

WEEKEND MUSINGS

Mahfuz Anam

The Dust and Dirt behind the Glitter

LAST week I had the honour of being invited to participate in a live broadcast television programme called 'Abhimat' (View point). It is one of the very few live programmes now on air in the BTV, and perhaps the only one that has the provision to take phone-in questions from viewers, which the participants then have to answer. I was invited courtesy Md. Jahangir, who is a well-known and successful compare of this, and many other programmes on BTV.

The programme for which I was invited dealt with 'How to provide Education for All.' I really have no qualification to participate in such a programme except perhaps for my sincere interest in the subject, and for the fact that I had recently organised a Daily Star Round Table on it, which brought out some excellent ideas on how to deal with the matter.

However, the reason I refer to this programme is somewhat different. The programme permitted me to go to the TV studio after almost a year. The last time I was a participant in similar programme called Mukhomukhi. Before that, I had been, to the same studio as a student, back in the late sixties. I remember going to these studios when the Rampura station had just been commissioned, and we participated in debates and discussion programmes, representing, first the Notre Dame College, and later the Dhaka University.

What struck me during my last week's visit, and the reason why I decided to write about it, is the utter lack of maintenance of the facility that I saw there. Obviously I did not get to see the whole building, but only the entrance and the studio. But this sample gave me a pretty good idea about the whole place.

The building, seen from outside, appears to be quite nice. The entrance hall through which I went to the studios, it is spacious, well lit and quite impressive. As one enters the corridor leading towards the main studios and the huge auditorium, one is struck by the impressive murals on the left side wall. It is obvious that this corridor was meant to be aesthetically tasteful and artistically impressive. But, those intentions are now buried under a thick layer of dust, leaving the unmistakable impression that the cleaners of this place must surely have been on a long strike. The studio from where the programme was telecast, looked like a place that has seldom been cleaned. The chair I was given to sit was dusty only to the extent the clothes of previous occupant was able to wipe of the dirt when he or she sat on it.

As I waited for the programme to start I perused around the studio, and looked at the numerous spotlights that hung from the ceiling, the rods that helped to suspend them properly, and all the props and other things that my eye could see. Everything seemed never to have been dusted or cleaned.

What pained me most was the high-tech camera and other equipments that the technicians were using, all appeared to suffer from a level of neglect and misuse, which could be believed only if one saw it, itself. The tripods on which the cameras stood did not bear any marks of being dusted, leave alone wiped. The cameras were dusty except for places which were in constant use — like the handles, some switches and of course the eye-holes and the lenses.

Obviously the technicians who were using the equipments did not feel it their duty to look after them. May be the task belongs to the maintenance department. But that department comes on to the scene only when something breaks down. Technically therefore, it appears that there is nobody responsible to do the simple job of wiping and dusting the equipments, and thereby preventing them from developing serious defects. Or is there?

The reason I am going into such boring details over such mundane a matter as clearing and dusting things we use daily, is because what I saw in the BTV studios is symptomatic of our general attitude towards all publicly owned property. But more importantly, it is symptomatic of our inability to create good management systems that ensure optimum maintenance of fixed assets, and equipments, so that we get the maximum use out of them. We all know that electronic equipments must be kept dust free. The BTV Headquarters is centrally airconditioned (at least it was unless lack of maintenance ate it up too). And yet the whole place is so much full of dust and dirt.

Another stinker was when I went to the toilet. The commode was as usual totally bereft of either the cover or the seat. Water was falling through the cistern unceasingly. The basin faucet did not work, and the waste water line was clogged. The whole floor was literally flooded with water that could not pass because the drain was blocked. In spite of all this, it was the only toilet usable — readers will understand what I mean.

The wide corridors, that are one of the striking feature of the BTV Head office, was covered with layers of dust. I don't know about upstairs, but the ground floor corridor did not look as if it had seen a sweeper for the last several months.

This is the condition, when there is, I am sure, a fleet of cleaners and sweepers who are on BTV's payroll.

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

To India with Compliments

by Asoke K Bagchi

OUR ship MV *Toscana* berthed at the Naples harbour early in the morning. While entering the port, we saw the island of Capri and the thin column of smoke coming out of the crater of mount Vesuvius. The volcano went into fury in 79 AD and submerged the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum under volcanic ash and lava — which were excavated 600 years later!

The harbour of Naples was full of big ocean liners like SS United States, MV *Conte Biancamano* and MV *Adrea Dorea*, three of the most luxurious passenger liners of the early fifties.

