



FILE VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

Generation Z will be shaping the next few decades



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The young generation of today, around the age of 14-29 years, is the first social generation born in the digital era. The cohort born roughly between 1995 and 2010 is bracketed as Generation Z, or in short Gen Z. Because these young people have grown up with access to the Internet and digital mobile technology, and since they have very little or no memory at all of a world without touchscreens and social media, members of Generation Z have also been dubbed “Digital Natives.”

According to the Global Youth Development Index Update Report 2023, published by the Commonwealth Secretariat, almost half of the global population, and 60 percent of the Commonwealth population, are under 30 years old. The number of 15-to-29-year-olds was 1.8 billion in 2022, or around 23 percent of the total world population.

At the global level, there has been much discussion in recent years emphasising the need for stronger and more prominent inclusion of young people in decision-making spaces. In Bangladesh, two key coordinators of the Anti-discrimination Students’ Movement have been appointed advisers (equivalent to minister) of the interim government formed in August after the previous oppressive government was ousted following a major student-mass uprising. Inclusion of students in top decision-making positions of the government is unprecedented in the world, which carries deep-seated implications and speaks of the expectations of the young generation.

Bangladesh is going through a demographic transition, changing the age structure of the population. According to the Population and Housing Census 2022, young people between 15-29 years of age make up 27.82 percent of the total population.

This change in population occurred due to the gradual shift from high fertility and mortality to low fertility and mortality. According to the 2022 census, the proportion of the working-age population (aged between 15 and 64) is 65.63 percent of the total population, which was 60.62 percent in the 2011 census and 57.01 percent in 2001 census.

The high ratio of the working-age population in comparison with the dependent population, aged between 0 and 14 years plus 65-years-old and above, offers a demographic window of opportunity for Bangladesh. If utilised properly, this ratio can be transformed into a demographic dividend of economic growth.

However, studies show that demographic dividend is not just an automatic outcome of labour participation rate but also a growth outcome achieved through the right policy and action. Failure to act effectively and promptly to

adapt to the changing age structure increases the risk of missing the opportunity to achieve higher economic growth. In case of failure to act promptly and effectively, there even remains the likelihood of facing worse penalties such as rising unemployment, higher rates of crime and drug addiction, mass unrest, and political instability.

As half of the world’s population is under 30, it is now more important to change the way decisions are made because the lives of young people are affected the most by the decisions we make today. The Be Seen Be Heard Global Youth Survey conducted in December 2021, indicated that 76 percent of people aged under 30 believe politicians simply don’t listen to young people. This large-scale qualitative and quantitative research was commissioned by

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The Body Shop in collaboration with the United Nations Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth.

The research found that across the board, 75 percent of people surveyed think politicians are “untrustworthy” and 84 percent of people described politicians as “self-interested.” The majority of the people in the survey also agree that the age balance in politics is wrong.

Our general conception of young people is broadly the primary barrier to giving more weight to young voices in public decision-making spaces. We should rather ask ourselves, are young people really irresponsible and disengaged and do they actually lack the will and aptitude to create real impact?

Back in 2017, a not-for-profit organisation Varkey Foundation commissioned a research on a global scale into the attitudes of 15 to 21-year-olds on a variety of ethical, personal, community and political issues. The Generation

Z: Global Citizenship Survey 2017 polled more than 20,000 respondents in 20 countries across North and South America, Europe, Africa, Australia and Asia, including India from South Asia. The survey found that the majority of the Gen Z respondents considered making a wider contribution to society to be important to them.

The Deloitte Global 2024 Gen Z and Millennial Survey connected with 22,841 respondents in 44 countries to explore their attitudes about work and the world around them. The Survey recorded the responses of 14,468 Gen Zs and 8,373 millennials from countries across North America, Latin America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia-Pacific.

The survey found that nearly all Gen Zs and millennials want purpose-driven work, and they’re not afraid to turn down work that doesn’t align with their values. Roughly nine in 10 Gen Zs (86 percent) and millennials (89 percent) said having a sense of purpose in their work is very or somewhat important to their overall job satisfaction and well-being.

