

It is seldom appreciated by the government in power in Bangladesh what a lot of people out there, in different parts of the world, keep thinking about helping this country, especially in the field of trade, commerce and investments.

Some send us signed letters, full of innovative ideas, which we are only too happy to publish, although, we suspect, they rarely get the attention they deserve from the authorities. A few make long-distance calls — the last one was from New York — asking when their communications would "see the light of the day", a favourite expression among writers to newspaper editors.

Then, once in a while, we get unsigned notes and letters, even documents and copies of confidential studies which we read carefully, wondering if we can use them and how. Since, in many cases, we are unable to establish their authenticity, they rarely get into print.

This is hardly the case with a document which has just landed on my desk.

It is an impressive brochure, marked "The Economist Conferences: Government Roundtables", which lists as many as 11 such seminars cum workshops of government leaders, business entrepreneurs (foreign and locals), investors and experts from different fields.

All the roundtables, scheduled between this month and late 1994, organised by the noted British weekly, cover these countries: Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan, China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia.

One country is missing from the list: Bangladesh.

The concerned reader who has sent me a copy of the brochure has pasted a note on the booklet, which, appropriately enough, asks: "Is the Bangladesh Government sleeping? Who will wake them up?"

Since it sounds like a plea to *The Daily Star* to do something about it, we reproduce the cover of the Economist brochure, together with the note from the reader.

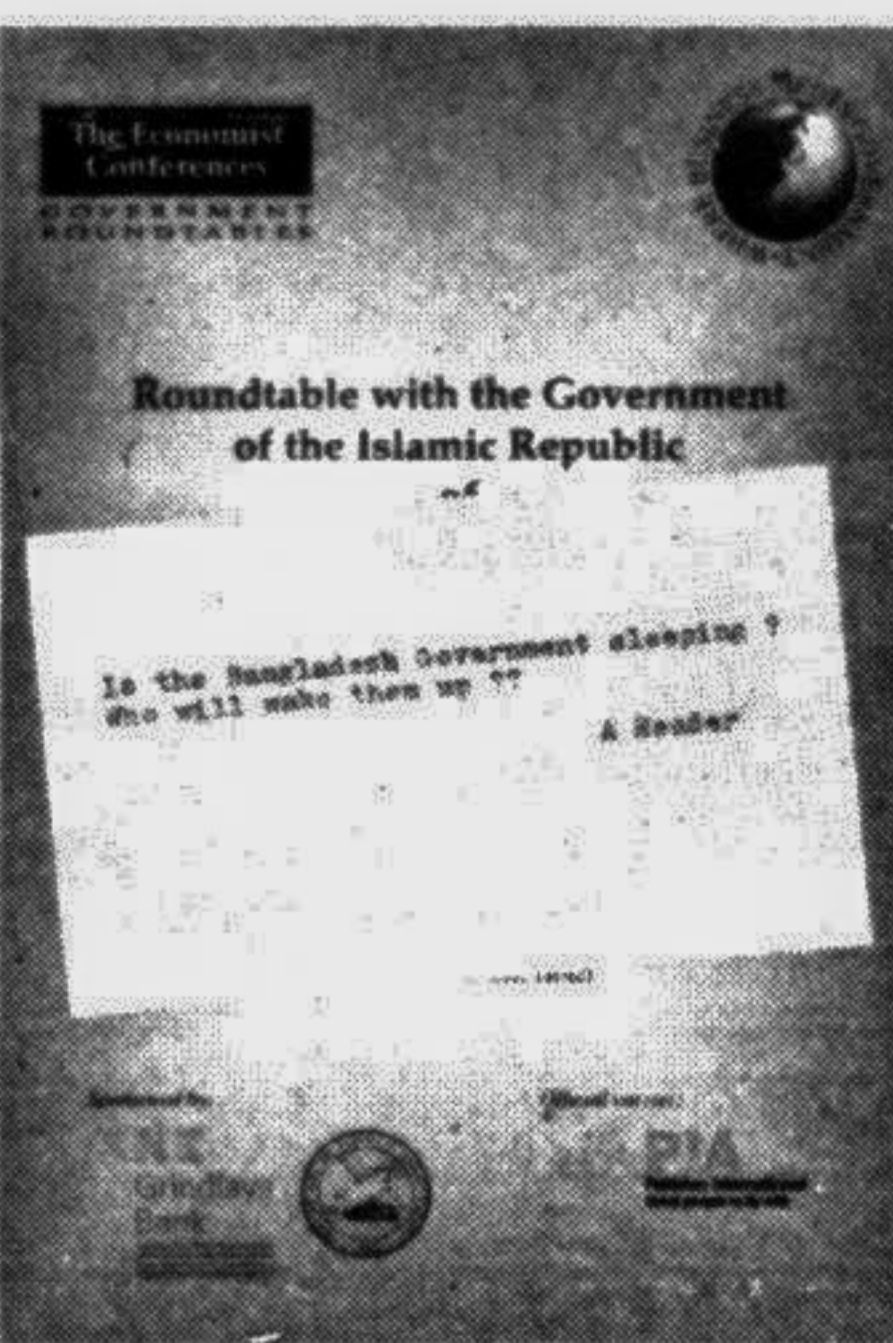
The brochure spells out the theme of each roundtable in simple precise terms, without the use of cliché or ex-

