

A DEVILISH DIG AT HYPOCRITES

Fayza Haq

MORSHED Chowdhury, with his recent master's degree in Fine Arts from Chittagong, has captivated the Dhaka art enthusiasts by his bold symbolism at the College of Arts and Crafts display.

Morshed has little care for the gurus of fine arts or so he proclaims. He is not out to win their approval, at any rate. Like many angry young artists he is there to teach the world a lesson and rectify the evils that surround our metropolitan existence. He has abandoned the idyllic and romantic for the revolting, ugly and overtly didactic.

He tells us that he has no

time or patience to play around with colours, compositions or textures or simply to flaunt his craft, style or knowledge. To him the artist has a purpose in life. It is not to simply delight with colours or images or even play with impressions or fancies.

The painter is out to instruct as do teachers of the old school. His field is social and political. Morshed certainly has a decisive message even though he delivers it in a naive and hectoring style. On did not perhaps even lampoon Marie Antoinette or Imelda Marcos with such relentless, merciless portrayal. Is a human being—even a politician—only a

greedy ruthless animal, one wonders. Even the dinosaur looks placid compared to the subjects ridiculed and condemned to some inferno.

Morshed has control over the brush and knows how to present human contours in precise details. He has a good eye for colours for the purpose of his lambasting corrupt politicians and hypocritical men about town with their piled up millions in Swiss banks of a tremendous sale.

"Expulsion from Paradise" had an embarrassed and humiliated political leader and his wife being pelted by half-naked street urchins. The evil symbol of the snake dominated

this supreme ridicule. "Golab Jal" was another creation showing a well-to-do politician with all the pretences of religious piety, being dressed with the similar rituals as Louis the XV on his wedding day. The prostitute included in the forefront of the composition completed the ugly world of deception, lies and cheating. "Shabemehr" had once again the theme of the down-trodden prostitutes. It was clearly indicted in the painting that while one wretched hooker died unsung and ignored many others had come up to replace her and continue the tragedy of sham and ignominy.

"Curved moon" brought in the story of how the poor and the ignorant were sweet talked into supporting their sides. "Enjoy it" had the identical theme of politicians of disrepute. Perhaps nobody had told Mirza that politics was a mugs's game, in any case, and not to be so distressed by it.

"Evil wave" brought in drugs, lasciviousness in the city office premises, cruelty of the bourgeoisie to their over-worked servants. "Fan of Jannat" truly delineated how improbable it was for a man to equally divide his affection between his wives.

The ardent enthusiasts of the feminist movement's would surely give the painter many accolades. Subjects such as polygamy and prostitution have been repeatedly condemned in the paintings. The attack is acidic and ruthless.

