

What's Common Between 'Dhaka Salad' in Paris and a 'Special Sylheti Dinner' in New York? Innovation.

MY WORLD

S.M. Ali

You must try our Dhaka salad," said the fair-complexioned Kashmiri waiter whom I had mistaken for a Turk or a Greek with a mischievous grin, as if he too was a little amused that this "delicacy" should be served at a restaurant in Paris.

Then, in a peculiar mixture of Urdu, French and English, the waiter explained that the preparation was a speciality of one of the two Bangladeshi young men working in the kitchen. It was an offer I could not refuse.

There was nothing particularly special about the salad. It was a plateful of tomatoes and onions, cut into thin slices, mixed with plenty of green chillies and vinegar. It was hard to make out if there was anything else, like any spice, was used in the preparation that, for some inexplicable reasons had been given the Dhaka label.

Perhaps, the reason was quite understandable. Obviously, the two from Bangladesh were anxious to do something different, like the "invention" of a new dish, to get some work in the kitchen.

Earlier, on learning that I was from Bangladesh, the Kashmiri waiter had brought the two young men out from the kitchen. It was past the normal lunch hour. During a quiet chat, I had been told that the two, both looking thin and a little nervous, were college

students, one in Khulna and the other in Bogra. It was hard to make out if they had completed their studies and how they managed to come as far as Europe. They evaded my questions and kept watching the main entrance.

There was no need to find out more about them. They were the two typical illegal immigrants from the Third World, among whom Bangladeshis now occupy an unspecified but growing number.

Despite their nervous look and unimpressive appearance,

there was something nice but pathetic about the two. I felt terribly sorry for both, knowing full well that the restaurant which had certainly found out that they had no "papers" to stay on in France probably treated them as charity cases, entitled to two meals a day — with plenty of Dhaka salad — and a small pocket allowance — and nothing more.

Just two days earlier, I had met another young man whom I instinctively knew to be a Bangladeshi, selling flowers — a cover for begging — at a Paris underground station. I had

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spoken to him in Bangla. He had answered and then lowered his eyes. For a moment, I thought that he might break down, in shame. After putting a five-franc coin, I had walked away, with an uneasy feeling, bordering on a sense of guilt for our country.

Little has been said and hardly any investigative research done on what is probably one of the unwritten tragedies of the Third World, one that has also touched Bangladesh. It is the fate, with all its ups and downs, that immigrants, legal and illegal, from developing countries have suffered during the past four decades.

From being the much sought-after cheap labour in the fifties and sixties in Britain and in major industrial countries in West Europe, the immigrants no longer feel that much wanted in any of these countries. The anti-immigration policy manifests itself in many different ways, while the inability or refusal of workers from Asia and Africa, setting up their own enclaves in the major cities of West Europe, to belong to the mainstream create inevitable social pressures and tension. The result, a developing crisis of major magnitude.

As compared to North Africans, Vietnamese and Laotians, Africans from former European colonies and now Sri

Lankans, Bangladeshis constitute small minorities among immigrants in most European cities. However, like Sri Lankans, they are better educated than most other categories of nationals from developing countries who have flocked to Europe for better life. But unfortunately they are reluctant to take on such tough manual jobs as, say, garbage collection which may be acceptable to black Africans. So, they end up by hiding in the kitchens of restaurants in France, "selling" flowers in a Paris metro station, hawking newspapers, of all places, in Vienna (which I saw myself years ago) and, as just reported to me by an Italian visitor to Dhaka, washing cars in Rome.

Running away from home in search of opportunities one cannot find in his own country is certainly no crime. But an illegal immigrant violates the law of the land and can languish in prison, like a common criminal, sometimes for years. I have seen this happen in Thailand. Now, the same may be the case in some European countries. Herein lies a tragedy, but a tragedy overshadowed by greater misfortunes and disasters which are part of life in the Third World. So, as the saying goes, who cares?

This writer has been accused of paying a bit of extra attention to this paper's coverage of Maulvi



My home, my life. Photo: M. Haris Uddin

Bazar — in plain language, it is called parochialism — at the cost of reporting from other parts of greater Sylhet! The complaint comes from a dear friend who, a resident of Sylhet town, happens of know of my ancestral connection with Maulvi Bazar, a fact that is unknown to my competent colleague in charge of the national page. It is on this page that we do see news from Maulvi Bazar often prominently displayed, the credit for which goes to our local correspondent. Well, here's something for our correspondents in other districts to think about.

