

Bringing Together on a Difficult Path

by Ziaul Karim

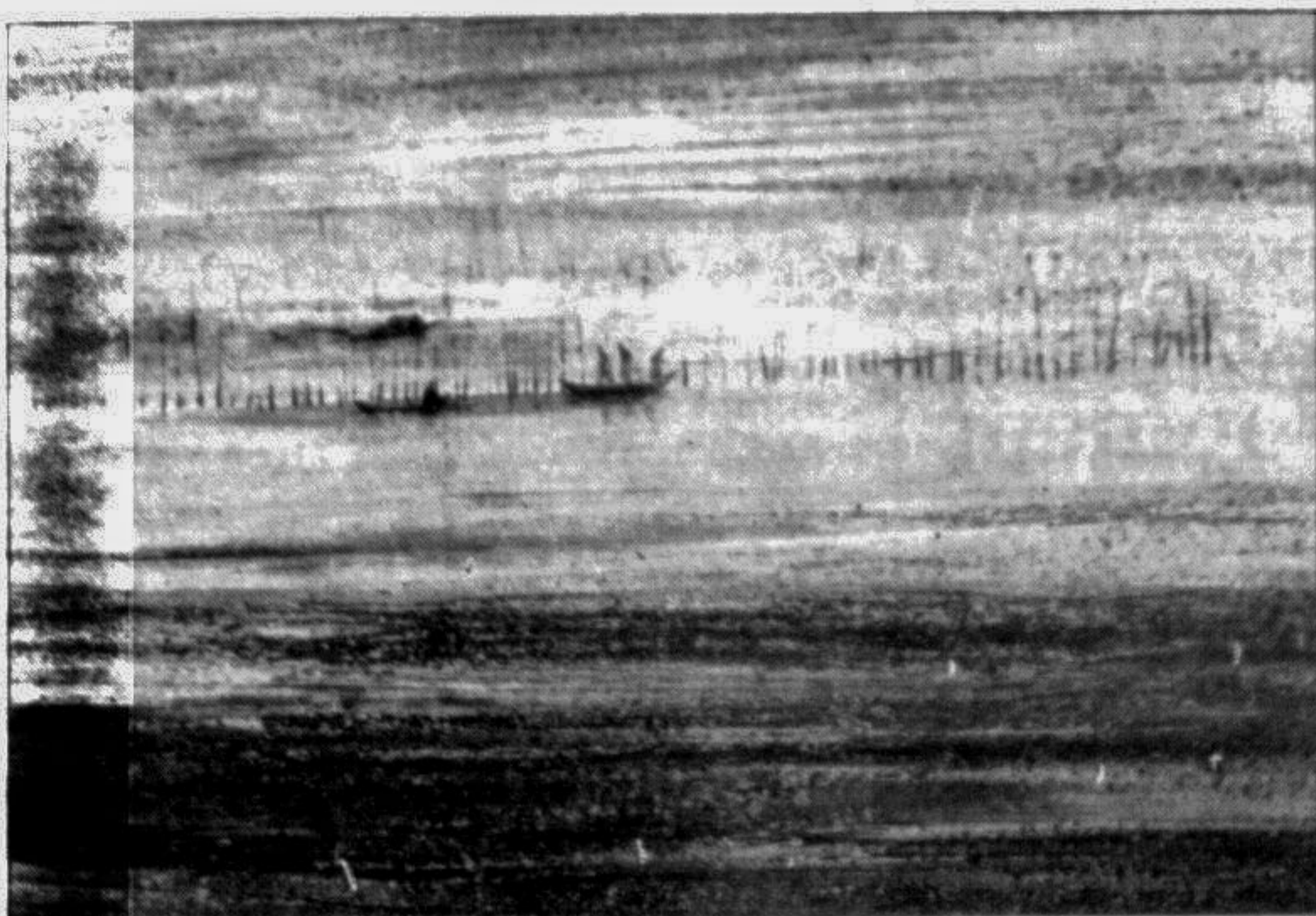
ABOUT 7 pm. Drizzling. I was a bit late, supposed to be there by 6. When I rang the doorbell — still no idea of the enchanting surprise waiting for me inside. Then the door opened and for me it was open sesame to the treasure-house of Ali Baba — the studio of artist Jamal Ahmed.

