

MY WORLD

S. M. Ali

I T was a shattering piece of investigative reporting — incisive, hard-hitting, largely balanced and topical. Produced by BBC-Asia and shown here last week, the 40-minute long programme was presented within days of Thailand being referred to in the most uncomplimentary terms — as a "land of whores" or something to that effect — by a noted dictionary in the West.

The BBC documentary focused on child prostitution, drug addiction and the spread of AIDS in Thailand, not just through a series of discussions and interviews or presentation of statistics. Instead, the viewers were shown teenage prostitutes hiding in cubicles of brothels in Bangkok and Chiangmai, drug addicts taking heroin shots and victims of AIDS lying on deathbeds. One frightening shot followed another, as if we were inside some kind of a purgatory, giving us some rare glimpses of what goes on behind the facade of affluence in this much-praised Southeast Asian country.

To be fair, the documentary also presented a group of social activists, men and women, and even government leaders who were fighting their own battles against the three menace relentlessly, in what looks like a losing war. There was Meechai Viravaidya looking grim and older than he did when we used to see each other a lot in the late sixties. Since then, this internationally known dedicated reformer has performed a remarkable job in helping to bring down the rate of population growth in his country. For Meechai — popularly known as "Mr Condom" — the battle against population explosion has become doubly difficult. This Australian educated Thai has now emerged as a crusader against AIDS and prostitution.

It was good of BBC to bring in Meechai into the programme. However, I was wondering whatever happened to a much-respected Buddhist monk who received the Magsaysay Award sometime in the late sixties for his work against drug addiction, especially among the young. His cure was essentially based on strict discipline of life in the temple and out-door activities. Some say, it was the personality of the monk which made all the difference. Thus, thousands who had fallen victims to drug abuse were freed from this addiction.

FACING these three deadly problems — prostitution, drug abuse and the AIDS — Thailand remains in a mess. But when did it all start? Where do we trace it back to? Paradoxical though it may sound, Thailand

which supposedly professes the Buddhist social norms — a country where virtually all able-bodied young men spend a stipulated time in monasteries — has always maintained a somewhat ambivalent, if not a permissive, position on moral values. So, in the sixties, when US soldiers, fighting in Vietnam, spent weeks in neighbouring Asian cities in what came to be known as R&R (rest and recreation) programme, it was Thailand that opened its door most enthusiastically, combining sex with recreation, tourism with the most blatant exploitation of women, more often than not, of teenage girls brought — or sometimes bought — from northeast provinces of Thailand. Then, there came young refugee girls from war-torn Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia, joining the dark world of sex, drugs and, a decade later, AIDS.

There were people who warned the country of the long term consequences of Thailand's pervasive obsession with tourism, especially with the way it was promoted, say, with sex trips for the Japanese. Among them was the late Pacy Ungkarakorn, the then Governor of the Central Bank who kept alerting his people of the growing social cost of what other officials saw as the economic progress of Thailand.

When we hear our experts hail the progress in Thailand and suggest almost euphorically that it is a model Bangladesh can learn from, I am far from sure if they see the total picture. How many of them are aware of the social cost hidden behind this progress? How many millions of Thais have been marginalised?

So, when we hear experts in Bangladesh hail the progress in Thailand and suggest almost euphorically that it is a model we can learn from, I am far from sure if they can see the total picture. Judging by all the economic indicators

and by what we see in Bangkok and in other parts of the country, the progress in Thailand is indeed phenomenal. But how many of us are aware of the enormous human suffering, the social cost, that remain hidden behind this progress? How many millions have been left out of the economic mainstream and marginalised?

FOR producers of Bangladesh Television (BTV) who have started showing a flicker of interest in development reporting, the BBC-Asia's programme on Thailand was probably a good learning experience.

Perhaps the most important element in the BBC documentary was the balance it struck between problems it focused on and remedies it offered. Some would argue that it covered the negative, the so-called dark side, a little bit more exhaustively than the solutions. But, then, this was probably the intention of people in charge of the project: To create an awareness in Thailand and in other parts of Asia of the dangers facing this Southeast Asian country and its neighbours.

