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BNSB hospital at Pahartoli a ray of sunshine

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The Eye Infirmary and Training Complex of BNSB (Bangladesh National Society for Blinds) at Pahartoli is something the Chittagong people as well as the country can feel proud of.

When the people are desperately looking for specialised and professional treatment of reliable standard to avoid the hazards of travelling distant places outside the country, the Eye Infirmary with its high quality modern technical facilities stands as a relief to the eye patients.

This full-fledged eye hospital equipped with latest surgical and other necessary instruments and facilities has already emerged as the best eye hospital of the country and one of the best in this region. The hospital with the help of an international eye bank conducts around 90% cornea transplantations in the country. Arrangements to provide the infant eye patients with international standard treatment as per the advice and consultancy from ORBIS and some other renowned eye treatment centres of the USA, also adds to its unique achievements.

The eye hospital started its initial activities at a rented house at Anderkilla in 1973. But its real journey began in 1983 at its own premises at the picturesque place of Foy's Lake under the then Pahartoli thana (now Khulshi).

With the financial and technical

assistance from different donor agencies, specially those of the private donor agency of Andhery Hilfi of Germany, the hospital complex was constructed on 8 acres of land procured at a nominal price from Bangladesh Railway.

The hospital is run by a board of trustees comprising representatives from the principal founding samity of BNSB, foreign donor agencies, local donors and one representative from the government. Renowned eye specialist Prof. Dr. Robiul Hossain is entrusted with the responsibility of Managing Trustee of the Board.

To cope with the tremendous pressure of over 500 patients crowding there everyday, excepting on its weekly holiday on Saturday, the hospital in its General Out-door provides treatment to the patients with minor problems after their registration while its specialised Out-door comprising special departments manned by skilled and highly trained physicians takes care of the patients with critical diseases. The Specialised Out-door takes care of the patients needed to be operated upon after admission into the In-door one. The different technical departments offering unique services include auto-clubbing, washing, workshop and 5 specious Operation Theatres (OTs). The 130-bed hospital has 30 cabins for rich people and 100 general beds for common people.

Of the specialised departments, those of Cornea and the Paediatric

Ophthalmology are the most remarkable ones.

A full-fledged eye bank having affiliation with the US based International Federation of Eye Banks (IFEB) is there to provide cornea for transplantations. Nevertheless, to help the hospital overcome the yet poor and insufficient collection as against huge demand, International Eye Bank of America has made arrangement to provide cornea here when the concerned Ministry duly came forward with necessary approval and co-operation facilitating their quick and smooth procurement.

For the treatment of the infant eye patients in the recently introduced Paediatric Ophthalmology, an agreement has been signed with the US based ORBIS. Through the agreement ORBIS related itself with the service of the hospital providing electronic and other necessary instruments and apparatus and training up the manpower. The department is designed to have inter-link with some high standard US eye centres through Internet to get advice and suggestion for the treatment of critical diseases. In the cataract department the patients, after removal of their cataract, are regularly getting Intra-Ocular Lense (IOL) fixed inside their eyes with the help of non-stress Facio surgery system to return to normal life within a very short time after the operations.

The hospital has also opportunities for glaucoma treatment and

other treatments done with laser application.

The In-door of the hospital, other than separate men and women wards, includes Child and Septic wards and cabin. Of the patients admitted to the In-door, 80% to 90% are needed to be operated upon and on an average 50 patients undergo operation here daily raising the annual figure of operations to 7500 to 8000.

Besides, contact lense department, fair price optical and medicine shops, cafeteria and pathological laboratory offer extended facilities in the hospital.

In order to ensure the uninterrupted functioning of the hospital with adequate funds, the board has taken an initiative to distribute the 100 general beds in exchange of a fixed donation. In this process anyone can donate a bed in exchange for Tk. 1 lakh whereupon an equal amount of money donated by the German donor agency Andhery Hilfi will be added with it. The interest of this total donation of Tk 2 lakh for each bed would be used in providing free- treatment to the poor.

Beside round-the-clock institutional activities, the hospital has massive Outreach programmes that include Mobile Eye Camp, U-5 Clinic and Primary Eye Care Centre (PEC). Through these programmes it provides eye treatments to around one lakh people free of cost and operates upon another 4000 to 5000 patients every year.



