

WEEKEND MUSINGS

Mahfuz Anam

Prof Rehman Sobhan
Launches his
New Experiment

PROFESSOR Rehman Sobhan has set up a new institution called the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), and held the first dialogue yesterday at the Sonargaon Hotel. The subject matter was Policy Reforms and Acceleration of Investment Activity in Bangladesh. The purpose of this Centre would be, as the handbook distributed by Prof Sobhan states, 'to institutionalise a tradition of more informed public discussion on policy issues.' The CPD will, he says, 'take on the task of initiating a process of public education on policy issues through a process of constructive dialogue.' Prof Sobhan intends to bring together, on a regular basis, 'government policy makers, Members of Parliament, the business community, professionals, academics, NGOs and donors to discuss specific issues.'

It is a great idea, and I personally welcome the formation of this body. For God only knows how desperately we need informed public discussion on policy issues of national importance. From the people whom Prof Sobhan was able to gather in the dialogue of yesterday, it was obvious that he tried to get as broad a spectrum of participants, and from as many diverse groups as possible.

I do not feel myself qualified to discuss the intellectual contribution of Prof Sobhan in the field of social science, especially economics, but I admire him as a person who has devoted his whole life, and every bit of his energy, in promoting the cause of Bangladesh. I first came across him as a student of Dhaka University's Economics Department in the late sixties. As a student political activist, I was compelled to miss many classes, but I never missed one of his. His tutorials were always very clear in content and succinct in presentation. His lectures on political economy and on disparity between the two wings of Pakistan, helped to weed out the rhetoric and emotion from my mind and replace them with facts and logic. I remember that I, along with my politically active friends, would avidly wait to read every week, the magazine Forum, that he and Dr Kamal Hossain (and may be some others) had brought out during those days. That magazine, to my mind, put solid factual arguments to the widespread demand for regional autonomy. I was never a good enough student to appreciate the intellectual brilliance of his lectures, but his sincerity touched me in those days, and his intensity of feelings for our people and our country inspires me even today.

Some people make uncharitable comments about him, holding him responsible for the post-liberation nationalisation policy, and as such for ruining the country's economy. I believe Prof Sobhan's lifelong work for our country will be more fairly judged in time. But for the moment he continues his own struggle to serve the country as best as he can, and knows how. His monumental effort in preparing the Task Force Report, done during his tenure as advisor in Justice Shahabuddin's Interim Government in 90-91, is another example of his capacity to put his incisive mind and boundless energy in giving some sort of research based intellectual guidance in economic and social decision making, that we so desperately need. It is a pity, and testimony to the folly of the present government, that it took no notice of the whole effort because of some assumed political leanings of Prof Sobhan. The report's significant and exceptional merit got buried under political considerations and personality clashes, resulting in the self-defeating neglect of a seminal research work that could have resulted in a more well informed policy decisions for the government, in many fields.

The reason I mention all this is because I cannot help but marvel at my former teacher's energy and tenacity in the singleminded pursuit of his mission. Anybody else in his place would have given up in disgust and frustration after the way the Task Force Report was treated. But no, Prof Sobhan is made of a different stuff. He has found a new avenue to channelise his energy and expertise — through the just founded CPD. I wish it all the luck.

BTV and Radio's
Shameful Performance

NOT much has been written about the way the radio and the TV covered the election results during the Mayoral and Commissioners' election held on 30 January last. In my view, it will remain as a permanent source of shame for the ruling party, which otherwise played more or less a fair game and thereby did much to enhance its democratic image. But as far as allowing the radio and the TV to operate in some sort of an evenhanded manner, the performance of the government controlled electronic media, is something that BNP will have reasons to regret for quite sometime to come. It is a blemish, that will haunt them in the coming days.

During the first night of results, the news agencies and our own reporters were all sending out the results from the Election Commission office more or less at the same time. These results were being broadcast, in the early hours of the evening, over the radio and the television, within minutes of the time that they were reaching us through the news agencies. But then around midnight, may be a bit earlier, when the results started startling the ruling party, and the

lead of the opposition Awami League was becoming unassailable, suddenly a time-lapse began show between results given by the EC and their broadcast by the electronic media.

