

My Little Battle with the AL Secretary, in a Lighter Vein; Star Staffers Get Mugged; A Nostalgic Journey to the British Council; and Translation of a Turkish Poet into Bangla

"YOU are on the road to fame", phoned a senior journalist who tries hard, with some success, to take a non-partisan view of the current political situation in the country.

These were some of the reactions from my friends and acquaintances to the rejoinder from Zillur Rahman, the General Secretary of the Awami League (AL) to my signed front-page commentary published in this paper on Sunday.

No, I assure him, that won't happen, because, I tell him in a confident voice befitting an editor, I will get myself invited to tea with Sheikh Hasina in her Minto Road residence ostensibly to continue the discussion we started during our last meeting as to how AL should set up a more effective, more sophisticated and more streamlined press relations department than one her organisation runs today.

I hope, we will be in the AL leader's small study upstairs where we sat on the last occasion sipping tea and discussing one of our controversial articles. If I remember correctly, the piece was on the Democratic Front which Hasina seemed bitter about and which had received, rather prematurely, an approving nod from The Daily Star.

At that point, the daughter of our Mujib Bhai may order a fresh round of tea. On my way out of the residence of the Leader of the Opposition, I may run into Zillur Rahman, the General Secretary of Awami League whose rejoinder to my commentary has prompted me to devote quite a bit of space in this column to one subject.

A friend from my university days but younger to me by a few years, he is a mild-mannered slow-speaking man who smiles easily and is pleasant in his manners. I see him as an excellent desk man, but hardly a star performer at a public rally.

Zillur Rahman is also a small-built man with a lean figure. So, when I read his hard-hitting rejoinder, full of sarcasm and even some malice, I recalled one of the little-known lines from Poet Tagore: Etho Tuku Jantra Hothe Etho Shabdo Ho? (How can there be so much noise from such a small machine?)

LAST week, two of my colleagues in The Daily Star also came under an attack, but of a different kind in the early hours of Tuesday. Chief Reporter Chapal Basbar and Staff Reporter Masud Hasan Khan were held up by four miscreants, commonly known as hijackers, and robbed in front of the WAPDA building in Motijheel.

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE Those Old Days of Jagannath College

Continued from page 8 siders entered the college campus to show their growing strength. Students of other parties resented that. Exchange of hot words and bitter quarrel made the situation tense. I wanted to face the students, but was prevented by teachers and students apparently for my safety. It was a tragic mistake for me not to force my way through the human wall and address the students. I was confident that the matter would have ended there. I talked over phone to district authorities, but there was no response. After some time, the telephone line was snapped. They could have, at least, stopped the outsiders entering and crowding the campus by shutting and guarding the gate. In short, the role played by them was disgraceful. My personal car was damaged beyond repair. I had been in the office from 9 am to 5 pm. The DC, IG and Divisional Commissioner came towards the end of the day just to see the fun. After 5 pm I left the office chamber for residence and did not allow any one to see me, as I was

tired and shocked. But after some time a phone call from Govt House disturbed me. I thought it was the Governor, but no, it was his son who wanted to apologise for what had happened in Jagannath College that day. I asked him where his father was and knew that he was in West Pakistan. Birth of Jinnah College (now Titumir College) When the Governor came back, he asked me to see him. When I met him, he talked a lot, and disclosed that he would nationalise Jagannath College, reduce the number of students to a half and divert the other half to 'Jinnah College' which would be established at Gulshan and would function as a Govt College with effect from July 1, 1968. Jagannath College would remain closed and reopen as a Govt College on 1.8.68. I would continue to be in charge of both the colleges — one 'sick' as he thought, and the other, in the making — till I join Jinnah College on 1.7.68 as Principal. He also expressed the hope, in flattering words,

matter of minutes. All through this frightening experience, the reporter's mind of my two young colleagues remained active. Had it happened to me, I told them very candidly the following day, I would have fainted in the arms of the muggers, leaving them with no choice but to cut me up into small pieces and distribute them liberally among all my friends and foes.

