

Conversation with the Other Bhutto, at Another Time, Another Place

HISTORY is full of twists and turns. Until a decade and a half ago, the only Bhutto who mattered in the politics of Pakistan, casting his long shadow over almost the whole of South Asia, was Zulfikar Ali. None else with the same family name stood up to the challenge of history.

Now, having read the exhaustive interview with the Pakistan opposition leader by my colleague Mahfuz Anam, published by this paper last week, one that earned us — and the writer — a lot of plaudits, I realised that the only Bhutto that now meant anything to her country was Benazir. Zulfikar Ali is what we can only call the other Bhutto. One should be hardly surprised if a few decades later, school children in Pakistan read about Benazir Bhutto, with a vague, incomplete reference to her father who was once the president of the country but was hanged on the charge of murder of a political opponent by his successor who himself died in an air crash... and so on.

If history is tragically incomplete, it can be also ruthlessly unkind.

So, for a change, we turn to the other Bhutto, not as a political profile, but as a centre-piece of a couple of conversations which, even in their fading recollections, are different from my talks with other politicians or perhaps from what my colleagues had with the former Pakistani leader.

If these conversations were different, it could be because they were essentially friendly chats, not particularly concerned with politics, which revealed for me what my former editor and mentor the late Faiz Ahmed Faiz had once described as the "sophisticated and the human side of Zulfi."

The timings and settings were important. Both the conversations took place either in late 1967 or in early following year, first one at the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok and the second one at Bhutto's residence at Clifton in Karachi where, nearly some 25 years later, Mahfuz met Benazir.

Bhutto — I mean, the other Bhutto — was then in political wilderness, having just left the government of Ayub Khan, through either dismissal or resignation — or in a combination of both — and working hard to create a political base of his own. If I recall correctly, the Pakistan People's Party, the creation of Bhutto and the legacy inherited by Benazir, was yet to be formally established, when we met in the Thai capital.

It was a phone call from the Pakistani politician to my newspaper office that brought me to the Oriental Hotel for tea with the Bhuttos — Nusrat was there too — but as the conversation went on, at a slow leisurely pace, I got invited to dinner, and we continued talking, with Mrs Bhutto playing the role of a silent hostess. In fact, I felt that she was not being particularly friendly towards me, at least at the start. It was Zulfikar Ali who told me why.

"My wife was surprised that I should invite you over to see us," he said. Then, after a pause, he added, with his wife looking a little embarrassed, "You will remember that your paper, the Bangkok Post, wrote a strong editorial against the policy of Pakistan of seeking

the President. It was a look of total distrust, cynicism and disapproval.

"Looking at this photograph," I had said to Bhutto, "anyone can say that you are just about to leave the government of Ayub."

Bhutto had just smiled. I wonder, how many of these photographs, including the one with Ayub, have filled the family albums of Benazir Bhutto. And whatever happened to that fabulous collection of books?

THE best part of our conversation in Bangkok was during dinner. It all started with a direct and, indeed, a most unexpected question put to me by Bhutto. "May I ask you a blunt question?" he asked.

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

friendship with China, while remaining a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and thus making the best of the two worlds. It came out just around the time I was leaving Ayub's government."

"But I was right," I said emphatically. "Pakistan should never have joined SEATO."

While Zulfikar Ali nodded, Nusrat gave me a smile, a forced one, trying to put me at ease.

In fact, our conversation had started on a much friendlier note.

"Where is the nearest bookshop where I can get the latest publications on Vietnam?" Bhutto had asked me soon after tea had been served.

No, he was not showing off. We talked quite a bit about books, especially those on Vietnam. Some months later, during my second — and last — meeting with him at his Clifton residence, he had given me a kind of a conducted tour of his library, a fabulous collection of rows and rows of books, covering all the walls.

On one shelf of the library, Bhutto had kept a selection of nicely-framed photographs, mostly of himself with world figures. There was one that caught my attention most. It was of Ayub who was addressing a public meeting, with Bhutto, sitting on the dais, looking up at

"Please go ahead," I replied encouragingly. After all these decades, I remember the question so vividly, as if it all happened last week or last month.

"Tell me, dear Ali, who amongst the politicians in West Pakistan would be most acceptable to the people of East Pakistan as the President of the country, the successor to Ayub?" he asked in his clear crisp voice.

I took a little time in replying to the question. I knew what Bhutto wanted to hear. That made me mildly angry.

I looked at Nusrat Bhutto and said, "While I am enjoying this dinner hosted by Mr Bhutto, how can I be so impolite as to mention anyone else's name?"

I was not sure how the two interpreted my answer.

