

Dhaka Day by Day

Beware the Trojan Horse

by S. Bari

In rubber sandals and printed kurta, Fritz Bennewitz looks more like a tourist from the sixties than a candidate for the title of "World Famous Director." He likes it that way. Working on a production of Brecht's "Man Equals Man," which opened in Dhaka last week, Bennewitz is 65, is allergic to claims of celebrity.

"Why do you want to interview a director? Nobody is interested in directors," he quips.

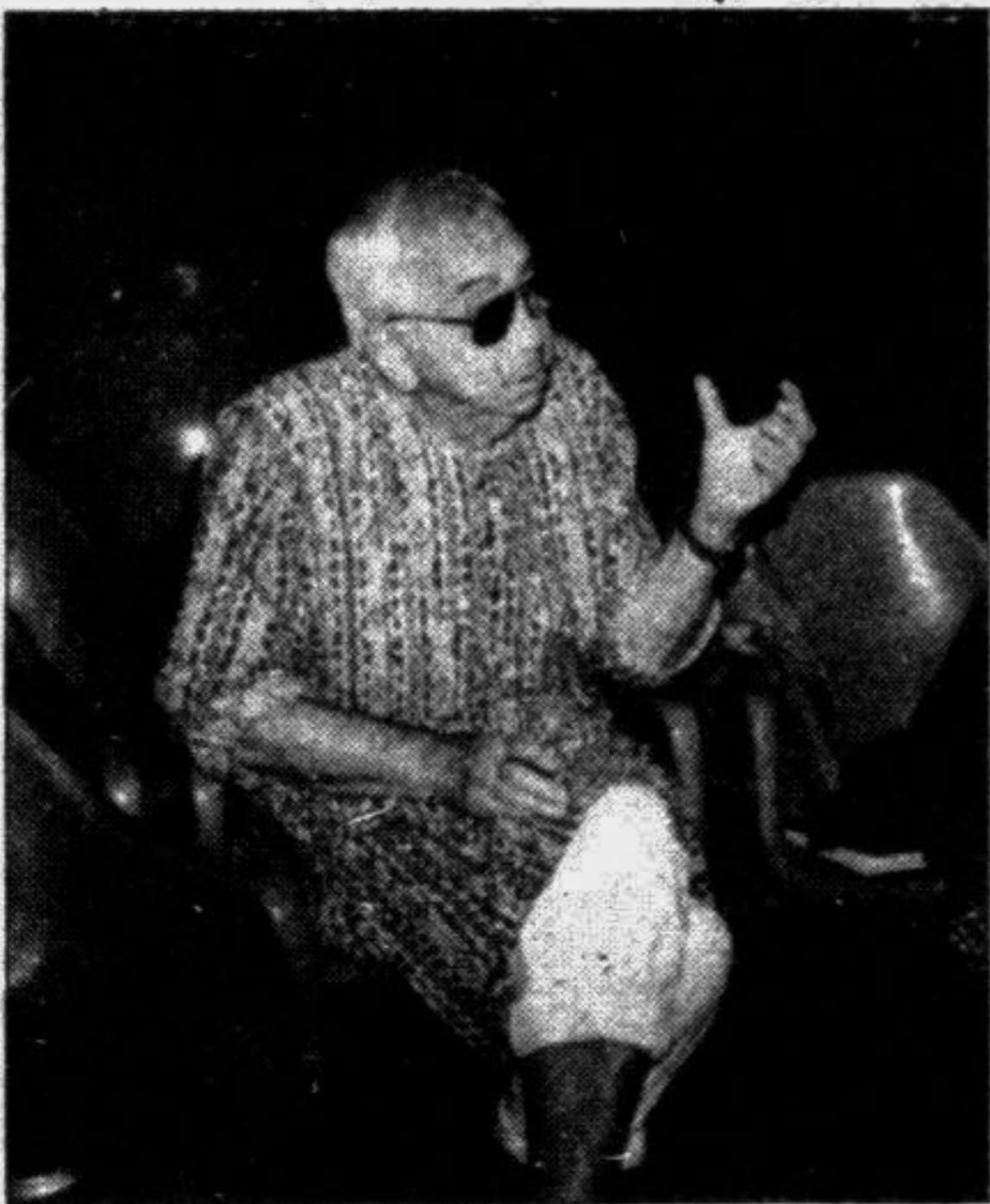
"People are interested in actors." He dwells obsessively on the negligibility of his part. "These actors I work with have other jobs. They come to rehearse after long hours at work and still give their best. They are the ones who do all the hard work," he insists, "not me."

