company must create an atmosphere where employees feel they are truly wanted, where there is a culture of

sharing information and getting feedback, where there is a sense of camaraderie, and where its people learn more about fellow co-workers in an atmosphere that's fun and socially stimulating. All these practices build pride and teamwork in the workforce of a company.

This, in turn, builds that all-essential foundation of employee trust, the key indicator that a company is a great place to work for. There is a saying: "When you have a high level of trust, you have a high level of commitment, and you have a high level of cooperation." As Amy Lyman, co-founder of the Great Place to Work Institute has found by surveying America's workers, they need to feel needed every day in office; they want to know they are there not just to earn a paycheck but to contribute something of significance to the world; and they need to feel they're part of a group of people working as a dedicated team to achieve a worthwhile goal.

By focusing on these human factors, many companies in Silicon Valley have made themselves into some of the nation's best places to work in. On the other hand, I also know of a few multi-nationals where CEOs feel that they were paying the employees from their wallets, or treat people "in the East India Company style," in exchange of paying them little higher than the market average.



A good company ... a bright future.

What makes the people stick to the organisation and remain committed to its success has been well answered by Jim Freer, vice chairman of Ernst and Young: "To come up with creative ways to keep employees satisfied, and to treat them with respect and dignity." Though a job is a very precious thing in over-populated Bangladesh, there is also a growing class that lays strong emphasis

on "work environment," seniors having time for juniors to share the organisational vision," and "allowing them to apply their own acumen for the progress of the company."

In a country like Bangladesh, where "acute intelligence deficiency syndrome" is spreading faster than "acute immune deficiency syndrome," we need to focus more on individual capacity

building in the organisations through further commitment to people, and putting the right people into the right job. It is again all about allowing people to share the same vision as well as torments.

It is not the machine, but the man behind the machine. The sooner we understand this, the better for this nation.

Mamun Rashid is a columnist.

Riverine regrets

The rivers of Bangladesh are in a perilous state; collectively, they present a picture of unmitigated woe. I can only offer my regrets for the abuse, neglect and depredation our rivers are suffering. This has been taking place over the years, and we have learnt to condone it with our apathy. I heard of a movement led by prominent intellectuals of the country to save the river Buriganga. It has possibly run out of steam if one takes a look at the Buriganga.

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

THE highway was looking so serenely quiet, with the roadside trees still full of leaves and their branches arcing over the road to lend a shade that soothed the sight. It was the toll collector who broke the spell with his alacrity in approaching our car for the toll charge. He was there again when we were returning. I felt amused that the bridge, one of the three built on the Aricha highway during the Pakistan period, was still considered for toll collection.

Indeed, it is the longest of the three, but the state of the river Tawrai that it spans saddened me. In the first place, it was difficult to locate the river for it has shrunk to the shape of a canal bashfully meandering on. Almost the entire channel of the river has the desolation of a silt wasteland. From the bridge I saw a solitary scavenger, a truck leaving brutal marks on the riverbed.

This is Tawrai ghat, as it is popularly known, a vantage point for the collection of milk for Milkvita. If this could happen to Tawrai what could happen to the other two rivers, Kaliganga and Bangshi? I am afraid these two rivers will be lost if the flow of water keeps on declining disastrously.

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I heard of a movement led by prominent intellectuals of the country to save the river Buriganga. It has possibly run out of steam if one takes a look at the Buriganga. The British Raj steamer Ostich was there at the Badamtali Ghat, and I was to board it for a river cruise.

A hideous stench buffeted me as I was boarding it. The foul smell was coming from the ghoulishly black water of the river. A greasy layer has settled on the water. All sorts of refuse, empty green coconut shells, banana skins, empty cigarette packets were floating. The steamer started cruising ahead.

I was thinking that cleaner water was ahead and that the foul odour would be left behind. We crossed Postogola and then Aliganj and the foul odour would not leave us, for the blackish watery expanse stretched far.

The Buriganga is being abused remorselessly! The establishments and factories on both sides

of the river are nonchalantly pouring effluent and garbage into the river. The Suvadda canal, an offshoot of Buriganga, has turned into a trickle; choked by indiscriminate dumping from garments factories. And how fares Buriganga on the western side of the city? It hardly exists there.

Near Kamrangir Char it is a pool of stagnant water. At Hazaribagh, the tanneries are pouring waste into the river. At Mohammadpur near the launch terminal, Buriganga has indeed become "Buri" (grandma) with its shrunken channel more befitting for a canal.

The woe of state of Buriganga is regrettable because a river and a city have a complementary relationship. A river adds ecological elegance and mobility to a city. We can readily recall here Shanghai with Huangpo, New York with Hudson, East and Harlem rivers, and Budapest with Danube.

Nothing of this kind has happened for Buriganga. The Babubazar Bridge has marked Keraniganj with most scornful development growth. The bridge itself is in a deplorable state. It has to be seen how slovenly it is.

The city has spread beyond Gazipur. But what has happened to the river Turag? While taking the Ashulia link road I was struck by

the emaciated look of the river. It struggles on, a canal of a river, its banks spreading far and occupied by sand traders and housing companies.

