

WORKING PAPER 33 – (Bangla) History In The Making (1) *The Bangla Paradox*

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Abstract

(Bangla) History in the Making inaugurates a series of Working Papers focusing on development paths – generally speaking, across what was once called the ‘Third World’; most specifically, as concerns the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. We can follow Fernand Braudel (original 1963) and conceptualise this developmental struggle as that needed to materialise the Industrial Revolution ‘achieved’ by the then First world between the late 18th and the early 20th centuries. In this first paper, we provide an overall vision of the evolutions effected in this so-called ‘catching-up process’, as well as of all the paradoxes inevitably involved in such a monumental endeavour. Success rates in the last 80 years have widely varied in both quantitative and qualitative terms; however, ‘dysfunctions’ still abound across the spectrum. In this regard, we are to focus on the specific case on Bangladesh, and on the (apparent?) paradox between its astounding ‘economic [and social] success’ and its relatively high levels of ‘political corruption’. Bangladesh will henceforth provide a specific case-study through which we hope to illuminate both ‘History in the Making’ across the world and ‘History in the Making’ as it’s happening right here, right now, across what is by far the largest delta system in the world.

Keywords: *Bangladesh, Democracy, Fernand Braudel, Grammaire des Civilisations, Francis Fukuyama, Adam Smith, Fixed capital, Green revolution, Human rights, Human Empowerment, Women Empowerment, Political Corruption*

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1. Introduction

In 1963, Fernand Braudel, a brilliant French historian, published a book called ‘Grammar of Civilizations’ (Braudel, 1987). The book was meant to provide an overview, a global understanding of all the world’s peoples and was intended as a proposal for France’s twelve-graders’ History curriculum – preparing French youngsters to grasp the world they lived in. The analysis of each ‘civilization’, starting with the Islamic World and ending with Russia and including everyone in between, was sub-divided in two sections – the civilization’s past history, first; the civilization’s current challenges [as of 1963], second. In the first parts we learn of complex histories, past glories, peculiar beauties. In most second portions, we then learn of countless difficulties, injustices, and dilemmas.

In 1963, a tiny fraction of the world was considered fully industrialized, fully democratized, and containing immensely empowered citizens: this was the first World, that is parts of Europe, North America, parts of Oceania, and to a large extent Japan. These lands had witnessed countless revolutions throughout the late 18th and all of the 19th century; countless achievements and intimidating wealth; these were the shiny examples to be followed by other ‘civilizations’. The Second World, that is the USSR, industrialized later, from 1917 on, and with a radically different formula guiding its economic achievements; on the other hand political and to some extent social developments left much to be desired – at least by western standards. The rest of humanity, China as the Solomon Islands as Pakistan and Brazil and Tanzania, was then called the ‘Third World’. This Third World, much of which had been outrightly colonized during the First World’s Industrial Revolution, had yet to even start its Glorious Industrialized journey, meaning that here the (economic) Industrial Revolution, like political democratization and social-human empowerment were all yet to be effected – or were just beginning.

Fast forward to 60 years later, in 2023, much has changed across the Second and Third Worlds. Much has been achieved, much is left to be achieved. All in all, Braudel’s preoccupation with the [non-First] World’s Industrializing Challenges (in both the economic, political, and social fronts) is alive and well. In 2011, Francis Fukuyama articulated this struggle under the image [of how to] ‘Get to Denmark’. Denmark is considered the world’s Least Corrupt Country (Transparency International, 2022), the world’s second Happiest Country (Hunter, 2022), a paradise of economic success, political coherence, and citizen well-being/ so-called ‘quality of life’. So, asks Fukuyama, why can’t other countries be more like Denmark? Why didn’t other countries, namely those from the Third World where everything was yet to be endeavoured, follow Denmark’s steps? Or, to use his exact words (2011, C1), how does a country become like Denmark – how are countries to ‘Get to Denmark’?

This series of articles is about the ongoing struggle to Get to Denmark. We call that struggle, that war, that massive endeavour ‘History in the Making’. We’ll focus on the economic, political, and social ‘sides of the coin’ involved in developmental paths taken by the non-First World, and we’ll try to analyse issues such as the permanence and transformation of pre-industrial ‘civilisational structures’ (à la Fernand Braudel), the new economic challenges and opportunities presented in a globalised economy, and the row of possibilities regarding factual human empowerment in ‘emerging democracies’.

Because we are writing in the name of South Asia Democratic Forum, we’ll combine general knowledge such as that of Braudel’s ‘Grammar of Civilisations’ with specific information regarding the South Asian experience. Because we are

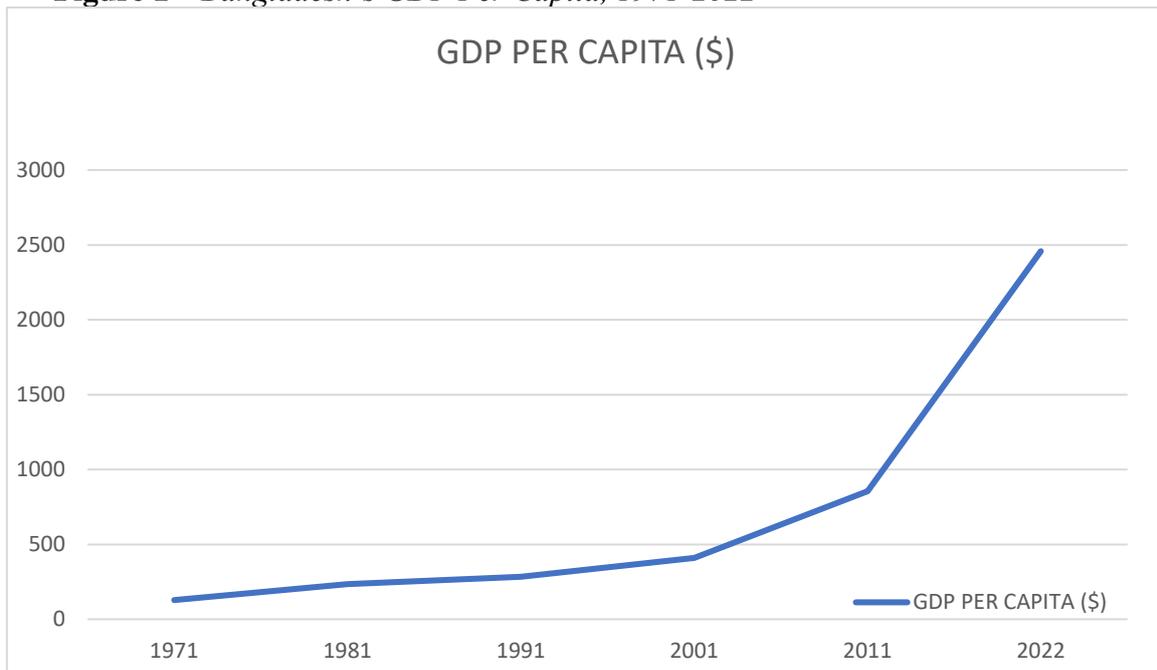
now in possession of a great amount of specific information regarding the country of Bangladesh, and because Bangladesh’s upcoming elections demand deep inquiries for a row of reasons, we’ll focus on this country in particular. We’ll call this study of Bangladesh’s experience of History in the Making ‘(Bangla) History in the Making’.

ARTICLE 1: THE BANGLA PARADOX

Much has changed across the ‘Third World’ indeed. Not all for the best - Sub-Saharan Africa comes to mind. Russia is no longer the USSR; neither its political outlook nor its economic dynamics impress much these days. Latin America shows reasons for hope, yet maintains the world’s highest levels of social inequality. On the other hand, Asian ‘Third World Fortunes’ were impressive indeed – and it does seem that ‘The Future Is Asian’ (World Economics, 2023). Yet Asia is huge, even if we fail to consider Siberia, the Middle east, and so on. Industrializing paths, political development and social ventures, rocky journeys to ‘Get to Denmark’ have widely differed. ‘History in the Making’ series needs to operate some large-scale comparisons across the globe indeed. For what concerns us here, India for instance, the world’s largest democracy by very far, contrasts marvelous economic performance with odd-at-best, grotesque-at-worst political dynamics, namely as concerns electoral practices (see, for instance, PAP, year, Introduction).

This contradiction between brilliant economic achievements and what can only be called ‘dysfunctional politics’ is also present in Bangladesh. Much more so, if we are to believe a wide array of observers, from Cambridge academics (e.g. Piliavsky, 2016) to global Organisations such as Transparency international and its Perceived Corruption Index (Transparency international, 2022) and members of the European Parliament (e.g. European Parliament, 2023). We’ll call this economic-political-social [apparent] discrepancy The Bangla Paradox. It constitutes the ultimate subject of this first article.

Figure 1 – Bangladesh’s GDP Per Capita, 1971-2022



Note 1 - GDP per capita is gross domestic product divided by midyear population.

GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or for depletion and degradation of natural resources. Data are in current U.S. dollars.’

Note 2 – Graph created with data from Macrotrends, ‘Bangladesh GDP Per Capita 1960-2023’. (2023).
<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/BGD/bangladesh/gdp-per-capita>

The timing is important. We’re in early October, 2023, and one huge story dominates all else in Bangladesh: the People’s Republic is holding its next General Elections on January 4, 2024. These will be the twelfth General Elections in the country in its 52 years of existence (see appendix 1; Wikipedia, 2023¹). Bangladesh’s two largest parties, the Awami League (AL) currently in power [with a ‘14 Party Alliance’] and the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) are the two main contenders.