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

travagant phrases. In this context, what the brochure says about the objective of the roundtable on Pakistan seems particularly relevant to the situation in Bangladesh. Let me quote a couple of appropriate paragraphs.

"Foreign exchange restrictions have been relaxed for all individuals, and permission to maintain foreign currency deposits is now granted. Similarly, broad reforms in the banking and financial sectors have stimulated savings and boosted domestic invest-



ment. Privatisation of public-sector banks and industrial enterprises is moving ahead, opening new investment opportunities in these areas.

"Despite these changes, the volume of new international investment im-

plemented has been disappointing so far. Our Roundtable will convene at a critical time, as Pakistan appears poised on the edge of an expansion and broadening the economy on the base laid by the recent reforms. At the Roundtable, senior executives will be able to probe for themselves the depth of the commitment to reform and its future direction through frank dialogue with Pakistan's leading decision-makers. Multinational firms which are reviewing the prospects for market entry will be able to ask questions about where this nation of 110 million people is headed — and the opportunities it offers to the worldwide business community."

If one substitutes Pakistan by Bangladesh, you have a ready-made theme for a roundtable on this country.

One problem is, the schedule of the Economist's roundtables for this year and next is all full. Maybe we should look for another prime-mover, perhaps the *International Herald Tribune* which has also been organising such seminars with notable success.

Talking about sponsors, we have noted that at least two of these Economist roundtables enjoy the support of two well-known banks. It is the Thai Farmers Bank in the case of the Bangkok seminar. In the case of Pakistan, it is an institution which incidentally also has an impressive network in Bangladesh. Yes, it is ANZ Grindlays Bank.

W E, in Bangladesh, are not short on ideas. We are not short on experts, not even of dependable researchers who can prepare studies for major conferences on contemporary issues. We even have an under-used international Conference Centre.

What we seem to lack is a mechanism that takes the responsibility of or-

ganising the kind of roundtable. The Economist has been setting up in as many as 11 countries. Of course, the moment such a mechanism is proposed, there will be some in-fighting among at least four ministries to control it, the Finance, Planning, Industries and Foreign Affairs.

There may be no need to copy the Economist Roundtable. We can design our own and open its doors to foreign experts, entrepreneurs, representatives of aid agencies and diplomats speaking for donor nations.

During a long conversation with this paper, nearly two years ago, noted economist Rehman Sobhan had suggested that the Aid to Bangladesh Consortium Meeting, normally held in Paris, should take place in Dhaka and that the main document on the needs of Bangladesh should be prepared by our own government, perhaps by the Ministry of Planning.

We, in the *Star*, liked the two ideas. Unfortunately, former Finance Minister Syeduzzaman, the other expert taking part in the discussion, did not go for Prof Sobhan's proposal. I am afraid, it did not make much of an impact on our friends at the local office of the World Bank (WB). However, I must recall with gratitude, that some 25 copies of the *Star*, carrying the conversation with the two experts, were taken to the French capital by the WB office and distributed among participants at the Aid Club meeting.

