

# Be power smart

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NO single rain drop can be held accountable for a flood but collectively they are. Little good things we do in everyday life make a significant difference collectively. Little change in our habit of electricity usage can make a significant difference regarding our power crisis when we work towards it as a nation.

This little change will not impact your everyday life and you will continue to enjoy your life the way we do now.

Let's start with the most ubiquitous mobile device -- the cell phone. What happens if you leave yours plugged in all night? According to measurements from Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, the average cell phone draws 3.68 watts of power from the outlet while charging and 2.24 watts when charged. Let's take the worst-case scenario and assume that you're over-juicing a charged battery for the entire night. Leave the average phone plugged in for eight unnecessary hours, and it'll use about 0.018 KW-hours of electricity.

Now do that math for 10 million cell phones. That is 1,80,000 units of energy we burn carelessly every day.

What about the other habits we have? Every time we walk by the refrigerator, we cannot help but open the door to have a cold glass of water or just to check whether some sweets have been saved for the guests or even check on some favourite evening snacks.

Home Energy magazine claims that opening these doors account for 7% of fridge energy use, assuming 42 door openings a day. The Institute of Food & Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida adds that poor open/close habits waste 50 to 120kWh a year. A 15 second opening and closing of that door could cause the compressor to run extra 25 seconds to compensate the temperature drop depending on the internal temperature setup and the ambient temperature.

With this habit we waste approximately 0.3KW-hours per day per refrigerator. Now, for 5 million refrigerators that is 1,50,000 units of energy we burn carelessly every day.

Computers and laptops have become a household commodity for city dwellers. A typical desktop computer uses about 85 to 250 watts. Add another 35-70 watts for an LCD monitor, or about 80 watts if you have an old 17" CRT.

Most laptop computers use about 25-60 watts. Leaving them on while you are not using them is a

significant wastage of power. An average of two hours per day idle time for a desktop could burn 0.6KW-hour and for a laptop 0.1KW-hour. Now do the math for 0.2 million computers and 20,000 laptops in office and houses. That is combined of 1,40,000 units of energy burnt per day.

Remember the days when our wives or house maids would leave the gas stove on overnight, so that they don't have to waste a match stick in the morning to light the stove. Well, that changed. At the same time, we all are getting smarter slowly for the usage of lights, fans, TVs and ACs. But there is still room for improvement.

While CFL energy saving bulbs is becoming popular, a mandate from power authority is required to enforce the usage of CFL or LED bulbs. A typical CFL consumes less than one-third of energy than an incandescent bulb light. If we you replace your total of 500W incandescent bulb with a total 125W CFL

you are saving 375W. For four hours of usage per day, it is 1.5KW-hour worth of extra energy you are burning each day. For 1 million such households, that is 1.5 Mega Watt-hour of energy we burn carelessly.

Let's forget about other power hungry appliances, like TV and AC, we already saved approximately 2 MegaWatt-hour

worth of energy per day by making a little change in our habits. The user numbers in each category are based on pure and conservative assumption due to lack of data.

The actual number could be double. Considering how much money our government pays to the quick rental service providers, our habits cause them to pay an additional approximately 5-7Crore Taka per day. That is about 2,000 Crore Taka per year or even more if we consider other power hungry electrical and electronics. Shocking as it may sound, it bears witness -- just look around your house and think about your habits. Just change the habits for a month and check your electric bill for that month.

Whether the government pays for or we do for our wastage -- it's our money either ways. Let's spend it wisely by saving for us and for our kids and their future. Regardless of how much we care about national spending, we sure do care about our own wallets. Make the change today and see the benefit near tomorrow! And, yes, you don't have to change your lifestyle, yet, you can improve it silently by saving the extra money that is deducted from your electric bill.

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# Reminiscences of an expatriate

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I always came back to Dhaka, year after year, taking a breather from my much extended expatriate existence, clinging on to my precious, preserved memories of yesteryears way back in time and a lifestyle which used to be. It never ceased to amaze my acquaintances (here and abroad) how I failed to see the changes (some drastic ones) and attitudes that represent the city of today: the city with its fast growing areas, breaking down of facilities and security, roads paved with stones and pits, the harsh faces of poverty and competition, the hordes of masses and incompatibility of people and ideas bursting forth in violent confrontations!

