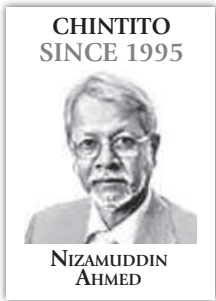


# In 2K20, let us resolve to be a little different



As we draw closer to pulling the curtain on 2019, it is an opportune moment for self-analysing ourselves.

We are mostly a nation of all-knowing, bragging, complaining, doubting, egoistic, fanatical, gossiping, hot-headed, insensitive, jealous, *keepa*, lying, meddling, nosy, oily, petty, quarrelling, romantic, selfish, turncoat, ungrateful, vainglorious, wasteful, xenophobic, yielding, and zzzzz... people.

Thankfully, the alphabet is only that much longer, otherwise there would have been more illustrations of our illustrious character. Don't try this in Khmer (Cambodian) language. They have 33 consonants, 23 vowels and 12 independent vowels.

Tune in to talk-show TV channels for a week to meet our "all-knowing" intellectuals, whose expertise range from onions to beauty queens. Sometimes appearing in two slots in one evening, they juggle with Angela Merkel's Brexit and Suu Kyi's impeachment.

They are also regular "braggers", sending text messages about coming on television, lest you are deprived of their punditry. I wonder if Donald Trump would stoop so low.

We thrive on "complaining", for instance, about foul odour in the neighbourhood after dumping last week's food garbage on the side opposite our front door.

Someone else's success is incinerating, but more so a "doubtful" attainment, achieved surely by means other than talent, effort and dedication.

We live on this side of "ego land". I do not talk to cows. I slaughter the biggest cows. I eat only huge cows. I am

the biggest... "Fanaticism" is best portrayed by those changing allegiance, which is okay the first time as an act of rectification, but seasonal swaying to political winds is an aspersion on one's rectitude.

"Gossip" here travels faster than the *ghatak* deserting a disastrous union. We are more often interested in

wife of a badly-injured husband, "What is your *onubhuti*?"

It is human nature to be "jealous" for a whole range of reasons, but our hypocritical charm allow us to be grudging of even those who we manage to congratulate after their achievements.

Being stingy, read *keepa*, has nothing to do with poverty, for some of the

them, whereas the nosy ones live to smell the crap.

Among the "oiliest" Homo sapiens are the *hobu Jamai* trying to win over the prospective Amma-in-law. From the perspective of being voluntarily greased, our bureaucrats are clear winners. They all have a towel on the back of their chair.

reaching double figures.

Children, even young students, would die before betraying their friends. Yet, "selfishness" breeds exponentially with age. Riding on self-interest, adults do not hesitate to become "turncoats".

Fanciful migrating children, who should be building their own country after completing their education abroad, and those who dump their parents in *briddha asram* could be equally branded "ungrateful".

We are a unique people who can boast even in defeat. A "vainglorious" politician can be heard saying, "I lost because only the people of my high intellectual level voted for me".

Keeping the tap running, the lights on, piling food that we do not care to finish or cannot, endlessly providing unsolicited advice, are all "wasteful" acts.

While singing songs of equality, tolerance and praise for mankind, the "xenophobia" in us comes to light when we mock a foreigner in Bangla in his presence. And, most embarrassingly, some of them understand the slang, but not our attitude.

A people, as unyielding as in 1971, soon had some from their kind painting the Pakistan flag on their cheek at a cricket stadium. We also "yielded" at the recent BBPL opening with Indian artistes shaming our culture, unless we have collectively embraced, "*Sheela ki jawani*..."

Zzzzz ... Sleeping with our eyes open is a common malady. Any matter remotely uncomfortable, or something that may benefit others at the cost of my time... it's sleeping time.

Those who are exceptions to the above, please raise your hands. There you are, 160×2 million hands have been raised. Children and babies were assisted by their elders.

Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed is a practising Architect, a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.



breakups. Tiffs among siblings, and loud exchanges between partners are our food for thought, and sleepless nights.

Heated up, we bang the table. "Hotter" still, we leave a party. Totally red, we will become violent. All of that because someone made a derogatory statement about a loved one—a singer perhaps, a foreign actor or the local Ward Commissioner.

Some of our more "insensitive" journalists are laughable for popping up the *koti*-Taka question in the most awkward of situations, such as to the

poorest have hearts as big as the ocean. It is about not sharing even when one owns a bank.

As if we did not have this trait before, but the mobile phone has enabled us to practice the vice of "lying" in 4G. Being in Shahbagh, we claim we are at Mohakhali. "Having dinner at Radisson Blue" maybe another way of saying "we are home alone".

"Meddling" and "nosy" are two sides of the same coin, causing similar discomfort. However, meddlers actively participate in matters that don't concern

He was invited to the wedding by an SMS or an email, but some of his friends were also called by phone. Promptly, mountains were made out of "petty" hills.

Resistance to illogical demand can lead to conflicts, as can envy. The scope to "quarrel" is endless, enthusiasm boundless.

Our "romantic" commentators can pen a poem to celebrate a lone goal against seven consumed by Bangladesh. Losing by eight wickets has also brought out the bard in us for a batsman just

## Okay Boris, you won. Now what?

### The electoral debacle in the United Kingdom



THE results of the recent elections in the United Kingdom took me back to another ghastly political moment.

You guessed it. It was in November 2016, when Donald Trump surprised millions of Americans, the rest of the world and quite possibly himself as he was elected president of the United States. Beneath the apparent differences between the two leaders of the two largest English-speaking nations of the world lie disquieting similarities.

But first, let's take stock of the profound disaster that has befallen the United Kingdom.