The partisanship of the coverage took an unbelievable turn when results from Khulna and Rajshahi, and to some extent Chittagong, were being broadcast, but not Dhaka's. Then as the night wore on, and the lead in Chittagong was also widening, the results from there also suddenly began to take longer than before, in being broadcast. From 1.30 am (morning of the 31st) onwards we started getting panic calls from citizens as to what was the matter. Serious doubts began to be expressed about the intentions behind withholding results of the two seats where the opposition was winning. From 2 am onwards, TV broadcast closed.

Next day morning we were treated to the absurd situation of the TV announcing the results of 380-plus seats, whereas many of the newspapers published that morning had already printed outcome of more 450 centres. The Daily Star, stealing a march over its competitors, carried the results of 504, when we went to print at 4 am that morning. (We published a city edition, to give the latest results to our readers) When the TV was repeating the same result around 10.30 am, the news agencies were creding the final tally of 704 centres.

Till that evening (31st January) TV and radio did not give the results that were announced by the EC in the morning. When, during the 8 pm news, a chart of the results was finally shown, there was no footage of the mayor-elect. It does not need too much imagination to think of the tons of footage we would have been 'treated' to if Mirza Abbas had won.

So what was the BTV, more pertinently the Ministry of Information, trying to prove? I am personally not convinced that a lawyer like Barrister Nazmul Huda would have been so naïve as to think, (like the proverbial ostrich which buried its head in the sand and thought that nobody could see it) that by not announcing the results on the state media, he could contain its public knowledge. The news of the results reached every nook and corner of the country through the news agencies, newspaper reporters, telephones, fax. In Dhaka the news spread like wildfire through word of mouth. So what was the gain of the BNP. In fact by withholding the announcement for those crucial hours, the BNP gave the opposition a field day, to tell the people that the ruling party was hatching plans to temper with the results. Thus the BNP has quite unnecessarily lent itself to all sorts of uncharitable remarks.

UN-JCGP Meeting

A big event of the past week was the meeting, in Dhaka, of the United Nations Joint Consultative Group on Policy (UN-JCGP). Never before have these five UN Agency Heads gathered outside their New York or Geneva offices (I wonder, if that is something they should so proudly proclaim, as they did for such a meeting. It was a good opportunity for them, as well as for us to get to know each other, and appraise them about the developmental problems that we faced. As a journalist I feel that there was a lot more that our readers could and should have come to know about these agencies, and especially about the visions of these men and women who head these world bodies. The press coverage was the usual, routine affair. We got very little insight into the thinking of these extraordinary men and women (after all, it is not ordinary folks like us, who get to head these big multilateral bodies) about the global and regional problems that the world faced. We, from The Daily Star, tried to interview all of these people, but we were prevented from doing so by an arbitrarily imposed quota, under which each UN head could be interviewed by only one paper. The idea being, I was told, that no particular UN Agency head should get disproportionate amount of coverage. I personally consider it to be an unnecessary and uncalled for interference in the work of the media. It all depends on the media's perception of who is more newsworthy and who is less. I understand the concern of the Dhaka based officials to ensure a smooth coverage of all UN Agency heads. But having ensured minimum coverage for each, it should have been left to the initiative of each newspaper as to whether or not it could have got any other interviews or not. There should not have been a deliberate curtailment of access for the media on the basis of an arbitrarily fixed quota. I think the press was prevented from serving their readers better.

What a Treat!

CHITRASENA-Vijra, a renowned cultural troupe from Sri Lanka kept the audience in Dhaka mesmerised for four days during the week that passed. It was a rare treat for us. Star readers must be knowing about it from our coverage and the beautiful picture of the lead dancer that we published. I congratulate our chief photographer Mohsin for that extraordinary picture. However, I want to point out that it is very seldom that we get to see such superb presentation of life, culture and traditions of the Sri Lankan people. We get to see artists from India and Pakistan. This was indeed an eye opening experience for me and many others like me, and we stand the richer for the opportunity. Thanks to the effort of a private body like Shadhona, which gave us this magnificent chance to enrich our knowledge about Sri Lanka. My sincere congratulations to them. I hope that Shadhona can give us more of such 'gifts' in the near future.

