

ON THE RUN IN DHAKA

by Fiona Thompson

As the urgent cries of "On, on, on!" ring out across the paddy fields outside Dhaka, a crowd of locals peer out from their kure-ghars to find out what all the commotion is about. Half afraid and half amused, they look on as a group of around 60 mud-splattered foreigners leap around before their eyes, scouring the mud in search of who knows what. They stare in utter disbelief as these crazy men continue to run around in circles, exhausted and knee-deep in slime.

But come hell or high water, this is what a certain group of ex-patriates will be doing every Monday without

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competitive sport — one which doesn't entertain the idea of a winner but loves to find the losers. Fifty-year-old Fred Kaul knows everything there is to know about hashas. Born in Britain, he has travelled half way round the world with his job and through his many visits to Bangladesh, has run around 65 hashas in Dhaka. Bursting with anecdotes and wild stories of hashas in every country from Bangkok to Algiers, Fred's the first to admit that he's stark-raving mad. "It's a great institution," says Fred shivering and soaked to the

Traditionally it's a men's thing," Fred explains, "which is rather sad because women enhance the scenery somewhat." And although mixed hashas are organised on

Various stories abound as to how the Hash runs first began but most would agree that it was round a table in a restaurant outside Kuala Lumpur in 1938 that the idea was born. Nicknamed the Hash House because of the left-overs it served up, this group of expats cooked up the ideal way of combatting boredom. And from its small beginnings it grew and grew.

Says Chris, a British hydrologist working on one of the Flood Action Plans for Mott MacDonald, "My punishment was to sit on a block of ice in just my shorts. I had to sit on it for 15 minutes or until it melted and I can tell you it was very painful." Chris has taken part in just 10 hashas during his time in Dhaka but he won't be allowed to leave it at that. "I don't know where I've been to on these runs," he says "I just follow the others."

Among the other punishments that can be doled out is the bucket of slime. Says Fred, "You have to sit in a bucket of this orange or green stuff while everyone shouts 'Wriggle and squirm.' It really is jolly good fun."

And at the end of every good hash, the hash master (a much coveted post) has the task of handing out the supreme punishments to the hash sinners. Each one is subjected to a 'down-down' when they must stand in the middle of a circle drinking down a mug of beer to the traditional hash song....

Me-me-me-me-me-me-me-me

Here's to the shortcutter. He's so blue. He's a hasher through and through. He's a hasher so they say, and he'll never get to heaven in a long, long day. Drink it down, down, down, down, down, down....

Although most of the hashers are British, Fred is delighted that there are a few Bangladeshis who enjoy the hashas too.

One of them, is 31-year-old Shariff — assistant manager at the Sonargaon hotel. Having taken part in 160 hashas in a around Dhaka, he's totally hooked too.



Doyel (robin), the national bird of Bangladesh. Photo: Kazi Akhtaruzzaman Nawab.



The hashers take a respite between runs.

fail. Better known as The Hashers, their regular weekly runs are a desperate attempt to hold on to a little bit of tradition and to keep their sanity amidst the noise and chaos of downtown Dhaka.

A hash run can only be described as a treasure hunt without the treasure. Two men — called 'hares' will have previously set a trail of shredded paper (probably High Commission secrets) along a pre-determined route. Every now and then, they'll drop it in groups of three circles known as a checkpoint and it's here that the hash runners must stop to sort out the false trails from the true ones. It's a non-

bone on his way to yet another run in Gazipur. In fact he's such a hash old-timer that when he learns of a new posting to foreign climes, his first thoughts turn to hash runs. He says matter-of-factly, "I find out from the British High Commission if there's a hash there and if there isn't, it's not worth going to."

Indeed, there isn't much that would keep him away from the regular Monday night run except perhaps one thing.

"My wife had the unreasonable to have our baby on a Monday," he chuckles.

Saturdays, the men still far outnumber the women.

To the outsider, the hash runs may appear to be a bundle of laughs from start to finish, but there are actually many rules that have to be adhered to.

