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Sustainable development

Bangladesh faces great challenges in coping with the infrastructure and service requirements of its growing population. Access to food, sanitation, pure drinking water, healthcare, education and social security are obviously inadequate in both urban and rural areas of our country. Poverty still remains a major environmental concern. Poverty means a lack of income, a permanent state of vulnerability and lack of access to

resources. Over 40% of the population of our country live in abject poverty. Poverty, population growth and environment have strong linkages in our country. It is critical to check population growth to achieve sustainable development. Because the growing numbers of the poor are forced by the few powerful rich to over utilize the environmental resources and put strain on their carrying capacity while the environmental

degradation further limits access to resources for the poor. Poverty has devastating effects on people's lives.

Reducing poverty is the central theme of development dialogue in our country. Promote sustainable development through increasing the productivity of natural resources involving the people in planning, decision making and management. Bangladesh, despite its increasing population pressure, poverty, illiteracy and natural disasters, will be able to manage its scarce resources in a sustainable way with continued political commitment and with the help of public and private sector bodies, NGOs, civil society, the media and the people at the grassroots level who have been managing the resources. Even the recently introduced Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) has been criticised for giving less attention to the environment.

It is necessary to alleviate poverty keeping environment in mind through proper use of the natural resources. It is also necessary to have ecological balance to make development sustainable and poverty alleviation more effective.

Manir Hossain
President of Society for Environment
and Nature Study (SENS)
MBSTU, Tangail



Set up more universities

This refers to Lutfur Rahman's letter under the above title on 27 August 2008. I would like to add some more points to the letter. I can hardly support the opinion that increasing the number of universities in the country's context is important. Undoubtedly, the number of certified students is increasing every year. It is also true that we have an acceptable number of government and private universities (govt. approved) in the country, though the number of high standard universities is very few. The undeniable fact is that we need some quality universities in our country. Every year these universities, especially private universities, are admitting a large number of students and producing some so called "graduates and undergraduates", whatever their merit might be.

This crass commercialisation of higher education must be stopped. **Md. Kamrul Islam Mishu Kutubi**
Dept. of English
International Islamic University
Chittagong

Obama won't win!

Hillary Clinton losing the Democratic Party nomination for President, it could inadvertently lead to the Democrats losing out on the presidency! Obama, despite getting a very experienced Senator as Vice President nominee, is not likely to win the presidential race.

Despite all the big talks of democracy, the USA is basically a country where colour matters a lot, which deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of White Americans.

They will not accept a non-White as President; more so as he is ancestrally related to Muslims! Despite all big talks, the Whites are fundamentally bigoted.

Further, many American women were disappointed at the defeat of Hillary as the Democratic Party nominee. Their notes may quietly switch over to McCain, to express their silent dissatisfaction over male chauvinistic feelings, which may have resulted in Hillary not being nominated. On top of that, Obama did not consider Hillary as his running mate. All these factors add to the subtle negative image of Obama, which will be reflected in the ballot!

Most Americans are silently conservative, both in their overall and religious attitudes. In their hearts, they possibly do not prefer Obama, and in the privacy of the ballot their hearts could well overrule all logic and good sense, which will adversely affect Obama's chances. **S.A. Mansoor, Dhaka**

Traffic jam and pollution

Life in Dhaka city is both interesting and miserable. The man who actually lives in the city of Dhaka can realise how miserable the life is when he wants to go to any place by bus or any other vehicle. And then this is the most polluted city of the world.

So these are not the problems of general people only, the high-ups in society are also suffering. The decision makers should address the issue. **Md. Shobuj Chowdhury**
Dhaka

Akbar's article on Zakir Naik

Mr M.J. Akbar is a renowned and prolific writer. I am too small to comment on his views. But sometimes great people also make mistakes as the saying goes, "To err is human". And in my humble opinion, M.J. Akbar is not above this since he made some objectionable observations in his article on the subject published in The Daily Star on August 4, 2008. While dealing with terrorism, he unnecessarily dragged in the name of Islamic thinker Dr. Zakir Naik, as if he is propagating terrorism. In his (Mr. M.J. Akbar's) word, "Zakir Naik, a television evangelist who has devoted following among the terror groups, gratifies Osama as the Ultimate Islamic Hero".