In BTV documentaries, we go to the other extreme. We offer a number of success stories, such as farmers growing extra-size vegetables, even grapes; setting up lucrative projects which immediately double the income of our cultivators; and establishment of a self-help institutions. The BTV reporter talks to people concerned, who say all the nice things that can be said about their ventures.

What is seldom said is, what kind of problems these entrepreneurs faced in getting their projects off the ground. What kind of impact have these ventures made on neighbours? Are there any critics?

The professional strength of a development-oriented documentary — or a feature in a newspaper — lies in its credibility which, in turn, is linked to the balance between what is right in a project and what is wrong. After all,

let's face it, no venture is perfect or totally flawless.

LIKE all telephone users, I get my share of cross connections. Just as I am in the middle of a conversation, two more voices appear from nowhere. We are then caught in a four-concerned talk.

I have dealt with the situation in different ways. Sometimes they work often they don't. The other day, I was talking to a Deputy Governor of the Bangladesh Bank. Suddenly, a third voice came on the line.

"Excuse me, Sir," I said with all the politeness I could command, "I am talking with the Deputy Governor of the central bank." And then added, "He is a very busy man and we will finish in a minute's time." The third party got off the line very quickly with an apology. So it worked.

The mention of the person you are talking to doesn't necessarily produce right result. "Please get off my line," I said to an intruder the other day, "I am talking to the Vice President."

"You are talking to the Vice President," the man who had invaded my line said in a puzzled tone. "We have no Vice President in Bangladesh."

I was about to suggest that we should really have a Vice President and put him (or her) at the Hare Road palace. No, you do not make such jokes on telephones. So, I spoke the truth.

"No, Sir, it is not the Vice President of Bangladesh," I said. "He is the Vice President of Dhaka-Sylhet Motrice Samiti." (Is there one? I wonder.)

There was a good laugh from the other end, in which the so-called Vice President also joined. Then, the line got cut off.

In the third most recent cross connection, I was asked by the faceless, nameless caller if I was really the editor of a newspaper — he had apparently been listening to my conversation — I should try to get him an appointment with a cabinet minister so he could get his wife transferred from Khulna to Chittagong. "Every editor should do some public service in his spare time," he said a little pompously. A good idea, I thought.

This time, I put down the phone, before he could name the minister!

SAYING of the week. "Popularity is a fickle mistress in politics" — a headline on a feature from *The Times*, London.

PASSING DAYS, FALLING LEAVES

Principal Hasna Begum

by Shahabuddin Mahtab

A couple of months ago, Hasna Apa, former Principal of Eden Girls' College and the Founder-Principal of Women's College at Road No. 7, Dhanmondi R/A, passed away, deeply mourned in thousand homes.



students with her versatile knowledge of the Bengali language and literature.

By working as an officer of the Ministry of Education, I had the privilege of knowing her a little better. While waiting to see the Education Secretary, she used to sit in one corner of my office, almost unseen. In one of these visits, I told her that Dr Jabbar, Principal of the Carmichael College, Rangpur, had informed me informally that there was a valuable collection of rare and other books in the Kakrail Mosque, which needed immediate care and saving. Through the efforts of Principal Hasna Begum, these books now form a valuable part of the college library.

A few years back, a guardian living near the Azimpur graveyard came to say that because of his modest income, he was unable to send his daughter to any college where any rickshaw fare was involved. Prof Hasna Begum, though possessed with the highest principles in life, still took down the name of the girl. I only learnt accidentally after many months, that the said girl was studying in the Eden College. She had later on done excellently both at the HSC and the BA examinations, fully justifying her entry in the college. Humanism is perhaps, a stronger sentiment, which at times transcend the moral principles of a person, believing in truth and justice. It is often said, that a truth told with a very hard intent, beats all the lies taken together.

Hasna Apa was the President of Sandhani Eye Bank. Now her mortal remains mixes with the mother earth, but her two donated eyes, lives on, giving sight to two persons, who will never know their donor.

May her soul rest in peace.