An L-shaped room. About 900 square feet; original works of celebrities like S M Sultan, Quamrul Hasan and Abdus Sattar hanging on the wall. Heaps of papers in one corner, easels in the other, canvases, palettes, colour-tubes, brushes, finished and unfinished works strewn all over the floor — a mess par excellence. Despite the apparent chaos, everything has its place, declaring the Nietzschean maxim, "One needs chaos to give birth to a dancing star." The tail of the L-shaped room has an attractive sitting arrangement with four cane-made armchairs and a wooden chest, turned-table, engraved with oriental motifs, in the middle.

He does not belong to any single école. In choosing style he is eclectic — happily borrowing from the impressionists, British landscape painters and even from his contemporaries, Shahabuddin, for example. So...

...avoid at first those forms that are too facile and commonplace. They are the most difficult, for it takes a great, fully matured power to give something of your own where good and even excellent traditions come to mind in quantity. Jamal has chosen this difficult path of tradition to give something of his own, and it is only because of tradition that the

'Jamalism' of his works goes almost unnoticed. In his traditionalism, one would find the cream of realistic painting — the impressionists' au plein air approach and Turnerian quality of what is called ars est celare artem in Latin (the implication of it is that the best art seems spontaneous).



Fishing with boat



Pigeons

it appears that he lacks a dictionary of his own. But under this almost character or diction-less detail-loaded style, he has carved an intensely personal idiom out of his eclectic journey that can be termed a movement in itself. On close observation, one would find Jamal's nature and men on the canvases declare a marriage between the real and the abstract. That is to say, his works are realistic and at the same time give the effect of abstraction that might remind one of Baudelaire's effort in bringing together the traditional foes in poetry, classicism and romanticism.

Rainer Maria Rilke, in a letter addressed to a young poet, wrote with a tone of counsel,

I had been lost in this aesthetically pleasing mess for how long I don't know, but my odyssey to this world was cut-short by the presence of the artist himself, who received me in a way that gave me the impression we are known to each other for decades; albeit I had been introduced to him only the day before. His is a kind of simplicity that tells me, he does not belong to the harrowing post-world war era; rather he belongs to a lost city of a lost time Keats has seen on a Grecian urn, that leads us to an obvious syllogism: he creates chef-d'oeuvre in landscape, or he is at his best when he tries to give expression to pastoral beauty. "Modern meter have seldom been tried by this man. This reluctance to experimentation and happy-living with a tradition — landscape painting — that dates back to Dürer being justified in a Wildeman way, "modernism or experimentation is of little significance, what matters is whether it is good art or bad art."

the French Embassy in concert with the dynamism of the Bangladeshi artists find their expression within the framework of Alliance-Francaise which continually welcome the exhibition of the works of Bangladeshi artists. The Allies were indeed, till very recently, the only places of exhibition in this country which patronise young artists. In the same way, scholarships are awarded regularly since 1974 to the Bangladeshi artists who study arts in France.

Shahabuddin, whose fame travelled throughout the world had been the first Bangladeshi to obtain a scholarship of the French Government. This allowed him to go to the "Ecole des Beaux Arts" in Paris. He is considered today as one of the masters of contemporary paintings. The painter Shahadat Hussain, also a scholar since 1988, Kalidas Karmakar studied in Paris the art of engraving. Now back in Dhaka, he created with the assistance of France, his own atelier (workshop) of engraving which helps to initiate the young artists in their techniques. The young painter Iftekharuddin Ahmed, who participates in the present exhibition has very recently arrived in Paris to study at "La Grande Chaumiere."

