

# It's a Grim Hunt for Housing

by Shamima Chowdhury

Nearly all of Bangladesh's garment workers — estimated at 1.2 million — are women from poor families. Many of the women have migrated to the cities from villages. They work hard for an industry that earns most of the country's export revenues. Lack of housing facilities top the list of the problems the women face.

Lily Begum works more than eight hours a day at a garment factory in the capital city. The 30-year-old woman does not bother much about her workload. What makes her bitter is the fact that she has no good place to live in with her two children and an ailing mother.

When Lily and her family moved to the city in search of a job some years ago, she hardly had any worry about a house. Getting a job was her prime concern. When she finally got one, her search for a house began and not long after she realised that renting a house was much more difficult than getting a job.

"I didn't want to live in a slum. At the same time I was too poor to afford anything better than a slum hut. At one stage I agreed to stay in a makeshift hut on the roof of a building," Lily said recalling her grim hunt for a house. In return, she had to agree to do errands for the owner of the house. She does not mind the odd work such as cooking, washing and cleaning. But she is having problems with the land lord's younger brother, a university student who makes sexual advances to her. "I understand that I have to leave this place very soon to escape the harassment," said Lily. She has no idea whether she will get a new house or not.

Usually, owners are reluctant to rent their houses to female workers. They cite a host of problems in support of their hostile attitude to women. About this problem the Sheikh Nazma, a leader of the female garment workers, said, "I joined a garment factory in Dhaka in 1984 to support my family. But the most serious problem I faced since joining the job is the lack of shelter. Nobody wants to

rent out house when they come to know that we work in garment factories."

Continued Nazma, "They know our earnings are paltry. They fear we may not be able to pay our rent. The land lords think we have no job security. We can be fired any day. So we are forced to live in places which are akin to slums."

The society has a poor attitude towards the garment workers even though they make remarkable contributions to the economy," Nazma said in an angry voice.

Most of the garment workers live in slums in the city's Badda, Rampura, Mirpur, Kamalapur, Kanchhalbag, Rayerbazar, Goran, Dakshinkhan, Madar-tek, Jatrabari and Barhmanchirran areas.

Those who live in rented house, they do it in a mess system with 5-10 people living in one room and per head rent ranges from Tk 200 to 300.

The main problem they face in these mess is a long queue in using bathroom and kitchen for which many of the workers cannot reach their work place in time. In the case of being late to report to work they are punished in the way of deduction from the monthly salary.

Garment worker Sultana Begum, who lives in Goran area, said that she felt victim to the authorities' penalty three times in a year.

Apart from these problems, the female garment workers, majority of whom come from villages, cannot keep their parents or their relatives with them whenever they come to Dhaka to visit them. Because the house owners think that the increase of inmates means more use of water and electricity.

While visiting these areas,

the News Network correspondent found that one Abdur Rab from the city's Badda area has rented two tin-shed houses to garment workers and he never allows their relatives to stay there because it will lead to more consumption of water and electricity.

"Who can guarantee that their relatives are not thieves or criminals, that's why I don't allow them to enter into my houses," Rab said.

Wiping tears, Rowshan Ara, one of the tenants of Abdur Rab, told this correspondent "I am contemplating leaving this house because this guy did not allow my old mother to stay one night here with me."

Besides, these garment workers are vulnerable to various diseases as they live in filthy and unhygienic condition. According to sources at the Dhaka EPZ Hospital, 43 per cent of the female garment workers live in rented mess and some of them are afflicted with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

"The garment workers may be the most vulnerable to deadly AIDS in Bangladesh," warned ActionAid, a UK-based NGO.

On the other hand, there is no security for the female garment workers on the streets. Returning home after night shifts is hardly safe.

As a result, many of them are attacked by muggers or rapists on the streets.

Hasina Begum (not her real name), a garment worker, was recently attacked by a group of terrorists while returning home from work in Sipahibagh area one night. Very recently rapists stripped another young garment worker in Rampura area in the evening.

Such incidents are taking place frequently. But few gar-

ment workers report to police for fear of shame and security.

President of Bangladesh Independent Garment Sramik Union (BIGU), Sheikh Nazma said garment workers could have developed more skills if they had no worry about housing. It will also help dispel the unfounded suspicion about garment workers. "I think solution to the accommodation crisis is one of our major demands," she said.

"Nothing tangible has been done to change our lot although a large chunk of the country's export earnings comes from this sector. And involvement of women in this industry is called revolution in women empowerment," she regretted.

Ayesha Khanam, general secretary of Mohila Parishad, said: "It's not possible for any organisation alone to solve the accommodation crisis of the garment workers. The government and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers Association (BGMEA) should come forward to resolve the problem."

