

The Duty of Remembrance (1945-1999)

by Federico Mayor

We have forgotten the anguish and suffering of the turmoil of violence and war. War is evil, not peoples. Not those who are suddenly swept into the maelstrom. However, we have not raised our voice to produce fort of persuasion and dialogue. We have failed to set up subregional alliances for rapid intervention in the event of disasters, whose role would be to reduce their impact and take advance action, so far as possible, when devastating forest fires, hurricane or other calamities strike. We have not yet learned to pay the price of peace and we are once more paying that of war.

"WE the peoples... determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". So begins the Charter of the United Nations. That was in 1945, in San Francisco. A war was ending in which recourse had been had to the most horrendous forms of mass and individual destruction. With terror-bombed cities, the peoples of the earth thought of their children and grandchildren and decided to spare them the woes they had just suffered.

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed. Such is the opening paragraph of UNESCO's Constitution, adopted in London in November 1945. Peace is constructed every day, by each individual. Peace is a course of conduct forged through education, science and culture, conferring on each human being the capacity to act according to his or her own judgement. When the V2s were falling on the United Kingdom, the British minister R A Butler concluded that only by means of education — encompassing such matter as knowledge of and respect for other cultures, awareness of the power of dialogue, and participation in public affairs — would it be possible in the future to avoid genocide, ethnic selection, torture and stifling of dissent.

Preventing war by going to its root causes: injustice that gives rise to exclusion and poverty, which in turn lead to emigration and the adoption of fanatical and extremist attitudes. Sharing more fairly, in order to avert disparities that tear society apart. The old saying: "If you want peace, prepare for war" has gradually given way to the idea of "Prepare for peace". If you want peace, pre-

pare for it, construct it. Do not accept the unacceptable; always listen, but act according to your own judgement; do not look elsewhere for answers to the essential questions, for the answers are within you. War must be prevented through development, through freedom of expression — which transmutates legality into justice — and through improved distribution of resources of every kind.

How many conflicts have been avoided. How much dignity — that of the intellectual and moral solidarity — proclaimed by UNESCO's Constitution — has been promoted or restored. But what is prevented and therefore does not happen is not seen. Peace is not seen. An eventful or a happy and hopeful life is not seen. What is avoided is not seen. Yet this is the greatest victory and we all — and first and foremost the media — will have to play our part in bringing out and dealing with what is invisible, what does not appear on the radio or is not written in the press.

In recent years, democracy has gained ground, and the voice of the people is now heard in places where silence previously reigned. Before, we had the peace of security. Now the security of peace is beginning to burgeon. Racial discrimination — that abomination of "apartheid" — has been overthrown in South Africa and Namibia, and two distinguished black figures (Nelson Mandela and Sam Nujoma) lead their respective countries. Peace has been achieved in Mozambique, El Salvador and Guatemala, and it is on the way in Ulster and the Middle East, because resolve and perseverance have worked in tandem. And vision. Vision, above all, because, as

Albert Einstein said, "in time of crisis, imagination alone is more important than knowledge."

To save — from the scourge of war? How? By means of sustainable development worldwide, sharing with justice. Helping all countries to acquire the necessary skills. Helping all citizens to be involved, that is, to count for something in public affairs and not just to be counted in opinion polls and elections. At the centre of the interactive triangle peace-development-democracy is education. Education for all throughout life.

"Democracy is the best solution in the fight against poverty", writes Amartya Sen, the new winner of the Nobel Prize-winner in Economics. In the 1990s, as though sensing in advance the need for change, many countries — including the highest-population countries — have made a great effort to invest in education through the establishment of new budgetary priorities. An increase in education is matched, in practice, by a decrease in population growth. Education is the best form of birth control. The present increase of 254,000 new "passengers" daily on planet Earth — duty of remembrance — will keep coming down if the trends of recent years continue.

