

# National Archive in poor shape

BISHAWJIT DAS

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The National Archives (NA) could not be a rich resource centre even 29 years after its inception because of neglect and non-cooperation of government officials, although it has the prerogative to claim official documents. "The government officials don't even have the idea about the National Archives. They don't understand the importance of preserving documents, although

we instruct them to keep records properly," said NA Deputy Director Salma Islam.

"It is difficult to collect documents from government offices. It takes us years to get the papers. We contacted Dhaka City Corporation and Land Survey offices many years ago, but we did not get their documents yet," she said.

The situation is not always the same and some are cooperative, said Salma. The NA has recently got a lot of documents from

Chittagong Divisional Office. According to the National Archives Ordinance 1983, the NA is the authority to ask for official documents and manuscripts 25 years after their publication.

Founded in 1973 under the National Archives and National Library Department, the NA has collected nine lakh documents, most of them catalogued and prepared for references.

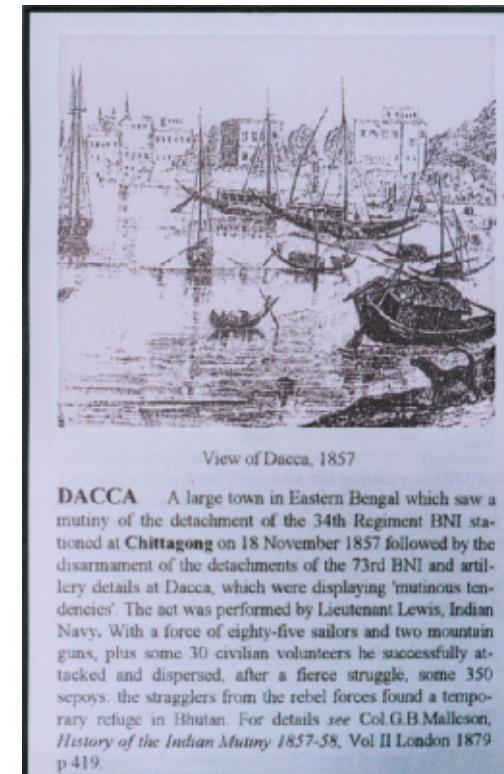
It has a resource of 57 microfilms of Bengali Newspaper from 1874 to 1916 from the India

Office Library, London, with the financial assistance of UNESCO.

Public records in the NA are open to readers for research. It is open from 9:00am to 4:00pm from Saturday to Wednesday and 9:00am to 2:00pm on Thursdays.

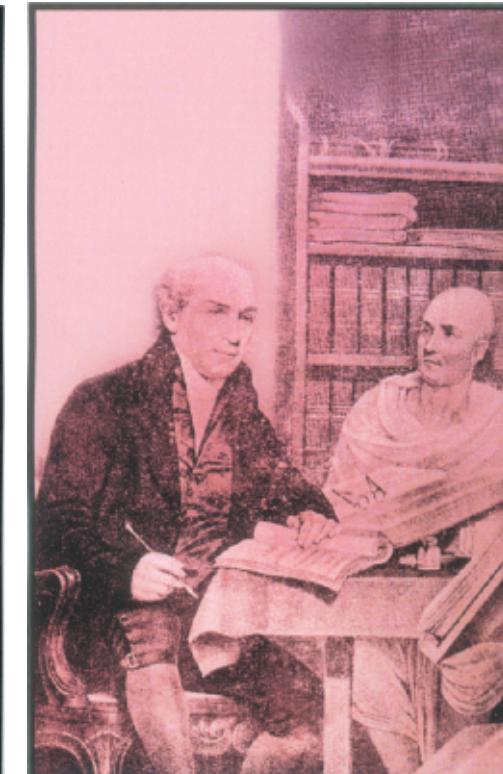
The NA has made an advanced step to preserve its documents. "We have already set up computers and an eight-man group is working to save the documents on CDs," said Salma.