As a pressure group, she said, her organisation has talked to the BGMEA leaders in this regard and put forward suggestions to solve the problem.

BGMEA president Mostafa Golam Quddus said his organisation has a master plan to relocate the city's garment factories in areas outside Dhaka city such as Savar, Gazipur and Daudkandi. "We will construct 80 big flats for the garment workers with an accommodation capacity of 4,000 workers in each building," he said.

Lily looks forward to the day when she will get one of such planned apartment building. Until then she knows she will have to endure the harassment and abuse from her land lord's brother.

— News Network

# Amartya Sen: The Empirical Humanist

by Badal Mukherji

What I write now was somewhat unexpectedly triggered by a question asked by a TV correspondent who was taking pictures of some books of Prof. Sen in our library. When a book fell open accidentally, he saw the page and got alarmed at what he saw: page after page of mathematical deduction, logical notation, graphs and equations!

AS the news of the Nobel Prize for Economics to Amartya Sen came over the wire services, a tidal wave of phone calls and TV cameras inundated us at the Delhi School of Economics. Portable instruments converted most of our offices into instant studios. We suffered gladly; there are so few things to be genuinely happy about in this country today that we appreciate the popular joy. Plus, we are particularly pleased as Prof. Sen taught at the DSE from 1963 to 1981, continues to be an Honorary Professor in the Department of Economics of the DSE, and wrote some great papers on the theory of development and social choice and his two-volume classic 'Choice and Welfare' while in DSE.

But the Golden Jubilee of the DSE begins on November 14 this year, to be inaugurated by President K.R. Narayanan who was himself a Visiting Fellow at the DSE in 1953-54 and the closing lecture in a very distinguished series will be given a year later by — you guessed it right — Prof. Sen.

But what I write now was somewhat unexpectedly triggered by a question asked by a TV correspondent who was taking pictures of some books of Prof. Sen in our library. When a book fell open accidentally, he saw the page and got alarmed at what he saw: page after page of mathematical deduction, logical notation, graphs and equations! Of course, those are what all his students, including myself have to sweat out through, all researchers in these areas must mandatorily know and, what is most important to realise, it is this bedrock

of hard logical structure on which his subsequent historical/institutional work on poverty, hunger, famines and inequality rests.

That is what gives them their robustness. It is becoming so very important to remind ourselves that there is no contradiction between ethics and morality on the one hand and hard cold logic on the other. If you thought otherwise, see A.K. Sen. "...I was introducing a new mathematical technique by which regions formerly abandoned to the vagueness of philosophers were conquered for the precision of exact formulae," wrote Bertrand Russell in his autobiography about his social choice and his two-volume classic 'Choice and Welfare' while in DSE.

I think we will do great disservice to him if we ignore the hard bedrock of analytical work that supports the structures that he built. Biographical details are now well-known, so I can be brief. Born in Shantiniketan, West Bengal, christened by Rabindranath Thakur (popularised to the world as 'Tagore' by the British), educated in the Presidency College, Calcutta, Ph.D. at Cambridge, a short stint at Jadavpur University, Calcutta, eight years at the DSE, Cambridge, Harvard (joint appointment in the Department of Economics and Phi-

losophy), Master of Trinity, Cambridge.

Amartya Kumar Sen, Nobel Laureate. In 1943 there was a terrible famine in what was then undivided Bengal. By his own account, this had an enormous impact on Prof. Sen, and the question the nine-year-old child asked is what the 64-year-old scholar has tried to answer all his life: "Why did not any of our relatives or friends die while hundreds were dying on the streets?"

It is essential to understand the progress of the intellectual pilgrim in finding an answer to this question and that is what makes the quote from Russell so strikingly appropriate. Sen started at the logical, mathematical deep end of the problem; sorted them out in the pages of *Econometrica*, *The Review of Economic Studies* and other frontline journals, in the jackets of OUP. Blackwell and the like, and then took on Third World reality.

The most significant departure that he makes can be highlighted by the so-called Sen-measure of poverty. As opposed to a head count of people below an accepted poverty line, what it does is roughly keep giving weight to the deprivation of a person; the further below the line she is, the heavier is the weightage given to her in the measure. It is not only the distribution (or, maldistribution) of income; it is the distribution of welfare in a society that this measure is trying to capture. The path of thought-evolution runs from microeconomics to the Theory of Choice to welfare economics to the Sen-measure. Now Sen is ready to take on the levity of the West as well as the

apathy of the East.