The Awami League has ruled Bangladesh since 2008, that is for 15 years – and not just any 15 years: by far the most economically successful 15 years of local history since the 18th century (before British intervention), or perhaps since ever. If Bangladesh was Denmark for instance, the next election’s results would hardly be contested. And in fact, even the Economist (2023) admitted current PM Sheik Hasina ‘was likely to win’. However, Bangladesh is not Denmark, and nothing is so simple in Bangla politics. First, elections in Bangladesh were seldom really ‘entirely peaceful’. Second, unfortunately, the next electoral endeavour certainly does not seem posed to be as tranquil as could be wished for – at least if we believe the local news (e.g. Barna24, 2023). Already in August it was said that ‘you could cut the tension [in Dhaka] with a knife’. The main opposition party, the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), is quite strong, and it gathers very noisy support not only in the capital but in the provinces as well. The BNP screams against governmental corruption and demands for a neutral caretaker government to ensure fair elections free from undue manipulations. It is not alone. Accusations of political corruption, economic stalling, religious extremism are thrown up in the air in every quarter. And western representatives, too, often condemn those in power in the People’s Republic through various channels (e.g. Blinken, 2023).

How will the Bangla Paradox unfold in the next few months? Perhaps much more importantly still, how are we to make sense of this Paradox to begin with?

2. The World Through Danish Eyes

But let’s start from the beginning. No, Bangladesh is not Denmark. And not just because of the radically different climates. Denmark, as a country, is remarkably ‘Paradox-free’: all is neat, even pristine. For instance, in 2022 Denmark was rated the world’s least corrupt country (score of 90/10) – while Bangladesh was rated n^o147 in 180 countries (score 25/100; Transparency International, 2023). Denmark’s GDP per capita is over 68.000\$ (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2023b) while Bangladesh’s is less than 2.500\$ (IMF, 2023a). Denmark was (again) rated the world’s second happiest country (after Finland) in 2022 (Hunter, 2022); Bangladesh doesn’t quite make it to that list yet. Which is understandable, considering.

Now. As mentioned above, ‘Getting to Denmark’ is a subtitle in the first

¹ Data obtained from the wikipedia article https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections_in_Bangladesh

chapter of Fukuyama's book called 'The Origins of Political Order' (Fukuyama, 2011). First, Fukuyama points out that yes, Denmark is now a world champion in more ways than one, but it wasn't always so. As the author makes note, Denmark is essentially a land of cold and ice, home of the Vikings (whose historical reputation is shady at best). One could add: all in all a poor and backward periphery of Europe (itself a periphery on the world stage) until at least the 15th century. Immense resources from a plundered continent were then to change European fortunes. Still, the road from the Denmark of 1500 for instance to that of 2023 took no less than *500 years* and involved countless wars, tragedies and failures (Fukuyama, 2011, C1). As concerns general developmental guidance, Denmark's historical path has precious little to offer the world.

In fact, those interested in miraculous developmental fortunes that take less than 500 years, even at times 50 alone, must look to the East – countries like Japan and South Korea, for instance. Bangladesh, too, is a poster child for what can be achieved in 50 years – by a country supposed to be 'basket case' by Henry Kissinger himself, no less. Not that 50 years is not a long time, especially when it's experienced as lived time – yet it's impressive. More impressive perhaps, all things considered, than Danish path to success.

So, second, Danes should be impressed. Yet, generally speaking, they aren't. Why? Because of all the paradoxes? Yes, most definitely, argues Fukuyama. Paradoxes around the world tend to be overlooked at the best of times – and otherwise despised. This may be because Danes – in fact most Europeans – have completely forgotten about their own tumultuous past [and related paradoxes]. They entirely 'blocked out' all the chaos and tragedy involved in the making of their own 'developmental successes' [not to mention, the role of other continents' resources]. What Fukuyama calls a colossal 'Historical Amnesia' is understandable, given the traumas [and lacks-of-honour] involved. Yet it's most regrettable when Europeans (or European colons of North America and Oceania) take on the task of evaluating non-European (or non-European populated) countries like Bangladesh and their own developmental journeys. Again, the world through Danish eyes despises paradoxes. It is unrealistic.

This apparent lack of realism affects, first, western views of the world as a whole. One can read, for instance, in the French *Courrier International* (from April-May 2023) a lamentation by a Turkish-born Iranian-American, writing from Prague, decrying the Golden Decades (ca 1950-1980) – when [among other wonders] 'populism and authoritarianism were confined to a small, un-cultured group of poor countries [across the world]' (Roumini, 2023, p.7). Yet in 1975, that 'small' group of countries included not only the whole of Africa, but also the Middle East, most of Asia except (glorious but shaky) India and perhaps Japan, as well as the whole of Latin America and much of Europe – so, ball-part, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of humankind (and this only if India excluded²). In 1975, the USSR covered over half of Europe; China of course was stringent; yet South Korea too was plainly authoritarian, as were Spain and South Africa and Turkey and Brazil. Furthermore, if we consider democracies not according to 'nominal powers' enshrined or not in constitutions, but as the actual degree of citizen well-being and empowerment, deeply authoritarian regimes often fare(d) infinitely better than more 'democratic' ones – notably, and most unfortunately, China fared much better than India; African comparisons are much more discouraging still. In any case, there was indeed during

² If we include India's questionable democratic venues in the 'non-full-democracies', can we say 7/8 or 9/10 of humankind?

the Golden Decades a small, nay, tiny minority of deeply exceptional countries: the minuscule, privileged few democracies that could be called developed and functional. Denmark included. (In fact, of course, there are far more democratic systems – and more functional systems – across the world in 2023 than there were in 1975. Than ever before in the history of humankind, in fact. These include South Korea, Brazil, South Africa and Spain of course, but also countries such as Bangladesh and the Philippines.)

But Western lack of realism also affects the internal, institutional ways we imagine specific countries are to ‘Get to Denmark’. Generally speaking, and exaggerating only a bit, it is imagined that developed, functional economic and political institutions out there are simply to materialize– as soon as someone that is reasonably powerful wants them to do so (Fukuyama, 2011, C1). That’s probably why, it has been noted, the US’ plans to implant post-war democracy in Iraq essentially involved a Tinkerbell³-like [Magical] ‘Freedom Dust’ (fairy dance included; Maher, 2005). Conversely, when pristine economic, social and political institutions fail to fall from the sky overnight, many imagine this is the fault of a specific individual, or at least a specific group – generally that of ‘politicians’. Yet that belief is incongruent with widely available data – that provided, for instance, by Transparency International, the very organisation that ranks Denmark as the world’s least corrupt country in 2022 (Transparency international [TI], 2022). TI’s Global Corruption Index, we have noted elsewhere, gave for the year 2019 a score of 50/100 or less to 2/3 of the world’s countries (Casaca, 2020); in 2022 75% of 180 countries scored 55/100 or less (Transparency International, 2023). These world-wide numbers, which can only be described as a widespread statistical pattern, hint at the ‘corruption’ phenomenon as much more of an inescapable fact of life across the overwhelming majority of the world than as a ‘deviation from the norm’ (Casaca, 2020). Of course, specific individuals come to much contribute and even embody specific political and economic policies – which is why someone once said something along the lines that ‘being on the [political] Left side of Dick Cheney was being on the Right side of History’⁴. And yet, to use Braudel’s (1987) borrowed analogies, in such a scenario [specific individuals] are roses, systemic corruption is the gardener. Or, to use a French saying, when the finger points to the sky, one must not waste much time analysing the finger.

3. The World In-The-Making

Can Danes, can westerners make an effort to understand countries like Bangladesh? Like India? Like China? Like Uzbekistan? ... Yes, we like to think they probably could. Writers like Fernand Braudel and Francis Fukuyama, among others, remind us that it’s perfectly possible. Furthermore, all westerners definitely should make that effort. Paradoxes included.

By the way, Denmark’s GDP growth in 2022 was... 0% (IMF, 2023b). In fact, out of the only ten instances of negative GDP growth in the world in 2022, two (Yemen and Ukraine) were in war-torn countries, two (Chile and Sri Lanka) are experiencing exceptionally tight fiscal policies; no less than six (the UK, Germany,

³ Tinkerbell is Peter pan’s companion fairy, whose magical dust conferred the power to fly high in the sky

⁴ And we can note that even then, the true power by specific individuals is much disputable. In the Epilogue of War and Peace, for instance, Lev Tolstoi builds a strong argument against the true personal power of decision of napoleon himself (who, for instance, always planned to attack England [but never could] and was always utterly un-interested in Russia [until forced otherwise])

Sweden, Czech Republic, Letonia and Lithuania) are located in Europe and experiencing no discernible exceptional tragedy [apart from Brexit]. More generally speaking, western numbers on the world stage – be it populational, GDP growth-related, even political corruption-related – leave much to be desired.

