

CROSS TALK

A positive signal to build up on *It should be reciprocated*

BANGLADESH Nationalist Party (BNP) has expressed its willingness to join the 12th session of the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) provided the ruling Awami League (AL) ensures congenial atmosphere in parliament.

Its positive intent is welcome in the backdrop of its continual boycott of parliament.

We would again reiterate our stand that all issues of national interest must be discussed in parliament. Questioning the wisdom of the opposition's long-drawn absence from the JS, we did also repeatedly remind its lawmakers that parliament is the house of the people, and not of the government. By being elected, they are obliged to represent their constituents in particular and the people in general as the elected opposition party.

We want to ask the question what the BNP has gained by keeping away from the JS for a better part of the last three years.

Conversely, what has the ruling party gained by not accepting a single proposed bill or suggestion from the opposition? What has it gained by its harsh language and aggressive stance against the opposition?

Altogether, has the nation benefited from the continued parliamentary impasse? Can it even get the benefits of a parliament if the present impasse continues?

For the BNP's part, what started out as one-point seat allotment issue has escalated into a nine-point demand they tagged as their condition to join the parliament. It is time they rethought their position in greater national interest.

At the same time, the Awami League has to demonstrate necessary tolerance and restraint and refrain from making any provocative remarks against the opposition lawmakers and thereby provide them with fresh excuse to slink into the old culture of boycotting parliament.

As the majority party in the House, the Awami League has the greater responsibility to engage the opposition in parliament.

Both the ruling party and the opposition should use this new opening to break the ongoing impasse and render the JS functional.

JSC results cause for satisfaction

Rural areas should receive priority attention

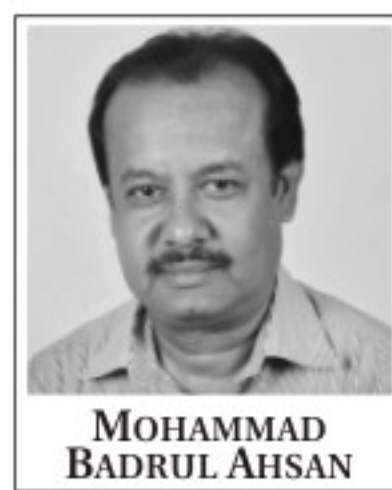
THE remarkable showing by students in this year's Junior Scholarship Certificate examinations is cheery news. The pass rate has risen by 11 per cent while number of GPA-5 holders has increased significantly over that of the last year. It is more heartening to know that students in general have fared better in English and Mathematics, which well accounts for their higher pass rate. A similar trend is also observed in the Junior Dakhil Certificate examination. A word of praise, in this connection, is due to the education minister whose energetic steps in distributing free textbooks has helped spur this positive change.

In spite of the success story, the widening gap in dropout and pass rate between rural and urban areas is cause for worry. The list of 20 best performing schools in each education board, prepared by the education ministry, is invariably topped by those situated either in metropolitan cities or district towns. It underlines the asymmetrical teaching quality between urban and rural areas. Rural students are not only deprived of the fundamental institutional facilities that urban students are provided with, a good number of them are also compelled to drop out because of poverty. While we applaud the government steps to help growth in education sector, we believe there is a lot more that needs to be done in order to bridge educational disparities between urban and rural areas. The government would do well to step up its stipend programmes to encourage talent in rural schools.

Although female students have fared better in making the highest grade, they have lagged slightly behind in pass rate. As a measure of interest in education, we find larger number of girls appearing at the exams than boys.

One final point, female education should be further prioritized so that girls' dropout rate falls and pass rate

The same old New Year



MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN

THE Great Timekeeper is licking His finger, ready to turn the page again. Tomorrow, at the strike of midnight, the book of eternity will

open to page 2012. There will be merriment all over the world as men and women are going to drink and dance through the night. Many of them will wake up with hangover and fatigue next day, too late for the new sun that will either have reached the mid-sky or dipped in the west by then.

Even though time is a divine thing, the New Year is manmade. Mankind has used the sun, moon, planets and stars to measure the passage of time throughout its existence. Ice-age hunters in Europe over 20,000 years ago scratched lines and gouged holes in sticks and bones, possibly counting the days between phases of the moon. Five thousand years ago, Sumerians in the Tigris-Euphrates valley in today's Iraq had a calendar that divided the year into 30-day months, divided the day into 12 periods, each corresponding to 2 of our hours, and further divided these periods into 30 parts, each corresponding to 4 of our minutes.

