

# Kachi-Kancha Bhavan : A Dream Come True

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

IT'S a dream come true. After long 38 years of arduous and perilous journey, Kachi-Kancha Mela, the reputed children's organisation is home today, April 21, at its own premises. The foundation for a ten storied Kachi-Kancha Bhavan — a building for the multitude of Kachi-Kancha Mela members was laid earlier on an allocated 18-katha i.e. 12960 square feet land at Segunbagicha.

With the inauguration of the gorgeous headquarters of its own Kachi-Kancha Mela institutionalised itself as a premier children's organisation of the country.

Built on a plinth area of 7200 square feet the two storied building will ceremonially be inaugurated today (21 April) by a person, who has dedicated his 39 years to build up Kachi-Kancha Mela as an organisation. He is Rukanuzzaman Khan, a founder Director of this organisation. It was Rukanuzzaman Khan who along with a handful of young activists laid the foundation of this children's organisation on 5 October, 1956 at Tarabagh residence of 'Poet' Sofia Kamal in the city. Thirty eight years ago from now nobody possibly dreamt the status of this children's organisation would reach the present height earning fame at home and abroad.

To mark this occasion of inauguration a cultural function has been arranged which will be presided over by no less a person than poet Sofia Kamal herself, who has been associated with this organisation since its inception. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Mr Justice Mohammad Habibur Rahman will inaugurate the auditorium.

Members of Kachi-Kancha Mela from Dhaka and Sylhet are participating in the function which includes staging of a written by Sukumar Roy. The children will be performing in the auditorium of their own building. This is a monumental pleasure and pride for them. It's a place where they belong, a place which comes more

fondly than home as they will be taught here in the arts of speaking, writing, painting, singing, dancing, and acting — the qualities that make one worthy. Presently, however, there is little scope to organise classes for painting or music because only auditorium has been completed. Plans are, however, also drawn to open clinic and vocational training centre for the disadvantaged section of the society to enable them to generate income for themselves.

The newly constructed building is also unique in the metropolis from the architectural point of view. Built at a cost of one crore thirty lakh taka, it has a modern auditorium with sophisticated lighting and acoustic system. It has 305 capacity seating arrangement in a 30X30 feet floor space. Presently there is hardly any auditorium of children's organisations in the city which can be compared with