And at this point, as we're about to suggest a few hints of what we believe may await us all in the future, we'd like to express the principle according to which numbers always hold the keys of lucidity. Not (only) because numbers are perhaps the most objective facts attainable by the inherently biased human mind, nor because every number is relevant. However, through numbers alone can one practice the miraculous science of statistics – and statistical patterns, or regularities, are a powerful tool of understanding indeed. They illuminate general tendencies. For instance, as we've noted elsewhere (Casaca, 2022; and as we believe to be deeply relevant) while no less than 1 in every 3 human beings in this world is either Indian or Chinese, European citizens account for less than one in every twenty individuals. In fact, over half the world's population is contained in the so-called 'Valeriepieris Circle' covering roughly-speaking South and East Asia (Tropical Hainan, 2023). Furthermore, unlike Europe's quickly aging populations, these Asian citizens are also very young indeed. Economic indicators point to the same general pattern. For instance, according to World Economics' 'Thought for the Day' for today, October 3rd, 2023 (World Economics, 2023), 'The Future is Asian'. Asia-Pacific's share of the globe's GDP, according to this source, stands at 51%; Europe would account for 18%, North America for 13%, South America for 7%; as for the 'rest of the world' – 12%. Well. Even as regards political corruption – for which, unfortunately, we lack enough data to create statistical patterns since let's say 1975 – Transparency International (2023) itself provides some surprises. For instance, although 'only' six non-western countries (Singapore, Hong Kong, Uruguay, Japan, Seychelles, and Bhutan) make it to the Top25 'Least Corrupt', the world's Top50 contains no less than 22 non-western political entities. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the United States stands at a humble 24th rank – between the Seychelles and Bhutan. The UK stands at an also humble n°18. No Western European (as opposed to Scandinavian) country makes it to the Top5. Singapore does.

However, as noted elsewhere (Casaca, 2023) perhaps the numbers most decisively concerning for western (and Indian) observers concern investment capacity in [global] infrastructure. We have noted elsewhere that 'the IMF [itself] states its own worldwide financial assistance as standing at ca. \$52 billion in 1984 (31.12) and \$148 billion in 2022 (31.05; IMF, 2023c) – that is, \$100 billion in worldwide financial assistance over the last 40 years. By contrast, today's China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) involves not billions, but trillions of dollars – according to one estimate (Refinitiv, 2019), \$3.5 trillion between 2013 and 2019, across 126 countries'. These numbers are crushing all by themselves – statistically speaking. Yet what makes us convinced that they are the most telling of all is the reasoning of Adam Smith himself, who, in his timeless *Wealth of Nations* (Smith, 2009, C1) argued at length about the incomparable [economic] generative power of infrastructure. Smith labelled infrastructure as 'fixed capital', which he carefully distinguished from 'circulating capital'. *Circulating* capital, as the name implies, circulates among economic agents; it emerges from simple trade of surplus production. It is present in even the simplest society, the most humble as in the most successful – and can perhaps be seen as just as essential as the blood flowing in our veins. This type of capital is generated, circulates, is then consumed – and vanishes. Hence, essential as it is to economic life, it is incapable by itself of increasing one's

economic capacity (which is why, while all human societies necessarily had some form of circulating capital, not all were ‘economically successful’). If a given individual/ collective intends to increase its economic power, it must invest part of this circulating capital into *fixed capital*, capital that is fixed in place, aka infrastructure. This is because fixed capital alone can multiply the generative capacity of circulating capital (a little like the heart transforms the generative capacity of blood). A common example is the wind turbine: relatively expensive to set up, as most forms of fixed capital are, but thereby capable of generating great amounts of precious energy literally out of thin air and with little to no further human labour involved. Fixed capital can take many forms, from factories to computer systems to roads and railways and banks and so on and so forth – the miracle of fixed capital is always the same, provided, that is, that it takes into account existing circulating capitals (hence why wind turbines only built in places of high winds).

So finally, coming back to Chinese investments, and why we believe they are especially relevant for predictions regarding the World-In-The-Making we’re witnessing: 1) because investments in fixed capital demand a considerable amount of surplus circulating capital, he who invests most in infrastructure is probably the richest [right now]; 2) because fixed capital is, all else being equal, the most reliable predictor of future economic power, Chinese astounding world-wide investments hint at a great future wealth indeed; 3) because the most effective fixed capital is that better adjusted to existent [and future!] flows of circulating capital, and as Chinese worldwide investments in strategic commercial routes clearly aim to adapt to, nay, shape our increasingly globalised world... or shall I say our Brave, Heavily Chinese-Influenced, New World.

4. History In The Making [Generally Speaking]

So the show goes on, the wheels keep turning, and fortunes are transforming. That’s another huge reason to study History in the Making across the [non-First] world. Industrializing, from scratch, in the 20th and 21st century – Lessons for 12th Graders. Fernand Braudel would approve, we’re convinced.

Industrializing, ‘developing’, is essentially seen as catching up, first of all. If we conceptualize Rostow’s take-off date of 1780 (Smith, n.d.) as the start of the Industrial revolution in the UK and mark its end after World War Two and the start of successive waves of worldwide independence, so in 1945, the period lasted for 165 years. Braudel speaks of ‘only two centuries, but what centuries they were!’ (Braudel, 1987, p.143). During this crucial period, the non-western world ‘missed’ the development of powerful factories, coupled with mighty banks and corporations capable of multiplying production many, manyfold; it ‘missed’ the development of a complex and ‘impersonal’ state bureaucracy capable of administrating enormous amounts of resources and articulating political action by the masses; it ‘missed’ the development of ‘strong civil societies’ capable of organising and peacefully cooperating to achieve common goals.

Well, in the interest of accuracy, non-western peoples didn’t really ‘miss’ the Industrial Revolution. They ‘financed it elsewhere’; it’s not the same thing. For, in global economic terms, the Industrial Revolution developed in a few privileged countries only through/ because of the immense exploitation of the rest of the world (to use a world-system terminology [see for instance Gills & Frank, 1994] ‘industrializing nations’ experienced ‘resource accumulation’ at the expense of

‘resource disintegration’ elsewhere). This economic exploitation often reflected in outright political colonization – or at least, as in China and Latin America, in a complete mockery of theoretical national sovereignty.

It’s important to point out that the Industrial Revolution was a global phenomenon, and that (almost) every people participated – albeit from different standpoints, and with different consequences for what came afterwards. Remembering this ‘global participation’ helps us better understand the infinite challenges of History in the Making, but also the benefits and opportunities.

The task of Industrializing itself, let us repeat this, was immense – and immensely difficult. It’s been an incredible journey. Here’s what one can read in ‘Grammar of Civilisations’ (1987), speaking, in the first chapter, of the ‘Islamic World’:

‘An ever-difficult economic growth: the dilemma (...) is that of the entire Third World. One must, in order to successfully integrate the world economy, to operate one’s own Industrial Revolution. A task easy to formulate, much harder to achieve, and one whose fruits will not be immediately visible... A task to which the colonial episode has failed to prepare anyone. (...)

Great progress has been made. However, demographic growth ceaselessly threatens all possibilities. (...) A birth rate of 50 to 1000, that is 6 or 7 children per family (...) a descending death rate, perhaps 20 per 1000; population growth of 2.5 to 3% per year (...) this rhythm, leading to a doubling population in one generation alone (...) combines death rates in Europe in 1800, without the outlets of colonialism and migration, with birth rates possible only at the best periods of the Middle Ages, if then... The mixture is simply explosive. (...)

[We thus witness] the stagnation of economic well-being, or even regression, in spite of [sometimes awesome] increases in production. (...) [For instance] in Pakistan, industrial production has grown from a 100-basis point in 1952 to 215 in 1958...’ (Braudel, 1964, pp.138-140).

This passage from *History in the Making*, 1963, reminds us of at least two relevant factors. First, advances in hygiene, medicine, life expectancy (and to a lesser extent education) were significant across the globe – hence the demographic dilemma, among others. Other ‘technologies’ were also of global relevance, and these included mass production capacities, transportation revolutions, and even infrastructure – in colonies and non-colonies alike. Of course, much economic-related infrastructure – be it railway systems in the Indian sub-continent or coffee harvest facilities in Brazil – served the interests of the inherited industrial world-system, that is, western interests. Yet it was industrial infrastructure all the same, and countries *Making History* in 1963 already had some very impressive achievements to their name (see above the example of Pakistan; of course, USSR, India and above all China – already in 1963! [Braudel, 1987] – numbers were much more impressive still). The technologies that allowed for the Green Revolution symbolize another global benefit obtained from new and wondrous possibilities. On the other hand, the world of strictly ‘market opportunities’ presented to all peoples across the globe was now, well, global itself. New and countless venues were now opened; as ‘globalisation’ emerged, as production grew across the globe and as economies became more and more integrated, economic possibilities multiplied. In 2023, we can notice that all Third-World success stories were able to make the most out of this self-multiplying external market (e.g. Castells, 2008).

A third element of the Industrial revolution that affected all across the globe

was political. Namely, the imposition of the [Industrial] Modern State, the political reflection of the [Industrial] Modern Market Economy let's say, indiscriminately across the globe. Modern State institutions, of course, like modern economic infrastructure, present immense new opportunities for power, control, astounding production, and so on. However, this 'universal', or indiscriminate, top-down imposition of Modern State institutions posed many problems, because the non-Industrialised world was not homogeneous at all. China in 1750 was a much different place than Hawaii, or Colombia, or Angola, or Morocco, or India; these differences influenced different experiences of the Industrial Revolution itself – and were translated in different 20th century realities. It is so often said, and indeed today a truism, that the USSR was but a new expression of the Russian empire; that the Chinese Republic inherited more than a lot from the Chinese Empire; that the Indian democracy reflects the numerous pre-industrial sources of power more than any 'colonial legacy'. In retrospect, perhaps, one can wonder how could it ever be otherwise – as 'modern institutions' never fall from the sky and must work with what's actually present on earth at the time of their 'birth'/ imposition (the word 'emergence' simply doesn't apply). And this is assuming that some sort of 'strong state structure' was in place before the Industrial Revolution. Countless 'tribal areas' of the world – most Polynesian islands and tropical Africa, for instance – seem to battle similar and much deeper 'ingrained dysfunctions', which Fukuyama described as everything from basic property law to forms of social hierarchy and the most basic internal coherence (Fukuyama, 2011, Introduction). In fact, this top-down imposition of Modern State institutions is perhaps what best explains the statistical patterns we find in 2022's Global Corruption Index (Transparency international, 2022). Paradoxes simply abound.