Perhaps what we should do is to organise a pre-Aid Club meeting in Dhaka, a meeting that, with international participation, takes up some of the issues discussed at the Economist Roundtable, thus going beyond the framework of foreign aid and grants.

It is too late for such a meeting this year — the Aid to Bangladesh Club meeting is just round the corner — and so we should probably think of this for 1994.

HE quote of the week "God has given us one mouth but two ears. So, we should listen twice as much as we talk."

A Chinese saying quoted by the Director General of UNESCO, Dr Frederico Mayor.

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

My Friend Mamun Mahmud

by Dr. Habibuz Zaman

I can distinctly recall the occasion, when I last met Mamun. This was several weeks before the Pakistan-army crackdown of March 1971. He had come to Dhaka from Rajshahi to attend a conference of Deputy Inspector-Generals of Police. I had bumped into him in the rotunda on the second floor of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Mamun had come to see Enam Ahmed Chowdhury, who along with his father, Giasuddin Ahmed Chowdhury, had been injured in an accident. While the accident turned out to be fatal for Giasuddin Chowdhury, Enam recovered within days.

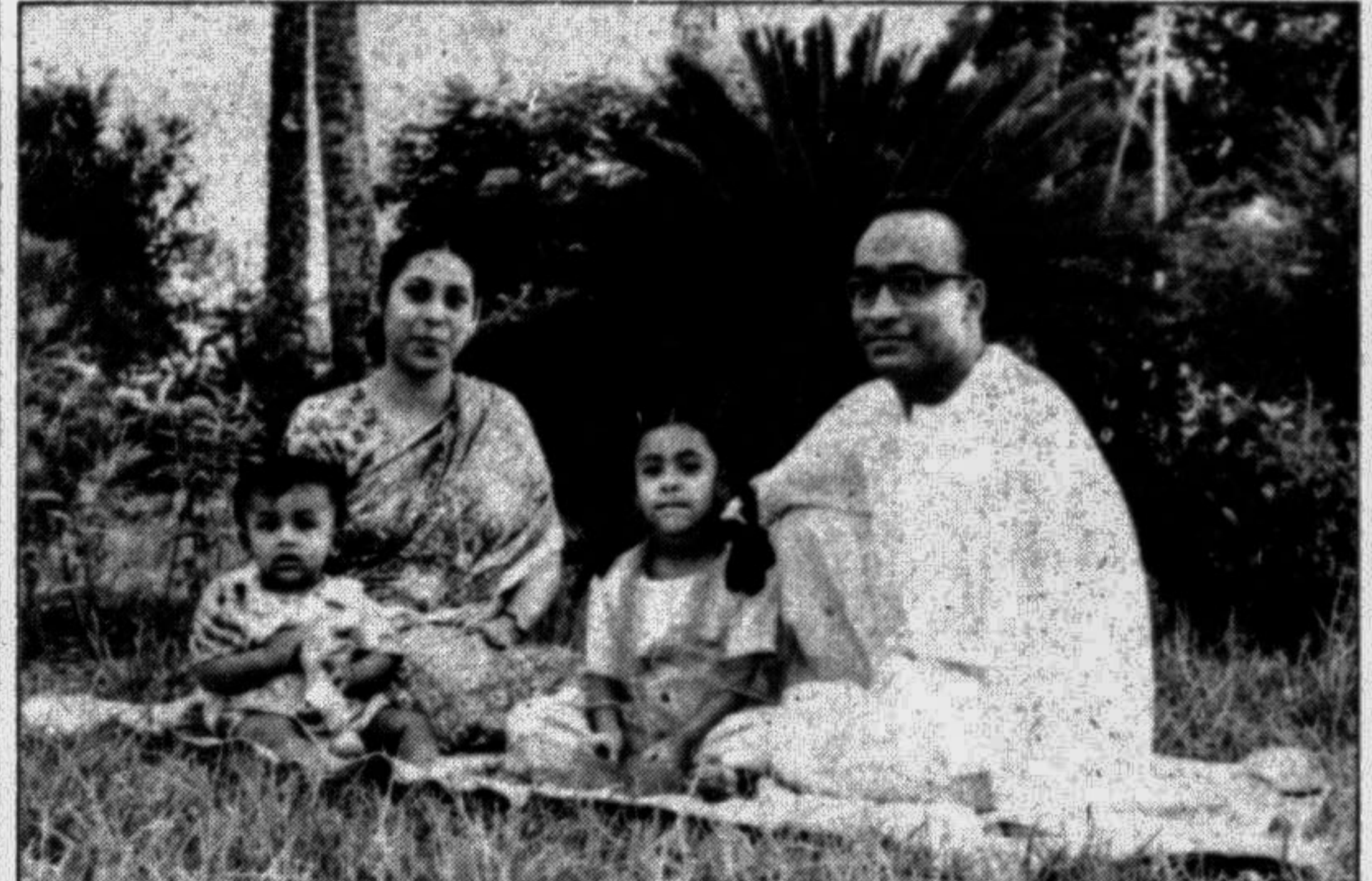
I had gone to visit my father-in-law, who was convalescing following cataract surgery. After seeing our patient, we had stood in the rotunda chatting for a while. I had realized that Mamun's stay in Dhaka was going to be a short one and there was no possibility of an extended 'adda'. So we were making the most of this unexpected