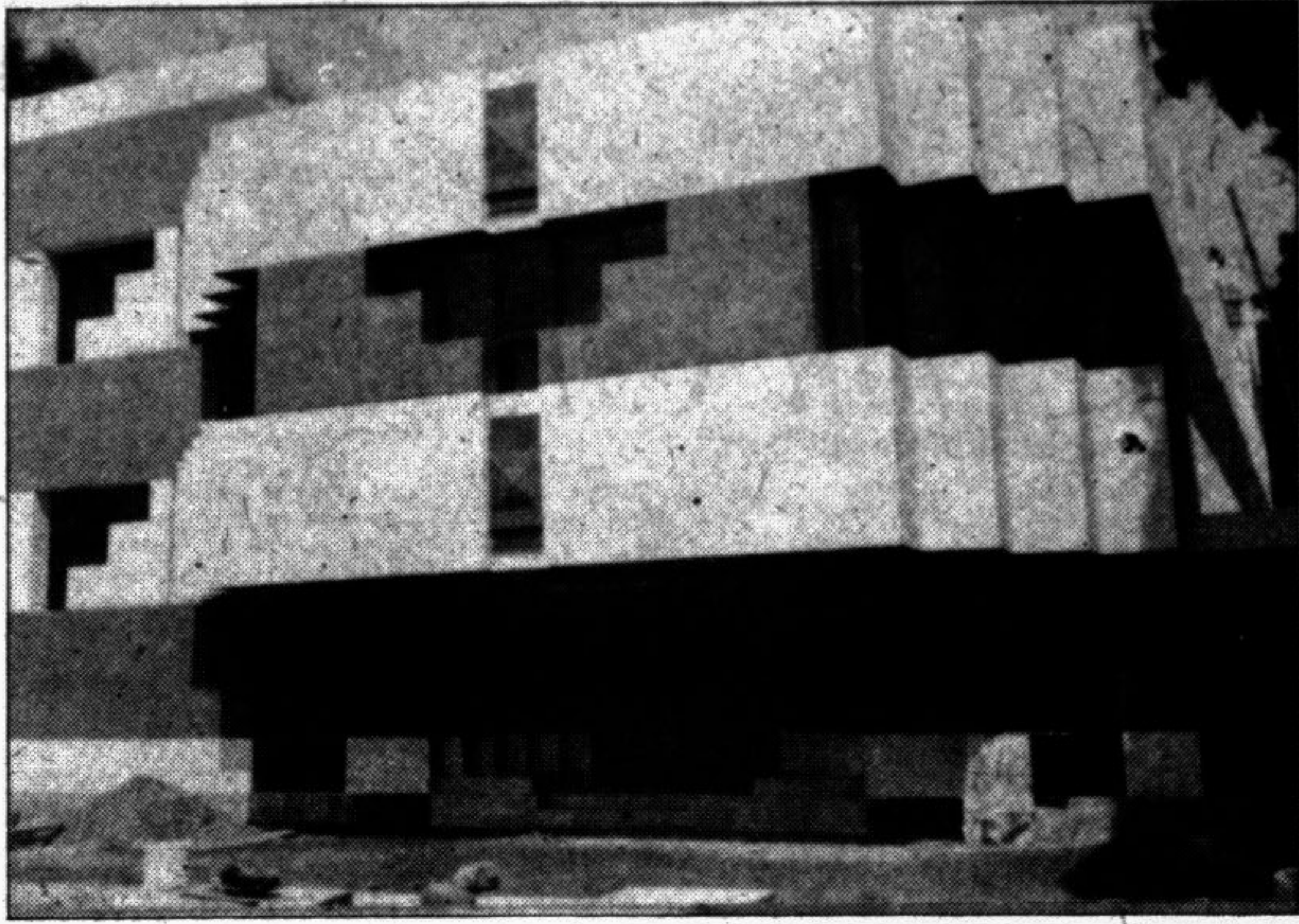
this. Design of the building with colourful facade to the children's imagination was made by renowned architect Rabul Hossain on behalf of M/s Shahidullah Associates, which was assigned as consulting firm for its construction. Carnival red, tangerine, navy blue and gray synthetic enamel paint add attraction to the structure.

On the back of the building there is an open air stage with appropriate lighting arrangement where musical soiree, drama, poetry recitation and discussion meetings can particularly be held during the dry season. And there is provision for parking cars.

The land for the premise was donated to this pioneer national children organisation during late President Ziaur Rahman's tenure of office. And thanks are also due to Norwegian Agency for

Development Cooperation (NORAD) for assisting this children's organisation to have its own building. NORAD, which is a Directorate under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway has been extending support for projects and programmes in partner countries to bring about a sustainable development. As a matter of fact Kachi-Kancha Mela was established with a view to imbuing in the children extra-curricular activities to flourish their mental faculties.

In its 38 years of journey Kachi-Kancha Mela has attained a national status and is possibly the only children's organisation in the country which can rightly claim this enviable position. It has braved many a stormy climate in its journey towards creating an environment for development of the mental faculties of the children. And now with a place of their own in the heart of the city, they are surely posed for a dent upward.



THE political weather report is gloomy. The politicians are fighting over demo-crag — that is the way the disgruntled non-political opinions are inclined to spell "democracy" (there is a crazy demon in the word, and the concept has yet to take root). This extrovert political fashion is the western version of an imported -ism. The pessimists believe the duty paid is very high. It is not selling well in the Opposition camp; although the sale of foreign consumer products is brisk (the smuggling should decrease with the open-market policy).

There is a lot of money around; otherwise the signing of a cricket star of the calibre and status of Wasim Akram would not have been possible by a popular local club. Foreign players are overcrowding the local clubs; but no inner source would confirm similar contracts with the political clubs.

Speaking of cricket, the politicians appear to be weak at this game. The ruling batsmen prefer to be content with safe singles through pushes and prods, treating the match as a 5-year Test; while the Opposition are applying the one-

## The Passing Show

by Alif Zabr

### Letter from Bangladesh

day tactics and go for fours and sixes; that is, the ball must go beyond the boundary. The boundary conditions are not well defined, according to some circles. All the shots are not played along the ground, or through the gaps. Lofted shots are preferred, which go above and beyond the heads of the fielders, the spectators, and the citizens. More than one ball has been lost.