Of course, economics, politics [and so-called 'civil society'] are but sides of the same coin. History in the Making, like every wide-ranging human transformation, affects all areas in tandem. In all areas, the Third World inherited both challenges and opportunities, and these must be studied in general terms as our developments in History in the Making unfold. However, the global similarities stop here.

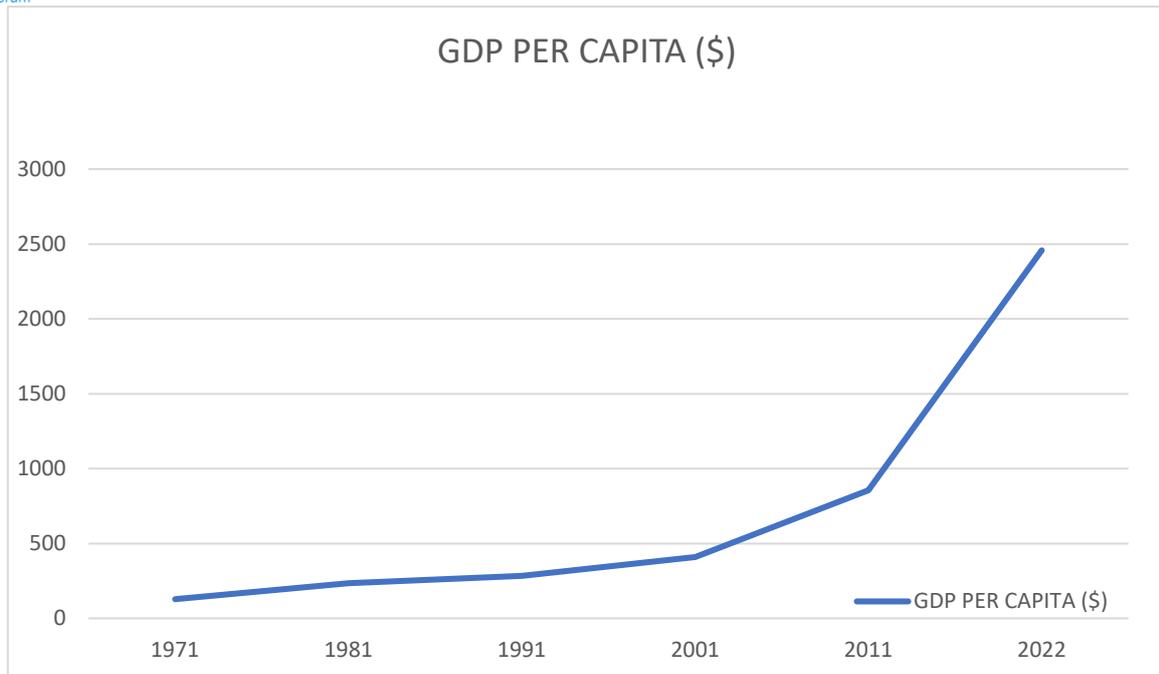
For another striking feature of today's 'third World' is exactly how much diverse peoples experienced different fortunes. Certainly most Somalis would happily settle with 'Getting to China' [on their way to mirage-like Denmark]. Economic outlooks have widely varied – even as, again, the greatest successes all seem enmeshed with the global world-system at large, much must be achieved in all areas if one is to be able to begin 'competing in the global market'. Wars, famines, genocides, IMF financial action have not affected all equally; all these specific tragedies are also chapters of 'History in the Making'. Another huge goal of these series is to understand 'political corruption' better – understand the ways in which modern political structures (aka the Modern State) de facto operate. This implies inquiring not whether political structures are 'dysfunctional', not even looking at ratings and other 'quantitative comparisons'. The ambition of understanding political corruption demands extensive exploration of dysfunction – asking how deeply dysfunctional, and how so. The ambition to dive far into the paradoxes themselves.

5. Bangla History In The Making – The Bangla Paradox

The series ‘History in the Making’ was designed when thinking about the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, because the People’s Republic of Bangladesh is a perfect example of History in the Making. The shortest possible background story is as follows: a country in the north of the Indian sub-continent, entirely located along the world’s largest delta, was the first British colony in the area as it was a quite rich quarter at the time. Deeply exploited [victim of above-mentioned ‘resource disintegration’] during colonial times, it experienced ‘decolonization’ as part of the larger political unit Pakistan – that is, as a human collective intuitively merged with today’s Pakistan, but located over 1000 kms away (separated by Indian territory). This religion-based arrangement, which separated the long united and interdependent Bengali-populated areas of Eastern Bengal (today’s Bangladesh) and West Bengal (now a Federated Indian State) so as to place the former under Islamabad’s administration was questionable at the time, and in retrospect perhaps downright nonsensical. It did not go well. By then an abjectly poor area of the world, Bangladesh succeeded in obtaining its own independence in 1971, after a well-documented, extremely bloody mass destruction campaign orchestrated by Islamabad. Deemed a ‘basket case’ by Henri Kissinger, unaided by the Second World, Bangladesh began its 20th-Century Independent History in some of the worst possible conditions. However, incredibly to all observers – and here begins our History in the Making – Bangladesh operated a Miracle across 50 years of existence (1971 to 2021 is the symbolic timeframe).

It is important to underline, again, that in 1971, Bangladesh could hardly face a worse scenario. First, it faced all common Third World dilemmas. The demographic dilemma was overwhelming – for Bangladesh was (and is!) an outstandingly (over)populated country, wherein famine was so recurring and systematic (seasonal) it had a common name: monga. Bangladesh’s economy, as mentioned, was noteworthy decimated during British rule; a miserably poor producer of raw materials such as jute, in 1947 ‘East Pakistan’ lacked a single jute-transformation factory (all located in West Bengal; Braudel, 1987). Bangladesh further faced the need to ‘industrialise’ in a so-to-speak properly national manner, for Bangladesh’s specific economic interests when part of (1000-kms apart) larger Pakistan were never a priority. But Bangladesh also faced further challenges, challenges so great observers like Henry Kissinger thought them outright unsurpassable; first among these, its sheer geographical outlook as an immense delta (over five times larger than the Nile’s, and infinitely more turbulent) plagued by often apocalyptic floods – and systematically threatened by tropical cyclones. To top it all off, not only did East Bengal/ Bangladesh have little historical tradition of independent political structures; what political structures and forces there were were systematically targeted during the Liberation War, the Bangladesh genocide and general destruction campaign operated by Pakistani Military forces.

Bangladesh’s future outlook could hardly seem more discouraging in 1971. Which is why the astounding, miraculous achievements since then are among the most impressive in all the world’s Modern History.



BANGLADESH'S MIRACLE IN NUMBERS

Figure 1 – *Bangladesh's GDP Per Capita, 1971-2022*

Note 1 - GDP per capita is gross domestic product divided by midyear population. GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or for depletion and degradation of natural resources. Data are in current U.S. dollars.'

Note 2 – Graph created with data from Macrotrends, 'Bangladesh GDP Per Capita 1960-2023'. (2023).
<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/BGD/bangladesh/gdp-per-capita>

Table 1 – *GDP Per Capita In India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, 1990 – 2010 - 2022*

GDP per Capita, PPP			
COUNTRY	1990	2010	2022
India	1.819	4.213	7.096
Bangladesh	1.730	2.683	6.263
Pakistan	3.062	4.058	5.452

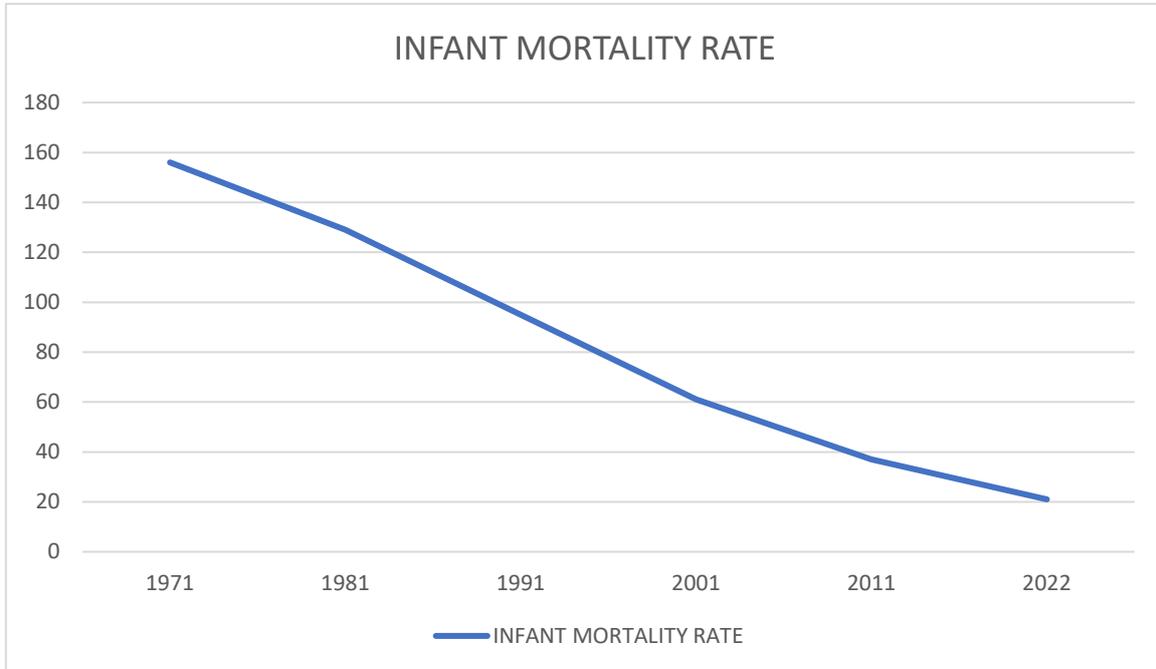
Note 1 Data obtained from the World Bank, 'GDP per capita, PPP (current international \$) - Bangladesh, Pakistan, India'. (2023).
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD?locations=BD-PK-IN>