Hölderlin has said, "We are in the period of darkness between the gods that have vanished and the god that has not yet come." Perhaps the dot-like, blurred being/beings of Jamal is/are thrown into this period of darkness.

A Successful Exhibition of Paintings of Bangladesh Artists in Paris

opened to the public in the Town Hall of the 16th district from 3 to 7 September and a second exhibition was held in a Private Gallery, Gallery Laurentin, after a second inauguration in presence of Mrs Jean-Michel Lacombe and few hundred other guests, from 8 to 16 September.

The exhibitions took place under most congenial atmosphere and hundreds of people who visited and enjoyed these exhibitions were curious and enthusiastic about the Bangladeshi paintings.

Two paintings were kindly offered by the painters themselves to the representatives of the French cultural field and the benefit from the sale of catalogues of the exhibition has

been offered to the humanitarian organisation, Ganoshashya Kendra at Savar, Dhaka.

Cultural Cooperation Between France and Bangladesh

SINCE the independence of Bangladesh, the bilateral relations between France and Bangladesh have always been cordial and friendly.

Andre Malraux came to Dhaka 20 years ago in support of the liberation movement; it was then the people of Bangladesh discovered France. From that time to the arrival in Dhaka of the President of the French Republic, Mr Francois

Mitterrand in February 1990, the cooperation between France and Bangladesh continued to be active and fruitful.

The training of researchers, of the high officials and the young professionals hold an important place in our cooperation programme. This programme provided 30 people with scholarships for higher studies or training in France since 1991. Steps were also taken in the area of development-research in 2 projects in agronomy aiming at increasing and improving the food production of Bangladesh. Furthermore other projects were undertaken concerning health and remote sensing.

On the artistic and cultural aspect the activities of the two Alliances Francaises in Dhaka and Chittagong constitute an essential role. The increasing number of students (1,200 enrolled in Dhaka 600 in Chittagong) along with the members and visitors who frequent these centres show the interest which the Bangladeshis have in French culture.

To respond to this interest, cultural events in the form of film shows (film library of Alliances Francaises assistance to the festival of short films of Dhaka), French plays (regular representation of the French troupes) music (concerts and festivals) and books ("La Fureur de Lire") are regularly organised.

In the field of Plastic Art, the involvement and the support of



Inauguration of the exhibition at the Town Hall of the 16th district of Paris

An exhibition of paintings of young Bangladeshi artists organized by the Embassy of France and the Alliances Francaises of Dhaka and Chittagong was held in Paris from 3 to 16 September.

Mr Pierre Taittinger, Senator-Mayor of the 16th district of Paris and His Excellency Mr Jean-Michel Lacombe, Ambassador of the Republic of France have inaugurated the exhibition at 6 pm on 2 September in the Town Hall of the 16th district of Paris in presence of two of the Bangladeshi painters and eminent French personalities.

Mr Ambassador of France delivered a speech before an audience of about 300 persons, reminding the main issues of the fruitful cultural cooperation between France and Bangladesh.

This exhibition entitled "Nouveaux Regards sur un autre monde" ("New look on another world") took place under the purview of continued cultural cooperation between Bangladesh and France and following two previous Bangladeshi painting exhibitions in France held in Paris (1991) and in Clermont Ferrand (1992).

Twenty-five paintings from 10 artists were displayed at "Exhibition 93". A priority had been given to novelty and to the young talents. A place was also given to experience.

Thus, among these artists, four had already exhibited in France, two exhibited for the first time in Europe, one for the first time in France and another one for the first time abroad. The most famous between them lives and paints in France since 1974.

The exhibition remained

Toni Morrison

Continued from page 9

subtly moving away from confrontation, howsoever subdued it might be, to compromise and unity surfaced in the rhetoric of humanism — the kind of humanism America speaks of and boasts of. We will return to this issue soon, but meanwhile let us take a brief look at Morrison's third novel called *Song of Solomon*, published in 1977.