Certainly, quite a bit of his writing on poverty, hunger and famines can be read (with great joy by anyone for, he is, both in writing and in words, a great expositor) avoiding the formal foundation. But that will completely miss the intellectual power of his work which is what makes him so compelling for the western world. "You want proof? Can you handle my theorem 337.2?" asks Sen. There must be some way to bring rationality around to ethics?

This is where Prof. Sen's position on democracy is to be judged. Yes, a totalitarian regime might be more efficient in the production of goods but, through a free press, a democratic form will be more efficient in the distribution of welfare; certainly, to avoid the extreme misery of death due to starvation in a famine which is what he wants. Who does not? At the same time, a democracy might tolerate for an unacceptably long time a lot of poverty, a lot of deprivation and misery. Sen will call for state intervention at this point more aggressively than only a system of universal adult suffrage would imply. "The best lack all conviction," wrote W.B. Yeats at the beginning of the twentieth century. Nearly one hundred years later, we have a counter example.

It was also Yeats' ominous forecast that some rough beast was "slouching towards Bethlehem to be born". Let us hope that the twenty-first will see the birth, not of a "rough beast" yet again but of humanism at last.

— India Abroad News Service

# One in Three Domestic Animal Breeds are at Risk

For thousands of years farmers have developed different breeds of livestock to feed their communities. But a fad several decades ago to introduce exotic breeds to boost food output has led to less animal diversity. Countries are finding that the past holds the solution for tomorrow's survival.

THE unique Caracu cattle of Brazil is making a comeback.

Despite its disease resistance and ability to survive harsh conditions, popular development theories of the past deemed the dependable Caracu passé and unprofitable compared to its Asian cousins.

Farmers instead were encouraged to import an exotic Indian breed, replacing the Caracu as their main source of income and relegating the South American beast to near extinction.

"A few years ago we thought our animals belonged in zoos," says Dr. Arthur Mariante, head of Brazil's animal genetic resource and conservation programme. "But this is changing now we understand where they come from."

Mariante started a conservation project and helped to establish an association for Caracu breeders — something which proved instrumental in changing their prestige-conscious mentality.

"Once they had an association, farmers became proud of the Caracu," he says. "When we started the programme there were only 5,000 of them, mostly crossbreeds. Now we have over 20,000 purebreds and there is a waiting list for semen."

Other animals have not been as lucky. Nearly 30 per cent of the world's 5,300 domestic animal breeds are at risk of extinction, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Rome.

Development over 12,000 years and representing the remaining pool of genetic diversity on which future generations will depend for food, these breeds are dying out at a rate of six a month.

With almost one-third of the world's six billion people relying on livestock to supply at least part of their daily needs,

Alan Martin writes from Rome

## The sinking ark

Nearly 30 percent of world's indigenous breeds of domestic animals are at risk. They commonly possess valuable traits, but are being replaced in developed and developing countries by high production breeds which need high inputs, skilled management and comparatively benign environment

<p><b>Sunicho Pony, Bolivia</b> Survives in highlands of Bolivia. Important for transport and widely used before agricultural reform of 1950s. Now replaced by donkey, used extensively as pack animal.</p>	<p><b>Yakut cattle, Russian Federation</b> Last 900 Yakut cattle found in Siberia. Can tolerate temperatures down to -60 C and poor feeding. Considered resistant to tuberculosis, leucosis, brucellosis and gives concentrated milk with high fat content.</p>
<p><b>Javanese Zebu, Papua New Guinea</b> 500 remain. Neglected because of small body size even though extremely fertile and highly tolerant of tick-transmitted diseases and screwworm.</p>	<p><b>Arvana - Kazah type dromedary, Kazakhstan</b> Selected for milk yield since beginning of century. Well adapted to harsh continental desert climate, lack of water and poor feed supply. Fewer than 1000 remain.</p>
<p><b>Bakwari (Muturu) cattle, Cameroon</b> Resistant to tick-transmitted diseases such as trypanosomiasis and helminths which decimate other breeds. 60 left. Rapidly losing grazing land to commercial crops.</p>	

the FAO launched the Domestic Animal Diversity Information System (DAD-IS) in early September to stem the worrying decline.

In India, for example, 50 per cent of indigenous goats face the threat of extinction, while an estimated 80 per cent of all poultry being produced comes from exotic breeds.

The computer database aims to help countries sustainable use and develop their irreplaceable domestic animal species and breeds. Keith Hammond, a senior officer in the FAO animal genetics resource centre,

As with the Caracu, the diversity of thousands of local breeds are threatened by the indiscriminate introduction of exotic breeds in an effort to develop and modernise food production.