Bennewitz has enormous respect for the theatre of Bangladesh. "The theatre tradition here is very young," he says, "but it has a strong reputation in the international arena as a vibrant tradition. At this relatively young age, Bangladeshi theatre has secured a seat for itself on the Executive Committee of the International Theatre Institute." This seat is a very prestigious issue. Last winter, Bangladesh hosted the annual conference of the ITI.

Bennewitz, a German, has directed Brecht's plays in far-flung corners of the world. He cautions against the wrong kind of cultural interchange. "Directors in Germany ask me, 'What are you going to teach?' and I answer, 'that I am not in Bangladesh to teach, but to learn.'"

The voluble director believes the road to sharing cultural themes has to be trod carefully. "I'm not simply bringing Brecht to Dhaka — when I go back, through these exchanges, my own countrymen will learn to look at Brecht differently," says Bennewitz.

The reason Bennewitz is wary of cultural exchange, he explains, is "because it is sometimes a Trojan horse. This kind of import can swerve towards neo-colonialism, given the right amount of disequilibrium. If it is not two-way." To the CNN-bombarded masses, that makes sense.



The actors and actresses for the local "Man Equals Man" production have been taken from a number of theatre groups, which makes coordination that much harder. The play has been translated by Asaduzzaman Noor. Bennewitz is all praise for the makeshift troupe. "There is an extraordinary potential here," he says, "almost without limitations." Nearly 40 years of experience make him well-qualified to judge.

He does not think adaptations from other languages are half-breeds. "It is not the costumes that make a play Bengalized, or the stage setting, it is the actors themselves. You don't necessarily have to transform it to a social setting."

What are the difficulties actors face here? Bennewitz, as usual, coats constructive criticism with a great deal of praise. "Theatre workers here deal with a lot of obstacles," he acknowledges. "There is no stock of props, few full-time actors."

"More importantly, they face a contradiction in their tradition. Your theatre reaches back very far, and it is originally body-oriented. You can still see this in village drama. On top of this is layered the later development of the Bangla theatre movement, which is very word-oriented. The actor teeters between the original nature of Bangla theatre and this newer demand. This can be a drawback. Bangla theatre has lost a lot of the rules of folk theatre, which in a sense is total theatre."

The trick is, according to Bennewitz, to find a genuine identity. "When Bangladeshi actors find that, and very often they do, they are true actors. This is why the theatre is so alive here," the director believes. Bennewitz has a feel for the language of drama, and he knows when the right notes are being hit. He illustrates his point with an illuminating example.

"I don't speak Bengali," he grins, "but believe me, when an actor makes a mistake in his dialogue, no one else notices — I do. I can tell if he or she has so much as dropped a comma."



Awami League President Sheikh Hasina addressing a group of people from Faridpur at her residence yesterday who joined her party recently. — Star photo

15000 children die of eye complications every year

Eminent ophthalmologists of the country have suggested integrated programmes under government initiatives to detect and cure eye patients for preventing rising cases of blindness.

"About 1.25 lakh people of the country, 30,000 of them children, are becoming blind every year, because of malnutrition," said Prof Mustafizur Rahman, Director of the country's largest 300-bed eye hospital — Islamia Eye Hospital.

An ophthalmologist of international repute, Dr Mustafiz told UNB that nearly half of the 30,000 children die every year of eye complications caused by malnutrition.