Meanwhile, I can promise

to my aggrieved friend at Sylhet that next time I write a nostalgic piece, it will be on the town he lives.

Well, why not something now?

Next to Dhaka salad served in a Paris restaurant, the meal that I remember with both amusement and fondness is "Special Sylheti Dinner", mentioned as a treat of the month, at a Bangladeshi-owned restaurant at Manhattan, New York some years ago.

A Filipino friend with me was absolutely fascinated that my home district — that was years before Maulvi Bazar had been upgraded in its status — should have earned such a distinction as to have a four-

course meal named after it, and that too in New York.

The first course was a thin tomato soup, when I had hoped for a bowl of 'khatta' which can compete with a typical Thai 'tom yam' soup. The reputation of other delicacies of the district had not reached Manhattan either. So, we ended up with the usual chicken curry, mixed vegetables and dal, which, I assumed, would be served, say, as a "Special Chittagong Dinner" as another treat of the restaurant the following month.

Bangladeshi immigrants, legal and illegal, are full of an innovative ideas. In many cases, their survival depends on them.

DRESS SENSE TIES UP POLICEMAN IN JAIL

Among all the major problems they have to grapple with, Africa's leaders still find time to make pronouncements on what people should be wearing. And this generally becomes a contest between those who favour traditional attire and those who favour Western styles. It's a confused debate, reports Gemini News Service, and one which shows no sign of being resolved one way or the other. by Paul Amina



exception to the publication of what he described as "half-nude women and the shocking portrayal of the women in erotic poses and in the obscene, lewd and sexually provocative language."

This edict was Njiru's maiden guidance in morality to the nation at the time when he had just been named head of the controversial new Ministry of National Guidance and Political Affairs, a task of which is to censor publications and films.

However, the Minister had apparently forgotten that cultural dance troupes parade around Kenya to entertain leaders and official guests, including heads of state and the Pope; the dancers are normally dressed in remarkably similar if not even less attire, than that of the Swazi entertainers. Skirts are all a traditional entertainer needs.

Kenya is not alone in the campaign to restore colonial vestiges like wigs for lawyers and tailcoats for formal-diners.

The priorities of some African leaders are largely misplaced, to say the least. A casual glance at the East and Central African countries campaigning for authenticity in their mode of dress, would find their economies in a shambles, unemployment acute, roads in disrepair, looming famine, a low literacy rate, telephones that don't work, and the countries are debt-crippled after spending their meagre foreign exchange earnings on weapons.

In Zaire, for example, President Mobutu Sese Seko first ordered all Christian names dropped — his was Joseph — and replaced with family names; he renamed the former Belgian colony with what is actually a nonsense word — Zaire — and introduced his version of national dress in a campaign of "authenticity" aimed at reducing Western influence.

Gradually, however, the Zaireans defied the authorities and abandoned the prescribed garb in favour of Western-style dress.

Recently the Zairean leadership cracked down on women who wore trousers, wigs, lipstick and other such symbols of Western "decadence," but they spared men from their campaign. Bars were ordered to admit only women dressed in wrap-around dresses and tops and to turn away those wearing Western dress.

BOOKS

of policy-making is dependent remarkably for its survival and continuance on the landlords who exert powerful influence and control over the landless peasants constituting the major portion of a country's electorate. All these are equally true in case of Bangladesh.

Politics and land are apparently two diverse fields. In the book under review, Dr. A M M Shawkat Ali hypothesises and proves that politics and land system influence each other. The book is the fruit of Dr. Ali's three year intensive research work accomplished at the cost of his normal rest and respite. Dedicated to the peasants of Bangladesh, the book records the historical events on and personal reactions to the developments occurring between 1793 and 1984 on the land system of Bengal.

In this book he discusses in chronological order our land system in the socio-economic perspective. He has taken pains to unify the disjointed facts, information, and ideas available and provides a distinct picture of our land system linking it to the socio-political forces that shaped its pattern.

The first chapter traces the evolution of the land administration system in Bangladesh from 1793 to 1983. It discusses the background of the Permanent Settlement and its impact on the structure and functions of the administrative and judicial institutions of Bengal and how the zamindars exercised their rights in collecting dues from the peasants.

