

# RIISING STARS

## Too Tender An Age For Labour

### Tokai

I was sitting in my car in old Dhaka, waiting for my mother to come out of my grandmother's house when I saw this little boy who could not have been older than my ten year old kid brother. He was visibly ill-fed, undernourished, dressed in rags, all skin and a bag of bones. He looked into the shabby interior of my car with a sense of envy at the "luxury" and "comfort" I was surrounded by. I was bored out of my mind. I decided to while away the time by talking to him and so I went ahead and asked him his name.

He told me his name was Zakir and I asked him what he did for a living because he was carrying a large sack over his shoulder. He sold scraps of paper he found on the streets and in dust-bins and got around 7 takas a day toiling from dawn to dusk.

There was a dilapidated eating-house farther down the street, proudly bearing the sign "Ghorowa poribesh khawano ho". This promised homely atmosphere consisted of a dimly-lit room which probably stank like garbage dump. In one corner there was a sink without a faucet. I could see customers going in a plucking out a soot-blackened mug from a drum (which probably contained dish water!) and wash their hands. They then dried their hands on a grimy scrap of cloth which looked to me like a well-used dust-rag.

Zakir noticed me looking at the place and, growing aware of his eyes on me, I asked him if he took his meals in that establishment. Much to my surprise he said that he couldn't afford to eat there. He

ate in some alley, where his meals cost him only three takas. I wondered that if he earned seven takas a day, he would be able to afford better meals. So I asked him what happened to the rest of his earnings, by now becoming pretty inquisitive, quite against my nature. Here's what I got:

he said he saved the rest of the money and his present savings consisted of a mere Tk. 40.00 which were in the keep of a shop-keeper whom he trusted with his life. He didn't have to pay for his lodgings because he spent his nights at Sudarghat. He didn't have a home to live in because his father had de-

serted the family and his "mother" was a typical step-mother whom we find in the saddest fairy-tales. He was deprived of food, shelter, love and warmth, all those necessities we take for granted. My heart reached out to him. I gave him all the money I had with me (a mere two takas) and one of the toffees I had with me. He popped the sweet into his mouth, the wrapper into his sack, saluted me and went off to get on with his life.

— Sumatya Andaleeb

### The Flower Girl

Did you ever wonder what sort of a life those little girls who pester you to buy their dried up flowers, every time you are stuck in a traffic jam, have? Neither did I, as a matter of fact, until one day when a small thing who wouldn't be more than four approached me with a garland of sweet-smelling jasmine which I unfortunately (for the both of us) could not afford in the event of being broke. I didn't want to dismiss her like she was a beggar, especially when she was so young. It was obvious that she was well trained to say the words, I translate. "Ma'am, please buy some flowers, they will suit you so well." I was convinced that she was tutored the second half of her sentence, because she dashed over to my father's door and told him the same. I figured she was pretty desperate and asked for some money from my dad and called her back.

Waving the paltry sum in her face, I struck up what could be termed as an interview. I found out her name was Tunl, and that she had many other brothers and sisters and her parents could not provide for

