

Dhaka Day by Day

Customs and Their Men

by Parveen Anam



As that aircraft hovers over the soil of the beloved land and over Dhaka, the love for the motherland, is overwhelming. The immortal lines — this is my own, my native land — play over and over again in the mind and visions of the 'rajanigandha', the lovely 'krishnachura' trees coupled with the sugary tea and the gossip, play havoc with the imagination. The plane touches the ground, there is the usual mad, mad rush to get off and ultimately we are all inside the immigration building, passports ready and smile even readier. Now the damper. Actually, the immigration man stamping your passport, is quite alright. If he does not find anything to smile about, life's burden perhaps weigh too heavily on his shoulders. In our magnanimity towards all fellow members of the human race, we are ready to forgive him. Saunter off towards the luggage conveyor, collect your luggage which sometimes takes quite a while to arrive and hurry off to the 'Green Channel'. Or the channel which says, 'Nothing to Declare', for those of us who find the word incomprehensible. And incomprehensible it appears because the entire meaning of the word means something else to the powers that be.

Just as you are about to enter the area, the servant of the people descend upon you like a ton of bricks. Their very attitude is one of hostility towards all gender and creed. Not so towards the favoured few though. These are the ones, who they have been tipped to favour. They breeze through followed by the adoring glances of the same customs people, who are throwing such hostile glances in YOUR direction. Perhaps it helps to have people in the right places, you wonder. However, yours is not to wonder why. Once you have managed to struggle with your case and put it on the concrete slab in front of the custom man, the horror story unfolds. The fact that you have only been away on business, and do not belong to a gold or drug smuggling ring appears to be of no consequence. The sold purpose of that wonderful little man in his wonderful white little costume, is to make you feel a first class smuggler. By the time he is

through with you, your belief in yourself is bound to be shattered. In accompaniment to the most audacious questions, and even more audacious looks he proceeds to open your case. Gleefully. Then he will proceed to rummage through your belongings, looking for the imaginary bar of gold and heaven knows what else, while you stand helplessly by trying to make sense of the whole thing. A couple of pointed hints are dropped as to how it might be easier all round, if you would be gracious enough to slip the convenient little dollar bill into his hands but of course some people still like to think they are above such nasty little habits and you stand steadfastly by your principles. You know you have done no wrong. He thinks otherwise. Your wrong is not gratifying him: your ideals do not permit such obscenity and you are all caught up in a merry-go-round, with you somehow being at the wrong end.

At long last, he begs you for something. The little Barbie Doll you have bought for your five-year old. Ah ha, is the look he gives you and dutifully taxes you, VAT and all, thanks to the Ministry of Financial Affairs. Perhaps it would have been cheaper to have bought that doll in Dhaka after all. But she wanted it. And again you are left wondering how those great little men in their great little act, ever manage to nab the real smugglers, when all they seem worried about is catching perfectly innocent looking business executives, returning home after a hectic business trip. Perhaps the customs and their men, should all be given a basic training course in psychology, which will probably better equip them to judge people, to some extent and stop harassing the innocent in the name of customs duty. The correct word of course should be, customs gratification. Unless the powers that be come up with something better. Which left to themselves, they probably will. While your love for the beloved land does manage to wear thin by the end of the ordeal, it is nonetheless a delight to come home, customs men and all.

UNDSWSGA assures help

Vienna based branch office of the United Nations Development Social Welfare and Special Groups Activities (UNDSWSGA) will provide financial assistance to the Social Welfare Ministry for conducting a survey of the disabled persons in Bangladesh, reports BSS.

The chief of the UNDSWSGA Dr Mohammad Sharif gave this assurance when he called on the Minister for Social Welfare and Women's Affairs Tariqul Islam at the secretariat office on yesterday.

Dr Sharif also gave assurance to bear the total expenditure of convening a national seminar on disability in the middle of next year in Dhaka.

Islam apprised Dr Sharif of the constraints facing by the government to continue welfare-oriented activities for the disabled persons.

Dr Sharif assured all possible cooperation and assistance from the United Nations to the government of Bangladesh in disability welfare sector.

Govt firm to meet basic needs of people: Anwar

Commerce Minister M K Anwar yesterday said the present government was determined to meet the basic needs of the people including medical facilities, reports BSS.

With this objective in view, he said, modern medical treatment facilities were being provided at the doorsteps of the rural people, while speaking at an inaugural function of an eye-camp at Homna Model High School Building in Comilla.

