

# 'Basket Case' no more



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina receiving the UN award.

"basket case" at its birth in 1971, and Bangladesh appeared to work hard to live up to the appellation. For the outside world, much of the country's history can be summed up as a blur of political protests and natural disasters punctuated by outbursts of *jihadi* violence and the occasional military coup.

No longer. At a reception Friday for world leaders attending the United Nations General Assembly in New York, President Barack Obama congratulated Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed for receiving a prestigious U.N. award earlier in the week. Bangladesh was one of six countries in Asia and Africa feted for its progress toward achieving its Millennium Development Goals, a set of targets that seek to eradicate extreme poverty and boost health, education and the status of women worldwide by 2015.

Bangladesh has much to be proud of. Its economy has grown at nearly 6% a year over the past three years. The country exported \$12.3 billion worth of garments last year, making it fourth in the world behind China, the EU and Turkey. Against the odds, Bangladesh has curbed population growth. Today the average Bangladeshi woman bears fewer than three children in her lifetime, down from more than six in the 1970s.

The country's leading NGOs -- most famously the microcredit pioneer Grameen Bank -- have earned a global reputation. Relations with India are on a high. In August, Indian Finance Minister

Pranab Mukherjee signed off on a \$1 billion soft loan for Bangladeshi infrastructure development, the largest such loan in India's history.

Sheikh Hasina, prime minister of Bangladesh, addresses a summit on the Millennium Development Goals at United Nations headquarters in New York.

Perhaps most strikingly, Bangladesh -- the world's third most populous Muslim-majority country after Indonesia and Pakistan -- has shown a willingness to confront both terrorism and the radical Islamic ideology that underpins it. Since taking office in 2009, the Awami League-led government has arrested local members of the Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, the al Qaeda affiliate Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami-Bangladesh, and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, a domestic outfit responsible for a wave of bombings in 2005.

In July, the Supreme Court struck down a 31-year-old constitutional amendment and restored Bangladesh to its founding status as a secular republic. The government has banned the writings of the radical Islamic ideologue Abul Ala Maududi (1903-79), founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, the subcontinent's most influential Islamist organisation.

Maududi regarded warfare for the faith as an exalted form of piety and encouraged the subjugation of women and non-Muslims. A long-awaited war crimes tribunal will try senior Jamaat-e-Islami figures implicated in mass murder during

Bangladesh's bloody secession from Pakistan.

Of course, it will take more than a burst of entrepreneurial energy and political purpose before Bangladesh turns the corner for good. The long-running feud between Prime Minister Wazed and her main rival, Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader Khaleda Zia, makes that of the Hatfields and McCoy's look benign by comparison. The war of ideas against the country's plethora of Islamist groups requires the kind of sustained pressure that Dhaka has been unable to apply in the past. And garment exports notwithstanding, the economy remains shallow.

Despite these caveats, Bangladesh ought to be held up as a role model, especially for the subcontinent's other Muslim-majority state. Arguably no two countries in the region share as much in common as Pakistan and Bangladesh, two wings of the same country between 1947 and 1971. With 171 million people and 164 million people, respectively, they are the world's sixth and seventh most populous countries. Both have alternated between civilian and military rule. In terms of culture, both layer Islam over an older Indic base.

Yet when it comes to government policies and national identity, the two countries diverge sharply. As a percentage of gross domestic product, Islamabad spends more on its soldiers than on its school teachers; Dhaka does the opposite. In foreign policy, Pakistan seeks to subdue Afghanistan and wrest control of

Indian Kashmir. Bangladesh, especially under the current dispensation, prefers cooperation to confrontation with its neighbours.

Perhaps most importantly, Bangladesh appears comfortable in its own skin: politically secular, religiously Muslim and culturally Bengali. Bangladeshis celebrate the poetry, film and literature of Hindus and Muslims equally. With Pakistan it's more complicated. The man on the street displays the same cultural openness as his Bangladeshi counterpart, but Pakistan also houses a vast religious and military establishment that seeks to hold the country together by using triple-distilled Islam and hatred toward India as glue.

In a way, their best known national heroes sum up the two country's personalities. For Bangladesh, it's Grameen Bank's Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, synonymous with small loans to village women. For Pakistan: Abdul Qadeer Khan, the rogue nuclear scientist who peddled contraband technology to Libya, Iran and North Korea.

Nearly 40 years ago, only the most reckless optimist would have bet on flood-prone, war-ravaged Bangladesh over relatively stable and prosperous Pakistan. But with a higher growth rate, a lower birth rate, and a more internationally competitive economy, yesterday's basket case may have the last laugh.

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bumpers and apparently teetering on the brink of chaos, it wasn't Pakistan that came to mind. That distinction belonged to Bangladesh.