At some places one can simply walk through the river. Rampant greed has turned the vast wetland behind Uttara and the eastern side of the Ashulia link road to Mirpur into a beleaguered tract of vast sandy expanse. Serried ranks of pipes supported by crossbars are pouring sand on the tract for Jamuna City.

It has the semblance of a war field, more akin to Maginot Line of World War I. The river Sitalakhsya is under great threat from sand and stone traders. At Ghorashal its water is highly toxic. The river grabbers have a facile plea that it takes place because the rivers are silting up!

It is all a case of conniving negligence on the part of the administration and remorseless greed on the part of the politician-businessman combine. Indiscipline comes so easily to men that they abuse the very order that supports them. But nature surely has its own way of rolling back the wrongs done.

The Holy Quran has spoken of it in Surah Rum: "Corruption doth appear on land and sea because of (the evil) which men's hands have done, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return (The Meaning of Glorious Quran, an explanatory translation by Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthal)."

One does not have to be a cleric to understand the perilous consequences of what the connivance

and the apathy are doing to its rivers and wetlands.

Of the five major rivers, relatively, only Meghna fares well. The Padma is a part of our heritage for the fish (Hilsa) it harbours; yet it has been suffering the most over the years since the commissioning of Farakka Barrage by our neighbour.

It now takes around 30 minutes from Paturia to Goalundo by ferry. There are vast tracts of sandbanks on the Padma from Hardinge Bridge to Aricha. When the monsoon water rushes from upstream the Padma plays havoc with the settlements on the banks of the river both in Bikrampur and in Sadarpur (Faridpur).

The Padma is the victim of man's inability to come to terms with nature. The fabled river has lost most of its past glory and eminence, and is burdened by silt deposit and constricted by irregular water discharge from upstream.

Jamuna's wide channel is also constricted by many sandbanks. Karatoa in the northern part, too, has shrunk considerably in the past few years. Water experts dependently observe that our neighbour is withdrawing water from as many as fifty-two rivers flowing into Bangladesh. The Karnaphuli in the south has its own problems.

The Kaptai hydroelectric dam was a grandiose project, but most inappropriate considering what it is giving and what it has taken away. It is producing only 80-megawatt electricity but has inundated Rangamati town and flooded vast tracts of wooded land. Karnaphuli is now carrying

large amounts of silt, which is deposited downstream. It is causing navigability problem for the Patenga Port.

The riverine regrets or watery woes, by whatever name we call it, are the work of spiteful and conniving men.

Bangladesh has a large population. But, proportionately, it has a small area. The sustenance of the country and its advancement depends on successfully addressing this paradox. We should, therefore, return to the fact that Bangladesh is a riverine country. Our network of rivers and wetlands are our lifelines.

They have given us a remarkably fertile soil. This is a fecund combination to build on. There are civilisations that have perished owing to their failure to use the two properly. Naturally, our rivers and wetlands can bring us doom if we treat them scornfully.

The present state of our rivers portend of a disaster in making. The realisation has to be spread all over the country if it is to bear fruit. Let the nation rise to say "Save the River." We have to free the rivers from the bane of conniving negligence in governance and rampant greed of river grabbers.

At the same time, the government should take up the cause of our rivers with our neighbour with a spirit of sovereign equality and trusting cooperation, free from the baggage of which government is in power. The time for it is today. Let the nation speak out on "Save the River" day.

Maqsud Jamil is a columnist.

How Asians secretly fix Hollywood movies

DO you see that brilliant Julia Roberts comedy movie *The Sparrow Becomes the Empress*?

No? Never heard of it? Well, it may be a surprise to you, but you've probably seen it. Although it would likely have been under the dull title *Pretty Woman*.

Today's the 85th anniversary of the invention of the talkie film camera, so let's talk movies. In Asia, we don't just chuck Hollywood movies up there on our screens. No, we gloriously reinvent them with eye-catching new names.

Come on, admit it: which is the most intriguing title? *The English Patient*? Or, the same movie as it was renamed in Hong Kong: *Don't Ask Who I Am*?

The Professional became *This Hit Man Is Not As Cold As He Thought*. And *Bladerunner* (which had nothing to do with blades or runners) became the intriguing *Silver Wing Killer*.

Few Asians have any idea what the phrase *The Full Monty* means. But the Chinese title of the film was the wonderfully clear and unobscure *Six Naked Pigs*. (I'm sure the stars were thrilled.)

In India, Hollywood movies are re-made from scratch, usually with a completely different title. The Indian equivalent of *When Harry Met Sally* appeared in 2004 under the name *Hum Tum*. When films move from India to the west, they don't bother translating the titles at all. *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* sounds exotic, while the sentimental literal translation would have sent moviegoers fleeing: *The Brave Heart Will Take the Bride*.

Yet it's the English-to-Chinese renamings which are most entertaining, because you can clearly smell the desperation of distributors taking huge liberties to make a

fast buck. *The Cable Guy* in Chinese became *Trump Card Specialist* and *Liar Liar* became *Trump Card Big Liar*. These make no sense until you realize that Trump Card is the East Asian moviegoers' label for Jim Carrey, whose first successful movies in the region were the *Ace Ventura* series (Ace being translated as Trump Card).

