

Mothering the motherless

BISHAWJIT DAS

For nearly a century, the Dhaka Hindu Ashram in the old part of the city has been providing shelter and care to orphans and needy children despite many struggles.

The nondescript sanctuary might not be known to most of us but ask anybody in Farashganj and you'll immediately learn about it and its *pishmoni*, the lady-superintendent Rani Mitra.

74-year-old Mitra is *pishi* (aunt) to the 80 children at the orphanage. She has dedicated her life for the children and has been working here for forty years.

The orphanage is located at 59, Farashganj beside the river Buriganga. Originally it was constructed in Bakshi Bazar on an area of 10 bighas. It shifted to Farashganj after the religious riots of 1950.

The Ashram opened in 1908 with just 5 children with financial support of a childless Jamindar's wife Dinmoni Chowdhurani. Renowned as Natore's Rani (Queen of Natore), she donated a large amount of money to this organisa-

tion to raise the orphans during the British rule.

The British also co-operated with this philanthropic idea and sanctioned a piece of land of 10 bighas in 1914.

"After the riots of the 50's ended, we took hold of that area in Bakshi Bazar again. But we could not manage to keep possession as we didn't have people to take care it," said Mitra.

"We used to get rent from that land and construction even after the Liberation War. Qamrunnessa Girls School, to whom we had rented, left the place without informing us and some other people forcibly took the possession of the land," added Mitra.

"We filed a case in 1984 and still we are fighting it in court. In a recent survey by the government officials, it was found out that the land was occupied by the Madrasa Shikha Board, Alia Madrasa and its hostel, a post office, a children's park etc."

Now, a four storied building in Farashganj, constructed with monetary aid from the Norwegian Bangladesh Association, houses the children.

"We can accommodate 150 children here, but no more because of financial crises," said Mitra.

"In old day's, I've heard that officials had to literally beg to get an orphan. In those times, people did not like the idea of sending kids to orphanages," reminisces Mitra.

"Now the situation is totally changed. We receive many applications, but can't afford to entertain most of them."

The 88-member orphanage lives like a family. 25 boys stay in the ground floor with their two male superintendents and two guards. 55 girls have the other floors with their *pishi* and two cooks.

Their days begins with morning prayers at 5 am. After finishing their chores and studies, they go to school at 10 am. All the staff join the morning and evening prayers. At 1 pm the children return from school and have lunch. The food menu is a humble one.



ALUSADIR MCCONNELL

Orphans have been finding sanctuary at the Dhaka Hindu Ashram for nearly a century.

Rani Mitra tells her tale

Rani Mitra, widow of a descendant of the Bhawal Jamindars, joined the orphanage in 1965 and could never leave.

"I did not have any intention to take a job. But the orphanage officials needed a 24-hour lady superintendent, which was not my idea of work as I would be left with no time for my family."

"Then the authorities said that if I didn't take over the responsibility they might have to close down the orphanage and return the students to their relatives. My late husband stepped in and persuaded me to take the job for a month. I was supposed to be here for only a month but that month never ended in 40 years," said Mitra.

"Often my children (three sons and a daughter) chide me saying that my devotion to the Ashram has turned them into orphans!"

"I tried several times to leave the place, but whenever I start packing, all the children and staff start crying and I have to postpone my departure. This orphanage has become a part of my life."

Mitra has a clear, loud and firm voice with an unmistakable Kolkata accent. She has spread it to all the students there and their accent is also beautiful.

While asked about memorable days, she recalled Brother Robert of Saint Gregory School and his assistance in 1972.

"After the war, we had nothing here. Everything was crushed and damaged. Then the priests of that school extended their hand and rebuilt this Ashram. They made furniture, provided books and helped in many other ways for which we are forever indebted."

B.S.

Dilemma over dismantling billboards

SOHEL ISLAM

The revenue department of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is in a dilemma over dismantling one fifth of the city's advertising billboards.

On July 15, the DCC decided against

renewing the contracts of all advertising firms and started dismantling billboards from July 19 in a bid to discourage excessive use of them.

In a recent interview with Star City, Dhaka Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said: "The VIP roads of the city might be declared billboard-free to preserve its aesthetic

aspects. Once the legal barriers are gone the sophisticated billboards will replace the old ones."

Following the decision, 19 advertising firms challenged the DCC's action in the High Court (HC). The HC stayed the dismantling operation until the matter is settled in court.

Later, six more firms filed a case with the HC, seeking the same exemption.

According to the revenue department, these 25 advertising firms own almost 80 per cent of the city's billboards.

Although there is a rule that each billboard should carry the advertiser's name, most don't follow that.