The NA publishes a half-yearly bulletin, Newsletter of Archives

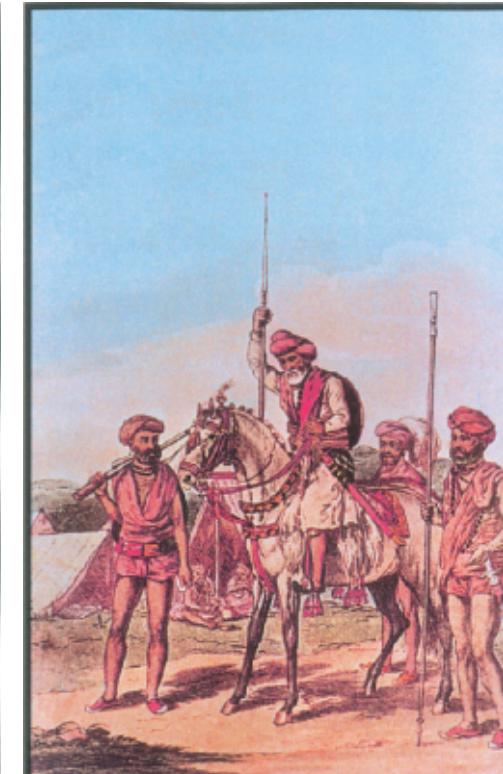


View of Dhaka, 1857

**DACCA** A large town in Eastern Bengal which saw a mutiny of the detachment of the 34th Regiment BNI stationed at Chittagong on 18 November 1857 followed by the disarming of the detachments of the 73rd BNI and artillery details at Dacca, which were displaying 'mutinous tendencies'. The act was performed by Lieutenant Lewis, Indian Navy. With a force of eighty-five sailors and two mountain guns, plus some 30 civilian volunteers he successfully attacked and dispersed, after a fierce struggle, some 350 sepoys. The stragglers from the rebel forces found a temporary refuge in Bhutan. For details see Col G.H. Malleson, *History of the Indian Mutiny 1857-58*, Vol II London 1879 p 419.



From left to right: View of Dhaka (Dacca)-1857, Picture of William Carey-pioneer in Bengali printing and a pundit, A mohunt and gossains-Sannyasi raiders in Bengal, Picture of Nawab Abdul Ghani K.C.S.I -- these rare documentation and pictures are in the collection of the National Archives of Bangladesh, which is now in a poor shape due to lack of cooperation of different departments.



COURTESY: BANGLADESH NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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and Libraries, to introduce its latest collections and announce their last news.

The National Archives and National Library Department has 82 posts to run the office. But 23 posts have been vacant for more than nine years.

"Collecting materials, cataloguing and archiving are a technical job for which trained people are a must," said Salma. "It is essential for us to have training from abroad."

The National Diet Library, the

national archive of Japan, is possibly one of the leading archives around the world.

Designed like the Library of Congress, Diet began rolling in 1948. Now it has a collection of 1,44,54,116 books, 12,65,075 sheets of map, 8,87,702 gramophone records, 7,43,640 rolls of microfilm, 3,92,161 magazines and a fleet of 1,572 officials to maintain and serve its readers.

Only last year it served as many as 40 lakh readers with references, books and photocopies.

## Sorrows behind silver screen

They are popularly known as extras belonging to a lower rung of filmdom and having a status far below protagonists, but their roles are a must for a movie. Their status not roles determined their way of life -- packed with a myriad of problems



COURTESY: DERSAN MOVIES

Glimpse from a Bangla film showing the heroine sharing a dance sequence with the 'extras'. Although the 'extras' work hard in the process of making a film, they are yet to be recognised as artists.

make a living, although they don't enjoy it.

Almost 1,500 extras work hard in the film industry to keep their body and soul together, with at least 150 of them entering the Film Development Corporation (FDC) at around nine in the morning, though the authorities say the number is 50.

They pass the day longing for a call from any film set. "There is no difference between us and day labourers," said Sufia Khatun, who earns Tk 100 a shift. She earns less than before, she said.

Landing a job is turning even tougher since the scarcity of jobs is increasing by the day. Movies had once been based mostly on 'social actions' needing a number of people on the screen.

"The movies produced now hardly have a scene on slum, college or social occasion that need more people," said Saleha Begum, an extra artiste working for nine years.