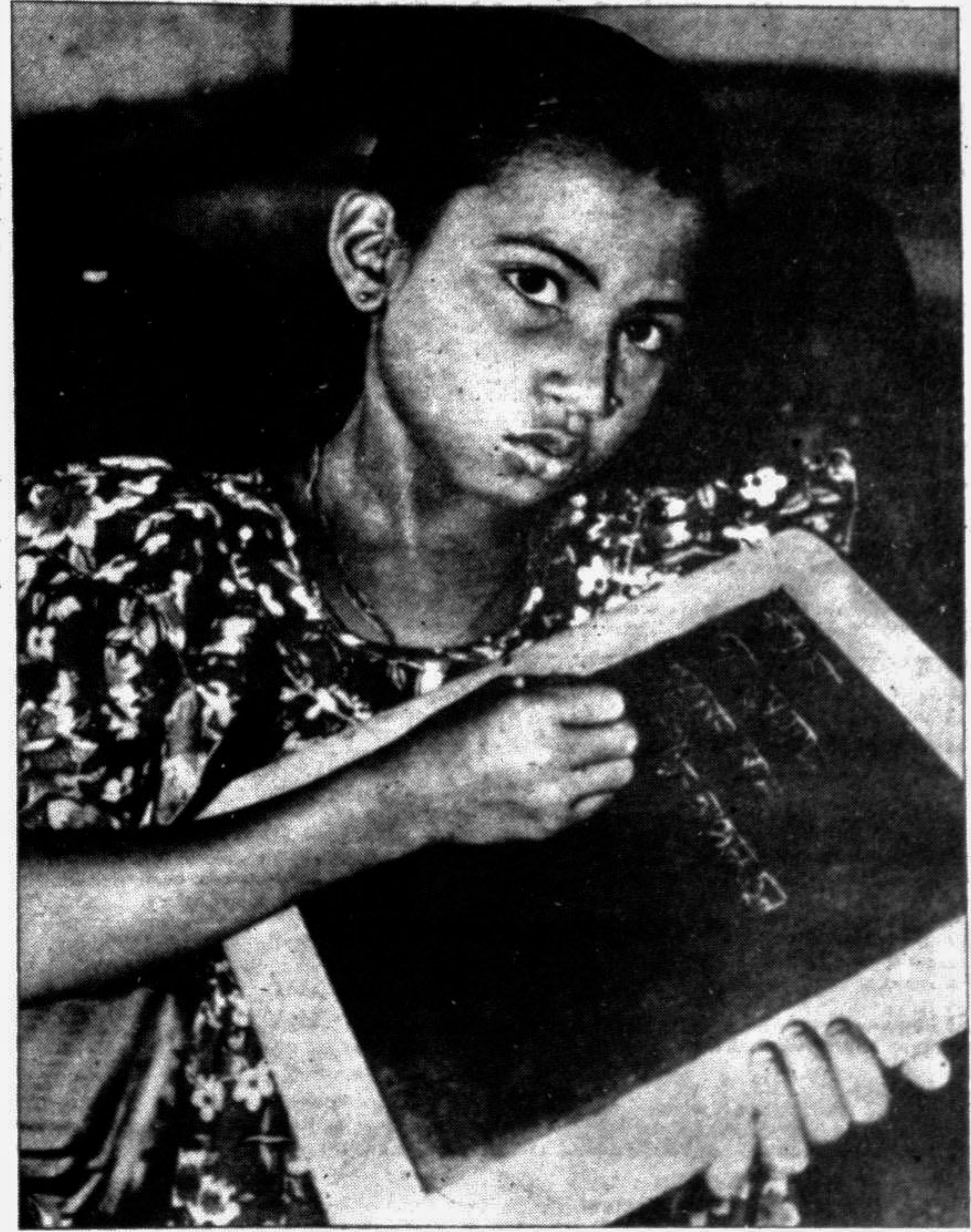
all of them on their own. It is that why she was giving me these nice flowers for a couple of takas. Yes, she nodded, with a finality, indicating that the chat was over. Just then a girl a little older, but nonetheless quite young herself, came to see how good a salesperson Tunl was making out to be. I hadn't bought any of her flowers yet. The elder one wasn't too happy to know Tunl was selling family secrets rather than flowers. Neither said they were sisters, but I caught little Tunl call the other "sister".

The other, who seemed to be a better sales girl (plenty of experience she had) started pulling out these larger garlands and saying I would get a small and a big one for just one more taka. I didn't have the heart to say no. The little one must have felt indignant about her failure because she started crying.

In front of me, she was scolded: I was taking my time to settle the notes, pretending to drop them inside the car and so on, playing for time when the reprimand started.

"What do you think Abba and Amma are going to say if you don't have any money to take home? Do you want to go without dinner for another night? Do you referring to as night duty too?" I didn't dare wonder what she was referring to as night duty. Suddenly, I didn't want to hear anymore. I handed over the money without further ado to the elder one and was thankful to find the car once more on the move, not long after they move on. My brief acquaintance with the little flower girl Tunl was over.

— Judith G De Costa



Too many children in our country never get this close to a chance to read and write: Education makes children feel better about themselves and about the world around them.