The kind lady had battled through life since she lost her father in her teens. Her quiet contribution to her father's family was immense. Thereafter she started her own family. Her husband, Professor Nuruzzaman, a scholar and also a former Principal of Titumir College, was a great support in all her noble activities.

Prof Hasna Begum was persuaded to accept the onerous responsibilities of a founding Principal when she had already passed her six decades. At this time of her life, she could have easily played with her grand children.

Professor Hasna Begum was a tireless worker, and she looked to all the little things of her household, as she would for her college. Apart from these, she could enthral her

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

Ka Karun Sajni.....?

by Ashoke K Bagchi

SAGIRUDDIN Khan was bowing up the doleful tune on the guts of his *sarengi* and the *mayukha* was peeping on the horizon. Ostad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan was strumming his *thumri* masterpiece and strumming his *surmandal*. Young Muna-war was droning his lower octave *tanpura* and lending his voice to his father. It was a memorable early morning of December 1955, everybody was spell bound. There was the young Mahapurush Misra, a newcomer to the musical arena of Calcutta whose accompaniment on the *tabla* was impeccable.

The bandish said that, "The lover was lonely as the beloved did not arrive." The lyric took my mind faraway, in the folds of history, as if Amir Khusru was singing in the durbar of Sultan Alauddin Khalji and the Sultan was imbued by the lilting composition of Khusru.

The function started at 8 pm, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan Saheb boarded the stage along with his son Munawar Ali, Ostad Sagiruddin the *sarengi*, Pandit Mahapurush Misra the *tabla* and Amir Ali the harmonium accompanist past the midnight. His repertoire began with *Khayals* in Malkaus and *Darbari Kanada* which were followed by his session on *thumris* like.....

"Naina more taras rahe
Aja balam pardest....."
followed by

"Tore tichhi nazaria ke bann
Oh tere jawani lag....."
and last of all it was the rendering of

"Ka Karun sajni na aye balam....."
the magnum opus of Khan Sahib in *Pahari raag*.

From that very morning it became my obsession to come close to Khan Sahib. Three simple persons helped me in my endeavours, one was Mitra Babu, the noted connoisseur of classical music, who attended practically all musical soirees in Calcutta; he was rather a permanent fixture of classicism. All artists knew and respected him because of his profound knowledge and an elephantine memory of the various nuances of the ragas as rendered by the various artists belonging to different gharanas and paramparas. The other two were Palit Babu, the old and the faithful carrier of Khan Sahib's *surmandal* and the last one, a Bagchi Babu who could always be found as the shadow of Khan Sahib whenever he came to Calcutta for his concerts.

One morning at the insistence of Palit Babu, I went to the Balu Hakkar Lane residence of Ostadji. He was sitting cross-legged on a red dhurri and strumming the *surmandal*, Bagchi Babu was playing the *tabla* and Munawar was singing the favourite raga of Khan Sahib, *Desi* *todi*, which he always called "Desi".

Palit Babu introduced me to Khan Sahib. He said, "Doctor Beta! *tasrif* rakho aur majene gana suno." I touched his feet in obeisance, from that moment I called him Baba and he always showered his affection to me as his "Doctor Beta", an unique honour bestowed on me by one of the greatest classical musicians of our country!

Baba, besides being a singer, was a composer and a teacher of renown. He was one of the most secular persons of our subcontinent. His composition like:

"*Lhaja re Har nam*" or "*Harim on tai sat*"

bear the testimony of his respect for Hinduism. He was a devout Muslim but he respected all religions. The prime reason for his permanent immigration to India from Pakistan was only due to his secularism. It is reported that the obscure fundamentalists of Pakistan did not appreciate his singing of Hindu Bhajans, which were like *haram* to them! He



always used to say,
"Beta! mera janam hue akhband Bharat ki Kasur me, may to Bharat me hi gujarna chahata hun, Insa Allah"
In fact, he died at Hyderabad in the south, where he lies buried.

One day Bagchi Babu informed me over the telephone that Baba has a severe pain in his left knee which was also swollen. I rushed to his residence along with a masseur. He was in great pains, the knee was swollen like a football because of inflammation and effusion. An orthopaedic colleague of mine drained out some of the fluid and injected intra-articular hydrocortisone. He had relief within about 2 days. Begum Saheba the mother, invited us to a dinner which she cooked with her own hands. Baba had rheumatism which might have been due to his craze for rich foods like *biryani*, *mutton* *rejala* and the like!

