

In praise of Mother's Day

LIZA RAHMAN

MOTHER'S Day is here. Many of us have already planned for this day, some are still planning. Mother's Day is not new for the international community but to many Bangladeshis, it's a relatively new celebration. In this age of information super highway, lot of Bangladeshis are now familiar with Mother's Day. But a few years ago, it was quite an unfamiliar term. In fact, many rolled their eyes when they heard that people in the western world show their love and affection to their mothers on a given day of the year.

I was one of them. While in Bangladesh, I never heard of Mother's Day. In 1988, when I finally settled down in the United States, my children were young and started to attend schools. Through them I came to know about Mother's Day. They used to bring handmade cards and other crafts from school as Mother's Day gift. After that, through sales at various stores and friends at work, I learned more about Mother's Day. At first I was somewhat sarcastic about Mother's Day, because of the way mothers are being treated all year long. They spend their old age all by themselves. Their children and grandchildren live far away from them. Some people spend their old

age in a nursing home, eat their dinner with strangers, cared for by professionals not loved ones. They wait eagerly to see the faces of their loved ones, who only show up on certain days of the year.

Which made me think that we love our mother all year long, our love is not limited to one particular day of the year, we love and take care of our parents all year long, we love them with all our heart, there is no need to show off our love. Maybe that is why people in the East never thought of showering their mother with love and attention on a particular day of the year, because they worship their mother all year long, all life long. Like in Islam, it says, that "a man's heaven lies at the foot of his mother." This made people respect their mother more than anything. But gradually I became quite fascinated and used to the idea of Mother's Day. Now, I eagerly wait to see how my husband and children are going to show me their appreciation on this day.

Early in the morning, I wake up from the noise and smell from the kitchen. My soon to be adult son makes my favorite breakfast of pancakes or bagels, also he makes scrambled eggs and toast, hot beverage, cold juice. Everything he puts on a tray along with the morning newspaper and a flower and brings to my bedroom. At that moment I feel

like I am the queen of the day. After my daughter went to university and started to stay in a dorm, I thought my luxury of having breakfast in bed had ended. But from the next year, my son started to make my breakfast. My daughter would buy something very precious and expensive for me. My husband would take me out for dinner to my favourite restaurant. While feeling like a queen, I try not to ignore my own mother. If she is

tion was known as Hilaria, it lasted for three days from March 15-18.

During the 1600s, England celebrated a day which was called Mothering Sunday. They celebrated it on the 4th Sunday of Lent (the forty day period leading up to Easter), it honoured the mothers of England. During this time, many of the England's poor worked as servants for the wealthy. As most jobs were located far from their homes, the

was famous for writing the words to the Battle Hymn of the Republic). Julia Howe began promoting the idea of a Mother's Day for Peace. It was celebrated on June 2, 1872 to honour peace, motherhood, and womanhood. In 1873, women in 18 cities across America held a Mother's Day for Peace gathering. Boston celebrated this day for almost ten years. But the celebration died out when Julia Howe was no longer able to pay

group of people. After that she started a letter writing campaign, which was the most successful letter writing campaign in history. Gradually people joined in her work, newspapers wrote editorials, people lobbied for it. Finally, the lawmakers started to recognise this celebration.

In 1910, the governor of West Virginia issued the first Mother's Day Proclamation. In the same year, Oklahoma celebrated Mother's Day.

of flowers is presented to mothers at family dinners.

Mother's Day is a very special day for people. We all love our mother, but on this particular day we love to show that off. The consumers have taken this opportunity and today almost 96 percent of American consumers take part in some way on this day. Everything is on sale at stores, from shoes to dress, expensive jewelry to cosmetics, handbags, household items, greeting cards, gift cards to beauty parlors, spa, facial, manicure, pedicure, buying cakes, candies, dinner, etc. Mother's day is the busiest day for many restaurants. Without a reservation, people don't dare go to the restaurants because waiting lines can be a mile long. Florists look forward to this day, because this day is considered as one of the best sales days for them. People can order flowers on the phone or internet from anywhere in the world to be delivered at the doorstep of their mother.