The Opposition walked out of the Parliament, being unhappy with the lbw decisions. The other side complained of bumpers. The wicket-keeping by the Power XI is reckoned to be weak by the media analysts; while there are too many slips in the fielding side. The Oppo XI are unhappy, as several catches were disallowed.

The Opposition has protested against the tactics of the ruling party. As the Opposition is not inside the House,

one foreign facilitator had to be tried outdoors. He left, with the impass remaining stable as before. One was described the situation as normal. There is a firm constancy in our instability. We are accustomed to it for more than one generation.

The generation gap is acute. The style and assertion of demands and impositions have changed, depending on the power of the pressure groups. The "greater movement" syndrome has infiltrated into the service-holders group, the industrial workers, the employees' unions, and even at the level of the school students, who block roads for alleged internal dissatisfaction over educational issues.

Illegal toll-collection and gun-toting have reached new heights; as also the drug menace amongst the youth. The higher academic campus is en-

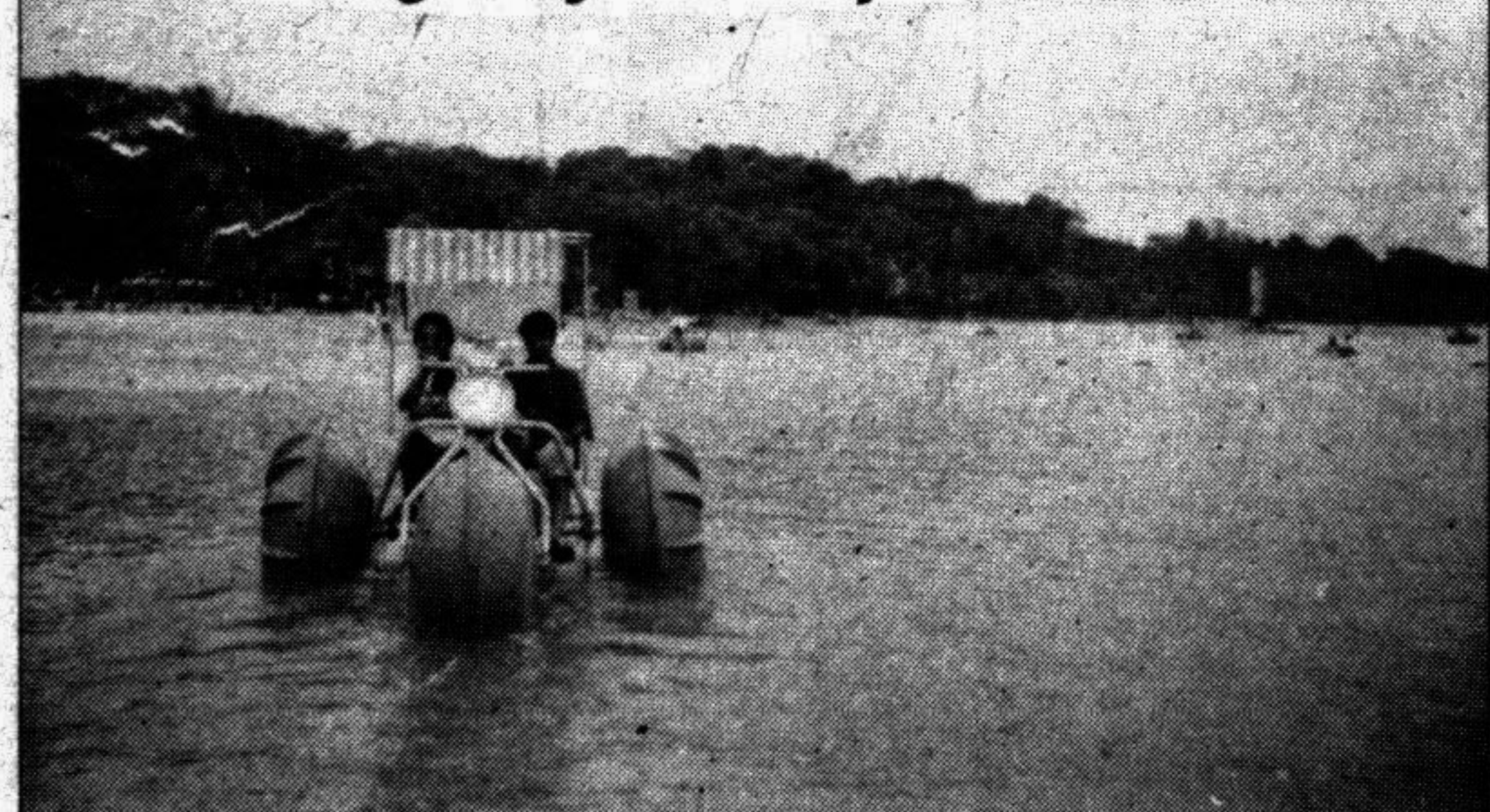
joying a costly holiday, due to political patronage. Highway and roadside holdups and nugging are believed to have declined to sporadic level. Discipline and defiance of authority threatens to become a way of life.