It is this very novel which exhibits Morrison's full maturity as a novelist and finally consolidates her power, position and prestige in the history of Afro-American fiction. The novel is centred on a black family called "Dead". Notice the aptonymic manner of Morrison at play. Milkman is the son of this fam-

ily. He is truly dead. But he returns to Virginia. He wants to rediscover life. He, therefore, resorts to music and mirth, fancy and flight. He has a friend. His name is Guitar (once again the aptonym). Guitar evinces an extremist black racist attitude, and exemplifies the polyphony of feelings ranging from love to repulsion. One must notice that up to this point, we have the myths of memory and the politics of memory in Morrison, howsoever she downplays them in her three novels mentioned so far.

In *The Bluest Eye*, for example, the young girl represents the essential black motifs of struggle and conflict which underlie the whole black movement against imperialism not only in America itself, but also more visibly in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The world of Sula and her grandmother, though not an easy one, is not devoid of the essential black sense of conflict and struggle which may whirl and whirl their ways into the abyss of nothingness only under the pressure of the evils of a cultural system inhibiting the spiritual freedom of blacks. *Song of Solomon*

tends to come up with a magic-song to "resurrect the dead", the black souls, but not totally at the expense of the black sense of conflict. But, ironically at the same time, it is from this novel that Morrison begins to show signs of moving away from confrontation with imperialist whites to an easy compromise with them in the name of humanistic unity, in the name of eradicating colour differences at all levels. The Morrisonian posture, here, is something like this: well, only man matters; colour does not.

A number of black critics, at this point, cannot afford to accept Morrison with ease; for, according to them, the tricky erasure of the colour of skin which is synonymous with that futile Nietzschean programme of a self-imposed amnesia can only hide the crucial areas of conflicts between imperialist whites and oppressed blacks, and thus can also preclude the possibilities of the continuous black struggle, based on class-and-colour-consciousness, for freedom. The lesson that Toni Morrison tends to provide, particularly in her two novels written in the eighties, is that the past must sometimes be left behind and that redemption is to be found not in remembering, but in forgetting. At this point,

only one needs to look into *Tar Baby*. Morrison's fourth novel published in 1981, and also into *Beloved*, the fifth novel which earned her the Pulitzer Prize in 1987 and which also turned out to be a commercial hit, a best-seller in America.

In *Tar Baby*, we have for the first time white characters coming in with full force — the imperative, as it emerges only subtly, is this: make space for whites as much as for blacks, and put an end to conflicts, and seek coexistence.

Of course, there is a touch of humanism here, and certainly race relations and racism are viscerated in *Tar Baby*; where also innocence is an absence made visible, as Morrison says: "An innocent man is a sin before God... Inhuman and therefore unworthy. No man should live without absorbing the sins of his kind, the foul air of his innocence, even if it did wilt the row of angel trumpets and cause them to fall from their vines". Is then a white man justified by his own sins? Perhaps, so. Is then a black man justified by his own sins. Perhaps so.

Getting down to *Beloved*, the novel usually treated as Morrison's masterpiece, is to experience, once again, the horror of denial — in fact more a denial than an affirmation. Of

course, it is not a denial of imperialist whites as such, but a denial of slavery not in terms of a struggle through life, but in terms of an instantaneous death, itself a metaphor for the art of forgetting. Yes, forgetting is beautiful, remembering painful. And death makes one forget, but life does not. The novel *Beloved* thus deals with the issues of life and death, remembering and forgetting, sin and redemption. Yes, it is in this novel that a fleeing slave cuts the throat of her baby daughter with a hand-saw so as to spare her beloved child the fate of a slave. Here, the resistance to slavery is electrically instantaneous, magically violent. But, the need for a struggle against the causes and roots of such slavery is not deeply felt, for Morrison emphasizes the essential art of forgetting. The style, as it were, is something like this: forget it, live in peace, make friends.