Palestinian Professor Probes Empires of the Mind

EDWARD Said, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York, has spent many years trying to bridge the cultural gap between the West and the Arab world. Since the publication of his latest book, *Culture and Imperialism* (Chatto and Windus, London), the 57-year old intellectual has attracted strong criticism from conservative academics and right-wing press in the US and in Britain.

Leading the attack was Cambridge University's Ernest Gellner. In the *Times Literary Supplement*, the professor of social anthropology wrote: "The problem of power and culture, and their turbulent relations during the great metamorphosis of our social world, is too important to be left to the literary critic."

Gellner went a step further and called him "a dandy and a Manhattan bon viveur." Over the pond the US media have been more crude, with headlines such as "Professor or Terror."

When the BBC asked Said to deliver the prestigious Reith Lectures this year, many eyebrows were raised. His six radio talks, called *Representations of the Intellectual*, received hostility from establishment intellectuals.

For the most erudite Palestinian spokesman the relationship between the intellectual and public life is an urgent issue. The true intellectual is a dissenter, he says, not subservient to the powers that be.

In stark contrast to this he argues that there is "an uncritical alignment between intellectuals and institutions of power which reproduces the pattern of an earlier imperialist history."

Said's latest work *Culture and Imperialism* looks at how the reality and ideas of empire underlay Western culture, not only in the past but to this day.

This book follows on from the seminal work *Orientalism*, published in 1978, which ex-

It is not easy to be a Palestinian spokesman in the US talking about the injustices of American policies towards the Palestinian people. But that is precisely what Edward Said has been doing for over two decades. Said has just finished a series of lectures on the BBC, which drew criticism from the right-wing elements. Gemini News Service reports on the controversy between culture and politics.

Daya Kishan Thussu
writes from London

plored how Europe created images of an exotic East.

At the end of the nineteenth century in Europe, Said writes, "scarcely a corner of life was untouched by the facts of empire." And literature was one of them.

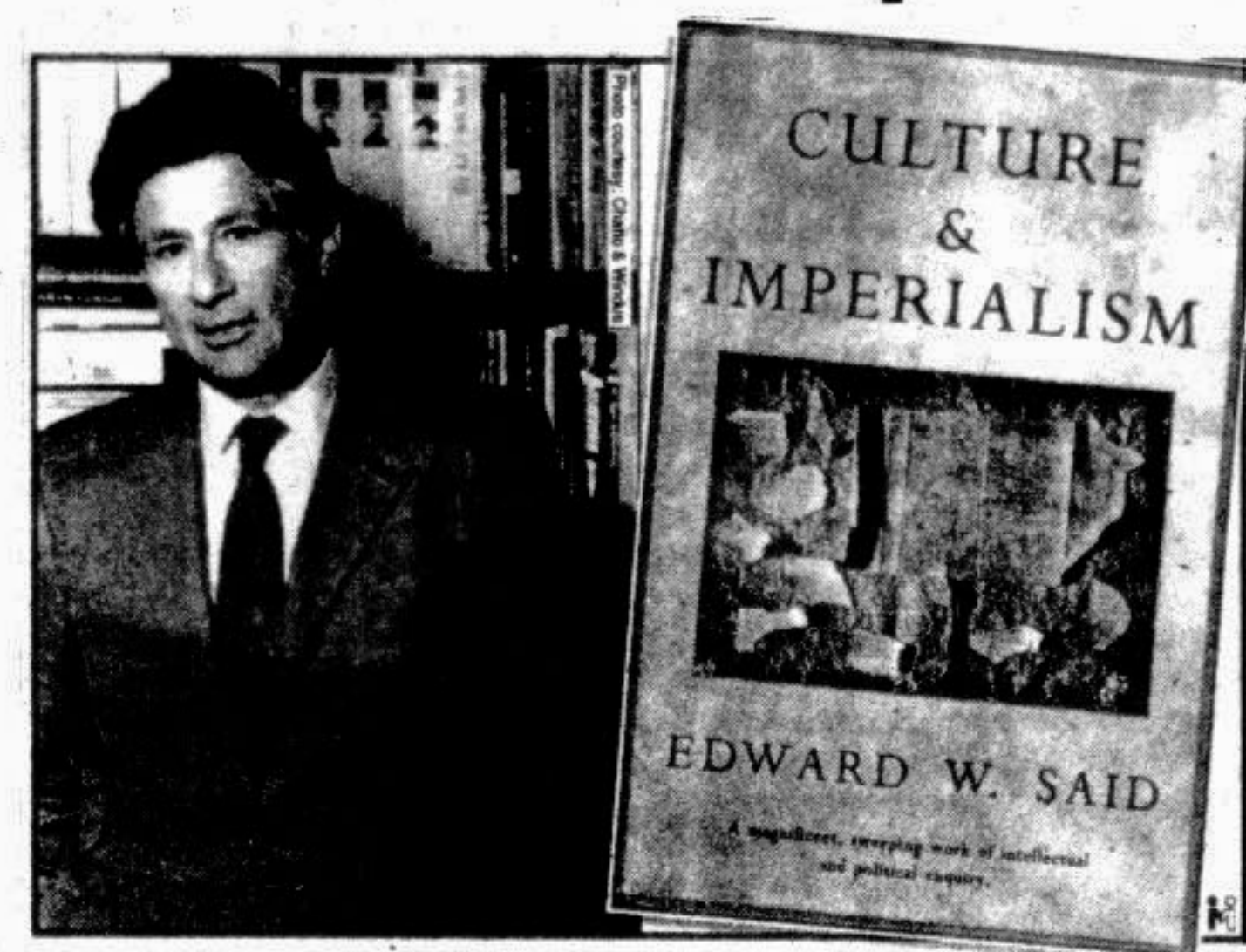
The novel came into its golden age during the period of empire. "Without empire," he writes, "there is no European novel as we know it."