The Opposition firmly believes in the philosophy of opposing. Perhaps it is the outcome of more than 20 years of non-stop experience. What they would oppose if they come into power is anybody's guess. This Opposition specializes in 100 per cent political jargon, activities and programmes. There is constant fault-finding with the party in power; ignoring the other fields, of more interest to and comprehension of the common masses.

The general sense of insecurity has heightened. The politicians on both sides are helpless in allaying the fears of the general public. One side is indifferent, while the other is indecisive.

While Nero fiddled when Rome was burning, here the politicians are fuddled while the flute is ready.

# A City of Superlatives



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one wishes to get to the island but more often than not the answer is the same — cable cars, of course, for even those with a slight touch of acrophobia like myself. Frightening and expensive, it's worth every bead of sweat as well as every dime. The best among all the attractions in Sentosa is the Underwater World which took us scuba diving without getting us wet or attacked by sharks or stingrays. This walkthrough oceanarium is Southeast Asia's largest. There's moving walkway along a 100-metre acrylic tunnel that took us deep sea diving, as we gazed at the silent world of the sea, gasped at the occasional school of sharks and marvelled at the amazing features of some of the sea

creatures. An encounter that would have been quite impossible without the technology, an experience that made us richer.

Apart from the underwater world, the Asian Village was lots of fun with its bounty of hair raising rides that the weak should actually avoid and the bumper cars that come naturally to Dhaka-residents.

Then there's the swimming lagoon where we paddled hired aqua cycles to our heart's delight just like the stars on Hindi movies but only without the song and dance sequences.

Next was the Musical Fountain which was better than we expected and last but not least the new attraction of Volcano Land Theme Park where they



A train ride

simulate snowfall and the eruption of a volcano! It was the best possible way of ending our day.

A mere fifteen hundred words aren't enough to describe the fun we had in the lion city or write about all the places we saw, like that wonderful place called the Jurong Bird Park that has the highest manmade waterfall and the Chinese and Japanese gardens, but I think this write up will give readers some idea about a country that achieved the impossible with sheer will and perseverance. People complain that Singapore is so artificial, even the trees along the roads were planted according to plan, they find it too perfect to be natural, but that's better than cutting off full grown trees to make way for concrete structures lacking the beauty and the ecological significance, right? Singapore grows on you with the lush greenery all around, the roads, the people

# Adored and Despised, Simultaneously

WHEN you toast health on drinks, do we strengthen the cause of health or health itself? The Paritans claim, drink stimulates the believer, stupefies the unwilling.

The poet was not getting the desired quantum of wine to drink to his heart's content. He did not have enough money either. None lent him money. He lost all sides, but not his poetic fancy. He prayed to God to turn rivers of water into rivers of wine in His munificence. He was poet Ghalib. His prayer, however, was not heeded to and, therefore, wine did not replace water in rivers. As such, wine continued to remain a scarce liquid which the drunkards love and the pious loathe. And those between them, some claim, loll out their tongue as others lick the drink.

