

# 'The Actors Must Connect With the Audience'

by Fayza Haq

**ARTISTS** Reportage  
Theatre, which is Portland, Oregon's premiere theatre, in the form of a team of four, will be visiting Dhaka in mid-October to hold a drama workshop at the Shilpakala Academy, and will also perform for the TV.

A.R.T. will be presenting "Driving Miss Daisy", which was highly successful in Broadway, and the film version of which has won many awards in 1990. The play deals with the growing relationship between a elderly Southern lady and her Black chauffeur. The play is replete with elements of humanity and humour.

The other play "Love Letters" involve the reading of letters sent between two individuals, who met fifty years ago. The author carries the audience through the vicissitudes of adulthood, marriage, divorce and consequential middle age.

In trying to bring in various aspects of American life A.R.T. will also perform "The World of Carl Sandburg", which is an adoption of the Pulitzer Prize winner's verse and prose.

A.R.T. reveals its innovative and economical performances. They are proud that the intimate theatre space provides the audience with a sense of involvement. The

immediacy is magical for the audience.

This Portland's off Broadway theatre specially deals with the subject with social and psychological insight. A.R.T. tries its level best to usher in high quality as well as social awareness. The theatre group includes top-notch actors, writers and directors.

Despite the limited budget, they have a hard-working and dedicated staff. Their aim remains high quality, intimate theatre.

The Portland troupe comprises Allen Nause, the artistic director. He has a reputation for being a director with a remarkable range, and has had his hands in the super hit comedies like "Tons of Money" and "Absent Friends". He has also directed Y. B. Yeats' "On Baile's Strand".

The actors and actresses in the theatre troupe include J. P. Phillips, who is always known to have a busy schedule. His credits include roles in "The Iceman Cometh", and three seasons with the New Shakespeare Touring Company. His

TV performance includes the "Midnight Caller" for NBC.

Vana O'Brian, who has appeared in forty productions in the last ten years, in the Portland area, is there in the



Allen Nause

Dream" and Aunt Eller in "Oklahoma".

JoAnn Johnson, the other actress in the troupe, has had such roles as Mistress Page in "The Merry Wives of Windsor",



JoAnn Johnson

touring group too. She has received the Best Actress award in Portland three times, and the best Supporting Actress twice. She has co-authored three locally-produced plays. Her Portland acting credits include the role of Mrs. Patrick Campbell in "Dear Liar", Titania in "Midsummer Night's

Mac (Sister Woman) in "Cat On a Hot Tin Roof", Queen Elizabeth in "Richard III" and Calpurnia in "Julius Caesar". JoAnn is also a dancer and choreographer, and has received a Dramalogue Critic's award for her choreography for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's production of

"Broadway", in '86. She has an M.A. in Speech/Theatre, and has toured as an actor/teacher with the Oregon Shakespeare festival's school visit programme.



Vana O'Brian

being done in USA. Allen Nause, on this occasion, stressed on how important and sensitive was the actor and audience relationship. He felt a rapport between the



J.P. Phillips

A Telepress conference with the A.R.T. artists was held with two Dhaka journalists and two drama experts. On this occasion the troupe expressed the opinion that they would be coming to Dhaka and visiting South Asian countries to make the Asian drama lovers aware of what is

actors and audience was a must. He also said that the function of the playwright was also of great consequence. He added that a gifted director could bring magic into a play.

Nause was speaking in response to a query as to what was the most vital factor in a

play — the direction, acting or the script.

JoAnn Johnson spoke on how relevant Shakespeare was today.

With modern plays, the acting however is more accessible, as the language was easier, she added. Vana O'Brian reminded the listeners at this point, that no American play was as rich or rewarding as the Shakespeare plays.

The troupe leader Nause, and the actor Phillips, spoke of the Afro-American and Asian theatre in USA as something important. They dealt with social issues, they informed us, and were mostly to be found in places like San Francisco, where there was a large concentration of the Chinese. The Japanese, Vietnamese and Cambodians also contributed to the Asian theatre in USA, one was told. This information was given in answer to a pertinent question from Mr. A. U. M. Fakhruddin.

Mr. Jamil Ahmed of the Dhaka University asked about

the box office intake. To this the group answered that 65% of the money came from the box office. The American actors pointed that they wanted to "soak up in the culture of the other countries" and "were coming here to South Asia, not to teach but to share ideas".

Vana O'Brian insisted that they must be able to have contact with the audience. "Honesty is what one is guided by. I must connect with the people I'm performing for," she remarked.

When asked why they had chosen the particular three pieces, the group replied that this was done to portray the different aspects of American culture. "Love Letters" was an upper class creation, while Sandburg was being celebrated as a blue collared poet.

