



# A library with a mission

By SHAHIDUL ISLAM

IT'S a fact that the education we receive from nature is superior to that imparted in the man-made institutions.

Libraries provide us with better and richer means to satisfy our learning needs and passions. And the lovers and connoisseurs of books are in a sense the wealthiest of the homosapiens.

A good book is considered as the best friend, philosopher and guide. It soothes one's mind when he or she is in discomfort, gives immense pleasure in one's leisure and widens his or her world of thinking, perception, ideas, knowledge and wisdom.

The invention of the library has made it possible to cater to the needs of man's taste and discernment. The students or persons who would frequent libraries are found to have benefited immensely through extensive reading.

But, now a days, it's pity that a large section of our young students and learners are seen craving for the latest CDs of lighter songs and are found roaming with those numbers in possession instead of books.

And the sermons on values and benefits of books get lost on them.

Besides, to our dismay, libraries or knowledge-providing institutions are becoming very scant in the society. One can count the numbers in our city in less than a second. One cannot expect a library of the magnitude or quality of Washington DC Library to be built overnight in this country, though.

Against the backdrop of this depressing scenario, the Abul Fazal Mukta Buddhi Charcha Kendra (Abul Fazal Centre for Cultivation of Free Thinking) in the port city of Chittagong ushers in a glimmer of hope and aspiration for many, especially those who always yearn for knowledge, learning and reading.

The Kendra, to be run by a trustee, established in a small building on the eastern side of Fulki, a non-traditional educational institution located just opposite the DC Hill, was formally inaugurated on May 4. The library started its journey towards building an 'enlightened society' here initially with 1200 books of a variety including classics, critical essays, books on history, culture, literature and so on.

Renowned educationist Professor Anisuzzaman was made president of the 11-member Abul Fazal Smriti Trust. Other members are eminent scientist Dr Jamal Nazrul Islam, prominent social scientist Dr Anupam Sen, economist Professor Sikander Khan, former DG of National Museum Shamsuzzaman Khan, member secretary and researcher Dr. Mahbulul Haq and five representatives from the family members of eminent litterateur, academican and former VC of Chittagong University, late Abul Fazal.

Under the auspices of this trust, six lecture programmes on different topics have been organized so far. Among those, two most remarkable and noteworthy lectures have been given by Dr. Anupam Sen on 'History of Ideas' concluded in six lectures and Dr. Shafique Haider Chowdhury on the 'Sundarban'.

A ceremony marked the launching of Abul Fazal Mukta Buddhi Charcha Kendra on May 4, the day Abul Fazal died nineteen years ago, at the Fulki premises. Former Chief Justice and Chief Advisor of the caretaker government Muhammad Habibur Rahman formally inaugu-

আবুল ফজল মুক্তবুদ্ধি চর্চা কেন্দ্র



rated the library. The day also marked the beginning of Abul Fazal's birth centenary as he was born in 1903 in Chittagong.

Professor Anisuzzaman, Dr. Mahbulul Haq and Abul Momen, son of Abul Fazal, also spoke on the occasion. On the occasion, veteran revolutionary Binod Bihari Chowdhury, eminent journalist professor Mohammad Khaled, internationally acclaimed scientist Dr. Jamal Nazrul Islam, a pioneer publisher Syed Mohammad Shafi and noted author Begum Mustari Shafi were accorded honorary membership of the library.

Abul Momen in his brief speech narrated the background of forming this new organization for scholarly pursuits in the city. Dr. Mahbulul Haq spoke briefly about the plans and programmes to celebrate his (Abul Fazal) birth centenary next year.

Justice Habibur Rahman put emphasis on Abul Fazal's pioneering role in making a modern Muslim society in this region. Dr. Anisuzzaman, in his presidential speech, paid rich tribute to Abul Fazal both as a social reformer and a creative writer.

Cultural activist Dulal Dasgupta read out excerpts from the works of Abul Fazal while 'Raktakarabi' rendered the inaugural song. An exhibition of hand-written manuscripts, diary and books of Abul Fazal was also arranged on this occasion.

The library will remain open for all from 5pm to 8pm on Thursday, Friday and Saturday every week.

PHOTO: STAR

Former Chief Advisor Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman inaugurating the Abul Fazal Mukta Buddhi Charcha Kendra in the city.

# High price of tea keeps foreign buyers away

## TTAB chairman tells

NURUL ALAM

BAKGLADESH must raise yield of tea with the reduction of production cost in a bid to boost its export, Tea Traders Association of Bangladesh (TTAB) Chairman Feroz Ahmed said.

"If we can not increase tea output to make its price competitive with other regional tea producing countries, it will be difficult to attract foreign buyers", TTAB Chairman said. "Presently our tea price is very high due to competition among our local buyers who are very active in the tea auctions to meet the home demand", he added.