Forgetting is, in fact, most tactically turned into poetics itself in *Jazz*, Morrison's last novel published in 1992. It is no doubt a powerful novel. If considered in the context of the linguistic elan the work irresistibly emits. This novel captures folk-rhythms and motifs accompanied by epic resonances, scale, space, and of

BTV Where do All the Good Programmes Go?

I arrive at home from my teacher's place in the evening weary and fatigued. I do, what is probably most expected of someone of my age I turn on the TV what do I find? I think it would be safe to say something that most people would rather not watch.

It is deplorable to find how many are turning away from BTV and resorting to V.C.R and cable TV. These should have been alternatives for only those times that the nationalist TV stations do not start airing their programmes. But since it seems that a large section of the society are using these alternatives as the regular form of entertainment, and the national TV as just a pause between switching channels, it could imply that it's time for BTV to seriously start thinking about redeeming its own position which it held upto the mid eighties — i.e. till the time they held the monopoly of visual entertainment: when people were impelled to accept whatever was presented to them. Strangely, the programmes schedule then was far more interesting, whereas, this is the time that they are having to contend with colossal competitors. Actually that is the key word — competition. BTV behaves like a retired old man, totally void of zeal and enthusiasm.

Comedies. Where have they gone to? Why have we dwindled down to only "Murphy Brown" which is not that amusing in the first place. I can recall some excellent programmes from my younger days such as "Different Strokes", "Small Wonder", "Bewitched", and most recently "Perfect Stranger". The older series could even be re-run on a second channel, if it is believed that none of the current inbred programmes can be replaced. It isn't anything impossible that I am suggesting. They did have a second channel in the past. Why did they close that down at the cost of so many smiles?

Talking about even 5 or 6

years ago, I remember that it was not necessary to turn to VDOs, because there were an abundance of good programmes for all age groups and catering to all tastes. For the adventure lovers there were "Tales of Golden Monkey", "Land of the Giants" and many more shows for the evening, followed by good captivating TV serials at night like "Remington Steele", "Man from Atlantic" and "Knight Rider" to name a few.

I am not suggesting that all the old "goodies" be re-run. All I am saying is that they could have been replaced with other equally entertaining programmes. There was always at least two or three things to watch everyday whereas nowadays it's become two or three things a week.

The standard of cartoon films has also declined sharply. How is it expected that children should settle down for such totally babyish shows such as "Know All" and "Young Robinhood" after smashing hits like "Thunder Cats", "Defenders of the Earth" and "Voltron" which are only three out of a list of more than a dozen computer animated action science fiction thrillers shown in the past.

There is an acute shortage of documentaries on BTV. Certainly that shortage is not all over the world. Excellent research intensive programmes like "Cosmos", "Birth of the World", "Believe it or Not" have also become extinct. With the end of "Perfect Strangers" there is nothing more to look forward to in the weekends except for "Dallas" and "L.A. Law", whereas Fridays was synonymous with eye sore from sitting in front of the TV from morning till night.

There were only three serials in the recent years which grasped the minds of young viewers and they too were "MacGyver", "Raven" and "Return to Eden". The last of the three had a terribly abrupt ending, the excuse for which was still tolerable. But what about "Raven"? After the thor-

ough censoring, I am sure that the film had been made tolerably improved, was it still too indecent for some? If it is a total move in that direction, then certainly VCRs and Cable TVs should not be permitted. "Raven" was a lively entertainment that had captured the heart of many. It is a sorry fact that it was brought to such an untimely end.

Where had I watched great classics like "Guns of Navarone" or "A Night to Remember" — it was BTV. Old movies do not always mean monotonous dramas where one cannot quite figure out what is happening every 40 minutes into the film — which are the types shown mostly nowadays. Most weekends I find some prize distribution ceremony spanning the whole afternoon or some black and white Bengali film from the days where people wore skin tight shirts, extra large bell bottoms and kept bushy sideburns, the heroes doing a little "twist" with a song grossly out of tune.