"Driving Miss Daisy" brought in the South, about which there is so much of curiosity outside USA.

Rounding up the talk, the group spoke of the present popularity of Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neill in America. Moliere, Sheridan, Shaw, Chekov, and Ibsen were also pointed out as favourites of the U. S. audience.

## The Mike-ing Menace

by Parveen Anam

A quiet gossip over a nice, sugary cup of tea, accompanied by a 'sing-hara' wrapped in a newspaper, is the privilege of the Dhakaite. Dhaka is a nice enough place, except that very soon one realises that the 'nice, quiet' gossip is perhaps not so 'nice' and 'quiet' after all, because you are in a keen competition.

Competition? The very word is like a knell of depression. Competition in drinking sugary tea? Surely not? Ah, you guessed it. The competition is with the omnipresent MIKE-man and since he has the distinct advantage of possessing a gadget which you abhor (?) You soon find yourself, shouting yourself hoarse trying to catch up on the latest in the gossip-front and the quiet afternoon, day, night, evening, morning (you name it) has turned into a shouting match between yourself and the MIKE-man to the extent that you probably even need a MIKE to hear yourself think. Because, surely in Dhaka, we take the cake for SOUND. And none contributing more vigorously to its overall effect than the ever-present MIKE-man. Or as blatantly and aggressively than yours truly the MIKE-man, at any given point in time, day or night. For who has not HEARD the MIKE-man, parading up and down the by-lanes, alleys, side-roads, main roads, with his mike, practising his vocal chords at the expense of the innocent citizen's hearing faculty? And an abandonment of thought and consideration that would

put the most shameless to shame?

Try and shut your eyes for the odd forty winks on a hot, sultry afternoon, or indulge yourself in some intellectual pursuit when lo and behold,

marvellous movie released last week in some obscure cinema house in some even more obscure village in some remote part of your country: through his MIKE at the TOP of his lungs. And of course you post-

The hammering our ear drums and finer senses take in the process seems to give the guy so much sadistic pleasure, you feel he has missed his profession in life — chief of a torture chamber.

If it is a wedding in your neighbourhood, be prepared to put up with at least a week's (if you are lucky) if not, 'only a month's' entertainment of Hindi pop songs on the MIKE, to enable you to partake in the celebrations (life would be so much easier if the happy couple had eloped, you mutter). Never mind if your child is ill and needs his rest or had his exams the day after and needs the peace and quiet for his academic achievements.

The louder the MIKE-man the more convincing he sounds — or so he thinks. Be it a lost cow, or the elections (elections by the way are HIS great favourite) for must HE not remind you who to vote for — certainly a candidate of HIS choice, or where to donate the skin of your sacrificial animal? The ever faithful MIKE-man will remind you without batting a lid. And dare you protest? (the city fathers certainly do not) What was the adage "Let a sleeping dog lie"?

In Dhaka we should be fast adopting the adage "Let the MIKE-man be". And in the meantime, if your prayers go unanswered, and HE does prove too much for your system or your eardrums, buy yourself a pair of ear-plugs. You cannot go far wrong with those.

tively need to be reminded of the weekly 'haat' in 'such and such' upazila, where you are sure to get the 'best' tooth powder in the land (by the time HE is through, you are sure you have a smelly mouth) and all at the TOP of his lungs (the envy of many a vocalist) under the banyan tree at your front gate.

He is of the very considered opinion that it is his birth-right to stand, shout, yell, and make a positive nuisance of himself at all hours of the day or night wherever he pleases.

you will swear the wrath of heaven has descended upon you or your past has at last caught up with you (and with not even a chance to repent your sins) as you are jarred so rudely out of your reverie; no, the heavens are kinder and your sins are minor — it is the ever-present MIKE-man who has caught up, extolling the virtues of some miracle ointment, guaranteed to cure you of all ills (doctors beware, your livelihood is threatened) or subject you to the excitement, glamour and glory of some



## The Mistakeman

by Sankar Pande

Here, in the newspaper office, the word 'proof' and the elusive yet powerful hyphen have been deleted from his designation. He is simply a Reader — a truth about him recognised, professionally.

A reader inevitably shaped and matured. In fact, he had always been strong enough to read, fighting shy of football or the like 'hi-risk, outdoor games. Patience, bitter as it is called, would never allow him kill time nobly through a game

of cards or chess. With features just not ugly and a height hardly changing since he had been in class VII, he could afford to wait, dressed, for hours at strategic points for the pleasure of seeing and listening admiringly to (never teasing) the budding beauties. So he read — ever awake to the practicality of passing the exams and mindful of the soundness of his eyes and brains (incidentally, thanks to his abstinence from over-reading; well, he goes without specta-

cles or tranquillizers). He read the text books, more of their notes and most the 'most important' answers. Thus, a bachelor's degree was won — a qualification or no qualification for any moderate job in offices. Reading took a new course.