Time in itself is a continuous flow but a year is an arbitrary line we draw every 365 days. The New Year's Day drops frames in the footage of eternity

so we can indulge in the illusion of tracking its length. It's like the stereotype of a prisoner who scratches tally marks on cell walls to count time. Even better, it's like the milestones at regular intervals that measure the distance on a road. If one would like to look for a beginning on the New Year's Day, I suppose, another could look for an end as well.

Around the year 1330, a poet and Buddhist monk named Kenko wrote: "The most precious thing in life is its

How many of us are looking forward to welcome 2012 and how many of us are waiting to see 2011 leave? Where is our mind going to be at that particular moment? Is it going to be in the departure lounge of a bygone year? Or, is it going to be in the arrival lounge of a whole new year?

uncertainty." Come to think of it, how much of that uncertainty changes from year to year if not more of the same? Who can deny the monotony of living from three meals a day to three meals a day or from the lack of it to the lack of it? Who can deny the same bodily functions that are repeated over and over again? Who can ever deny the ennui of existence that comes in the daily dollops of mechanical motions we perform between coming out of bed in the morning and going back to

it at night?

People who commit suicide are those who succumb to this gloom of dailiness. For them next day is just the same as the previous day; yesterday, today and tomorrow being an endless repetition of the same organised emptiness. The coming year looks just as vacant as the old year that passed away.

True, only a few people kill themselves while most people like to live. One can think of life as a huge multiplex theater where different screens

show different films. Since all the films aren't equally absorbing, some viewers quit in the middle of the movie while others stay through the end credits. And there are movie buffs so engrossed that they don't mind sitting through repeated screenings.

It was American industry author Bill Vaughn who described the New Year's Day as a time when an optimist stays up until midnight to see the new year in and a pessimist stays up to make sure the old year leaves. How many of

us are looking forward to welcome 2012 and how many of us are waiting to see 2011 leave? What are we going to celebrate at the strike of midnight? Where is our mind going to be at that particular moment? Is it going to be in the departure lounge of a bygone year? Or, is it going to be in the arrival lounge of a whole new year?

The story goes that the late Russian ruler Joseph Stalin liked to proudly display his piles of fresh, clean underwear, which he boasted he changed everyday. Ordinary folks, who can hardly scrape three meals a day, cannot afford even that little change. Others will change from something to everything including car, home, business, country of domicile, and even spouse. On that range of affordability, the New Year's Day brings a fresh round of the foregone conclusion that life is as good as we live it.

The irony is that we look forward to a new beginning because we also look forward to an end. If the going is good, who should ever want any change? For the drinking, reveling people, the New Year's Eve will be an extended weekend, another day to get high and hilarious and stay out late. For the rest of humanity it's just an illusion. They badly need a new year because the old year like the years before has exhausted them.

The writer is Editor, First News and an opinion writer for The Daily Star.
Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Global consensus to rise and occupy

LAURENCE BRAHM

POLICE in many other American cities may have evacuated peaceful demonstrators of the Occupy movement. But that's done little to quell the unsettling discontent sweeping the globe.

Concerns of the Occupy movement in the US are linked with protests from afar. One of the most poignant moments during Occupy Wall Street (OWS) was when the Egyptian flag was hoisted over Wall Street. Unspoken irony and exuberance swept like a wave through crowds at Zuccotti Park. Protest leaders from Cairo's Tahrir Square had joined Occupy Wall Street.

Egyptian protestors explained to Occupy protesters how Washington spends \$1.3 billion each year supporting Egypt's military. The funds Mubarak used to repress human rights, and those Egyptian protestors themselves, could have been spent in the US to upgrade infrastructure and create jobs.

The Egyptians' words struck an anti-war nerve. Zuccotti Park had the nostalgia of 1969, but the issues run far deeper. A vast cross-section of America has merged, and Occupy Wall Street represents a microcosm of America.

Left or right, both sides have lost jobs. Protestors decry unemployment, rising inequality and home foreclosures, unprecedented since the Great Depression. Within a span of a decade, America's financial might was exhausted by unnecessary wars, fiscal stimulus wasted, and rewarding bailouts to bankers gone rogue. For Americans, the Wall Street-Washington coterie has become as much a symbol of incompetent government, politics of oligarchy and economic squandering as Mubarak and his military cronies are to the Egyptian people -- a point that hit home as the Egyptian flag unfurled in a crackling autumn wind over downtown Manhattan.