There is little dispute among experts that Brexit will hurt the British economy, which is likely to shrink. Just as it is with free trade between the United States, Canada and Mexico—once you have free movement of goods and services, too many businesses develop cross-national ties which can be very, very painful to sever. It's not just the big guys. Britain is dotted with countless small, mom-and-pop operations that source or send goods across the border. The new customs and tariffs nightmare will likely cripple a lot of them. Britain's young people dreamed of being part of a broader commonwealth with the rest of Europe based on broad pan-European values of a tolerant and plural humanism. They must be bitterly disappointed.

Boris Johnson is essentially a

mendacious Trump wrapped in an Oxbridge-educated posh accent. Like Trump, he has a penchant for bluster and making populist promises he has no idea how to keep.

However, give the devil its due. Unlike Trump, who squeaked through in his elections Johnson's victory is massive. The Labour Party has got the biggest thrashing since the days of Margaret Thatcher.

How on earth did this happen? First, let's get rid of the jaundiced critiques of Labour. The hapless Labour leader Jeremy Corbin has almost as many detractors on the left as he has on the right. They gleefully point out his failings. Corbin was too radical. He was too wishy-washy on Brexit. He was too soft on anti-Semitism. If Tony Blair or Norman Brown had been around, this could have been averted.

To be sure, there's a grain of truth in all of these critiques, but this was not what undid Labour. Corbin's predicament was that he faced an impossible task. The Brexit divide ran right through the middle of Labour's supporters, and even Solomon would be hard-pressed to find a Brexit policy that would satisfy everyone. For those who say unequivocal support for a new vote for Brexit would have done the trick, just look at the Liberal Democrats: They got clobbered as well.

But there may be a more disturbing reality lurking underneath it all. British writer John Lanchester observed in "Brexit Blues," a prescient article in the July 26, 2016 issue of *The London Review of Books*: "The trouble with where we are now is that the configuration of the parties doesn't match the issues which need to be resolved. To simplify, the

Tories are a coalition of nationalists, who voted out, and business interests, who voted in; Labour is a coalition of urban liberals, who voted in, and the working class, who voted out." (I urge readers to go online and listen to the audio of Lanchester reading his article. It is a sensitive, gripping, heart-breaking and detailed analysis of the socio-economic conditions that launched Brexit.)

Lanchester says a significant part

life expectancy. . . . The jobs and the grammar schools (are gone), and the vista instead is a landscape where there is often work . . . but it's unsatisfying, insecure and low-paid. This new work . . . doesn't offer a sense of identity or community or self-worth."

The similarities with the US are uncanny.

"The white working class is correct to feel abandoned: it has been,"



UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson at the Conservative party headquarters in central London.

PHOTO: AFP/NIKLAS HALLE'N

of the British white working class—a traditional Labour constituency—has been left behind

"Geography is destiny. And for much of the country, not a happy destiny," Lanchester writes.

"To be born in many places in Britain is to suffer an irreversible lifelong defeat—a truncation of opportunity, of education, of access to power, of

Lanchester writes. "No political party has anything to offer it except varying levels of benefits."

Boris Johnson has promised these disaffected voters that he will take back control, whatever that means.

*Caveat emptor.* Johnson has a long track record of breaking promises. Just last September, during his battle for the Conservative Party leadership, he had

famously said that he would "rather be dead in a ditch" than allow Brexit to be delayed beyond October. Well, October has come and gone, and Brexit hasn't happened yet. Johnson is quite undead.

As London mayor he broke a slew of promises. Among them: A bike hire plan with no cost for taxpayers, cutting congestion, cutting transportation fares, keep underground ticket offices open. And don't even get me started on the double-decker boondoggle.

Sound familiar? Trump rode to victory on promises to replace Obamacare and create millions of jobs with a huge infrastructure programme. Obamacare is still the law of the land, and nobody quite knows what happened to his infrastructure plans.

So, amid all the despair, I take some grim satisfaction from Johnson's undeserved victory. Trump's victory led to the Republicans gaining control of both houses of Congress and the presidency. They failed to repeal Obamacare, let alone replace it. There are strong signs that healthcare is growing in importance as an election issue, and voters trust Democrats overwhelmingly on this.

So, there you are, Boris. You've won with an overwhelming victory in Parliament. Brexit will happen.

Then the fun will begin, as Scotland tries to leave, and all the economic chickens come home to roost. How are you going to keep your promises? Your past record does not inspire a lot of confidence.

Good luck, because you sure as hell are going to need it.

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Ashfaque Swapan is a contributing editor for *Silliconeer*, a digital daily for South Asians in the United States.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

December 21, 1898  
**Radium discovered by Marie and Pierre Curie**

On this day in 1898, having recently discovered polonium, future Nobel Prize winners Marie and Pierre Curie discovered the radioactive chemical element radium, a silvery white metal that would be used to treat cancer.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Puzzle book feature

5 Video chat need

11 Diva's piece

12 Words before someone else's words

13 Workout count

14 Sports jersey feature

15 Mitchum or De Niro film

17 Poorly

18 Meadow birds

22 Velvety flower

24 Book part

25 Floor cover

26 Casserole bit

27 Blow one's top

30 Colorado resort

32 Origami need

33 Biol. or geol.

34 Like some resorts

38 Money, in slang

41 Shrek, for one

42 Copy fixer

43 Wrinkly-faced dogs

44 Lebanon trees

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22 Make ready

23 Surrounding glow

28 Former Spanish coin

29 Small quake

30 Braying beast

31 Cone units

35 Broadcasts

36 Jason's ship

37 For fear that

38 Last mo.

39 Dedicated poem

40 Free (of)

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO [dsopinion@gmail.com](mailto:dsopinion@gmail.com).

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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BEEBLE BAILEY by Mort Walker