Henry Kissinger famously dubbed it a

NOT long ago, when you thought of a South Asian country ravaged by floods, governed by

# Choosing a mayoral candidate for a mega city

It is important for the citizens to identify a suitable leader to run the city. In order to transform Dhaka into a livable city, a vibrant metropolis, Dhaka deserves a mayor who is modern, urbane, educated, future-oriented and dynamic.

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN and HABIBUL HAQUE KHONDKER

A student of Adamjee Cantonment College was crushed under the wheels of a bus in the city's busy Farmgate intersection yesterday afternoon [...] Mirpur Road blocked over student's death. 25 hurt in clashes. "Such news items along with discussions of endless woes due to nightmarish traffic jams have become commonplace in the newspapers and other media. They are symptoms of deeper problems of run-away urbanisation of the city of Dhaka.

Such problems were, however, not unanticipated. Commenting on Dhaka, Rehman Sobhan, an eminent scholar and chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue in Dhaka, once remarked: "The danger is degeneration [...] The prospect of anarchy in a population of 20 million is frightening beyond imagination."

Dhaka has been identified as the fastest growing mega city of the world. Although the population has not yet reached 20 million it is a matter of time before we get there. The current popula-

tion is estimated at 15 million, which makes Dhaka one of the top 11 mega cities of the world. Between 1990 and 2005, the population of this city swelled from 6 million to 12 million.

Dhaka has also been a mega city of the poor with 30% of the population living in poverty in the squalors of slums, which a well-known urban geographer described as "slumisation" rather than urbanisation. Concentration of such a large number of poor, unemployed or semi-employed, alienated youth poses a serious security threat to the well-to-do segments of the city.

While the problems are staggering, the efforts to deal with those are inadequate. The real problem lies in the governance of the city. Currently, Dhaka is managed in part by the various ministries of the central government as well as the mayor's office, with complicated problems of coordination and division of authorities between the two tiers of government. According to experts, the centralised government cannot manage a megacity like Dhaka.

While, ideally, the city should be man-

aged by the mayor, he does not have the authority. The mayor and the elected representatives of the people should have the power to make decisions as well as access to resources. Like any local government, the managers of city under the leadership of the mayor should be accountable to the people as well as to the central government. Delivery of services has to be highly professional, for which private corporations seem to be better equipped than fossilised bureaucracy.

It is time the concerned citizens speak up. A citizens' forum needs to be formed to persuade the relevant authorities to make amendments to the structures of city governance. In this regard, it is also important for the citizens to identify a suitable leader to run the city. In order to transform Dhaka into a modern and livable city, a vibrant metropolis, Dhaka deserves a mayor who is modern, urbane, educated, future-oriented and dynamic.

Although, as per rules, election for mayor is a non-party affair and the candidates do not carry the official identity of any political party nor any party symbol, the reality of Bangladesh politics makes it a party-based election just like parliamentary election. Given this reality, it would be nearly impossible for anyone, no matter how charismatic the person is, to be a serious candidate without the blessings of one of the two major political parties.

There is a lot of speculation in the news media about the probable mayoral candidates from both the rival political camps. The question is, who is the most qualified

and worthy of being elected? Dhaka in one sense is a cosmopolitan city with three distinct components -- old Dhaka, central Dhaka and the Dhaka of the new elites that grew rapidly after independence. A mayor must represent each of these components and must work as a bridge between them in terms of both needs and identity.

The best mayor Dhaka could have will be a can-do, straight-talking person who is not mired in rancid bouillabaisse of municipal affairs, looks like a successful person and is one, has the flair and energy of comparative youth, and will shake things up in the municipal affairs. It is time the city had a mayor with some style and grace. We propose Mr. Saber Hossain Chowdhury, who meets all the qualifications mentioned above and should be persuaded to run for this position.

For a long period of time our preferred candidate has been an important member of the principal component of the current ruling coalition. It is expected that his party's high command will give the nod to this candidate in view of the lessons learnt from the results of the recently held Chittagong City Corporation election.

It is not only the party but also the person who matters, especially in a local election. The prime minister, who is also the president of the Awami League, was both wise and savvy in congratulating the newly elected mayor of Chittagong soon after his election. She might show the same wisdom now in selecting a winnable candidate for Dhaka.



Unreserved loyalty of the candidate to the party or to its supreme leader does count to the diehard loyalists of the party, but one needs to carry the support of a wider spectrum of city dwellers in an election, overcoming the natural anti-incumbency sentiment, to be elected to preside over the city hall.

In fact, in addition to personal excellence, anti-incumbency propensity helped late Mohammed Hanif win the city hall in 1994, the only duly elected mayor of the city. And we believe our preferred candidate possesses the class and charisma to carry the support of the

silent majority who are not loyal to either of the political camps.