As they put it to me, the four miscreants were urbanised middle class and apparently reasonably educated young men who seemed sure of themselves. There was no doubt that they had done this before. For all practical purposes, they were, by profession, muggers. It was as simple as that.

The Toyota had stopped beside the baby taxi — what an irony, muggers ride a car and journalists use a baby taxi — and it was impossible for my reporters to see the registration plate. As it drove off, one could not make out the number.

For Masud, the big loss was his fairly expensive and dependable camera which he had learnt to use almost like a veteran photographer. A still bigger loss for him was an exposed film inside the camera which contained a set of pictures taken by him for a couple of good feature stories. As Masud put it to me, he won't be surprised if the muggers develop the pic-

tures and sell them to a newspaper inside the country or to a foreign journal. "Why not to The Daily Star?" we wondered.

Both Chapal and Masud regretted that after they had parted with their possessions, they did not get time to ask for an exclusive interview with the four miscreants for a full page feature for the Star, titled "Conversation with Muggers". The piece would have started with a routine question: "Would you please tell us how you started on your career as a mugger?" and ended on a polite note, "Thank you for your time. The police is waiting outside this room."

ONCE I manage to break away with my set residence-office-residence routine, I find the change stimulating, intellectually and otherwise. So, last Monday, it was nice to drive down to the British Council, once my favourite cultural centre in Dhaka, to chair the concluding session of the Symposium on Women in Literature and Popular Media. It was organised by the University of Dhaka's Department of English where I was a student in 1947-'51, from the undergraduate to the post-graduate level.

For me, it was a kind of nostalgic journey to the Council which I was visiting after a couple of decades. This time accompanied by my wife,

Nancy Wong, who had been invited to the seminar in her own capacity as a regular reviewer of books for The Daily Star. It was nice for me to show her the place where I had once met Prince Phillip — or rather attended a reception held in honour of the distinguished visitor — and interviewed historian Arnold Toynbee for a major feature published by the then Pakistan Observer. Then, there was the superb reading room, now considerably expanded, which we used fairly frequently.

Now, the Council has a good medium-sized auditorium where the seminar was held with almost clock-wise precision.

We arrived there during the afternoon tea break, before the start of the "last but not the least" session. We sat out in the green lawn, in the mildly cool lingering winter sun, chatting with a new generation of teachers of the university, mostly of the Department of English, and young students. They were pleasant, articulate and easy to talk to. If we had time, I would have spent hours with them, talking about everything and nothing, as we used to do some four decades ago, with my teachers and friends, like A. G. Stock, Munir Chowdhury, Amiya Chakravorty and, of course, Jotirmoya Guhathakurta.

Guhathakurta was too young to be my uncle. He was just my "Sir", the form of address we used for all our teachers. But after we lost him in the war of liberation, he became something of an elder brother to me, in my recollections.

So, sitting in the lawn, I met Meghna, the daughter of my late teacher, and immediately regarded her as a long-lost niece who, with a doctorate from the University of York, now teaches at the Department of International Relations in the University of Dhaka. Again, like so many other members of various faculties, Meghna also manages to write and edit books, to participate in seminars, and even to serve as an Associate Editor of a quarterly journal of the Centre for Social Studies. In some ways, therefore, she has been following the footsteps of her late father who founded and edited, an extremely short-lived but impact-making magazine, Mukti, with my friend Jamal Zahedi, as his co-editor. As I told Meghna, it was for Mukti that I wrote one of my rare pieces in Bangla, an appreciation of the poetry of Sukanta Bhattacharjee.

We indulged in our recollections of our literary adventures — and some mishaps — of the past, not forgetting that, like Mukti, another impact-making but, again, a short-lived journal of our university days was "New Values" whose founder-editor, Prof. Sarwar Murshed Khan later joined us at the seminar.

It was a comfortable feeling that, a part of the world we lived in, during our university days, has survived, like a little island of grace and sanity in an ocean of turbulence, campus violence and disintegration of social and moral values.

It was a good week for me for receiving new publications as gifts.

First, Meghna Guhathakurta gave me a copy of a timely book, just published by the Centre for Social Studies, titled, "SAARC: Beyond State-Centric Co-operation". It is edited by Meghna and Imtiaz Ahmed who is an Assistant Professor in the Department of International Relations in the University of Dhaka.

