





A special advisor is appointed. It is sometime after November 1977. From the ranks of a unified civil service comes Malik. The word means owner, but it is also a common name. His brief from the new military junta is to erase all signs of the recent past, of there having been. This is a high-powered post, but Malik finds a lot of the obvious already completed. Portraits, statues, named gates, road signs — all of this was removed in the first rush.

The job is a lot slower than he expected. Constant signs of progress have to be shown to the General. One morning, a major arch is removed from the highway. The workers get at this job with gusto. But most days, the erasure project focuses on the banal everyday. The big task will be editing the text-books, excising of names. But that has to navigate the bureaucracy — even in these times.

The fourth week on the job, the obvious appears to him within a morning transaction. A cart puller hands change back, and it is there in the flirty sunshine. The dead ruler's face, engraved on the two and the five. But not the ten. That last one has, for reasons unknown, a royal mosque next to the Governor's signature. There are red threads inside to prevent forgery.

He asks for an inventory of all currencies where the assassinated king appears. By the central bank's count, there are eight hundred million such notes in all denominations floating around. That works out to ten notes of any kind per person. The population is about eighty million plus at this time. Of course, some own higher value notes~~≠~~ and they might even be stockpiling. Some others have not seen notes, any notes, in weeks. Moving from work to food to hunger with no barter in between.

Trading posts are set up next to barber shops in the north. These men who cut hair are usually Urdu speakers. They turn out to be very reliable arbitrators. Honest, in their fashion. Maybe limbo citizenship and refugee status keeps them in check. Malik's system is a simple barter exchange. Bring in old torn notes and exchange them for new ones. One is to one. People who are not able to pass old notes when shopping come in for this. So many people reject torn notes in daily life anyway. Bhai eta bodlae den, Change it please.

The new currency notes have a sheaf of rice, a lotus, and a sun. No human faces.

The overall scheme works far in excess of Malik's original scope. Hundreds of thousands of notes pile in. The government quietly removes them each week and pulps them in warehouses. Mixed with water and bleach, crushed under pistons. The job has to be done quietly, because there are still loyalists in the cadres. Of course, the regime is not very nervous. They remember that nobody went to the President's house in August, to put bodies in front of tanks. But still, courage can be recovered. So the currency project stays secret. Asesino su caro.



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পাঁচুর মোড়
সদর বাজা
জয়পুরহাট

আর্ট হাউস



Somebody asks Malik: why not just pull all the offending money off the market. Why such an elaborate process. Because, he explains patiently, you can't withdraw that much currency without causing deflation. He studied Economics at Oxford in the sixties.

Army, civilian, khaki, tunic, khaki, safari suit. Governments collapse with clockwork strokes over the next decades. Malik is retired by the next incoming cabinet, the program is buried in an administrative shuffle. But in northern towns, the exchange mechanism continues for another thirty years. People forget, if they ever knew, the original motivation. The government oversight is gone, but parallel exchanges spring up. Twice within this period, the dead man's family comes back to power. They order millions of new markers for the patriarch. Kill me before my time, but you cannot kill my name.

To comply with her directive, the Central Bank focuses on bigger notes. For the first time in this small country's history, a thousand taka note is issued. That lost face again, inside a magenta halo, is newly minted.

The pulping of tiny notes, it continues.