

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 petty 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 dusted only to the extent the clothes of the 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 himself. 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 monitors.

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.

I understand that BTV is making a lot of money. In fact an example of it was that the 'Abhimat' programme, which had never been sponsored till date, was sponsored that very night of our programme. This meant that even discussion programmes, otherwise termed as boring, were now being sponsored. Can't a bit of the rising profit be diverted to public convenience?

Some Programme producers were telling me that there is no decent waiting room for participants. So if there is any distinguished guest, who comes to participate, they are entertained in the rooms of BTV's high officials. But for the regular participants, they have to hang around the studios.

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 to 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

AGAIN 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 were 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 films, there will be audience for 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 cosmopolitan attitude in our nation building.

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 analysis, it is the people, not the military alone.

If Pakistan can do it, why can't we? Again on the PTV programme, the comper was a very smart and competent lady. She conducted the programme in immaculate English with perfect poise and confidence. In the BTV there is no women comper on any of the discussion programmes. I think it is high time that women should given leading roles on discussion programmes on BTV.

I am sure they will add a new, and much needed poise and colour to these programmes.

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 Meunier chocolate factory, built of bricks and iron, in Noisiel, near Paris, and including the La Broque Mennonite-Anabaptist farm in Alsace.

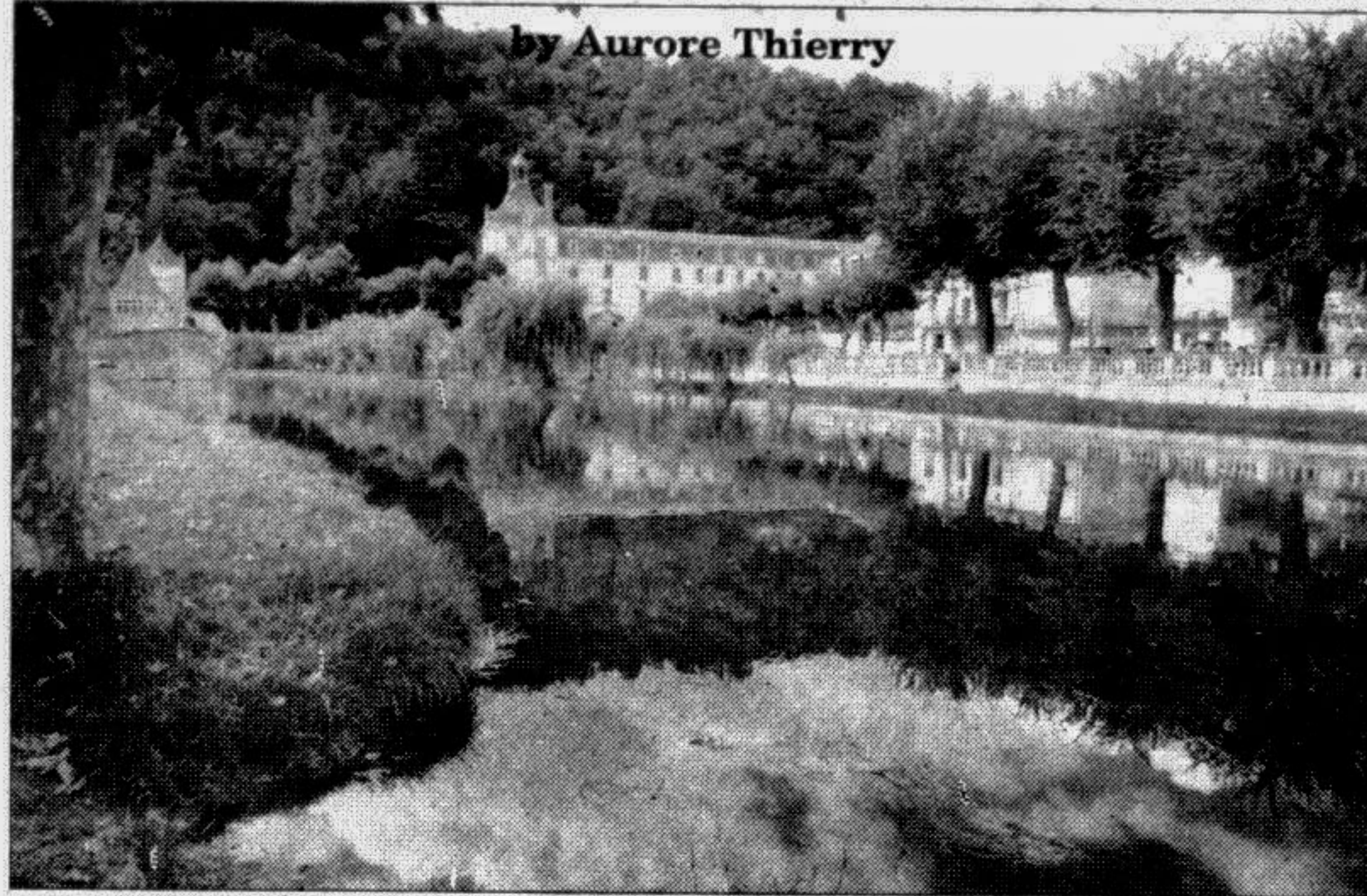
Factories and Castles

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-townhalls in Haute-Saone, as well as the prestigious National Assembly and its magnificent library. Nearby, there is also the wood-

A Passion for Old Stones

by Aurore Thierry



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 Trilbardou, dating from 1920, in the Seine-et-Marne department, or the blast furnace in Dommarin-le-Rance, in the East of the country.

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 Haguénat, 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 Tatiou museum-island, off the coast of Normandy, or take a steam-train, for instance from Toulouse to Albi to Rodez.

Theme itineraries have also increased in number, such as that of the 14 cities in the Gironde which, in the heart of the famous Bordeaux vineyards, have organised an architectural circuit, illustrated at night with lighting effects, or the guided tour, by former miners in the maze of shafts and galleries in disused mines.

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