from Rajshahi — since he had responded to the 'Pakistan-army crackdown of March 25, 1971. According to unconfirmed non-official accounts, Mamun had been done to death within the Rajshahi cantonment. Reportedly, his wife, Mosfeqa had since moved heaven and earth, including generals of the Pakistan army, in search of her husband. Even after two and a half years of his absence, she had not reconciled to the fact that Mamun was no longer alive. She had not given up hope. Understandably in October 1973, she had hurried to Delhi for a visit to Ajmeer Sharif seeking the blessings and intervention of Khawja Baba for the safe return of her husband.

Mosfeqa's father passed away within months of his return to Dhaka. For several years, Javed and Zeba had grown up under the affectionate care of their mother and

Dhaka University after partition in August 1974 for a Master's degree in International Relations. That is when I came to know him closely during visits to the Fazlul Haq Muslim Hall Extension on the west side of the pond, and in the playing fields of the War Club. Mamun had later moved to live with his parents in Purana Palta. This had made it easier for us to meet more frequently.

Mamun belonged to the 1951 batch of the Police Service of Pakistan, which included Salahuddin Ahmed, S M Ahsan, M Amrullah Islam, Nurul Islam, Hassan Ahmed and K G Mohiuddin from the erstwhile East Pakistan. His surviving colleagues speak of him with genuine love and respect. He was a great companion and a valued and dependable friend. He belonged to a breed of senior police officers, who did us proud, because of their unflinching integrity, honesty and strength of character — not uncommon both before and for some years after



chance meeting. I recall we were joined for a while by a well-known, lawyer-politician, who had held important positions in the Provincial and Central Cabinets. Naturally, our conversation turned to the political arena. What would be the consequence of a lack of understanding between the victorious Awami League and the Peoples' Party of Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto? In my somewhat naive understanding of the political process, I remember I had asked the politicians as to why the Awami League should give up the opportunity of ruling the whole of Pakistan, rather than be content with guiding the destiny of only one part. Though I was unable to provoke a response, my understanding of the "6-point demand" of the Awami League did not envisage an immediate separation of the two parts of the country.

Little did I realize what was in store for us, and how wrong I was in hoping that the Pakistani military junta was ready to transfer power to the Awami League! Mamun seemed thoughtful and concerned but had remained quiet throughout. We had parted company that evening without the faintest idea that we would never meet again. Mamun had disappeared

grandmother. Mosfeqa, being an only child, her parents had given their full-time attention to Mamun's family, more so after the tragedy of 1971. The grandmother, who had outlived their daughter, also passed away in recent years. Happily both Zeba and Javed have had a good education and are well settled in life at Dhaka. We can be proud of them.

