

A Killer Truck Starts a Trip with Mother's Blessings; an Invitation to Mayor Abbas; and Tribute to a Manila Politician

It may have just escaped the attention of our readers that many of the owners and drivers of trucks and buses, rightly dubbed as "killer vehicles", are a God-fearing lot. Judging by writings painted up in vivid, often garish, colours on their conveyances, some of which were photographed last week by my colleagues, a journey is started only after a prayer is offered to "all merciful Allah". When this is not done in the haste of getting the over-crowded bus off to "good start", there is always time to seek the "blessing" of the mother, no matter whether her son is the owner or the driver of the vehicle. More to the point, she probably seldom responds to this call for "blessings", judging by the number of accidents caused by these trucks and buses, very often resulting in senseless loss of human lives. May be, for a change, these humble sons operating or driving these vehicles should turn to their fathers for some guidance, instead of seeking blessings from all-forgiving mothers who, as in our traditional society, are always ready to give a second or a third chance to an offending son even after his reckless driving has caused a few deaths.

Let's leave the parents alone and turn to our traffic cops, the people who are really responsible for preventing reckless driving that so often results in accidents and loss of lives. Has the control of traffic improved in recent months and years? Perhaps yes, but only in a few selected crowded intersections — not certainly along the highways connecting Dhaka with other metropolitan centres and district towns. My sources in the police department say that they are unable to perform even a reasonable job in managing the increasingly chaotic traffic within the capital and outside, mainly due to the shortage of manpower and vehicles. To meet its transport problem, the department does often requisition privately-owned cars and even baby taxis for emergency duty — sometimes quite arbitrarily — while, I suspect, it quietly considers the option for drafting members of the public as honorary traffic cops.

As one senior police officer recently confided to me, the ever-increasing security duty carried out by his department for government leaders and visiting dignitaries has turned already a bad situation into a critical one.

Are these just lame excuses? I am not sure. However, I do know that Manzurul Karim, the Home Secretary is a competent and a "no nonsense" civil servant whose long association with the Scout movement has increased his dedication to public welfare. If he can reorganise the police department to enable it to do a satisfactory job not just in reducing traffic accidents but in dealing with the crime situation, he will certainly get my support — my full support.

My full support will also go to Mayor Mirza Abbas, the head of the City Corporation, if he can handle a perennial problem with the same vigour and earnestness that he displays in addressing public rallies. Friends say, he is a good Mayor.

But let's put him on a test, in garbage collection! Over two years ago, when I was temporarily out of the newspaper field, a stinking situation, literally and otherwise, that we noticed in the collection of garbage along the Old DOHS residential area prompted me to tip off a reporter of my old paper, the *Bangladesh Observer* on what I thought was a good story. After all, a few decades ago, a noted US journalist had won an award by writing a three-part series on the garbage collection in New York for the *NY Times*.

The *Observer* reporter did a good, comprehensive story which ended with the outline of a plan of the City Corporation for

in the Old DOHS, towards the Cantonment, we saw garbage dumped beside the railway track all along the way, stinking garbage which was probably days old, all open and exposed. It was all very different when we entered the Cantonment. There, it was tidy, green and clean, with no sign of any garbage anywhere. There were roses in bloom in nicely tended flower beds. What a contrast!

On my way back from my office in Dhanmandi, we drove through the residential area in Gulshan and Banani and saw exactly what I had seen earlier in the day along the railway line, between Banani and Mahabhalia crossing.

During this drive, I worked out a modest

Commercial Area. I will leave the choice to Mayor Abbas. Then, if the Mayor is not too bored with my company, we will pay surprise visits to a couple of movie houses and some of the cheap-looking hotels which have mushroomed in and around Motijheel. Here, in all these places, we will be looking at the sanitation facilities and general cleanliness, toilet arrangement and, above all, if there are fire exits (especially in the cinema halls). If, at some of these so-called hotels, we run into drug addicts, pimps and prostitutes, Mayor Abbas would know how to take care of them, using the full force of law.

If our rendezvous produces some results, we may well see a cleaner and a more liveable Dhaka slowly emerge in place of the present polluted garbage-filled stinking city.

This will be our common gain. But we will have something special for the Mayor. It will be a major feature in *The Daily Star*, titled, "A Day in the Life of Mayor Abbas."

Wait. We may even do something really special, something that no newspaper here has ever done for a Mayor in our living memory. It is a two-page supplement on "Living in a Cleaner, Healthier Dhaka", which, among other things, will carry a message from none other than Mayor Abbas. If this does not boost the work of the City Corporation and, at the same time, promote the political future of Abbas, nothing else will.

WHEN it comes to garbage collection or even less obnoxious civic problem, I believe in making a direct contact with the Mayor. I did it once in Manila, and it worked.