In true public schoolboy style, there are some pretty horrendous forfeits (hashits) that have to be paid should you accidentally commit a fearful hash sin. Shortcutting, trying to be a front-runner or talking to a woman while on a run, are all looked upon gravely as Chris Karavasil found out.

Says Shariff, "I try to persuade some of my friends to come along too. It's an opportunity to exercise and sweat after a whole week's work and in Dhaka there's really no place for Bangladeshis to jog."

For American-born Linda Andrews, today's mixed hash is her first. Whether it'll be her last remains to be seen. Sitting on the train in her spotless white shorts on the way to the hash starting point, she has no idea what lies ahead. At this point Fred looks out of the window at scenery and jumps up and down with enthusiasm.

"Wouldn't it be great to set a trail through those water lilies," he muses. Linda is under-

terred and goes on to explain that she wants to run regularly with the hashers as it's the only real international event there is in Dhaka. While most nationalities stick to their own embassies for entertainment, the hash at least gives people the chance to make friends from all over the world.

As the train chugs further along the track out of Dhaka, the hashers point out various hash landmarks. Dolby's keys for instance is so-called because Dolby was the runner who lost his keys there. Pete's puddle is where Peter Jones once set the trail. Every hasher too is supposed to have a hash name and they range from The Flying Dutchman to Old King

and Cuddles. "Some of the names are rather vulgar," says Fred, "but at least you get the chance to change them after about 50 to 100 runs."

Has statistics too 're terribly important. Says Fred, "Every 50 runs, you're awarded with something. In Jakarta, it was a pewter tankard. I've got 14 mugs now and I don't know what to do with the bloody things!"

Dr David Todd, a freelance anthropologist from Guildford, England is running proof that although the hashas may look a rather rowdy affair, a lot of good comes out of it. David sports a T-shirt depicting the Cyclone Relief Hash Run — one of many charity runs the hashers organise to help

Bangladeshi people. Personally I found by very first hash run here truly memorable. There's nothing quite like trailing through undergrowth, slipping and sliding in the monsoon rains and watching on as a fellow hasher falls again face down into the river. In fact I haven't had as much fun since I first watched the Bangladesh News At Ten during the referendum.

But perhaps Fred Kaul's driver sums it all up more succinctly than anyone. On seeing Fred off on yet another hash, he couldn't help but enquire, "Sir, why do you do this on your day off? It's quite unnecessary." Not much you can say to that!

A trip to unified Germany is indeed a thrilling experience. It is more so for a journalist. Recently I had been to Germany in a programme for Asian Journalists to visit international audio-and video fair in Berlin. We were taken to different places of interest in Bonn, Berlin, Hamburg and Munich.

We had exchanges of views with personalities like Mr. Robert Lochner, Director of the Institute for Journalism, Berlin, Ms Ulrike Moll of German Foundation for International Development and Mrs. Delfe Korus of Sender Fries Berlin (SFB), broadcasting and television station. We had educative and informative sessions also with Mr. Gerd Rainer, Foreign Editor of Deutsche Press Agency (DPA) and Navira Sundaram Rummel of North German Radio and Television.

The session with Mr. Lochner over a lunch at Berlin journalists' club was very informative indeed. The talks covered various aspects of political, socio-economic and cultural issues of unified Germany with the fall of Berlin wall. The unification of Germany has been possible as people of both the parts no longer wanted to remain divided by the Berlin wall. The pieces of the wall, which kept the national divided for decades, are now being sold as souvenirs to tourists. Today, there is no wall and no security personnel. Many lives were lost for trying to cross over to the erstwhile West hoodwinking the security personnel. The big achievement of the German people today is that they can breathe in a free atmosphere as one nation with the fall of the

German Unification In Retrospect

Nurul Huda

Rapid changes are also taking place in the media world in the erstwhile GDR under the changed political situation. Journalists who once served under socialist system, have to quickly adjust themselves to the changed situation by switching over to market economy. It is indeed a difficult job. Many journalists in GDR, have either been forced to or voluntarily quit the profession. It is however, difficult for me to go into the depths of the problem in a short visit. The circulation of Schweriner Volkszeitung, a daily coming out from Schwerin, capital city of erstwhile GDR state suffered badly following unification. With the change of top level editorial staff including the Editor and change in ownership from state control to individual, the circulation started regaining, according to Mr. Gert Ullereich, Deputy Editor of the daily.

