

### The Big Crowd Puller

There is a haunt of scholars in Bangladesh which is frequented each day of the year by as many as 4500 people with no pretensions to intellectual eminence — plain men and women, many of them come to town to see the wonders of God's creation. The National Museum at Shahbagh has been visited by about 15 lakh people during the last year.

Anything that draws that size of a crowd is, by that count alone, a very important nation-sized thing. That importance gains in dimension when one appreciates the fact that this place exposes all this multitude of people to culture and heritage. Bangladesh's whole population, perhaps specially its literate upper crust, has, for numerous political and social reasons, long been roaming aimlessly in a cultural wilderness, in spite of the great February Language Movement and the remote and deep-acting Tagore. It has been cut largely from its roots which go back to thousands of years of recorded history, not to take into account the paleolithic evidence of social thriving on the banks of Padma and Jamuna and its hundred branches. The National Museum is in a way bringing that dangerous chasm which politics and plain greed had only widened in the last fifty years.

Our National Museum has indeed come a long way in the short span of 67 years. In its almost half-a-million square feet of floor space it accommodates about 72 thousand exhibits—modest number no doubt if compared to other national museums, but something unthinkable by Nalinikanta Bhattashali, its progenitor or Abul Hasnat and Syed Mohammad Taifur, his close associates. For most of its seven-decade life it was sustained against heavy odds only through the mad zeal and all-giving sacrifice of Bhattashali, the greatest name in Indian iconography. But, apart from being impressed by the number of the exhibits wouldn't he have been a little too pained by the absence of an evenness of quality in collecting that heap or by the way they are being displayed.

Or by the way the poor visitors, once in, are left in the lurch by the missing guides, or by the famine of research undertakings that attends the big place or by the strange smallness of its publications. The institution evidently has put more emphasis on staging shows than going in for things of more lasting and fundamental import. Museums and libraries are things that grow into eminence, slowly and thoroughly. And it is good that it is so. Our National Museum went the other way round.

The main supply line to a museum is archaeological activity. The new director of the behemoth, Dr. Nazimuddin, knows only too well what a cruel stepmother has our state been to our archaeology. At the present rate of our digging of proven—and even partially opened—sites the Shahbagh big thing will take more than a century to get a collection worthy of our rich past and amiable heritage—something nearing even the prestige of the small keepsake sort of Bhattashali's things.

On the eve of our museology opening a second spectacular in June this year at Ahsan Manzil let us be frank about one suspicion. And that relates to the health of the other museums of the land. How is, for instance, Varendra doing? Has there been any significant addition to that wonderful assemblage of antiquity of Maitraya and Dighapatia? Any whatsoever in the last twenty years? Or has it steadily dwindled ever since the partition of India?

Museums are very important to a nation. In order to be that they must be good and dependable ones — not like Balda or Salarjang. And the nation's museums must be in their totality and not by one or two pampered ones.

### Last One to Go

Communism is dead. Long live the Communist Party! That seems to be the message from Albania's first multi-party elections in 50 years. Albania was the first European country after Russia to go under communist rule; it became the last to shed orthodoxy and switch over to a more liberal political system. A surprising two-thirds majority for ruling Party of Labour makes sure it will take even longer for Albania to emulate the rest of Eastern Europe.

Albania has always been a bit of an oddity. Unlike others in Eastern Europe, its communist party under Enver Hoxha turned out to be fiercely independent, attacking both Moscow and Beijing whenever the occasion arose; and unlike Yugoslavia, it pursued a strictly Stalinist economic and social policy. It accepted its status as a virtual outcast, but remained independent.

This streak of defiance, the lack of which destroyed communist credibility in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, probably saved Albanian communists from a similar fate. But the real test begins now. President Ramiz Alia's failure to win over the urban population — where the communists suffered their worst defeats — may yet prove to be his undoing in months to come. The party's intentions towards the all-important issue of economic reforms still remain unclear. Failure to solve the country's economic problems could result in widespread urban discontent which could then spread.