"However, I too have a question to ask," I said. "Who amongst the politicians of East Pakistan would be most acceptable to the people of West Pakistan as the next President of the country?"

If my question — in fact, a counter question — had taken Bhutto by surprise, my host kept the reaction to himself.

Instead, speaking almost in a whisper, he

said softly, "I wish, I knew. Perhaps Sheikh Mujib. But he won't get the support of even a fraction of people in Punjab. Perhaps, he can't also keep the country together. Then, you have such moderates as Ataur Rahman Khan and Hamidul Huq Chowdhury. But they have no political base even among their own people in East Pakistan."

We continued to eat our meal in silence. Suddenly, as I sensed, the mood around the table had become a little sullen.

Then, as if to bring a bit of life back to our delightful evening, I offered to Bhutto what I pompously described as "my formula" for him becoming an all-Pakistan leader, with his power base extending from Karachi to Khulna.

"What is it?" he asked with a seemingly genuine show of curiosity.

I said, "Take a residence in Dhaka and divide your time between the two wings of the country. Learn Bengali. Enrol yourself at our High Court and be as visible in Dhaka as you are in Karachi. Adopt a couple of Bengali children. At least, pay for their education, even if you do not let them call you Abba. Go to the Dhaka University once in a while and give a series of lectures on international affairs, a field in which there are few experts of your stature. If you follow this formula for four to five years, you won't ask me again who amongst the leaders of West Pakistan would be most acceptable to the people of East Pakistan as the next President of the country."

Both Zulfikar Ali and Nusrat listened to me with undivided attention. There was something else I wanted to say by way of concluding my remarks. And I said it without beating about the bush.

"My Bhutto, every bright East Pakistani is expected to manage to learn Urdu, to feel at home in Karachi, Lahore or anywhere else in West Pakistan. Then, he is accepted as a true Pakistani. But it is never the other way round. That's why we sometimes say, as one country, Pakistan does not exist, in human equations."

I do not remember how the evening with the Bhuttos ended.

Of course, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did not follow my formula for becoming an all-Pakistani politician, accepted by the people in the erstwhile East Pakistan as much as by the people in the West wing. Looking back, I know now it was not in him to feel a part of this part of the country. This was his misfortune, not ours.

Wedding of Two Statues and...

by Gholam Mohammad



COLUMBUS weds Liberty on 12 October, 1992 — the wedding of two statues. As the 'bridegroom' will come from Barcelona to New York where the 'bride' is located, the event to that extent wears an oriental look.

This wedding ceremony is a part of '500 years of Columbus' to be completed on that date, as has been viewed by D+C, a German bi-monthly from its third year.

D+C in a major story published in its 4/1992 issue, has termed the so-called discovery of America by the Europeans 500 years ago. As the worst genocide in the history, a brutal invasion/conquest (conquista) leaving 100 million dead, 185,000 kilograms of gold and over 16 million kilograms of silver transferred from there to Europe over a short span of 30 years in the beginning of the 16th century and a merciless penetration into and elimination of a culture in that process.

The slave trade from Africa was initiated by Columbus who has been regarded as the world's first slave trader having immense greed for

gold rather than being a materially disinterested scientific researcher. D+C makes an open confession that all of Europe profited tremendously from the plunderers of Columbus.

In this backdrop, the authors of the New World Order, according to D+C, are cementing the heritage of Columbus and conquista. To quote: "The New World Order which rests not least on the claim of the USA with 5 per cent of world population to have the right to use up 25 per cent of its resources and to emit 25 per cent of all pollutants into the environment, leaves little room for such visions."

Noted American historian Francis Fukuyama's announcement of the 'end of history' is relevant here. He mentions that since the present form of liberal, democratic, free-market oriented state best fulfills the desire of human beings for material welfare, individual freedom and self-esteem, the dialectical process has come to its end. No further fundamental contradictions are thinkable which will set the historical process in motion again.

Fukuyama has possibly oversimplified things. To this effect, D+C remarks editorially that Fukuyama is wrong: the liberal market society is not the end of history but only a transitional phase on the way to something new — the sustainable world system which establishes a balance between consumption and renewal of resources.

To us, a part of the Third World, the wedding event of the statues of Columbus and Liberty in the third eye view of the Germans, provides us an interesting opportunity to draw our own objective conclusions on the facts available. The union of slave trade with liberty is a contradiction by any standard against which the German conscience has revolted, provoking the conscience the world over, to review the situations around.

The journal continues — 'the Germans have their own task on the wedding occasion which calls them to remember, to mourn and to accept the responsibility.'