The British never cared "to protect the interest of the tenants." The trial and error policy of the colonial authority aggravated the process of social integration." The author critically examines the various procedures adopted by the colonial rulers and concludes that "the basic feature which led to the contradictions in the land policy during the earliest phase of the colonial rule was that collection of rent was viewed as an end in itself."

Corruption, fraud, and mismanagement marked the entire environment. Moreover the absence of a rational land policy aggravated the state of chaos and confusion. Continued peasant agitation in Mymensingh, Pabna and Dhaka in 1868, 1873 and 1875 respectively opened the eyes of the colonial rulers who now started thinking of introducing new legislations. From this time on, the peasantry became associated with politics.

Chapter II is concerned exclusively with the ominous effects of the Permanent

Politics-Land Interplay

A Book Review by Syed Naquib Muslim

Politics and Land System in Bangladesh. A M M Shawkat Ali. National Institute of Local Government, Dhaka. Pp. 385. Prices : Taka 176; US dollar 14.

Settlement on the peasantry and the peasant protest against the deprivation and oppression they were subjected to. It draws on the reports of the civil administrators like Deputy Magistrates and Collectors of Dinajpur, Chittagong and Rajshahi whose accounts reflect the hard-heartedness of the British and helplessness of the peasants. The author gave elaborate treatment of the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885 which gave rise to a new class 'called middle class'. It was rather instrumental in contributing to the perpetuation of the colonial rule.

In chapter III the author shows the interplay between politics and land reform measures introduced between 1838 and 1937 and discusses the functioning of various political, administrative, and social organizations that emerged in the wake of various land reform measures undertaken to 'regulate the

land system'. This chapter shows how the mahajans, big businessmen and lawyers emerged "as" interest groups and how by dint of their affluence and education got involved in local politics and administration.

Chapter IV demonstrates how the political forces helped in the continuance of the existing land system; it shows how the peasant rising began to impact the manifestoes of the major political parties such as the Congress and the Muslim League. The chapter gives the minute details of the

roles of the anti and pro-tenant organizations and emergence of the historic Tebhaga Movement. In chapter V Dr. Ali launched "an analytical overview of the political and administrative responses to land and agrarian reform measures" adopted by the Pakistani rulers between 1947 and 1971. Chapter VI addresses the administrative and political measures taken up to improve the land system since the birth of Bangladesh.

Chapter VII epitomizes what were dwelt upon in earlier six chapters. Here Dr. Ali concludes that there exists no

dichotomy between politics and land system; rather these two are inextricably linked to each other. He recapitulates and reviews analytically the events that took place since 1793 regarding land administration system in Bangladesh and with a note of pity and despair winds up saying: "Although the zamindars were rooted out of the land in paper, they remained part of the social fabric and the alliance with the middleclass remained unbroken.... the basic scenario remained unaltered."

The entire study is based on a logical framework model. Basing on five premises built with five chapters excluding the "Overview" chapter the author strikes the conclusion in a deductive manner and this he puts in chapter VII. Lists of abbreviations, acronyms, and annexures have been systematically incorporated to help the readers perceive what Dr. Ali intends to communicate.

THE Chief Magistrate at Nakuru in Kenya, Mrs Rose Walekha, was not amused that a police constable on duty inside the courts as a prisoner escort was not wearing a necktie.

So she ordered him to be locked up with other prisoners in order to impress upon his colleagues the need to maintain smartness.

This unique punishment is but one of a number of odd decisions in recent times involving Kenya's dress sense, some of which have prompted official intervention. Some people are now wondering whether it is time the government formulated a clear-cut policy on dress mode, so as to avoid conflicts between the public and officialdom.

In Kenya today, hotels are still likely to close their doors to guests, and the Speaker in Parliament expels MPs, if they are not wearing ties and jackets. Visitors to the Legislature who wear the national dress of other countries are not spared either, unless they are state guests.

An equally bizarre decision to that made by Magistrate Walekha, was made by the Kenya government when it ordered the withdrawal from news stands of two publications, Drum and True Love. The cover photographs of young Swazi girls performing a reed dance at the enthronement of King Mswati were described as "pornographic."

Culture and Social Services Minister, James Njiru, took

VIDEO SCENE

Kaiser Parvez Ali

Hello video watchers, you will be reading about the top circulating video films, in the video circuit of our country. Every week films in the chart will either make new entries, move up or down or remain static on the ladder of popularity and demand. So hold on to your seats and watch out for the chart and reviews.