The observation is objectionable on several counts.

To call him an evangelist is wrong. The Illustrated Oxford Dictionary defines evangelist as "1) Any of the writers of the four gospels, 2) Preacher of the Gospel, 3) Any lay person doing the missionary work."

In the above context and within the dictionary meaning, he is not the writer of the Gospel. He is not preacher of any Gospel. And he is not a lay person doing the missionary work, rather he is the most learned man well versed in the contemporary religions like The Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. He is the preacher of Islam and peace. He also holds interfaith dialogues where the learned men of different religions participate. That fosters amity amongst various faiths and promotes peace. Those who have heard him over television or in

person would agree with me that he upholds the cause of peace and decries terrorism. Therefore, the question of his being popular among the terrorist groups does not arise. As said, he is not a layman doing the missionary work. He gives reasons for his arguments quoting authentic references from the Holy books of the Christians, Jews, Hindus and Muslims. He is the preacher of Islam and world peace.

Hope M.J. Akbar would realise his mistake.

Abu Imran
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Development of Khulna region

People of Khulna were very enthusiastically waiting to see the outcome of the adviser council meeting held in Khulna on 26 August, headed by the Honourable Chief Adviser.

The people of Khulna welcomed the meeting and made all efforts to make it a great success.

The outcome of the meeting has pleased the people of Khulna to a great extent, though the expectations were more in view of prolonged sufferings, deprivation and non-fulfilment of legitimate demands. Now we expect immediate implementation of the decisions made, ensuring availability of adequate funds to start with.

Unfortunately, two major and vital long standing demands have not been fulfilled. We don't understand why the issue of airport, the most important and basic element for the social and economic development, did not carry any importance to the advisers, while the

government has been trying to make better use of Mongla Port, EPZ, along with developing the Sundarbans as a tourist spot. The people of Khulna would request the government to reconsider the issue without further delay.

Secondly, Khulna should have a television station to uphold the cultural events and activities of this locality and also to telecast various developmental activities in the region.

Nasar
One-mail

Corroded railway bridges

Steel structures, bridges or buildings, need protection against corrosion. Rusting of steel is a natural phenomenon. Oxygen from the ambient air while in contact of the exposed steel surface forms ferrous oxide which is called rust or corrosion that eats upon the steel surface, ultimately leading to failure of the structure.

To prevent this destructive natural process, steel surface is covered with paint covering, first a red-oxide primer and then one or two coats of weather resistant paint. But before application of the rust protecting paints, the surface must be clean and free from any trace of corrosion; else the applied coating will spill off in no time. The department responsible for erection of steel structures is also responsible for protection of those structures from corrosion with application of anti-rust paint on all the exposed surfaces as an essential part of regular maintenance.

Unfortunately, it's never done. Thus, the recent media report that 600 bridges of the Bangladesh Railway are on the verge of collapse posing threat to the lives of the millions of passengers passing over these bridges daily is very timely. I am sure that this will draw the attention of the higher authorities. I am also sure that these bridges have never been maintained after their construction. (To verify the veracity of this statement, one can have a look at the Ghorasal Rail Bridge over the Shitalakhyia very close to Dhaka.)

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Education and vocational training

This is in response to the write up of Mr. Avik Dasgupta.

I think he rightly portrayed the flaws in our education system.

It needs a complete overhaul, incorporating curricula based on practical approach.

Moreover, we need more & more vocational training institutes so that students who drop out after their primary education can enrol themselves in those institutes & build their capacity and certain skills that match the jobs currently in demand in foreign countries. This will reduce the sufferings of our unskilled workers abroad.

This deserves a closer look from the authorities concerned.

Syed Muhammad Azim
Chittagong

Save our cottage industries

We have a great opportunity to earn more foreign currency through promoting the cottage industry. By using a little amount of money and little portion of land, we can establish a cottage industry. In case of rural people, it may be an effective source of income, besides their main occupation.

Moreover, we have an age-old tradition of our cottage industry. It should be noted here that once "Muslim" was famous for its fine quality.

