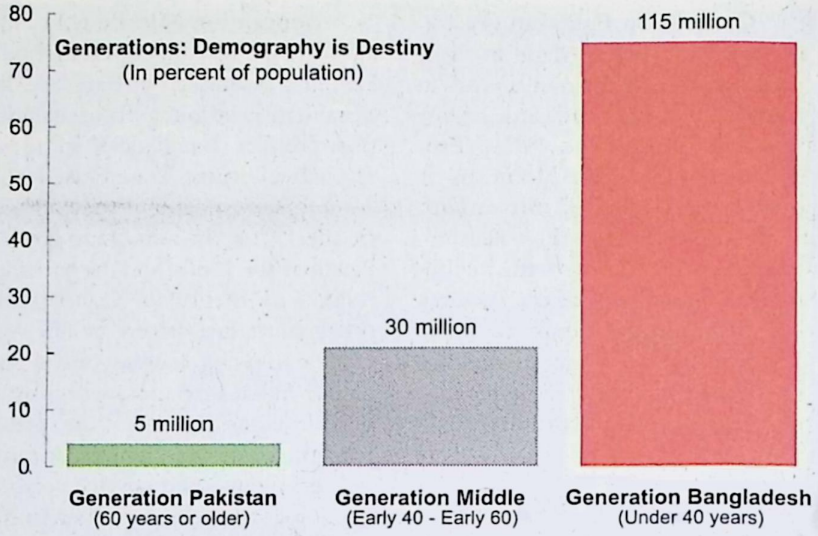
the largest group (see graph on right), Generation B, as of now, has been helplessly sitting in the backseat looking ahead. In the meantime, ironically, politicians and, more generally, powerbrokers from Generation M have been busy with partisan politics and driving the bus off the road by stubbornly looking in the rearview mirror.

Naturally, as simple election arithmetic suggests, Bangladesh's political and policy-making centre of gravity will need to shift very rapidly in the coming years to address the dreams and aspirations of Generation B. In terms of sheer numbers, Generation B seems mathematically poised to take the positive vision of Generation P and the positive aspect of Generation M and create a new Bangladesh. These forces can only be delayed, but not denied.

Political leaders in a democracy cannot afford to behave like ostriches for long, and ignore these deeper forces of demographics with their heads in the sand. If they do (which they currently seem to be doing), they will do so at their own peril, especially given the changing architecture of our society.



The Changing Architecture and Physics of Our Society

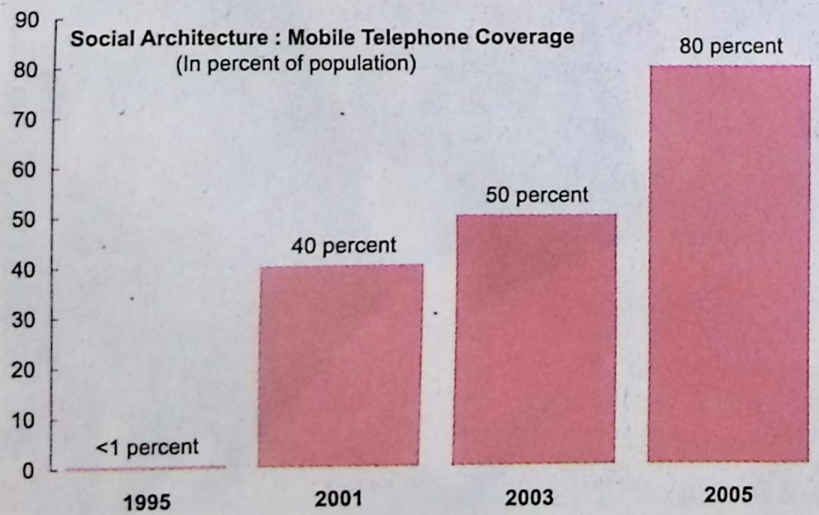
Not only is our nation young, with over 50 per cent of its people under 25, its very architecture is also in an unprecedented flux.

At the macro-level, forces like urbanisation and industrialisation are rapidly rewriting the social fabric of this crowded nation.

At the micro-level, communication technology such as mobile phones, internet and media are rapidly transforming how we relate to and communicate with each other, which in turn will inevitably dictate the terms of political control and accountability, amplify any social discontent, and spread localised hopes.

Structurally, two key forces are quietly revolutionising the social architecture: i) mobile phones and ii) media growth.

From 1995-2005, mobile phone coverage as a percentage of population shot up from almost zero to 80 per cent (possibly even higher now, see chart below based on the World Bank data). This is a sea of change.



One small example captures the magnitude of this migration of power to common citizens. In the late 1980s, Ershad had to try hard to get three mobile sets for personal use (he spent about a million dollars -- over three crores taka then). Now 35 million mobile phones are in the hands of common citizens.

Mobile phones have united 150 million Bangladeshis, who are no longer 150 million isolated islands but one connected continent. Echoes of their dreams and despair can now travel at the speed of electromagnetic waves through their mobile phones. Dreams are, thus, increasingly more transferable, despair more violently contagious.

The second revolution has been in media access, especially the rise of private television channels in the last decade. Surely, media does not operate outside the gravitational pull of traditional political forces and vested interests. Powerbrokers everywhere, therefore, appreciate the power of media and naturally try to control them through their invisible hands.

But the television and print media in Bangladesh are becoming