Everyone is trying to make a profit on Mother's Day. They are creating new ideas to market their products, people are just falling into their traps. Anna Jarvis opposed the commercialisation of the Mother's Day. She said, "I wanted it to be a day of sentiment, not profit." We don't remember the main theme of Mother's Day. Anna Jarvis wanted people to spend quality time with their mother, she wanted people to send hand written letters to their mother, not beautiful cards with printed wishes that she called "a poor excuse for the letters you are too lazy to write." She opposed the selling of flowers and cards, she was even arrested while picketing the sale of flowers on Mother's Day. At the end of her life, she was so horrified and disgusted by

the commercialisation of her dream child Mother's Day, and wished she hadn't started it.

On this Mother's Day, remembering the main ideology of this day, let's put some personal touch to the gift for our mother. Many families begin Mother's Day with breakfast in bed. Usually dad and kids will let mom sleep late as they go into the kitchen and prepare her favourite meal. The best way to celebrate Mother's Day is to give your mom the day off. Let her take it easy and relax while the rest of the family does the work. If you are able, visit mom in person. If you can't visit her, be sure to call her. Buy her something that you know she has been wanting. Also, many handmade gifts such as a nice picture with mom on a beautiful frame or old pictures of mom in a photo album, or a hand made shawl or scarf can be a good gift. To show our love, we don't need to spend a fortune. A favorite plant in a pot can brighten mom's day. A recipe book or a new set of stationary for writing letters can be very useful. Or you can take time off to run an errand for her. Be appreciative; don't wait after her funeral to let her know how much you appreciated her. If you have already bought a card, tuck a personal letter inside. Patch up a quarrel before it's too late. Make a meal for your mom or for another mom.

Most of all, instead of waiting for a particular day to tell mom, how much we love her, let's just do it more often. Let's visit or call her more frequently. Let's just remember love is not a can of water, it's like an ocean. It'll never end if we give it out everyday.

Happy Mother's Day!

Liza Rahman writes from New York, USA.

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nearby, my siblings and I try to take her out, buy her something special. After living in the US for several years, she too became quite used to in this tradition. Now, back in Dhaka, on this day, she expects a call from her children. Even though we call her all the time, but we make sure to call her on Mother's Day.

The concept of Mother's Day might be new to us but this is a very old tradition. Many people might not know this tradition is thousands of years old. In the ancient Greek Empire, the spring festival honored Rhea, wife of Cronus and mother of the Gods and Goddesses, it lasted from March 22-25. In Rome, the most significant Mother's Day like celebration was dedicated to the worship of Cybele, another Mother of Gods or Magna Mater. Cybele was the daughter of Heaven and Earth and was the mother of all Gods. Ceremonies in her honour began some 250 years before Christ was born. This Roman religious celebra-

servants would live at the houses of their employers. On Mothering Sunday, they would have the day off and were encouraged to return home and spend the day with their mothers. They would bring a special cake called mothering cake to provide a festive touch. It was kind of fruit cake or fruit filled pastry known as simnel. Also, they served a sweetened boiled cereal dish called furnety at family dinners during this celebration. As the spread of Christianity through out Europe, this celebration changed to honour the Mother Church. People began to honour their mothers as well as the church. By the end of the 19th century, Mothering Sunday had completely died out.

After WW II, England started to celebrate Mother's Day again when the US servicemen brought this tradition to Europe with them. The commercial enterprises started to use this occasion to make a profit.

Mother's Day was first introduced in America by Julia Ward Howe (who

most of the cost for it. Howe turned her efforts to working for peace and women's rights in other ways.

Anna Jarvis is known as the real founder of Mother's Day. She is the real power behind the official establishment of Mother's Day all over America and world. After the death of her mother, she swore at her mother's gravesite to dedicate her life to her mother's project and establish a Mother's Day to honour mothers, living and dead, as her mother believed if families honoured their mother on a special day, the fighting and hatred would soon end. Anna Jarvis felt children often neglect their mother enough while she was still alive. She hoped that Mother's Day would increase respect for parents and strengthen family ties. There is a persistent rumour that Anna's grief was intensified because she and her mother had quarreled and her mother died before they could reconcile. In 1907, Anna had her first Mother's Day celebration with a small

By 1911, every state of America had its own observances. By then many countries including Mexico, China, Japan, South America, and Africa started to celebrate Mother's Day. On May 1914, Congress passed another joint resolution designating the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day. In the same year, President Woodrow Wilson issued the first proclamation making Mother's Day an official national holiday.