He himself has been with the daily since 1961. The circulation of the daily was about two lakh, which is now 1.8 lakh.

While talking to us at the conference room of the paper, Mr. Gert frankly admitted the truth that the journalists had been facing problems in switching over to the changed editorial policy. The daily had its journey in 1945. He also narrated the wage disparity between employees of erstwhile

East and erstwhile West Germany. The wage structure for the employees of the erstwhile West Germany is 40 per cent higher compared to those working in the erstwhile East Germany.

The problem before the policy planners and politicians of the federal government of unified Germany today is to gradually remove the disparities between the people of the erstwhile East and West. It might require some decades but the disparity has to go, asserted Rudi Zeller, a young law student. The government has already initiated programmes for reconstruction of the economy of the former GDR, he said. Asked if Mr. Gert Ullereich had any regrets for working under socialist system he said, "Socialism has definitely done some harms but there were also some ideas of welfare for mankind in it."

He concluded his discussion saying, "Journalism can always develop better in a free atmosphere."

Ms Regine Marquardt, Chief Editor of recently floated weekly Mecklenburger Aufbruch in Schwerin said that the weekly had its birth in clandestine way during the movement for unification. It was however, irregular carrying the message of the movement, she added.

Narrating the socio-economic condition of people of Schwerin, so to say erstwhile

GDR. She said that there were many who had been living on doks. About one million people have temporarily migrated to the erstwhile West Germany in search of employment. Many of them return to their houses on week ends.

Meanwhile, Mr. Karsten Kurowski, a senior teaching staff of Academy for Journalism said that about five per cent of Hamburg people have been working in the press and publications. The academy has so far imparted training to about 12,000 persons since its inception in 1972. Housed in an old building overlooking the lake, the academy is being used by newspaper owners for skill development of their editorial staff. Meanwhile, a large number of people who had so long been working in state owned enterprises, have either been thrown out of employment or facing the threat of unemployment. They need to be provided with jobs and those having no accommodation have to be provided with shelter, suggested Ms Ulrike Moll.

Some vendors belonging to the sub-continent including Bangladesh did not escape my notice. I met some of them hawking flowers and other commodities. Indian food is fast attracting the German as well as other European tourists. We had the occasion to visit some such Indian restaurants both in Hamburg as well as in Berlin.

The lady who owns it, has been in Germany for 21 years. She started the restaurant only a couple of years ago. She migrated to Germany with her engineer husband. The memory of spicy food of the restaurant will remain fresh as long as the memory of German visit.

Have they all gone to Washington? Everyone?

Nostalgia seems a dangerous word to use; but it still remains the brooding cloudburst at one's moment of truth. One's reality these days in airconditioned cubicles, in those languid penmanship across the crossed cheques is really only a blurred silvery existence; an incongruous mother-of-pearl walled in by baroque trappings on this glossy sheet of "square". A world, long back in nostalgia, considered a healthy absurd.

And, way back, in those rambling man days in rummisted groves of academe one had chewed countless abstractions starting at the Bob Dylan sky. One was a past master at taking those metaphysical journeys across all those humped bridges that the mind had built.

One fantasized till fantasy became almost an art form. One dreamt like there was no tomorrow. One

Where have all the radicals gone?

by Shakil Kabem

specialised in inner space. One had definite destinations to reach in those dreams. Quick, brief fictional appearances were made at all the storm centres of radical student politics of the sixties. One helped dispel the popular Western concept of the submissiveness gook. Self righteous Marxist froth was liberally ranted against the System. One considered oneself as that radical intellectual from the East, one who could provide the essence of the political karma: the radical's low keyed O.M.

