

It's All about My Old School; and Hopes for other century-old Institutions

ALIGHT-HEARTED mood that I often get into when writing this column has suddenly disappeared. Maybe there are the lengthening shadows, the dimming of the sunlight and the darkening of the Ashar sky, all conspiring to turn what is normally a pleasant duty into a dull chore.

However, there is also a specific reason. I have been looking at a photograph of the century-old High Schools at Maulvi Bazar, in greater Sylhet, my old school, a run-down structure that, to start with, can certainly do with a fresh coat of paint. What's more, I have been reading for the second time a published report by this paper's correspondent, Rajat Kanti Goswami, a comprehensive history of the institution, with a long list of distinguished personalities, past and present, who, in their teens, walked down the long corridors of the school, in rain and sunshine, either on their way to the class or on their way out. All this forms a part of the history of the school, that should lift our hearts.

Unfortunately, it is different — rather depressing — with what is happening now. The report by Goswami tells us something of political infighting among students and local residents which has caused serious uncertainties about the proposed centenary celebration of our old institutions. The possibility of the "festival" being held in the near future is rather dim unless the District Commissioner of the town discards what Goswami describes guardedly as his "silent role" in favour of a positive intervention. Meanwhile, old students of the school, now residing in Dhaka, such as the Finance Minister, as just-retired high ranking UN official, several former district commissioners, doctors and the governor of the central bank, not to mention a handful of journalists, can work out a plan to honour the institution that, in the past, produced gold medalists of all-India fame, fighters against the British rule, social workers and writers.

My colleague, Wahidul Huq talks about other educational institutions, schools and colleges, which may be soon completing their centenaries or have recently done so. Situated in different district towns — district of older times, not the sub-divisions upgraded without much mental preparation — they were set up in another age, in the age of philanthropy, a thirst

for modern English education and absentee landlordism, in that order. Are all these institutions in a state of decline, no longer living up to the tradition of their individual glorious past? I hope not. But they are all caught in the challenges of the changing times, such as politicisation, bureaucratic bunnings and mindless infighting among student groups leading to senseless violence. As I said metaphorically as the start of this piece, there are the lengthening shadows, the dimming sunlight and darkening Ashar sky.

When we do observe the centenaries of these institutions, we should not be talking about reviving the past. We should be thinking

for modern English education and absentee landlordism, in that order. Are all these institutions in a state of decline, no longer living up to the tradition of their individual glorious past? I hope not. But they are all caught in the challenges of the changing times, such as politicisation, bureaucratic bunnings and mindless infighting among student groups leading to senseless violence. As I said metaphorically as the start of this piece, there are the lengthening shadows, the dimming sunlight and darkening Ashar sky.

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

of moving forward, adding something new to what we already possess, finding a new direction out of what often looks like a quagmire.

ONE does not think of one's hometown all that much, especially if one is away from it for a long period, as I have been from Maulvi Bazar for decades. I just cannot decide when I should pay it a visit and suffer a few shocks. The roads will look narrower than they do in my imagination, houses pathetically rundown, the "choumohoni" — the main shopping centre or maybe it has another name — bigger, dirtier and noisier, and even the football field facing my century-old school will seem too tiny to be more than an apology for a village playground.

Yet, Maulvi Bazar has a powerful presence in my sub-conscious, I realised it with some intensity during the war of our liberation in 1971.

Then working in Singapore, I was asked by my newspaper to write a colour piece on any town or village of Bangladesh, one that might capture the mood of the time. I wrote about

fered him nothing. Then, after a lapse of a few years, when I paid another visit to Maulvi Bazar, I was told by one of my brothers, that my friend had lost his mind, gone mad. He could be seen walking down the road, wearing almost next to nothing, muttering to himself. I avoided passing by his father's printing press for fear of running into my friend. I knew there was probably nothing I could do to help him. The fact that I did not even think of doing something for him is what later made me rather angry with myself.

If my friend had lost his sanity, so had Maulvi Bazar lost its soul. This is what made my hometown a dying one. I prayed that the emergency of Bangladesh would help this faceless, insignificant town rediscover its soul and that someone would be singing again, walking down the riverside to watch the sunset over Monu. That was what my hope for Bangladesh was all about.

The piece meant something to quite a few of my readers in Singapore, who had some connections with Sylhet and believed in the War of Liberation for Bangladesh. Among them

was my long-lost cousin from Nagaland, Mani Chandola, married to an Indian journalist, Harish. Mani's father, K V Chusa, who, as a Deputy Magistrate in Assam, had been a colleague of my father and uncle — this is what made Mani my adopted cousin — eventually became a member of the Indian parliament from one of the eastern-most states of India. Another was an equally big surprise, Mushahid Ali, a Singaporean of Sylhet origin, who had made a career as a diplomat in the city republic's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. By now, he has probably become a Singapore ambassador somewhere or retired from the service.