Then, at the end of the seminar at the British Council, I received a nice gift for being such a "good chairperson", as Niaz Zaman, the prime-mover of the symposium put it. It was a copy of "Other Englishes" — rather an unusual title — which is a collection of essays on Commonwealth writing, published by the University Press Ltd.

Lastly, on Tuesday, Ambassador Ermisoglu of Turkey, paid me a welcome visit and presented me a copy of Bengali translation of selected poetry of one of his great national poets, Yunus Emre who lived — would you believe it? — 750 years ago. His reputation has not only survived this long passage of time but has also become a subject of resurgence of interest among literary critics in Turkey and outside. A publication of Bangla Academy, the translation from the original Turkish to Bangla has been done, with superb skill as the Ambassador put it, by one of our former diplomats, Arshad-uz-Zaman, perhaps our one and only Bengali scholar well-versed in Turkish language and literature, with noted poet Mohammad Nurul Huda putting Zaman's translation into verse form.

We introduce these three unique publications in this column. We will have them reviewed in due course.

Film on Martyred Intellectuals



At the grand camera opening...

Ghatak is not an everyday film. A 60-minute monochrome production shot on 16 mm film, Ghatak, or killer, deals with the killings of Bengalee intellectuals in December, 1971.

The film, directed by Zahid. Hossain and featuring Doly Zahur, Keramat Mowla and Monirul Islam Badal in principal roles, had its grand camera opening at the Central Shaheed Minar on December 14.

They murdered them during the genocide of 1971, be-

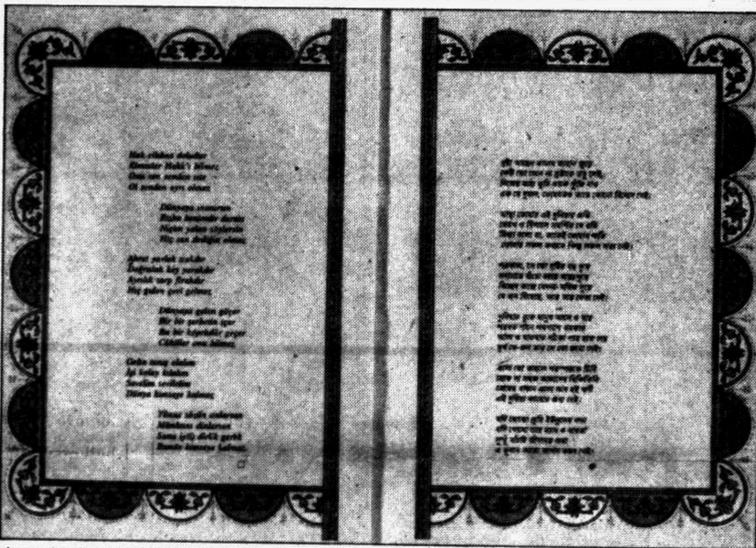
cause intellectuals are always the first to warn people about the dangers of fascism," said poet Shamsur Rahman at the camera opening ceremony.

During the discussion, author Shawkat Osman said that there had hardly been any films in the past 21 years "which could inspire us. Now, a new generation is coming forward which is a matter of great delight."

Ghatak, to be shot by Mazharul Islam, will take seven to eight months to complete.

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali



A couple of insula pages from the Bangla translation of poetry of Yunus Emre.

SAARC Beyond State-Centric Cooperation Edited by Imtiaz Ahmed Meghna Guhathakurta

Other Englishes ESSAYS ON COMMONWEALTH WRITING Edited by Niaz Zaman, Sharikat Hussain, Pirous Azim, Kaiser Haq, Syed Mansoorul Islam University Press Limited