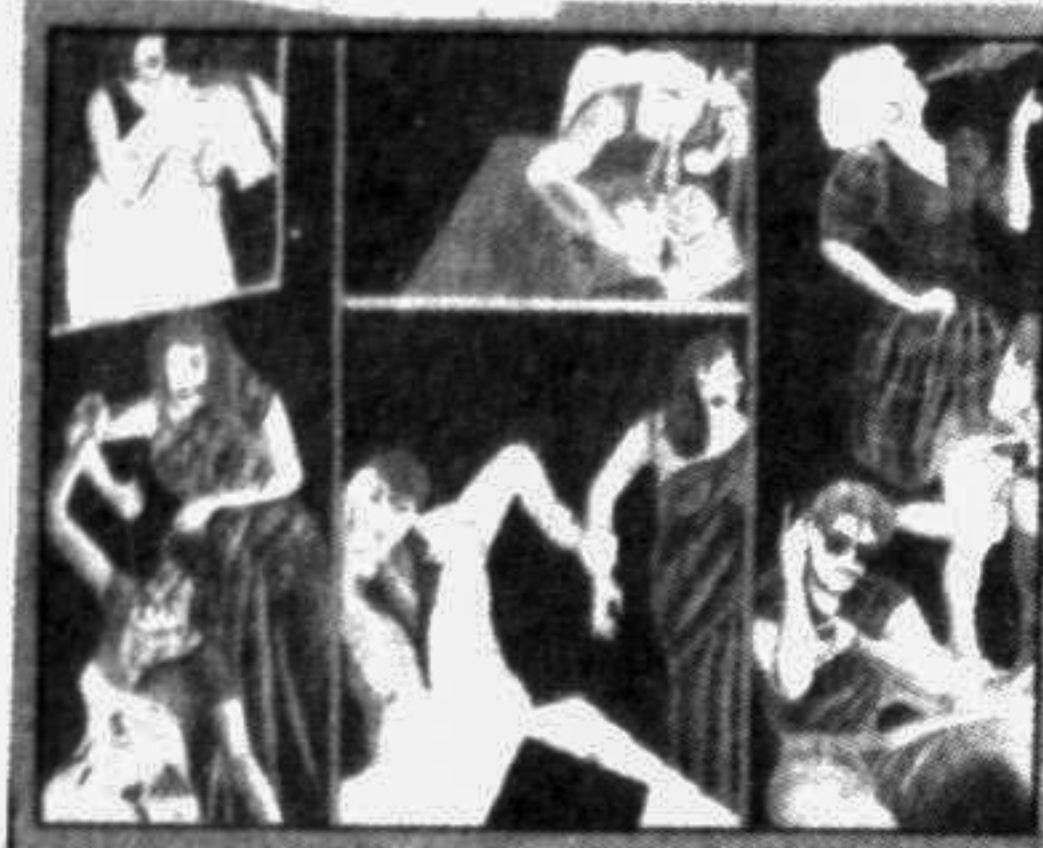
The portrayal is true and would delight the minds of the Bangladeshi women who are not only confined to the four walls of the home, and repeated child bearing, but are at a loss as to where to take their protest against deprivation of their chastity, and the trampling of their souls.

Perhaps among the young artists in Bangladesh nobody before has gone into an all out rampage against the social in-