Middlemen surfaced to fix jobs for extras and take money for that. "We pay the middleman Tk 20 for each job,"

said a junior artiste.

Many women accused production managers of paying them less. "They tell the producers that they pay us Tk 200, while we get only Tk 100 a shift," said a woman artiste on condition of anonymity.

Meagre pay is not the only difficulty to confront. There also exists social stigma. "Our efforts to convince the prejudiced people that we don't do anything wrong proved futile," said another woman.

Sometimes even family members misunderstand them, making life more miserable. Jyotsna, a 20-year-old woman, lied to her husband that she works in a garment factory. "He lives with another woman and does not pay me any money. What he can only do is dictate me," she said in frustration.

Life becomes even harder for those women already reached their twilight years. "Who will appoint us to sing, dance or even buzz around the heroine. We lived out our beauty," Saleha Begum sighed.

She recollects the golden time

when she earned Tk 500 a shift in case of a good role. Even they never needed to commute on their own since the production house paid transport allowance.

The waiting room inside the FDC for extra artistes has long remained in a dilapidated state. Sunlight hardly reaches the dingy, shabby room having only a broken bench.

The artistes complained of insecurity even inside their waiting room. Sometimes, men are found sleeping or even taking drugs inside the room, they said. The girls are reported to be harassed by them.

Badiul Alam, FDC assistant director (security), said there is a permanent police camp consisting of eight members at the FDC. "We can ensure the women's security inside the FDC but cannot do anything when they leave the FDC at night," he said.

He admitted to the possibility of women being harassed by production boys.

## City children crave for respite from pressure

MORSHEDE ALI KHAN

September 3, 2003. It was result day at the Dhaka YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) Girls High School and as usual, there was nervous anticipation among hundreds of students.

The Bangla medium school at Green Road was handing out the marked answer sheets of the second term examinations for the parents to take back home and check. Worried guardians waited outside the school premises throughout the day. Even children barely six, had an unnatural fear written all over their faces while waiting for the sheets.

For Humaira and Priyanka, of class three and four respectively, results meant almost everything. Their parents had long insisted on good results at any cost and have put in tireless efforts to keep their offspring studious. Teachers too put pressure on the children by threatening them with expulsion if results were not satisfactory. Unfortunately for the two little girls, their results were not quite up to the expectations.

Priyanka sobbed till the end of classes that day and slipped out of the school premises unnoticed by her

waiting mother and the school authorities. The child, too afraid to face her parents and teachers, walked alone on the streets oblivious of the dangers that lurked on every corner.

Meanwhile, Humaira's pregnant mother couldn't get the answer sheet from the clutches of her terrified daughter. Suddenly she broke free from her mother's grip and started running away.

It was not until 6pm that little Humaira was spotted by a resident of Lake Circus. A crowd soon gathered around the tot in school uniform. Frustrated and angry, a defiant Humaira declared that she did not want to return home. But as her identity card was pinned to her dress, someone informed the school authorities.

As the news spread, Priyanka's father Jashim Uddin, thinking that it could be his missing daughter, rushed to the spot near Panthapath where the girl was located. He looked dejected when he found out that it was someone else.

Humaira was taken to the school where the school authorities, including the headmistress faced angry relatives of Priyanka.