No other liquid stuff has been adored and despised simultaneously like these hard drinks. From cave man down to the twentieth century elite society, these intoxicants inspired, benumbed and ran man into transitory trances. The Aryans brought religion to mingle with wine-making and then clad it with an elaborate ritual, right from collecting the herb, squeezing the juice and drinking it en masse. All tribal taboos and cults were related with drinking so as to make the belief more complex and intoxicating. The gods and goddesses were invented to preside over drinking ceremonies so as to lend it some segment of divinity. Music was

created to please the ears so as to ease the passage of this liquid from mouth to the stomach. It did not stop here. Woman subsequently was introduced as Cup bearer. With the association of woman with wine, man's hunt for pleasure reached a new watermark. And later poetry joined the race.

And some bards of the later middle ages added a new whig to poetry. It was wine — an intoxicant to make the poet soar in imagination. When poetry had won wine as its horse drinking assumed cultured aristocracy and soared to celestial heights where only fancy could roam and reign.

Mirza Asadullah Ghalib, the celebrated urdu poet, was once reminded that Allah did not listen to the prayer of those who were addicted to drinking. At this he replied that when one had drinks, what should he pray for? He told in two lines how wine inspired him:

'Fir dekheye andaze gule afsonaye guftar  
Rokh dey koyee potmonah o sabha mere aagey!  
Keep the goblet full with the from the flask.  
Then watch how best I talk'

Excessive drinking ruined Ghalib financially. He suffered imprisonment for his debt to one McPerson who supplied him drinks on credit. During

the Sepoy Mutiny Ghalib was arrested and was taken to one Colonel Brown who asked whether Ghalib said, yes, he was a Muslim, but only half. Because he drank wine but did not stop so low to eat pork.

In later part of his life, Ghalib appeared to have given up drinking when he wrote:

I returned thirsty from her abode.  
May be I have given up drinking.  
But what happened to Saki?  
Of the Persian poets, Hafiz and Omar Khayyam, seemed to

And wilderness is the paradise enow!

Those who see things beyond the pale of eyes claim that Khayyam spoke of something far deeper than what it ordinarily meant.

Poets, composers and litterateurs seem to have viewed things with their inner eyes. Wine always added a new dimension to the sight. Mark Twain, while travelling to France, assured the customs that he carried nothing but clothes. After opening the suitcase, the Customs Inspector found a bottle of Bourbon inside. In reply to the query, Twain said, the bottle was his nightcap. All religions forbid hard drink. In Islam, gambling and wine are forbidden. They claim Hindu gods share drinks, Christians say, Christ drank wine at last supper.

Two poets once were said to have been drinking together. After sipping few glasses, one asked the other not to drink any more. He wanted to know why. The other poet in an affectionate tone claimed that the appearance of the poet who was drinking heavily was just melting away and was giving a blurred look. To keep his body intact, he should not have drunk any more, so advised the other poet.

Some claim, in *vine perita* there is truth in wine. In drink, some sought God, others have Him immersed. Alone He knows whether or not He exists this side or across the goblet.

## Distant Drum

M N Mustafa

have sung more intensely about *sura* and *saki* — the wine and the cup bearer. Many authorities suggest that *sura* and *saki* were symbolic representation of a deep mystical thought. In one of his poems Hafiz said:

With lover beside, wine goblet in hand,  
Rose garland round the neck,  
Who cares for the Sultan?  
He is but a slave beneath my foot!

Omar Khayyam added one more element to drinking, it was music. He desired to carve out a paradise in the wilderness, not alone, but in the company of the choicest:  
Here with a loaf of bread, a flask of wine  
A book of Verse and Thou,  
Beside me singing in the wilderness.

# Nostalgia for a Colonial Past

THEY'RE still alive and playing in the capital of America's former colony the Philippines, those old phonograph records we used to know and love so well.

The 1950s may be 40 years gone, but in Manila the old songs are still being heard — in motorized tricycles, jeepneys, buses and taxis, in bars and restaurants, elevators, on radio and television. Still also very much around are the rockers, yuckers and tearjerkers, although it seems like blasphemy to call a song as sublime as *Ebony Eyes* a tear-jerker.

Why Manila? Some say it reflects nostalgia here for a time when the Philippines had the highest standard of living in Asia, and students from all over the region flocked to the University of the Philippines for the best possible education.