Teenagers and young adults of today are the people who will shape the next few decades. In a time when the world is infested with conflicts and terrorism, climate change, rising inequality and economic instability, we shall need a balanced generational mix in the public decision-making space to find solutions to problems that have so far been unresolved. If generations of all ages come together, we can view things from the fresh perspective of young people and include their voices in politics and civic engagements.

By investing in young people Bangladesh can transform its one-time demographic window of opportunity into a demographic dividend. Investment to create an environment of high-quality health and education is necessary to make the most of our demographic opportunities. Reforms are necessary to ensure transparency, accountability and good governance for the attainment of the demographic dividend.

Public-private partnerships are imperative in many areas of social policy to come up with innovative ways for both public and private sectors to share costs and administrative duties associated with the provision of social services. The government, on the one hand, must become more efficient trustees of taxpayers’ money. On the other hand, businesses need to explore the effects of a whole range of factors from better-educated workers to improved environmental performance.

The degree to which young people successfully engage with their respective work and civic engagement at large will positively play a key role in determining the future progress of Bangladesh. If the young people are given the support they rightly deserve to keep up their strife and motivation, Bangladesh can positively achieve inclusive growth. The coordinators of the Anti-discrimination Students’ Movement have laid the first stepping stones towards a more inclusive and justified future.

Elegy on Andrew Eagle



Rebecca Haque is professor of English at the University of Dhaka.

REBECCA HAQUE

Death, be not proud...

My dear friend, Andrew Eagle, passed away at the age of fifty, peacefully in his sleep in December 2024. Sleep on, Andrew, with your soul embraced by the bright, fragrant blooms of the eternal heavenly bower.

For me, now old and grey, with my seventieth birthday having passed in the first week of December, the news was a shock—like a blow to the head. Days of silent mourning followed. No tears. Only the endless reel of my mind playing scenes from decades of close connection with a gifted writer and a wonderful human being.

I first met Andrew in the mid-1990s at an International Conference on War, organised by the University of Dhaka’s Department of English. The conference was held in the new auditorium of the under-

clumps to resume our beloved *adda*. Most befitting pastime for wordsmiths.

I am on a sofa with two others, seated directly opposite the open front door. I see Andrew lingering on the threshold, a bit nervous, hesitant to encroach into our hallowed space. I jumped up and quickly walked towards him, right hand held forth to shake his, smiled and said, “Please come in. Do sit and have tea with us. And...you are...?”

His reply, “I am Andrew Eagle” made me hoot with delight.

We next met on a coffee date at the Bangla Academy lawn one pleasant November evening during the Dhaka Literary Festival to chat and celebrate. I wanted to buy his co-authored book, *APRIL*. A true gentleman, Andrew paid for the coffee. However, to my chagrin, I did not have enough cash to pay the Tk

mugs—white with a dark blue rim and the University of Dhaka logo. I had the peon discreetly deliver one to Banerjee. After refreshments, I planned to give one to Andrew as well.

The actual purpose of Andrew’s visit was to pay homage to the hundreds of martyred students, massacred by the Pakistani army in genocidal gunfire in their campus residential halls in 1971. I cherish the privilege of guiding him to the green lawn and the effulgent new tree planted by Senator Edward Kennedy to honour the dead. As we all know, the original iconic Banyan tree, symbol and semiotic of the violent Language Movement since the 1950’s, was chopped down by the Pakistani soldiers.

Andrew walked on the green grass. He sat under the tree. Touched the fresh bright green leaves. He walked back to the pavement on the edge of the lawn and handed me his smartphone to capture the image for posterity: Andrew in the foreground, with the majestic tree filling the landscape. I think to myself, as I click away several times, “What wondrous Inscapel!”

The final volume of the esteemed journal *SIX SEASONS*



Andrew Eagle (1975-2024).

