

- [Home](#)
- [Opinion Home](#)
- [1971](#)
- [Agriculture](#)
- [Development](#)
- [Economy](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Environment/Climate](#)
- [Finance](#)
  
- [Polls Archive](#)
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Rubana Huq

## In transit: the next train home

November 30, 2010



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Everyone is too attached to India. The government is; our culture gurus are; the tourists as well. While the general people fear over-friendly overtures from any government, the policymakers have no option but to choose sides. Therefore every five years, we travel from one side of the court to the other. Being transported, it affects our social scene, but then again, we manage. We are an adaptable race.

Being in South Asia is difficult without having proximity reference to India. Once, not so long ago, a retailer had sent me a parcel marked Dhaka, India. I felt offended, defeated and alone. In spite of my father being strictly a Park Street-St. Xavier's boy, I carry no reflection of Victoria Memorial, New Market or the yellow Ambassador. Therefore, being considered as a part of India was a slap straight across my nationalistic face. Needless to say, I gave up business with my 'illiterate' customer and felt immense pride in it.

Yet, years later, today I run to India to study, copy and follow.

While interacting with a management employee of a French bank based in Delhi, I was cajoled into sharing the picture of our economy. "Oh...", she said, "India of the '70s...Don't worry you'll get there too". I gaped at her in surprise. Who said we wanted to be where they are? And most importantly who envied them? I didn't; the man next to me didn't; none of us did. She sensed my disappointment and said: All you need is a few international events and your infrastructure will fall into place, just like ours did way back in 1984. I was surprised again. Here I thought Manmohan Sing had made all the difference in the '90s and there she was praising the contribution of international sporting events! I retorted: But what about the falling bridges, inadequate toilets and corrupt officials? She had nerves of steel. She bit into her vegetarian finger sandwich and said: Ah...but that happens everywhere. As long as you get your roads and utilities in place, some people are bound to benefit from it.

With the endless scams hitting Indian economy, 2G being the latest, India still goes on with bold strides. The reason is understandable: India has business leaders like Ratan Tata who literally shies away from media, looks after his employees much better than any other employers and still waits for his small Maruti to come and pick him up from the hotel porch. Somewhere down the line, these Indian tycoons don't lose touch with the ground they grow up on. With every scam, there's at least one responsible leader condemning the scandal, blaming the corruption on a shrunk moral universe, just like Sonia Gandhi did, just the other day. That's why there are porcelain elephants named after an Indian Madhu standing at Park Lane spelling the sales gimmick with every

conservation plea. That is why there are 'Rath Yatra Parade' that exemplify the Empire riding back. That is exactly why the silver screen, too, is infested with Indian appeal.

Yet India is standing firmly on its own "desi" ground. With the Indians owning up to whatever they use and like, their ambassadors mimic the old Morris Minors of the West and yet Hindustan Motors go on, endlessly producing these cars with easily changeable spares, offering low maintenance while in Bangladesh we have the sharpest of SUVs being ridden at every lane, even if it runs at 10 km per hour. This is where India distances itself from the hegemony of Western modernity and takes pride in its anti-modernist stance.

China, too has Confucian merchants, who are businessmen and are imbued with the teachings of their tradition and proud of The China That Can say No, a bestseller co-authored by four Chinese scholars who felt inspired by Mahathir and Ishihara's The Voice of Asia and specially Ishihara's The Japan That Can Say No. With this spirit of positive defiance, the Chinese can look forward to beating USA by 2030 in its race to the top. RMB is gaining strength, as planned by the Chinese at their right time and right turn. China has also opened its doors to Bangladeshi exports with a generous duty-free advantage. China, to the surprise of many, has continued to build silent bondages across the region through setting up infrastructures and relieving the impoverished. Chinese humility knows no bound. An official delegation from Chengdu was in Dhaka a few days back. The team consisted of two government officials and a translator. Their purpose of visit was just to extend invitation to a fair the sub provincial city of Chengdu was hosting in February 2011. While I had the opportunity to meet the team, I was taken aback by the chief of the delegation. He spoke to me in a way as if I were a Chinese. With full fluency, he blabbed in his Sichuan Chinese while looking straight into my eyes, as if I were expected to know the language at some point in the future. The translator helped, also not losing her eye contact while I had difficulty looking away from the eyes of the Chinese man who had no shortage of conviction and faith in his language. I questioned myself, will I be able to look into someone's eyes and speak in pure Bangla without resorting to Benglish (Bangla+English)? I suppose not.

There lies the problem. Till we actually gain understanding of what we are being handed down by the West and the non-West, we need to rebel against the constructed concept of development. As much as Arturo Escobar spoke against the Western constructs of the Third World and called the non-Western situation "post-development", we too need to cross the territory of "post" and form development diction of our own. There must be alternative development discourse; there must be social movements which are not guided by mere regional index of wealth and power.

Within our own borders, we maybe disappointed by events, deterred by politics, or dampened by history, but let us wisely tighten our own fists, and become subjectively identified. Only then can we wait at the platform, preparing for the next train speeding to our destination, to *The Bangladesh That Can Say No*.

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[Rubana Huq](#) is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group and CEO TV Southasia

Tags: [Economy](#), [India](#)

This entry was posted on November 30, 2010 at 11:42 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. Riaz Quadir on December 5, 2010 at 4:04 pm

History has not been very kind to "the people of the lower Ganges" to use Macaulay's words; and today, neither is geography nor demographics. Man, being fundamentally shaped by these and other elements has little choice in the making of his future. Having said that, the one element he does control (to an extent) is education. If there ever was a panacea for our earthly travails, it is education! The writer's enlightened views are a result of education – and by education I do not mean marketable skill development, which today is commonly mistaken for education (thanks to the West). I mean the power of critical thinking. Without it we are little better than sheep being led to slaughter or to the pasture without the ability to distinguish between the two.

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2. Mozammel on December 4, 2010 at 2:15 pm

This article reflects the long back feeling of nationalism.

If we are actually in the era of universalism in a global village can we differentiate or identify ourselves differently with our effort?

Because it is done automatically by our inborn qualities who we are. The most common and universal way of identifying quality will be to regain the lost character again by virtue of faith and practice and discipline ourselves to become the man and to prove wrong to the utter dismay of the great poet Rabindranath Tagore-mother you made us the Begali, not the man.

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3. harun al nasif on December 3, 2010 at 12:07 am

...let us wisely tighten our own fists, and become subjectively identified. Only then can we wait at the platform, preparing for the next train speeding towards our destination, to The Bangladesh That Can Say No.

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4. Mohammad Choudhury on December 1, 2010 at 11:47 pm

This is an amazing article! The topic is very timely and the writing style is even more impressive. Kudos to the writer!

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5. [MBI Munshi](#) on December 1, 2010 at 12:35 am

Unfortunately the article is 20 years ahead of our illiterate, incompetent and avaricious politicians.

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S S M T W T F

1 [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#)  
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13 [14](#) [15](#) [16](#) 17 18 [19](#)  
[20](#) [21](#) [22](#) [23](#) [24](#) [25](#) [26](#)  
27 [28](#) [29](#) [30](#)  
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