## Education—the Challenge to Change

by Ellen Weiss

CHANGING educational systems is at best a daunting enterprise, since it often involves altering long-held, traditional attitudes. A number of countries, however, have taken some fledgling steps towards such change as a result of the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990.

The Conference, which was sponsored by UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, was a response to growing worldwide recognition that educational quality and access in many countries were either stagnating or actually declining in the face of relentlessly competing development needs.

Four basic end-of-decade goals emerged from the Conference:

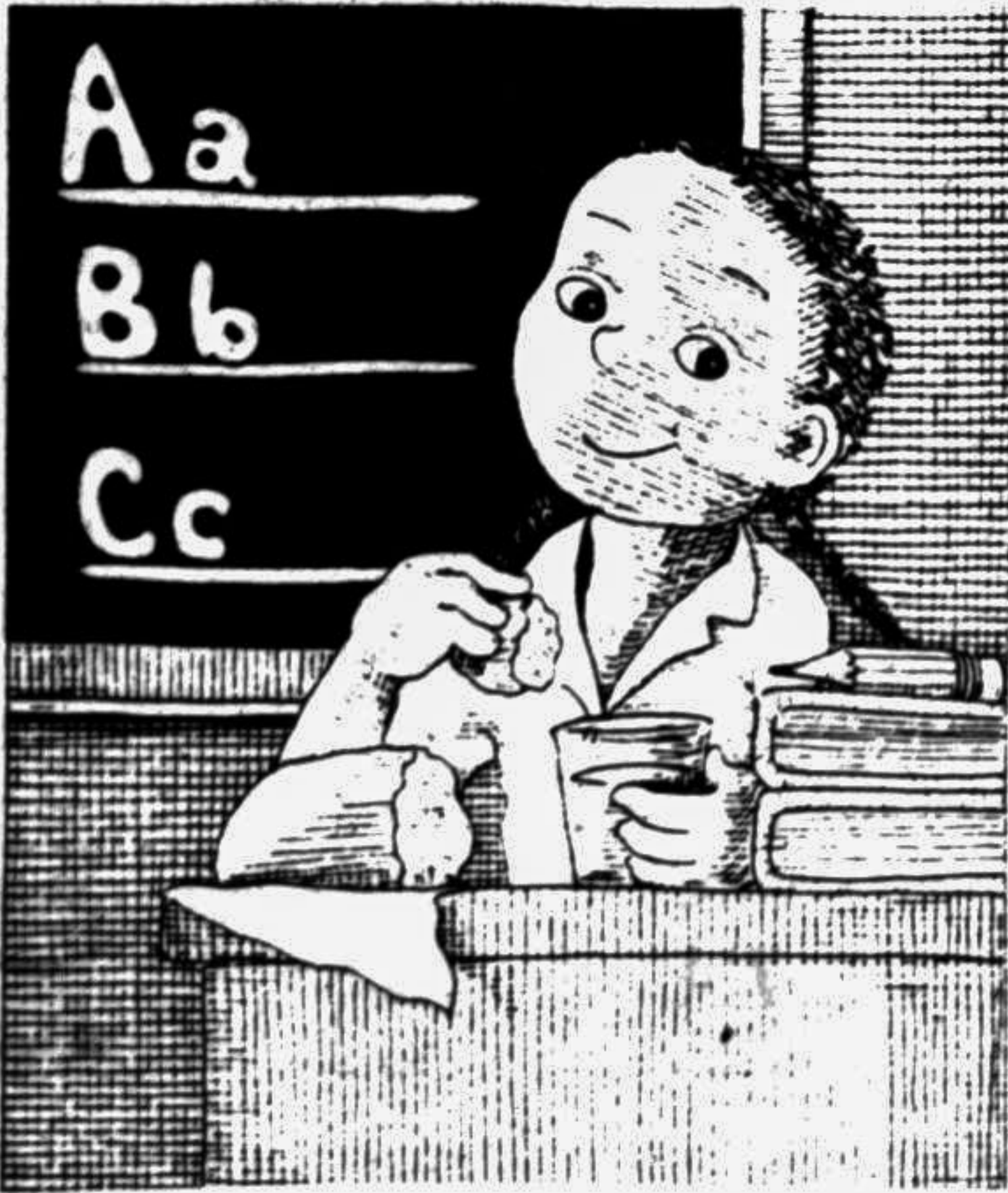
- expansion of early childhood care and developmental activities;
- universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary school-age children;
- a reduction by half of the adult illiteracy rate;
- the increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge, skills and values required for better living and sustainable development.