PHOTO: COLLECTED

construction Social Science building, next to Modhur Canteen. Fakrul Alam was the chairperson, and I was an associate professor with some influence and, I believe, modest writerly recognition.

I, of course, knew Andrew’s work well. Both of us were regular contributors to *The Daily Star*—the literary page and the Friday weekend magazine—along with a close-knit group of academics and writers from my department: Niaz Zaman, Syed Manzoorul Islam, Kaiser Haq, and Fakrul Alam. But incredibly, I had never seen a photograph of Andrew. This was my fault, as I had been in Canada during the early ’90s, often trapped in my own gloom and disconnected from events back home. I missed the overthrow of General Ershad.

Incidentally, I was one of the first to hear the breaking news of Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination by a Tamil suicide bomber. I was sitting in my apartment at Dalhousie University, writing a term paper late at night with the transistor radio on low, so as not to disturb my neighbours through the thin walls. Stunned, I paced the floor for a while before calling my Tamil friend, the wife of a Commonwealth scholar who lived upstairs. She had become like a sister to me, and sharing that sorrow together eased the ache in my heart.

But I digress. Let me take you back to the auditorium. During the inaugural session, I sat in the front row in a black-and-white cotton sari, while Andrew stood out, noticeably, three tiers up to my right at almost a 20-degree angle. I turned around to nod a greeting, and I remember he was dressed smartly in a white shirt and black trousers. We exchanged smiles. During the tea-break at 11 o’clock, some of us leisurely walked into the Teacher’s Lounge and sat in

800 (only). I was so embarrassed. But being a quick-witted, pure-blood *Dhakkaiya* girl, I made a swap deal with my Hatiya younger brother: one medium-size jar of the notoriously famous Australian bread spread “Vegetemite” from Melbourne on my next trip back from Down Under.

We met again—for me to hand over the promised jar—at the Daily Star (DS) Centre. Syed Mansur Hashim was then working as assistant editor at *The Daily Star* and was a responsible and valuable asset in his capacity for soliciting original pieces for

Review (New Series, Vol. 6, No. 1, 201), edited by Fakrul Alam, contains just three non-fiction pieces. My memoir, “In My Place: Betwixt First Language and Mother Tongue” (pp. 87-92), appears at the top, followed by Somdata Mondal’s “American Individualism” (pp. 61-65), and Andrew Eagle’s “Follow the Fish” (pp. 121-128) at the bottom. In his editor’s note, Fakrul Alam writes, “Andrew Eagle’s captivating account of his quest for a whale shark in the Maldives will certainly strike a familiar note for devotees of Melville’s perennial classic *Moby Dick*.”

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the paper’s special supplements. He also wrote occasional pieces for the newspaper. We three the DS nerds were very good friends. Mansur took us to the bustling staff cafeteria and treated us to wholesome snacks and hot beverages. An hour of fun and laughter, wit and banter. Sword-play with query and repartee.

One day, before the pandemic, Andrew visited me in my office (room no. 2058) as pre-arranged. He wanted to tour the arts faculty campus. We met with the current chairperson, Kajal Krishna Banerjee, who was a few years my junior as a colleague but two years my senior as an undergraduate. Kajal had returned after earning a doctorate in African literature from Jadavpur University. While the two men chatted, I went into the back room and retrieved a spare box of special ceramic

However, what makes this farewell SSR issue unique, and a collector’s item now is the concluding photography section, with Andrew’s black and white photomontage of the “idyllic South Sea atoll in the Maldives.” Five final photos are of Andrew chasing the whale.

On December 24, 2024, at 2:25 am my subdued heart throbbed with undying love for Andrew and I thought of lighting a candle on Xmas eve.

Let me end my elegy with Andrew’s voice in “Follow the Fish”:

“If I was a writer... If I was a writer, with words would I scoop the hiss of Indian Ocean waves as they glide in and off the beach, beyond the balcony. ...the Maldivian sea is soul music.

‘I’m still here’, the island’s ocean breathes...”