However, the vicious circle

of a financial system based on loans that enrich those who hand them out (keep their factories working) and impoverish those who receive them (who cannot keep their own factories running or exploit their natural resources) has given rise to a growing mismatch, accumulating wealth at one extreme and utter poverty at the other. The wealth in question is often unappreciated and forlorn, because one cannot love what one has not dreamed of and striven for.

And thus, guided by market forces and short-term indicators, instead of implementing policies prompted by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we have little by little forgotten the horror of war.

We have turned up at major world conferences on the environment, population, social development, and the role of women, but then failed to honour our pledges. In 1974, in the General Assembly of the United Nations, the most developed countries agreed to help the least privileged with 0.7 per cent of their GDP. That left 99.3 per cent for themselves. The exception of some Nordic countries, that was another broken promise. What is more, in the last three or four years, the proportion allotted to international co-operation has dwindled (to 0.2 per cent of GDP)

and there has been a rise (three to fivefold in many countries) in military expenditure.

Duty of remembrance. Crime of silence. We have forgotten the anguish and suffering of the turmoil of violence and war. War is evil, not peoples. Not those who are suddenly swept into the maelstrom.

However, we have not raised our voice to produce fort of persuasion and dialogue. We have failed to set up subregional alliances for rapid intervention in the event of disasters, whose role would be to reduce their impact and take advance action, so far as possible, when devastating forest fires, hurricane or other calamities strike. We have not yet learned to pay the price of peace and we are once more paying that of war.

The price (inhuman lives, the finest monument that we have to safeguard) of the 1939-1945 world war led to the founding of the United Nations. In 1989, when the Soviet system came down with the Berlin Wall, the world glimpsed the rainbow of a new change. The Iron Curtain had rusted because, while it was based on equality, freedom was overlooked. We are now embroiled in a system which, while based in freedom, has overlooked equality. And both have dispensed with fraternity.

When it seemed that, at last, the peace dividend could be reaped and that the United Nations system would be strengthened, just the opposite has happened: the United Nations has been weakened and its functions stripped down to (post-conflict) peace-keeping and humanitarian assistance. The whole development mechanism (agencies for agriculture, health, labour, education, science and culture) has "zero growth" imposed on it. UNESCO has a great many tasks but only one underlying purpose, that of building peace and establishing a culture of peace instead of that of war and violence which has prevailed since the dawn of history. But even where UNESCO is concerned, the United States, the most powerful country on earth, has been unable to honour its heretofore return to the Organization, for budgetary reasons (the sum involved being a few tens of millions of dollars).

In 1999 we are once more seeing the use of force, with the most sophisticated weaponry, although the consequence — owing in large measure to journalists and reporters — is still that the air forces will come down out of the skies, except in the desert, and wage war from house to house and from tree to tree. Once again we are dealing with force, and this time, what is more, outside the United Na-

tions system, which creates a very dangerous precedent. If, with its present membership and functions, the Security Council is unable to act with the requisite dispatch and authority, then let that body be changed and improved. But to ignore the United Nations is to fuel the anomaly of having national-scale democracies to address national problems and a world-scale oligarchy to deal with transnational issues.

The United Nations is the sole framework for a strong international democracy that will enable us to go to the roots of violence and terror, which all too often engender nationalistic, religious and ideological zeal, the only one that can make it known that the international community will not recognize those who come to power by blood-letting rather than by the ballot box; the only one that will interpose its forces vigorously and swiftly in the event of manifest violation of human rights. Everyone would thus know what to expect, and we should avoid the immense confusion caused by any conflagration — for the first casualty of war is truth.

Now, in 1999, we shall have to go back to thinking and acting as we did in 1945. On the threshold of a new century and a new millennium, we shall have to act like founders to strengthen the union of nations, so as to forestall violence and war. We shall have to base such a union on four new contracts: social, natural, cultural and moral. We shall have to draw up and abide by codes of conduct — in terms of flows of capital, energy, water, weapons, and so forth — on a planetary scale. We shall have to invest more heavily in the miracle of each human being, each unique

human being. The cost is reasonable when one considers that spending on arms alone last year topped eight hundred thousand million dollars.