About 60,000 people become blind for cataract, 30,000 for malnutrition and the rest for other causes like infection, injury — agricultural trauma — mostly from paddy sheaf, glaucoma and diabetes.

Dr Rahman put the number of blind in the country at nearly 10-15 lakh, one third of whom could be prevented from being blind or be cured with proper treatment and creating awareness.

"We have hardly 250 ophthalmologists for about 12 crore people — one doctor for 5 lakh people against one for 40,000 in America and one for 2.5 lakh in India."

Acute patients of the country are getting treatment to some extent, but thousands of asymptomatic patients who are in latent condition with glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and other complications are getting blind without treatment, the eye specialist said.

One National Institute of Ophthalmology run by the government, privately run Islamia Eye Hospital, eight eye hospitals run by Bangladesh National Society for the Blind (BNSB), two eye hospitals of Lions International, 13 eye departments in 13 medical college hospitals and few mobile eye camps arranged by NGOs are not sufficient to meet the demand, he added.

Another noted eye specialist, Prof Syed Modasser Ali of IPGMR (PG Hospital), said more than 100 people were going blind everyday, and more than half of them are children who die within a few weeks of

being blinded.

"Cataract, vitamin 'A' deficiency (xerophthalmia), agricultural and industrial trauma, corneal ulcer — mainly caused by fungal and bacterial infection and glaucoma — are the main causes of blindness in our country," he said.

Ignorance and wrong treatment are also among the main causes of blindness, he added.

An author of 10 books, including "Community Ophthalmology," Modasser Ali said not more than 2 per cent of the total population had access to eyecare as most ophthalmologists are available in the main cities.

Appreciating the role of NGOs, particularly BNSB, in combating blindness, he said more private entrepreneurs should come forward to develop eyecare facilities.

Prof Ali urged the government to withdraw taxes on all eye medicines and equipment like India and Pakistan to promote private investment and cheap eyecare facilities for millions of rural people.

Consensus to eliminate violence

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Education yesterday reached a consensus on elimination of violence from the campus in the greater interest of education, reports UNB.

The unanimous decision was taken in its meeting held at Sangsad Bhaban with Education Minister Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar in the chair, officials said.

1 killed, 2 hurt as bomb blasts in Khulna

KHULNA, Mar 8: A middle-aged man was killed and two others were injured in an explosion while making bombs at a village in Patkasa, Thana on Friday, reports UNB.

According to police, Abdul Aziz (35), Huq Gaz (22) and Sabur (37) were hired to make bombs in a house at village Dehuti to forcibly occupy a shrimp field.

Federal Tax Assistance For Americans

On March 14-15 a specialist from the Internal Revenue Service will visit Dhaka to assist those with United States Federal tax filing obligations. Call the US Embassy Consular section at 884700, ext 794 or 273 for more information.

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A ten-day etching exhibition of artist Monirul Islam began at Shilpangan yesterday.

— Star photo

HERE and THERE

BWF

Bangladesh Workers Federation (BWF) in a statement Monday demanded the formation of a tripartite council with representatives from national trade union federation, employers and relevant government ministries to scrutinize the report of the Wages Commission.

President of the BWF, M A Mottalib in the statement said until any decision on the report is made 60 per cent of the dearness allowance of the workers should be paid and retrenchment of labourers should be halted.

BWF also supported the SKOP called 48-hour strike programme.

Dhirendranath Dutta Parishad

A special meeting of the Shaheed Dhirendranath Dutta Smritirakkha Parishad was held on Sunday at 5.30 pm at the residence of Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid.

The meeting presided over by Justice Kemaluddin Hossain was addressed among others by Shawkat Osman, Poet Shamsur Rahman, Dr Salahuddin Ahmed, Justice KM Sobhan, Prof Rafiqul Islam, Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid, Prof Mustafa Noorul Islam, Rahat Khan, Santosh Gupta, Minar Mansur and Arma Gun.