Mamun was the elder of only two children, both boys, of Dr. Wahiduddin and Begum Shamsun Nahar Mahmud, one of the best known Bengali women educationists and social workers of her time. Dr. Mahmud was a senior government servant and had risen to the rank of Surgeon-General to the Government of East Pakistan. Mamun had acquired many of the gentlemanly qualities of his father — calm, composed, soft-spoken, friendly and helpful — almost never hurting the feelings of others. I have not heard any harsh comment against him from anyone, who knew him more closely than I did. I dare say he had a whole array of friends and well-wishers!

Mamun had done his undergraduate studies at the Presidency College, Calcutta and the Aligarh Muslim University. He joined the

Partition. How sad such officers are rarely seen these days!

Mamun was a sportsman par excellence. He played football, hockey and cricket well and to his heart's content. He had maintained a slim, agile physique and a keen, sensitive mind. Like many others, whose parents were in government service, Mamun was no revolutionary. He certainly was not trained to take to arms against the government he was serving. No doubt he had a clear understanding of the best interests of the Bengales at heart. He was trapped, like so many others, and killed in cold blood by the ruthless Pakistani hordes.

As we remember Mamun Mahmud and countless others, a full 22 years after his sudden death in the prime of his life and maturity, we sadly take note of the prevailing unhappy circumstances in our country. Our political leaders have been arguing and fighting among themselves endlessly and aimlessly. They seem to have lost a sense of proportion and responsibility to the nation, slowly but inexorably pushing the country towards chaos and anarchy. The widows and orphans of 1971 can derive but little consolation from what we

Continued on page 11

When Cowboys Become Teary-eyed Poets

COWBOY Brynn Thiessen is dressed in a black cowboy hat, blue jeans, leather boots and a belt with a big shiny buckle. His nearest neighbours, not counting cattle, live several miles away. He talks and walks with a certain swing; his actions are quick and his body strong.

On the outside, he fits the movie image of a cowboy perfectly. But that's about as far as the resemblance goes.

Thiessen is a poet. When asked why he chose to be a cowboy, he smiles. "The same reason why lettuce grows toward the sun — nourishment." He twists his long, waxed moustache.

Thiessen's knack for poetry has made him something of a star at the annual Maple Creek Cowboy Poetry Gathering and similar events across the prairies of western Canada and the United States. He started writing as a kid and says poetry just came naturally. Working in wide open spaces close to land and animals provides the opportunity to reflect on life, he says.

Ranchers like Thiessen are not unusual. Writing and reading poetry is a flourishing pastime among cowboys and their female counterparts.

In the past five years, cowboy poetry gatherings have become annual events in many small rural towns, inspiring many ranchers to try their hand at writing for the first time.

Last summer, cowboys came from miles around to get up on stage and share their latest songs, stories and poems in Maple Creek's legion hall. Wooden chairs creaked, and the faint sounds and smells of beef, potatoes and pies being cooked came in from the background. Sometimes the microphone screeched or kids forgot their lines, but it was all part of the fun.

Audience members smiled, laughed or cried to hear stories so familiar they could be their own — helping a neighbour fight at grass fire all night long, going out early in the

The Marlborough Man died of cancer. His famous cigarette advertisements live on, but North American cowboys are proving it is time for the stereotyped image of the cold, silent, gun-sliding cowboy to die too. Modern cowboys find writing poetry to be much more their style.

Jill Forrester writes from Maple Creek, Canada



In the world of the cowboy Gary Cooper as marshal in the film High Noon

morning to help with the birth of a calf, or watching a daughter learning to herd cattle on her horse.

Thiessen, like all participants, was given only 10 minutes to perform. Organisers stress that everyone, first-timers and seasoned poets alike, get equal time on stage and that it is not a competition.

Thiessen agrees that the gatherings are a time to encourage one another, to make friends, and most importantly, to listen.

The bonds that form between people at gatherings are remarkable, he says, describing the wonder of spending a weekend listening to everyone

from "a kid who's five to a guy who's 75," all sharing their funniest stories and deepest reflections. "Most people have at least one serious poem about themselves, and it will come out here because it's a safe place to do it."

Isolation has forced cowboys to make their own entertainment, so it is not surprising. They have a talent for poetry and story-telling.