But mall store owner Rodolfo Garcia has a different view. "Fifties music is the true music, there is no other," he says. "Why settle for second best? Everyone — old, young and in-between — is aware of it. This was one of the greatest musical revolutions ever."

Disc Jockey Pedro (The Fish) Galante partly concurs. "A '50s music programme or station formal attracts the young, who have adopted a whole slew of the very best numbers as their own," he says, "and those important older listeners love every word of every song."

All right, Fifties Fiends, let's get down to the nitty-gritty. What are the absolute all-time certified-platinum Manila '50s Top 15?

- \* Jailhouse Rock. Shock and horror to parents in staid '57, only Elvis Presley could put a song like this on, the charts. Great, feel-good rock 'n' roll.
- \* Great Balls of Fire. The same can be said of this hot, raunchy piano-pounding hymn to frenzy by the south's widest white man, Jerry Lee Lewis.
- \* Tutti Frutti. Sung by Mr. Lewis' black counterpart Little Richard, rock 'n' roll's outrageous theatrical raver. Lightning-tempo, vocal and piano.
- \* Oh Boy. Perhaps Texas "jerk" Buddy Holly's finest moment. Great lyrics, vocal and harmonic, and an uncharacteristically good "get-down" guitar solo.
- \* Maybellene. Chuck Berry gets confused between his girlfriend and his car in this early hard-drivin' anthem to the open highway and open parking places.

There's a timeless wistfulness to the songs of Johnny Mathis, and it's helped along here by the lyrics. The best from the Beethoven of sentimentality.

\* Lonesome Town. This masterpiece by Poor Little Fool Ricky Nelson is like a Marlboro ad, with its mournful evocation of small towns on long highways in the Great American Countryside.

\* Are You Lonesome Tonight? The spoken segment is better than the singing in this best of all Elvis Presley Ballads, and probably explains its huge ongoing popularity.

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Perhaps the most audible Manila musical messenger is the jeepney, many are fitted with powerful stereos, and each driver has his own musical peccadilloes.

Imagine two young male American music freaks — day-glo, beach shorts, armless T-shirts, headbands, Walkmen — looking for a jeepney ride.

"This guy's got the Led Zeppelin retrospective," says one to his friend. "Forget it," replies the other. "This one's got Elvis Presley's Complete Sun Sessions. I've never even heard it."

"Where's he going? counters the first dude. "Who cares?" replies the second.

And off they go, to be deposited two hours later in a dark and unknown suburb on the outskirts of Manila. But hey, it's only rock 'n' roll ...

— *Depthwise Asia*

\* Broken Heart. Connie Francis falls to pieces again in this irresistible country-flavoured classic.

\* Mr. Blue. Probably because of its lyrics, this is the Bobby Vinton song that Filipinos have for decades taken to their hearts. It's a little too hot in Manila for Blue Velvet.

\* The Twelfth of Never.

\* Monster Mash. A send-up of 50s Frankenstein-type horror movies by Bobby (Boris) Pickett and the Crypt Kickers, fortunately a one-hit group.

\* (Tan Shoes And) Pink Shoelaces. Sartorial rebellion by teen rockers, courtesy of clothes-freak the Big Bopper, who also did Chantilly Lace.

\* Surfer Bird. An impressively moronic take-off of early '60s California surf music by the appropriately named Trashmen.

\* Tearjerkers: *Ebony Eyes*. Heart-stopping harmonics by the Everly Brothers, beautiful. "Nuff said."

\* Donna. The Spanish Connection, Richie Valens, croons one of the most beautiful teenage love ballads ever. Predictably, the movie *La Banba* is one of the all-time Philippine box-office hits.

\* Breakin' in A Brand-New Broken Heart. Connie Francis falls to pieces again in this irresistible country-flavoured classic.

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Roller coaster ride in Asian Village, Sentosa Island

and the system in general.

Before our journey we heard so many things about Singapore — some of them nice, most of them not so nice, all of which made us a little wary about the prospects of the trip.