So, Maulvi Bazar found a place in the international media. Whether it made a difference to the future of my hometown, to the centenary celebration of its century-old school some 20 years later, is another matter.

If only I had the time and energy, I would have started travelling around the country, preferably by public transport, from one town to another, feeling the noise, smell and dirt in each place. I would visit the local college, sit down with students in the shade of a mango tree and find out what they believe in and what they want. I would eat my food in local restaurants, visit the bazars and see what the prices are like. I would get sick from time to time, look for non-existent medical help but would not think of abandoning the trip. I would not offer instant answers to problems of any of these towns, because I would have none. Instead, I would listen and find out what people know, want and even read.

Yes, even read. I would visit the public libraries and see what new books have been added to the bookshelf and, what's more important, what people read instead of watching the video. There will be times when I will wonder if this is my country, the country I believe in.

Then, I will make a surprise visit to Maulvi Bazar, see for myself if it rediscovered its soul after liberation and, what's of more immediate concern, if we can all do something for the centenary celebration of our old school, before another century passes us by, — or our children or grand children — in silence.

Times Don't Change

by Arjuna

AND what happens now to Afghanistan? That poor country has been the punching bag of nations for about 24 centuries — Persia and Alexander's Greece made it part of their empires once.

Genghis Khan took it over in 1220, Tamerlane a century later. Then the Moghuls made it part of their Indian empire in the 1500's.

It was in 1747 that a local chieftain wrested power for the first time — not for long, though. Britain had meanwhile conquered India, and seized effective power in Afghanistan to make it a buffer state against Tsarist Russia which badly needed a warm water port on the Gulf of Arabia to fuel and victual its fleet so that it could become a world power.

So, from 1749 to 1979 — or 230 warring years — Afghanistan played the buffer role. Fighting on all its borders sputtered unceasingly. Even when Communist Russia replaced its Tsarist rulers, the push for that warm-water port remained a key strategic endeavour.

And Britain remained adamant that only its fleet should rule all the waves. Up on the Afghan border, through the famed Khyber Pass to Jelalabad and Kabul, the British Army stationed several generations of troops, both infantry and cavalry. Many a romantic adventure story, real and fictional, is told of the Khyber.

Russia perpetually probed the northern border, at times allying itself with the Uzbeks and Tajiks who inhabit the northern one-third of the country. On the south and west, the Pushtu-speaking and Farsi-speaking people squab-

bled with the British and among themselves.

Times do not change for Afghanistan, alas. When Pakistan was formed in 1947, the border Pushtuns and Baluchis frequently revolted against Rawalpindi. The Pakistanis feared a Soviet takeover of Afghanistan, because the Russians would then require a "corridor" along the Iran-Pakistan border to get to y-ics, that old dream-a warm-water port.

The fears of 230 years seemed justified when Moscow occupied the unhappy country in 1979.

I visited the border last in 1984. The Khyber Pass was not romantic. There were no Bengal Lancers in red jackets and egret feathers galloping bravely against the jezail-bearing Pathans, no flags in the breeze, no bugles.

Down the dusty trough in the mountains came caravans of refugees, the camels weighed down with bundles and children and chadared women. The Afghans carried a few of the old Lee-Enfield rifles of yesteryear, but US military aid soon furnished them with machine-guns and bazookas.

Now the Soviet occupiers have gone, their empire fading into history, just like those of Alexander, Genghis, Akbar and the once-gorgeous vice-regal Britons.

But alas, the Pushtu peoples and the Farsi peoples and the Uzbeks and Tajiks squabble still. Iran and Turkey cast eyes on the country.

Can Afghanistan exist, free and peaceful? Too many historical memories crowd into the view.

— Depthnews Asia

ASIA'S UBIQUITOUS STREET FOODS

Continued from Page 7
operators must keep their places spotless and burn all rubbish and left-overs.

In Singapore all food stalls are located in "food centers" provided with adequate supplies of clean water, state-of-the-art waste disposal facilities, sufficient space to prevent overcrowding and pleasant, usually shady, surroundings. All vendors and stall operators must be licensed and all pay nominal fees for the space they rent from the government. Just in case vendors or stall operators become complacent, recalcitrant or plain lazy in attending to hygiene and food quality, official inspectors are forever on hand to remind them of their obligations.

