

Dhaka Day by Day

East or West, Home is Best?

by Rashida Ahmad

Incurable pessimism appears to be a national characteristic in Bangladesh. People complain almost about everything — from the road traffic to the insolence of servants. Almost every conversation contains some disparaging remarks about the state of the country or its people. Criticism of the status quo has always played an important role in most societies, but the grievances aired in everyday social intercourse are not positive criticisms. It is bitter cynicism mixed with disillusionment. The notion that the West is best seems to underly this deep dissatisfaction that people feel. But is this belief justified?

People in Dhaka speak of buildings that have tilted to dangerous degrees, because they were built without the proper foundations, with despair in their voices as if substandard building work were unique to Bangladesh. But those who know will confirm that London has witnessed the dereliction of whole towerblocks in the inner cities, built in the sixties with structural faults and cheap materials. Some of these buildings are known to have collapsed altogether. In some cases only one or two flats out of a whole block have been occupied usually by the poor.

est in society, mostly elderly people living on their own.

Complaints about the service sector abound. For example, car mechanics here are looking for a chance to cheat the customer by replacing a whole headlight when all that was required was a new cover. But mechanics are the same the world over. In England if a clutch needs adjusting they will put in a whole new gearbox and change all the tyres if you're not careful, assuring you that it was absolutely necessary.

As for the complaint against corruption, it is not unheard of even in the capitals of the cradles of democracy. Some in the states complain there is not much to choose between the CIA and the Mafia. Remember Watergate and Iranagate, maybe, Iraqgate is shortly to follow, or perhaps Haitigate. No doubt, the US government is free to do as it pleases and it does. On the subject of corruption in Britain suffice it to say that those scandals which are uncovered and reported in the media are the tip of the iceberg and that the Official Secrets Act can have no place in a true democracy. There's no denying that politics by its very nature requires compromising one's principles to a great extent and thus corruption is always a possibility. Maybe, in Bangladesh it is accepted as almost inevitable and dealt with openly. In the West

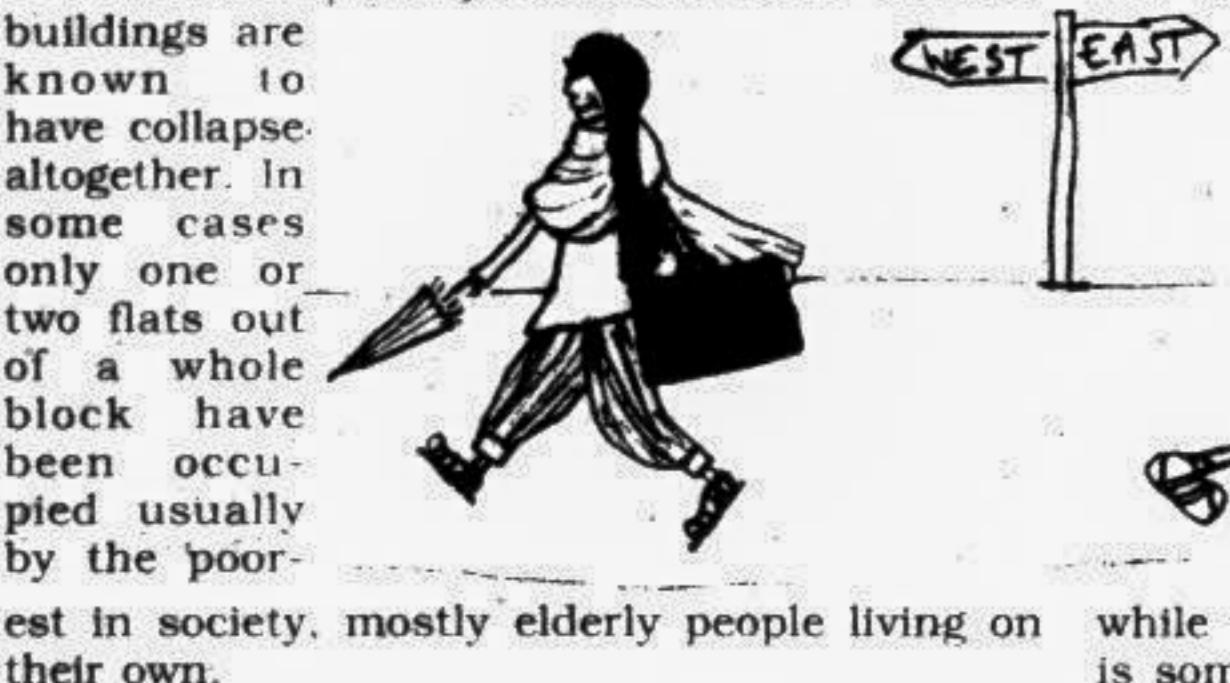
there is hypocrisy and smugness. Compared with Washington, or London's corruption and crime records, Dhaka's is very naive — to say the least.

Of course, there are many problems here such as poverty and suffering on a scale unseen in the West since the last century. But those who protest the loudest are not poor. They live in houses kept spotlessly clean by servants who also cook and look after their children for them, (unheard of in the West unless you are very wealthy), and so are in a position to do something about the numerous grievances they have about their country. Those they complain about — usually the uneducated masses — are not in such a position. They are stuck in a system not always of their own making, powerless and talked down to by their 'superiors', and trying to survive in a hostile world where even the innocence of childhood is a luxury.