Alia now faces a difficult task. He not only has to carry out reforms to breathe life into the economy, he also has to cushion the population from transitional shocks such as unemployment and inflation. For that he needs foreign, particularly Western, economic assistance. Policy of self-reliance of the Hoxha years has left Albanian standard of living well below that of the rest of Europe. Thousands have fled in recent months to Italy to seek better economic rewards for their labour. Alia's immediate task will be to stem the flow and attract the emigres back with proof of sustained economic and political reforms.

To achieve economic progress, Tirana may have to swallow the bitter pill of Western aid. But that aid is unlikely to be forthcoming unless the communist party's stranglehold on the country's media, police, military, industry, agriculture, bureaucracy etc. are dismantled. Western banks and government will want to see a genuine pluralisation of society before committing any money. Alia needs the assistance if he is to turn victory at the polls into something longer-lasting. The biggest mistake he can commit is to take the results as a green light to carry on in the same rigid, orthodox manner of the past 47 years.

A decision just taken by the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka could seriously set back hopes for the country's bitter ethnic problems to be solved within a unitary national framework, as most people would prefer.

In fact, it could be seen as yet another reason for a parting of the ways and the birth of a separate state of Eelam in the north of the island for native Tamils.

The court ruling negated at one stroke all the efforts made early last year by the Sri Lankan government to provide a fair solution to one aspect of ethnicity by introducing proportionate selection.

Such measure, the court decided, violated constitutional rights. If proportionate representation is to be introduced the constitution will have to be rewritten. That can only further delay any settlement.

Last year the cabinet authorised the Ministry of Public Administration to direct that appointments to government service and promotions within it at national, provincial and district levels were to be made strictly in accordance with respective ethnic ratios.

The quotas were to be 75 per cent for Sinhalese, 13 per cent for Sri Lankan Tamils, five per cent for Tamils of Indian descent, and seven per cent for Muslims. It was also laid down that appointments and promotions should be by merit along (subject to ethnic quotas) and free of political patronage.

These rulings provided what the Sinhalese considered a reasonable response to allegations by Sri Lankan Tamils that in recent years they had not been given places in government service, even in proportion to their numbers.

Before independence in

# Court Gives Premadasa a New Ethnic Headache

S. Muthiah writes from Madras

**A gesture of conciliation to the Tamils from the government of Sri Lanka has been frustrated by the Supreme Court, which has ruled an ethnic quota plan unconstitutional. The government had given orders to institute an Indian-style system to ensure a fairer sharing of jobs between the races. By turning down the idea the court has made the country's ethnic tangle even more complicated.**

1948 and in the first years afterwards the Sri Lankan Tamils — through better educational facilities and hard work

### Sri Lanka: Tamil areas

Sri Lanka Tamils descend from South Indian settlers and leftovers of invasions 1,000-2,500 years ago.

Indian Tamils descend from workers imported for British teafields 70-120 years ago

Total population	16m
Sinhala	74.0%
Sri Lanka Tamil	12.6%
Indian Tamil	5.6%
Moor	7.1%
Other	0.7%

- Over 50% Sri Lankan Tamil
- 20-30% Sri Lankan Tamil
- Up to 47% Indian Tamil



had dominated government service. Their numbers were in much greater proportion than their population. Sinhalese resentment over this was the genesis of the island's ethnic problem.

What that resentment virtually cut off government avenues of employment for the Sri Lankan Tamils, the ethnic divide widened and became more violent. Last year's administrative orders were a gesture of conciliation by the government.

Neighbouring India has long had this kind of quota system for its aboriginal tribes and so-called depressed classes. The state of Tamil Nadu, next door to Sri Lanka, has for years also had further quotas for backward classes, a caste-based classification.

These reservations in India caused few problems until V.P. Singh sought to add to the quotas when he was prime minister briefly last year.

Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa believed all

Sri Lankans would accept an Indian-style system an most Sinhalese raised no objections.

With the Sri Lankan Tamils in the north and east involved in what they consider a war of independence, the rulings may have been considered irrelevant, but if they had paid attention to them they would not have relished Sinhalese recruitment in their traditional homelands.

The immediate issue did not involve them, but it did involve the large number of Tamils still in government service. Most live in Colombo and other cosmopolitan towns and many saw it as a threat to their future.

Customs Superintendent Ponnambalam Ramapillai, a Tamil, appealed to the courts. He said he was one of 53 officers who had applied for one of about two dozen posts of assistant director and would be deprived of selection because under the new orders 19 Sinhalese and three Sri Lankan would have to be chosen. The petition drew attention

to the fact that while Tamil ratios were well below the quota in the armed and police services and the government clerical service, they were still well above the quota in such services as customs, health, engineering, accountancy and law. In all these services the quota system would hurt the promotion chances for hundreds of Tamils.

The Supreme Court ruling has now given them new hope. The judges — four Sinhalese, two Tamil and one Muslim — said the new scheme violated the right to equality assured to the petitioner by Article 12 of the constitution.

Chief Justice Parinda Ranasinghe, a Sinhalese, said: "The only consideration that should prevail is merit, or merit on a seniority which alone would enhance and ensure the efficiency of the service."

Another judge said: "It amounts to constitutionally unwarranted discrimination on the grounds of race, and race alone."

The judges also pointed out other anomalies in the new administrative orders. They did not, for instance, take into account the children of mixed marriages or provide for other minorities.

The court ruling has further complicated Sri Lanka's ethnic tangle. Quotas may violate the constitution, but without them Tamils might have little future, whatever their merit if the record of the last 30 years is anything to go by.

— GEMINI NEWS

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NEW DELHI: Tribals and women are the most vulnerable of India's rural poor.

They are also among the focus of agricultural development, albeit lopsided, in India.

Take the Orissa Tribal Development Project launched in 1988. It is an important initiative for it marked the first time that an external development agency was substantially involved in working directly with tribal peoples.

The agency — the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) — will soon present for approval another project, the Andhra Pradesh Tribal Development Project.

With the Orissa initiative, some 12,500 tribal and 4,000 non-tribal families in the Koraput Block in Koraput District are now being assisted in reversing the trend of declining production, accelerating environmental degradation and deepening poverty.

The US\$24.2 million Orissa project has gradually replaced traditional shifting cultivation on fragile hillsides by more productive farming on more stable soils.

The construction of small low-cost diversion structures and gully plugs also reduces the risk of erosion, as does a program of planting trees and perennial crops like coffee and pepper.

Applied research provides improved seed varieties. Strengthened extension services promote more effective farming and soil conservation methods. Better roads have made it easier to bring essential agricultural materials and social services to this isolated enclave.

## IFAD Rearranges Indian Priorities

External development agency works directly with subcontinent's tribal peoples for first time

Uncertainty of land ownership makes farmers in Kashiipur Block reluctant to invest in long-term improvements. A comprehensive land survey is being undertaken by the project. When completed, it will be instrumental in establishing an equitable system of permanent tenure.

Active and decisive participation in building the foundations for sustainable agricultural and economic growth is also being encouraged through the promotion of group activities and self-help schemes. With the help of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Ag-agamee, the tribal community is made more aware of environmental issues, opportunities available to women as well as men by marketing and credit, and legal and land rights.

Women are also one of IFAD's concerns. In India, as in most of the developing world, women play a crucial — and too often ignored — role in food production. The full potential of their contributions to family income and the rural economy, as well as of their growth as persons, frequently goes unrealised.

Meeting the specific needs of women, lightening their burdens, supporting their activities, both in the home and the fields, and promoting their leadership skills, have there-

fore been an important feature of an increasing number of IFAD-initiated projects throughout the world.

