Seasoned politicians gleaned that, and they were emboldened by it, as shown by Sheikh Hasina's periodic outbursts and Khaleda Zia's tirade (from the floor of a courthouse no less!) in June when she promised that the present regime would also get its comeuppance in the form of facing trials when an elected government assumes office next.

The sad part is that whether they have succeeded in pulling it off or not, Bangladesh was crying out for the shock to the system that the military-backed caretaker government provided at the time. The alternative was a farce, a more enduring eyewash, an acceptance of perpetual subjection at the altar of a failed yet persistent democracy. The disappointment lies in how the shock has been administered.

Corruption can be fought in many ways, and the route chosen in our case was exemplary punishment en masse from the top-down. Whether that was the right choice or not is another matter altogether, but once the choice is made, you at least expect it to be carried out with due diligence to its logical conclusion. In dealing with a problem so deep, there is no room for half-measures.

And so as hundreds of perpetrators reaching into the deepest corridors of power were rounded up, we supported the process. A spate of sentences was handed out, and we nodded in approval. Now, most of them are free. Where does that leave us? Where does that leave anyone who sought, who hoped for, who believed in change?

If the army in conjunction with some of the most respected individuals in our society is too weak a force, who else is left to turn to? Independently, we have seen eminent personalities like Dr. Yunus get flustered by even the shallowest waters of our political terrain and back off. Who is left, then, for us to look up to?

But between the talking heads and the smooth customers and the overtly nostalgic, and above the naysayers and the idealists, I see a people who recognise the sheer pointlessness of it all, the pettiness really, of reducing your country to a prize up for grabs.



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I see a people more assertive of its relevance, more secure in its own skin, more receptive to new ideas, more willing to take an initiative, more confident in its stance, more springy in its step.

I see a people on the verge of attaining the Gramscian notion of culture, that it is "organisation, discipline of one's own inner self, a coming to terms with one's own personality; it is the attainment of a higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one's own historical value, one's own function in life, and one's own rights and obligations in life."

They are the young of this nation, and praise be to Neptune, there's no dearth of them. I refuse to impose an age-bracket on them. They are whoever has seen through the myth of government in our country, and decided to grab their futures by the hair themselves, because they can.

They are the ants creeping all over the old order's newspapers, board-rooms, courtrooms, billboards, television screens, policy institutions. They have their grievances, yet they are deferential towards their forefathers' contribution in building this nation to whatever extent they have. So they are quite ready to wait for the baton to be passed, as opposed to grabbing it irreverently.

In the meantime, almost without knowing it, merely by chasing their own dreams, they are laying the foundations for their future hegemony. Their individual visions in unison augur a Bangladesh breaking free of the pettiness that has dogged its development for so long. And there will lie the challenge, in striking that delicate balance between individual ambition and collective progress.

One wonders how they will take to their new shoes. It cannot be too long now. Already, I can hear the pessimists bristle, as they mutter their indignation at such hubris. But even if they had seen it with their own eyes, it is in their code of conduct to write off the ones I'm putting my faith in next. The very last remnants of it.

Some, like Uncle Nazmul got unlucky. But all in all, as a generation, they are now safe. Nothing that cannot be gotten over, when the stakes are so high as control of a nation.

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