"We are supposed to remove the billboards which don't belong to those 25 firms. But, we cannot conduct our operation because we are unable to identify which ones are illegal," said Saiful Islam, an official of DCC's Zone Nine.

"There's a risk that if we dismantle any of the billboards of the firms which went to the HC, it could be us who will then have to land up in court. That's why the entire operation is stalled at the moment," said Islam.

In justifying their going to the court, the advertising firms said that the DCC's recent 30 per cent increase in tax for billboard advertising has not been done in tune with reality.

"The prime reason behind this raise was to discourage the mushroom growth of billboards. Another reason is that we are planning to replace the old billboards with modern ones," said an official of the DCC's revenue department requesting anonymity.

Meanwhile, the firms have continued requesting advertisement for its blank billboards despite the legal complications.

Replying to a question, Islam said that they too were not clear about the legal implications. "We are not sure whether the advertising firms can do further business with their billboards when the matter is in court."

Keep off cell phones while driving

CITY CORRESPONDENT

With the use of mobile phones getting more popular every day, it's a common sight in Dhaka to see people talking on their cell phones while driving. However that tendency can prove fatal as it increases the risk of traffic accidents.

There are estimated 15 lakh mobile phone users across the country, a majority of whom are Dhaka residents. Dhaka has about 1,11,000 registered cars according to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) statistics. Besides, there are numerous motorbikes, taxicabs and other vehicles and a good number of the people who drive or ride them, have mobile phones.

"Self driven car and motorbike drivers

often talk on their cell phones while they are driving, and that is a prime reason for many accidents," said a senior official of the BRTA. "As we do not have any legal power to check this practice, drivers are getting away with the dangerous game," he added.

A United Kingdom Transport Research Laboratory study conducted last year, proved that talking over mobile phone while driving carries more risk than driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The danger remains the same be it a hand-free or a hand-held mobile phone.

"Considering the potential hazard, many countries including the USA and the UK, have prohibited talking on mobile phones while driving. It's about time we did the same, otherwise the situation may go beyond control," said a BRTA official.



Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is in a dilemma over dismantling the advertising billboards on DCC land.

Health, Market Price & Library

HEALTH

- Hospitals**
Heart
 National Institute of Cardio Vascular Diseases (NICVD), - 9130800, 9122560-59
- Burn**
 Dhaka Medical College Hospital
 Burn Unit-8626812-6
- Cancer**
 National Cancer Institute-8014914, 8826561-65
 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University-8612550-4, 861455-9
- Diabetes**
 Diabetic Research Hospital (BIRDEM)- 9661551-5, 8616641-50
- Mother & Child Care**
 Shishu Hospital- 9119119, 8116061-62
 Azimpur Mother & Child Health Training Institute- 8624827, 8624980

- Eye**
 Istamia Eye Hospital-9110794, 9119315
 National Eye Hospital- 8117202, 8114807
- Dental**
 Dental College -9002035
- Orthopaedics**
 National Orthopaedics (Pangu) Hospital- 9114075, 9112150
- General**
 Dhaka Medical College Hospital- 8626812-6
 Rushmono General Hospital- 8317819
 Holy Family Hospital- 8311731-25
 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital- 8612550-4, 8614545-9
 Bangladesh Medical College & Hospital- 8115443, 9118202, Shamaria Hospital- 9131901
 Suhrawardy Hospital -- 9130800,

- 9122560-69
 Salimullah Medical Collage Hospital -- 7310061-4, 7319002-6
 Cholera Research Hospital (ICDDR)- 8811751-60
 Monowra Hospital 8319802, 8318135
- Blood Bank**
 Red Crescent Centre- 9116563
 Sandhani (DMCH)- 8624040
 Sandhani (SMCH)- 7310061, 7310061, 7319022
 Dhaka Medical Collage Hospital- 8626812-9
- Eye Bank**
 Sandhani International Eye Bank- 8614040
- Ambulances For Dead Body**
 Anzuman Mafidul Islam (Kakrail) 9336611, Gandaria 7319808, 7318166,
 Al-Markajul Islam 9127867,

MARKET CLOSED

- Gulshan 1, 2 markets-Friday
 Elephant Road-Friday
 Bishal Center-Friday
 Baitul Mukarram Market-Friday
 Polwell Market-Friday
 BCS Computer City-Friday
 Isha Khan Shopping Complex-Friday.
 Rajaxmi Complex-Friday
 Stadium Market-Friday
 Bangabazar Market-Friday
 National Museum-Thursday
 Ahsan Manzil-Thursday.
 New Market-Tuesday
 Gausia Market-Tuesday
 Mouchak Market-Sunday
 Dhanmondi Hawkers Market-Tuesday
 Dhanmondi Hawkers Market-Tuesday
 Eastern Plaza-Sunday
 Farmview Super Market-Sunday
 Muktiyuddha Jadughar-Sunday
 Dhaka Zoo-Sunday
 Shishu Jadughar-Sunday