"Our home consumption is going up every year and if this trend continues, in near future we will not find surplus tea for export", Feroz, also a tea trader, said.

"Bangladesh tea might be edged out of global export market unless the output increased," he said.



Feroz Ahmed

Every year internal consumption shows a growth of over one million kgs which has now reached to over 30 million kgs annually, he added saying "it is growing very fast".

Bangladesh produced about 55 million kgs tea last year. Feroz said "as our price is very high we are getting poor export enquiry which is really a set-back". "We are lagging behind in exporting tea though our tea has potential for export mar-

kets," he said.

"Export price of one kg of Bangladesh tea now stands at 1.5 dollar while similar type of tea in India costs 85 cents and in China 40 cents per kg," he said.

"Our price must come down to a reasonable level to attract the foreign buyers," Feroz said.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are the major buyers of our tea while other traditional foreign buyers turned to India, Kenya and African countries to import tea at cheaper price, he said. "As such our tea export market is shrinking day by day, he added."

"But we can export more tea to Pakistan if it allows relaxation of import duty as committed by the Pakistan commerce minister during his visit to Bangladesh several months ago," TTAB chairman said.

"There is immense prospect of Bangladesh tea in Pakistan markets," he added.

Pakistani importers are paying 30 per cent duty now which is a barrier to tea export to that country, he said.

"As a SAARC and Muslim country Pakistan should reduce the tariff to facilitate the access of Bangladesh tea in its markets," Feroz said.

"We suggested our government to negotiate with Pakistan for arranging a special preferential tariff in case of tea export from Bangladesh. There was no follow-up on the Pakistani commerce minister's visit to Bangladesh in context of tea".

"I hope our commerce ministry will soon take steps to send a delegation to Pakistan to arrange negotiation in this regard before its budget was announced," TTAB chairman added. When asked he said Bangladesh embassies can take steps to campaign for promoting tea exports.

"Due to lack of proper campaign our tea exports started to decline," he said.

In reply to a question he said in the year 2001 tea export from Bangladesh was recorded at 12.93

million kgs, down from 18.10 million kgs a year before (i.e year 2000).

Plans were underway to raise tea output as well as boost export.

Tea is a major cash crop and

Bangladesh has 158 tea gardens. Tea plantation here date back to 1840. At present over 48,000 hectares of land are under tea cultivation. Average yield stands around



PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

This natural fountain makes Shubhalong an attractive tourist spot

# Clean Up Chittagong 2002

JULIA M CROCKETT

FOLLOWING on the pilot scheme for this project, a competition for English medium schools held in 2001 in which the British Council Chittagong encouraged principals to ask their pupils and students to look around the immediate environment in which they worked and studied to find practical opportunities for improvements, we are now pleased to announce a five year scheme called Clean Up Chittagong.

The hard work which went into the many excellent projects produced by schools, and the splendid publicity which the competition gave to the need to improve our local

environment, started people thinking. Now we need to plan together to create a longer-term scheme which includes a larger number of people, not in competition with each other, but in co-operation.

Of course, the very title of the scheme implies that Chittagong is dirty, that this state is a problem, and that solutions exist. But what might Chittagong look like if the most interesting aspects of life and behaviour here were radically altered to make Chittagong into a bland place of spotless streets and fake smiles? Would we still like it? If the one-legged beggar galloping across the street with his crutch, and the woman sleeping on the roundabout, and the squatting man by the

ditch at the side of the road, and the people ripping bloody chickens to pieces next to the fire exit, and the bins of rubbish chucked over the wall every morning didn't exist, would it still be Chittagong? Do we want it to look, and smell, and sound like a gleaming disneyworld? Well, no.

But there are aspects of daily life here which are so detrimental to everyone's health and well-being that some changes would be of enormous benefit. Take the uncovered drains, for example. Disgusting, basically. Or the gaping holes in the pavements. Or the belching fumes from the baby-rickshaws, or the undrinkable water. Yes, you could say that about some

facets of life in my own city of London, some of it is today as mediaeval as in the 12th century, apparently. And it's true that the City Corporation women are out there every morning in their yellow jackets, sweeping the dust from one side to the other, and the men are there digging the gunge out of the drains, and the cops are there waving at the taxis as they dart off in all directions at once. There is in fact some order in this chaos.

So, if we are to hold further Clean Up the World -- starting with Chittagong, starting on my own doorstep -- events, what are the real priorities? Please tell me what you think.

The writer is Director, British Council, Chittagong.