As we can see from the charts above, in pure GDP per capita terms, Bangladesh's developments have been very impressive indeed. Bangladesh's evolution since 1972 (GDP per capita of 91\$) to 2022 (6.263\$; Macrotrends, 2023a) is astounding by itself. It becomes even more impressive when compared with Pakistani numbers, for Pakistan presented numbers twice as high in 1972 (151\$; Macrotrends, 2023b).

However, as GDP per capita represents a statistical average, we all know it can hide much inequality within. A group of 6 people earning 50\$ each as salary

will translate in an average salary of 50\$ ($50 \times 6 = 300$; $300:6 = 50$). However, the same 50\$ average salary can represent a group of 6 people with widely different earnings, for instance a ten-times difference of 100\$ versus 10\$ ($100 + 100 + 50 + 30 + 10 + 10 = 300$; $300:6 = 50$). Which is why it is useful to cross data on GDP per capita with data more reflective of what has been called ‘human empowerment’ (Rahman, 2023, quoting Amartya Sen).

Figure 2 – Bangladesh Infant Mortality Rate, 1971 - 2022



Note 1 The expression of the data presented in Table 2 (below) in the form of a graph.

Table 2 – Infant Mortality Rate, 1971-2022

INFANT MORTALITY RATE	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011	2022
	156	129	95	61	37	21

Note 1 Data obtained from Macrotrends, ‘Bangladesh Infant Mortality Rate 1950-2023’. (2023). <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/BGD/bangladesh/infant-mortality-rate>

Table 3 - Infant Mortality Rate in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, 1985-2022

Infant Mortality Rate			
COUNTRY	1985	2010	2022
India	100.69	45.307	26.619
Bangladesh	122	39	19
Pakistan	115.361	72.625	55.777

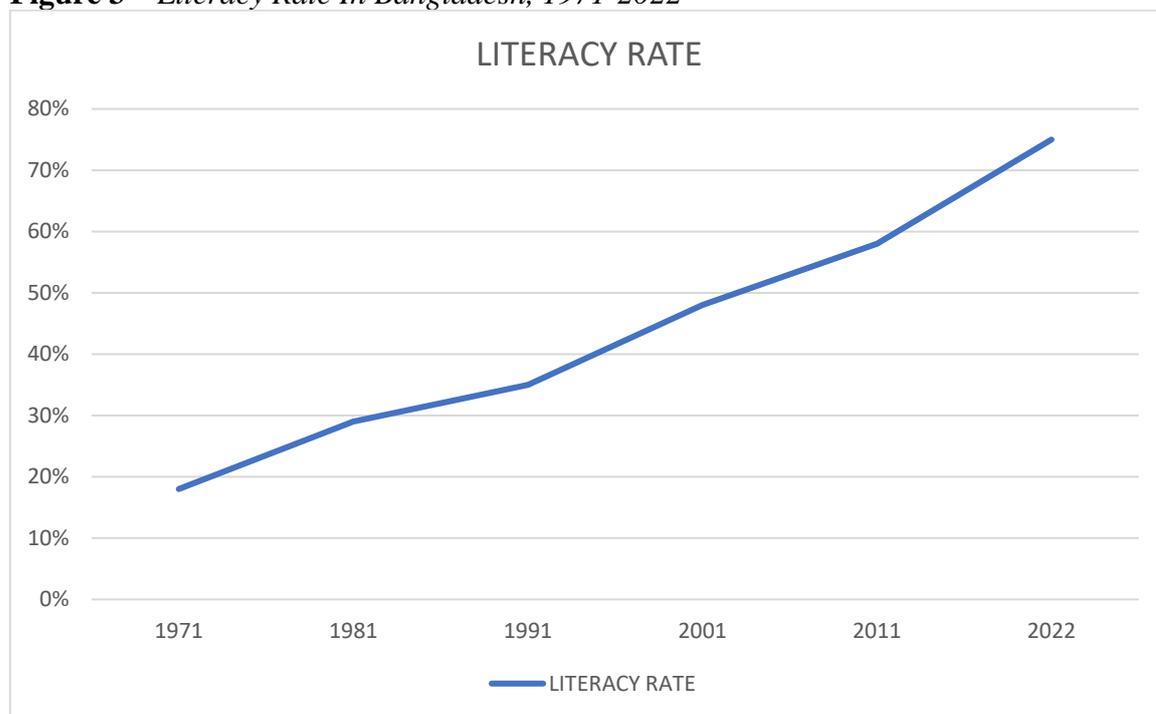
Note 1 – Data obtained from Macrotrends,
<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/BGD/bangladesh/infant-mortality-rate>
<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/PAK/pakistan/infant-mortality-rate>
<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/IND/india/infant-mortality-rate>

Table 4 – Literacy Rate In Bangladesh, Ten-Year Gaps, 1971 To 2022

LITERACY RATE	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011	2022
		18%	29%	35%	48%	58%

Note 1 Data obtained from Macrotrends, ‘Bangladesh Literacy Rate 1981-2023’. (2023). <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/BGD/bangladesh/literacy-rate> Data for 1971 was found in Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh, ‘Press Release: Free Textbooks Distribution – A Success Story of Bangladesh’ (2023). https://mofa.gov.bd/site/press_release/646db55b-d795-4939-8efb-15a39301ac11

Figure 3 – Literacy Rate In Bangladesh, 1971-2022



Note 1 The expression of the data presented in Table 4 (above) in the form of a graph.

Table 5 – Literacy Rate In India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan (1981), 1991 – 2010 - 2022

COUNTRY	Literacy Rate		
	1991	2010	2022
India	48%	69%	74%
Bangladesh	35%	59%	75%
Pakistan	25% (1981)	55%	58%

Note 1 – Data obtained from Macrotrends, ‘Bangladesh Literacy Rate 1981-2023’. (2023). <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/BGD/bangladesh/literacy-rate> ; Macrotrends, ‘Pakistan Literacy Rate 1981-2023’. (2023). <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/PAK/pakistan/literacy-rate> ; Macrotrends, ‘India Literacy Rate 1981-2023’. (2023). <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/IND/india/literacy-rate>

And indeed, Bangladeshi data regarding Infant Mortality Rates and Literacy Rates is more impressive still – as well as revealing of overall democratization-as-empowerment. Once again, comparisons with Pakistan are most revealing: for instance, although Bangladesh’s GDP per capita in 2022 is only ‘slightly’ higher (6.263\$) than that of Pakistan (5.452\$), its Infant Mortality Rate (19 per 1000) is

over twice as low as Pakistan's (55 to 1000). In fact, Bangladesh surpasses both India and Bangladesh as concerns Infant Mortality Rates and Literacy Rates. Not only is this most admirable, it also suggests strong political-institutional and social developments – which starkly contrast with Bangladesh's fame for 'political corruption'. The paradox deepens.

Never in the history of humankind was there a human collective wherein economic, political and social dynamics were not entirely intermeshed and indeed interdependent. This does not mean all areas are at all times equally functional – or dysfunctional; however, it does mean all aspects of a given human collective are always deeply interconnected. For instance, even the simplest forms of 'circulating capital' demand commonly enforced rights and obligations, as well as commonly agreed rules of transactions – all of which are political features found in all societies (e.g. Febvre, 1996). Economic and political dynamics both reflect and influence each other – and when one is transformed, so is necessarily the other. Social aspects such as values and moral dictates (not to mention spiritual well-being) in turn both reflect and influence economic dynamics and political provisions. Three sides of the same coin – pass the paradox – found everywhere since the dawn of times.

So how was the Bangladeshi miracle achieved? It is a long story. In fact, it involves a complex series of long stories. And the three sides of the coin are necessarily present everywhere.