This recognition that women must be full partners in development is the foundation of the Fund's most recent effort in India: the Tamil Nadu Women's Development Project. In 1989, IFAD approved a loan of US\$17 million specifically earmarked for improving the economic and social status of women of three districts in the State — Dharmapuri, Salem and South Arcot.

Implemented by the Tamil Nadu Corporation for the Development of Women, the project takes a major step in establishing a new approach to, and providing a model for, women's development because it focuses on overall development, not just on improving women's economic lot.

Of prime importance is the effort to raise women's level of social and personal awareness and to increase women's self-confidence and self-reliance. The project promotes cottage and village industries among the landless, land provide credit and savings facilities to support these ventures. Horticulture and sericulture will be encouraged, and women will receive technical assistance for

farming and animal husbandry.

India has received a greater share of IFAD's funds than any other country: loans totalling US\$212 million for seven projects, as well as Technical Assistance Grants for applied research in fields directly relevant to small farmers. These loans, which are provided to the Government of India on highly concessional terms, represent almost 7 per cent of IFAD's entire lending program.

Over the past decade, IFAD's initiatives in India have undergone a significant transformation in both approach and target. In the early years, IFAD responded to the government's request to support a major effort to expand the area of land under irrigation. In 1979, for example, the Fund provided US\$50 million for the Bhima Command Area Development Project in Maharashtra and US\$55 million for the Rajasthan Command Area and Settlement Project on the Indira Gandhi Canal.

These were followed in 1982 by US\$25 million for the Madhya Pradesh Medium Irrigation Project and a year later by US\$35.3 million toward a Public Tubewells Projects in Uttar Pradesh.

These projects brought an equitable distribution of water to large areas of rainfed farm-

land, enabling tens of thousands of farming families to extend their growing season, diversify their crops and significantly increase their harvests.

While these efforts were important and successful, IFAD realised that its assistance would be most effective not in broad, large-scale irrigation schemes, but in projects that were especially designed to support the desperately poor and neglected rural population, especially those who live in areas where environmental deterioration is a serious problem.

Its assistance has thus increasingly been directed to rainfed agriculture and toward women and scheduled castes and tribes.

This approach had its first concrete expression in 1981, with the US\$37.8 million Sunderban Development Projects in the southwestern part of the State of West Bengal. An area of natural beauty and assets, it remains one of India's poorest and most inaccessible regions.

Some 1.6 million people live in the project area; 40 per cent belong to castes and tribes.

Well over half of the population are farm families with an average holding of less than 1 hectare. Many have no land at all. Waterlogging and tidal

erosion threaten the land. Crop yields are low, access to markets difficult and poverty endemic.

More than 225,000 families benefited from this innovative project. Wet season agricultural potential has been increased through a combination of improved drainage, water control and cultivation practices. While small-scale irrigation schemes have enabled farmers to grow more dry season crops.

Fishponds, managed and maintained primarily by groups of landless families, have been established. Fruit trees and mangrove planted on canal and river embankments, besides arresting erosion, provide much needed income and fuelwood.

Founded at the end of 1977 as a specialised financing agency within the United Nations system, IFAD is relatively young. With a professional staff of 85, it is relatively small. But the impact it has had on the lives of disadvantaged people throughout the developing world belies its age and size.

Unique among international financing institutions for its exclusive mandate to increase food production, reduce malnutrition and alleviate rural poverty, the Fund has mobilised almost US\$12 billion to finance 292 projects in 93 countries.

All of these projects focus on specific groups of the most defenseless and neglected: small farmers, nomadic herdsmen and artisanal fishermen, as well as the rural landless and women.

— Depthnews Asia.

### To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

#### On misdeeds of the last government

Sir, When we harp on the fact that nothing has been done by the previous regime, we make it extremely difficult for our high officials to ask donor nations for further aid.