In Singapore such "reminders" are not taken lightly. The system works admirably if for no other reason than the penalties for failure or refusal to comply are draconian.

"The result of Singapore's super-insistent food discipline, though, is all to the good for the public," Dr. Qureshi says.

"As in so many other fields of public responsibility, Singapore has led the way in assuring its people good, wholesome food at reasonable prices. How beautiful and beneficial it would be if all our nations could say the same."

— GEMINI NEWS

(Preface 1991).

The Mannheim Dudens have included GDR vocabulary since the early 1970s. It was wasn't large — some 130 head-words were followed by the suffix "DDR" (GDR). This indication of origin has now been supplemented by the abbreviation "ehem," i.e. formerly, and the number of words referring to the now defunct state has grown quite considerably. Aktivist (activist) and Volkspolizei (People's Police) were already in Duden. They have

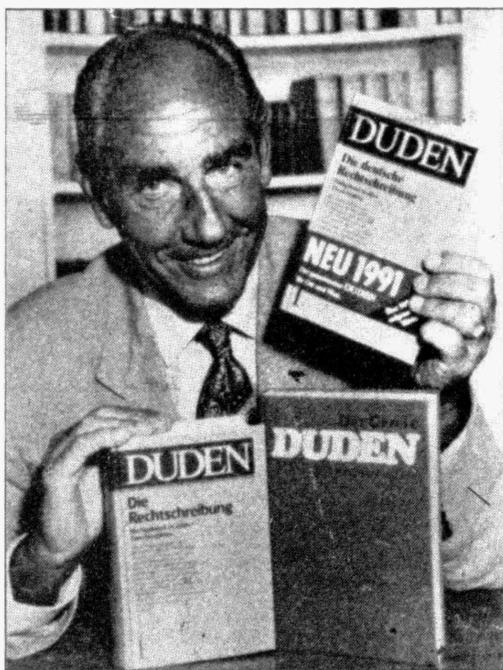
now been joined by new entries such as Volkssolidarität (GDR organization for solidarity help), Wohnraumlenkung (GDR administrative allocation of housing), Reisekader (GDR citizens allowed to travel to western countries) and Trabi (Trabant/make of GDR car). This is undoubtedly not only useful for Ossis (east Germans) and Wessis (west Germans) — also included in the new Duden — but also for foreigners learning the German language.

— IN Press

The Germans' Favourite Dictionary

20th Edition of Duden Valid throughout of Country

by Wolfgang Wemer Sauer



LEIPZIG: Some books not only have their own history; they also have their sons. The *Bibliographisches Institut* in Mannheim had no fewer than two to offer when presenting its latest work in Leipzig. It was a very prosaic book which was celebrated in song: *Der Duden, Rechtschreibung der deutschen Sprache 20. Auflage 1991*. (The Duden. Orthography of the German Language. 20th edition 1991.) They need you, you silent helper" singer Joy Fleming bellowed into the television cameras in a "Duden Blues" number specially composed for the occasion. Unfortunately that's true; sometime or other one just has to look up the complicated orthography of the German language. And because it's so complicated there has been a Duden — for the last 111 years.

There are not many books in Germany boasting a history like that of Duden. And what a number the things is has outlined: Imperial Germany, the first German Republic, twelve years of a Nazi regime — which ended up in four occupation zones, and almost 40 years in which there were two German states and two Dudens. Since Duden is by no means just an orthographic reference work but also the German's favourite dictionary, its various editions have always been a reflection of history. Now Germany unity has been restored — and the *Einheitsduden*: a common Duden for eastern and western Germany.

Let our revised Duden go forth in the confident hope that it may, for its part, guarantee the unity of our people and our democratic German fatherland." This wish in the preface to Duden is not, however, expressed in the 1991 edition, but in the 14th edition in 1951. That was the last common edition, brought out in Leipzig, the original location of the publishers, before Duden was split.

Its publishers were dispossessed in the Soviet Zone of Occupation immediately after the end of World War II. They established a new Bibliographic Institute in Mannheim. But the book itself, the Duden, withstood the years of turmoil in the first instance, after 1945. A very roughly revised, new edition of the last Duden dating from the Nazi era — from which only the crassest ideological entries had been removed — was published in Leipzig in 1947. This edition — the 13th — was reprinted again and again, now in the Eastern Zone, now in the Western Zones. Some words were simply deleted, such as *Hitler* and its compounds (*Hitlergruß*: Nazi salute, *Hitlerjunge*: Hitler youth etc.). This edition of Duden had 15 reprints, the last being in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1954.