The duty of remembrance. I remember now, with particular feeling when in Auschwitz and Gorki — two places declared World Heritage sites by UNESCO — we firmly said: "Never again." When, seeing Robben Island from Cape Town, I exclaimed: "Never again." And when we were opening the "Press House" in Kigali and, in Bujumbura, the "House of Peace". And in Somalia and elsewhere. And we kept saying "Never again". Then in Sarajevo. And in Mostar, beginning now to rebuild the bridges, large and small. Never again.

It is never too late for peace. Better today than tomorrow. Let there be a cease-fire and, with the same extravagance that is used to turn the wheels of the war machine, let us now turn the wheels of peace. Let the truth be known and justice be done. Under the care of the United Nations, let those who have been expelled from their homes and their land return to a Kosovo that is autonomous and plural, from both a religious and ethnic point of view. Wounds are inflicted in a long time to heal. A start must therefore be made as soon as possible.

As soon as possible we have to set out on another path and we have to write a history different from the one which, for the time being, we can only describe. This would be the best legacy to leave to our children and grandchildren, and those whom we promised, in 1945, to keep from the scourge of war. They duty of remembrance.

The author is the Director General of UNESCO, Paris.

Architecture in the Spirit of a Place

by Kazi Khaleed Ashraf

Most of us simply continue to bypass the crucial theme of tradition considering it an "old-fashioned," or at best romantic, practice, an obstacle in the glorious path to modernization. This is a superficial thinking that will only keep us removed from the true calling of architecture, and its essential role of responding to the spirit of place.

QUITE some time has elapsed since the beginning of the modern architectural discipline in Bangladesh in the mid-1950s. And still there are basic questions about architecture: What does architecture do? What is the scope of architecture in Bangladesh? What should be its role in the city, in the village, and for people of different groups?

In a country of limited resources like ours, the responsibility of the architect is tremendously important. Unfortunately, there are a lot of general misconceptions about architecture, about what architects do (or can do), and what the larger role of architecture is. Even most architects are not quite sure about their own calling and what they can do for Bangladesh.

The uncontrolled growth of cities and the massive pressure to build in the global consumerist culture should not delude one into thinking that a building is only a commodity, a product of square footage and taka values. The old conception about (good) building is as valid as ever: it is made in response to a specific and concrete situation, a real "place." By being so, it establishes our position in nature, and, in our context, becomes a visual expression of dwelling in the delta. The history of the last two thousand years shows that the quality of the delta has always persisted and re-emerged despite social upheavals, dynastic changes, and ideological shifts. An architecture that is responsive to the spirit of place would have to deal with the delta, with its wind, water, and clay, and with its sun, silt, and vegetation. The principles of a thoughtful architecture have to address site and situation, specific locality and condition.

The issue of identity has been a pervasive theme in Bengali cultural consciousness, and yet architecture, the locus where geography, material need, and human aspiration come together, has been poorly addressed in all discussions. If identity and all that really mean anything to us, we should be able to see architecture a bit differently — the most profound site of identity-making. We can begin to investigate what architectural models and patterns of settlement have appeared and reappeared to address our various needs — our physical, psychological and collective needs — and how they can be reinterpreted and reconciled with contemporary conditions.

Several tendencies are noticeable in recent architectural practice. A sort of internationalism pervades in the work of most architects Uttam Kumar Saha, Nahas Khalil and Rafiq Azam have produced a number of remarkable and high-profile work that show, specially in the urban setting, a modernist sensibility. Much of the work represents, a tension — a creative tension — between an abstract language (whose origin is primarily in Europe) and a local urgency, between the attempt to be part of a world culture and

actually being part of a specific place. This tension is not very different from that experienced by thoughtful architects even in the epicentres of globalization, be it North America, Europe, or Japan.

A much more problematic side emerges in the naive euphoria of a younger generation,

in order to catch up with such catchy themes as "cyberspace" and "global civilization," but without really understanding one's own place, and without actually comprehending the global phenomenon itself, has led to a lot of damaging consequences. This sort of half-baked and ill-informed internationalism, promoted by equally inadequate patrons who think that they are modernising the poor nation, only fuels the insufficient perception of architecture, and continues to be a distorted picture of the real task.