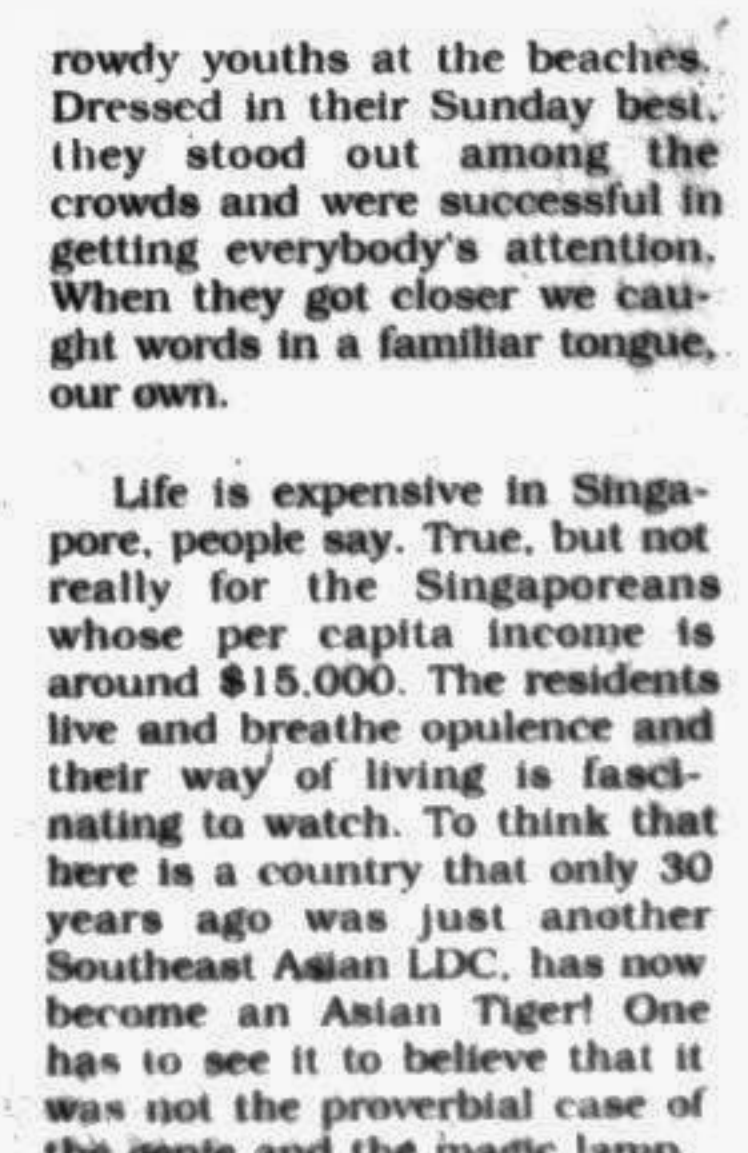
After the trip what I can add is that this is the city that gave me my first public no-risk bus ride, my first experience of watching a movie on the big screen, my first go at a video game arcade, my first bike ride on a public thoroughfare and many more less hazardous things. Being privileged enough to be born in a free country it's a shame that I had to go abroad to enjoy the freedom to walk home alone at night without fearing for my life or wait at the bus-stop without a soul in sight or to trust strangers with implicit faith to show me the way to some place; insignificant things but nevertheless all new experiences for me. There is a feeling of safety foreign in any other part of

world yet you hardly ever see policemen on the streets. I came across people who had come here for the seventh or the eighth time and were still hungry for more — most of these people were from the land of opportunity seeking refuge from the crime, the filth and the moral degradation. In Singapore, my 15-year-old cousin has learnt to go the extra step to drop trash in the garbage bin whereas in his own country he would have grown up to be just another careless school boy; he warns me not to step onto the road before the light turns green fearing that I might do just that. What a pity.

However, his fear is not unfounded. In Sentosa, for instance, we came across some

rowdy youths at the beaches. Dressed in their Sunday best, they stood out among the crowds and were successful in getting everybody's attention. When they got closer we caught words in a familiar tongue, our own.

Life is expensive in Singapore, people say. True, but not really for the Singaporeans whose per capita income is around \$15,000. The residents live and breathe opulence and their way of living is fascinating to watch. To think that here is a country that only 30 years ago was just another Southeast Asian LDC, has now become an Asian Tiger! One has to see it to believe that it was not the proverbial case of the genie and the magic lamp.



Bumboats, characteristic of the Singapore River