GDF, Dhaka

Gender Relations and Development Forum (GDF, Dhaka), a forum of 16 Dhaka based NGOs, held a rally Monday in front of the National Museum to observe the International Women's Day.

Lions Club of Dhaka Progoti Greater

Lion Engineer Mohammad Nurul Islam has been made Director of the Lions Club of Dhaka Progoti Greater for the year 1993-94.

Islam, a Divisional Engineer (Phones) at the Central Exchange, Ramna, Dhaka, has been working for the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board for the last 21 years.

Bangladesh Scouts

A nine-member executive body of Bangladesh Scouts Parliamentary Association was formed on March 1 with Abu Yusuf Md Khalidur Rahman MP as President and Abdul Matin Khasru MP as Secretary General.



Tuesday

- 5:00 Opening announcement Al-Quran Programme summary
- 5:10 News in Bangla
- 5:20 Recitation from the Bible
- 5:25 Ezo Para Shikhi
- 6:00 Ma O Shishur Swasthya
- 6:30 Open University
- 7:05 Nazrul songs
- 8:00 News in Bangla
- 8:40 Drama
- 10:00 News in English
- 10:30 Parliament round up
- 10:35 Film show: ENG
- 11:30 Khabar /The News
- 11:40 Tomorrow's programme summary
- 11:45 Closing

Weather

Dry weather to prevail

By Staff Correspondent

Weather forecast by the Met office for the next 24 hours commencing 6 am today (Tuesday) says, dry weather will prevail over the country while the day temperature may remain nearly unchanged across the country.

The maximum temperature of 32.0 degree Celsius was reported from Teknaf and Jessore yesterday (Monday) and the minimum of 11.0 degree was reported from Rangamat.

The sun sets today (Tuesday) at 6:05 pm and rises tomorrow (Wednesday) at 6:13 am.

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

Cities/ Towns	Temperature in degree Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	9 am	6 pm
Dhaka	30.8	14.2	54	41
Chittagong	30.0	16.2	50	49
Rajshahi	31.8	11.5	40	33
Khulna	30.7	12.8	52	47
Cox's Bazar	30.5	19.6	51	54
Sylhet	30.5	16.0	66	52
Dinajpur	31.0	14.8	77	44
Barisal	31.0	13.8	67	39

Obituary

Abu Taher Khandkar, private secretary to the chairman, Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) died of heart failure early hours of Sunday at the Suhrawardi Hospital in city. He was 46, says a press release.

The deceased left behind his wife, one daughter, four brothers and sisters and a host of relatives and friends to mourn his death.

Commemorative stamp on Haji Shariat Ullah

Bangladesh Post Office will issue a commemorative postage stamp of Taka 2 denomination and a first day cover valued Taka 5 tomorrow on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Haji Shariat Ullah, the founder of Farajil Movement, reports BSS.

Monir's solo painting show opens

By Staff Correspondent

The solo exhibition of the well-known artist Monirul Islam, opened yesterday at Shilpangan, Dhanmondi.

The exhibit comprised 67 pieces of water colours and etchings, with prices ranging from Taka 6,000 to Taka 20,000. Patrons and art lovers attended the opening function.

Speaking at the inauguration, Mr Zillur Rahman Siddiqui said that Monir had done a good job delineating the preoccupations of people. Despite having lived abroad for years, the artist had not lost touch with his motherland.

Living in Spain, Siddiqui added, Monir had surpassed the skill and thought content of many of the past and contemporary artists and writers of Bengal.

Siddiqui continued to say that the fact that 17 paintings by Zainul Abedin had been stolen by a programmed method, as is done overseas, proved the fact that there was a growing appreciation of art in Bangladesh.

Justice Ataur Rahman speaking at the same function added his views that he was proud of the fact that a painter from Bangladesh had established himself abroad.

Justice Ishtiaq Ahmed, speaking extempore, said that it would be a pity, in the process of the brain drain, the wrong works of art went abroad, simply if the wrong paintings had been selected or if painters who deserved to go abroad, did not get a chance to do so.

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