This week's entry witnesses the release of one children's film and that is Jack London's White Fang. I am sure the kids will love watching it.

The top videos in circulation this week are:

- Hindi**
1. Indrajit—* Amitabh Bachan, Jaya Prada, Kumar Gaurav, Noalam.
 2. Dil Hai Ke Mania Nahin—* Aamir Khan, Puja Bhatt,

- Bengali**
1. Shakha Prashakha—* Shaumitra, Mamta Shankar, Ranjit Mallik.
 2. Path O Prashad—* Shaumitra, Shandya Roy, Utpal Dut.
 3. Nilimani Nil—* Tapash Pal, Indrani.
 4. Gana Shatru—* Shaumitra, Mamata Shankar, Depankar Dey.
 5. Palataka—* Pransanjee, Babita.

- English**
1. Run—* Patric Demsey, Kelly Preston.
 2. Longest Drive—* Kurt Russel, Tim Matheson.
 3. Hamlet—* Mel Gibson, Glen Close.
 4. Moral Thoughts—* Bruce Willis, John Panton, Harvey Keitel.
 5. White Fang—* Children's Film.

Source Amity Video, Uttara.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,

Long ago you wrote to a woman about being depressed after having a baby. You said it was temporary and she would get over it soon. Well, I had a baby 6 months ago but I still feel depressed. The baby is very difficult. He does not sleep nor eat properly. The doctor says he is fine, what should I do?

Rehana, Banart.

Dear Rehana,

Feelings of weakness, inadequacy and weariness is quite common after giving birth. This condition normally does not last more than a few weeks. Things get back to normal when the mother's body regains strength and adjusts to the new demands made on her. However, if this condition persists for too long then professional help should be sought. In your case, the problem seems to be irritability rather than depression. Consult a doctor for your child and if there is nothing wrong physically then the reason for his being so difficult might be the family. Share your feelings with your husband. May be, he has a clue to what is happening.

Dear Mita,

Please advise me on how I can make my husband go to my relatives' houses. He never accepts any invitations from them and makes the excuse that he is busy. What makes me very angry is that my mother-in-law supports him and tells me that I should not force him to go. What should I do?

Mina, Tikatuly, Dhaka.

Dear Mita,

It is very difficult to force a person to do something against his will. You will have to get to the root of the problem. Do you know why he doesn't want to visit your relatives? He might be having some valid reason, however unreasonable it might sound to you. Try to come to a compromise. Don't ask him to visit all relatives, but only those who are special to you. As for your mother-in-law's attitude, this is a common phenomenon and you should not take it so seriously. Many mothers feel proud when their sons don't get too attached with their in-laws.

Dear Mita,

My wife and I both value your advice and read your column regularly. Fortunately we don't have any serious problems to write about, but my closest friend is having a lot of marital problems. They are always fighting. His wife goes away to her parents' house every month, and he brings her back everytime. They come from different social backgrounds and are not suited to each other. Do you think they should get a divorce?

Selim Jahar, DOHS (New)

Dear Selim,

I was very pleased to hear that you two have such harmony in your marriage. As for your friends, I really cannot give any serious advice based on the information you have provided. Since they have not approached you for help, I am afraid it sounds a bit interfering. Talking about divorce is also inappropriate at this point, most probably they will solve their problems themselves. You can, if you feel close enough, request your friends to talk to a marriage counsellor or to somebody they trust.

Dear Mita,

My child, who is only three, wakes up screaming in the middle of the night. This has happened at least 6 times last month and we are getting worried. We have also taken him to a doctor but it did not help. He is otherwise a healthy child.

Nasrin, Mirpur, Dhaka.

Dear Nasrin,

The doctor in our team says: A child who wakes up screaming, perspiring and cannot be comforted has had a night-terror or nightmare. This starts occurring in children around age two. Worry, fear or even medication can lead to this symptom. Try to avoid stressful or over stimulating situations before bed time. Go and comfort him when he wakes up crying, and reassure him, but remain calm yourself. Leaving the child to "cry it out" is not recommended.

WRITE TO MITA

Run by a trained and experienced Family and Marriage counsellor, assisted by a professional team of doctor, psychologist and lawyer, this column will answer questions relating to family, marriage, health, family laws, and social and interpersonal relationships. Please address letters to Mita, The Daily Star, GPO Box 3257 or to 28/L, Toynbee Circular Road, Motjheel, Dhaka-1000.