cuts across barriers of religion, caste and ethnic group. Their driving force is survival, in pursuit of which they fall easy prey to the underworld mafia who can hire them with the lure of money.

Victims of a callous, fractured society, the children are now receiving the attention of many non-government organisations (NGOs). The success of SPARC in Bombay has encouraged other NGOs in the city, such as Yuva and Vatsalya, which adopt street children.

In Calcutta, NGOs such as Ashalayam have made a difference to the lives of many street kids. It runs a night shelter for homeless children and encourages them to learn a skill. Once

youngsters start earning, an account is opened in the bank and they can start looking for a place to live. The rent is paid by Ashalayam until they are young adults and can start living their own lives.

Organisations such as Save the Children and the Vivekananda Education Society provide free education. The government and Unicef are also seeking help from Mother Teresa, the Catholic nun who works among Calcutta's poor, to launch a scheme for the protection of street children. One of the project's aims is to strengthen organisations already trying to help the children of the streets.

RANJITA BISWAS is on staff of 'Financial Express', Calcutta.

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 Manuella 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 war and Aids are not only hardships that send children out of Uganda's streets.

Amudani Kayemba says his uncle mistreated him for the slightest mistake: "He used to hang me upside down. I had

nowhere to turn except taking this life."

Not all street kids have broken links with their parents or guardians. Social scientist David Muganyizi estimates that about two-thirds are in contact with their parents, often contributing money to the household income.

The economic hardships faced by some parents forces them to ask their children to take to the streets, says Opon Akak, who works to help the children. Some earn money by selling food which has fallen off trucks, and use the money to pay school fees.

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. Sebana Kizito, a Kampala Member of Parliament, advocates that street kids should be rounded up and thrown in prison or made to do farmwork.

Opon Akak is enraged by such attitude and says politicians lack compassion. Fortunately, community efforts to keep children off the streets are gathering momentum. The main targets are Aids orphans.

One man, Semukasa, has built a village polytechnic where street kids work on agricultural projects and are taught to produce handicrafts for sale. More than 20 orphans train there and Semukasa plans to increase the number when he gets more funds.

Many children have been allowed to stay in the homes of their dead parents, where they are helped by relatives. More than 20 orphanages have been built by ordinary citizens to house, feed and educate dozens of children.

Kefa Sempangi of the African Foundation, which runs an orphanage with more than 200 children in Mukono, about 20 kilometres from Kampala, says that with the help of foreign sponsors the lives of many children have been improved.

"I have produced two doctors who now work in government hospitals and I have here a headmaster who was also picked from the streets," Sempangi says.