The present trend of deterioration manifested by BTV continues, then it is perhaps not too farfetched to imagine the "demise" of the institution in the "not so distant" future. Everything should have its proportions, and I believe we have had more than our share of the same commercial repeated thrice before a movie lit only creates distaste and apathy for the product, talk shows lacking all the life seen in foreign talk shows (the local versions having some brave men delivering long speeches and non witty answers) and hours of "sangtanushans".

I do not wish to sound like an unpatriotic young upstart as one might erroneously picture me to be, but I am only trying to express the generally felt views of a very large number of people which comprise the viewing population of BTV, and I only hope my comments will not be disregarded as "all good things have critics" but a sincere concern for the better of all.

— Chowdhury A A Quaseed-bin Humayun

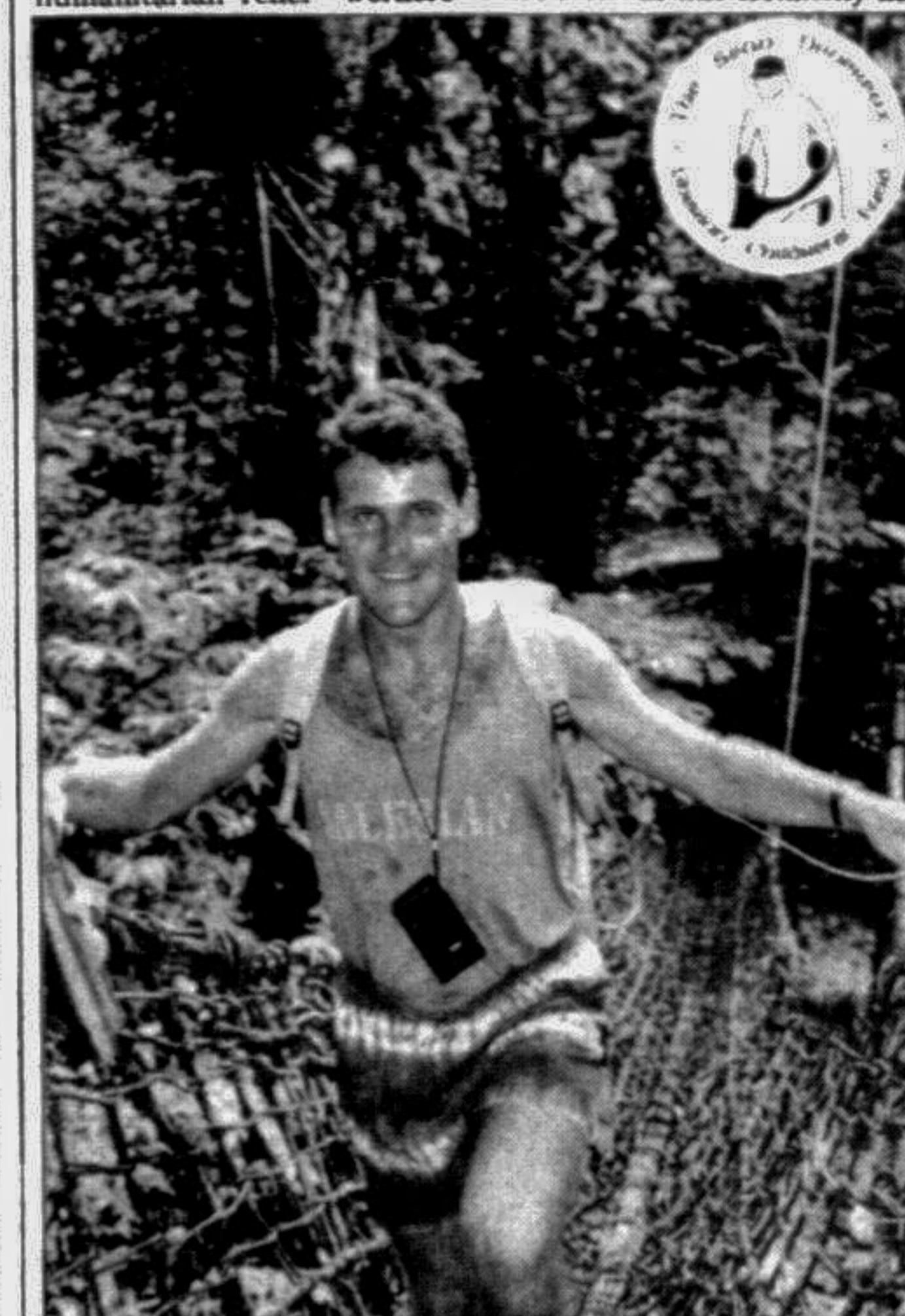
Dying for Peace

Continued from page 9

Barettas, M-16s, Bazookas, varying in price from \$ 75 up to \$ 200. We have a lot to answer for and you at home can do something by lobbying your MPs. The letter goes on to express the frustration and helplessness Sean felt watching greedy gunmen and local warlords robbing relief goods meant for the suffering people and trying to thwart the efforts of humanitarian relief workers

like himself. The letter eventually reached John Major and MPs of the British Parliament.

At the same time in Kismayu, local warlord, Omar Jess went on a killing spree, murdering 200 people. Sean was among the relief workers who recovered the bodies. Sean was later interviewed on CNN where he gave a full account of the massacre and the systematic torture of women and children. It was this testimony that



Sean Devereaux — a martyr for justice

eventually cost Sean his life.

With Sean's killer still at large, Dermont's quest for justice began with continuous letters to UN officials and finally a meeting with the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. "I don't want retribution," says Devereaux, "I just want to see that he is arrested and that the safety of other aid workers like Sean, is ensured."