Any donor can then say that since we have not been able to use our aid for nine years, we would need far more to build up the country than what we have asked for. It can also be then said that since our economy has been completely destroyed during the past nine years, we should be in a very difficult situation to make a fresh move towards economic development. It is important for our government to ponder these points.

Mahmud Ahmed Banani, Dhaka.

#### Woman MPs

Sir, Recently we had a free and fair Parliament election in our country aiming to establish an exploitation-free democratic Government. As a woman I feel proud to have a lady Prime Minister and a lady Opposition leader who have been elected directly by the voters in the general election which proves that we, the women of Bangladesh, are competent enough to contest with our male counterparts and voters are not backward either not to choose ladies as their representatives. Then why the system of choosing female Members of Parliament by the male MPs through an indirect election thereby depriving the womenfolk to choose their representative in the Parliament?

Munira Khan 14 Green Road Dhaka.

#### Accidents, crime and punishment

Sir, The following is a common if not a daily occurrence in the country and staple of the news industry. The scenario goes somewhat like this: speeding truck or minibus runs over pedestrians killing one or more luckless souls, driver escapes — truck impounded and a case filed or, killer truck smashes into tea shop killing 5 or 6 or more. There are many variations of the same scene — the carnage continues and seemingly all these are accepted with equanimity by a deeply fatalistic population.

The amazing part is that the drivers of the killer trucks or buses are hardly ever apprehended — and even if he is there is never any news about punishment for such wanton negligence or involuntary manslaughter.

The question is what is the responsibility of the police administration in cases like these? Why are they unable to apprehend the culprits when crores and crores of Taka are expended to equip them and

for their establishment.

Also, what is the responsibility of the truck or bus owners? It is inconceivable that they have entrusted vehicles costing several lakhs, of Taka to drivers without knowing their real addresses or other relevant information.

Is it the group interest of the truck/bus owners or union members who operate them that take precedence over the safety and rights of the public? The public has a right to know. Naz Shafiq Naz Motihel C/A, Dhaka.

#### Radio Bangladesh

Sir, The authority have invited suggestions for improvement of the broadcasting services. I find the following drawbacks in the radio service: (1) some stations have strong signal, but the sound is low. Some engineering friend tells me it might be due to low 'modulation'; (2) many programmes have bad and unnatural sound (called 'distortion'); (3) hi-fi quality is missing most of the time; (4) there is considerable difference in quality between the commercials and the scheduled programmes; with wild

variations in the volume of the sound; (5) the FM quality is below normal, maybe due to one of the causes mentioned above (quality of the original recorded programme).

We listeners would be satisfied if two objectives are kept in view: (a) operation at professional standard; and (b) the drawing room should not become a control room.

A. Mawaz Dhaka.

#### PDB delicacy

Sir, The electric power supply is as stable as our politics; and as unpredictable. In my area (Mohammadpur), the supply is sure to go off at least once daily, if not more. In addition, the daily voltage fluctuations remind us of modern dances by the younger generation.

There are a number of small workshops nearby which carry out welding during daytime, causing voltage fluctuations of as much as 20 per cent every few minutes.

I use a number of electronic equipment at home which are very sensitive to such large fluctuations, be-

yond the control of automatic voltage regulators, which I use. I cannot afford UPS (uninterrupted power supply system) as these are very costly.

I understand that under the Electricity Act PDB is bound to offer a minimum standard of service to the various grades of consumers (domestic, industrial, etc). It is not clear why welding machines are run using domestic supply line.

It is a pity that in our country nothing runs even at normal routine level; not to speak of improvements, and better service. This is the atmosphere in every sector. Everybody talks about rights, and nobody says anything about duties. Indiscipline has led to indifference. Those who can afford it, try to combat indifference, with bribes, which has simply been institutionalized.

Can we expect from the new government that the various public services be brought back to at least the normal routine level on top priority basis? This is the least we can expect from any administration. Domestic consumer Dhaka.