

# Are we better off today than five years ago?

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

DURING the election campaign in 1980 in the USA, candidate Ronald Reagan asked his countrymen rhetorically: "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" and the rest is history. Americans took the question very seriously and concluded that they were worse off in 1980 than in 1977, when President Jimmy Carter started his term, and voted him out of office.

Imagine what would happen if our politicians asked Bangladesh voters the same question, or a similar one, every five years as they head for the national elections, and the outcomes in the national elections were based on the electorate's perception of their well-being, or quality of life? Unfortunately, it is not easy to answer the question, "Are you better off today than you were when the opposition was in power?", since improvement in the quality of life is not a matter of simply building more roads, better pay, or even fewer people living in poverty. It is more than these, or even the sum of these or other measures of welfare.

Let me elaborate on the last statement. Quality of Life, like Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Per Capita Income (PCI) is one of the few measures of a country's well-being and economic progress recognised around the globe. Unlike the other two metrics, a Quality of Life Index (QLI) allows the major donors and international agencies to measure a country's progress in improving its citizens living conditions in both monetary and real terms over a time period, and in comparison with other countries. The goal of this short essay is to identify a couple of areas where Bangladesh could do better on the global race to score higher on the quality of life measures and to improve the lot of the average Bangladeshis.

Let me start off with some well-known facts. My fellow Bangladeshis will be glad to know that Bangladesh compares well in comparison with other South Asian countries and it has done well in the last three decades to improve the quality of life of its population. As the following table shows, it is at par

with Pakistan, and India, all things being equal.

Economist's Quality of Life Index for South Asian countries

Country	Country Quality of Life Score (out of 10)
India	5.759
Pakistan	5.646
Bangladesh	5.229

So, what is QLI? In simple terms, it is basically a composite, or an index, of several measures that capture both subjective and objective conditions in a country. Per capita income is one of the nine indicators used by *The Economist* magazine to calculate its Quality-of-Life Index (QLI), whereas political freedom is one of the subjective indicators in the index. Other measures such as UNDP's Human Development Index or the Life Quality Index developed by Canada's Waterloo University take a subset of the nine indicators used by *The Economist*. However, QLI has its critics, since it includes certain indicators measured arbitrarily, to say the least: geography, religious freedom, and political rights. On the other hand, the indices ignore other more relevant statistics, for example unemployment rate and malnutrition.

As a Bangladeshi voting citizen, I would also value the accomplishments of a government to lower the crime rate, public corruption, and honesty/truthfulness of the politicians. Among the economic indicators I would consider the movement in percentage of the population below the poverty line, the hunger rate among children, and some other health indicators (deaths by cholera, drinking water, elimination of diarrhoea, etc.) which are not factored into QLI.

Having said that, the overall QLI has been improving since 1988 and it has improved relative to others. However, there is a statistical margin of error. And the most important caveat is, "did the QLI improve because of policies of the present government?" Many of the improvements in our quality of life happened due to industrialisation, availability of rural credit, and lower birth rate, and these are long-term

developments. Improvement in the law and order situation, if any, could be claimed by the current government.

Incidentally, the National Public Perception Study jointly sponsored by Asia Foundation and *The Daily Star* asks the respondents on the performance of the present government. In the area of education and health the policies were rated better than in the economic indicators: unemployment, inflation, and corruption. It would be unscientific to conclude from this fragmentary evidence that the quality of life has worsened or improved during the present regime, but the electorate appear to have made up their mind. It needs to be seen if the surveys, the elections, and the quality of life measurements dreamed up by academics all agree or are at odds with each other.

I will end this essay by turning to two curious aspects of *The Economist's* Quality of Life Index. Bangladesh will score higher than some of our Asean sister countries and less than others in three areas: political stability, political freedom, and climate. Fortunately, unlike some of our neighbours, we are working on political stability and political freedom. But progress has been uneven in the last twenty years. Unfortunately, we can't do much about climate!

On a positive but bizarre use of the index, *The Economist* has recently been touting QLI as an indicator of future well-being, and calling it the "lottery of life" index. It purportedly answers the question, "where do you want to be born," i.e. which country offers children born in 2013 the best outlook for them when they reach adulthood in 2030? Well, for all it is worth, and for Bangladeshi's who are trying to emigrate, they should either head for the small Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden or Denmark) or Switzerland. Unfortunately, language barrier and strict immigration laws make these countries almost off-limits. However, Australia was one of the three countries that topped the latest QLI survey, and Australia has pretty liberal immigration policies.

The writer lives and works in Boston.

## Climate talks heat up in Warsaw

### POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

AT the end of the first week of the Nineteenth Conference of Parties (COP19) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) being held in Warsaw, Poland, some of the issues have been agreed but some still remain for the ministers to resolve in the second week of high-level meetings.

One of the remaining topics is that of loss and damage from climate change. This issue is hotly contested between the developed and developing countries. At the beginning of the COP there were three proposals put on the table by Norway, European Union and the Group of 77 (G77) and China respectively.

After initial discussions the two co-chairs of the contact group on loss and damage were asked to try to consolidate the three proposals and identify areas of convergence and those of divergence.

