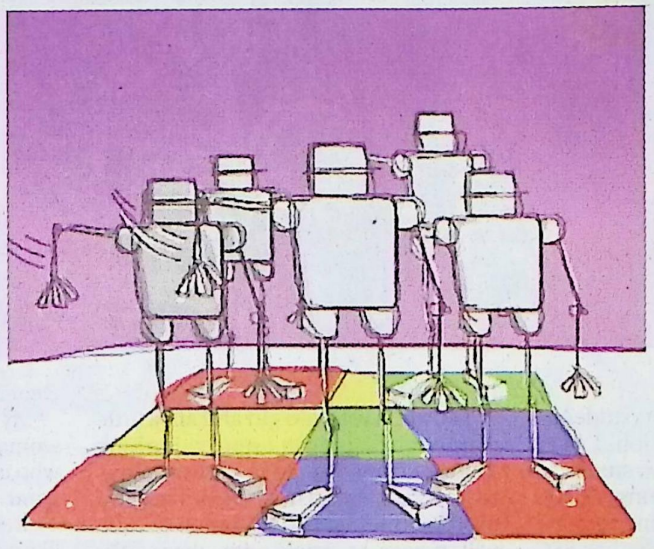


"We are the Robots"

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If any of you were teenagers during the eighties you may remember a catchy song called *We are the Robots*. The voice was digitally manipulated to sound robot-like and the music complimented it with funky, mechanical sounds that drove teens into robotic disco moves. The lyrics included lines like "We are the robots.../We're functioning automatic, /And we are dancing mechanic/We are programmed just to do/Anything you want us to...

The reason why this rather obscure number is being mentioned is because these days that's what most of us seem to have become: robotic, leading mechanical lives, uttering the same inanities over and over again, smiling at people we want to punch in the face -dancing to the same monotonous tune.

Take the tagline of many governments at their pathetic attempts to appear 'green'. "Cut one tree but plant two saplings' or something like that. What could be more stupid than cutting a tree that has been surviving human apathy for the last fifty years? Do these people know how *long* it takes a tree to grow into maturity? The idea of say, slaughtering a beautiful Krishnachura that bears those flaming orange and red flowers, providing shade and much needed beauty to our ugly concrete jungle of a city, is appalling to the tree lover. But to the official who has ordered the murder and his minions who have carried it out, it means hard cash, perhaps money to buy a set of ugly wooden furniture! The 'official' reason of course is that the tree is somehow obstructing the road that needs to be expanded, or it's branches are interfering with the electric cable. Or simply, that it is too much trouble to sweep those fiery orange petals from the street since how can streets be strewn with petals and leaves right? Concrete after all, must be kept clean from nature.

If you pass by the Airport Road that goes to Uttara you will notice the thinning of the once thick greenery that lined the road on both sides - an illusion that gave visitor that this was what the entire city looked like. Now you can see through them and witness the concrete eyesores that have been built after the massacre.

Trees at Surwardy Udyan, another rare, green spot, were about to be slaughtered to make way for constructing flats for the NAM conference. Protests and human chains prevented that but later when no one was looking some trees were given the axe.

In many neighbourhood parks trees have been sacrificed to make walkways for the ladies and gentlemen who need to keep their diabetes and cholesterol in check. Did anyone protest when the years-old *badam* tree was cut along with many others? Did anyone suggest that the walkways could be built around the trees? Of course not. *We are the robots.*

Like many other 'World Days' World Environment Day has been observed recently. It cannot be a celebration rather a lamentation of what we have destroyed with our own hands and what we have lost forever.

The Daily Star has launched a campaign to expose the deplorable destruction of our rivers and water bodies through pollution and encroachment. The Star Magazine has also been part of this endeavour devoting quite a few cover stories and features to this issue.

It is a horrible feeling when we realise how our own follies have destroyed so much. It is mortifying when we understand that we had it all but let it all slip away. We had rivers that looked like seas and trees that made us one of the greenest nations on the planet.

Self-criticism is always a harsh pill to swallow but a much needed medicine if we want to get well. We can never go back to that rich, healthy past we so hanker for. But we can pay heed to our conscience and stop further self-destruction. When we refrain from cutting a tree, when we stop throwing our domestic and industrial garbage into the rivers and stop the noxious fumes into the air through our vehicles and factories, that's when we will begin to heal from our self-inflicted wounds. That's when we can stop that awful refrain in our heads that says *We are the robots.*