It is a sad truth that we have lost this potential industry on account of the invasion of multi-national companies. Though we have enough raw materials in our country for cottage industry, the condition of these industry is decaying day by day. Our handmade goods can no longer compete with the machine made goods. Poverty of our people is also responsible for the poor condition of cottage industries.

This industry must be developed in order to develop our economy.

Rezaul Haque Mostafa
Chowdhury
Dept. of Microbiology
University of Chittagong

Russia and USA today

To the great surprise and disappointment of the USA and European powers, the former USSR (now Russia) developed atom bomb in 1949 within four years of the USA dropping two atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, killing and maiming millions of Japanese.

Germany started World War I as well as World War II and carried out annihilation, holocaust, and destructions all over the world. Why did not the USA drop atom bomb on Berlin, the GHQ of the German hordes, but instead dropped two atom bombs on a less dangerous and weak Japan?

Immediately after World War II, the USA and the USSR, who fought shoulder to shoulder against the German forces, stood apart for their respective gains, socio-economic and political ideology and military strategy.

The USA and some of its allies in Europe did not like the economic and scientific prosperity, rise in military power and the influence of the USSR in international affairs.

The USA and its allies in Europe started conspiring and creating division, disunity and mistrust

amongst the Soviet leaders.

After the demise of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in 1953, forceful retirement of Nikita Krushchev in 1964, followed by the power struggle between Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, the USSR plunged into darkness and disintegrated in 1990.

The great USSR was fragmented and sub-divided, Warsaw Pact was dismantled, Yugoslavia was cut into pieces and the former USSR, now Russia, lost its credibility as world superpower.

Russia (former USSR) and the USA have never waged war against one another but they have confronted disputed, criticised and condemned each other on many issues. They are good chess players in international political affairs.

In the midst of Washington-Moscow charges and counter charges, we are afraid if long outstanding and explosive issues like US backed Israeli occupation of Palestine, US occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, US "war" on terrorism, US-Iran tension, will further strain the relations between the two countries.

OH Kabir
Hare Street
Wari, Dhaka

Poor cricket

Bangladesh got their last chance and utilised it nicely to get back some confidence ahead of the three-match one-day international series against Australia when they met Northern Territory Chief Minister's XI in a one-day match, which they won convincingly by a huge margin of 120 runs. Thanks to Mehrah Junior's unbeaten 132, Tamim's 52 and Ashraful's 80.

However disappointment and Tigers seem to be knotted together and the poor performance could be seen again when the Tigers lost the 4 match practice series against the kids of Australian Institute of Sports (AIS) as they lost three games and won only one. This time bowling of the Tigers had no answers against the Academy boys as they were taken apart by the AIS kids all around the ground and the batting also gradually lost its way.

Before the trip started in a write up dated 27.07.08 just a month back, I mentioned that the Bangladesh cricketers fail to concentrate on the game when the tour is three weeks old and this time it has been only two weeks of practice matches and it looks like this tour

will also end in a similar fashion as far as the players' determination and concentration is concerned.

There is no point in repeating the failures again and again. However, I think that Bangladesh cricket pundits should sit down and discuss regarding the future of the high profile coach Siddons. Bangladesh failed to deliver as a team in ODIs after Siddons took over from the legendary Dav Whatmore. Siddons has no excuse as he took over the assignment after seeing Bangladesh perform at the highest level for four years under Dav Whatmore. It was anticipated that Siddons would be able to bring more discipline and confidence to the team.

As said before, we all know the results of the three-match ODI series against the Australians. But we have to see how the team and the individual players perform under the supervision of Siddons (who has been training the Tigers for a period of almost 8 months) remains.

Sohel Ahmed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

America's dwindling firepower

With the United States bogged down in two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and facing terrorist threats around the world and a hostile Iran, it can no longer fight multiple wars. Despite its massive nuclear arsenal, the United States lacks manpower and political will to fight such many-sided wars. The Soviet Union was a formidable superpower with far larger number of nuclear warheads than the United States and yet it could not continue the war in Afghanistan and eventually collapsed when it could not sustain the burden of war.