Encouraged by promises of high yields, farmers are quick to rely on the imported breeds. However, too often the animals' productivity and longevity are reduced because of their intolerance to the climatic, diseases and nutrient constraints common in developing countries.

The deterioration of the world's animal diversity has led to a rethink of the practice

and calls for a paradigm shift among farmers, particularly in developing countries.

"We thought we could solve everything by bringing in a Formula One," Hammond says. "But they only perform well on a racetrack with a good driver, not on a country road."

He says of the fad to favour exotic breeds: "In many ways this theory was a step backwards. You can't just bring genetics in from elsewhere and think they will make a difference."

With DAD-IS, scientists, agronomists and policy makers will be able to scrutinise and predict more closely the possible impact of importing a particular breed to a foreign environment.

Learning the genetic importance of endangered animals is another important component of DAD-IS. The agricultural community remains largely ignorant of the wealth of its genetic resources, says Hammond.

While the Convention of Biological Diversity gives countries sovereignty over their plant and animal resources, over 180 nations are involved in finding a solution to this global problem.

All have agreed to contribute their latest findings to DAD-IS. Already such cooperation has led to discoveries that could benefit similar species in different countries.

"In Madagascar we just found a pig that is resistant to swine fever, which is just lethal to African pigs," enthuses Hammond.

The discovery would allow countries facing the possible decimation of their pig stocks to save them by injecting the lifesaving genes.

By learning more about the natural qualities of indigenous animals DAD-IS researchers hope to speak a revival.

— Gemini/News

# Agri-Cards: Promising Freedom for Whom?

Sudha Passi writes from New Delhi



The model of Grameen Bank in Bangla-desh or the micro-credit schemes where in they pool in their holdings and stand guarantee for others would have been a better option.

PROMISING to free farmers from perennial indebtedness, the proposed agri-card scheme has generated much enthusiasm among cultivators but experts say the moneylender-farmer-market nexus must be broken to make it a success.

Like urban credit cards, agri-cards will allow farmers to straightaway withdraw cash upto a certain amount for a given period thereby ensuring for him ready and timely availability of money to suit his needs as a cultivator.

But the similarity ends there. Officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, who are finalising the modalities of the scheme, say the credit ceiling will depend on the size of the farmer's holding and his requirements for the particular crop he proposes to grow. It will be fine-tuned to local needs.

The scheme cannot succeed unless small and local farmers; committees are properly represented, says Prof Kabra noting that credit planning has to be associated with the production plans of blocks at the local level.

According to him, the scheme still doesn't take into account the ground realities. "It's like catching the wrong end of the stick," he says.

The own holdings of small farmers are very small and would not suffice all their credit needs so they would still be de-

pendent on the big farmer, who is also the moneylender and finally the buyer of the produce, explains Kabra.

According to him, the model of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh or the micro-credit schemes where in they pool in their holdings and stand guarantee for others would have been a better option.

Let there be genuine groups and credits worked on real needs," he says noting that institutional credit so far has actually landed them in more trouble than they were.

Kabra quotes a study by H S Shergill on Punjab to point that even mediocre farmers not in need of mechanisation bought tractors on loan for their small holdings and got trapped in debts they weren't able to finance.

Officials, however, argue that the scheme has its origin in similar schemes offered by rural branches of commercial banks and it has worked successfully in states like Kerala.

Several commercial nationalised banks have been offering the scheme since the early 80s and it had been implemented in progressive states like West Bengal for farmers going in for growing vegetables, fruits and short duration crops where the returns come in fast and can be returned soon, they say.

The proposed scheme though

aimed at providing short-duration credit will, in all likelihood, be implemented in a few select states where the credit system is already there, say the officials.

Rules and rights of the farmers on the agri-cards will have to be defined to clear all doubts of the farmers, they say.

Refusing to be drawn into any controversy over the credits again going into the hands of those who actually don't need them, the officials said the cards would be "restricted" to cultivators only.

While official sources say that the scheme would most probably be introduced in western U P, Haryana and Punjab, Joshi notes that these simply aren't the areas where the farmers are in dire need.

Says Kabra, "The big farmer doesn't need the credit. The viable educated farmers have the means to arrange from the institutions. The poor and marginal farmers — and they are in majority — might not get the benefits."

"Even if they are allowed to consume all that they produce and ensure food security for them, these poor cultivators would slowly get educated and solve their social problems."