The first element in the Bangladeshi miracle, or at least that invariably mentioned, regards the highly successful integration of the country within the Globalized Economy – more concretely, its successful ventures in the global chain of garments manufacture. This ability to make the most of global economic opportunities in this sector was aided, it is true, by initiatives such as preferential trade by the EU (GSP+ and so on), which provides tax benefits to Bangladeshi-made garments in the EU market; however, it is also true that the EU has given similar opportunities to many countries, and Bangladesh grabbed them like no other. Which is probably because, although economic 'market opportunities' [to gather significant amounts of circulating capital] indeed ultimately decide a country's material fortunes, they are never the only factor at play. Many political provisions and social dynamics are involved in a given country's ability to profit from economic circumstances. Thus, for instance, Bangladesh's current success finds its roots in the depths of the 1980s, when Bangladeshi governments [had no choice but to] open(ed) themselves to external agents, charitable NGOs and ruthless IMF alike. On the one hand, Bangladesh became a test-tube for (economic, political and social) 'developmental strategies' effected by NGOs, many of extremely remarkable success (and a Nobel Prize, no less). On the other hand, Bangladesh also gradually 'liberalized' the economy – meaning withdrawing subsidies and other state provisions and 'facilitating private investments', political measures of immense social impact – and so ultimately made possible the country's insertion in global production chains. When one ambitions to study Bangladesh's exemplary economic trajectory and 'History in the Making', one must deeply explore all facets of Bangladeshi existence – in an integrated fashion.

This is also true, for instance, of Bangladesh's Green Revolution, which effectively ended systemic famine (the seasonal famine mentioned above, 'monga') and even allowed for ample food surpluses – not to mention, more-than-honorable

places in the world’s ranking of cereal and vegetable producers (e.g. Bokhtiar & Samsuzzaman, 2023). This was perhaps the greatest of all miracles, no less because Bangladesh is a poster-child for overpopulation (1.330 habs/ sq. km. as we speak!; Worldometer, 2023) and properly feeding all Bangladeshis seemed but a distant dream for millennia on end.

The Green Revolution was a pre-requisite for all other ‘economic-political-social’ developments in Bangladesh. Without it, ‘global-market based’ economic fortunes would not be feasible. This is because market-based capitals, Adam Smith’s ‘circulating capital’ we’ve mentioned in Section III, are as they say a ‘necessary, but not sufficient’ factor. Funding availability is sine qua non to the use of said funds, yet true development demands ‘fixed capital’ capable of multiplying the effects of available resources and opportunities. Yet even ‘fixed capital’ itself is a necessary, but not sufficient condition – investments in infrastructure must analyze available resources and opportunities so as to discern strategic priorities. To continue our previous metaphor, wind as circulating capital is useless without a fixed-capital windmill (or, better yet, wind turbine); however, even the best wind-turbine is useless when built in a windless area. The Green Revolution as ‘fixed capital’ may be seen as invariably the first ‘fixed capital investment general priority’, a pre-requisite for all other developments, because it concerns the most productive ‘economic resource’ available to humankind – humans themselves. In plain terms, well-fed citizens contribute infinitely more to national fortunes (and cost infinitely less to national resources) than non-well-fed citizens. More generally speaking, a mass of empowered citizens inevitably creates an empowered nation. This is true of every country in general, but perhaps even more of a strongly agricultural country such as Bangladesh. Even today (Mosharraf, 2023), 70% of Bangladesh’s population is rural – and, of this 70%, 87% of households depend on agriculture on way or another. Which means that a 1% rise in agricultural income has the potential to reduce overall poverty by 0.39% - compared to a 0.11% reduction contributed by a similar increase in non-rural income (Mosharaff, 2023).

However, Bangladesh’s Green Revolution is worth exploring in depth also for those aiming to understand ‘History in the Making’ more generally speaking. The Green Revolution is extremely significant not only insofar as it constitutes a quintessential transformation of Circulating Capital into Fixed Capital, but also because it reveals most explicit that all sectors of a country’s economics, politics and society are deeply interdependent – so deeply interdependent that one missing piece of the puzzle easily makes the whole construction crumble. This deep interdependence constitutes a crucial factor of all ‘History in the Making’; it is our ambition to develop it at length in future articles. A first overview is provided here.

Table 6: *Circulating Capital Underlying the Green Revolution*

GLOBAL ECON & TECHNOL	NATIONAL ECON & TECNOL
<p><i>At the basis</i>, [global] Research Technology Transfer [made possible by new globalised economic and political structures]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ High Yielding Varieties or HYV seeds, ➤ chemical pesticides, fertilisers, insecticides and ➤ controlled methods of irrigation and cultivation 	<p>Available government funds (top-down)</p> <p>Available production and resources (bottom-up)</p>

<i>Global market opportunities</i> <i>International aid</i> <i>NGO work (bottom-up) for example microcredit</i>	
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Note 1: Information gathered and re-structured from Mosharraf, B. (2023). Bangladesh Review – Green Revolution in the 21st Century – Wonderland Bangladesh. Empowerment Through Law of the Common People (ELCOP) and from Bokhtiar, S. M., & Samsuzzaman, S. (2023). A development trajectory of Bangladesh agriculture: from food deficit to surplus. Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council.

‘Research Technology Transfer’, the technological knowledge and tools at the source of the Green Revolution, are generally considered the greatest factor at play – and indeed, such globally-available (transferable) resources were sine qua non. However, globally-available technological know-how was a necessary, but not sufficient pre-condition; to this day not all developing countries have been able to materialize its potential. Which is why we’ll consider available technological knowledge and resources as ‘circulating capital’ for the purpose of this discussion. It could only be transformed into a Green Revolution ‘fixed capital’ through its articulation with a range of adapted, national-level infrastructure investments. The same is true not only of global market opportunities, but also of various forms of international aid and even NGO action – both of which, if not duly translated into lasting forms of ‘fixed capital’, are of little productivity at best (downright dysfunctional at worst, and not only through the various forms of embezzlement that often curse them⁵). All forms of ‘global circulating capital’ must articulate with ‘national circulating capital’, among other factors, if the right infrastructural investments are to be accomplished and long-lasting ‘fixed-capital driven development’ is to occur.

Which brings us to our second point: not only is circulating capital a necessary, but not sufficient condition, but also not all forms of infrastructure (fixed-capital) investments are equally successful. Fixed capital investments per se are also a necessary, but not sufficient factor at play.

Table 7: *Three Sides of the Coin involved in the Green Revolution*

ECONOMICS	POLITICS	SOCIETY
Top-down	Top-down	
National budget allocation/ funding National economic policies (ex. favouring private initiative through the restriction of government subsidies) Technological research (transfer)	National policy & strategy National legal framework National infrastructure	<i>Education, training needed for behavioural change in a traditional society</i> - nutritional knowledge - technical knowledge - awareness of benefits innovation
Market distribution / ‘expansion of value chains’: enhancing market access, distribution, storage capacities (ex. market linkages from	‘Robust & consistent policy framework, with substantial public investments in technology, rural infrastructure, and a reliable	<i>Economic incentives</i> - empowering small producers, ex. microcredit

⁵ One is reminded, in this regard, of an NGO worker in São Tomé e Príncipe who, as recently as ten years ago, casually discussed the possibility of importing rabbits into the island. Such import would decimate the local fauna.

<p>farmers to buyers to make agriculture profitable)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bottom-up</p> <p>Regulated market and legal protection Distribution of inputs (from HYV seeds to range of technologies)</p> <p>Market rentability Microcredit (initiated by NGOs, taken over by Bangladesh’s Central Bank) Fiscal incentives Private sector participation in minor irrigation</p>	<p>market’</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bottom-up</p> <p>Political stability and legal protection ‘Subsidizing and facilitating a timely and cost—effective supply of inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, irrigation machinery’ Quick and effective dissemination of technologies to end users ‘Strong institutional capacity to provide necessary services to farmers, such as large-scale adoption of technology’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - incentives such as fiscal benefits - market rentability <p>(If agriculture is not profitable, the farmer has no incentive to produce beyond subsistence levels)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Distribution of inputs</i></p> <p>Local infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - irrigation (ex solar irrigation pumps) - water logging - farm mechanization <p>Local technologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - adoption of HYV - crop zoning - soil testing
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Note 1: Information gathered and re-structured from Mosharraf, B. (2023). Bangladesh Review – Green Revolution in the 21st Century – Wonderland Bangladesh. Empowerment Through Law of the Common People (ELCOP) and from Bokhtiar, S. M., & Samsuzzaman, S. (2023). A development trajectory of Bangladesh agriculture: from food deficit to surplus. Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council.

And herein lies one of the most crucial aspects of History in the Making (more accurately speaking, of Human History in general): not only must circulating capital be transformed into fixed capital if development is to be meaningful, and not only must investments in fixed capital be duly prioritized so as to take into account available resources and opportunities. The articulation of circulating capital and fixed capital must be accomplished in all economic, political, and social areas at once. It is often said that ‘organic growth’ [in a given human collective] is like a balloon – it occurs on all fronts at the same time, in the same fashion that air expands in all directions at once. Again, achieving successful and lasting economic development can be seen like an extremely complex and variegated construction – wherein if one piece falls, the construction risks crumbling all together. Every factor influences both every other factor and the whole endeavour generally speaking. For instance, all the technology and infrastructure in the world can be of little meaning if the farming population is not properly educated regarding the benefits of this fixed capital – as well as properly trained on how to use it. On the other hand, all infrastructure and education can become useless if the farmer lacks palpable economic incentives to produce beyond subsistence levels. The best economic policies fail if market relations are not stabilized by properly enforced legal dispositions at all levels of the collective. The best legal provisions fail if ‘markets chains’ of storage, distribution, and exchange are not enforced in a coherent manner. We could go on.

Bokhtiar & Samsuzzaman (2023) write of ‘the right combination of government policies, plans, strategies; efforts by academics, researchers, extension specialists; [articulation with] food chain operators, processors, distributors; [and] above all, farmers themselves’. By this is meant everything from the strictly technological advances implied in the development of new cereal strains to the economic infrastructure needed for improved irrigation, improved transportation,

increased transactions and the political and social infrastructures needed for the transmission of new knowledge and education, social coherence in resource distribution, etc. It's all very complex at the best of times.