There is yet a larger segment of architectural work which generally goes unnoticed, but which is about providing complex services requiring large-scale management and planning, and major technical know-hows. It includes the building of hospitals and health centres, schools and institutions, industries, and such vital structures as cyclone shelters and power stations. Architectural organizations like Shapathi Sangsad, BCL, DDC, Assoconsult, and PWD, for example, have directed a number of such projects in various parts of Bangladesh.

But eventually it has been a small group of architects who have been reflecting on that critical question: What should be the basis for designing in Bangladesh? What kind of architecture for its cities and its villages? Their work reflects a search for an architecture that is rooted to a particular place and that responds to its historical tradition and cultural memory. Much of the work are outside Dhaka's high visibility

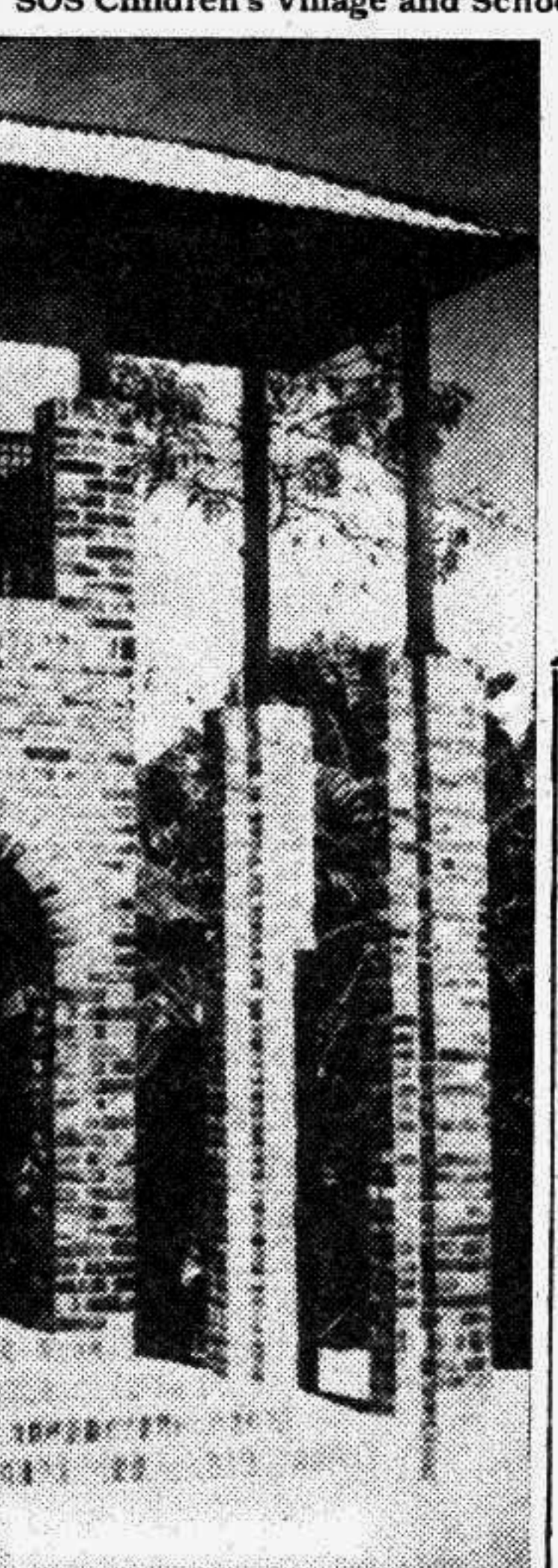
and hence remain rather unknown to many. There is reward in following some of these projects for they involve perennial issues which thoughtful architects and responsible patrons will face time and time again. Three themes are considered here: (1) the choice of building typology, (2) the nature of grouping buildings, and (3) the relationship of building and land.