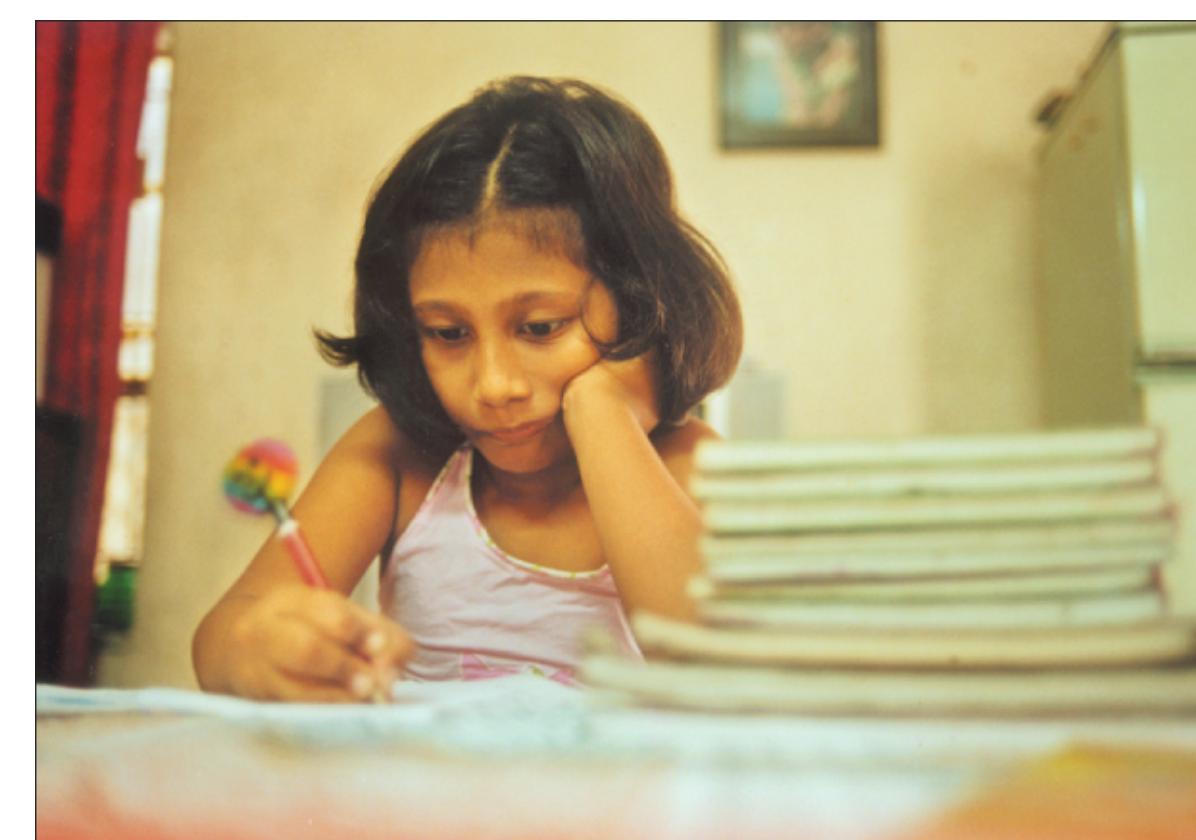
"Where was the security? Why did

your teachers threaten to expel the children? How could our child slip out of the school without being challenged by the guards?" These were a few of the angry quaries. The authorities, in turn denied any negligence on their part and alleged that the children had gone missing from the custody of their mothers.

While all this was taking place, the news came that Priyanka had just reached home on her own.

Relatives said that the children, with huge volumes of homework everyday, do not have any freedom for any extra curricular activities. As soon as the child returns home from school, she barely has time to take a bath and have her food. Soon, she is off to a private tutor where she has to stay doing her homework till late in the evening. When she comes back home, she no longer has any energy left.

The incident just goes to show that tough competition to get admission to reputed schools, a tough and vast syllabus and the constant pressure from both parents and teachers is turning our children into timid, scared and emotionally insecure human beings. What future is there for such a generation?



Most children are deprived of extracurricular activities while coping with an extreme pressure of studies.

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED and

SULTANA RAHMAN

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The silver screen is synonymous with glamour, rumour, controversy and wealth. Life of all the people singing around trees, streaming down tears for an emotive scene or even confronting the evil to establish good seems impeccable to the people outside.

But it is sorrow and hurdle rather than mirth and laughter that define the behind-the-screen life of some cine-artistes or junior women artistes, to be more precise.

They are popularly known as extras belonging to a lower rung of filmdom and having a status far below protagonists, but their roles are a must for a movie. Their status not roles determined their way of life -- packed with a myriad of problems.

Coming from the underprivileged section of society, most extra artistes get into the profession through middlemen. Girls like Khairul Sundari or Mousumi turn up for the job only to

SYED ZAKIR HOSAIN