Kumarkhali

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he bought from Benaras. There is an interesting story about the bigrahas. While Kalyan Roy was on pilgrimage he was fascinated by the beauty of the image of Sri Sri Gopinath and Sri, Sri Gopi Rani in a sculptor's shop at Benaras. He placed an order for similar pair of bigrahas and went to Brindaban from Benaras. When he returned from Brindaban he found that work on bigrahas were not completed. The sculptor gave him the bigrahas that were made for the Maharaja of Benaras. Kalyan Roy came home with those bigrahas and placed them in the temple. The sculptor handed over the Maharaja of Benaras the other pair of bigrahas intended for Kalyan Roy. After some time, the bigrahas appeared in a dream before Maharaja of Benaras and told him that the images must be sent to Kalyan Roy. Accordingly, the pair of images were sent by Maharaja to Khorshedpur and they were also placed in the same temple with Sri Sri Gopinath and Sri Gopi Rani. The new pair of images were called Sri Sri Radhanath and Sri Sri Radharani.

This temple, which is known as Sri Sri Gopinath Jew Mandir became a place of pilgrimage. During Snan Jatra (bathing procession) which is performed on the same day as that of Sri Sri Jagannath Deb at Puri, a large number of people took bath in the Gopinath tank attached to the mandir. The number of pilgrims that gathered there on this occasion was estimated between 5000 and 10,000 before partition of British India. A Mela is also held during Snan Jatra occasion for one day.

Mazar of saint Khorshed Faqir is also located here. SHELADAIH is a village un-

der Kumarkhali thana, only six miles to the north of Kushtia town. It is connected by road from Kumarkhali and Kushtia as well. The name Shelaidah has been formed out of the two words — Sheli and Daha. Mr 'Sheli' was an indigo planter and 'daha' means a pool of water. Therefore, the name of the village means village formed on the pool (daha) where Mr Sheli was a distinguished inhabitant. However, Nilkuthi of Mr Sheli was washed away by the erosion of the river Padma.

In 1800 Prince Dwarakanath Tagore, grandfather of poet Rabindranath Tagore purchased the zamindari of Natore Raj in an auction. The Shelaidah estate of Tagore was part of the zamindari. Rabindranath was assigned in 1891 to look after the management of the estate. The elegant three storied Kuthibari where Rabindranath had spent a good part of his life in writing numerous poems, short stories and dramas has become a place of historical interest for tourists and lovers of Bengali literature.

Kumarkhali, a historical place, is exposed to the ravages of the river Gori. The river has changed its course and the erosion of the river has washed away the oldest high school, a part of the college and part of prosperous Tebaria village where 'Himalaya', a beautiful rest house of Jaladhar Sen and princely building of physician Reboti Mohon Saha, who was awarded gold medal by Calcutta University in early 1900s, are situated.

The erosion continues unabated. Serious efforts are required to stop the erosion by the river which has silted at many places.

Photos: Rezauul Karim Hannan

an educational tour within East Pakistan. Students wanted me to go with them as a guide, and I went gladly. It was, indeed, a wonderful experience.

After Monem Khan's fall, bureaucracy stood in my way to going ahead with healthy academic and extra-academic activities within and outside the college campus. Creation of posts at different levels, filling up these posts, fixation of pay, etc. were difficult work, but they made it almost impossible. My colleagues at all levels and even senior students worked day and night though they were not getting their pay. They worked miracles and raised the college very high in public esteem. I felt proud and was inspired by their activities and conduct. I also rose with the occasion and acted with courage and confidence sometimes even beyond my competence. My superior officers, though sympathetic to me for my bold steps, were shaken. As for example, though Jagannath College was nationalised, night shift was left out, owing to mistake at Directorate level. I kept night shift working on payment from private Jagannath College funds. Secondly, construction of a building was left incomplete for financial constraint at the end of the financial year. I issued a cheque for Taka four lakh from the Private College funds to the Chief Engineer, C & B for the completion of the building.

It may be remembered that during Yahya's rule political atmosphere in the country grew very tense, and academic atmosphere grew hot. In those turbulent days when all around us appeared dark; we kept our academic light burning within and outside the precincts of the college. Extra-academic activities throughout the country were not allowed, but I held Students' Union Election

in the College and Annual Sports Meet within the Dhaka Stadium. I requested the authorities concerned not to interfere with our activities and assured them that there would be no trouble. I also requested them not to allow any police to be there. They agreed, and our functions were a grand success.