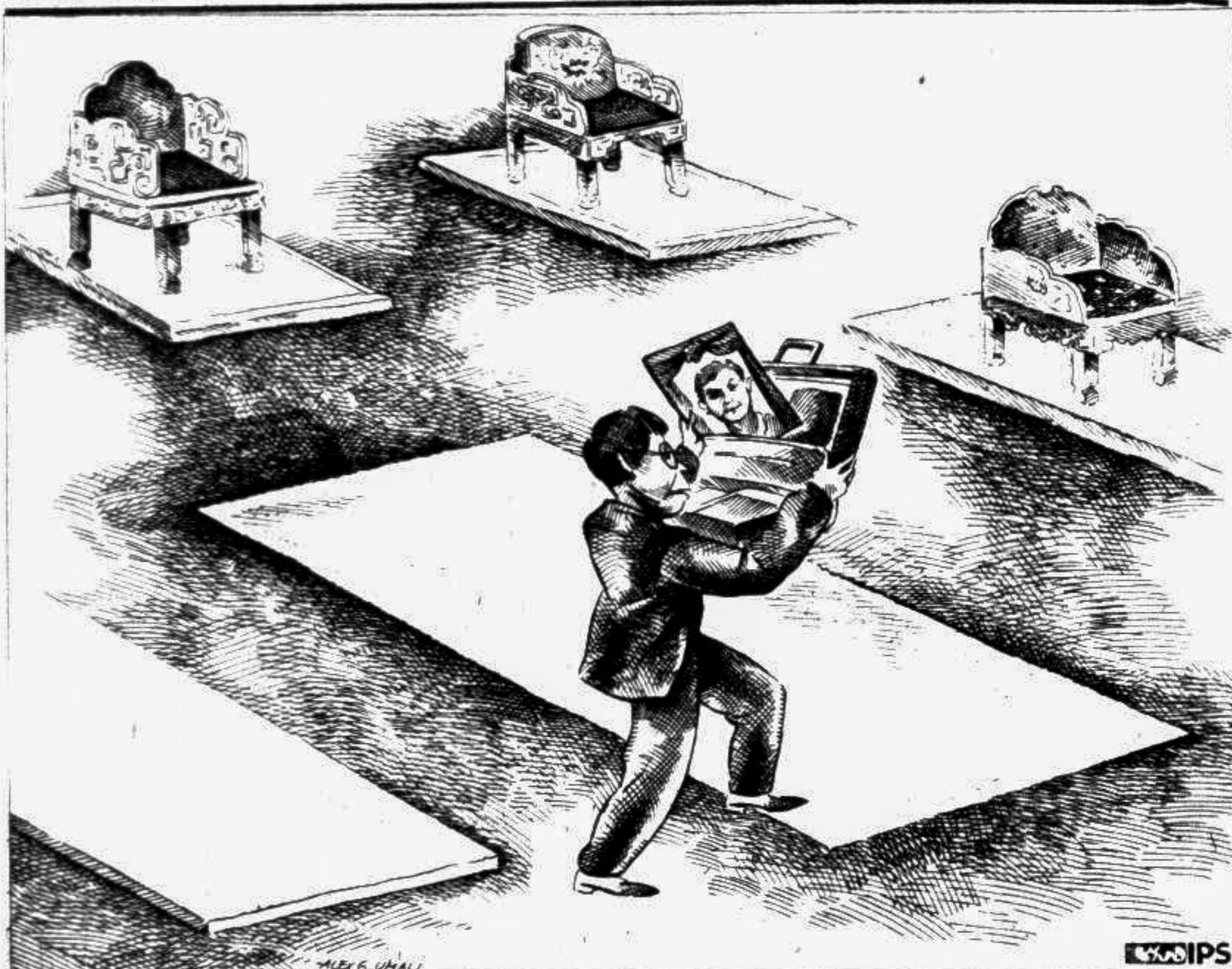
We are very fond of mentioning 'history' and at times 'true history' in our rhetoric. There is always the third eye which is very crucial. Realities around the two statues who are reported to be going to be married amidst one of the greatest celebrations, should awake us with a jerk.

One cannot ignore one's friends either, and mine, incidentally, live as far apart as Tikatuly, Banani and Mirpur. They have pressing matters that must be analysed. The "advise and consent" cannot be done easily over the telephone.

Continued on page 9

An Eternity with Emperors

Starting next year, rich, dead overseas Chinese can be buried in a cemetery formerly exclusive to royalty. Deirdre Godfrey of IPS reports from Beijing



CHINA, which has long tried to lure rich overseas Chinese to invest in toys and electronics factories in the mainland, now wants them buried here as well — for a fee.