Classic sentimental songs like *Home on the Range* laid the foundation for today's twangy, heart-tuggin' Country and Western music, popular around the world. Likewise, small local rodeos where ranchers test their riding and roping skills gave birth to the big tourist-oriented rodeos of today.

The ranchers are quick to point out, however, that many of today's rodeo athletes and country singers are not real cowboys because they have never lived on a ranch.

The blossoming interest in cowboy poetry is a sign that modern rodeos, radio, cinema, television and pop music do not satisfy people's need to tell their own stories and to highlight the uniqueness of their home communities, Thiessen argues.

Organisers hope cowboy poetry gatherings will encourage people to pass on local history and family stories, which they say have been neglected since people turned their attention away from each other and to the television set.

Unlike the popular movie image, they say, cowboys have always had loyal hearts and good senses of humour. Relying on their neighbours for help during branding season or in times of bad weather have made their relationships rich in a way that is unlikely in the city.

Dories Bercham, who ranches, writes poetry and organises the annual gathering in Maple Creek, believes sharing stories helps people to cope with change. Over the past decade rural communities have suffered from drought and dwindling populations. Many women now want to be out on the range rather than in the kitchen, and this is also straining families.

Everyone around Maple Creek knows Bercham for her humorous poems about the life of ranch women. Her most famous poem, called *Somebody*, describes women being blamed when "somebody" does something wrong, yet receiving little credit for their work, when the rest of the family doesn't remember which "somebody" cooked them supper.

Bill Carlson turned to poetry after retiring to the city because of health problems. A former rancher from Montana, he performed at a poetry gathering

near Wood Mountain, a town a few hundred miles from Maple Creek. More than 70 years old, Carlson received so much praise when he shared his poems at the gathering he was inspired to publish his writings, despite never finishing grade school.

Carlson hopes his poetry will help city folk, including animal rights activists often critical of ranchers, understand what raising animals is really like. While recovering in hospital, he told a nurse his poem about the pain of a horse left to die naturally. "As groggy as I was, I said to her:

At last on one damp day's dawn, the strength to rise at last is gone

All day he pounds his head upon the ground

The bottom feet cut trenches, quarter round

No longer can he see the beauty of the azure sky

Because by now the maggots have ate the upper eye

At last he tries for one more breath but can't

God, why all this paranoia about a pet food packing plant?"

The poem left the woman almost in tears, he says.

Carlson is proof that the silent, cold facade of Hollywood cowboys is constricting and unrealistic. "I never shed a tear over nothing in my life," he says, "but when I get to these poetry gatherings those poems can really get me teary-eyed." — GEMINI NEWS

JILL FORRESTER is a Canadian freelance journalist.

Personal Values and Our Society

by KS Nazmul Hasan

A social man is a moral man with built-in personal values in relation to the society. It entails certain beliefs, faiths and principles of words and actions. Values are the things of social life-ideals, customs, institutions, etc. towards which the people of the society have an effective regard. These values may be positive, as cleanliness, freedom, education, etc., or negative, as cruelty, crime or blasphemy. Every age passes with a set of personal values and while certain changes are inevitable, some of its governing principles are the same — that is, while it aims to reform man's interpersonal relations in society, it also strives for certain foundations that is true for every age and every society. Ours is a prismatic society rapidly changing, full of strains and contradictions. It hardly confronts the individuals with a challenge to think things out. As a result the individual changes with the ever chang-

ing society. This would not happen if our society were a stable and progressive one with a certain more or less fixed foundation of principles as well as dynamic outlook. Dynamism involves in keeping pace with changing requirements of the time, that is, it can change, amend, add and reform itself to the required extent and mode best suitable for the maximum social benefit of the individual and society while the foundation of the society remains intact. What Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru spoke of India more than half a century back is quite suggestive for our society even today, "without the dynamic outlook there is stagnation and decay, without some fixed basis of principle there is likely to be disintegration and destruction." Dynamism should be synonymous with all our actions and certain fixed basis of principle should be realised,

assimilated and practiced by all of us so as to ensure integration and growth. Hearing though, we have been failing to make any progress to these directions in the past decades. We attend meetings, seminars and workshops to talk, listen or discuss 'Loss of values in our society'. But the question remains how far we could change ourselves, not to speak of others. We should not be forgetful of the fact that personal values are units of social values. Besides, as far as the individual is concerned his needs and wants are in large measure the determinants of his values.