For days, we had noticed that the garbage collection in our area, called San Juan in the Philippine capital, was going from bad to worse. The truck appeared sometimes every other week (if we were lucky) or only once a month. Residents — or their maids — started throwing their garbage on an empty plot, next to our house.

I was left with no choice but to write a letter, explaining the dismal situation, to none other than Joseph Estrada, a film actor-turned-politician, who was then the Mayor of San Juan. I did not know him personally. However, the fact that I was a foreigner, in charge of a regional media organisation, was certain to make some kind of an impression on Estrada, so my friends said. They were proved right.

The Mayor replied to my letter, apologised for the totally "unacceptable" situation in garbage collection and promised immediate action. Estrada kept his promise. For the rest of our stay in Manila, we lived in a cleaner San Juan.

Thanks to his dedication and commitment to civic duty, Joseph Estrada has moved up in the political life in the Philippines. Today, he is the country's Vice President and one of the policy makers in the administration of President Fidel Ramos.

So, as we see, one can never underestimate the importance of garbage collection, whether it is in Manila or in Dhaka, no matter who is in charge. Joseph Estrada or Mirza Abbas.

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali



improving the garbage collection right through the whole city, from Mohammadpur to Banani. If I remember correctly, the plan involved the purchase of new modern transport and the setting up of covered garbage bins, among other not-so-innovative measures. The whole plan was to be fully implemented in a matter of months.

As far as I can see, the plan is yet to see the light of the day. Or let me put it more simply: It is yet to be put into effect.

If anything, the situation may well have worsened.

The other day, driving along the Masjid Road,

plan. One of these days, I will invite Mayor Abbas to join me for breakfast at Hotel Abakash at Mahabhalia. Then, we will drive around the area, before going over to Mohammadpur or the old city to continue with our unannounced inspection tour. We will have lunch at a restaurant which serves people in the lower income group and take a look at its kitchen and toilet facilities to see if they are clean enough by reasonable standards. Then, following the maxim, "After lunch, walk a mile", Mayor Abbas and myself will take a leisurely stroll along the back lanes of the old city or the Motijheel

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

Poush Shankranti at Dilkusha Tea Estate

by Murad

THESE is something in this world which cannot be seen but has to be felt in the heart. One such is the silent world of Dilkusha Tea Estate. One can feel the real picture of silence if he has a close view, far away from the modern civilization, of this lively estate.

Evening comes gradually over this estate. The life is suspended here. Except for the sound that the birds make big forests with Gargan, Segun, Karol, and bamboo are silent as you walk through. The morning dew lies on the green grass and looks like white pearls. The mechanical life is forgotten here in the abundance of nature.

At midnight sound of "kirtan" comes from the labour lines at the distant hills. Hours together they sing. At midnight the full moon floats in the clear sky and the whole jungle wears a unique charm. The happiest thing that can be found at midnight, I am sure this cannot be found in places like Los Angeles, or San Francisco or Paris — this can be seen only at a place like this tea estate.

It was a "Poush Shankranti", one of the greatest festivals of the garden workers. When I returned to Dilkusha at 11.45 pm with the broken motor cycle from another tea estate, "kirtan" had already started at Bijoy Sarder's house — "Oh! Bishno Thui Kai Gairah Thui Jhara Radha Kandha-ra." I don't know where Bishno has gone or why Radha is weeping. I listen to the "kirtan" for long hours, which takes me to a different world.

In the evening of "Poush Shankranti" a good number of women, along with children, carrying "debata" (on their shoulders) and singing reli-

gious songs came to my bungalow. I listened to the songs with great interest along with Mr. Kajal Sinha, the assistant manager. The women workers gave "oulu dhan" and spread "dub" (scented sticks) with Ganga "jal" and they took off the "Debata Mala" from the Debata's neck and put it on my hand. It seemed to me that they also respected me like a "debata". It is a religious festival and culture which is maintained by them for years.

Poush Shankranti brings peace and happiness for Dilkusha workers.

The cool spring of Dilkusha is passing through the valleys and hills for years together — very silently and very gently. There is an over-bridge on the brook near Section No 3. If somebody puts his cars near the stream it seems as if somebody is crying, maybe for years together. A strange sound always comes through the spring, several times I had been there but heard the same sound again and again. I tried to find out the real history of the spring. If any, but the people of Dilkusha are ignorant about it and they are not at all concerned with. They are very simple and think only of eating and living.

Now, after years of changes, it is not possible on my part to return to Dilkusha again. But memories will remain in my heart for more and more years to come.

The unknown mystery of the sound of the spring, the unique moonlit nights, the serene tranquil days, the forests and the birds and above all the humane tea estate workers, their "within and without" celebration of "Poush Shankranti" will ever make me full to the brim of my heart and I shall ever miss them.