Rich, and dead, overseas Chinese can now have an eternal snuggle alongside Chinese emperors in the royal tombs near Beijing. And you don't even have to be Chinese, as long as you have the money.

"Have your soul put to rest in dreamland — an imperial cemetery" said a large advertisement in the Beijing English paper, 'China Daily' recently.

The Hualong cemetery 128km southwest of Beijing now offers affluent Chinese from Taiwan, Hong Kong and North America the opportunity of spending afterlife side-by-side with emperors of China's last dynasty.

Four emperors of the Qing dynasty are buried in the Hualong cemetery. Plus there are nine empresses, 57 concubines and six other imperial family members. But when the tombs, which is near the grave of Emperor Guangxu, opens in April 1993, the area will no longer be exclusive royal burial site.

Officials here say they are trying to attract overseas Chinese willing to pay US\$4,000 dollars to reserve an eight-square-metre burial space. Burial space is getting scarce in Japan as well, and they can come too.

Burial sites are also in short supply in China, but less affluent citizens here have to make do with a simple ash urn burial at the foot of a tree outside the Hualong perimeter. Hualong officials concede they may make exceptions for important locals with the right kind of influence.

Hebei province, which owns the site, has approved the sale of eternal resting place to foreigners and will be the one reaping in the profits. Cemetery manager Tian Peisheng says most of the income will be used to help develop poorer areas of the province.

Plot sales alone should bring in US\$70 million, and operators are expecting about US\$600,000 annually in service fees. They expect to fill the site completely in two years, after which new areas within the grounds of the Western Qing Cemetery will be opened. Another association is planning to open the

Eastern Cemetery of the Qing dynasty using the same scheme.

Rubbing shoulders with dead royalty is not Hualong's only attraction. It is also blessed with good 'feng sui' — the natural characteristics of the land considered important factors affecting well-being of the family of the deceased.

Finding a site with these characteristics were a must for emperors and the Qing burial grounds are near a mountain range said to resemble the lair of a dragon. Gushed the 'China Daily' advertisement: "It is truly a soil of supreme auspiciousness and a land of long-lasting fortunes."

Tian says the idea came about when he and others were contacted by many overseas Chinese who wished to be buried in China. "It's a traditional idea for Chinese people, no matter where they live," he explains. "It's deep in their minds to come back."

Many overseas Chinese do have burials in their ancestral villages, but this is the first and biggest offer in China so far of such exclusive burial space for foreigners. Inquiries are flooding in, including one from a wealthy Taiwan retiree who is reportedly looking to buy as large a plot for himself and his descendants.

Tian also notes that about 30,000 former anti-Communist Kuomintang soldiers who fled to Taiwan after the 1949 revolution are now in their 60's and 70's and want to be buried in the mainland.

Gui Changgen, a department director for the 'People's Daily,' says the wooded area of the Western Qing tombs was the site of fierce battles between the People's Liberation Army and the Kuomintang. He laughs at the irony but says "the concept has changed after so many years."

By the end of this year, Hualong officials project a sale of 10,000 plots.

Cemetery workers are now planting two million trees in preparation for the opening. Plans are also underway to develop tourist facilities to accommodate family members who will arrive for the traditional Chinese "grave-sweeping" festival.

Hualong cemetery directors say they hope that along with the expected increase in visitors, new sources of investment will come for Hebei province.

Dare One Indulge in a Respite!

by Fayza Haq

WHEN one is actually ill, and the surgeon instructs one that one should be flat on the bed for a week it remains impossible. This happens specially if one is basically an insomniac. By the time one collapses into bed at night, at heavens know what time, due to various duress, it is very difficult to go to sleep.

There is the whistling at night, of the various paramours, and the amorously inclined, and this may irritate one instead of lulling one to sleep, or tranquilizing one in any manner. I know not who whistles in my neighbourhood, in Dhanmandi, as its is not considered proper or safe for a lady to go out with a torch at night to investigate. Moreover, the maid-servants, who normally chaperone me, are deep asleep at the time I would lie awake and read or listen to music. The music, again, no matter how low pitched, may disturb my immediate neighbours and my extended family. This may also ruffle up the people who live on the ground floor, which happens to be rented.

It is at night, as everybody knows, when the liaisons of the servants progress and prolong. The neighbouring 'chowkidar' yawns. The dogs in the immediate neighbourhood bark. You can then well envisage the situation.

As for some people, who have their houses near my bedroom, they have kept a "chowkidar," with whom there are constant quarrels. His master has always had trouble with him. This gate-keeper has often been caught sleeping by the master, and the mistress of the house then has had to mediate. You can imagine the mini pandemonium that results from this.