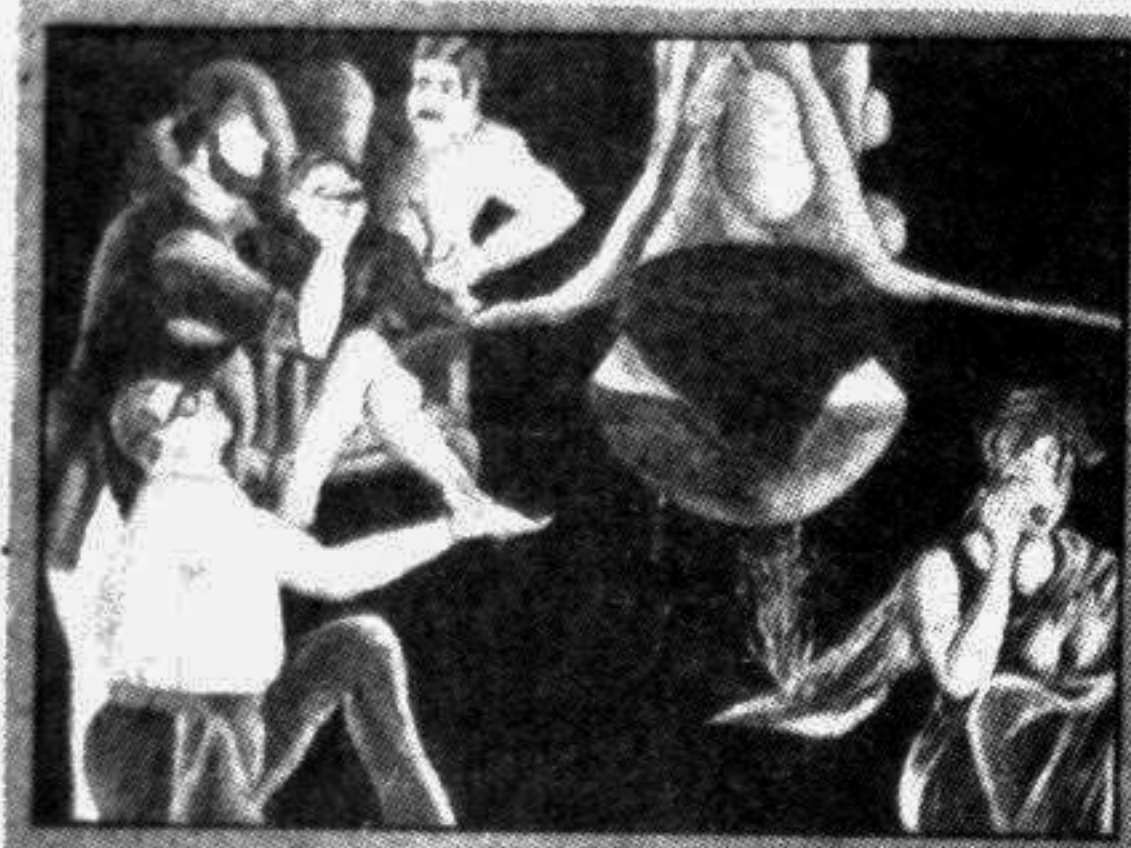


Visitors admiring works at the second solo exhibition of paintings of Morshed Chowdhury that concluded last week.

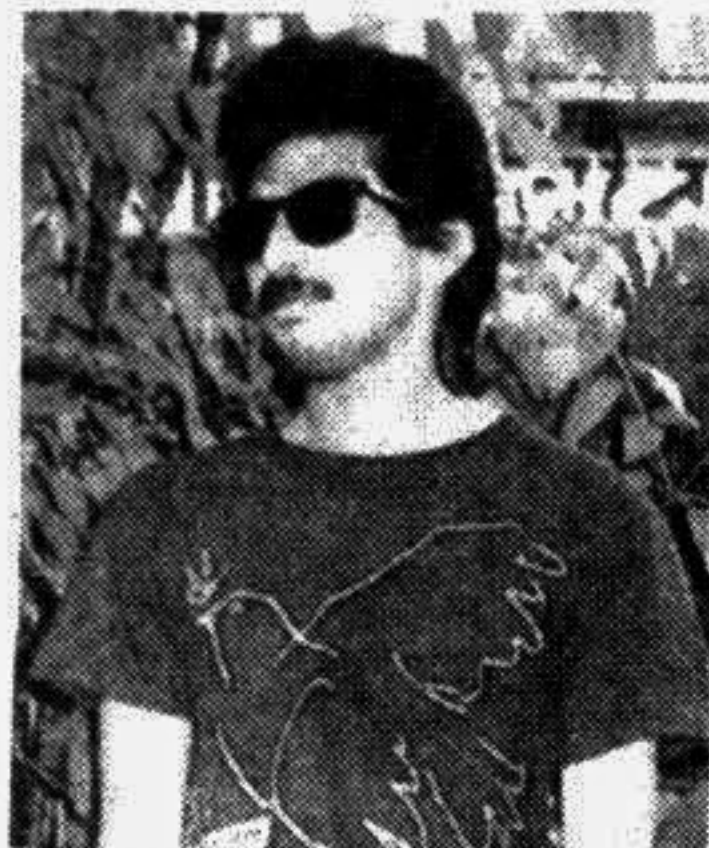
—Star Photo



'Bad Wave'.



'Golabjal'.