CRESPO SEBUNYA is a reporter with the 'Weekly Topic' in Kampala.

Sniffing away Hunger

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tional oil consortium, refines 3,000 tons of Toluene annually for manufacturing purposes. Inhaling Toluene-based glues and thinners can cause blindness, brain damage, and liver and kidney failure.

Following the death of a 14-year-old Guatemalan street kid, the Resistolero Project, led by Casa Alianza and its US organisation, Covenant House, launched an international campaign, challenging the US manufacturers of 'Resistol' to reformulate its product. Jose Linares was awaiting a transplant after chemo had destroyed his kidneys. He stayed at Casa Alianza's Guatemala City refuge, having been abandoned at the age of nine.

His death inspired Harris to start a drug rehabilitation programme in the Guatemalan capital that now treats 60 street children. It also resulted in the introduction of a Bill before the Guatemalan legislature to require the manufacturers of contact cements to add a repellent known as 'mustard seed oil' to their formulas to discourage glue sniffing, a practice now mandated by some US states.

But such legislation has not prospered in the region. In 1989, largely at Casa Alianza's bidding, Honduras passed a 'mustard seed oil' requirement that has never been put into practice.

The Resistol trademark south of Mexico is owned by the US-based H B Fuller Corporation, which maintains operations in 17 Latin American countries and accounts for 90 per cent of the industrial glue trade in Central America.

In July 1992, just days after a US national television expose of Resistol abuse in Central America, Fuller's board of directors announced the withdrawal of all Resistol products from the Honduran market and a cut-off of all but industrial inventories to Guatemala.

"Solvent abuse is not a products issue — it is a human issue," Fuller president Walter Kissling declared. Fuller has also announced grants to street education projects in Central America, says the company's public relations chief.

But the Resistoleros are suspicious of Fuller's publicity blitz. Harris points out that the transnational maintains large inventories of its product in El Salvador and Nicaragua, where Resistol dominates the market.

Fuller operates production facilities in cities where solvent abuse by street kids has accelerated, because of access to the product, says the Casa Alianza director.

In November 1992, Guatemala City police raided a house where street kids were being schooled in home robbery techniques, and discovered two 54-gallon industrial drums of Resistol being dispensed to them as reward for successful thievery.

Another transnational accused of not making it hard enough for the street kids of Central America to obtain its products is the German-based Henkel Chemical Corporation, which manufactures Patex, the second-most popular contact cement in Guatemala and Honduras.

Fuller public relations officer Bill Beilknapp complains that the popular Resistol has become a generic trademark, and that the kids are really abusing products manufactured by competitors like Henkel.

"Our product is not the drug of choice for the street children for one simple reason — it's too expensive," insists a Resistol spokesperson in Mexico City.

The Resistol trademark in Mexico, held since the early 1970s by a joint venture with a US corporation, is now wholly owned by the Mexican conglomerate, Grupo Desc. Resistol is wrestling with its public image as Harris and his Mexican Resistolero committee discuss the introduction of 'mustard seed oil' legislation with Mexico City representatives.

The proposed regulation is criticised by Guillermo Locht, a Resistol products engineer, because the additive may have possible carcinogenic repercussions. Instead, Resistol will reduce the content of Toluene in its glue by two-thirds.

To demonstrate its civic spirit, says Locht, the corporation is undertaking a television campaign to announce the reformulation. New stocks should be on store shelves within six months, as existing inventories are depleted and no recall is contemplated.

"We are doing our part," said the Resistol engineer. "It's as if we were changing our formula from tequila to beer."

JOHN ROSS is a poet-activist-reporter with more than three decades of experience of covering South America.

Sarajevo's Weapon

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talk from people all over the world of initiatives to open a 'cultural corridor' to the city that would also allow our artists to leave and work outside. But it never came to anything.

It is difficult for foreigners to get to Sarajevo and even more difficult for us to get out. But a few people who did come to Sarajevo could inform Europe of what happens in the city and what happens to people like me.

Why aren't people of the art and culture allowed to leave Sarajevo? Because nobody can speak better about the situation there, or ask the world more persuasively for solidarity with our suffering city, than the artists who live in it.

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 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 thirties.