The 1951 revised Leipzig edition incurred displeasure in western Germany, however. Invoking the unity of the nation was of no avail; the Leipzig Duden was all too heavily stamped by the political situation in the young GDR. The word *Genosse*: comrade (favoured by the Nazis and Communists alike) managed to

survive the 1941 edition, but was also style *Touaritsch* now (Russian for comrade), *Naziregime* (Nazi regime), *Friedenskämpfer* (pacifist) and *Produktionsgenossenschaft* (cooperative) were now included. Three years later a West German edition came out in Mannheim, likewise styled "14th edition". This marked the beginning of the period in which two parallel editions of Duden were published.

Except for one occasion, in the late 1960s/early 1970s, the new editions of Duden operated on the "alternating principle". A Leipzig edition followed a Mannheim edition, followed by Mannheim etc. There were five East German editions, six West German. The number of editions alone shows that the two editorial teams ignored each other. If the new edition functions as the 20th, it means nothing more than the fact that the west German point of view has won. The five Leipzig Dudens have been passed over. Nowhere in east or west did the Duden publishers ever make mention of their competitive counterpart — even though both were linked with the tradition and Konrad Duden. They celebrated 1980 in Mannheim by publishing "100 Jahre Duden" — a centenary edition. One can argue about the date; after all, Konrad Duden had already brought out an orthographic dictionary in 1872, — known as the *Schleizer Duden* — but it wasn't published by the Bibliographic Institute.

This very first Duden also had something to do with unity. Scarcely had Prussia presented the German states with the *Reichsvereinigung* (imperial unification) in Versailles in 1871 than Konrad Duden, principal of the *Gymnasium* (grammar school) in Schleiz, set about standardizing German spelling. At that time, all the larger German federal states had their own orthographic rules and regulations. That does not mean that a Bavarian could not read a text from Prussia. Was Schiller only understood in Württemberg or Goethe only in Weimar? Of course not. A general orthographic standardization of German spelling had long evolved. It was just the minor points that needed putting in order. C was sometimes K, Z sometimes C (*Circus*, *Cirkus*, *Zirkus*) and a few familiar words sometimes began or ended with "th" or "t" (*thun* and *tun* — to do; *Mith* or *Mut* — Courage). Konrad listed the spelling of the more common words, thus creating the original form of his best seller.

In 1878, he took part in a conference which was intended to reform spelling and which also drew up a simplified orthography. What he and the other reformers then submitted incurred Bismarck's displeasure, indeed, wrath. He had realized early on that it was already expecting a lot of

Duden, the standard work on German orthography, is now valid for the whole of Germany once more. During the division of Germany, there was a Duden-West (left) and a Duden-Ost (right). Guenther Dosdowski, head of the Duden editorial department in Mannheim, is holding up the all-German Duden.

— Photo: INP/AF

the people "to get used to new weights and measures, and new coins."

Even at that time, (re-)unifications were not all joy. "And now they want to introduce this linguistic confusion. That's intolerable." The chancellor displayed a sense of proportion by forbidding out of hand what had been worked out as a reform of spelling under the chairmanship of his Prussian education minister. (The quotations are taken from a written record of a conversation by Member of parliament Lucius. They can be found in *Bismarck's Werke* (Works), Vol 5 — 1973 — p 660) Konrad Duden, who, immediately after the reform conference's failure, vehemently advocated democratic, simple orthography, i.e. without "interference by government", rapidly adjusted himself to the situation. He compiled a complete orthographic dictionary of the German language — based on Prussian rules — which was published in 1880.

Following Bismarck's death, the question of spelling started to move again. A second conference was convened and Konrad Duden was once again one of its members. What was decided in Berlin in 1901 was nothing more than formal approval of the status quo created by Konrad Duden and his dictionary. In the 7th edition in 1902, he warns against thinking that orthographic re-

form "is to now come to a stand-still for all time" (preface) — which is exactly what has happened to the present day — thanks to Duden. Edition after edition of this book has been published since that time, always referring to "the official orthographic rules." The few rules at the turn of the century have now swollen to 212 in the 1991 Duden, cover almost 50 pages and are confusing because of the many cross-references.

The "reunification of Leipzig and Mannheim editions" — as it cautiously states in the new Duden — would have been an ideal opportunity for an up-to-date revision, particularly in the rules section. Persons using Duden now travel with the "Intercity Express", pay by "Eurocard" and wear the latest in "jeans." Although he language descends into pidgin German at times, what else can one do when even the railways and the post no longer use their official titles? Reforms have long taken place in various parts of German orthography without intervention by governments and Duden.