After bringing their text to the parties there were further discussions at the end of the first week but some areas of divergence remained, so the issue is being sent to the high-level segment next week to be resolved there.

Although there are significant areas of convergence, especially on what needs to be done, there remains a major area of divergence on the institutional arrangements for loss and damage. The developing countries are sticking to their demand for an international mechanism on loss and damage to be agreed here in Warsaw while the developed countries are refusing to accept a new mechanism and want the loss and damage activities to remain under adaptation.

The developing countries argue that loss and damage is different from adaptation and hence deserves a separate mechanism to talk about it.

However, developed countries fear that allowing a separate mechanism may leave them open for claims for compensation.

As ministers arrive in Warsaw and take over from the technical negotiators, deals will be done and discussed. So far, the negotiators from the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Africa group together with others in the G77 have been very united and have spoken with a strong single voice.

It is important that ministers from the developing countries also continue to speak with this strong common voice. If they become disunited they will lose, but if they manage to stay united they may well win and get an international mechanism on loss and damage here in Warsaw by the end of next week.

The writer is Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh and is in Warsaw attending COP19.

## Resolving sectarian violence in Myanmar

NEHGINPAO KIPGEN

THE sectarian violence in Western part of Myanmar in Rakhine state in 2012 escalated to a larger scale of tensions between Muslims and Buddhists in the central part of the country in 2013.

The violence has resulted in the loss of more than 200 lives and made over 140,000 people homeless. Despite the country's democratic reforms, the simmering tensions between the two communities remain a concern for the international community.

The latest international concern was visible when Bill Clinton, former president of the United States, made a surprise visit to Myanmar and gave a speech at the Myanmar Peace Center in Yangon on November 14.

While appreciating the Thein Sein government for initiating a "remarkable" political transition, Clinton called for an end to sectarian violence in the country. Speaking to a mixed audience of political, social, and religious leaders, Clinton said: "The whole world cheers every piece of good news and is sick every time they read about sectarian violence," and added: "Because everywhere on earth, people are tired of people killing each other and fighting each other because of their differences."

Clinton, who was visiting Myanmar with his philanthropic organisation, the Clinton Foundation, also met President Thein Sein, House of Representatives Speaker Shwe Mann and the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The timing of Clinton's visit and his message was important for three reasons. Firstly, Bill Clinton, as president, presided over the imposition of US sanctions on the former military junta during his two terms in the White House from 1993 to 2001.

Secondly, Clinton's visit coincided with the three-day visit (November 13-15) of a European Union delegation led by its foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, which included European commissioners, members of the European Parliament, businessmen and members of civil society groups.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Clinton's visit also coincided with a visit to the country by a delegation of the Organization of

Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The OIC team, led by its Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, comprised of representatives from some Muslim-majority countries -- Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Djibouti and Bangladesh.

Though the objective of the OIC mission was to assess the situation surrounding lingering tensions between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims, the arrival of the delegation was protested by Buddhists, including monks, who accused the OIC of being biased toward the Rohingya Muslims.

The Buddhist protesters accused the OIC of meddling in Myanmar's internal affairs and attempting to influence the amendment of the 1982 Citizenship Law, which would pave the way



for citizenship to Rohingya Muslims.

In October 2012, the Myanmar government refused permission for the OIC to establish a permanent office in the country after the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding for the Islamic organisation to provide humanitarian aid to victims of the sectarian violence.

Though there is no immediate and easy solution, the Myanmar government must continue to explore all possible options to establish a peaceful and congenial relationship between Buddhists and Muslims.

Any long-term solution should address the unique problems of the Rohingya Muslims, where the gist of the matter lies. While the problems of other ethnic minorities in the country centre round the question of autonomy or federalism, the Rohingyas are confronted with identity crisis.

The Myanmar government will have to address the Rohingya problem at some point, and it is a matter of either now or later. Though short-term measures such as humanitarian aid can address the immediate needs of the people, a political solution is necessary to resolve the problems.

By political solution it does not mean doing favour to one group over the other. A consociational democracy is one possible model that can be instituted. This model would offer a political platform for elites of diverse groups to work together for a common interest.

The simmering tensions will continue to persist as long as the people cannot embrace or respect each other's identity and culture. In this regard, both the Rakhine state government and the union government must engage in reconciliation programmes to bring together leaders from both sides.

If the Myanmar government needs the assistance of others, it must not procrastinate. Given the nature of the crisis and the international community's keen interest to see a successful democratic transition in the country, others will be willing to help resolve the conundrum.

Meanwhile, the OIC and other Muslim-majority countries should refrain from actions or initiatives that can fuel hatred and enmity between the two communities. As the Myanmar government granted the necessary permission to visit the violence-affected areas, the OIC must pursue a policy of equal treatment to all victims, regardless of race and religion.

Such impartial engagement can be important for building trust and understanding between Buddhists and Muslims. If mutual trust is established, it can possibly help the Myanmar government to plan a mutually acceptable solution. Mutual trust is also important for the OIC to develop good relations with the majority Buddhists population.