The painter

A Dependable Narrative of Language Movement

Bhasha Andolon Itihas O Tatparja. Co-authored by Abdul Matin and Ahmed Rafiq

Review by Waheedul Haque

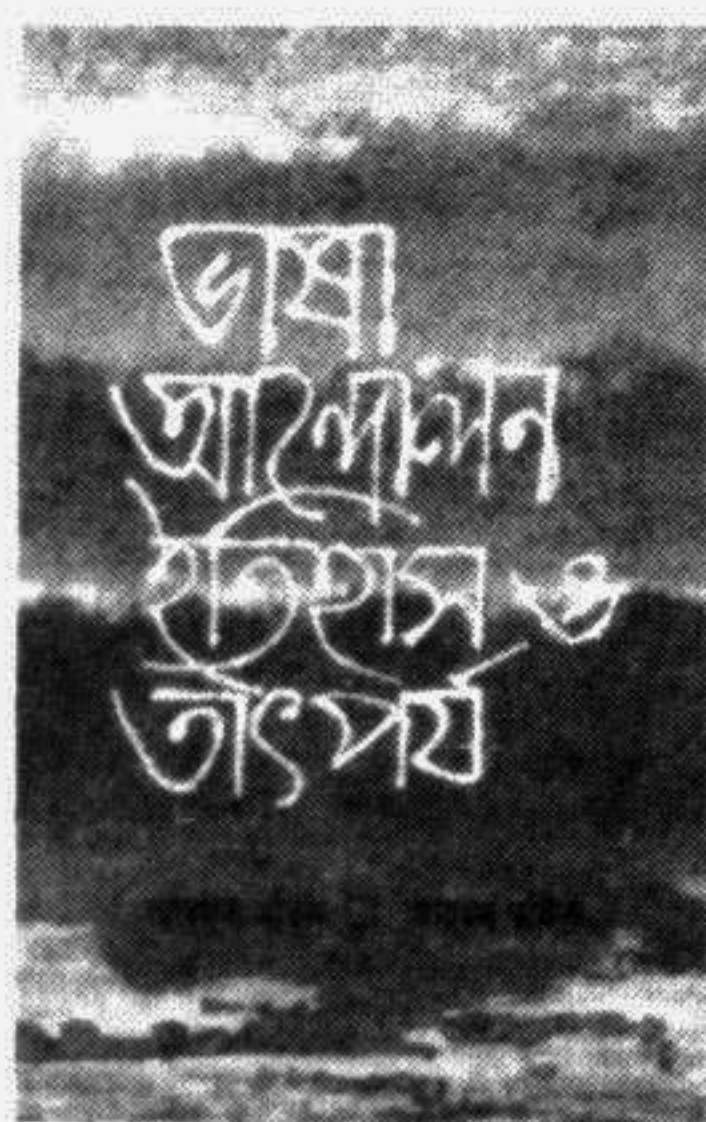
THE great Language Movement, hitting its peak in February 1952, is the fountainhead of all social and cultural progress in the Eastern Bengal region that was formerly East Pakistan and now constitutes the independent state of Bangladesh. But that came by only as a spin-off. The main success and the thrust of the movement was political — and the Bengalee people's severance of all ties with Pakistan in a bloody liberation was ignited by a diabolical genocide unleashed by West Pakistan — and the eventual rise of the first nation-state in the subcontinent was a direct result of that.

This political aspect of the Language Movement has been brought into a sharp focus by a kind of commemorative volume — a very remarkable book indeed — published in February this year by Jatiyo Sahitya Prokashani, Bhasha Andolon — Itihas O Tatparja comes out at a particularly significant point of our national denouement.

No one could be better qualified to write such a definitive book on the Language Movement as the two authors of the book. Mr. Abdul Matin, a revolutionary political activist known and respected by all quarters is better known as Rashtrabhasha Matin in recognition of the fact that starting in 1948 till many years later he personified in the eyes of his fellow activists and all who ever were around anywhere the movement, the movement itself. The other member of the duo — Mr Ahmed Rafiq has earned respect as a serious student of Tagore and a very profound and erudite literary critic who was also himself deeply involved in the Language Movement. The two writers' impeccable credentials give the book a decided authority — a very essential attribute for

anything that comes out on the movement. The lot that has already been published — not so much in volumes as in articles — including Badruddin Umar's tome and Bashir Al-Helal's standard work on the subject, is all a mountain of contradictory information. The two authors have taken special care to clear this Augean stable — that is one very good thing about the book. But in so doing they seem to have spared none of the stalwarts of the movement or the renowned writers on it. They have that way perhaps vitiated the commercial prospect of the book. But their refusal to compromise lends the book an air of gritty integrity which is far more precious than commercial success. In dismissing unfounded claims and baseless reports they have shunned arrogance and any show of impatience. Diffidence has been a hall mark of their work which should with time be recognised as the best and the most dependable book on the history of Language Movement. And with a 225-page text one of handiest and quite affordable at Tk. 100.