Baba said, "Beta! Tu ne mere ko elaj kia lekin mai tereko kya najrana dun?" I said, "Abka narfi". He said, "Kaal subhah zara zaldit aana, myene tereko ek ajib kism ko nazrana dunga!" I was on the scene at 6.30 am. I found him already sitting ready for his morning *rawaj* after the *namaj*.

He said, "Tu ne bahut dafa mere pyar..... dhun Aye na balam" *sune hong*. *Maine jab ist thumri ka bandish tair kley they, tab wo to bahut lambi thi, kul milake chhattish quatari! Lekin jab mai bandish ko sur me bandhete tab to sunne wallakon ki dhiraaj par kheyal rakhhe usko bahut chhoti kalna para. Aaj myene tereko wo pure bandish sunaunga*"

I started, I listened, I do not remember for how long! I was dazed, awe struck and my emotions inundated my senses! This was the last time I saw Baba alive.

After many years of his demise once at my earnest request, Munawar also sang the full bandish. At that time Munawar used to stay in New Delhi. Among the audiences on that day was the young Gazing Khal Ghulam Ali of Pakistan.

Today both Baba and Munawar are in *zannat* but I cannot forget them, the two worshippers of God through their divine melodies!

REFLECTIONS

On Rescuing Water Distillation Plants!

by Dr Habibuz Zaman

NOT long after I had assumed responsibility as Director of Health Services, Medical Education, Training and Research of Bangladesh in June, 1972, I received a phone call from the then Health Secretary to the effect that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, then Prime Minister, was terribly upset over an incident involving students of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College, Barisal. I was told that students of that College had taken possession of a truck belonging to the United Nations Representative Office, Dhaka (UNROD). The vehicle had been sent to fetch two large water distillation plants from the Medical College, Barisal. Apparently, these two plants of very large capacity were lying unused at the college since the cyclone of November, 1970. According to available information, these distillation plants had not even been unpacked. The Director of the Public Health Institute, Mohakhali, Dhaka wished to use these two pieces of equipment for production of intravenous fluids, which could be distributed to medical institutions in Bangladesh. As per his request, the UNROD authorities had sent the truck to bring the plants to the Public Health Institute.

The student leaders of the Medical College had prevented the plants from being removed. Instead they had ordered the driver of the truck to lock up the vehicle, hand over the keys to them, and return to Dhaka. In fact the students had very kindly and thoughtfully provided the driver with a signed receipt for the UNROD truck! The UNROD Chief was understandably furious over the incident and, after waiting for a few days, had written directly to the Prime Minister.

The Health Secretary instructed that I ascertain the position from the Medical College authorities and take all necessary steps to have the plants released and brought to Dhaka. He suggested that, if necessary, I should go to Barisal to do the needful.

Having had a rather limited experience in dealing with matters of this nature, I had asked a peon from my office to accompany me. I had briefed him that he should be following me like my shadow during my entire stay at Barisal, and should any mishap occur to me, he should feel free to return to Dhaka and report the matter to my office and to the Health Secretary, who was my immediate supervisor!

We reached Barisal around eight in the evening. The Principal and a few Professors received me at the steamer ghat. They left me at the Circuit House where a large delegation of students came to see me. The student leaders gave vent to their annoyance with the authorities at Dhaka. They felt unhappy that so little in the way of instruments and equipment had been allocated to their College. Now the Government authorities were taking away the only item, which they considered was rightfully theirs. Under no circumstance would they be willing to part with the distillation plants which were two of the few large equipment they had in their college.