It was announced over the public address system that we would be sailing off for Genoa at the zero hour, so we had plenty of time to explore the city of Naples.

Myself, Bhaskar and Dr K the nuclear chemists went to the shore and started walking aimlessly along a wide road which the Italians call a *strada*. The road had tram tracks like the Calcutta tramways and the motor cars were running at break-neck speeds, which was rather an alarming sight. There were plenty of scooters, the post-war genre of the good old motor-cycle. Those were putt-putting in all directions without paying any heed to the traffic cop! The traffic condition was very homely and nostalgic to us and we felt as if we were on Chittpur Road! It was very obvious that Naples was as noisy as Calcutta!

At a street corner, a group of young men were standing; they were dressed in silky rain-pipe trousers and pin-pointed shoes. A roly-poly lady was passing them, suddenly one of the

boys knelt down in front of her and started singing the aria ... *'La donna e mobile'* with lots of sensual gesticulations. The lay was very annoyed and smattered something to them in her soprano timbre and made gesture as if to kick the singer. I later come to know that those were the notorious *pappagallo*s or parrots of post-war Italy who were menacing eve-teasers and ladies' handbag snatchers! What a grotesque transformation of the great Italians of history!

At the backdrop of the port there was a low rising hill; at two different levels of it were two tall bronze statues, the upper one was of Garibaldi and the other one of Matzini. The rostrum of the statues were stepped and made of shining greenish black marble.

Myself and Bhaskar were sitting on a step of the statue of Garibaldi and leisurely puffing off cigarettes. Dr K, our senior companion, who was a chronic bachelor with superstitious concepts, went down to the small plaza in front of the statue of Matzini. There was a group of young and ill-clad women standing on the plaza. They readily surrounded Dr K and started gyrating their hips! Suddenly we heard and alarm call from Dr K ... 'Help! help! Bagchi! Bhaskar! ... save me! save me!' We sprinted down to the plaza, and I shouted out to the girls in full throat ... 'Leave him alone! ... leave him alone! ... Carabinieri! ... Carabinieri!' The girls left him and stood in a row a few yards in front of us and started their choral...

'Indiano impotenza! Indiano impotenza! ...

'Indiano imbécile! ... Indiano imbécile! ...

'Indiano homossexual! Indiano homossexual! ...

They were complimenting Indians as Dr K refused their collective advances!

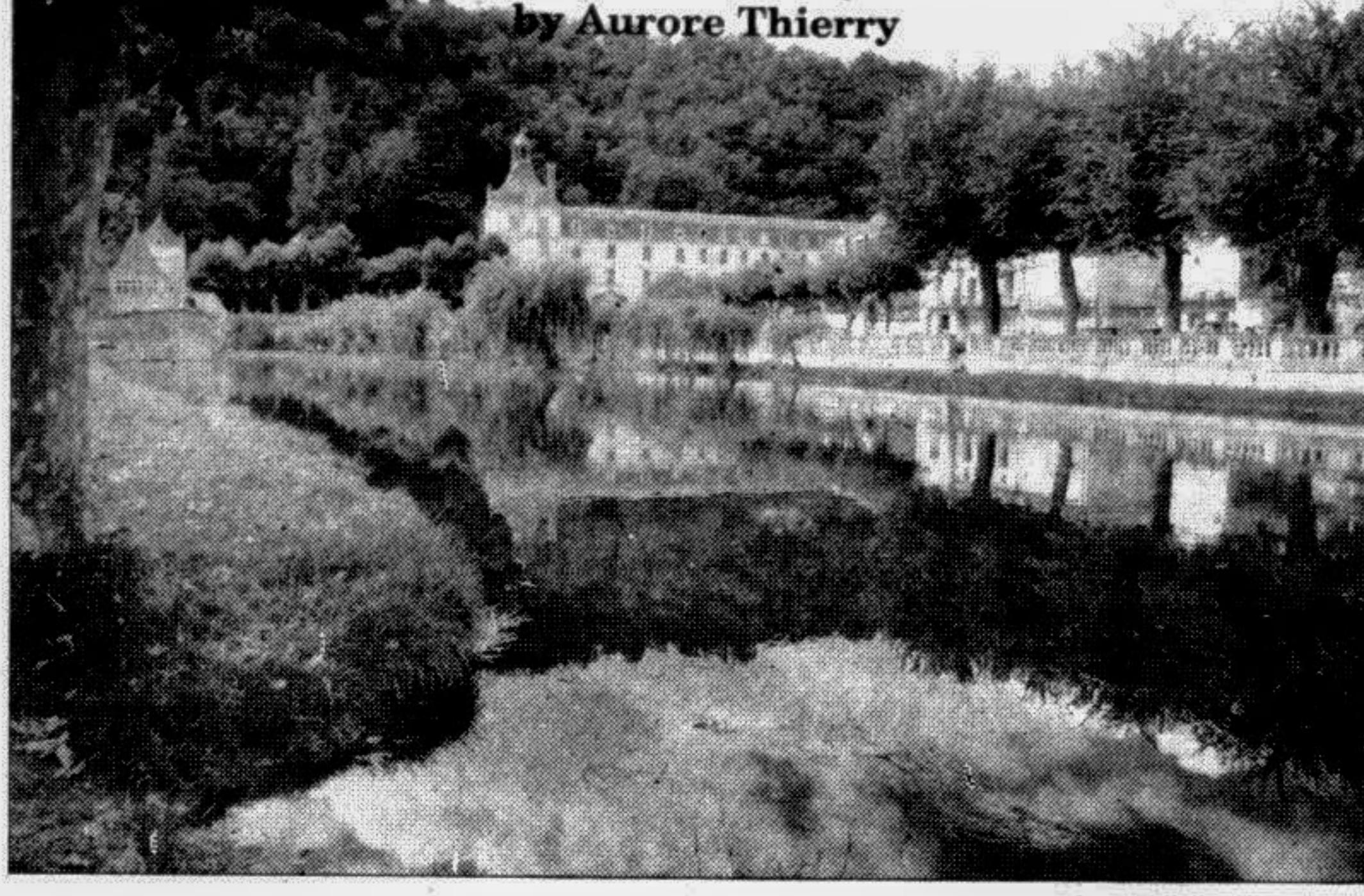
We called it a day thinking ...

