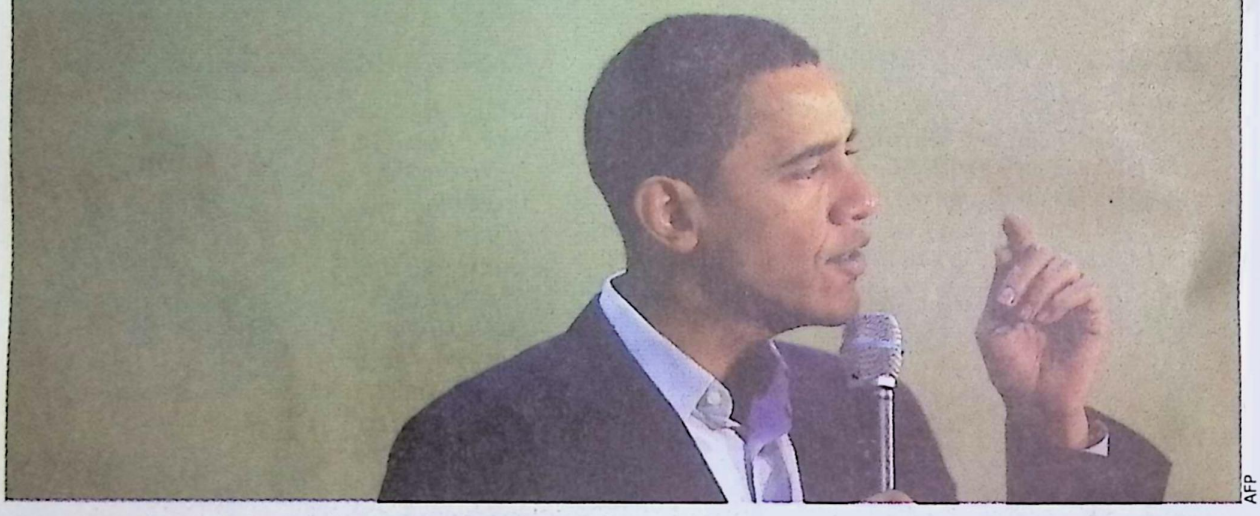
Calling Generation Bangladesh: Is there an Obama in the house?

Faisal Salahuddin argues the ingredients are in place for us to have an Obama of our own



AFP

BARACK Obama, with his compelling life story, is inspiring America like nobody has since John F. Kennedy. The child of a black father from Kenya and a white mother from Kansas, and raised by his grandparents, Obama started his political life at the bottom of the food chain as a community organiser in Chicago, and is now reaching for the US presidency.

As a curious outsider, I have watched Obama with polarised emotions over the last couple of months. I have alternated between inspiration and depression; inspired by his magnetic promise for the American youth and saddened by the lack of such leaders at home.

What does Obama mean in the Bangladeshi context? He represents a breed of bottom-up politicians who can inspire and unite the younger generation to dream of tomorrow -- and then deliver (Obama is not at this point yet, agreed).

Can we have our own Obamas who can voice the dreams of our youth? I argue that the evolving math, physics and chemistry of our own society suggests: Yes, we can. At the very least, we have many of the right ingredients.

Leaders do not fall from heaven (although recently in our land, they tend to assertively drop from the chosen family trees). Since leaders grow in domestic soil, they reflect ground realities and the unpredictable mixture of "inevitability" and "randomness" of history and society.

In Bangladesh's case, the brewing "inevitability" of our history and society is bound to shape future policies and politics. The chemistry of changing times can set off political reactions, catalysing the fierce urgency of the present. Let's see how.

The mathematics: Demography is destiny

A nation can be viewed as a mathematical distribution of people -- different generations with their own unique experiences.

Based on each generation's formative years, ours can be broadly split into three:

i) Generation Pakistan (P)
ii) Generation Middle (M)
iii) Generation Bangladesh (B)