PHOTO: STAR

The Eye Infirmary Complex at Pahartoli

The Eye Infirmary and Training Complex also housed the Chittagong University affiliated Institute of Community Ophthalmology to provide post-graduate Diploma in Community Ophthalmology course here. The complex through different training courses including IOL

(intra-ocular lense) surgery has so far imparted training to 153 physicians and through different paramedic and special courses trained up 263 nurses, paramedics and technicians.

Other than local participants, many from the neighbouring Nepal, Bhutan, The Maldives and Malaysia

are taking part in the training courses regularly.

A total of 27 doctors and 210 officials and employees of different categories are engaged there for the Eye Hospital and Training Centre and different projects under it.

The Managing Trustee of the

hospital Prof. Dr. Rabiul Hossain said, "Pro-people service to the needy is the topmost priority and objective of the hospital."

"We are committed to come to the need of the poor and ensure that they are not refused treatment here," Prof Rabiul said adding, "As per the strict principle of the hospital above 25% patients are treated free of cost while some for nominal or remitted expenses."

"The dedication which is vital for such institute and the hard work by skilled workforce rendering treatment of quality and international standard helped the Eye Infirmary develop to its present state from almost zero," he added.

Prof. Rabiul told The Daily Star that a complete Ophthalmology Department was being set up at the hospital to start activities soon while an Out Patient Department for children would also start functioning by this year.

However, he strongly felt the shortage of doctors in the hospital and regretted that some patients have to go back every day only to come the next day as the hospital cannot cope with the pressure. A good number of doctors attain specialisation through training in the hospital complex giving undertaking to work for five years in the hospital, he said. "But many of them go elsewhere for money much before the agreed period ends."

"We always want to be self-reliant, so the government as well as others should also come forward to join us in this noble venture," he added.



PHOTO: STAR

A modern architectural design of Cherag (lamp) at Cheragi Paharer More (hill crossing). A Muslim preacher used to sit on the hill top of the place for prayer spreading a mat and lighting an earthen lamp (Cherag).

CCCI takes move to ensure security of businessmen

Farid Ahmed Chowdhury tells The Daily Star

NURUL ALAM, Chittagong

In a bid to ensure security of the businessmen, the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) will collect reports of terrorist attacks on the business community in the port city and take the matter up with the higher authorities.

The CCCI has already set up a monitoring cell to gather information from the businesspeople who became the victims of terrorist activities.

"The move is aimed at helping out the businessmen who were either attacked by the terrorists or affected by illegal toll collection," CCCI president Farid Ahmed Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

He said the OCs and senior police officials of all the 12 thanas in the city are also involved with the monitoring cell to ensure proper coordination in the efforts to improve law and order situation in the industrial sector here.

"Whenever we get any report of attacks on the business house or industries by the terrorists or extortionists, we immediately inform the Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) and the respective thana about the incident, seeking legal action and remedial measures," Farid said.

"We now want to draw more



Farid Ahmed Chowdhury

attention of the higher authority to the deteriorating law and order and place the reports of such incidents before them for necessary action," he added.

He, however, claimed that the situation has improved to a little extent after setting up the monitoring cell.

The law and order situation had deteriorated in the port city alarmingly following the last national elections, prompting the CCCI to set up the monitoring cell.

CCCI president also said that most of the listed and identified terrorists and their ring leaders were yet to be arrested. "Those terrorists and their godfathers must be arrested for improving law and order situation in the port city," he said.

Chittagong thru' the eyes of John Beames

GOLAM SARWAR CHOWDHURY

John Beames was the Commissioner of Chittagong Division between 1878 and 1879. It was one of his last postings in India where he had arrived in 1858 as a "Bengal Civilian". After working in Calcutta, Punjab, Gujrat, Purnea, Balasore and Cuttack, Beames had reached Chittagong in February, 1878. Apparently he was depressed at this time and a brief account of Chittagong contained in the last chapter of his book, Memoirs of A Bengal Civilian, posthumously published by Chatto & Windus in 1961, reveals tell tale signs of that depression and ill health.

In this column I will give a description of Chittagong and its people as seen by Beames but will refrain from contesting some of the observations that are made from a highly exaggerated and condescending colonial perspective.