# A View of Kazir Dewry

MOHIT UL ALAM

KAZIR Dewry is one of the most crowded neighbourhoods of Chittagong. It is basically a Mahalla which has got its name from the Kazi family that once possessed all the lands in the area. Kazi Bari, the family's homestead is on the southern side of the Shahid Saifuddin Khaled Sarak. There is a big mosque in front of the house along with a graveyard in which is buried the famous litterateur Abul Fazal who was son-in-law of the Kazi family by his first marriage. The mosque, of which Abu Fazal's father was a Pesh Imam or head priest for over thirty years, stands on the bank of a big pond which today unfortunately is almost dried up expect for a little pool of water used by people for ablution and bathing.

The Shahid Saifuddin Khaled Sarak starts at Lal Khan Bazar in the west and runs through Kazir Dewry dividing it to two clear sections and ends at Jamal Khan Sarak in the east. The southern section of Kazir Dewry is square-shaped with Kazi Bari at one corner and the Bangla Hotel on the other. The Bangla Hotel is owned by Kazi Shahjahan, the son of Kazi Enamul Haq who truly bore the image of a representative of the landed gentry of the bygone days. Kazi Enamul Haq was both an admirer and friend of Abul Fazal, and when in later years both Abul Fazal's fathers-in-law, the famous litterateur Mahbulul Alam, and his brother poet Wahid Ul Alam, got settled in Kazir Dewry, he became their friend too. Kazi

Shahjahan is now a BSD (Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal) leader and run on a party ticket the national election of 2001 from Chittagong 9 constituency. Abul Fazal was a close friend of poet Didarul Alam, the younger brother of Mahbulul Ul Alam, but Didar having been dead in 1929, Abul Fazal's relationship continued with Alam family after he lost his second wife too, having married Umratul, Mahbulul Alam's eldest daughter. In the meantime Abul Fazal got a plot of land at Kazir Dewry as endowment from the Kazi family and built a house there called the Shahitya Niketan, a big two-storied house on the Haji Nur Ahmed Sarak. After his death in 1983 his children have added two more floors to it and the house stands proudly bearing the litterateur's memory. Abul Fazal might have influenced Wahid Ul Alam, his uncle-in-law, to buy a piece of land at Kazir Dewry on the southern side of the Shahid Saifuddin Khaled Sarak. Wahid Ul Alam, in his turn, induced his elder brother Mahbulul Ul Alam also to buy a plot at Kazir Dewry, who by 1954 having retired from the government service was planning to return to Chittagong finally. Mahbulul Ul Alam chose his plot deep inside the Kazir Dewry 2<sup>nd</sup> lane, and it so happened that by mid-1950s three prominent literary figures Mahbulul Ul Alam, Abul Fazal and Wahid Ul Alam- started living in the same mahalla. Today Kazir Dewry, 2<sup>nd</sup> lane is eponymously renamed as Shahityik Mahbulul Ul Alam Sarak, but young Kazir

Dewrians having no clue whatsoever wonder who he was.

Anybody entering Kazir Dewry 2<sup>nd</sup> lane for the first time will be daunted by the sheer number of puzzling bends of the lane. The lane branches off from the Shahid Saifuddin Khaled Sarak near Kazir Dewry vegetable market and then zigzags like a Bangla alphabet 'da' until it meets the Battery Goli at the other end. This is a melting pot of people high and low. While the former VC of Chittagong University, Prof Abdul Mannan has his paternal residence here, most of the inhabitants by profession are attached with the nearby Chittagong Club either as waiters or as keepers. Two merchant families, those of Pyear Mohammad Sowdagor and Sher Mohammad Sowdagor, had been dominant in the area by tradition and riches, but after the death of the respective Sowdagors they have lost their hold and new groups of merchants have emerged. Pyear Mohammad Sowdagor was a very enterprising old man and did many good things for the community. He died as an octogenarian, as did Mahbulul, Fazal and Wahid, for whom at one time it looked like that old people at Kazir Dewry never died.

Shahid Saifuddin Khaled Sarak was named after Saifuddin Khaled who was killed by the Pakistani soldiers in 1971 at a frontal battle while defending a barricade. Saifuddin Khaled was the son of late Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury, who was an Awami League minister in the first cabinet. The Shahid

Saifuddin Khaled Sarak was previously called the Empress Road, so named after a visit by Queen Elizabeth to Chittagong in 1961. The Queen briefly stayed in the old Circuit House and attended a reception in her honour by the people of Chittagong.

The Circuit House afterwards became the very house in which president Zia was brutally killed on May 30 in 1981. It was then converted into Zia Museum and beside it there was erected another guest house, a modern two-storied luxury building, also called the Circuit House and is mainly used by the government officials on tour in Chittagong.

Kazir Dewry has hugely changed since the time when Mahbulul Ul Alam bought his plot there in 1956. At the Kazir Dewry Square the 4-storied Appolo Shopping Centre commands an imposing view, and beside it the massive Tower House a multi-purpose apartment complex is rising taller and taller dwarfing even the railway hills a furlong away. The MA Aziz Stadium (previous called Neaz Stadium), recently upgraded as the 82<sup>nd</sup> test venue, is also at Kazir Dewry. There is a big field in between the Stadium and Haji Nur Ahmed Sarak which is a playing ground for young men from adjacent localities, and which is used as the venue for Muktiuddher Bijoy Mela every year.