The United States is now facing an economic downturn in the aftermath of the mortgage crisis and a budget deficit of epic proportions. It is also facing a massive trade deficit vis a vis China. By the end of July 2007, China exported a staggering \$321 billion worth of goods to the United States while America exported a paltry \$65 billion worth of goods to China, leaving a massive \$256 billion trade surplus in China's favour. In fact, China is now bankrolling the U.S. budget deficits. As former Vice President Al Gore said during the Democratic Convention at Denver: "We need to borrow from China in order to buy oil

from Saudi Arabia." America will have to borrow even more heavily from China if it wants to fight another war with Russia.

Russian leader Vladimir Putin understands America's predicaments. While the United States is facing a crushing foreign debt, Russia is enjoying massive foreign exchange earnings due to soaring oil and gas prices. Compared to a bankrupt America, Russia's treasury is now overflowing and Russia is now in a far better position to indulge in foreign military adventures. While Georgian President Sakashvili invaded the breakaway Ossetia, misguidedly hoping that the United States will protect him, Russian invasion of Georgia must have shattered all his illusions. He must now realise that the United States is facing an economic meltdown at home and a looming military debacle in Iraq and is no longer in a position to protect its allies in distant corners of the world.

Sensing America's weakness, Russia is now playing a game. It has signed an agreement to pull out its troops from Georgia and yet Russian troops continue to occupy Georgian territories. Moreover, Russia has recognised the breakaway