The logic veered off track when the first *Austin Powers* movie was released in East Asia as *Trump Card Big Spy*. It starred Mike Myers rather than Jim Carrey, but distributors apparently thought that the fact that it was a completely different human being was too subtle a difference to worry about. Why be fussy? Deranged white guys are deranged white guys.

In Taiwan, *The Blair Witch Project* became *Night in the Cramped Forest*. An embarrassingly bad parody called *The Bare Wench Project* was released as *Night in the Cramped Forest 2*, as if it was the sequel. (The actual sequel had to settle for a different title: *Spirits of the Dead Roar*. I imagine it was spirits of the original writers who had a right to roar.)

Movie distributors in East Asia reckon Western movie titles are not literal enough for Asian audiences. *Deep Impact* became *Earth and Comet Collide*, and *Eyes Wide Shut* became *Eyes Wide Open*.

Anyway, next time you see Julia, tell her from me that I loved *The Sparrow*. And if you meet any Western film directors, I challenge them to market a romantic comedy movie under the name *Hum Tum*.

Tomorrow: From new movies to brand new words you need to know

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Iran's organised reformers

Mehdi Karrubi is the AI Gore of Iran. According to him, but for vote-rigging he would have been the president and not Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The cleric is leader of the National Trust Party, founded after his 2005 defeat, and was a speaker of Iran's Parliament, or Majlis. Even though he is a reformist, he believes that President Mohammad Khatami allowed radicalism to tank the reform movement. In his first interview with the western media, Karrubi, 69, talked with Newsweek's Maziar Bahari about this week's Majlis elections.

Bahari: A few days ago the headline of your party's newspaper was KARRUBI IS WORRIED. Why were you worried?

Karrubi: A large number of very good people who could be Majlis candidates were disqualified (by the Council of Guardians and the Ministry of Interior). Nonetheless, we have lobbied high-ranking officials and different parts of the government and the situation has improved. So you are not worried anymore? I'm worried but less so. When the Guardians can veto bills, what gain is even a powerful Majlis minority? The Council of Guardians has a

responsibility to make sure that the Majlis bills are in accordance with the teachings of Islam. Of course, at times we have suffered from a narrow-minded approach, but they are not as narrow-minded as some people think. And you can solve most problems by lobbying the members of the Council and other high-ranking officials of the Islamic Republic. Is democracy in Iran only possible within the constraints of traditional methods, like lobbying and backroom negotiations? Democracy means different things in different societies. We don't have the same situation as in Germany. There are people,

like me, who know where they live and how to adapt democracy to their own country. There are others who, as soon as they have an opportunity, start abusing this freedom. Like those people who ridicule religion as soon as they can. These people give an excuse to the reactionaries who make an all-out assault against anyone who talks about democracy. What are your main criticisms of the reformist movement during Khatami's era? The most important of all was their destructionist approach. They questioned the "Islamic" component of the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic is a government

chosen by people in a country where the majority of people are Muslim. On the other hand, these days there are people who are questioning the "Republic" aspect of our system of government and don't respect people's votes.

And of Ahmadinejad's government?

Because of the anomalies during the 2005 presidential elections, I don't want to comment on this government. But I wish their success because their economic and foreign-policy failures would hurt our people.

Don't you think those who rigged the last vote can do it again?

That is one of my worries. But this time the candidates have been allowed to assign their own supervisors at the polls. People are more sensitive to anomalies. Also, our previous government [Khatami's] was not strong enough to protect people's votes. Even when Mr. Khatami was supposed to present a report about the problems with elections, he was reluctant to do so. I didn't raise hell at the time because I liked and respected Mr.

Khatami. This time, if there are problems we can express our complaints publicly.

Do you favor resuming relations with the United States?

America doesn't have a good history in Iran, but I am in favor of resuming relations now. Even the late Imam Khomeini said that if the American government changes its behavior, we can resume relations with it. He didn't mean that the Americans should convert to Islam. It's just that the Americans should accept us as equals and respect our independence.

And then?

There are other issues, such as releasing frozen Iranian assets in America and stopping support of anti-Iranian terrorist groups.

What should the future American president do vis-à-vis Iran?

There are candidates now who talk about starting negotiations with Iran without any preconditions. Naturally, I'd like those candidates to be successful. For example, someone like Barack Obama?

Yes. Or whoever who can play a positive role in the Middle East as a whole.

Will you support former president Khatami if he becomes a presidential candidate, in order not to split the reformist votes?

We will have a member of our party as the candidate. It wouldn't necessarily be me but someone who is a member of our party. Would you have a good chance to win?

Someone from our party will have a good chance. Even though last time I entered the race without a party, I was the No. 1 candidate in many provinces. So next year our supporters will still vote for us and will be even more organised.

So this interview might have been with the future president of Iran.

I don't want to even think about that now. You asked me your questions and I gave you my answers.

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