The book sets the movement in a wider perspective both in time terms and in terms of politico-cultural significance and influence. And the subject is broached and introduced from the standpoint of the Bengalee people being a language-based anthropological-demographic phenomena with a distinct cultural identity rather from the Pakistan im-



posed communal approach to a people's identity. The Language Movement was an expression of the contradiction between these two and eventually won the day for the former. To properly focus this long standing contradiction among the Muslims of Bengal stock the authors start their story from before the partition of India. The challenge to Bangla from the West is addition to the problem that was already plaguing the Bengali-speaking Muslims and it continues to do so till today when the pressure from outside is no more.

A very good point with the book is its deliberate and unrelenting effort to deromanticise the historical narration of its subject-matter. There is two broad tendencies among

writers on the subject and the many claimants to the many credits of the great event. One: the movement is projected as wholly a student-inspired and student-executed thing, particularly of students of Dhaka. Two: There is a propensity to place the credit of crucial decisions and effective actions on individuals — quite unjustifiably most of the times. The authors do a great job of recognising the role of the government employees in crystallising the movement in its early formative days as well supplying the main manpower to the rallies and demonstration up to even February 22.

And, after placing the Tamaddun Majlish achievements in the 1948 demonstrations — and that of Professor Abul Kashem — in a correct perspective, the authors go on to clear up the jumble of contradictory claims on the credits of who first of all decided to break Sec 144 on February 21. They do not credit any person or persons with doing that and rather show that, in spite of an 11 to 3 vote on February 20 rejecting the move to break Sec 144 on the morrow at the All Party Committee of Action — the students, wherever they were — in hostels or homes — came out prepared to break it without anyone prodding them do so. The authors make their case convincing through introduction of evidences.

In the same manner the confusion on the exact number of martyrs on February 21 and their identity are tackled with authority and definiteness.

The book is a necessary reading for all those who love Bangla, and those that have a sense of involvement in the shaping of their destiny by the Bengalee people as also those that want to know about this nation's inspirations and basic struggles. We commend it actually to all kinds of readers and to every bookshelf.

all the poems of Homer the original manuscript of Euclid's Elements, the first to enunciate the principles of geometry.

the Septuagint, the first Greek translation of the Old Testament

the works of the pre-Christian astronomer Aristarchus, who long before Copernicus, maintained that the earth revolved around the sun.

But unfortunately, for all its magnificence, the library is no more. It suffered the same fate that befell the famous statue of its founder and was completely destroyed.

It is still not known what was responsible for the destruction of the library — the Romans, the Arabs or some inexplicable act of God. But according to one Arab chronicler, Ibn Al-Kifti (quoted by Luciano Canfora in his 1989 book *The Vanished Library*), the Caliph Omar in 649 A.D.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,

I really appreciated the letter addressed to you regarding colour prejudice in our society. It is shameful to see mothers of eligible men look for "fair" brides and how a girl from an early age is made to become aware of her colour. My skin happens to be light while my two daughters have lovely brown colour. I cannot tell you how many countless times I have been told on my face that my daughters unfortunately do not look like me. In my eyes they are beautiful, intelligent, healthy girls and nothing anybody says will make me ashamed of them. Do more people have such problems? I wish they would write.