The leaders of the four sponsoring organizations warned on the first anniversary of the Conference: "To achieve the goals of basic education for all by the year 2000, much more needs to be done. This will require greater efforts at country level and much greater support by the international community."

In the year since the Conference, there has been progress on a number of fronts towards the goals. "We are already seeing that what has come out of the Conference is not just rhetoric," says Dr. Akhila Habte, Chief Adviser to the newly formed UNICEF Education Cluster.

In Nigeria, several goals have been specified for the period of 1991-95: 46 local government areas will be helped to provide basic literacy and numeracy training to 70,000 women and 80,000 girls, and 230,000 women and girls will be provided with health information in women's education centres.

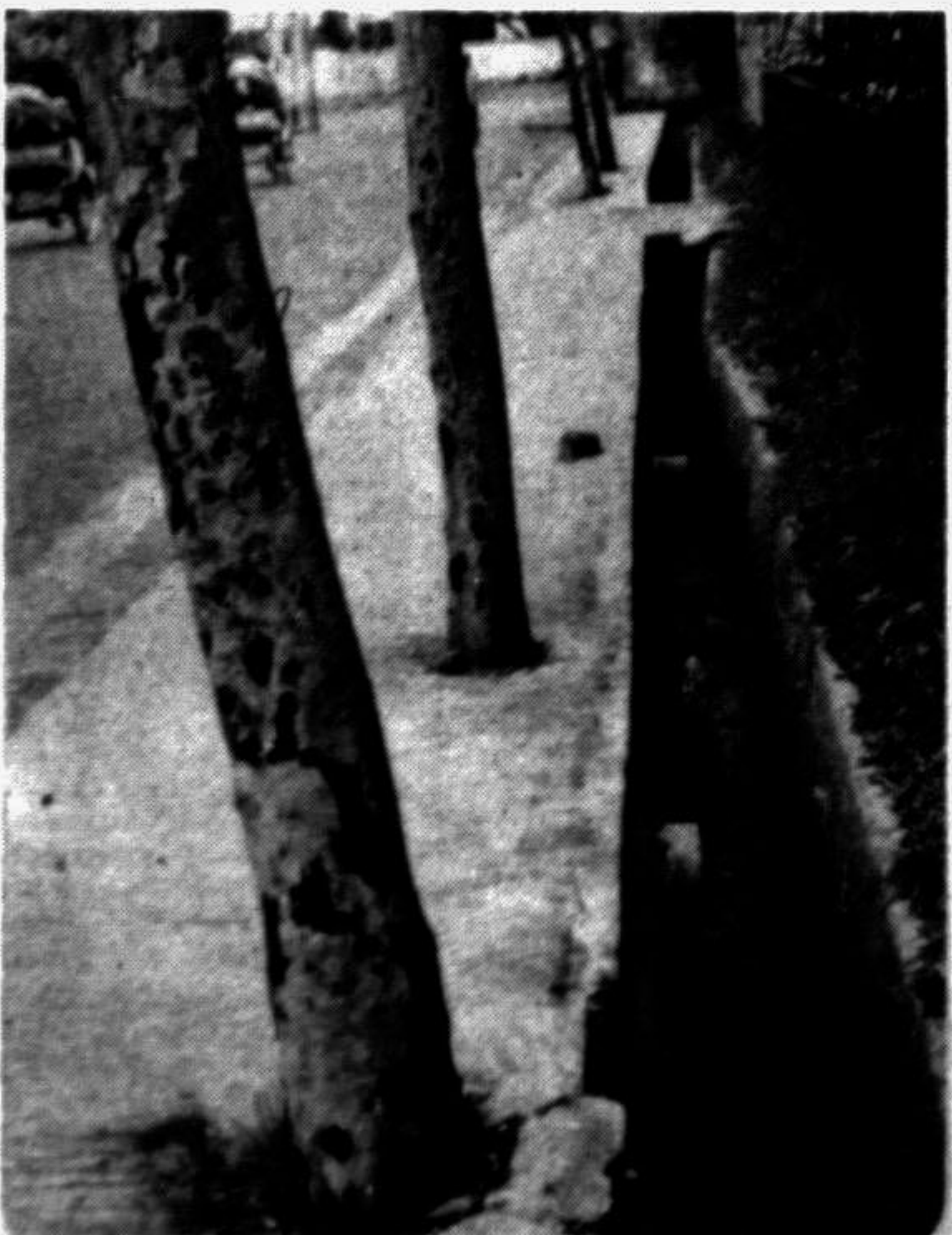
Primary schooling or its alternative is planned for every child within a kilometre of his or her home in India. The country plans to achieve 80 per cent functional literacy among 15 to 35-year-olds, male and female, from every identified disadvantaged group, by the year 1995. In 1985, the adult literacy rate in