Perhaps my images of the same city contrasted with those of the others as a way to "cocooning" myself in the bubble of a past time and cherished memories that always spelt "home" to me ... the home I continued to return to (or attempted to return to) throughout the life I led and still lead as an "expatriate" in several cities of the world; perhaps, my return was to catch remnants of some shining elements of my life that revolved around the memories and relationships that used to be a part of my developing life in Dhaka, crisscrossing ages, experiences, and, finally, steps leading to the present, and yet another trip to my city. So I would prefer to live in my world of the past and see only what I wanted to, and that reflected my images of home that I would cling to and carry back to my other life in a foreign country. I guess, I wished to live (as so many other expatriates) in the past to enrich my present in the face of adversities and criticism from the many others in competition even though my family and I lived a good, successful life abroad with plenty of recognition in our own rights.

As I returned every year, I would pull the veil of memories and expectations over reality ... unconsciously ... perhaps to retain the façade of what I expected to be or as a sort of willing things to be. Was I till then a romantic or an escapist ... wishing what I visualised far away from home to be real? Did I paint real life to be what I related to in my moments of expatriate life and my discussions with my expatriate acquaintances, students, colleagues ... holding up images behind rose-tinted glasses (?) of simplicity, perseverance, modesty and nature in

all its unadulterated abundance ... of modest great men and women, hard working common people and richness of literature and arts ... of satisfaction in spite of poverty, ethnicity and pride in heritage and folk lore, of respect for talent, honesty and merit, in spite of differences, of creation and generosity as means of national stature? I think I described a nation that stood united in spite of diversity in all walks of life and beliefs ... of lush fields, wide open skies, and modest statures and expectations, pride in self and simplicity, and modest people with great gifts to give and share ... of a nation thriving in itself and its people. This was the city that was, and still existed, in me within changes of development over the years.

Yet, as I return now for the umpteenth time when I feel a lot more advanced in years and life, carrying my devastating load of personal tragedy when the stark and hurting realities of life remove expectations and break the imagination into shattered pieces of fact, I attempt to reanalyse my images and

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memories in the light of all the queries that take hold of me. The depth of reality is harsh and hurting: is reality more real and the "rose" of my tinted glasses less pink, do they show the paths less strewn with pure crystals of true happiness and peace? Are there darker sides lurking beyond the bright lights and modern edifices of growth and change? Is the pride and joy of the bright youth striding ahead in success and achievement real and lasting? Is there reality in the shadowy images of a better future?

Why do these questions haunt my thoughts and overshadow many realities? Am I being influenced by the actions and feelings of the many people who talk to me ... of people looking for other pastures? People who have become disillusioned or disappointed? People who would rather be in my position as an expatriate to so called lands of plenty and peace?

For once, I attempt to sit outside my self-made cocoon, look around me and wonder if the city, the home I want to return to, actually has the daunting, dark, hidden places of secret trysts and acts, of restless, sad, desperate souls and terrified whispers. Is the land too overcrowded and are the clear, open skies dwindling and overcast?

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# Israel's fading democracy

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WHEN an American presidential candidate visits Israel and his key message is to encourage us to pursue a misguided war with Iran, declaring it "a solemn duty and a moral imperative" for America to stand with our warmongering prime minister, we know that something profound and basic has changed in the relationship between Israel and the United States.

My generation, born in the '50s, grew up with the deep, almost religious belief that the two countries shared basic values and principles. Back then, Americans and Israelis talked about democracy, human rights, respect for other nations and human solidarity. It was an age of dreamers and builders who sought to create a new world, one without prejudice, racism or discrimination.

Listening to today's political discourse, one can't help but notice the radical change in tone. My children have watched their prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, kowtow to a fundamentalist coalition in Israel. They are convinced that what ties Israel and America today is not a covenant of humanistic values but rather a new set of mutual interests: war, bombs, threats, fear and trauma. How did this happen? Where is that righteous America? Whatever happened to the good old Israel?

Netanyahu's great political "achievement" has been to make Israel a partisan issue and push American Jews into a corner. He has forced them to make political decisions based on calculations that go against what they perceive to be American interests. The emotional extortion compels Jews to pressure the Obama administration, a government with which they actually share values and worldviews, when those who love Israel should be doing the opposite: helping the American government to intervene and save Israel from itself.

Israel arose as a secular, social democratic country inspired by Western European democracies. With time, however, its core values have become entirely different. Israel today is a religious, capitalist

state. Its religiosity is defined by the most extreme Orthodox interpretations. Its capitalism has erased much of the social solidarity of the past, with the exception of a few remaining vestiges of a welfare state. Israel defines itself as a "Jewish and democratic state." However, because Israel has never created a system of checks and balances between these two sources of authority, they are closer than ever to a terrible clash.