Bashirul Haq's village home (1991) at Bhatsala in Conilla is nothing short of an architectural landmark in the Bengali spirit. The house is a contemporary expression of the "pavilion" model, the ideal image of dwelling that has emerged out of centuries of encountering the sun, wind, and rain — the structure with a parasol-like roof and porous walls. While Bashirul Haq is known for his private houses and urban housing, the home in Bhatsala demonstrates the special sensitivity needed for working in a rural setting. The building is a two-storied structure built around an existing "uthan" (courtyard) with older huts. The lower floor of the new building is built in ordinary exposed brick, a heavy mass containing small enclosed rooms. The upper level, on the other hand, is an open skeletal structure forming a partially-canopied airy terrace from where one can take a breathtaking view of the endless paddy fields.

The project is outstanding because even if it employs current methods of construction, it does not forget its setting — the existing "uthan" around which it is organised, and the village, with its pattern of independent



Architect Bashirul Haq's village home, Bhatsala (1991). huts, ponds, orchards, and paddyfields. The Bhatsala house is a compelling reinterpretation of a rural typology.



SOS Children's Village and School in Bogra (1994). Few architects have successfully tackled the issue of grouping buildings in a complex, in most cases creating

nothing but barrack-like buildings. The BRAC Centre outside Faridpur (1993), by Saif Ul Haque and Jalal Ahmad, and the "Bachte Shekha" (1994), an NGO institution in Jessore, by Saif Ul Haque, are remarkable examples of organizing buildings in a complex. The projects are a fabric of buildings and spaces created by different independent volumes gossling each other around interlocking courtyards, some of which are enclosed and some semi-enclosed. The new fabric is intimately engaged with the exist-

ing setting of ponds and orchards. One can meander from one area to another through a variety of interesting spatial experiences which are further heightened by the presence of semi-traditional architectural elements, the intimate texture of brick, and the modulation of light and shadow, also give a

rather simple brick huts with CI sheet roofing, but the merit lies in the overall arrangement of the complex.

The first significant thing is that the huts are laid out on the site in a deliberate irregular manner but following a visual logic determined by the dynamics of moving in the site. Moreover, the whole land of the site — the "bhita" — is reshaped into a completely new landscape of a variety of terraces, platforms, mounds, embankments, steps, and ramps. Passages and walkways are woven onto that created landscape. As Raziul Ahsan, while keeping the buildings rather straightforward, concentrated on the land-form, converting it into a complex and imaginative landscape.

While these three themes involve primarily non-urban settings, a bit more challenging course for reinterpreting tradition is required for dealing with the city. No matter what, innovation and experimentation in architecture can come only through addressing history, tradition, and place. Even the most avant-garde Western architect is profoundly imbued with his or her own cultural history. Most of us simply continue to bypass the crucial theme of tradition considering it an "old-fashioned," or at best romantic, practice, an obstacle in the glorious path to modernization. This is a superficial thinking that will only keep us removed from the true calling of architecture, and its essential role of responding to the spirit of place.

The author is an architect and architectural writer. He is currently at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

Water Scarcity Hits West Bengal

Krittivas Mukherjee writes from Calcutta

VILLAGES of West Bengal are in the grip of a drought-like situation due to the unrelenting heat wave and drastic drop in the water table. The heat wave has claimed 15 lives and damaged crops worth over one billion rupees. Most of the casualties have been reported from Purulia, Bankura, Midnapore and Murshidabad districts where water is reportedly selling at ten rupees a bucket. Three farmers are reported to have committed suicide due to crop failure.

Thousands of people of Purulia and Bankura districts, which have been experiencing a day time temperature between 42 and 45 degrees Celsius, converged on the Manbazar block of Purulia last Sunday and offered prayers for rain. Unlike

in other parts of the country, West Bengal usually receives 135 mm of rain from November to April, which hasn't happened this time.