## POTTED TREES

Afsana Akhter

The municipality's recent drainage and the construction of side walks is indeed commendable.



India was 58 per cent for men and 29 per cent for women.

Brazil plans extensive monitoring, evaluation and diagnosis of basic education at the municipal and state levels.

Bangladesh has made universal primary education compulsory and has required that all newly recruited primary school teachers be female. The country plans to reduce drop-out and repetition rates from 70 per cent in 1990 to 50 per cent by 1995.

"There are obstacles, of course," says Dr Habte. "Innovation is one: How do we change what we have been doing for centuries? Education tends to be formalistic, and we need to be flexible and adaptable."

Dr Habte is hopeful, however, about progress. There is a renewed emphasis, he explains, "that these activities should not just be left to Governments, but that private volunteer agencies, professional associations, communities and parents should participate as much as possible. This was one of the major achievements of Jomtien." (UNICEF).

mendable. The effects of these improvements can already be seen in certain areas of the Dhaka Metropolis. They add to the beauty and cleanliness of these areas, also facilitating traffic and ensuring pedestrian safety. However, all this has been accomplished at the expense of certain innocent living beings and these are the great trees that stand along the previous borders of roads.

The picture shows the fate of a tree located on Dhanmondi's Road No. 6A; and how such trees are encompassed by concrete, no consideration having been taken of their requirements of water, soil and space for normal growth.

The authorities may have thought that rather than cutting down these trees they have become advocates of the afforestation program. But the truth is that such trees, whose growth has been severely restricted, shall not live long. May I remind you of the fact that tree-roots are responsible for absorbing excess water and retaining soil.

The general public and the concerned authorities must seek a better alternative for road construction which shall not impair trees permanently. It may be suggested to allow a circular area of soil to surround the base of the tree, separating it from concrete. It is hoped that such consideration will be taken during the planning of further road developments.

## QUIZ CLUB

There were no winners for last week's Quiz contest.

The answers are:

1. Georgia
2. Commonly known as cocaine coke — an alkaloid derived from the leaves of coca plant.
3. Rina Khan
4. Paris
5. Shinto — means 'the way of the spirits'.
6. Fear of food.
7. Winchester
8. Charles Persault
9. 1946
10. John McEnroe

This week's Quiz questions:

1. What was Indra Gandhi's nick name?
2. Who was the grandfather of Akbar?
3. What is a Dalai Lama?
4. Which city is called the 'Place of the Gods' and where is it?
5. Where is Puerto Escondido?
6. Who wrote 'Pigmillion'?
7. Where is Pelican Island?
8. Name the only country having a double triangular-shaped flag.
9. Which batsman in cricket has scored more than 6000 test runs at an average of 99.96?
10. Who was the first governor general of Free India?

## Some Rules of Spelling

English spelling is notoriously difficult and careful observation and practice over a long period are the best methods of achieving a high standard. Frequent reference to the following rules will help you to avoid some of the more glaring errors.