I explained to them that the capacity of the two plants was so large that one day's production would perhaps be adequate to meet the needs of the Barisal Medical College and Hospital for a whole month. Moreover, neither of the two plants had been put to use in Barisal for about 18 months. In fact they had not even been unpacked! Their requirements of distilled water could easily be met by much smaller plants. On the other hand, when put to use at the Institute of Public Health at Mohakhali in Dhaka, these plants could help supply many varieties of intravenous fluids to a number of medical institutions in Bangladesh. I urged the students to view the matter with a sense of patriotism and a

national outlook. I sought their cooperation in despatching these plants to Dhaka. They were absolutely adamant and bluntly refused to do anything of the sort, before replacements had been arranged from Dhaka, and a number of other urgently needed instruments and equipment had been received at their institution.

I mentioned that I had always held a high opinion about the intelligence of our student community. I was therefore surprised that not only had they taken illegal possession of large vehicle, belonging to an international organisation, but also they had in fact given a receipt for it to the driver. Under the circumstances, if the district authorities, meaning the Deputy Commissioner, took the matter seriously, he might even have the student leaders arrested. How could I then help them? I therefore, expressed my hope that before such an ugly situation developed, everything possible should be done to resolve the issue. As a final warning, I mentioned that even the Bangabandhu had been annoyed and disappointed with this unseemly behaviour.

Immediately I noticed a melting of the ice. They requested my co-operation to work out a face-saving device. They suggested that I agree to take delivery of only one plant, and urged that I should not insist on removing both of them at one go. The second plant would be released, they promised, immediately after the college had been provided with a token supply of equipment, available at the Government Central Medical Stores, Dhaka. I had left them that night with the assurance that I would certainly consider their request seriously. I planned to pay an extended visit to their institution the next day to see for myself all the shortcomings.

Next morning, I first took a look at the UNROD truck and realized that it had a carrying capacity of five tons. I visited the departments of the college, the students' hostel, the kitchens and the different laboratories. I was more than convinced that the institution did need a lot of equipment to bring it up to a minimum standard.

The Principal, at my request,

had arranged for me to address the student body in the auditorium at noon. The meeting was attended by a large number of students and teachers. I told them that I would do everything in my capacity to expedite improvements in the Medical College and Hospital. I asked them to recognise that Bangladesh had just emerged after a bloody War of Liberation. During the previous year, everything had been at a standstill. In fact the economy had been wrecked. Since the Medical College at Barisal was a developing institution, funds would be made available for meeting most needs. With patience and perseverance everything would be forthcoming in due course.

On inspection of the plants, I discovered that the UNROD truck was not large enough to carry both the plants at one time. While each distillation plant weighed three tons, the truck had a carrying capacity of five tons only. It would therefore not be possible for the truck to transport both the plants together in any case. I considered it important to ensure that at least one of the plants was moved soon, so that the operation could be viewed as on-going. At the same time, the students could feel happy that their point of view had been given due consideration, and importance!

I suggested to the Professors and the Principal of the Sher-e-Bangla Medical College, Barisal to keep me informed if they faced any difficulty with their essential indents from the Central Medical Stores, Dhaka. As things developed, I was deputised by the Government of Bangladesh to the World Health Organization, which I joined about eight months later. In the meantime, I had not heard of any complaint from any quarter — the students, the College authorities, or the Public Health Institute at Mohakhali or the Ministry of Health. Sometimes I wish I could visit Barisal to see for myself if my hopes had been fulfilled, and promises made by me redeemed!

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THEY have fallen in love not with the women, but with foreign languages. To them learning foreign language is a love which has become an essential part of their lives. For more than a decade Md Liaquat Ali Khan and Ashik Elahi Chowdhury have been learning foreign languages one after another which makes them distinct from others.

Both Liaquat and Ashik cannot imagine their lives without attending the classes of foreign languages. Fluent in French, German, Spanish and English they are now learning Italian at the Institute of Modern Languages (IML) in Dhaka University.

Liaquat Ali Khan, a member of BCS Taxation Cadre, started learning French in 1979 at IML. He has completed a four-year course in French language, two-year course in Spanish and two intensive courses in Italian. Besides, Liaquat knows

German, Arabic, Hindi if not so fluent as in French, Spanish and Italian.

"Language is always mysterious to me. When my father and his maternal uncle used to talk in Hindi and Persian it attracted me. I found the sounds of their conversation much interesting. It seems to me like music and from them I got the inspiration to learn foreign languages," said Liaquat.