Protestors in Tahrir Square and Wall Street articulate equal frustrations. Both have joined hands to express outrage at an unjust order that's blatantly hypocritical. Declining economies, loss of jobs, poor infrastructure, lack of trust in government, unnecessary wars and manipulated media top their lists.

Protesters have responded by occupying public space, engaging in non-violent disobedience and forming transparent ad-hoc governing councils in open areas. They espouse issues, but do not promote personalities, an antithesis to the political arrangements they decry. They release their messages through unedited live news streams via the internet.

The peaceful revolution has gone global.

These protestors demand more than just a new swap of politicians. They call for reconstructing the global financial architecture. This requires new economic models to replace outdated ones, fundamental policy changes and a reassessment of underlying assumptions and values long taken for granted.

OWS are protesting against policies that endorse "greed" and call for a new consensus.

The "Washington Consensus" is

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neoliberal economic model that suggests unfettered markets will reach equilibrium, by promoting liberalisation of trade, privatisation and deregulation. It was first coined in 1989 by John Williamson an economist at the Institute for International Economics. For decades, it's been an unquestioned mantra, applied cookie-cutter globally by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the US Treasury. Under this mantra, capital markets trading debt-leveraged instruments became the source of wealth creation. Globalisation by multinational corporations during these same years outsourced productivity to gain global markets, pushing stock prices up, while turning America's once vibrant communities into ghost towns. Mass consumerism promotes a mono-cluster of brands, stripping them of character and identity.

Today there are calls for a new structural adjustment, not by economic

theorists, but by protesters alarmed by inequality. A new Global Consensus could be emerging.

Resistance to the Washington Consensus started 15 years ago. During the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, China refused unsolicited advice of the World Bank, the IMF and the US Treasury and merged planning and market to forge a mega-economy. Labelled the "Beijing Consensus" by Joshua Cooper Ramo of Kissinger Associates, it promotes subsidies and reforms in emerging economies in pursuit of innovation, multilateralism, distribution of opportunities and sustainability.

Activists across the developing world have come to the realisation that standard economic measures overlook key components of well-being and stability. Thus, new measures and programmes emerged from Asia -- the Himalayan Consensus, articulated by the father of microfinance Muhammad Yunus, and the "gross national happi-

African countries, adopted the African Consensus Declaration in Gambia on April as a fresh economic paradigm.

An OWS "working group" is preparing a blueprint for an alternative economic movement, proposing the exchange of commodities and services, creating localised sustainable businesses. With bank and venture-capital financing limited, there's a quest for creative financing solutions for small local businesses, essential for reviving communities.

Meanwhile, corporations are rethinking their role in order to survive: Are their goals just profits, shareholder values or management bonuses? How a corporation contributes to sustainability -- what it does for its communities, the environment or employees -- should that be measured, too? New corporate responsibility schemes are being hatched, green-technology and social-enterprise funds being launched. In the end, government must respond with trade policies and fiscal incentives that guide corporations toward new patterns of behaviour.

Governments must reexamine their responses, too. Stimulus to create rapid consumption does not solve economic hardship because too much consumption is one of the problems. We share a planet of diminishing resources. So consumer behaviour must change as well. Stimulus funding needs to be invested into communities, education, upgrading infrastructure and power grids that accommodate renewable energy -- all of which will create new jobs.

Meanwhile emerging global configurations like BRIC, G20 or G77, continue to shift the tectonic plates of global financial order. The economic rise of China, India and Brazil could create a new global financial order.

One thing is clear. Global values are changing. They're better understood and placed in a new context. We share a multiethnic world of rapidly diminishing resources. The values and assumptions underlying economic formulas, the functions of our financial architecture, must change, too.

Thanks to peaceful revolution, a new global consensus is emerging.

The writer is a Lawyer, Political Economist and Author. He has been with protestors at Occupy Wall Street.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

December 30

- 1066**
Granada massacre: A Muslim mob storms the royal palace in Granada, crucifies Jewish vizier Joseph ibn Naghrela and massacres most of the Jewish population of the city.
- 1922**
The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is formed.
- 1943**
Subhas Chandra Bose raises the flag of Indian independence at Port Blair.
- 1947 King Michael of Romania is forced to abdicate by the Soviet Union-backed Communist government of Romania.
- 1965**
Ferdinand Marcos becomes President of the Philippines.
- 1993**
Israel and the Vatican establish diplomatic relations.