### Doubling of Letters

1. When adding a suffix beginning with a vowel to a single consonant, we double the final consonant if the syllable preceding it is stressed and contains a single vowel:

|       |           |
|-------|-----------|
| begin | beginning |
| occur | occurred  |
| refer | referred  |
| big   | bigger    |
| sad   | sadder    |
| omit  | omitted   |

But (a) If the final syllable is not stressed, we do not double the final consonant:

|        |          |
|--------|----------|
| edit   | edited   |
| shiver | shivered |
| merit  | merited  |

### Exception

A final 'l' coming after a single vowel must always be doubled even if the preceding syllable is not stressed:

|         |            |
|---------|------------|
| travel  | travelled  |
| quarrel | quarrelled |
| marvel  | marvellous |

(b) If the final syllable has two vowels or two last consonants, we do not double the final consonant:

|           |             |
|-----------|-------------|
| soil      | soiled      |
| entertain | entertained |
| attract   | attracted   |

## "Sands of Time"

Mehreen Rahman

I picked up a handful of sand — them let it fall slowly through my fingers. I repeated this action again and again, oblivious of my surroundings — my eyes on the blue-green waves all the time, as if in a trance. Laughter and music — the sounds of merry-making drifted towards me in the cool summer breeze. It seemed as if it had been ages since I had last been happy. How strange, I wondered, that a person can rejoice while another can mourn in the same place at the same time. But could I blame those vivacious, happy and innocent people for my sorrow and misfortune? No, I could only envy them, for I longed to laugh, like them.

It was bright and sunny, a perfect day for the holiday makers. I, too, had thought that it would be just another holiday. I had thought that Mum would get well, we would all spend a fantastic week in this truly exotic island and then go back home. Home.

Home without Mum. I was not looking forward to it. Nor did I feel enthusiastic about staying here, amidst the coconut trees, the sea and the sands: the magnificent fantasy land — suddenly, this utterly gorgeous and heavenly place had lost all its charm. I felt exhausted — extremely tired of the pain I had been tangled in since the past few days. It seemed as if I had no energy left — not even to just sit back and appreciate the beauty around me. I could only gaze at the water: as far as my eyes could see, there was only water. I noticed a family playing games in the water — having great fun. That reminded me of my two-year-old brother. They were all the family I had left. I snapped out of my day dream and looked around, my eyes frantically searching the little figure clad in shorts and T-shirt. I spotted him standing next to my father, a balloon in one hand and an icecream in the other, and felt relieved. Since my mother's death, my father had become very responsible towards my brother. It comforted me to know that at least the little one did not have to suffer for he did not compre-

hend at all what was going on. And me? I had secluded myself from them. I knew I was being selfish but I somehow felt that I would get over the trauma quicker if I was left alone. My father was very understanding. He did not expect any consolation from me since he knew that I myself was fighting hard against the shock and the pain.

I heard a familiar sound — that of someone crying. I turned back to see a little girl crying because her sand-castle, the result of hours of patience and hardwork, had been trampled by a careless adult. I watched her anger, sorrow and frustration come out in her tears and it took me back to the day my mother was going to be operated on. There were risks but there were also some chances of her surviving the operation. But she did not. It was not a movie or a novel and so there were no miracles. I reminded myself that this was reality — this was life. Here, miracles did not take place anymore.

People die, but even then life goes on. Nothing ceases. My tears did not cease either. My memories hurt like fresh wounds. They were so vivid that I could almost feel my mother's presence beside me.

I closed my eyes and felt as if she was sitting right next to me, talking and laughing. I could clearly hear her voice.

My mother. The person I loved the most in this world. I could see her face — her eyes looking at me. I opened my eyes and found that a shadow had been cast upon me. I looked up to find my father saying, "give it time." I thought, "I will give it time because time is all I have got, and I have got plenty of it." I followed my father and my little brother out of the beach.

We were going back home the next day. Home, and life would be different from now. I bid a silent farewell to the vast sea, the sprawling sands and the golden sun setting in the horizon... at least they would never change, like lines did, nor would they die, like people did.