The employment notices and ads, guides, career undigests with changing panoramas of current affairs, who's who, etc. were to be swallowed. A job or two of the clerical nature were found, until, at last, the drifting ship of a reader was harboured at the newspaper office.

So the contented reader will be seen with a reader-journalist air about him. In his late thirties or early forties, he is — maybe ideally — slightly built. Not unlike his fellow men at office, he is at once chatty and serene, with a tinge of confidence irradiating his otherwise nervous face. For, why should he lack in confidence so long as the omnipotent 'copy' is there and the dictionaries close by?

The reader may be seen holding the copy for his colleague or reading to him aloud in a halting, droll voice, mentioning in a queer but professional manner, not only the punctuation marks but also the capital letters, changes of paragraphs, italics, bolds, etc.

Unabashed he will mispronounce or spell, letter by letter, a hundred and thousand words. Since, in print, the spelling counts. And, the art of pronunciation is long but time in a newspaper office is fleeting.

The reader's best friend — ever so considerate for not having coined one like the 'printer's devil' — often calls him 'mistakeman'. And there must be many more among the valued subscribers inclined to recognise him as such. Anyway, mistakes seem to be fading far away to see the News Section grudging, the Editorial frowning and the Feature Section in audibly sighing. The good, good Editor, an avid reader of other newspapers would, however, avoid seeking and finding mistakes in his own to avert the risk of blood pressure increasing.

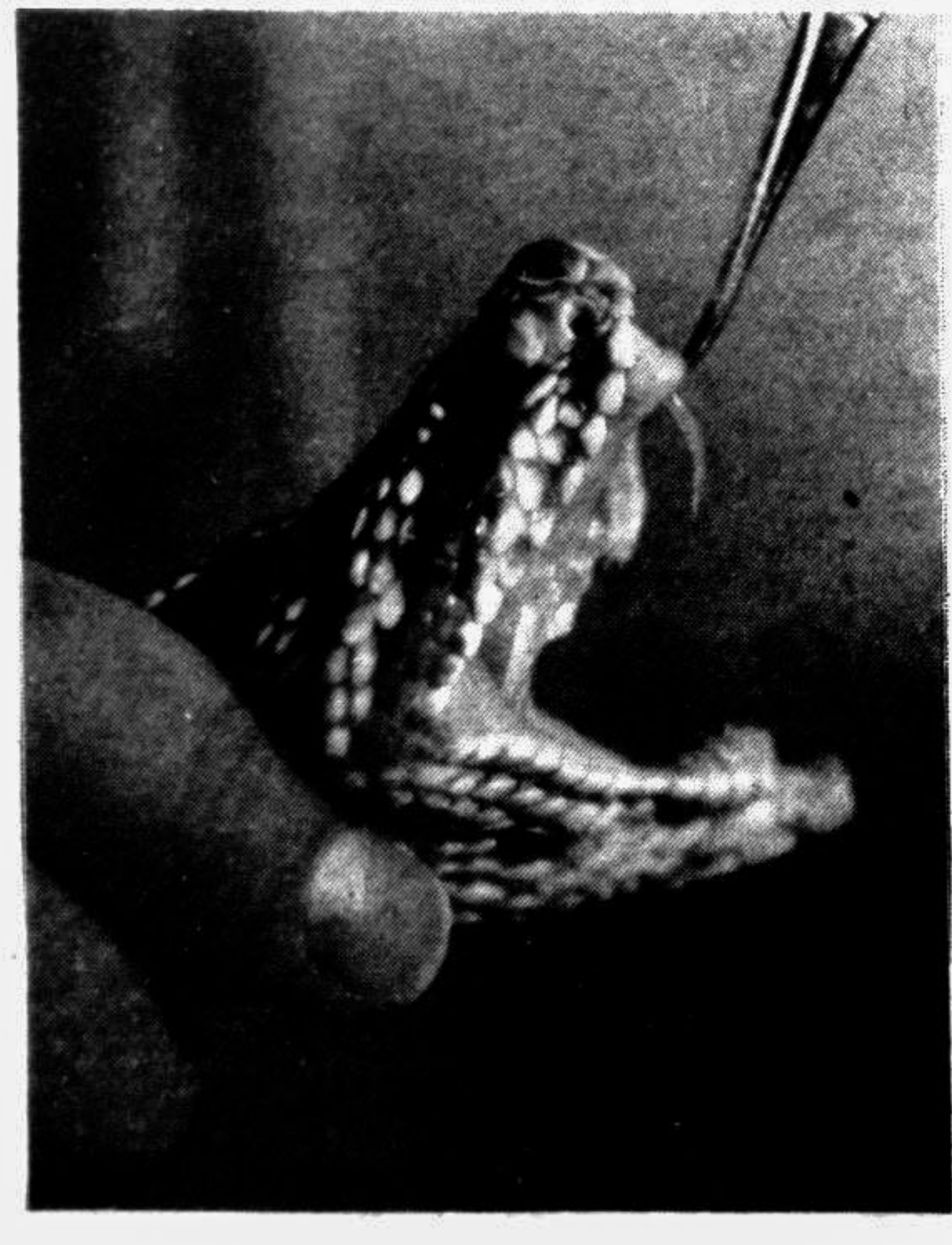
Could the mistakes be done away with? Could the 'copy' of the reader's life be better composed, edited and a few chapters thoroughly re-written? But, for God's sake, no mistake-songs!