Honesty and love for others have been and are the foundation of any good society. All other actions and words are the natural outgrowth of it and the guiding principles with the ultimate aim of personal and social welfare. Personality of a person is a prerequisite of his

personal values. Personality is the existence of a person as an embodiment of an assemblage of qualities. The assemblage of qualities involves all the constitutional, mental, emotional, social etc., characteristics of an individual. Without being respectful to other's freedom and responsibility personal life cannot be shared with other persons. The respect of persons for one another is the basis of morality. If we need to be moral we have to respect others. If we need to be respected we have to make personal relations. True it is, we first learn the meaning of personal relations within the family. And we expand our social horizons with our experience in the family.

The expansion is made through communication, that is, the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions or information between and among people and the basis of which is shared feeling. It is

Continued on page 11

WRITE TO MITA

Responsibilities and Reasons

Dear Readers,

I shall continue where I left off last time with the situation of Rana and Sayeed. To refresh your memory, Rana and Sayeed are a young couple who are in the second stage of their marriage. The honeymoon stage is over, they now have new responsibilities, commitments and aspirations. Rana is planning to go back to her career which she had discontinued after the birth of their child. Sayeed is not very happy at the prospect. His reason is that the child will be neglected.

Let us look at what is happening to the couple. They are now in the second stage of their marriage. They have renewed their commitment to each other and are settling down in the pattern of life they have chosen for themselves. This was a marriage by choice, therefore, both know each other very well. Theoretically, there should not be any surprises, or any unexpected developments. Rana has recently announced that she wants to go back to her career. Though Sayeed married a career woman, he is not prepared to accept Rana's decision. There is a contradiction within himself. Sayeed is a reasonable, modern, and a considerate husband. Why then is he complicating things now. What then is happening to Sayeed?

First, even though he married a career woman, he really did not expect her to continue with her career after marriage. Before marriage, he was attracted to the smart, intelligent confident woman and married her for those qualities. Now that the initial phase of unreality is over, he wants her to conform to the stereotype of a traditional wife and mother. He has not learnt to accept her dual role of mother and career woman. He finds a contradiction between the two and is, therefore, giving all kinds of reasons which are not very valid to prevent her.

I had written earlier that often couples choose each other for certain qualities which they no longer find very desirable after the initial euphoria fades and reality sets in. Sayeed now wants a wife who will look after the children be a gracious hostess. He has a preconception of what marriage should be

like, specially after the children come. Unfortunately, this preconception is not shared by Rana who thinks it is very natural for her to go back to work now that the baby is older.

Under these circumstances, what should the couple do. It seems like a stalemate.

Advice to Rana: Your determination to go back to your career is correct. Now the question is how and when you will do that. Remember, you can always disregard your husband's wishes and go right ahead to joint your work. But that is the easy way out. The challenge is to work it out among yourselves and make him see the logic of your action. You must also try to analyse the reason for his resistance to you career. The important point to remember is please do not judge your husband by this one action. Think of his action in the totality of his personality. He must be having many good qualities for which you choose him above everyone else. Build on that, there is a very good chance that he will see your point of view soon.

Advice to Sayeed: Please think about your wife's decision. Don't brush it off because it might have some merit. Perhaps at this stage of your life you might think that your wife should not pursue a career. There might come a time later on when her career might prove to be a valuable asset, both financially and intellectually. The other important thing to remember is even though she might agree to your request to maintain harmony at home, she might resent this decision later on. It might then be too late to retract and she will ultimately blame you for it.

Advice to both: This is a very important stage of your lives. Both of you are trying to assert your personalities and at the same time are trying to adjust to each other's needs and demands. Communicate this feeling to each other. Though this is a serious issue, it is not insurmountable. Weigh the pros and cons of your decisions. Discuss the implication and what this means to the family. I am confident that between the two of you some kind of compromise can be reached.

— Shaheen Anam