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 motorcycle. 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 Chitpur 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 lady was very annoyed and smattered something to them in her sopsano timbre and made gesture as if to kick the singer. I later came to know that those were the notorious pappagallos 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! ... Carabineer! ... Carabineer!" 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 imbecille! Indiano imbecille! Indiano homosessuale! Indiano homosessuale!" They were complimenting Indians as Dr K refused their collective advances!

We called it a day thinking "Arrivederci Napoli! Citta di amore italiano!" Meaning: We will meet you again oh! the amoretic Italian city!

Enayet Karim

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work for the cause of Bangladesh. Meanwhile we had been able to establish regular contact with the Mujibnagar government. Professor Rehman Sobhan visited us twice as an emissary of the Prime Minister Mr Tajuddin Ahmad. In early July, on the basis of consultations with Mujibnagar, we had made plans to openly declare our al-

legiance to Bangladesh. Unfortunately, Enayet Karim suffered a second heart attack at this time and had to be transferred to the Intensive Care Unit of the Georgetown Hospital. Visiting him in the Intensive Care Unit I told him that all the Bengali officials would quit the Embassy but in view of his critical health condition he should remain in his post until his recovery, given the prohibitive cost of his hospitalization. I still remember the conversation vividly. When I told him that we felt all of us except him should leave the Embassy he became visibly upset and, ignoring my plea to remain calm, said with deep emotion, "Kibria, I know I may die any minute but I do not wish to die as a servant of Yahya Khan. I wish to die as a free Bangalee. I will join you all from my hospital bed in quitting the Pakistan Embassy. Before I die I want to declare my allegiance to Bangladesh."

Needless to say, I was deeply touched by his moving words and had no alternative but to respect his wish.

He could have died any minute but he had only one thought in his mind. The liberation of the motherland and a burning desire to join the struggle. He survived the attack and eventually he joined us when we left the Pakistan Embassy on 4 August. I must say, his worthy wife Hosna Karim also played a brave and highly laudable role in carrying out her husband's patriotic decision. We all knew her as a

lady of great social grace, charm and culture but when the time came she rose to the occasion and demonstrated her strength of character. Enayet Karim was still convalescing when the family shifted from the official residence. Mrs Karim did not flinch for a moment even though the future to her must have looked very uncertain indeed.

I was serving in the Foreign Office in Dhaka in 1972 when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman asked Enayet Karim if he would accept his appointment as the Foreign Secretary. Any other person with health problems would have excused himself from his most demanding and onerous post. Bangladesh has just emerged on the world stage as an independent nation but the vast majority of countries had not till then given us recognition.

The urgent problems of stranded Bangladeshis in Pakistan and other outstanding issues were yet to be resolved. China had vetoed our admission to the UN. The situation demanded a strong person, with the stamina to work twelve hours a day if not longer. However, this dedicated man did not seem to have any thoughts for his health or his personal interests.

Serving independent Bangladesh as its Foreign Secretary was to him the pinnacle of glory and honour. It was an opportunity which he just could not refuse. Bangabandhu held him in such high regard and esteem that he would have certainly allowed him to remain in Washington if Enayet Karim wanted to continue there for health reasons. But Enayet

Karim was made of sterner material. He accepted the challenge despite the vulnerable health situation and devoted himself to his new assignment, drawing upon all his resources of mental and physical energy. Predictably, his fragile health could not stand the strain of the great pressure of work and while working in the office on 16 February, 1974 he suffered his third heart attack. Even on his death bed in the Hospital he was concerned about some important files which needed Bangabandhu's urgent attention. Enayet Karim's wish to die for Bangladesh was finally answered.

Enayet Karim's contributions as a diplomat can be evaluated objectively and correctly only when the authentic history of the early days of our independence will be written. Since the assassination of the Father of the Nation on 15 August, 1975 a conspiracy of silence has placed a curtain on his achievements in different fields including the field of international relations. The calm, experienced and skilful hand of a seasoned diplomat was there by the side of Bangabandhu when crucial and far reaching decisions were taken on key foreign policy questions. I sincerely hope that the shameful attempt by certain interested quarters to distort history will stop and an effort will be made to write an authentic history of those fateful days when Bangladesh assumed its place in the comity of nations as an independent sovereign state. I believe that only then will this brave, modest and intensely patriotic man get his due recognition.