'Arrivederci Neapol! ... Citta di amore italiano! ...

Meaning: We will meet you again oh! the amoretic Italian city!

A Passion for Old Stones

by Aurore Thierry



In the last weekend of September, six million people flocked to the 10,000 or so public and private historical buildings which flung their doors wide open in order to reveal their treasures, reducing their admission charges and holding special events for the occasion.

Anything can be visited on these 'Heritage Days', from the rooms in the Elysee presidential palace, for which whole families calmly queued for hours, to the Meurier chocolate factory, built of bricks and iron, in Noisiel, near Paris, and including the La Broque Mennonne-Anabaptist farm in Alsace.

Factories and Castles

A simple list of the place open forms an astonishing poetical inventory. Lovers of old stones wonder at will from a fire-station from the age of Louis XIV, located in the Marais district of Paris, to the salt cellar in Flavy (in the Essonne), the elegant chateau of Guermantes, looking so much like the cardboard castles of Eurodisney, and the Delacroix quarry cellar on the banks of the Seine.

Curiosities of the Republican heritage include the 19th century wash-house-towns in Haute-Saone, as well as the prestigious National Assembly and its magnificent library. Nearby, there is also the wood-

panelling in the 'Quai d'Orsay', as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is familiarly known.

Today's even know-how, living communities and trades form part of the cultural heritage. Visitors could thus cast a respectful eye on the age-old gestures of the distiller of

illicit brew at the cider museum in Normandy. They could watch the lacemaker in Alencon famous for its special stitch, the harnesser of horses in the Perche, the tiler, the troglodyte peasant on his farm in the Poitou and the tin-smelter.

The industrial heritage can

also be discovered such as the water-pumping station which brings water up from the river to top up the canal at Trilbardon, dating from 1920, in the Seine-Marne department, or the blast furnace in Dommartin-le-Rance, in the East of the country.

Theme itineraries have also increased in number, such as that of the 14 cities in the Gironde which, in the heart of

On that same day, one can also enjoy the splendour of historical gilt, frescoes and woodwork in some private princely residence which is normally closed to the ordinary human. These include the mysterious Hotel Haguenot, in Montpellier, in Languedoc, and its garden of intelligence, or the Montgeoffroy chateau in the slightly faded, but so classy, 18th century style, in Maine-et-Loire, a great hit with chic internal design magazines.

The Heritage out and out

Organised visitors, culture fans and those nostalgic for the past can accumulate a maximum of visits in these two days. They can fly over the Cathare chateaux, which were an important centre of religious resistance in the South of France. They can travel by boat along the lazy Mayenne river or to reach the Tatihou museum-island, off the coast of Normandy, or take a steam-train, for instance from Toulouse to Albi to Rodez.