Said argues that the work of some of the most famous names of English literature, Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling, was a product of the empire and helped to sustain imperial culture.

And yet so few Victorian novelists engaged in a serious way with what was going on in the empire. Jane Austen, for example, is famous for her provincialism, where the outside world rarely intrudes.

Said devotes a chapter to her novel *Mansfield Park*, in which she merely alludes to Sir Thomas Bertram making a fortune in the colony of Antigua. Although the lifestyle depicted on the country estate is based on wealth from the Caribbean island, there is no awareness of how it was made, by slavery and exploitation.

He argues that imperial values pervade the novels of even

Edward Said
Endrith

Said's latest book explores the relationship between culture and colonialism

those figures considered anti-colonial in the West. Said suggests that Joseph Conrad, despite his criticism of imperialism, nevertheless reflects the belief that the empire was necessary.

He quotes from Conrad's most famous work *Heart of Darkness* as a prime example of the West's racism, arising from deep fears of the otherness of what they encountered. Said here is treading on territory well-covered by many Third World writers, notably Nigeria's Chinua Achebe.

Even if there were liberal anti-colonial or anti-slavery views, Said argues, they tended basically to demand a more humane administration of colonies, and did not question the 'fundamental superiority of Western man or, in some cases, of the white race.'

He contrasts this with the works of Third World writers such as Frantz Fanon, who played an important role in the Algerian war of independence against the French in the 1950s and became a major theorist of anti-colonialism. "Camus and Gide were writing about the same Algeria that Fanon wrote about," he argues. Then why is the perspective so different?

Said writes: "An Indian or African scholar of English lit-

erature reads *Kim*, say, or *Heart of Darkness* with a critical urgency not felt quite the same way by an American or British one."

Not much has changed in the post-colonial age. "In our time, direct colonialism has largely ended," he writes. However, imperialism "lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere..."

One residue of this imperialism, he says, can be seen the way "natives" are represented in the Western media. "Not only in what is said but also in how it is said, by whom, where and for whom."

Bringing his argument up to date, Said sees the 1991 Gulf war as a colonial war. "Britain bombed Iraqi troops in the 1920s for daring to resist colonial rule; seventy years later the United States did it but with a more moralistic tone, which did little to conceal the thesis that Middle East oil reserves were an American trust."

The media with their power to "manufacture consent" played a key role in that war. Said writes:

"The most disheartening thing about the media — aside from their sheepishly following the government policy model, mobilising for war right from

the start — was their trafficking in 'expert' Middle East lore, supposedly well-informed about Arabs."