Yet it must be deeply explored, as countless nationally-based economic endeavours fail precisely because of the lack of interlinkage between a given collective's different areas of action. The point being, again, that History in the Making necessarily entails understanding exactly how these different areas can be addressed in an interdependent, coherent fashion.

A second area wherein Bangladesh has exceeded both itself and its neighbours (namely India and Pakistan is 'Education for All'. As mentioned, statistics on Education are perhaps even more revealing than those regarding GDP per capita – both because GDP per capita is a mathematical average that can be quite misleading and because statistics on education translate a crucial level of human empowerment.

Table 8 – *Some General Statistics Regarding Education For All In Bangladesh*

<p>1971 6 universities, literacy rate 18%, female school enrolment 17%</p> <p>2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 153 universities; 150.000 institutions overall • Literacy rate (overall) 75% • Primary school enrolment 98.3% (85% in 2000) • Girls enrolment 50%+ • 87% basic competence reading; 81% proficiency in maths • Repeat rates 6.4%; survival rate to grade 5 is 81% • 40M students; non enrolled 700.000 • Over 1M teachers • 2.7M girls with stipends
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Note 1 – Data gathered from Tasnim, W. (2023). Bangladesh Review – Education for All: Changing the Face of Bangladesh. Empowerment Through Law of the Common People (ELCOP).

If we maintain our view as human capital as the most potentially revolutionary form of fixed capital available to humankind, investments in 'education-as-fixed-capital' can be seen as those most crucial [beyond basic subsistence needs] for a country's long-term developmental success. Like the Green Revolution and the ability to feed all citizens, investments of resources in education-as-fixed-capital are quite substantial indeed. Yet the returns of this investment are of a quintessentially multiplying nature – educated citizens contribute infinitely more (and cost infinitely less) to the collective than non-educated citizens. Most basically, a literate and mathematically proficient population is sine qua non to mass use of modern technology and infrastructure. Modern technology and infrastructure are sine qua non to an educated population. Here we go again.

Table 9: Three Sides Of The Coin Involved In Education For All

Economics	Politics	Social
<p>Top-down Economic policies favouring investments in education 2.2% GDP allocated to education PPPs – government with IOs, NGOs, and private agents ‘to leverage resources, expertise, innovation to drive educational reforms’</p> <p>Bottom-up Economic empowerment sine qua non to educational choices made by citizens – children are only allowed to study if their work can be postponed Material benefits, cash rewards, etc.</p>	<p>Top-down (Row of international treaties as general guidance) Row of national policies as collective strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Curriculum reforms ➤ Teacher training/ capacity ➤ Stipends/ free book distribution <p>Bottom-up Ensuring educational infrastructure at the local level</p> <p>Ensuring inclusivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Non-formal education: life skills, adult literacy, lifelong learning, second chance for drop-outs ➤ Reaching remote and marginalised communities, establishing school facilities in even the most challenging geographical areas, mobile schools ➤ Free textbooks for children in five minority ethnic groups in their own language <p>Ensuring gender parity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Stipends, all girl schools, separate sanitation facilities, cash incentives for girls and adolescents ➤ Employment opportunities, supporting services regarding child care and other responsibilities 	<p>Top-down National campaigns of awareness regarding the benefits of education Social innovation from traditional moral and social constraints</p> <p>Bottom-up Equal access to education, economic resources, and political participation at the local level Female empowerment and engagement at the local level</p>

Note 1 – Data gathered from Tasnim, W. (2023). Bangladesh Review – Education for All: Changing the Face of Bangladesh. Empowerment Through Law of the Common People (ELCOP).

We chose to create a table that includes the special care taken regarding ‘Educational Inclusivity’ – which, of course, both reflects and interacts with

economic and political inclusivity more generally speaking, and which provides a further hint of the true nature of Bangladesh’s accomplishments. Bringing functional education to all corners, large and small, near and far away, geographically fortunate and unfortunate is no small matter. Here, too, Bangladesh must be thoroughly explored as a revealing example of ‘History in the Making’, capable of much illuminating similar struggles in other corners of the world.

And finally, we could not end this section without presenting what is perhaps the Greatest Jewel of this Crown – women empowerment. Women empowerment in Bangladesh is remarkable – we all know that most garment workers are women, for instance; Sheik Hasina, of course, is herself a woman (‘Asia’s Iron Lady’, it has been said; Banyan, 2023) and keen on women issues (South Asia Democratic Forum, 2023). More generally speaking, to continue the reasoning in this section, women empowerment – that is the empowerment (as fixed capital) of no less than half the population – is both crucial for long-term development and a particularly complex struggle faced by all ‘pre-industrial societies’ on their road to industrialization. Well-fed, educated, economically active and politically empowered women, of course, produce infinitely more than women disempowered in one (often more) of these respects. However, perhaps more than any other aspect, empowering women is impossible through economical or political ‘national policies’ alone. Women status relates to the deepest and most-ingrained social structures – and demands the most wide-ranging and vigorous ‘all-areas’ campaigns to eradicate. In Bangladesh, the female literacy rate is 72.82% and the female labour participation is 42.68% (Shaha, 2023). In Pakistan, it is 46.49% (Statista, 2023) and 21.67% (numbers for 2019; Amber & Bezawit, 2023), respectively. In India, female literacy stands at about 92% (numbers for 2021; Global Data, 2023)? BUT female labour participation is around 30% (Reuters, 2023). Further explorations of Bangladesh’s multi-variegated developments in women empowerment are much needed.

Table 10: Three Sides Of The Coin Involved In Women Empowerment

Economics	Politics	Social
<p style="text-align: center;">Top-down</p> <p>Economic policies favouring <u>financial empowerment</u>, e.g. the Central Bank lending to women entrepreneurs at reduced Women employability in garment sector</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Top-down</p> <p>(Row of international treaties as general guidance) Row of national policies as collective strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Non discrimination in public employment act (and other forms of <u>legal protection</u>) ➤ Reservation of seats in the National Parliament ➤ National Election Commission: rule of 33% female representation in all Committees as needed for Party registration 	<p style="text-align: center;">Top-down</p> <p>National campaigns of awareness Social innovation from traditional moral and social constraints Female empowerment beyond social constraints</p>

Bottom-up	Bottom-up	Bottom-up
Financial Inclusion through Microcredit (pioneered by the NGO Grameen bank; later made a national economic policy) Supporting services regarding childcare and other responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 1 of 2 Vice-Chairmen in Upazilas must be female ➤ 1/3 Seats in City Corporations, Upazila Parishads, Union Parishads must be female <p>Ensuring local legal protection</p>	Equal access to education, economic resources, and political participation at the local level – equal access to ‘capacity building’ Female empowerment and engagement at the local level

Note 1 – Data gathered from Shaha, A. R. (2023). Women Empowerment – Showcase Bangladesh. Empowerment Through the Law of the Common People (ELCOP).

We’ll conclude by noting that Shaha (2023) writes of ‘an integrated approach of capacity building, financial inclusion, and legal protection’. Here, again, empowerment-as-fixed-capital works on all fronts – and here, again, all fronts are interlinked and interdependent. One can read about the green Revolution (Mosharraf, 2023) that ‘In Bangladesh, empowering women through agriculture plays a transformative role in promoting gender equality and alleviating poverty’. Participating in the agricultural labour force, namely as micro-entrepreneurs benefitting of microcredit (whose loans women are both statistically more likely to repay and more likely to reinvest ‘in their families, in education and in health’) empowers women, which become capable, financially autonomous agents. Empowered-women-as-fixed-capital then operates its multiplying effects, in Bangladesh as elsewhere; thus Mosharraf (2023) writes that ‘if women had the same access to productive resources as men, FAO says, they could increase yields on their farms by 20 to 40%. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries between 2.5 and 4%, which could in turn reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12% to 17%’.

To summarize, Bangladesh’s economic fortunes are not just outstanding by themselves – they are extremely impressive in the complex intermeshing of economical, political, and social interactions that underly each. In all of Bangladesh’s endeavours we find a complex, variegated and interdependent row of factors somehow working in tandem and effecting the transformation of circulating capital into such crucial, basilar, overarching forms of ‘fixed capital’ such as the Green Revolution, Education for All and Women Empowerment. Further explorations are needed to better understand how History in the Making operates in all these areas in general – and in each in particular. However, what is clear and undeniable from the start is that no piece of the puzzle is unaffected by every other piece, and that each piece is absolutely crucial to the proverbial whole.

THE BANGLA PARADOX

Which brings us back to the beginning – the Bangla Paradox, the (more than apparent) discrepancy between all these economic and social indicators and the (more than outwardly perceived) political dysfunction witnessed in Bangladesh. Right here & right now, this Paradox is embodied most concretely in the People’s Republic upcoming elections, scheduled for January 4, 2024.

Of course, again, this political dysfunction is above all relative – relative to the country’s impressive social and economic achievements. As we hoped to have made clear, Bangladesh’s achievements would simply not be possible if the

political system was ‘fully dysfunctional’. It’s not true, as argued in the Economist, that ‘As it turns 50, Bangladesh is doing well, *despite* its politicians’ (The Economist, 2021). In the garment industry as elsewhere, it is simply not true that ‘Successive governments have helped mainly by getting out of the way’ (The Economist, 2021). As we have tried to begin exploring, Bangladeshi governmental action through the decades has been nothing but most proactive. And this even at the ‘worst of times’; one can read, for instance, in Mahmood (2021) the example of a nation-wide system of all-season [i.e; flood-resistant] feeder roads linking a host of once-isolated villages to national road systems (3.000 kms in 1988; 15.000 in 1997); the example is especially relevant perhaps as in that period of time Bangladesh’s ‘political instability’ was at its prime, at least as regards electoral politics.