In the meantime, the international community must continue to extend all possible help for Myanmar to resolve its sectarian and political problems and for the emergence of a stable democracy.

The writer is General Secretary of the US-based Kuki International Forum. His research focuses on the politics of South and Southeast Asia, with a concentration on Myanmar.

## All-party government: It's allies plus allies

FARID HOSSAIN

WHEN a gallon of water is mixed with another gallon of water the result is an increase in quantity. However, it does not improve the quality.

So, the joining of Jatiya Party (Ershad), Workers Party (Menon) and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu) with the Awami League-led "all-party government" does not bring any qualitative change in the nature of the government. Simply put, it is allies plus allies. The only change we see is that the Mahajote government has turned into an all-party interim government supposedly to oversee the upcoming parliamentary election. The creators of the formula also like to call it the polls-time government.

The so-called election-time government has started its journey with the swearing-in of six ministers and two state ministers. Five of the new faces are from Ershad's Jatiya Party. JP has also got another berth in the form of Ziauddin Bablu as an adviser to the prime minister with status of a minister. The actual size of the interim government will soon be known.

The prime minister has still kept valid her invitation to BNP and its leader Khaleda Zia to join the "all-party government," an offer Khaleda Zia has rejected. Instead, she led a high-powered team of her party to meet with President Abdul Hamid on Tuesday evening, a day after Hasina moved fast to name her all-party government.

If Khaleda Zia does not change her mind and finally stays out of Hasina's government, there will be no all-party election-time government. In that case it will be a multi-party arrangement with an ally helping out another ally.

The challenge that Hasina has been facing in overcoming the political crisis remains the same as before. It is how to persuade BNP to drop its demand for a neutral non-partisan caretaker government and join the polls under her administration. Whether BNP joins the interim government or not is irrelevant. Even without joining the polls-time government BNP can make the election credible through its participation. If BNP sticks to its guns and boycotts the election the vote will not be credible, nor will it be universally acceptable.

Khaleda Zia has her own challenges too. If she boycotts the election, but fails to build an effective resistance to it she risks ending up a loser. A mere boycott of the polls does not help her and her cause. Having failed to shake the government through a series of rather suicidal hartals, Khaleda Zia has reached a stage where she must make a brave decision to participate in the voting with or without Hasina in office.

It seems she might take part in the election even under the formula devised by Hasina. But Hasina remains her only stumbling block. Khaleda Zia has announced her firm stand that she will not accept Hasina as the prime minister of an election-time government.

In that case, if Khaleda Zia says yes to election, Hasina may move aside, leaving the office to the Speaker or someone else loyal to her.

Will that work? An answer to this question can be found if the two sides sit across the table with an open mind. This point has been underscored by US Assistant Secretary of State Nisha Desai Biswal at a news conference on Monday, ending a two-day official visit to Bangladesh when she met both the ladies separately.

Optimists like us are not giving up hope for a negotiated end to the current political impasse.

A pause in the opposition-sponsored hartals, Khaleda Zia's visit to Bangabhaban to meet the president, Tareque Rahman's acquittal from a money laundering case, in which an FBI agent testified against him, are being discussed in the media and political circles as developments that can lead the feuding politicians to a meaningful dialogue, and a solution.

The writer is former bureau chief, Associated Press (AP).

By THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

1 Gulps with gusto

7 Surgery souvenir

11 Square

12 Jerry Herman musical

13 Take over

14 Important times

15 Rotates

16 Fire

17 Something

18 Temperature unit

19 Runner

20 Zlatoppek

21 Tiny laborer

22 Harry Potter's creator

25 Team backer

26 Even

27 Kicks out

29 Clergy garments

33 Paris

34 Concise

35 Sax sort

36 Blues-based music

37 Some stories

38 Galahad's mother

39 Goals

**DOWN**

1 Fixed proportion

2 Free of censorship

3 Ghana

4 Charter member

5 Dandies

6 Shrewd

7 Bouquet

8 Travel group

9 Remarkable

10 Bristle at

**Yesterday's answer**

16 Southern lass

18 New Zealand natives

20 Catchphrase

22 Sporting spear

23 Made animal

24 Moscow native

25 Cow or sow

28 Irascible

30 Type a password, perhaps

31 Salty mixture

32 Ranch

34 Go it alone

36 Nap sack

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40

10-19

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

On letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

**10-17 CRYPTOQUOTE**

ZIP APLXNMH LMSXPQXS

SFX OZPRN DMN ZIPHXKXHX

SZ IH, LA OX SDEX SFXV

SXMNXPRG DMN SPIRG.

— DVZH JPMHMHZM DRBZSS

**Previous Cryptoquote:**

NEVER GO BACKWARD. ATTEMPT, AND DO IT WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT. DETERMINATION IS POWER.

- CHARLES SIMMONS

**BEETLE BAILEY**

GO TELL COOKIE I'LL HAVE THE 1190

WHAT'S THAT STAND FOR?

3-29

**HENRY**

THE NUMBER OF CALORIES IN MY FAVORITE BREAKFAST!

GREG+MORT WALKER

3-29

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3-29

**QUOTABLE Quote**

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

William Butler Yeats