It must have been particularly galling for Said to see media experts repeat generalities and lies, shielding the real reasons for the Gulf war behind moralistic tones about human rights and democracy. The worst victims of that conflict were Said's own people, the Palestinians, tens of thousands of whom were expelled from Kuwait.

Born in a prosperous Arab Christian family in Jerusalem in what was then Palestine, Said was from 1977 to 1991 an independent member of the Palestinian National Council, the Palestinian parliament in exile. He inspired the PNC's Algiers resolution of 1988 which accepted, for the first time, the existence of the state of Israel and a rump state for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

Said, an eloquent critic of the pro-Israeli bias of US Middle Eastern policy, has had to cope with a Jewish-dominated American academia and the press. His critics have called him an anti-Semite, although most of his friends are Jewish.

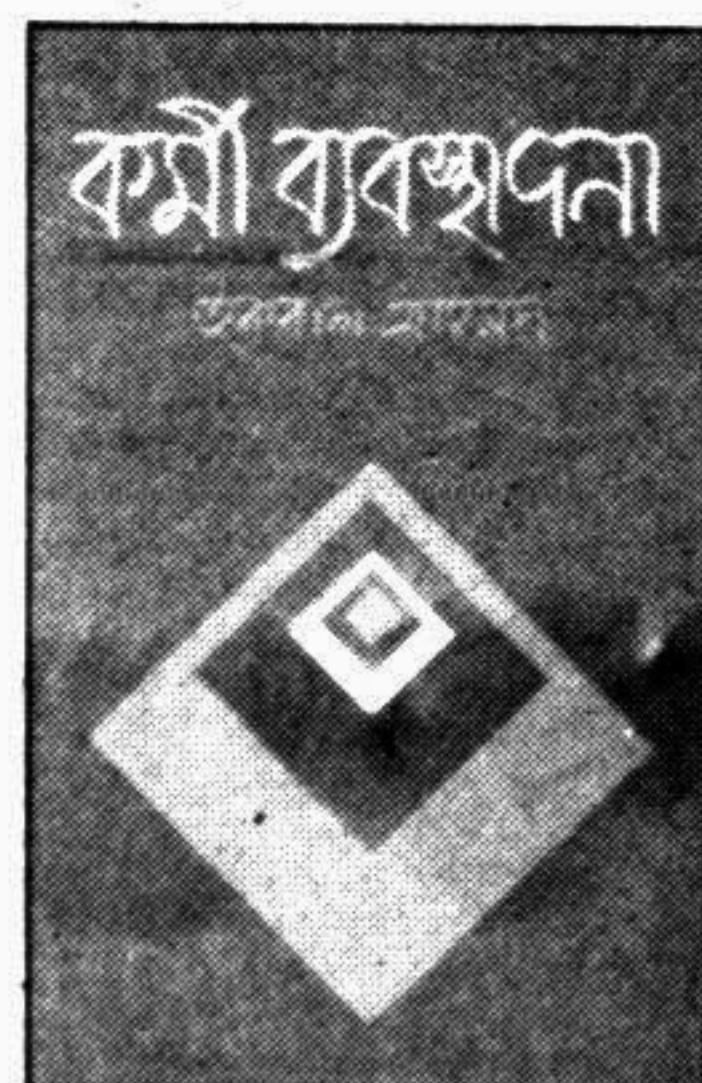
He says that he belongs to a small minority of marginal voices "outnumbered and outorganised by prevailing Western consensus that has come to regard the Third World as an atrocious nuisance, a culturally and politically inferior place."

In the post-Cold War world, he says, his critics have "taken up a strident chorus of rightward-tending damnation, in which they separate what is non-white, non-Western, and non-Judeo-Christian from the acceptable and designated Western ethos, then herd it all together under various demeaning rubrics such as terrorist, marginal, second-rate or unimportant."

DAYA KISHAN THUSSU is Associate Editor of Gemini News Service.