Lily, Dhanmondi

Dear Lily,

Three cheers for your attitude! This is what is needed to get out of such prejudices. Our society will have to realize that women are as important as men and contribute equally in production as well as in development. And fair or dark, they will have to be given that recognition. We could also make this into a social issue to be discussed in various forums. When feminist movements all over the world are struggling with issues such as equality in pay, etc. it is a pity that we are still bogged down with such ridiculous prejudices as colour. I am hopeful that with education and awareness of women's position in society this kind of prejudice will gradually go.

Dear Mita,

Please don't laugh, but I have to tell you this. In a party that I attended last week an old friend commented publicly and within earshot of many others that I had dyed my hair the wrong colour and that it was most unbecoming. I was completely taken aback, embarrassed and said the first thing that came to my mind which was I will dye my hair the right colour when you start to lose some weight (she is very over weight). This completely put her off and she did not talk to me the rest of the evening. Tell me was I wrong in retorting the way I did? Why do people make such cruel remark? I think this kind of reply will really shut up rude people like my friend.

Farida, Gulshan

Dear Farida,

Even if she struck the first blow, I think it was childish and unkind of you to retort back the way you did. It depends on the kind of friendship you have with her, but if it means, anything to you I think you should go and apologise. I know you will not like my answer but one does not always win by having the last word on everything. A carefully thought out comment at an appropriate time is much more effective. You can discuss what happened with your friend at a later date; maybe she did not mean to hurt or humiliate you at all.

Dear Mita,

Last time a woman wrote about the frustration in her life because she felt useless after 20 years of marriage. She wanted to know if there were others like her. I would like to tell her that there are many like her, such as myself. But fortunately that is all in the past and I have been able to find new meaning to my life through a worthwhile occupation. 5 years ago I turned 40 and realized that time was slipping by and I had done nothing for myself. I had not completed my

ordered the library's entire stock of books distributed to the city's public baths and set ablaze.

Whatever the cause of its destruction, there has been no trace of the library or its contents for a millennium.

Now an ambitious plan has been conceived to rebuild the Bibliotheca Alexandria. "It will be as before, the most glorious library in history," its promoters say.

Coordinated by UNESCO, the project aims to construct a library that will house four million volumes as well as computer programmes, keyboards and printers able to cope with hieroglyphic languages. Using both paper and electronics to store information, the new institution will serve the Arab world and the Mediterranean basin and will be linked by computer to the rest of the world.

In fact, it has already received its first donation: 10,000 manuscripts from Madrid University's Islamic collection.

More than 500 architects competed to design the structure. The winning design — a 31-metre tall, partly sub-

merged disc symbolising the ancient Egyptian image of the sun — was submitted by the Norwegian firm Snøhetta. The foundation stone has already been laid and building tenders are due to be awarded next year.

The library will also include a school of librarianship.

The campaign to raise the \$200 million cost of the project enjoyed an auspicious launch. At a gathering that included Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Queen Noor of Jordan, Prince Turki of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Zayed of the United Arab Emirates and Queen Sophia of Spain, pledges of \$64 million were made. Even Iraq's Saddam Hussein phoned in a promise of \$21 million. He honoured the pledge shortly before launching the invasion of Kuwait.

In November UNESCO launched an international appeal to raise the rest of the money so the library can open on schedule in 1995.

Sanjiva Wijesinha is chief of surgery at Colombo Children's Hospital, he was trained in Sri Lanka and at Oxford and Melbourne.

graduation because of marriage, I had not acquired any skill to qualify for a job. All I had done was raise 4 children, cooked, entertained, and kept things in order at home. My husband who is a very nice person was shocked when I told him about the dissatisfaction with my present life. He could not believe that having provided everything for me and for my comfort I could be unhappy. I insisted on going back to studies and completing my graduation. The whole house was in turmoil, but when I showed that I was serious they respected my wishes and even started to help. I graduated, got a job in the neighbourhood school and discovered I was very skillful in the way I handled children. Gradually one thing led to another and I became an advocate for Children's rights. I later started to work in a voluntary organization which looks after slum children. Now I am not the mother of only 4 children but of 40 children. I love my work and have even earned the respect of the whole family. Please print my letter as I want to tell women like me that it is never too late to start.