Beames describes Chittagong Division as lying in the "eastern-most" corner of Bengal on the eastern or Burmese side of the Bay of Bengal. He names a very large population of the Division as "Mughs." But in the next breath he speaks of even a larger section of the "Bengali Mussulmans" whom he regards as the "most quarrelsome, litigious, vindictive race in India." Nevertheless, he sprinkles a little praise to this observation by saying that many of them are bold and skilful sailors who supply crew to many steamers and sea-going vessels. Apart from this passing adulation, Beames remains consistently harsh in his description of the Muslim population of Chittagong. He takes another sweep at them in his reference to Noabad, a vast tract

of land, in Chittagong, that consisted of small estates. During Beames' tenure, the "settlement" of these estates were being made and the process had enabled him to watch the Bengali Muslims in their worst countenance: litigation, disputes, counter-litigation and counter-disputes were the most prominent traits discernible to Beames. He quotes another British officer, Sir Henry Ricketts, as having said that every Chittagonian is born with a "stamped paper" in hand and as soon as "he" learnt to walk, went straight to the court-house, fixed a lawyer and started a case.

Beames is no less harsh in his description of the Hindu Bengalis as well. He speaks about their sycophancy and their eagerness to keep the British happy under all circumstances. In this regard, Beames narrates an incident on 1st January, 1879 when he had to receive a poem from an elderly gentleman named Ram Kinu Dutt who was widely known as the "Poet of Chittagong." According to Beames, Dutt regularly sent long poems, written in English, to the Viceroy and other senior officers of the Raj who after having read the poems would send replies as a matter of courtesy. But Dutt would interpret these answers as recognition of his extraordinary poetic prowess. The poems sent to Beames on New Year's day were "written in a beautiful copperplate hand on large sheets of paper, with an elaborately drawn and coloured border which it must have taken him a long time to do."

Beames speaks about the Christian population of Chittagong in an almost similar vein. But compared to the other two communities,

his comments on the Christians whom he regards as mostly being of Portuguese descent are more caustic and insulting. He alleges that people of this community led a dissipated life and resorted to gambling, heavy drinking and adultery. Beames specifically refers to one Wallace (not his real name), "a very black half-caste" who had been a Deputy Collector for thirty years and had not quite legally amassed a great fortune. With his ill earned fortune, Wallace had bought "two flourishing and remunerative tea gardens in the Chittagong district."

Wallace had left the property to his minor son with the condition that upon growing up he would support the rest of the family consisting of the mother and two other children. Wallace had appointed another Deputy Collector, Masson (not his real name) as Executor and General Supervisor of the property. In this quite long description, Beames speaks about the moral degeneration of almost all of Wallace's children who led a very undisciplined and wayward life as they grew up into adulthood. It is evident from his descriptions of the three religious communities, that Beames never considered people of Chittagong from their respective religious perspective. As a senior officer of the Raj, Beames considered these people merely as natives. Whether they were Muslims, or Hindus, or Christians did never matter in his appraisal of them.

One redeeming feature of Beames' otherwise persistently unkind comments about the natives of Chittagong is his account of the

tribal people. He refers to the people of the Hill Tracts as amusing and their land as the only part of the Division that he had actually liked in sharp contrast to the rest of Chittagong that had seemed to him as an "evil, malignant place and people. Its very beauty is an evil beauty -- a beaute du diable." The people of the hills were much more attractive in their customs and culture, and in their food and dress, although many of them believed and practiced different forms of witchcraft. Beames narrates an incident involving the Chief of the Lushais who was bewitched and had eventually died. Just before his death, the chief had mentioned to his son as to who had really cast the spell upon him. "The Chief's son, on his father's death, sought out the man who had bewitched him and killed him. In doing so he thought he was performing a sacred duty and so did all his tribe."

John Beames' description of Chittagong and its people have a historical value in the context of recent developments in post-colonial theory. It is quite amazing to discover that Beames enjoyed his earlier postings in Calcutta, Punjab and particularly in Orissa, although the same person went through a drastic transformation after coming over to Chittagong where he could only discover evil among its people, its terrain and even its landscape. His description of Chittagong is like a journey to the heart of darkness, of course, propelled by a colonial mind-set.

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Incidents of abduction panic Ctg people

SHAHIDUL ISLAM, Chittagong

Frequent incidents of abduction for ransom in the port city of Chittagong and in the district during last few months panicked the residents here and became a matter of concern to the law enforcing agencies.