An Excellent Handbook on Personnel Management

WITH my theoretical knowledge of about half a dozen books on personnel management and practical experience of the discipline for a couple of years, I was highly impressed after reading the book *Kormy Babosthapona* (personnel management) by Iqbal Ahmad. Many, if not most, of the few books in Bengali by our local authors on higher studies are just translations of foreign books and there is little touch of any special or exclusive creativity there. Being a sort of transliteration, such books hardly come out of its alien context and students face problems to link their theoretical knowledge derived from these books to practical situations here. Mere translating some chapters which are included in our syllabus is not a good job by any text book author, for that doesn't help students in their real learning. It may help students understand the concepts to an extent, but adaptation of the theories in our socio-economic context becomes quite difficult and at times simply impractical. Iqbal Ahmad has come ahead perhaps to rescue the students from this type of situation. Basing on his practi-



cal experience along with teaching experience at the Institute of Business Administration, Dhaka University for quite a long time, he has done comparatively, a wonderful job. "Kormy Babosthapona" can be considered as a complete book on personnel management.

The author has drawn a detailed historical background of the personnel management since inception of the concept, according to the documentary books on the Industrial Revolution, and shown how it

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by Iqbal Ahmad
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Reviewed by Lutfur Rahman Belayet

gradually flourished and evolved in Bangladesh and other countries till today. Different perspectives adaptability in changing situations, functionalities of personnel management and the manager concerned, personnel management as a coordinating factor, organisational structures-line staff relationship, job policies, different factors of job description, job specification, performance evaluation, manpower planning, different stages of selection process, salary and wages administration and its working procedures, detail analysis of organisational behaviour, motivation, management by objective (MBO), steps of manpower planning, training and development, management development and its significance, industrial security and factors helping in maintaining that, roles of labour organisations, labour law and its implications figure the discussions in the

book. Every chapter has been discussed elaborately with different contexts, references and views of authors world wide.

While discussing the historical background of personnel management, the experienced author has stuck to the core of the subject, for the knowledge and information of the reader. For instance, according to him, the concept of Personnel Management first found roots in Western Electric Company in Chicago. And the philosophy, bases, policies and relationship of the discipline with some other subjects have come under threadbare discussions. Thus the author has penetrated into every context and it is difficult to find lapse of any vital issue necessary for personnel management.

Iqbal Ahmad who is also an expert in Labour Law, has given legal touch to all the sides concerned with manage-

rial functionalities. Every organisation has some legal bases and with elaborate discussions of the key bases the book comes to conclusion with definitions of different terms of the respective Labour laws which apparently seem to be easy but are often confused in understanding. Most of the terms used in the book have their respective English version which will obviously help the readers in better communication.

Printing, paper, binding and other production sides of the book are as excellent as the content. The cover is designed by the reputed and revered artist Quamrul Chowdhury and is, of course, pleasing. The price as such, is lower than expected.

'Kormy Babosthapona' is also worth reading by and can be an appropriate guide for every official, especially the managers of organisations. The officials who do not have commercial background may also know a lot about the intricacies of administrative procedure from this book which will strengthen their confidence as well.

Iqbal Ahmad dedicates the book to the martyrs of the great Language Movement.

WASHINGTON: Islamic music is as rich and diverse as the Islamic world itself, US and regional scholars agree.

This rich diversity is what is on display in "The Musical World of Islam," a programme of concerts sponsored by the World Institute of Music in New York City. The concert series has been running since November and continues through March 1994, offering American audiences a broad view of the many different musical traditions found in the Islamic world, according to Robert Browning, artistic director of the Institute.

both the production and marketing of the couch-shell bangles that a Hindu wife must wear as long as her spouse lives. Long before we came to appreciate the many points of greatness distinguishing this 600-foot long lane, only about 12 feet wide, housing more than 30 thousand people, we had picked up a respect for it mixed with no end of awe. In the communal tension prone Dhaka, Shankhari Patti stood for ferocious invincibility by a community of dwellers ever threatened and ever shrinking over the best part of a century.