You're My Love

by Gazi Sadeq

Diamond, pearl, money or gold
All the earthly riches you told —
I can give you everything
In return I expect nothing.
But you'll never get my "Love"
Unless you heartily say "You're my love."

How is that? (Even if a Mockery ...)

by Iqbal Ansari

Those who will trust
are the ones who'll bust;
Those who will cheat
are the ones shall be deemed fit.
Those who will enjoy destruction,
be the ones deemed to have reached perfection!
Those who will live on corruption
shall be regarded as reaching anointment;
Those who will live honestly,
are the ones who'll die promptly.
Those who will live by greed,
shall be deemed as living by creed;
Those who will blunder and plunder;
shall be deemed not going asunder.

Songs of Freedom

FOR more than 20 years, materials of remarkable documentary film on Bangladesh's war of independence remained stored in a New York basement. These have now been discovered by Tareq Masud and his wife Catherine, a result of their dogged persistence, deep respect for the ideals of the liberation war and a determination to complete an unfinished job.

The film was originally shot by Lear Levin, an American film-maker. In early 1971, when he was in his early 20s, Levin was attracted to Bangladesh's war of independence after reading about it in American newspapers. The war was already in its sixth or seventh month. Major US newspapers often reported about the plight of millions of refugees who had crossed into India. The gruesome stories of atrocities committed by the occupying Pakistani army were published every now and then. Some accounts of the resistance offered by the Mukti Bahini also appeared sporadically. There was a growing support inside the US for the Bengali partisans. The liberal wing of the Democratic Party and many others, who were suspicious about the US government's military links with Pakistan, actively opposed the Nixon administration's silent endorsement of the genocide in East Bengal. Levin felt the war in Bangladesh offered him an opportunity to record on celluloid the making of a remarkable story — the resistance of a people against brute force and their desire for freedom. He was also confident that once made, the film would be a hot favorite of the US TV networks.

Levin's one-man film crew left for West Bengal in September 1971. He spent more than two months in the war zone, first covering the refugee camps, and then inside Bangladesh where the war was fast moving to its final months. But what attracted Levin most was the activity of a cultural group organized at that time to inspire the freedom fighters and the people at the refugee camps. It was called "Muktijoddha Shilpi Sangstha", the Association of Artists — Freedom Fighters. Levin was deeply impressed by

the commitment of the members of the group and their total faith in a cause that often seemed remote. He also formed close friendship with many of the artists. For two months, he followed them all over the place: in the refugee camps along the borders, deep inside Bangladesh in Mukti Bahini camps, journeying with them by bus to local schools for public performances, crossing a river in a country boat, or walking with them for miles along the earthen road.

Together with Catherine, his American wife — who is also a film-maker and graphic artist, he began telephoning dozens of Levis. The list was endless and the search was most frustrating until they ended up with a Levin who was also a film-maker. Could this be him? Or is it just a coincidence? Anxious, tense and dying not to be disappointed, Tareq gathered enough courage to call him.

Levin, taking the call from the other side, was surprised,

them. It will no longer be Levin's responsibility.

"Yes, yes," Tareq and Catherine said, still recovering from the joy of discovering a long lost treasure. They immediately rushed to a lawyer to sign and seal the deal. After a quick browse through the material, they realized there was more than 20 hours of top quality unprocessed footage. To edit them into a full length film — say, of 90 minutes or more — will require several months of hard work and thousands of dollars. "We'll think about money later, let's start the work first," they decided without fully realizing the difficult task ahead.

Before they could embark on their grand mission, Tareq and Catherine decided to edit a quick short version of the film basically to raise funds from Bangladeshis living in the USA. The two, together with Bablu, a cinematography student in New York, worked day and night and finished a 30-minute short version of the film for a preview in March 1992 at an Independence Day function in New York. Fittingly, they called the film "Mukfir Gaan" — the Song of Freedom.

For those who fought in the liberation war, "Mukfir Gaan" is a nostalgic return journey to 1971. It is a rare document that faithfully records the courage and dream of a struggling nation, the painful and slow trek towards freedom. Through the campaign of the cultural activists, who were as much freedom fighters as those who stood guard at their bunkers and ambushed enemy positions, the film brings to life a tumultuous time and recounts the pains and glory of a heroic struggle. The songs the artists sing are inspirational.

The puppet shows they perform at Mukti Bahini camps bring a rare smile on the weary faces of the ragtag soldiers. The private conversations, interjected in between the songs and other war time activities, also records their personal agony, the uncertainty about their loved ones left behind, the dilemmas they faced daily. We see them crossing into Bangladesh from the other side of the border in a country boat. As they step down one by one, they stoop low, touch the muddy earth and smile with a sense of satisfaction. Yes, this

perhaps even moved, for being asked about his work done more than two decades ago. Yes, he said, he had worked on a film about Bangladesh in 1971 but it was never finished. Besides, he has lost all tracks of events in Bangladesh.

