an active internet the laptop keeps me connected to not only the world I have left behind but also to the new world I'm in.

It allows me to call anyone in India. It lets me speak to anyone in the world. It allows anyone anywhere to chat with me as well. The moment it's switched on it becomes an outlet for my thoughts, my feelings and my opinions. I am also able to listen, convey or exchange notes with family and friends -without a break- as if I were present. And they can see me as I can them. Every morning unfailingly an online friend sitting in far away Trivandrum keeps tabs on me. She checks to see if I'm safe and well especially after Dhaka erupted. Her cheery 'good morning' sets the tone for my day. My mother keeps me up to date with matters at home while my brother regularly sends me music on YouTube. My children email me as never before and lecture me as always. I check my Facebook status with more fervour than usual and am as active or perhaps more on Twitter. And I write for my editors as if I have crossed no borders.

My laptop is my postman, music system, DVD player and my phone in turns.

It is also my window through which I take in Dhaka. With just a tap, the national newspaper links tell me all that is happening in the city. Places to go to and places to avoid. If there is a hartal or if there will be violence. Their weekly magazines introduce me to Dhaka's cultural scene and cuisine- even their personalities. Their editorials explain what I wasn't aware of, before. They hold up the country's past, its present and its hopes for the future. They make me think, analyse and review all preconceived ideas. They also show me how political opinions differ. I form my own. And their editors allow me to share their pie. I have never been more grateful. As I explore, absorb and understand a culture and country not unlike my own but with its own particular history and notions of freedom and democracy I get to know an entire nation that was to me till now just a name on a map. Through my laptop.



Well ensconced in my chair I know now as much as one can know Dhaka as an outsider. I know where the best groceries can be bought. The chain of Agoras and Meena bazaars that are nearby. The restaurants that I need to visit - Urban Spice for Indonesian food and Sajna for Indian. It tells me where I should go to get the famous Dhakai Muslin and the Jamdhani weaves - To Tangail Kutir, Aarong, Jatra and Aranya-lovely names for lovely shops. I know its neighbourhoods and I can spot a *jhal muri wallah* a mile away. 'Artisan' is where we get factory leftovers and the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre- intimate local music soirees.

Tripadvisor points out the must see sights and I follow its advice. The Lalbagh Fort, the Shaheed Minar, the Armenian Church and the old city Dhaka seem familiar thanks to it. A cruise on the Dhaleshwari, walks by the Gulshan Lake; tackling a *Kachchi biryani*, a bite of the *pitha*, the laptop shows me where. From Gulshan to Basundhara City mall a few taps and voila I'm there. And 'shuprobhat' and 'khemone achen' now trip off my lips easily thanks to its versatility. I know now that they are a nation strong on patriotism. A people proud of their language and their culture. I also now know Bangladesh's history goes way back beyond that of 1971 into the 7th century when it was part of a larger India, a Buddhist and Pala Empire before being conquered by the Hindu Sena dynasty, the Mughals and the British.

While I delve into their history, read up their present and talk to my folks back home, I realise- all over again- I am able to do so only due to its conjunction with the other of the world's greatest discoveries since Graham Bell –the internet. That it is with it as a download that the laptop really knows no boundaries, no limitations and nor to my joy, I realise, do I. Now central to my very being and integral to my present life, it is as much a part of me as any limb. Each time I connect I invite life into my living room. I even know what Michelle Obama wore to the inauguration and how the new Pope addressed world. And I realise Bill Gates was quite with it when he called his creation 'Windows'. And I 'm conscious that in Dhaka –out of my comfort zone- Bing, Yahoo and Google act as my directory, my compass and a trusted beacon that guides.

Virtually my sole connect to the world outside my window it keeps me sane, active and grounded anew. It lets me bond, it lets me survive with élan. No longer do I feel lonely. No longer do I feel lost or alone. A steadfast companion that fails only if the Wi Fi drops, it is my best friend. And so as I live my life through my laptop I can't think of a better way of living when the odds are all stacked up against you and the only person you know well in a new country is you, yourself. ■