My days in Jagannath College were running fast to an end. That was because of my tussle with the bureaucracy from the beginning. I had been trying hard to have the pay scale of all employees fixed and their arrears paid. At one stage Finance Department refused to meet our demand for lack of funds pending new budget allotment. I was shocked and rang up Admiral Ahsan who was then the Governor, and spoke about my awkward predicament. He readily agreed to pay the amount from his special funds. What a fine gentleman he was! It was too much for the bureaucracy to bear this humiliation. They must get me away from Dhaka and Jagannath College. So I was transferred first to Comilla Victoria College and then to Rajendra College, Faridpur. I was, of course ready by that time to leave Jagannath College, but I did not disclose what I had in mind. I was waiting for my reliever, but in vain. I was in terrible suspense, because I could be of no use to any body any more. Teachers and students constantly poured into the drawing room. I tried to avoid them, but could not. Some rushed into my bed room. They all wanted me to try to have the transfer order cancelled. I told them that during my 28 years of service, I never begged anything from any body. But when I faced injustice and irregularities I fought

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that I would continue to cooperate with the Government loyally as I had been doing before. Though surprised at these dramatic developments, the Governor's active role in what happened at Jagannath College on 28.2.68, was clear. My pronouncement proved true. So, flame-like, I heaved a deep sigh. Oh my prophetic soul, I thanked him for his confidence in my ability to shoulder the stupendous responsibility of supervising two colleges at a time. As for other matters, I just told him that I was a teacher and a Govt servant. I could not go beyond my limit. I did not find anything wrong in his declaration of nationalisation of Jagannath College and establishment of Jinnah College at Gulshan. I assured him of my whole-hearted cooperation as long as things move cleanly and in public interest. The Governor looked grave, and I left. The neat and tight work programme and plan about the two colleges must have been prepared at the highest level with competent experts of the departments concerned. Series of meetings at different levels followed, and public leaders, high officials and educationists were summoned from all parts of the country by the Governor to flash what happened in Jagannath College on 28.2.68 and what he proposed to do. What pained me most was that he used me, in

most of those meetings, as a show-boy for his propaganda. He blamed the "unruly" students and teachers who, he thought, played in the hands of the "enemies of the State." He wanted people's support from suppressing "rowdism" on the campus. I worked hard in consultation with the DPI and Education Secretary. Indeed, we three, Mr Mujibul Haq, Edn Seey, Mr Ferdous Khan, DPI and I, formed a team. We visited the site for Jinnah College and found it excellent for a good college. My work was within the site, watching the progress of the work of different kinds, i.e. construction work for adapting the DIT, Building for college purpose, constructing new buildings, making furniture, etc. I passed most of the day in Gulshan. Every night I also sat with some of my colleagues to work for nationalisation of Jagannath College as well. We had less than four months to complete the work for making Jinnah College ready for starting, on 1.7.68, and five months for nationalising Jagannath College with effect from 1.8.68.

One week before the ceremonial opening of Jinnah College, some top-ranking officials including the Chief Secretary, were called to the Govt. House. The Governor disclosed that he would leave for Moscow on 1st July at 1 pm. Now the question was

who will take the opening salute? We thought, Mr. Asfar, the Chief Secretary, who acts as Governor in his absence, would take the salute. But, no, pointing his figure towards me the Governor said "he will take the opening salute and declare the college open". Though I felt embarrassed, I had to obey the command. Nationalisation of Jagannath College was the desire of the Governor to have it under his control, but he did not dare to do that outright before, because he knew that would be resisted. It may kindly be recalled that even after nationalisation of Jagannath College, movements of the students continued to have it denationalised. In the general movements of the students throughout the country that was the first of their eleven-point demands; and in the Students' Union election that was the most important issue. Though I attended Jinnah College once a day, I had to work hard to make Jagannath College ready for nationalisation within July. My colleagues and office staff helped me a lot to prepare a set-up and work out the details in consultation with the DPI. A good number of students left the college and got admitted to Jinnah College, but that did not affect this college in any way. The old atmosphere prevailed after upheavals, and all were happy when the college opened as a Govt College on 1.8.68.