"All know is that people in Bangladesh are now opposed to the liberation war. I understand the fundamentalists are in power there. If they come to know about this film, they may even chase me up to New York," Levin said, sounding utterly serious.

New York Memo

S G Hasan

Unfortunately, Levin had to return to New York in November, only days before the war entered its final phases. He had already spent all his savings, and his plan for a quick documentary was already in jeopardy. Within weeks after his return, the scenario in Bangladesh dramatically changed. A full-scale war started between India and Pakistan and the resistance movement reached a new peak. On 16 December, the country became free. Levin realized it was already too late for him to process hours of raw footage shot in Bangladesh and then sell them to the networks. He also had no money and there was no sponsor. Disappointed and heart broke, Levin decided to neatly pack the reels and store them in the basement of his New York apartment. He soon forgot about them.

The next chapter of this remarkable story begins almost 20 years later, in January 1992. Tareq Masud, now a resident of New York, decided to look for a film made in 1971 by an American film-maker. As a film society movement activist and short film-maker, he is pretty well known in Dhaka among film enthusiasts. His short film "Adam Surat" on the life and works of painter Sultan has brought him kudos from home and abroad. Himself a freedom fighter, he had heard people talk about the work done by Levin, but no one could properly identify him or give a clue about his whereabouts. Somehow the name Levin stuck in his mind: that's all he knew, no first name, no middle name.

WRITE TO MTA

Respecting your Partner

Someone once told me "I love my wife, but more than that I respect her". I was struck by that and had asked him what did he mean by that. According to him, love is very subjective and can have many different kinds of expressions, but if respect forms the basis of any relationship then it is much more tangible and real.

Working with clients as a marriage counsellor, I have come across many couples who become disillusioned with each other and do not understand why. I have also received many letters from couples or individuals who have written that they find their spouses irritating and uninteresting. One woman openly admitted that whatever her husband said annoyed her, and though she realized later on that he was right, she never apologised. What has happened is, knowingly, or unknowingly, one of the partners, or both have lost respect for each other. They find nothing to admire or appreciate in each other and have fallen into a trap where all they do is humiliate or deride the other and the relationship. In broaching this subject I have had many disagreements with couples who often say, if one is married to a person what is there to respect, after all one has to live together, anyway. Other comments have been, "Respect? I have not thought about it or I used to respect him but now I don't, to such extreme cases as she does not deserve my respect anymore". Many also say that they have not given the matter much thought. Let us see what really happens.

When two people are attracted to each other, it is usually because there is something unique that a person has found in the other, it could be physical, intellectual or social. I am, of course, talking about marriage by choice. When they decide to marry each other it is because they have found certain qualities in each other, which according to them, will form the basis of a permanent relationship. This sense of worth which a partner gives to each other is respect, and which, if made to last, adds that special meaning to a marriage. In arranged marriages couples come with certain expectations and adjust to each other's needs. Over time they learn to love and respect each other. Unfortunately, as the years go by, couples forget what they admired in each other and they start to pick on the negative sides of the other. It starts with slight subtle remarks and without realizing it, and a time comes when they insult each other openly. One of the reasons this happens is that couples do not attach much importance to

this fact of the relationship. An illustration of a husband putting his wife down, and what we hear very often is:

Mrs X: I am so tired, the children were very naughty and did not want to go to bed, the maid ...

Mr X: You should see what I have to do all day at the office, while you sit at home and give orders, I have to work and earn a living.

In our culture, women are taught to respect their husbands. Our religion and also the law dictate it. Therefore, disrespect towards the spouse usually manifests itself in the husband showing disrespect towards his wife, unless in special and unusual cases when the wife feels superior to him because she has more money, or is more qualified academically.

One also hears conversations such as "All my wife is interested in is sarees and jewellery", or "Please don't talk about politics with my wife, she will not understand". On the other hand, I have also heard some wives openly humiliate their husbands by saying "So and so has such a good job, why can't you try and get one too" or "My friend's husband buys such nice gifts for her, you never give me anything". These are thoughtless and unkind comments, which do not help build anything but rather destroys one's self image. The husband forgets that even if his wife does not work outside the home, she works all day to make life easier for him and deserves appreciation and respect for it. The wife, on the other hand, should be sensitive to the weaknesses of her husband and not put him down just because he does not earn as much as her friend's husband does.

As I said before, love can be expressed in many ways and can evoke many kinds of reactions, which are not necessarily always positive, but respecting each other can only have a positive feedback: the more you respect the more you get out of the relationship. It enhances each other's self esteem and self image and makes you worthy of each other and the family. Just think about it seriously, in your spouse that you points. There must be something in your spouse that you respect and admire, build on that special quality. Bring out the best in him or her, that is the challenge. It needs effort and work and does not happen automatically, but believe me, it is really worth it.

— Shaheen Anam