State Relief Minister Satya Ranjan Mahato said most of the districts have been facing a drought-like situation. "If there is no rain in the next few days, the situation will really turn critical," he said. The state government has earmarked Rs. 1.15 billion (\$27.3 million) to meet the situation.

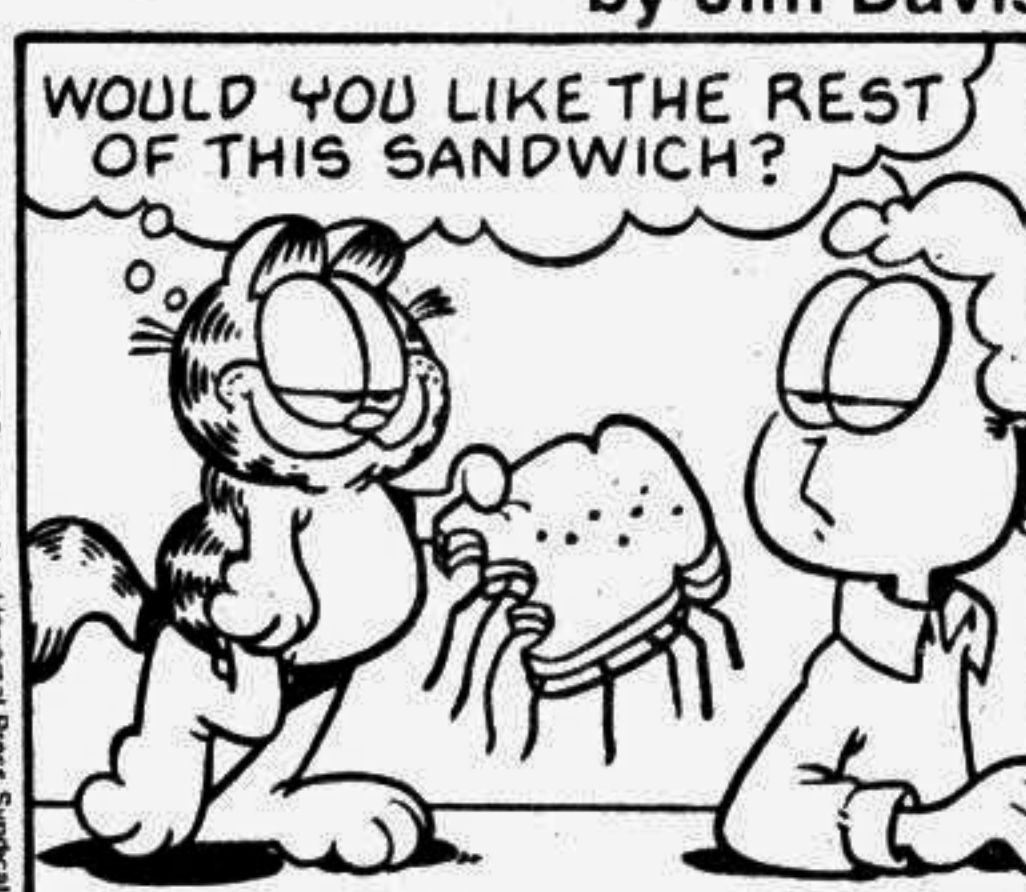
Drought in the region is an annual feature, but the situation this time appears to be worse than that of the famine-like situation of 1967, according to residents of Purulia town. The main cause of concern for the authorities is the rapid fall in the level of sub-soil water. Cracks have appeared in vast

tracts of parched land. Tubewells are also of little help and ponds have dried up. People of the coastal areas of Contai, Digha and Tamulur are facing a new kind of problem — cracks on the walls of their houses because the ground below had cracked open due to the heat.

A report from Midnapore said the ground water level had dropped by about 90 feet. Standing paddy crop had been totally damaged because of the dry spell and non-availability of irrigation water from the Kangsabati and Silabati reservoirs. Public Health Engineering Minister Gautam Dev, who visited the drought-hit areas, admitted that more than 10,000 tubewells had been rendered useless due to the dry spell.

— India Abroad News Service

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by Jim Davis