The first step towards self-improvement is to be positive. Jingoism must not be condoned, but is there something wrong with taking a little pride in your own country and city? And perhaps even occasionally noticing the good things about life here? The irony of the matter is that

while people here believe that life in the West is something to aspire for, in the West people are realising that something has been lost that the East still possesses. Ancient and unique cultures are still valued, artisanship and craftsmanship are still widespread, the utmost hospitality is offered by rich and poor alike, there is importance placed on the family and the elderly are respected and looked after. Most importantly, technology and mass consumerism have not yet replaced God as idols to worship blindly. And television has not yet become the opium of the masses.

However there are causes to be wary. It is better to make the most of what is left because it's changing all too rapidly. Those who visit from the West are often quite disturbed to see the extent of cultural imposition, done quite unnaturally, on the East. In the face of such global conformation, as we are witnessing today, defeatism and pessimism are killers of cultures. It is all too easy to yield to the new imperialism. It has been designed to be too easy, to appeal to the most basic instincts for comfort and security through material possessions. But a strong and affirmative vision is required for the future. Don't be a party to the murder of your own culture.



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BNP leaders, workers urged to make party stronger

Information Minister Nazmul Huda yesterday urged the local level BNP leaders and workers to make the party stronger by gearing up organisational activities, reports BSS.

The Information Minister was speaking as chief guest at the extended meeting of Dohar Thana BNP at the Thana Complex auditorium.

Giving a resume of various development activities in Dohar Thana during the last three years and a half, the Information Minister said the people have been participating in the socio-economic development programmes spontaneously. This is the politics of our nationalist government, he added.

In this connection he pointed out that many leaders and workers have joined BNP from other parties because of its politics of development and production. He called upon all to work unitedly for the development of their area.

Referring to the on-going dialogue, he said it was being held in a cordial atmosphere to resolve the political stalemate.

Later the Information Minister saw the development of the local Joypara College.



Abul Hasan Chowdhury, MP, international affairs secretary, Bangladesh Awami League, is seen with Gareth Evans QC, the foreign minister of Australia. Chowdhury called on Evans during his recent visit to Australia.

JS body on Social Welfare Ministry meets

The 26th meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Social Welfare was held yesterday at the Sangsad Bhaban with State Minister for Social Welfare Fazlur Rahman in the chair, reports BSS.

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Bangladesh Shipping Corporation M.V. BANGLAR BAANI (VOY-NO. 54-OW)

The above vessel will load Cargo for East African ports as per following tentative loading schedule in place of M.V. Banglar Doot declared earlier:

ETA	ETD
Chittagong 28.10.94	02.11.94
Mongla 03.11.94	10.11.94

All valued shippers/buyers/patrons are requested to extend support to Bangladesh Shipping Corporation by offering timely booking/nomination in favour of above vessel.

For space booking and any other information please contact in the following address:

DHAKA	CHITTAGONG	KHULNA
28/1, Toyenbee Circular Road Motijheel Commercial Area Dhaka-1000. Phone: 250430, 258378 & 251455.	"BSC Bhaban" Saltgola Road Chittagong Phone: 503790 & 501288	KDA Building (2nd Floor) Lower Jessor Road Khulna Phone: 22326, 21142 & 23702
Telex: 632204 & 642231 BSC BJ Fax No: 02-863950	Telex: 66277, 66253 & 66359 BSC BJ	Telex: 633327 BSC BJ
Fax No: 031-225506	Fax No: 041-22643	Fax No: 041-22643

Metropolitan



Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Jatiya Sainannaya Committee held a rally in front of the Taher auditorium in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Half of rural households to get sanitation facilities

The government will bring 50 per cent of the total rural households under sanitation coverage by June next. Taka 50 crore will be allocated to support setting up of 25 lakh sanitary latrines in as many houses by the time, reports BSS.

This was decided at a high-powered inter-ministerial meeting held at the NEC Bhaban yesterday. Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman was in the chair. State Minister for Planning Dr A Moyeen Khan also spoke on the occasion.

So far 35 per cent of the rural areas have been brought under the sanitation coverage. As per decision of the meeting, the government would provide Tk. 200 to each person who will set up one sanitary latrine under the 'accelerated sanitation extension support programme' of the government.

Each latrine costs Tk 500 only.

The finance minister directed the authorities concerned to set up at least two sanitary latrines in each

Discussion on lexicon revision

By Staff Correspondent

The Bangla Academy organised a meeting of teachers of different schools and colleges in the city to discuss the academy-published 'Bengali-English Dictionary' at its seminar room yesterday afternoon.

Academy Director General Prof. Harun-ur-Rashid, speaking on the occasion stressed the need for a revision of the dictionary, already published in the country, to make it a compendium for the teachers, students and other concerned.

Apart from an emphasis on the revision of the lexicon, Prof. Harun praised the dictionary for its exceptional quality of containing words of most common use. It also contained graphics and rules of usage, he said.

The teachers assured the DG of their cooperation in this regard.

Dutch envoy meets Zahir

The Netherlands Ambassador to Bangladesh, Robert A Vornis, called on Industries Minister AM Zahiruddin Khan at his office in the city yesterday, reports BSS.

During the meeting, they discussed the issue setting up of 'joint venture' project in Bangladesh on the basis of mutual benefits of two countries particularly in the field of chemical, paper, machinery and shipyard sectors.

Obituary

CHITTAGONG, Oct 23: Ismat Ara Niti, Associate Professor of Haj Mohammad Mohsin College, Chittagong, died here last night. She was 47, reports BSS.

She left behind two sons, a daughter, husband, and mother.

Gulkhani of the deceased will be held at her residence at 144/85, Chattershwar Road on October 26.

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