DK, Shgun Bagicha
(Real name withheld)

Dear DK,

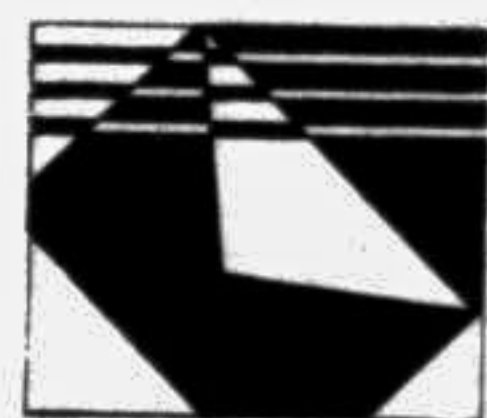
Thank you for your letter. I would not dream of not printing it. Accept my heartiest congratulations, women like you are an inspiration for all of us. With your kindness and generosity you have brought happiness to many children and I wish there were more people like you.

Dear Mr. Mojibul Haque,

Your letter was too long and therefore I could not print it. Since the question was of a legal nature I referred it to the lawyer in our team who has given the following advice.

Your question was to find out if there were any services available where you could get legal counsel without spending a lot of money since you already have spent so much without getting the desired result. There are various organizations you could go to and one of them is Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights.

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 28/1, Toynbee Circular Road, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000.

Recreating the Greatest Library of the Ancient World

by Sanjiva Wijesinha

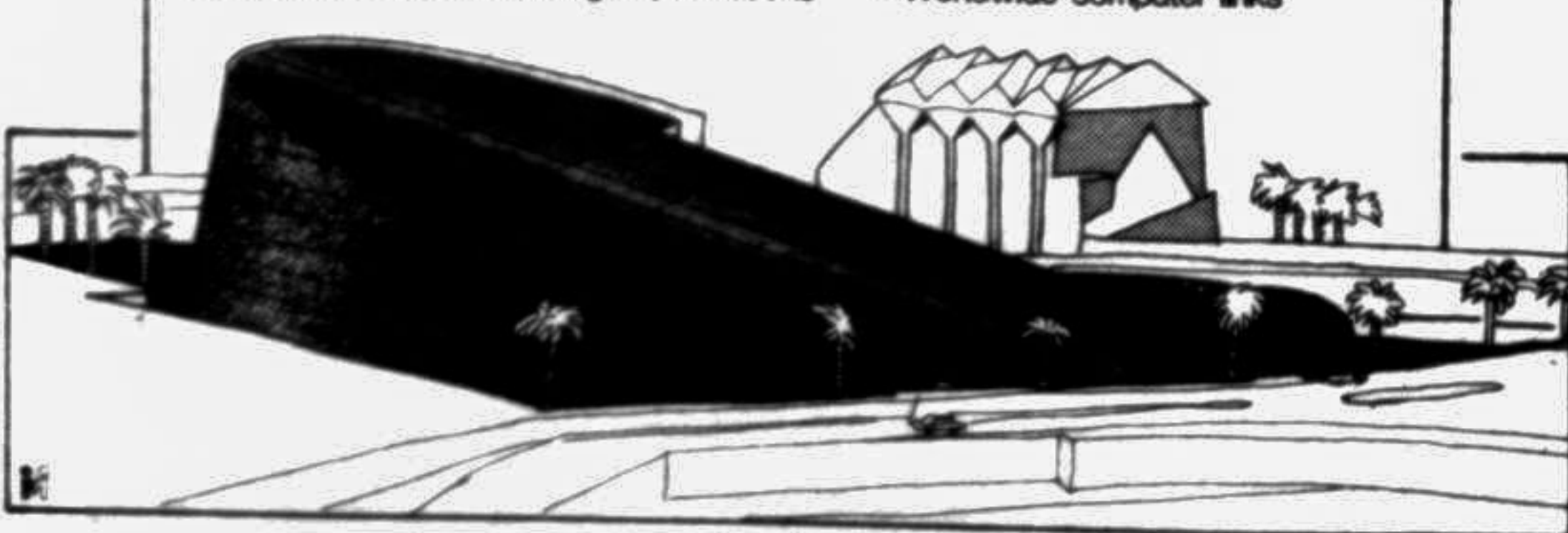
The Library of Alexandria is being rebuilt, hundreds of years after the structure and its priceless collection of works from the ancient world mysteriously vanished. The original library held 500,000 scrolls making up some 54,000 books. As Gemini News Service reports, the new library being constructed through a UNESCO-backed project will contain four million volumes and an array of computer equipment.