## COBRA VENOM

EXOTIC decorative backdrops are not to be found here in Ludwig-hafen: Germany's only snake farm is not a zoo. Snakes have been bred here on the grounds of the Knoll pharmaceutical works since 1973 — the present stock of 500 reptiles is the largest in Europe.

A tropical climate, 28 degrees Celsius with a humidity of 75 per cent — is maintained in two rooms here. They contain shelves with plastic containers that almost resemble supermarket shopping baskets. Each of them contains a single snake.

"Snakes are not particularly aesthetic creatures," says Rolf Kreuz, one of the three herpetologists (reptile experts) at the Ludwig-hafen snake farm, "they don't care whether they lie on a decorative rug or in a plastic box. What's most important is that they have body contact with their hideaway."



NATURAL disasters are part of the environment in which we live. They do not discriminate between people or countries. And yet, no disaster is entirely natural. Human activity invariably aggravates the risks through insufficient attention to where and how settlements are built, or natural resources are exploited. Disasters are, therefore, complex events; and the problem of disaster prevention and mitigation has many facets. "Mitigating Natural Disasters", A Manual for Policy Makers and Planners, published by UNDRP (1991), sets out to demystify the scientific and technological aspects of disaster mitigation. Although the Manual has been written with the developing countries mostly in mind, it would be incorrect to suggest that the developed countries could not learn from such a study, especially at the regional and local levels.

Among those who have responsibility for what one may broadly call disaster mitigation, not everyone agrees on the priorities or even on what the subject is mainly about. This study addresses an aspect, or segment, of the disaster mitigation spectrum that has received little coherent attention outside a highly specialized scientific group: risk assessment and reduction through structural and non-structural physical measures as a function of the hazards (s) involved.

Those who have prepared this study have long been convinced that the physical aspects of disaster mitigation have been shunned by a significant proportion of the disaster management community, largely because of the mental blockage caused by the need to master, at the outset, a number of fundamentally principles in earth sciences and engineering. Yet the scientific principles involved are no more difficult to grasp than

## Mitigating Natural Disasters

basic principles in any other discipline. Much of the challenge, therefore, resides in how knowledge is reformatized (to use a computing analogy) and presented to the lay user.

Disaster managers face many conflicting convictions, prejudices and beliefs. On the one hand, scientists (including engineers) tend to make two

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assumptions: first, that a scientific explanation of the underlying phenomena causing disasters suffices to provide the basis for preventing further disasters from occurring; second, that what is self-evident to the scientist or engineer must be self-evident to everybody else.

On the other hand, those who work in the social and humanitarian domains tend to believe that disaster management is essentially a matter of social management and policy formulation, and that pre-disaster planning relates predominantly to preparedness. Quantifiable technical issues are often seen as by-products. One might also add a further category: those to whom disaster management is synonymous with development policy, to the extent that disaster management becomes a substitute for development.

A further observation may be made as a corollary: the topics or subject areas concerned with disaster mitiga-

tion have been either too compartmentalized, too hermetic (e.g. hydrology, seismology, meteorology, civil engineering, etc.), or too diffuse, covering board policy issues on disaster management, relating largely to relief and rehabilitation.

None of the assumptions made by the various groups mentioned above are necessarily false, but alone they do not suffice. At some point, science, technology and society must meet. Disaster mitigation undoubtedly must comprise a spectrum of complementary measures in the social, economic, political, scientific and technical fields.

"Mitigating Natural Disasters" is a Manual intended as one of many disaster-management tools. It does not pretend to act as a substitute for other standard works or methods in disaster mitigation or management, and should not be seen to do so. It should be examined on its own merits.