Devereaux, who once worked for British Airways as crew manager, has himself been involved with the orphanage called "Families for Children" in Sreepur for many years. The school, he explains, was established with financial help from the British Airways staffs. It was Pat Kerr, who now runs the orphanage and according to Devereaux, "the main driving force and source of inspiration", who suggested that the new paramedic unit be named in the memory of Sean. "We are very happy," says Sean's father, "that his name should remain in Bangladesh especially because of his love for children." He adds that Rolf Carrier, resident representative of UNICEF, has promised that in keeping with its commitment to women and children, UNICEF will do all it can for this programme. Meanwhile, in Liberia, Sean's sister Theresa has established the Sean Devereaux Liberian Children's Fund to help the child war victims in Liberia. For the Devereaux family this is their own positive approach to tragedy.

Sean's tragic death has been mourned by many Liberians, especially the children, who have lost a dear friend. To keep his memory alive a school in Monrovia to help children of war, has been built in Sean's name.

At present Dermont Devereaux, commonly known as 'Gerry', is working with the Prince Charles Youth Business Trust that helps young people all over the world start their own business. Devereaux adds that he would like to introduce this concept to Bangladesh where there are so many unemployed youth. By doing this Devereaux is continuing Sean's own interest in helping young people and motivating them.

Sean's remarkable strength and love for people is summed up in an incident recounted by his father. Devereaux describes the last night that Sean's family saw him alive, during a Christmas break in December in Nairobi: "We had been laughing and joking around for a long time," says Devereaux, his deep blue eyes smiling at the memory, "when I asked him why he was doing this since five Americans had already been killed." Sean's answer was simple yet determined: "While my heart beats I have to do what I can do and that is to help those who are less fortunate than ourselves" — a principle that the Devereaux family wishes to keep alive by continuing his work.

CORRIGENDUM
Apology has been sought by the writer for inadvertently mentioning "late" against the name Kazi Alamgir in the write-up "Profile of a Gymnast and Dramatist" published in the Weekend Magazine on October 8. Kazi Alamgir, who made known himself as the fastest runner in erstwhile East Pakistan is still alive.