There was really no doubt that one was a splash in the US of A. Honoured obviously at being accepted by the movement in such comradely fashion. (After

all, the Ph. D dissertation for Berkeley was torn up before being handed in, was it not? Paper chase it was not to be!) But in keeping with Camusian traits, doubts did in fact gnaw at the fevered mind. In clearer moments of retrospection (oh, they were so few) one wondered whether one was not being used, perhaps as an errant exception to Eastern humility.

But, one was a stirring example for those radicals back home, who in turn were anxiously waiting for the return of the corduroyed messiah. The "moshals" flickered with the throw away alienated effects of the New Left. And, then the return to

one's land, one's own political backwater, where one had tried manfully to slink into the greenery, angry and mean. To the political groupies, one became the god-head. One was an issue; one was News.

But the atom never greets the gayer atom, the cosmic never embraces the all; the still remains the always and the grit in the rancid orgy butter is the mundane existential undertone. For the runaway ego, already late for redistribution, temptations lurked in every physisic bend and corner.

Nothing was gained, even less discovered and the ritual flights of fantasy backslid heavily to hermetic misery.

The spirit did not tap on the shoulder any longer and the flesh gradually acquiesced under its yielding layers.

The mad streaker lost out to the long distance runner.

Electrifying performance

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were sent to torment the fishermen and prevent them from working. The artists themselves sold sweet water fish — with the women alongside the men. The shrimp culture would have completely destroyed their existence.

In the play based on the evils of dowry the protagonist went to the bank for the loan of his daughter's marriage. Eventually he could not pay back the loan. The interest grew and the man got into the trap of a money lender as well.

A notice came from the bank with an ultimatum to pay up. His fate led him to auction his house to pay off the loan. The "matabbar" of the village grabbed the opportunity of seizing the poor man's land. However the remaining poor people of the village helped him organise a protest and finally rescued him from the "matabbar". The actors were so involved that one of them fainted and the others all literally cried at the finale.

While conveying the message of "united you stand" the

actors had change of scenes and introduced stage props in the form of the human actors themselves. For example, the chairs and tables in the bank and the door were contrived by men bending and folding over.

This somehow did not strike as naive but rather dramatic and convincing. A social and political message was powerfully conveyed.

"Izzat" too had the story of a man who was financially and physically wiped off the face of the earth. The protagonist, a day labourer, could not fight against odds. This was the case of a sick man. The rich oppressors of the village were toying with the lives of the other landless labourers too. Once again the poor were depicted as banding together and throwing out the villains. The economic significance was clear.

The cultural experts of the country had feared that the actors would only appear on the

stage and make tedious statements.

But seeing them perform they realised that these illiterate people were God gifted with the art of acting. It came to them instinctively.

What they delineated was a part of their actual existence.

They took incidences from actual life. People had feared that the acting would decentigrate to the level of the "jatra".

"Even in the midst of the destructive influence of the VCR and the impact of 'jatra' there is the healthy message of the simple rustic performers," says Masud Bibagi. One wonders what people like Franco Zeffirelli and David Lean would have thought of the dedicated actors from the village with their do or die attitude.

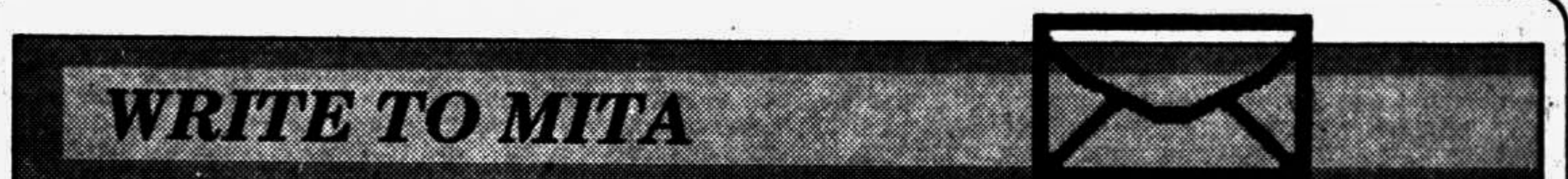
A comic relief was perhaps all that was lacking in the hours of enacting of tragic stories.