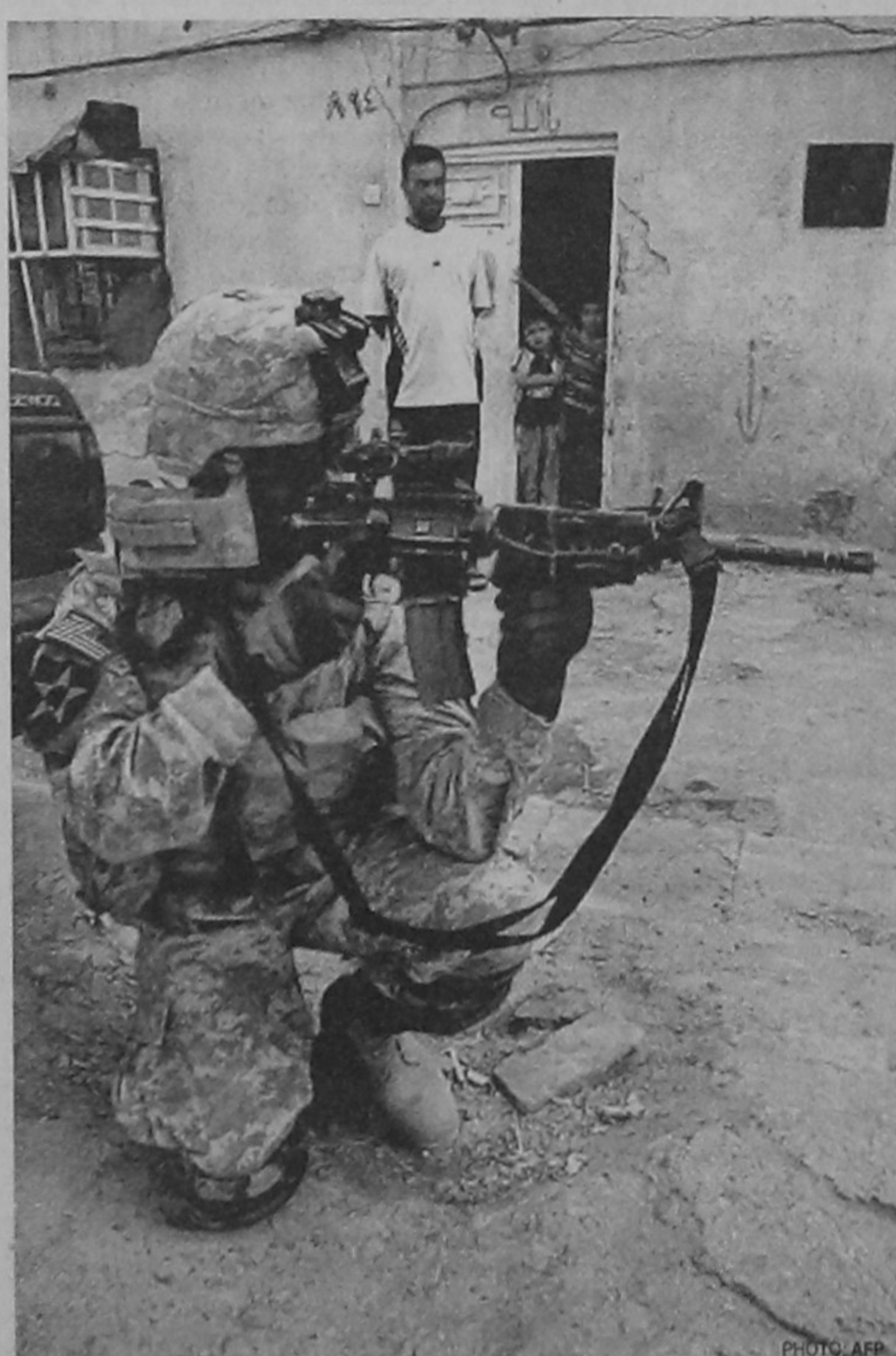


PHOTO: AFP

provinces of Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia as independent states, dashing Georgian hopes to bring the two breakaway regions to Georgian control. The United States cannot do anything to change the situation. A war with Russia on Georgia is unthinkable as it will only add to America's hardships and no Americans, including neo-conservatives, are willing to make any sacrifice for Georgia. Most Americans are now tired of wars which are costing too much American dollars and too many American lives. It is more likely that the United States is moving toward a creeping isolationism as it did during the period between two World Wars.

When the United States withdrew from the European affairs after the First World War, it left behind a military and strategic vacuum which the declining Britain and France could not fill. As a result, rogue states like Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy rose to fill the vacuum. The rest belongs to history. Similarly, the declining economic and military powers of the United States may be prompting Russia to flex its new-found economic and military clouts. West European nations like Germany and

France are becoming increasingly dependent on Russia for their energy supplies and cannot stand up against a resurgent Russia. East European nations like Ukraine and Poland may be fooling themselves by hoping that America will come to their assistance if threatened by Russia. But they must realise that the United States no longer has the political, economic and military clout or even the political will to help them in any meaningful way.

Even if more hawkish Senator John McCain is elected as president of the United States, he will find that America is ill-prepared to meet its multiple international obligations. He will find that most Americans are more afraid of losing their homes to banks than losing Georgia to Russians. The same applies to Senator Barack Obama who is calling for a change in the direction in which America is going. Most obvious change will be to reconcile America's diminishing role in the global affairs with China and Russia's growing role. Our only hope is that both China and Russia will not follow in the footsteps of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. **Mahmood Elahi**
Ottawa, Canada

Back to square one?

Our politics is suffering from a sort of Sidr effect, thanks to our past political culture, based on utter indiscipline, external and internal. Today the political leadership is without a sense of direction. The entrenched effect has to be erased. Inside the parties (especially the two major ones), there are chaos and disintegration and terrible splits. It is too late for the released top leaders to create seamless internal bonds. The effects of the fallout would linger for a long time. The voters feel unsure of the near future, not to speak of the long-term view.

During the current phase of political transformation, we have to unlearn more than we have to learn. Unlearning is a tough trial, personally, individually, and collectively. It involves change of mentality, approach and philosophy. If the approach be correct, then the details would fit in through fine-tuning. The core has to be right. It needs extraordinary leadership qualities. The running leadership culture is based on charisma and dynasty rules. It means that the leaders depend on the followers, and not the other way round. Sycophancy can never improve a society; and nepotism is a hidden virus.

The definitions of 'suffering' and 'sacrifice' look good on paper, but practicing it in daily life is tough. There are many examples from the lives of great leaders in human civilization through the ages. As toddlers, we have fallen many times, but refuse to learn or unlearn. It is sad (and inspiring) to read the history of old golden Bengal. In contrast, look at the plight of the Bengalese today. The spirit of 1971 struggle has been fritted away. We have to start from zero again -- thanks to whom and what?

Fake followers are in bereavement of headless parties. This is the view of the majority of the oppressed and suppressed voters (80 million of them).

We are stuck up with one major obstacle: we get the leaders we deserve! **AMahasen, Dhaka**