In the early years of statehood, the meaning of the term "Jewish" was national and secular. In the eyes of Israel's founding fathers, to be a Jew was exactly like being an Italian, Frenchman or American. Over the years, this elusive concept has changed; today, the meaning of "Jewish" in Israel is mainly ethnic and religious. With the elevation of religious solidarity over and above democratic authority, Israel has become more fundamentalist and less modern, more separatist and less open to the outside world. I see the transformation in my own family. My father, one of the founders of the state of Israel and of the National Religious Party, was an enlightened rabbi and philosopher. Many of the younger generation are far less open, however; some are ultra-Orthodox or ultranationalist settlers.

This extremism was not the purpose of creating a Jewish state. Immigrants from all over the world dreamed of a government that would be humane and safe for Jews. The founders believed that democracy was the only way to regulate the interests of many contradictory voices. Jewish culture,

consolidated through Halakha, the religious Jewish legal tradition, created a civilisation that has devoted itself to an unending conversation among different viewpoints and the coexistence of contradictory attitudes toward the fulfillment of the good.



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The modern combination between democracy and Judaism was supposed to give birth to a spectacular, pluralistic kaleidoscope. The state would be a great, robust democracy that would protect Jews against persecution and victimhood. Jewish culture, on the other hand, with its uncompromising moral standards, would guard against our becoming persecutors and victimisers of others.

But something went wrong in the operating system of Jewish democracy. We never gave much thought to the Palestinian Israeli

citizens within the Jewish-democratic equation. We also never tried to separate the synagogue and the state. If anything, we did the opposite. Moreover, we never predicted the evil effects of brutally controlling another people against their will. Today, all the things that we neglected have returned and are chasing us like evil spirits.

The winds of isolation and narrowness are blowing through Israel. Rude and arrogant power brokers, some of whom hold senior positions in government, exclude non-Jews from Israeli public spaces. Graffiti in the streets demonstrates their hidden dreams: a pure Israel with "no Arabs" and "no gentiles." They do not notice what their exclusionary ideas are doing to Israel, to Judaism and to Jews in the diaspora. In the absence of a binding constitution, Israel has no real protection for its minorities or for their freedom of worship and expression. If this trend continues, all vestiges of democracy will one day disappear, and Israel will become just another Middle Eastern theocracy. It will not be possible to define Israel as a democracy when a Jewish minority rules over a Palestinian majority between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea -- controlling millions of people without political rights or basic legal standing.

This Israel would be much more Jewish in the narrowest sense of the word, but such a nondemocratic Israel, hostile to its neighbors and isolated from the free world, wouldn't be able to survive for long.

But there is another option: an iconic conflict could also present an iconic solution. As in Northern Ireland or South Africa, where citizens no longer spill one another's

blood, it will eventually become clear that many Israelis are not willing to live in an ethnic democracy, not willing to give up on the chance to live in peace, not willing to be passive patriots of a country that expels or purifies itself of its minorities, who are the original inhabitants of the land.

Only on that day, after much anguish, boycotts and perhaps even bloodshed, will we understand that the only way for us to agree when we disagree is a true, vigorous democracy. A democracy based on a progressive, civil constitution; a democracy that enforces the distinction between ethnicity and citizenship, between synagogue and state; a democracy that upholds the values of freedom and equality, on the basis of which every single person living under Israel's legitimate and internationally recognized sovereignty will receive the same rights and protections.

A long-overdue constitution could create a state that belongs to all her citizens and in which the government behaves with fairness and equality toward all persons without prejudice based on religion, race or gender. Those are the principles on which Israel was founded and the values that bound Israel and America together in the past. I believe that creating two neighbouring states for two peoples that respect one another would be the best solution. However, if our shortsighted leaders miss this opportunity, the same fair and equal principles should be applied to one state for both peoples.

When a true Israeli democracy is established, our prime minister will go to Capitol Hill and win applause from both sides of the aisle. Every time the prime minister says "peace" the world will actually believe him, and when he talks about justice and equality people will feel that these are synonyms for Judaism and Israel.

And for all the cynics who are smiling sarcastically as they read these lines, I can only say to Americans, "Yes, we still can," and to Israelis, "If you will it, it is no dream."