Whether it is Saber Hossain Chowdhury or not, this city will have to adopt the habit of electing a mayor of distinction and panache. Is there anyone else in the political horizon from either party who can outdo his competence and flamboyance to preside over the city hall?

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# Bullying at workplace

Bullying is a serious offence at the workplace, and a sadly ignored agenda in most of the organisations in Bangladesh. Those who are bullied suffer in silence. The impact of bullying on the worker ranges from mild to severe depression, loss of confidence and finally resignation.

FARIA NAZ HOSSAIN

YOU have just finished working on a project proposal for the office that you gave your heart and soul to during a weekend, not to mention the bouts of acidity attacks you had due to 10 cups of coffee to keep you awake, added with icy glares from your better half, only to come to work on Sunday and receive no acknowledgement for your hard work and efforts on the paper from your supervisor. Your line manager passes the (your) proposal to his superiors, very conveniently forgetting to mention your hard work in giving it a shape.

You sigh and stare at your desktop. This scene has become a common thing and you have faced this on a regular basis for the past several months; each time you gave additional effort into your work, you were silently hoping you would hear "great work" by your line manager. Sadly it never happened. You have almost given up and think of quitting your job.

But wait a minute, before you start doubting your competence or think of

resigning, rewind/refresh your memory, your previous managers were happy with your work and you know that from past appraisals and the accolades your regularly received, and that employee of the year award. So you are indeed a good performer, not an average but a good one, hmm ... you wonder what's the problem with this particular supervisor?

Is your manager constantly undermining your work and you can't remember the last time you heard a thank you from him? Is he/she not involving you in important meetings? Does the above scenario sound familiar to you?

If you have been deliberately undermined on a constant basis on your work by your line manager without citing specific reasons, never thanked for working extra hours, not given credit for the papers you work on, not received acknowledgment for your good pieces of work, faced constant criticism from your manager, and been intentionally ignored, you may be experiencing behaviour that is termed as "bullying at workplace."

Bullying may be characterised as

offensive, intimidating, malevolent, or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, belittle or injure the recipient. Bullying or harassment may be by an individual against an individual (perhaps by someone in a position of authority such as a manager or supervisor) or involve groups of people. It may be obvious or it may be insidious. Whatever form it takes, it is unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual.

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Examples of bullying/harassing behaviour include but are not limited to:

- Preventing subordinates from progressing by intentionally obstructing promotion or training opportunities;
- Blaming someone for problems caused by others;
- Exclusion or victimisation;
- Always given too much to do, so that one regularly fails in one's work;
- Regularly threats of sacking;
- Unfair passing over for promotion;
- Spreading nasty rumours;
- Insulting someone by word or behaviour (particularly on the grounds of age, race, sex, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief);
- Demeaning someone;
- Unfair treatment;



- Misuse of supervision or of power or position;
- Sexual advances;
- Deliberately undermining a competent worker by overloading and constant criticism.

Bullying can involve arguments and rudeness, but it can also be more subtle. Excluding and ignoring people and their contribution, unacceptable criticism, and overloading people with work are other forms of covert bullying.

Bullying can make working life miserable. You lose all faith in yourself, you can feel ill and depressed, and find it hard to motivate yourself to work. This has an

effect on your personal life; many divorces are results of depression at work.

Stress, loss of self-confidence and self-esteem caused by harassment or bullying can lead to job insecurity, illness, and absence from work, and even resignation.

Bullying isn't always caused by people's tribal instincts, or someone picking on the weak. Sometimes a person's strengths in the workplace can make the bullies feel threatened, and that triggers their insecurity and they bully to feel secured.

Talk to someone who you can trust at senior level in the organisation (many

companies have a whistleblow policy) or to the trade union. The last resort is the employee grievance procedure, take advantage of that. If you find it difficult to cope, talk to your manager or supervisor. If your manager or supervisor is the bully talk to higher authorities.

If you can, talk to the persons in question, who may not realise how their behaviour has been affecting you. Work out what to say beforehand. Describe what has been happening and why you object to it. Stay calm and be polite. Often, bullies retreat from people who stand up to them.

Find yourself an ally. Don't be ashamed to tell people what's going on. Bullying is a serious offence and in many companies in the West there is a zero tolerance for bullying -- and it is a punishable act.

Before you lodge a formal complaint or speak to your supervisors take preparation. Write down details of every incident of bullying and harassment and keep copies of any relevant documents as evidence.

One thing to constantly remind yourself is that most often those who bully want to crush your confidence. You need to understand and recognise that criticism or personal remarks are not connected to one's competence or abilities. They reflect the bully's own weaknesses, and are meant to intimidate and control you.

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