Mohit Ul Alam is a professor of Department of English, Chittagong University.

# Bridge on the river Karnaphuli

## A crisis that remains ignored for years

ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD

THE century-old Kalurghat rail and road-bridge once again emerged as the only means of linking the southern region of Chittagong division on the other bank of the river Karnaphuli with rest of the country. Thus forcing millions of people to wallow in untold sufferings and miseries for years together.

Despite having a well-developed road network with Arakan Sarak (Ctg-Cox's Bazar highway) the road communication of this region is maintained through this bridge alone in a century-old fashion when another bridge over the Karnaphuli remains the "crying need" unheeded and ignored by the authorities concerned.

Sole dependence on the Kalurghat bridge originally a railway bridge that was modified to facilitate the movement of road transport as an interim service providers how the severity of a problem that requires to be addressed immediately on an emergency basis.

At present millions of people of south Chittagong, hilly district of Bandarban and Cox's Bazar are forced to travel over the bridge risking their lives and undergoing unthinkable sufferings. Transportation of goods is also made through the dilapidated and worn out bridge that poses threat to the bridge itself and, therefore, the communication facility.

In case of any accident the road link of the region with the other parts of the country is sure to collapse for an indefinite period.

The 2094-ft long bridge was installed as a simple rail bridge of steel structure between Janalihat and Gomdandi Railway Station (at kms 13.11 - 14.8) in 1930.

British engineers constructed it with 13 different types of spans that include one 150ft-steel girder, twelve 100ft under-slung ones, five pieces of 80ft and a single 40ft deck type span and twelve 16ft joists. It has an approach of 560ft length at Chittagong end and 490ft at the Dohazari end.

The bridge was commissioned for operation of trains in Chittagong-Dohazari section in the year 1931 to continue till date.

Thirty-one years after its inauguration, considering suffering of the people it was modified with decking

and carpeting and turned into a rail and road-bridge in 1962.

With a road space of only 10ft the bridge was opened to the traffic allowing vehicles having a maximum load of 10 tons within a restricted maximum speed of 16 kms per hour to provide an interim service until the construction of a road bridge.

Since then the bridge served as a vital road link here for the 30 years till the Shah Amanot Bridge (locally known as the Karnaphuli bridge) was constructed over the river Karnaphuli in 1990.

Shah Amanot Bridge brought about a great change in the communication here shortening both the distance and time needed for the journey to a significant extent.

But within ten years of its opening the bridge was closed for heavy vehicles as its wooden deck developed cracks and became worn out at many places. The people now travel through the 'tenure expired and narrow bridge' of Kalurghat risking their lives with several times higher and ever-increasing volume of traffic movement everyday.

Besides, one-way traffic along the bridge creates an unbearable

congestion of vehicles on both the ends of the bridge where the travellers have to wait one to two hours in long queues to cross the bridge alone, which should usually be a 30-minute journey.

Bangladesh Railway, the owner of the bridge, leases it out every year to earn a lot of revenue that stood at over Tk. 1 crore in the auction this year for the use of road transportation.

Bangladesh Railway has two other such rail and road bridges one on the river Teesta in Lalmonirhat and the other on the river Kanchon on Dinajpur-Birra section, both in the western zone.

Though smaller in size when compared with those two, Bangladesh Railway finds this lone rail and road-bridge in its eastern zone as the most important one in terms of utility and revenue earning. People blame Bangladesh Railway for not undertaking any renovation work of the bridge that brings in a handsome economic profit for it.

However, the owning authority also appears to be quite alert to the condition of the bridge and sufferings of the people when it goes on with regular decking and carpeting

work on the bridge side by side erecting railings on both the sides.

Besides, the authority is also learnt to have come up with proposal and actively thinking for the renovation and expansion of the bridge.

When contacted the Additional Chief Engineer (Bridge) of Bangladesh Railway (East) Abul Quasem said, "We have already sent a proposal for renovation and expansion of the bridge to the higher authority to include it in the five-years plan some two years back and the authority is quite aware of the need of everyone using the bridge."

"But the proposal failed to have immediate response as there are many aspects related to it," Engineer Quasem told this correspondent. "The bridge was opened to traffic to provide interim service until the authority responsible to look after the issue comes up with a new bridge considering the inconvenience of the people. "In case of renovation, the expenditure has to be kept to the minimum as emergence of an alternative or a permanent solution might cause huge financial losses rendering the entire

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: STAR

The century old Kalurghat Bridge over the river Karnaphuli.