The original library

- Founded by King Ptolemy II
- Aimed to collect every book in the world
- 500,000 scrolls comprising 54,000 books

UNESCO's new library

- Opens 1995, cost \$200m
- 4 million books
- Worldwide computer links



IT was Alexander the Great's successor in Egypt, Ptolemy the Second, who initiated the original Library of Alexandria. Now hundreds of years after Ptolemy's creation vanished in the sands of time, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is working to recreate the greatest library of the ancient world.

More than 2,000 years ago, King Ptolemy (the Ozymandias of Shelley's well-known poem), founded the library in Alexandria on the shores of the Mediterranean, with the avowed intention of collecting all the books in the world.

The first librarian, a pupil of Aristotle, was given almost unlimited funds by the king to buy books from all over the known world.

At its zenith, the library held more than 500,000 scrolls comprising 54,000 books, and in the words of novelist E.M. Forster, was "the most learned place on earth." It was the grandest work of Ozymandias, King of Kings, whose epitaph read: "Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair."

Like its neighbour, the lighthouse of Pharos in Alexandria's harbour, a 440-foot wonder of the ancient world, the library functioned as a beacon of light to the world of learning.

Scholars are still uncertain what was contained in the library. But according to Dr Mustafa Al Agha of Kuwait University, one of the leading scholars in the field, the works published or stored there included:

Brahmaputra

From Page 9

If you allow that only half the channel tunnel is in the UK, the 17-mile stretch from East Finchley to Morden via Bank on the London underground's Northern line remains our longest tunnel. And that construction, from 1890 until well into the 20th century, had almost as many hold-ups as the "misery" line's present Charing Cross-Euston run.

As for Brunel's revolutionary atmospheric railway, the South Devon, with its eight pumping stations between Exeter and Newton Abbott, a chain of technical failures after a few years of experiment showed it to be impractical. The problems became bigger than the project.

Ironically, while engineering achievements may have been financially ill-equipped in Britain — but of immense benefit to impoverished mankind — Brunel's ambitions were not domestically confined. Bangladesh has long since forgotten the debt owed this greatest of all Victorian engineers.

In 1850 Brunel secured his first Indian contract for iron

railway fixings for a line between Calcutta and Dhaka. The East Bengal Railway was therefore given birth. Accompanying Brunel were Britain's finest bridge builders, and at the time of his death (1859) an 1860 ft iron bridge comprising some 4000 tons of metal costing Pound 275,000 allowed rails to penetrate into Darsana and Kushiya.

Calcutta and Chittagong were no doubt in Brunel's mind when his S.S. "Great Eastern" completed a trial run from Southampton-Colombo-Southampton, a distance of 22,000 miles, without one coaling stop. Technically ahead of all rivals, but financially a flop only due to the whim of accountants' caprices. A later generation of steam vessel builders made fortunes from Brunel's brainchild, and Dhaka soon established river connection with the Sundarbans. Unheard of until the repository of science and invention — Britain — advanced eastward the "Age of Enlightenment".

Brunel's great contractor contemporary Thomas Brassey recalls East Bengal railway construction "running at Pound 14,000 per mile — three times the cost of a route from London-Birmingham".