The five-day eye camp has been jointly organised by the Lion Club of Bangladesh and the local eye camp committee.

Director, National Eye Science Institute Prof Dr Humayun Kabir and twenty eye specialists of the country are participating in the camp, where about 3500 eye patients are getting treatment. Among them about two hundred patients' eyes had been operated upon and the rest had been given prescription, advice and necessary medicines for the eye diseases.

The past governor of Lion Club of Dhaka-815 Humayun Kabir, Professor Dr Anisul Islam, renowned social worker of Homna Md Sirajul Islam, Deputy Commissioner, Comilla, the elite of Homna were present on the occasion.

M K Anwar, who is the chief patron, said the rural poor people of Homna and adjoining areas were getting eye treatment free of cost from the eye camp. All expenditure of the camp is being borne by the lion clubs and the local committee. He said similar eye camps would be organized in other parts of the country in future.

Rafiq hands over possession documents of plots

Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam Mia yesterday formally handed over the possession documents of plots to the affected people at Shyampur-Kadamtali rehabilitation area whose lands were acquired by RAJUK 26 years ago for industrial projects, reports BSS.

Addressing a gathering on the occasion, the minister said that concerned authority would provide all facilities like water supply, electricity, establishment of schools and hospitals for the inhabitants of this area. He urged the people to cooperate with the government because this government was committed to the economic emancipation of the people.

The function was addressed, among others, by Salahuddin MP, Chairmen of RAJUK and WASA and the local leaders.

Dateline Khulna
Followers of Islam always think of people's welfare, says Mostafiz

KHULNA, Dec 18: Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman today said the real followers of Islam always think for the welfare of the people as Islam is a peace-loving religion, reports BSS.

Islam teaches us tolerance and peaceful co-existence and with this end in view people this country are very much conscious for maintaining traditional communal harmony, he said.

The minister was addressing as chief guest the foundation laying ceremony of Baitun Nur Jame Mosque Complex here.

Presided over by Khulna City Mayor Sheikh Tayebur Rahman the function was addressed, among others, by Syeda Nargis Ali MP, Divisional Commissioner Abdul Mukhtar Choudhury and elderly politician Dildar Ahmed.

The minister said the dream of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman should have to be materialised for ensuring peace and prosperity of the nation. He called for united efforts for materialising the dream of the late leader.

Mayor Tayebur Rahman called upon all to be more conscious so that the anti-social elements could not jeopardise the existing social peace.

Later, the minister formally laid the foundation stone of the proposed new building of Bagerhat pourashabha at the pourashabha office premises. He also handed over the key of the ambulance of Fakirhat Thana Hospital to the concerned authorities at Bagerhat Circuit House premises.

Imam Parishad

A UNB report says: Khulna Imam Parishad today urged the Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to rebuild the Babri Mosque by January 14 failing which 'he (Rao) will not be allowed to land in Dhaka for the SAARC summit.'

Nurul Islam Patwary's death anniversary today

A milad mahfil on the occasion of the eighth death anniversary of eminent journalist, columnist and litterateur Nurul Islam Patwary will be held today after Asr prayers at his Baitul Aman Housing Society residence at Shyamoli, reports BSS.

Patwary, who used to write columns in the pseudonym of 'Nuipa', was the editor of the Dainik Bangla, Dainik Ittefaq, Dainik Barta, Weekly Bichitra and Kishore Bangla.

The family members of the deceased have requested all relatives, friends and well-wishers of late Patwary to attend the milad mahfil.

'Govt committed to uphold rights of people'

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mirza Gohar Hafiz has said that the present democratic government is pledged to uphold the constitutional rights of the people, reports BSS.

Addressing a public meeting at Tetolia Friday the minister said, the elected government is accountable to people through the parliament it would take all possible measures to resolve the basic problems of the people, he added.

He mentioned that the past autocratic government had plundered the country's economy during its nine years rule. The present government has taken pragmatic steps to bring discipline and momentum in economic sectors including banking and other financial institutions, the minister added.

Mirza Hafiz asserted that social justice and rule of law would be established at all cost to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the people. He urged the people to extend their whole hearted support to the leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia to build up a happy and prosperous nation.

Weather

No change in night temperature

By Staff Correspondent

Dry weather is likely to prevail over the country during the next 24 hours commencing 6 am today (Saturday).

The Met office forecasts, night temperature may remain nearly unchanged during this period over the country.

The minimum temperature of 7.8 degree Celsius was reported from Rajshahi yesterday (Friday) and the maximum of 26.3 degree from Satkhira.