MARKET PRICE

- Rice (Tk. Per Kg)**
 Miniket- 20-22
 Pajam- 18.50-19.50
 Najirshail- 21-22
 Kalijira- 33-34 (Polao)
 Chinigura- 35-36 (Polao)
Dal (Tk. Per Kg)
 Masur Dal- 42-44
 Masur (Imported)- 38-40
 Mug Dal- 42-44
 Mug (Imported)- 38-40
 Motor Dal- 36-38
 Motor (Imported)- 20-21
Oil (Tk. Per Litre)
 Mustard- 65-70
 Soyabean- 42-43
 Palm- 35-36
 Coconut (Imported)- 100-160
 Veg. Ghee- 42-44
 Ghee- 300-320
Spices (Tk. Per Kg.)
 Onion (local)- 20-22
 Onion (Imported)- 17-18
 Garlic- 32-34
 Garlic (Imported)- 24-28
 Ginger- 26-28
 Ginger (Imported)- 35-38
 Turmeric- 65-70
 Turmeric (Imported)- 62-65
 Dried (Red) Chili- 80-85
 Green Chili- 35-40
 Coriander (Dhania)- 30-32

- Kalijira- 8-10 (100 gm)
 Cumin (Jira)- 14-16 (100 gm)
 Cinnamon- 14-16 (100 gm)
 Almond- 60-70 (100 gm)
 Aniseed - 40-50 (100 gm)
 Black Pepper- 20-24
Vegetables (Tk Per Kg)
 Potato- 13-14
 Eggplant- 12-14
 Green Papya- 8-10
 Pumpkin (Misti Kumra)- 7-8
 Patal- 10-12
 Karala- 16-18
 Borboti, (Beans)- 14-16
 Dherosh, (Okra)- 12-14
 Kakrol- 10-12
 Kachumukhi- 10-12
 Kachurlati- 10-12
 Cucumber- 10-12
 Chichinga- 10-12
 Jhinga- 12-14
 Lal shak- 10-12
 Pui Shak- 8-10
 Green Banana- 6-8 (Per Hali)
 Jali Lau- 10-12/Piece
 PaniKachu- 8-10
Fish (Tk. Per Kg)
 Rui (Local, Big)- 170-180
 Rui (Imported, Small Size)- 90-100
 Katal (Local, Medium Size)- 140-150
 Katal (Local, Small Size)- 90-100
 Katal (Imported, Medium)- 100-110

- Hilsha (Big)- 140-150
 Hilsha (Small)- 80-90
 Pangash (Big)- 100-160
 Pangash (Small)- 60-65
 Shing- 280-300
 Prawn (Big)- 180-200
 Prawn (Small)- 110-120
 Silvercarp- 50-60
Meat & Egg (Per Kg)
 Beef- 85-90
 Mutton- 140-150
 Chicken- 75 (Poultry)
 Egg- 15-16 (Duck, Farm), 15-16 (Local Chicken)
Fruits (Tk. Per Kg)
 Green Coconut- 8-10 (Per Piece)
 Pineapple- 10-12 (Per Piece)
 Coconut- 10-14 (Per Piece)
 Guava- 8-10 (Per Hali)
 Banana- 6-8 (Per Hali)
 Lemon- 4-5 (Per Hali)
 Mango- 40-55 (Differs species)
 Apple- 80-90
Others (Tk. Per Kg)
 Sugar- 34-35
 Brown Sugar- 26-28
 Salt- 10-11 (Packet)
 Tea- 120-130
 Gold- 8500 (11.66 grams)
 Silver- 250 (11.66 grams)
 Sources: Agricultural Marketing Department

LIBRARY & INFO

- Libraries, Cultural and Information Centers**
 Central Public Library- 8626001-4, Shishu Academy- 9564128
 Shilpakala Academy- 8614673
 Bangla Academy- 8619550
 Islamic Foundation- 9550280, 9556407
 Nazrul Institute- 9114602
 Ford Foundation- 8116133
 Alliance Francaise- 8611557
 British Council- 8618867-8, 8618905-7
 Community Development Library- 8113769, 8113604
 Goethe Institute Int'l- Dhaka- 9126525-6
 Indian Information Centre & Cultural Library- 8615096
 The Russian Cultural Centre- 9116314, 9118531, 9118314
 Drik Photo Gallery- 9120125, 8112954, 8123412