And we always had a hunch that the labyrinthine housing — architecture if you stretch it — contributed heavily to its invincibility. Tanvir's film — short although it is — brings that impossible architecture into focus together with the more impossible life more familial and communal than

Rich Diversity of Music
from Islamic World

The festival features music from Iran, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Pakistan, Turkey, Sudan and Azerbaijan. Artists include: Simon Shaheen and the Near Eastern Music Ensemble, Dimi Mint Abba, Meral Ugurlu, the Persian Traditional Music Ensemble, Nursrat Fateh Ali Khan, Ilyas Malayev Ensemble, Hassan Hakmoun, Tanrikorur

Ensemble, Ali Jihad Racy and Mansour Ajami, Hamza El Dini, and Alem Kassimov. Browning said he hopes the concert series will help to combat the stereotyping of Islamic music and the Islamic world. "We have to adjust our ways of thinking," Browning said. "The series gives people an opportunity to see that the Islamic world produces a wealth of music, as wide in scope as what the Western world offers."

Philip Schuyler, an American musicologist, and Simon Shaheen, a performing artist, underscored this point in a December 7 Worldnet television programme with interlocutors in Algiers, Beirut and Damascus. The Worldnet participants included musicians, musicologists, journalists and ministry officials from the region.

"If you include the entire

world of Islam, including the United States for that matter, but certainly from Mauritania to the Philippines — there can be said to be no single music of Islam," said Schuyler, a professor of ethno-musicology at Columbia University who has lived and studied in Morocco and Yemen.

Regional differences can influence the interpretation of the music, he added. "Individual circumstances — social and political and religious — have enormous impact on the music. And there have been different contributors to music of the region — Muslims, Christians, Jews and others."

Even though Islamic music is very often sung in Arabic — the language of the Quran — in interpretations of the music will vary from region to region because of different dialects and accentuation, Schuyler said.

"Local accents and local dialects will also influence the way the words are enunciated," he noted. "There is a tremendous spectrum, a huge range of styles, even though they all share the Arabic language."

While there is diversity in Islamic music, there are also shared characteristics, Schuyler said.

One common thread in Islamic music — and other religious music as well — is giving

preference to the human voice over man-made musical instruments, Schuyler noted. "The most spiritual instrument is the human voice, because it is separated from the man-made object of musical instruments."

Another shared aspect is the priority given to "unmeasured music," i.e. music lacking a "measurable beat or definite rhythm," he explained. This aspect of the music "goes back to the spiritual nature that is not governed by physical rhythms, just as it is not governed by physical instruments."

Simon Shaheen, a well-known composer and performer of Near Eastern music, rejected identifying genres of music produced in the Islamic world. "I consider these terms not necessarily important," he said.

Shaheen argued that Western genres such as "classical" or "traditional" don't tell us very much about the music or the culture in which the music was produced. These terms are often based on another region's musical traditions and interpretations, he said.

"It seems to me that the Western intellectual influence on the musical thinking in the East has forced us to create these pigeonholes and create these classifications and terms. And it seems to me that the meaning of that is wrong," he remarked.

Shaheen who plays the "oudh," an Arabic string instrument, stressed the importance of preserving one's native musical roots.

'The Tale of a Lane'

A Mature Human Document

ARCHITECT and poet Rabul Hussain very unambiguously called Tanvir Mokammel's 34-minute short video film 'The Tale of a Lane' a documentary on architecture and recommended its participation in the only international festival of architectural films held every year at Lausanne in Switzerland. Architect Hussain was making the comments before the first screening of the short film recently at the Goethe Institut auditorium. His praise in advance discomfited many myself included. The half hour that followed fully justified his enthusiasm and the spectators.

by Waheedul Haque

with such distinguished people as Shamsur Rahman and Kabir Chowdhury, Shawkat Osman and Akhteruzaman Ilyas among them, were treated to wonderful results of a dynamically moving camera, which was but a video camera only and of no outstanding merit and limited in a thousand ways, and yet was it moved with imagination. And imagination made the camera transcend its limitation and perhaps no one now would need to make any allowance for the film's being only a video piece. The rough

ends that are strewn throughout the film, not deliberately, but because of the camera and shooting limitations, lends a kind of quality to the film rather than takes anything away from it.

Shankhari Bazar, the conch-shell product market of Dhaka, is not quite a bazaar but is only a patti — which stands for a minimarket in Bengali. And this unique phenomenon of housing and of architectural and human adaptation was for long indeed known to the Dhaka bhoomiputras as Shankhari Patti. And this was a special kind of patti outselling all markets in the subcontinent in