The sun sets today at 5.16 pm and rises tomorrow at 6.36 am.

The maximum and the minimum temperature and humidity of some of the major cities and towns of the country yesterday were:

Cities/Towns	Temperature in degree Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	9 am	6 pm
Dhaka	25.1	11.1	82	70
Chittagong	26.0	13.5	76	65
Rajshahi	25.0	7.8	75	73
Khulna	25.0	9.3	93	74
Cox's Bazar	26.0	15.2	77	65
Sylhet	25.5	11.8	73	59
Dinajpur	24.5	10.2	82	73
Barisal	25.8	10.5	92	84



Abdus Samad Azad, Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Parliament speaking at the inaugural function of short film based on Habibul Islam Habibi's 'Bijoy 90'. — Star photo

Speakers at seminar

Free market essential to boost economic growth

Speakers at a seminar here yesterday said deregulation for both goods and financial markets were essential in market economy to improve economic efficiency and enhance long term economic growth, reports BSS.

They also said the government should undertake courageous steps of restructuring to introduce competitiveness, reduce losses in the state enterprises and create a congenial atmosphere for private investment with a view to revitalising the economy.

The seminar on 'Market economy: Freedom of choice, competition and value' organised by Carl Duisberg Samity (CDS), Bangladesh was held at the German Cultural Centre here with Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce in the chair.

Dr Ashrafuddin Ahmad Choudhury of Dhaka University and Dr Quazi Mesbah Uddin Ahmad of Planning Commission took part in the discussion on a key-note paper presented by Dr M Shamsul Haq of the Institute of Business Administration of Dhaka University.

H Lechner, Director of the German Cultural Centre (Goethe Institut) took part in the discussion as a guest of honour.

In his introductory speech, the CDS Secretary General Syed Akhter Zamil said mismanagement and less accountability in economic sectors were the major causes for hindering the development while lack of political and economic accountability created mess in the economy.

'Bangladesh needs a stronger regulatory environment to get rid of default culture which is eating up the vitals of the banking system,' he said calling for a 'robust and functionally integrated financial system' and 'integrated capital and money market' in Bangladesh.

Outgoing Chinese Envoy meets Jahanara

The outgoing Ambassador of Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kim Dal Son called on State Minister for Cultural Affairs Prof Jahanara Begum at her secretariat office here on Thursday, reports BSS.

Participation of womenfolk in uplift process underscored

Post and Telecommunication Minister Muhammad Kamarat Ali has underscored the need for massive participation of womenfolk in the development process of the country without which overall development of the country is not possible, reports BSS.

The minister was addressing as chief guest at the inauguration of silver jubilee of T and T Ladies Welfare Association at the Engineers Institute on Thursday.

Presided over by association President Begum Jahanara Selim the function was addressed among others by Additional Secretary in-charge of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication, Dr A M M Shawkat Ali, Chairman Bangladesh T and T Board Abdus Selim and associations vice president Shamima Rahman.

The minister said that present government has launched a number of vocational programme for the socio-economic advancement of the less privileged womenfolk of the country.

He appreciated the initiative of the association for taking vocational training like sewing, training school and computer training course.

Children urged to build themselves as worthy citizens

Planning Minister A M Zahuruddin Khan has called upon the children to build themselves as worthy citizens of an independent state through flourishing their talents being imbued with the spirit of patriotism, reports BSS.

He said that people of all sections of the society including parents and teachers have special role to play for flourishing the latent talents of the children who are the future architects of the national development.

The minister was speaking as chief guest at the prize distribution ceremony of the children's painting competition organised by the National Museum as part of its week-long programme for Victory Day celebration.

Among others Dhaka University Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor Wakil Ahmed and Museum Director General Sheikh Akram Ali spoke on the occasion.

The minister said there was a rich hidden treasure of creative faculty and intelligence in our children. Now it is imperative to create congenial atmosphere so that the children can flourish their creativity and talents, he said adding that it was not possible on the part of the government alone.

Turning to the campus violence the minister said this curse should be eradicated from the sacred educational arena of the country for greater national interest.

Some 1,000 children took part in the competition.

Sheikh Rehana's husband back home

Prof Shafique Siddiqui, the husband of Sheikh Rehana, returned home Wednesday after his prolonged treatment in Singapore, reports UNB.

Prof Siddiqui had undergone operation twice in a Singapore hospital. His condition is improving, family sources said.

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina was among others to receive her youngest sister Rehana and the brother-in-law at the airport.

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