Ashik Elahi Chowdhury, enrolled himself at the Goethe Institute in Dhaka in 1983 in German language course. Since then he has been learning different languages. An advanced student in German language Ashik completed *Zentralellemittelstuen-Pruefung* (Central Intermediate Final), which is controlled by the central office of Goethe Institut in Bonn. He is one of the four who successfully completed the course in Bangladesh. Now he is learning "Business German",

another advanced course in Economic German, which is jointly controlled by the Goethe Institute in Dhaka and German Chamber of Commerce.

Besides, Ashik is also learning Italian at IML fluent in German, French, Spanish, Italian and English, Ashik said "Knowledge of a foreign language is the ticket to fly in the realm of knowledge. It broadens your mind and extends your personality". Besides, he has also elementary knowledge of Dutch, Japanese, Latin and Greek.

"Language is an interesting matter. The entity of human being cannot be imagined without language. It is language which makes a man, a man", said Liaquat Khan, an ardent lover of foreign language. "Though it is difficult to keep

in memory the grammar of a language, but one can get hold on it if he or she becomes studious. While I was a university student I could not see the sunset. As soon, as my sociology classes were over I used to rush to the Language Institute to attend French class and when I came out it was night", added Liaquat.

It is Liaquat, who used to go to his work place at Munshiganj in the morning and return to the capital in the evening to attend his Spanish language class (When he started learning Spanish language he was transferred to Munshiganj). But Liaquat did not give up. He has in his mind "*Volere e Potere*" (Where there is a will, there is a way). Every day, for two years he went to Munshiganj early in

the morning and after spending a busy day in the office journeyed back to Dhaka for Spanish class.

"During my journey from Dhaka to Munshiganj and Munshiganj to Dhaka I learned by Spanish lessons in bus and boat as I had no extra time to spend on Spanish" said a smiling Liaquat.

For his good command over French Liaquat was selected by the Foreign Ministry to work in the protocol branch during the OIC conference in 1983. He worked in Reception Unit No. 2 as an interpreter and proved his worthiness to the foreign delegates.

"Sometimes the foreign delegates became astonished when I talked to them in French. They often asked me from, where I

learned French. Due to his easy way with French he then Secretary General of Tunisia Branch of League of Arab States. Tohami Negra, told Liaquat that "Nous sommes freres" (we are brothers).

"To learn a foreign language you need three P. These are—passion, patience and practice," Ashik went on "Learning language is a continuous process. One must have passion and patience to learn a language and with great love he or she has to practice it regularly."

Besides, learning languages, Ashik spends his time on translating Franz Kafka, Hermann Hesse, Heinrich Boll, Dante, Albert Camus and Simon de Beauvoir into Bangla. "I am not a linguist or a philologist and don't wish to be one. I just want to work in the

applied field of languages. That's why I want to translate the great masterpieces of foreign literature and important books written in foreign languages on science, international economics, political science and philosophy in to Bangla," said Ashik Elahi Chowdhury with a winsome smile.

When he was student of Dhaka College, Liaquat was actively involved in student politics. For the two successive sessions he was elected vice president of Dhaka College Students Union. But in his university days he devoted himself to acquire knowledge by learning languages instead of politics. "I am fond of literature due to this I have taken Bangla literature as subsidiary in honours. Besides, one of the reasons behind my interest in foreign languages, is that they will facilitate me to read the great works of great poets and writers in their original languages,"

said a smiling Liaquat. To their friends both Ashik and Liaquat are "lingua-lords" and their teachers consider them as the most serious and intelligent students of foreign language.

But learning foreign languages is not encouraged in our country. Most of the so-called educated people consider it as a time wasting matter and it has no application and value in life at all, said the two language lovers in an emotion checked voice.

"Foreign language learning should be encouraged at all levels of our education. Government can establish different institutes where foreign languages could be taught. People should be encouraged to learn language so they can get job aboard easily," suggested Ashik with the hope that one day Bangladeshi young people can prove their worth.

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Language : A Different Love

by Abdur Razzaque Khan