New Meanings for Old Words

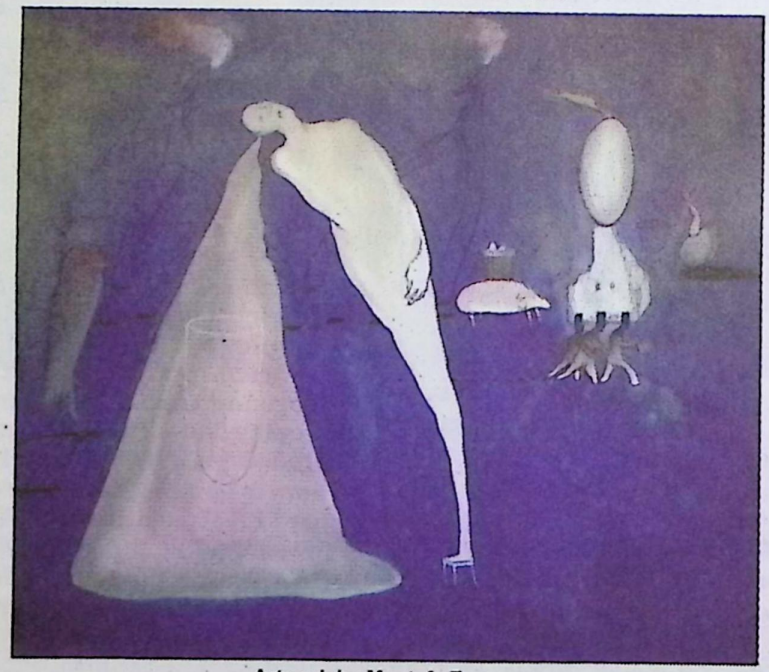
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Many of you may feel smug about being in total synch with the latest trends in fashion or the latest versions of the snazziest electronic gadget. You may also be in tune with the latest jargon that's in circulation, depending on what your identity is. If you are a politician its 'a sea change of development' or 'digital Bangladesh' that you will use during every speech, even if it's a tree-planting ceremony. If you are an NGO official or a consultant writing reports for one, you need to churn out sentences like "capacity building of core beneficiary groups that engage in participatory behaviour". If you are a teenager or a so-called 'youth' you better be using lingo like '*abarjigs*' ('*abar jigay*' loosely translated as 'and your point is?'), '*part mare*' (being a bit of a snob) and of course the most used and multi-functional word in every young person's vocabulary - '*joss*' (an equivalent of the American '*Arright!*' or the British 'Wicked Cool'.

Lately however, a new set of words and expressions have crept into official and informal vocabulary that we may reflect on, to see where our wonderful civilisation is headed.

Take the words 'student politics'. It no longer means making simple demands to the university authorities about improving the disgusting cafeteria food or for ceiling fans in the dorm rooms or for loftier causes -to end racial discrimination, economic disparity or autocratic rule. Now, it means getting out your best machete or hockey stick, a little revolver if you are one of the high ups, and beating the brains out of some rival political gang member fondly called your 'co-cadre' who has the temerity to overstay in the hall room (designated for the student cadres of x, y, or z party) *even* after your mother party has won! It is after all the ruling student cadres who should be responsible for collecting the fruits of all development work of the university, not to mention the 'cadre fees' for admission.

Student politics also means creating a reign of terror on campus so that ordinary non-aligned students can develop their athletic skills, to make them run like gazelles chased by starving hyenas when a brawl between rival groups break out. They also have to know how to pack their belongings in the shortest possible time, say an hour or two, when the university closes sine die after the authorities have thrown up their hands in the air to show that they *just give up*. There is a rumour in town that a shop in Nilkhet is selling special 'Quick Escape Gear' complete with a change of clothes according to gender, nightwear (*lungi-genji* for males and kaftan for females), a torch (for obvious load shedding no matter where they go), some life-saving food (chips, soda and *chanachur*), a box of Orsaline (for obvious reasons) and a first aid kit for possible bruises and cuts from being caught in the middle of cadre fighting matches.



Artwork by Mustafa Zaman

Entrepreneurs moreover, are thinking of setting up cheap shelters for 'displaced students of campus violence' where rooms will be as ventilation-free and cramped as the dorm rooms they have vacated and food will be as low-grade as the uni canteens.

Then we come to the much used term 'crossfire' which means 'getting rid of the scumbag criminal (*he looks a mess anyway, after certain modes of 'persuasion'*) plus this is the best crime-fighting tool since it was developed while executing a method called 'Operation Clean Liver'. Crossfire is also a form of spring-cleaning for the law enforcement agencies as it helps to relieve somewhat, the overcrowding in the jails.

This brings us to the 'mysterious' deaths of BDR personnel in custody that we read about in the papers frequently. Perhaps the public is not aware of the fact that two of the selection criteria during appointment of BDR personnel are that the candidate must be prone to heart disease or at least have suicidal tendencies.

As for the outside world the list of these new age words are endless. We've all heard about 'collateral damage' which means 'expendable humans, preferably *Moslem*', 'Homeland Security' which means 'traumatising Americans and foreigners of Muslim origin' and 'You are with us or against us' which means 'be our stooges or get your heads blown off' and of course that wonderful euphemism 'Friendly Fire' which means 'we were so paranoid and delusional, we actually knocked off our own guys. *Oopsy daisy.*