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- [Opinion Home](#)
- [1971](#)
- [Agriculture](#)
- [Development](#)
- [Economy](#)
- [Education](#)
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- April 19, 2011

Rubana Huq

In transit

October 4, 2010

I had to listen to a 24-year-old development worker lecturing me on how well the country was adapting to the democratic processes. I eventually lost a dignified battle. It's indeed refreshing to discover that the young have not lost faith yet. But then again, perhaps they are too young to know any better. Not that we know any better as well. The life and times of a nationalist in this country seems to be caught up in a circle. To believe or not to believe, to pledge or not to pledge. The first one applies to us, the mere citizens and the latter to those in power. In fact, even the words seem to be lost in translation. Every government has a new diction, a new understanding of progress.

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And of course, we have a different stake on almost all that continues to happen and written about in the newspapers. The question is why is it necessary for us to subscribe to at least five newspapers a day, out of which two have the essential tabloid appeal and the rest three their own tone? The reason is we are a jealous middle class bunch wanting to hear or steer the ultimate negatives of any government, any people or even any ideology. None in our nation have come through the pages of history with undisputed claim; none have been able to call the other worthy. It's always like the handkerchief game we played in our childhood. Given a chance, we start dropping our dirty hankies behind the other's back while the other remains blindfolded. The 'other', rather has the ones out of power has always been led to the gutters, blindfolded, unsure of the decree or direction. At the same time, those in power start off with absolute good intentions, get carried off with the zeal to over-perform and unconsciously create demons bigger than themselves. These demons are hungry demons, unfed for centuries and craving the slightest drop of human blood. These demons wear the garb of praise, religiosity, rhetoric and repetition. These demons know how to lay traps for those in power to fall into. And very soon, our leaders cave in, entrapped in the well woven ego-blankets that have been provided by the demons that eventually misplace them in history and politics. Power soon finds pleasure in hyper-glorification and allows the cushioning effect to set in.

This is exactly when the papers write what they write and the journalists, in spite of belonging to the corporate bubble, dare write what they write. Pretty soon they are ushered and de-usherred in the offices of power, being cajoled to write what is good for the country. What exactly is good for the country? There's at least one plain where the position and opposition agree on: positivity. The media ought to be positive. Certainly. The media has to be responsible. Certainly. The question, again is: what turns media to become negative or critical? Need we ask and answer?

Need we ask why the media covers every strike and every labour unrest that take place in the city? Truth be known, it is a group of 'us' who hope that the the media will not cover accidents, deaths or damage and only harp on our positives. On a simpler note, neither of us has been able to find the balance between transparency and righteousness. None of us have ever critiqued our own conscience and woken up with anything but nightmares of another day of dread. Truth is there is an opaque line that defines 'we' and 'they'.

I was watching the waves break against the Hong Kong harbour this morning. Behind my wall, there's an infinite queue in the elevator to get in to the floors, rushing to join their own cubicles that assure their bread, scarves and the end of the day sense of fun. No one's talking about their families or failures. I look over The South China Morning Post and it's about the Tianjin global climate change talks and how China, now the world's

biggest producer of greenhouse gas, is trying to overcome its shame of Copenhagen. There's no gossip, no tremor on the fung shui village head pleading to use public funds for building a bridge. But yes, there's an editorial on that.

Disconnected... the masses go on. Truth is they are all investing in their own personal development and individual goals when we are resorting to common political *adda*? Haven't we learnt that it is only the privileged that make and break our dreams while we read our own papers and pass judgments that do not reach those who rule our lands? And when shall we ever learn that the way forward is to be looking at our own selves, our own risks and failures and not at the privileged who perpetuate the style of governance in this region? After all, the privileged, too are in an unsure transit, caught within their own power games, oscillating between Paradise and banishment, in every five-year or so. And shall we not remain where we are and who we are, forever?


Rubana Huq is the managing director, Mohammadi Group; CEO, TV Soouthasia and a PhD candidate at Jadavpur University.

This entry was posted on October 4, 2010 at 6:22 pm and is filed under [Development](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed.

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1.  newyorker on October 6, 2010 at 9:43 pm

Very thoughtful and enjoyable thoughts.

I hope everyone in Bangladesh (not just the politicians or whoever) can introspect to find their own faults, misgivings, biases as well as strength, justness and talents as we move forward.


For it is only when one knows oneself well that they can advise/ lead others in the right path.

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2.  akhtar Shah on October 5, 2010 at 7:44 pm

The article makes a subtle but meaningful reading of the mood music of the country.

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3.  sajjad on October 5, 2010 at 9:04 am

Good write-up. Keep writing.

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1

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[16](#) [17](#) [18](#) [19](#) [20](#) [21](#) [22](#)

[23](#) [24](#) [25](#) [26](#) [27](#) [28](#) [29](#)

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