Furthermore, obviously, the astounding development of the last 15 years necessarily demanded functional political involvement in the most varied sectors of collective existence. In fact, the Economist itself is almost schizophrenic in its opinions of Bangladeshi politics. A recent interview between one of its correspondents and Sheik Hasina herself led to her characterization as ‘Asia’s Iron Lady’. The first paragraph of that article stands in sharp contrast with other pieces on Bangladesh’s leadership. It reads thus:

‘Bangladesh’s prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, is the world’s longest-serving female head of government, and one of the most significant of either sex. During two decades in office she has presided over momentous poverty alleviation in her country of 170m, fuelled by average annual GDP growth of 7% for much of that time. The 75-year-old has led her party, the Awami League, to victory in three consecutive polls, and four in all—one more than Indira Gandhi or Margaret Thatcher managed. With an election due early next year, which she is expected to win, The Economist asked her, in an interview in her northern Virginia hotel suite, what ambitions she had left.’ (The Economist, 2023).

Of course (we are certain from experience) it’s much more difficult to vilify a character once one actually meets in person. Still, it perhaps seems that The Economist, too, is not without its internal paradoxes.

On the other hand, unfortunately, ‘accusations of political corruption’ are not limited to The Economist alone. In a recent webinar, when we had the opportunity to hear the most staunch accusations against the government (among which, paradoxically, that of ‘complete denial of freedom of expression’), much name-dropping occurred. Organisations such as Freedom House, Civitas Monitor, and even the Press Freedom Index of ‘Reporters Without Borders’, which allegedly placed Bangladesh at number 163 out of 180 countries, were mentioned (South Asia Democratic Forum, 2023). As regards the latter, one invites the reader to access news outlets such as Barta24 and see for him/herself⁶. More seriously still, at least at face value, is the recent Visa Ban (24.05.23) placed by the USA against ‘any Bangladeshi individual, believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh’ (Blinken, 2023). One may, of course, doubt the actual capacity by US congressmen to understand even their own national politics, let alone the politics of halfway across the world – in Iraq as in Bangladesh as in countless other instances. Initiatives by members of the European Parliament are hardly more convincing. However, and to us more worryingly, deeply academic (and knowledgeable) sources such as ‘Patronage as Politics in South

⁶ Words are strong and views are free, see for instance <https://www.barta24.com/details/politics-en/187850/bnp-will-create-tsunami-in-chattogram>

Asia' (Piliavsky, 2014) also strongly single out Bangladesh's Dhaka's clientelist networks. That is, even in works fully dedicated in studying 'patronage practices' present across the Third World and most specifically in South Asia, in a work fully aware that such 'patronage politics' constitutes above all a form of political-economic articulation less effective than, but as valid as, more 'bureaucratic-impersonal' dynamics of the industrialised Modern State, Bangladesh is observed as especially problematic. Transparency International, too, (2022) rates Bangladesh at 147 in 180, way behind India (rated 85/180) and even Pakistan (!; 140/180).

Political violence in Bangladesh, most unfortunately, is undeniable. It is urgent to try to understand it. Understanding the Bangla Paradox is indeed our greatest ambition, which we hope will gradually unfold as further studied are accomplished.

First, population numbers may provide a clue, insofar as historically speaking, as far as we know (from Chinese Imperial statistics, for instance), overpopulation always correlates with various forms of social unrest – and violence. However, as food security is one of Bangladesh's greatest glories, as hunger is more or less entirely eradicated, 'overpopulation numbers' become more relative and less predictive. Second, Patronage as Politics provides another clue: in an economic-political-social environment wherein state bureaucracy is weak and limited economic resources are distributed through clientelist networks, electoral results are somewhat of a 'zero-sum game' (Banyan, 2023). Winner patrons, which come to control disproportionate amounts of already narrow assets, must naturally favour redistribution to their clients and supporters alone – meaning that competing patrons and clients are disproportionately deprived of access to scarce goods and services. In this context, winning or losing [elections] is much less about vision and policy and much more about well-being if not survival. Political violence-in-contestation is relatively unavoidable, in Bangladesh as much elsewhere Third, this has been especially so in the 'liberalised economies' of post-1980s, wherein 'state safety networks' were removed in the name of 'the free market' and 'private enterprise' – leaving patrons and above all clients to fend for themselves, with the well-known world-wide results observed in the last few decades.

These three factors alone provide let's say 'general hints' – some larger pieces of the puzzle to be examined. Yet the specific context of Bangladesh must also be thoroughly explored. The Economist provides a clue in an article called 'Why are West Bengal politics so violent?' (Banyan, 2023). It turns out, perhaps unsurprisingly, that there's a wider, historical-structural element (à la Fernand Braudel) present in all this. One can read in The Economist:

'What explains such extreme political violence in one of India's most important and culturally rich states? Non-Bengali Indians might attribute it to Bengalis' stereotypical penchant for politicking and quarrelling, a counterpart to their equally fabled love of intellectualising. (The region has produced many of India's greatest artists, including Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray.) "Two Bengalis is an argument, three is a political party, four is a riot," goes an old joke.' (Banyan, 2023).

Rhetorical prowess apart, the article versed on a village-level electoral clash in June 2023, which left no less than 50 fatal victims (so being that no less than 11000 people went into 'preventive detention' during the event). In fact, 'According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, an NGO based in America, [West Bengal] recorded 3,338 incidents of political violence, including political murders, between 2016 and July 2023, the highest number of any state except

militancy-riven Jammu and Kashmir. This is despite the fact that West Bengal's underlying crime rate is not especially high. It is much lower than in the vast and lawless nearby states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.' (Banyan, 2023). Apart from the Patronage as Politics factor already mentioned, other issues of 'deep historical explanation' according to this article include a tradition of political insurgency during British rule, full of 'peasant uprisings and leftist insurgencies', so being that left-right divides substitute religious-ethnic frictions found elsewhere in India [which in turn indicates, if need be, that human conflicts are seldom related to their stated motives]. An unusually high level (by Indian standards) of local power and autonomy provided to village units in West Bengal is also mentioned as a further reason for localised carnages.

It is probable that all these factors are at play in Bangladesh as well; much further exploration is needed and such exploration is crucial for a productive understanding of 'Bangla History in the Making'. Diving in the Bangla Paradox has just began.

6. Conclusion

The world of 2023 is much different from that analysed in the 'Grammar of Civilisations'. The second World no longer exists; the First World has seen far better days – and indeed seems less and less able to serve as 'an example' for 'developing countries'. The Third World, the great majority of humankind, has achieved much indeed in the quest for 'industrialisation'. Of course, it has known a wide array of different fortunes. And only very, very few countries can be said to have achieved anything near 'Getting to Denmark'. Yet the global wheels are turning. History in the Making presents some astounding achievements indeed, and countless lessons on world history more generally speaking.

In this context, the West's general lack of let's say reverence, or at least respect, for all glories attained, is unfortunate indeed. Fukuyama noted this lack of realism stemmed from 'historical amnesia'. Perhaps also a misplaced sentiment of superiority and a large measure of self-delusion. Which may impede western observers from properly understanding History in the Making itself – much to their own loss.

History in the Making demands overall historical visions embarking the whole of humankind – and, for the better or worse, they're a tradition for that point of view. It also demands that specific cases be concretely studied. Which is why these articles are not called 'History in the Making' alone but (Bangla History in the Making. Even Fernand Braudel didn't write much about Bangladesh in 1963. Then part of Pakistan, with few foreseen glories at the time, the Bangladeshi case was not considered especially relevant in an overarching vision of 'Grammar of Civilisation'. Things have much changed today. And not only because Bangladeshi has astoundingly 'Flipped the Script' in the face of all detractors – and therefore holds incredibly valuable lessons on how to rise from the ashes, lessons most relevant to a variety of nations and countries across the world. Also because Bangladesh has done so in articulation with western powers such as the European Union. Above all because, for all its flaws, real and apparent, judged but not understood and so on and so forth, Bangladesh is a Democracy and upholds Democracy's values on all fronts. It is, by the way, the most Democratic Muslim nation the world has yet known – and not only in theory; in mindset as well. 'Developing Nations' are not the only ones which should have all eyes on Bangladesh – a declining Western World much in need of Asian allies (not to

mention, of civilisational understandings) should too.

We aim to explore the Bangla Paradox from two different but interlinked perspectives: the Bangla Paradox as a general human phenomenon let's say, to be studied in the perspective of 'History in the Making' across the 'Third World', on one hand; as a specific phenomenon, timely expressed in the People's Republic's upcoming elections of January 4, 2024, on the other. As regards the first aspect, we'll explore general sources on world history, globalised-times industrialisation, democratic politics, human rights and human empowerment, etc. We are especially interested, as mentioned, in the complex intermesh of all Three Sides of the Coin in this general 'History in the Making'. As regards the second angle, we'll analyse all the material specifically about Bangladeshi realities we'll be able to get, from both Bangladeshi sources and from elsewhere.

Now that a first draft of methodological overview was endeavoured, let's dive in and farther as possible.

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