The question we beg the reader not to ask is: should we not rather have a disaster preparedness manual, or a general policy manual instead? Work in these fields exists and continues to flourish. What we are attempting to do is fill a gap in the disaster mitigation spectrum.

The Manual addresses, on the one hand, a tangible segment of the disaster mitigation spectrum, namely the control and reduction of the physical damage caused by sudden and violent natural phenomena (floods, cyclones, earthquakes,

volcanoes, and landslides); and on the other, presents this segment of the spectrum in such a way that it will be of the widest possible interest to disaster managers at the technical, professional, administrative and policy-making levels. The exercise consists in adapting scientific and technical knowledge to the needs of users who are not scientists themselves but who need to understand the physical parameters of disasters in order to decide, plan and implement mitigation measures, especially at the sub-regional and local echelon.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the Manual is not only a methodological guide, but also a practical guide on information-gathering and management to apply to the parameters described. The Manual is, perhaps, above all else, a training tool in disaster risk assessment and reduction for professionals, policymakers and managers.

It is recognized that disasters are not strictly-speaking "natural". The agency of man is also a determining factor. However, the term "natural" has been used for convenience as opposed to industrial, chemical, environmental and other man-made disasters.

The Manual differs from previous studies on comprehensive disaster mitigation in that it has systematized the technical spectrum of disaster risk assessment as a whole, albeit within a policy framework.

"Mitigating Natural Disasters—Phenomena, Effects and Options—A Manual of Policy Makers and Planners". Published by the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (March 1991). Copies are available from the Distribution and Sales Section, United Nations at New York or Geneva. UNDRP/MND/1990 Manual-Sales No. E. 90 III. M.I. Price US \$ 30. — UNDRP

## WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,

We move in a circle where most people are very rich. I can see their hypocrisy, double standards and artificial behaviour but don't have the guts to get out of it. Is it very important to be a part of this group in Dhaka in order to succeed? What do you say?

Anonymous, Dhaka.

Dear Anonymous,

The necessity of being in touch with highly placed and rich people is exaggerated. If their behaviour or life style disturbs you much than you can just keep a very casual contact. Relationships based on such superficial reasons can neither be satisfying nor lasting. Try to be your own person, ultimately those whom you call hypocrites and superficial will respect you for it.

Dear Mita,

Long time ago a man was interested in me but I was not. We went our separate ways, and both got married to different person. I have been very happy. But unfortunately his life has not been very smooth. Now after many years he wants to renew the relationship. This does not make me feel comfortable because I don't know how his wife will react. Mita, what do you think I should do? He is a dear friend and I don't want to hurt him.

Kishwar (not real name), Dhaka.

Dear Kishwar,

I don't see any problem in your having a friendly relationship with your old acquaintance provided it is seen in the right perspective, especially by him. Whatever he felt or may still feel about you, the relationship will have to be confined to that of a well wisher or a good friend. His wife's reaction is a very important factor.

She will have to feel confident and secure in her relationship with him before you both can be friends again.

Dear Mita,

I used to be so confident and sure of myself before marriage. But after 16 years of marriage of my friends say I am a changed person. May be it's all my fault that I don't have a career nor my husband's respect. Is it too late to change things now? I am afraid that after few more years it will get worse and then there will be no chance of doing anything.

Salma, Malibag, Dhaka.

Dear Salma,

You are right. After a few years it might be too late. If you have realized that your life is wasting away then the process of changing it should start now. Women in our culture give up their identity too easily. Doing and listening to everything that the husband says gradually erodes self-confidence and a time comes when a woman stops thinking for herself. Fortunately that has not happened to you yet. Get a hold of yourself.

It is not too late to start a career. Look around, there are many women who started late and have flourished.

Dear Mita,

I have a peculiar problem, very different from the ones you usually answer. I have done well in my career and am quite successful. But because of many bad luck and unwise decisions my husband has not been able to succeed over the years. Now he has developed a complex and we are having problems in our marriage. I have tried many things but we are going further away from each other. I don't know what to do, we have two children aged 9 and 11.

Noori, Dhaka.

Dear Noori,

This is not as peculiar a problem as you feel. Just a little away from the norm. He is suffering from a loss of self esteem and you are the only person who can help him regain it. Society expects men to succeed and is very hard on those who don't. I do not know what you have tried but communication is the only answer to your problem. Let him know that he is not alone, that you are with him all the way and will stand by him no matter what. Meanwhile try to find out if you can help to get his career on track but do it without hurting his ego. It is in times of crisis that the strength of your relationship is put to test.

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.