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Television for Development Education of Our Policy Makers

SINCE I have talked so much about television, I would like to continue to do so, but on a different vein. I wonder if we in the BTV cannot start programmes like the EARTHFILE or HEALTHFILE which are regularly broadcast on the BBC programme of the Star TV network. These few minutes programmes deal with urgent environmental and health issues touching upon the immediate concerns of the viewers, and serving to educate them on the present day problems. The development challenges that Bangladesh faces, are many. In almost all the instances there exists tremendous information gap, about the real nature of the problem, especially at the top political and policy making level. For example I feel, (and I would love to be proved wrong,) that most of our politicians know that we face serious population problems, but have very little idea as what the problem really means in terms of land use, water needs, employment requirement, housing shortage, health care needs, educational needs etc.

It is because of this ignorance that we glibly talk about Education for All, and Health for All by the year 2000 without any idea of what such programmes require in terms of resources, manpower and governmental commitment.

So, can we not produce highly impactful three to five minute films on relevant subjects like health, nutrition, population control, child care, common diseases — and hundred other similar topics — and have them repeatedly broadcast over our television for the education of both the leaders and the general public.

Something to Learn from Pakistan Television

GAIN on television. On Wednesday night I accidentally switched on to the Pakistan Television (PTV) and saw a discussion programme on the current crisis in Afghanistan, and the role Pakistan can play in it. The programme was participated by a sitting general, a retired general, one expert and a few members of the public. The first thing I would like to point out is that the discussion programmes was in English. Since long BTV has given up doing programmes in English. But why? Even if we do not have a large audience in English, still we should have some programme in English to keep up its use, and to popularise it further. I cannot see the rationale for totally abandoning English language discussion programmes, while we continue to show a large number of English films. If there is audience for English, then we should have English language current affairs programmes.

If for nothing else, at least for the large number of expatriates, members of the diplomatic corps, the UN staff members, and foreign experts, we should have occasional current affairs programmes. This will help our foreign guests to know what we, in Bangladesh, are thinking about global issues, and also about local issues. I think if the BTV undertakes a survey, it will find that there is a large enough audience for such programmes, to be worth its while. I request the Information Ministry to think about it, especially in view of our efforts to acquire a more English language current affairs programmes.

Second thing about the PTV programmes was the level of discussion. The subject of Afghanistan is linked with Pakistan's security concerns. The Pak military has been, and is currently involved in the affair. Yet the discussion was free and provocative enough to hold my attention for more than an hour.

So, why can't we on the BTV, have such a free and frank discussion on national issues, even those that touch on the security. After all the military is a part of us, belongs to us, so why should we not discuss their affairs. Then again who will defend the country in the ultimately

Bombay's Nameless

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erosion of social values, break-down of traditional joint families and increased rural poverty have contributed to the children's dislocation.

As they live on pavements,

they are frequent victims of sexual abuse and crimes like drug trafficking. A World Health Organisation report says that all over the world street children often end up as drug addicts.

The United States-based Indian film-maker Mira Nair's award-winning *Salaam Bombay* evocatively portrayed these rootless children, living in abandoned railway coaches, dilapidated houses and in 'red light' areas.

The world of these destitutes

Army of Orphans

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problem has been made worse by AIDS, which is estimated to affect 10 per cent of the population.

According to a World Bank report, there are 784,000 orphans in Uganda, or 10 per cent of the country's total population under 15.

The situation has become so grave, says Manolo Pinto, director-general of Uganda's AIDS Commission, that the number of orphans is expected to increase five-fold in the next five years.

A motorist wearing ill-fitting trousers recently fell prey to one of their traps. As he bent over to check his car, a cigarette butt was thrown down his pants. As he yelled and struggled to remove it, a group of kids made off with his briefcase.

Mukasa also talks of assaulting tourists. When two women passed by and ignored the children's begging, Mukasa says with a giggle, 'the punishment we gave them was to throw handfuls of dust in their faces.'

But harshships that send children onto the streets are not only hardships that send children onto the streets.

Amudani Kayemba says his uncle mistreated him for the slightest mistake: 'He used to round me up and throw me in prison or made to do farmwork.

Clearly, action is needed before there is a violent backlash

against the children. Reactions like that of Gingo, a commuter who lost his watch and received a deep gash when attacked by street kids, are increasingly common. 'I wish something would take place like happens in Brazil,' he says, in a reference to the assassination of street children in Latin America.

Harsh measures are also proposed by some leaders.

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