A Thin Line

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respects to the shaheeds a mukhtijoddha on crutches laughs bitterly and asks, "what did I get from this independence which took away my leg?" This is followed by a character wearing the national flag and covered with a white cloth. This is Freedom personified and he is horrified at the state of the people, who ask "who is to blame?" Then comes Democracy chained and blood stained. He explains his condition by saying, "because all those who have come to power have killed and wounded me. They have fabricated their own history to serve their own interests." The play ends with the conclusion that a revolution of the people is needed for the words "freedom and democracy" to have any real meaning.

Both plays are beautifully done in terms of acting, content and of course, direction. They succeeded in highlighting social and political issues in a way that is effective in creating awareness while at the same time moving the audience with their realism.



Dear Mita,

My husband is suffering from all kinds of health problems but will not stop smoking. I am afraid one day something terrible will happen and it will be too late. He is very stubborn and never listens to anyone. He is only 45 but look 55 only because of smoking.

Rouishan, Maghbazar, Dhaka.

Dear Rowshan,

Some people refuse to see reason no matter what. Unfortunately your husband is one of them. There are many ways and strategies to stop smoking but before that he has to decide that he will at least try to quit. For all your know he might not be too convinced about the disastrous consequences of smoking. Therefore work at that before trying to make him stop.

Dear Mita,

My fiance is very jealous. He does not allow me to see my old friends and forbids me to work outside. He has many good qualities but I am afraid that his jealous nature might create problems in our married life. How can I change him? Please advise.

Fatema, Dhaka.

Dear Fatema,

I have written several times before that it is very difficult to change people specially if they are not even aware that they are making a mistake. Being Jealous as a husband and as a fiance is common in our men. It comes from possessiveness, and patriarchy. The only thing you can do is to make him feel confident and sure of your relationship. He might then stop being afraid of letting you go out into the world.

Dear Mita,

A close friend after suffering inhuman torture at the hands of her husband became mentally imbalanced. For 20 years she remained married hoping someday he would change. Now she is without a home, a husband or a career. She is mentally too weak to get any job. Her friends and family are also fed up because she does not talk sense anymore. But is she to blame for what has happened? She has been a

victim of abuse and now has reached this stage. What is the solution? What can she do now? Can she do ever become independent?

Karima, Dhaka.

Dear Karima,

Your friend's case is a sad one. Countless women in our culture have been driven to the state she is in now, and all in the name of "sanctity of marriage" It is essential that she gets proper medical attention first. She must attain a certain level of mental balance to function in her day to day life before she can take any step towards becoming independent. This is a very complex issue and cannot be answered or solved through this column.

Dear Mita,

(I will be most grateful if you could please answer this letter on your 27 Sept issue of the Daily Star. This is most urgent and I'm quite desperate. Please help me. Thanks)

I am a young and attractive woman who recently met a man at work. This man in question is apparently attracted to me, which I got to know gradually. He used to talk to me about everything and anything. When however, he gave me a present I refused and told him that I was already engaged. He was quite unattractive anyway and I only saw him as a colleague. I thought he got my message and understood my position. However, recently, he has started to try and talk to me whenever he gets a chance. In this society, a woman's status may be lost if she gets into a scandal. What do you think his intentions are, even after I told him that I'm engaged? Please advise me as to how I can live normally without this man pestering me.

Yours Sincerely, Anonymous, Bally Road, Dhaka.

Dear Anonymous,

Your letter did not reach me on time and therefore the delay in answering. The only way to solve this problem is to have a frank talk with your colleague. It is only natural that young people get attracted to each other at work, but sometimes this attraction is one sided and creates problems. Whatever the man's intention might be, he must be made aware of the reality of your engaged status. As for a scandal, I am quite sure such a situation will not arise. If you are strong and determined no matter what people say, you will survive it. Don't let undue societal pressure run your life.