The "chowkidar" himself yawns from time to time, all throughout the night, coughs and sneezes. When there is an hour left for the "azaan," he begins to recite his "suras." He does this at such a pitch and tenor that every sentence can be heard from even my brother's "penthouse," as I call his room on the terrace, to myself, when I am disenchanted with the world, and no longer giggling about Hardy's tragic vision.

The street whistles of the neighbourhood patrols can be shrill and unnerving at the dead of the night. It jars one's sensibility and stirs one from one's sleepy position on the sofa, as happens to be in my personal case. It is imperative that the street patrols should be there, or I cannot imagine how insecure we would feel, even in a bourgeoisie area like Dhanmandi.

As for the amorous manoeuvres of the "sahibs" in the neighbourhood, I dare not comment for fear of the consequences. I would have no objection to it — as it is their own personal matter — as long as it did not cause any noise. They come in their cars in

which they attach musical signals that carry "Jingle Bells" "Father Christmas is Coming to Town" and other tunes which I find quite out of place in a place like Dhaka. However, everybody has the right to have his own choice, specially when one is paying for the commodity which one is buying. Yet I do wish people would have more consideration. And how I wish I were not hyper sensitive myself!

By the time one falls asleep, I have no notion when that happens to me — there are the neighbouring vendors who must ply their wares and earn a living. There are the vegetable sellers; fishmongers; broom-sellers; the sellers of "muri", old bottles of perfume, old newspapers, the key-makers and what have you.

The ladies of the neighbourhood find it more economic and convenient to deal with the vendors, specially when there is no male servants in the house. Their husbands have their jobs to do and they have their own pursuits, as going to and from Dhanmandi and New Market alone has become an exercise on which

one could write a piece for a travelogue. The bumps and jerks in a "baby-taxi" or a "rickshaw" — ensuing from the constant digging and remaking of the roads which the experts choose to do during the monsoon season — and various other factors, compel to deal with the vendors.

When the door-bell rings my heart does not go pitter-patter but "carmba-carmba." The "chanda-parties" have been haunting our neighbourhood for days now. They know that my elder brother is out at work during the day-time. They give false names and addresses so that they cannot be tracked down. I feel like tearing down the stairs and having a karate or judo session with them — but that would scandalise the entire neighbourhood. More importantly, it would give my mother and brother a fainting fit or a towering rage. This business of "stand and deliver," that has been going on in the homes and streets in my neighbourhood and in other areas such as Mohammadpur, Mirpur, Banani and Gulshan, annoys me tremendously, as it affects my friends, whom I treasure.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,
I married a man of my choice six years ago and have lived with my in-laws ever since. I sing on Radio and sometimes on Television but have always been discouraged. This has hurt me so much that now I have practically stopped singing because even my husband has stopped supporting me. Now tell me Mita, is it right to give up or compromise on such basic issues? I resent it deeply but there is no alternative.
Anonymous, Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Dear Anonymous,
Women after marriage make a lot of sacrifices and adjustments to maintain harmony. Though some flexibility and adaptability is essential it should not be taken to an extent that her total personality is submerged. This sacrifice creates much resentment that it is not worth the effort. Because, ultimately it does not bring harmony in the family. I will advise you to start singing again but do it gradually. Let the family know how much it means to you and have a dialogue with them. Giving up cannot be a solution because it will always come back to you.

Dear Mita,
Three years ago, I divorced my husband because he was inconsiderate, cruel and selfish. It was an arranged marriage and I tried to adjust for 10 years, but could not. My family was against the divorce and wanted me to keep on trying. Now, after three years, I have started thinking that maybe I was too rash and should have tried to keep the marriage together. What do you think? Please advise.
Shams, Dhanmandi

Dear Shams,
If your husband had the characteristics that you just described then you certainly did the right thing. It is high time that you put everything behind you and started looking ahead. These doubts will keep on haunting you if you allow them to. You have taken a matured, calculated adult decision — so stick to it. If you could not adjust with your ex-husband before, you can never do so in future, because he certainly has not changed.

Dear Mita,
I have been happily married for the last 12 years. Recently, I met by accident the person I used to like long time ago. He wants to renew contacts and has started coming very often to our house. My husband understands, but I can see that he gets a little jealous. What should I do? Please advise.
Sabrina, Bakshibazar (not real name)

Dear Sabrina,
There is no need to discontinue relationship with an old friend as long as it is put in the right context. It is your responsibility to see that your husband does not feel threatened or insecure. It must be clearly understood by your friend that he is only a small part of your life and his company, though enjoyable, should not in anyway disrupt or affect your primary relationships.

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.