In most cases, the abducted persons were released either upon paying ransom or meeting other demands of the miscreants, sources said.

Police sources said about 25 persons, mostly belonging to the well-off class and expatriates, in the district and city were abducted during the last four months.

However, many incidents of kidnapping in different parts of the city and district are not reported fearing risk on the lives of the abducted persons. They prefer obliging the miscreants rather than informing the police.

In one of the recent such cases, four security guards of Dabua Rubber Garden in Raozan were kidnapped on February 26. They were Tipu Sultan, TS Abdul Quddus, Javed Hossain and Rafiqul Islam. Of them, Javed was released but fate of the rest three could not be ascertained till date.

In one of the sensational cases, Mostafizur Rahman, 40, a Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) employee, was abducted on way to his office by the unidentified miscreants at gunpoint from city's Oxygen Intersection area

on January 8. Later, the abductors demanded a ransom of Tk.50 lakh for his release.

Mostafiz was released on January 19, 12 days after his abduction. The miscreants released him at Firingee Bazar ghat of the river Karnaphuli on that morning.

Although Mostafiz and his family members denied any payment for his release, one reliable source in the CMP said they had information that Mostafiz was freed after paying at least Tk.7 lakh to the kidnappers as ransom.

In another recent incident, Amar Palit, 40, a businessman, was kidnapped along with his motorbike on way back home from Sagirhat area in Raozan upazila on January 13. However, Amar was released next day after paying Tk. One lakh to the abductors. He, too, avoided police help and legal procedure.

Earlier to this, Mohammad Gofran, 42, a cycle-parts trader, and Fazal Haque, 35, were kidnapped in close succession from Fatikchhari upazila area in December last year.

Mohammad Gofran was forcibly taken from his house in Kazirhat Bazaar on the night of December 20. Fatikchhari police, however, rescued him the following night from a thatched house at Ashia Tea Garden. Three miscreants were also arrested in this connection.

But the fate of Fazal Haque, who was abducted from near Fatikchhari Coronation High School on the night of December 19, is yet to be known.

Another victim was Md.

Nasiruddin. He was abducted on December 16 from his house at Sundarpur village in Fatikchhari by miscreants. The abductors demanded Tk. Two lakh as ransom for his release. He, too, was later rescued by police from the house of alleged terrorist Didar, leader of Didar Bahini, on December 18.

Nalini Master, a local businessman, was kidnapped at gunpoint from his village home at Dabua under Raozan upazila on the night of December 16. He secured his release reportedly after paying a good amount of money as ransom.

Manager of Polar Ice Cream Company Md. Shahjahan, 35, was abducted from Bohaddarhat area on November 26 last year on way home allegedly by a group of BCL terrorists, who shifted their allegiance to the ruling party's student wing JCD soon after the October 1 general election.

Shahjahan could consider himself fortunate as he was released by the miscreants on "humanitarian ground" within 48 hours, thanks to his sudden serious physical ailment while he was in confinement.

An investigation shows that Fatikchhari upazila, considered a violence-prone zone in the district, is being the most vulnerable area and 'sought-after target' so far incidents of abduction are concerned. During November and December, 2001 about 14 people were abducted from different areas in Fatikchhari.

At least four to five powerful syndicates of notorious criminals and terrorists are learnt to control the 'lucrative' business of abduction in the district and city, police sources said.

"Although an old culture, abduction is a profitable and coveted crime now-a-days, which brings huge money easily despite risks. That's why miscreants and anti-social elements alongside the identified terrorists are being drawn into this bad culture," Md. Monirul Islam, senior assistant commissioner of DB (CMP) said this while he was talking to this correspondent recently.

Shibir's notorious cadre Habib Khan, the prime accused in the sensational Bohaddarhat Eight Murder Case and ward commissioner Liaqat Ali Khan murder case, is learnt to have sole control over all the incidents of abductions in and around the city while his close associate Yakub, also a top-notch Shibir terrorist, reign and run the 'business' in the district, police sources added.

A statistics reveals that over 100 people were kidnapped for ransom during the last decade and the abductors have earned more than Tk. One crore as ransom money from the families of the victims concerned.

The criminals spared neither Swapan Singh, an elderly person, nor Yasin, a boy of 4, in their lust for money.



STAR PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

A large flock of seagulls probe the beach front at Sonadia in Cox's Bazar for fish during the ebb.