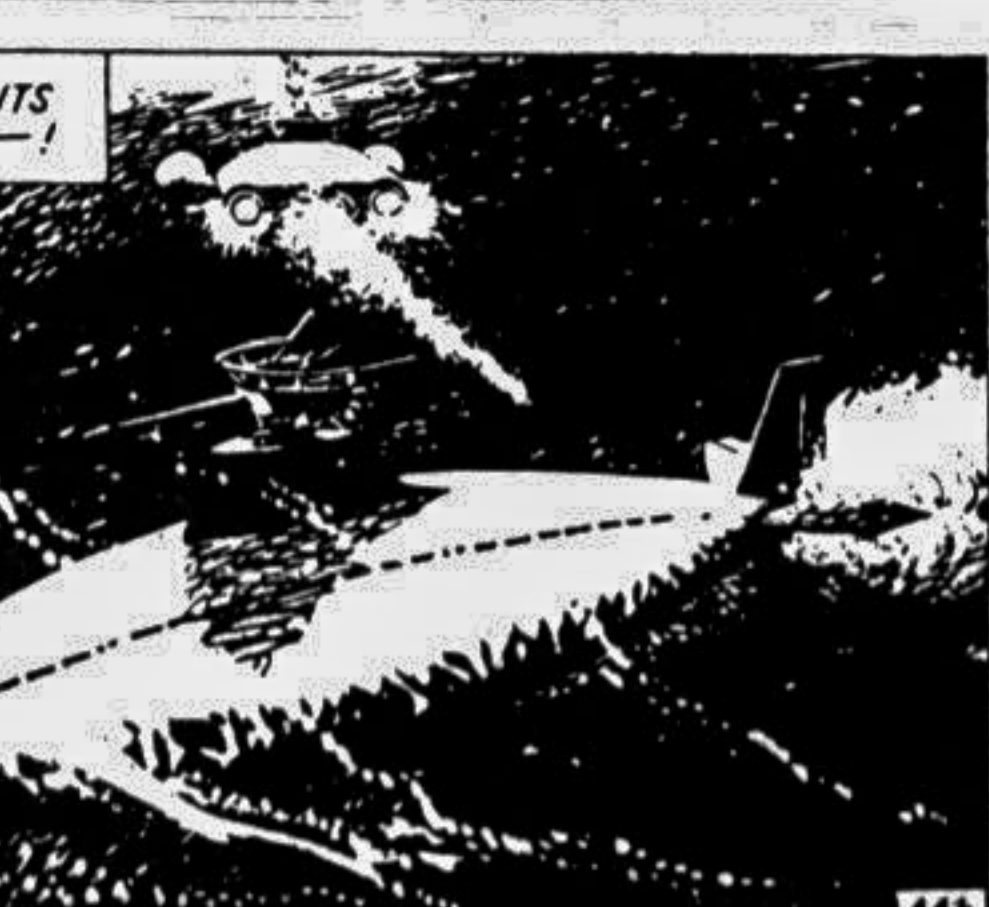
Any state scheme, notes Kabra, will have to tackle these problems if it really aims at bettering their lot.

— PTI/APB

## Garfield



## James Bond



## Lost Generation

ONE child in three is not registered at birth leaving them without proof of identity or age that may deny them education, healthcare and even nationality, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The UNICEF says that a birth certificate is required for vaccination in at least 20 countries and for treatment at health centres by more than 80 nations. Often the reasons for lack of registration are practical. According to Carol Bellamy, UNICEF's director, whether seeking health care or immunisation, entering school or proving that one is too young for military service or to work

in hazardous industries, a birth certificate is necessary.

Many developing countries lack the technical and professional infrastructure to ensure that all births are recorded. The UNICEF has urged for more funding for child immunisation programmes which could save up to eight million lives a year.

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## Herbs on Sale

THE US-based herbal company, Sunrider International, will enter into the Indian market by the end of 1998. The products include a range of herbal food, drink, and cosmetic. The company has

planned to invest about US \$27 million in the Indian market in the next five years, says O-Lin Chen, president Sunrider International. The company may set up a manufacturing plant in India in order to tap the herbal resources of the country, the president added. The health products of the company include food supplement include drinks and snacks, while there is a range of household cleaning products too.

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## Stormfree

A portable pyramid capable of protecting people from being struck by lightning has recently been developed by researcher Mat Darvenzia of

the University of Queensland, USA. Built of aluminium tubes, this curious device operates on the simple theory that when lightning strikes, the charge passes harmlessly through to the ground through a conducting material. Larger pyramids are now being constructed to protect larger groups of people.

During severe storms, there should be a gap of at least 25 cm between the frame and those taking shelter inside, says Darvenzia. The research for this storm shelter was undertaken on request from Singapore's ministry of defence. Singapore, where thunder storms last for as many as 200 days a year, will use the device to protect its soldiers and equipment during field exercises.

CSE/Down To Earth Features