But Duden is not just an orthographic work: it also fulfills "the function of a people's dictionary" (preface 1991). One doesn't just look up the correct spelling of a word, but also its derivation and meaning. Many, but by no means all the words, are given the relevant explanation. One learns,

for example, that "A" is a letter, that *Beipult* (praying desk) has something to do with the "Cath Church", that *City* is of "Engl" origin and means "Geschäftsviertel" (business quarter) in major cities; *Innenstadt* (town centre). One learns nothing about the word *Doppelagent* (double agent). The word is just included without further explanation. In other words, Duden is incomplete and chaotically laid out. There are 115,000 headwords on 750 pages. Lack of space makes the creation of a proper dictionary impossible.

The German *Universalwörterbuch* (universal dictionary), by the same publishers, has a larger format and needs almost 1,000 pages for roughly the same number of words. It goes without saying that correct orthography is also included.

"Over 5,000 new entries!" the cover boasts. It is undoubtedly useful to look up the correct spelling cursor, *hopligan* or *mountainbike* in Duden. On

the other hand, it calls for a certain amount of knowledge of foreign languages to find such words. Other new entries, such as *Pachfrau* (skilled woman) are hardly a problem to spell and, in case of doubt, can be deduced orthographically by simply reducing them to their component parts. At best, the enlargement comes in useful with several hundred entries from diverse areas, such as *Glasnost*, *Telekom* and *Immunschwache* (AIDS) which describe "what has come to pass in recent years."

But the real "hit" for the 1991 Duden is unification. "They need you/in Saxony and Holstein/... Thuringia and Westphalia/Berlin and Bonn/Mannheim and Leipzig" according to the lyrics of the "Duden-Blues". The list of states and cities celebrated in song by Joy Fleming contains more than those named above. We'll just have to learn where Duden is valid for east and west in future. After all, should things not work out linguistically in the new Germany, Duden has preserved a few words "which were in common usage in the ex-GDR and which are important for an understanding of the recent past"

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,
In the past you have written to women who suspect their husbands of unfaithfulness. This is a fact which many women after years of married life has to face. What can a woman do at the age of 45 if her husband at 50 falls in love with a 35 years old woman? How can the wife compete with a younger woman who is more beautiful, has a career and is attractive in every way. Mita, do you have any solution to such a problem?
Anonymous, Dhaka.

Dear Anonymous,
The problem you have addressed is very real and has no easy solution. The only way a woman can overcome her vulnerability is by becoming strong, self-reliant and confident. What you have written about can happen in any marriage, but unfortunately women in most cases become victims because of their physical, financial and psychological dependence on men. Some day when women are no longer so dependent, the unfaithfulness of husband will no longer be so tragic and humiliating.

Dear Mita,
Three years ago I married off my eldest daughter. She was only 19 then. The proposal was very good, the boy was from a good and well-to-do family. Both me and my husband decided this to be the best for our daughter. Unfortunately things did not work out that way. She could not adjust with her in-laws or with her husband. When things became unbearable for her we brought her back and now she is with us. What can we do now? Should she get a divorce? Please advise.
Rabeya, Dhanmandi

Dear Rabeya,
My answer will offend you but I have no choice. You as parents have made the same mistake, as many do, of deciding what you think is best for your children without caring for their opinion. In this age and time marrying off a 19-year-old girl, not allowing her to complete her education or to mature enough in order to take the most important decision of her life herself, is unforgivable. I know you meant well, but that is not enough. Now that things have not worked, you have brought her back. What does she have to say to all this? Was the problem in her relationship with her husband or with the family? I am sorry but it is not possible for me to give advice on such a serious matter without getting some more information. One advice I can give you and that is, let her be independent, allow her to take decisions. Remember she is 22 years old.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,
My wife died four years ago and left behind a daughter who is two-and-half now. Because of pressure from my parents and many other problems, I am getting married again. What I am afraid is, will my daughter be taken care of? This is causing me a lot of anxiety. My job is such that I shall have to be travelling a lot and if my child suffers, I will not know. What should I do, please advise.
Saleem Khan, Maghbazara, Dhaka

Dear Saleem,
You need not feel guilty about remarrying because life is stronger than death, and it must go on. What is worrying is your reason for remarrying. I hope you have thought about it seriously, and have met and know the person you are marrying and have taken the decision yourself. As for your child, it all depends on you and of course, your wife. The fairy tale step-mother is very rare now. But if any problem occurs, you must try to solve it in the beginning.

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.