At the end of Anna Jarvis' life more than 40 countries celebrated Mother's Day. Today, Mother's Day is celebrated almost all over the world. Most celebrate this day on the second Sunday of May, just like America but there are some exceptions. Spain celebrates it on December 8, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. They not only honour the mother of the family, also Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. France celebrates it on the last Sunday of May. On this day, a special cake resembling a bouquet

Savar building disaster

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THE sudden collapse of a 9-storey garment factory building at Savar on April 11 has brought immense misery to the families of the victims, who were mostly poor factory workers. According to newspaper reports, there are 45 workers missing, 76 killed and 84 rescued after clearing the debris by the rescuers on April 19. To carry out the rescue operation, several machines and equipment were promptly mobilized to the spot. Crawler cranes, back hoes, jack-hammers, trucks were seen being used. Possibly, there was other equipment in use: air compressors for constant fresh air supply inside the collapsed building helping the trapped survivors to breathe, water-jet cutter and power diamond-saw machines for cutting the concrete slabs and beams into smaller blocks,

hydraulic breakers mounted on excavators, generators, water pumps, oxy-acetylene gas cutters, etc.

The rescue team comprising of the Fire Brigade, Civil Defence and the Army Engineering Corps headed by a Brigadier General has done a good job working round the clock for eight days on a war footing even though they have limited resources. Obviously, they deserve public admiration. This disaster has certainly provided vital experience for the rescuers in handling catastrophic situations. This will guide them to be more efficient in future rescue operations.

In the days following the Savar tragedy, Bangladeshis celebrated the Bangla New Year in Dhaka by attending various cultural functions organised by many reputable organisations. It appears that none of these organisations observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect to the victims, who died under the rubble of the building collapse, before starting the functions, since there was no mention of it in the prominent dailies. Shocking. This writer hopes to be proved wrong.

A building may collapse due to natural disaster or human error. In this case, natural disaster is absolutely out of the question as no cyclone, earthquake, landslide or soil erosion by severe flood was recorded in Savar on April 11. In these days, however, tall buildings are designed to withstand heavy winds and earthquakes (to a certain magnitude only). So it is human error which might be responsible for the collapse of this factory building.

When investigating the source of the fault, we need to evaluate how a building project is executed. Usually it involves different parties, namely the owner or developer, the financiers, the architects, the engineers, and the insurance companies. The owner may arrange finance from the bank in terms of loan against the property as collateral. As such, the bank has to monitor the progress of the property to see whether their loan is used legitimately.

In Singapore and Malaysia, the architect is responsible for the architectural plan and executing the contract administration of a project right from the start to end, in line with British format. Professional engineer, quantity surveyor, main building contractor, piling contractor, M & E contractor, land surveyor, geotechnical specialist, instrumentation specialist, all are selected by the architect and all of them discharge their professional services under the guidance of the architect. Before the commencement of construction, plans and construction drawings with calculations, duly endorsed by the professional engineer, are submitted to the government authority for approval.

In Singapore, BCA (Building and Construction Authority) is the government body responsible for approving these plans. The engineer in a project is totally responsible for the design of structural members, workmanship and supervision of the construction conforming to the usage of approved materials in accordance with the standard code of practice. Both Singapore and Malaysia have their own standard of practice, which actually endorses the use of BS (British Standard) code of practice for execution.

Nevertheless, some countries go by the American Standard say ACI (for concrete structure) and AWS (for welding). Japan has its own code of practice that is called the JIS. They're all basically same. Bangladeshi engineers probably follow the American codes in their designs. In most countries, an engineer is required to register in a professional body to obtain a certificate to do his or her practice. Of course, he or she should have valid qualifications, which are set by the government authority, to comply with.

According to the newspaper reports, the Bangladesh government is yet to approve such an institution (Professional Engineer's Board) despite constant pressure from the Institute of Engineers since the early 1990s. It seems the PE Board issue has failed to take off thanks to bureaucratic bottlenecks. What a poor showing! Now, it is the poor factory workers who are paying the price! Mind you, the failed building was an industrial building whose loading capacity, ceiling height, and other parameters are unlike the specifications for residential buildings.

In any building disaster, the authority first holds the architect responsible until a necessary report is submitted by him spelling out the reason of failure. The reason: is it because of inadequate structural design, faulty workmanship, use of substandard materials, lack of quality control, foundation failure due to wrong piling system, unauthorised additional floor construction, installation of unapproved machines, unspecified

vibration of the production machines, goods storage exceeding the floor capacity, utility service mishap or combination of few? Generally, before a building collapses to the ground for unsound construction, it sends out distress signals for a period of time, showing cracks in the structural columns, walls and floors, giving sufficient time for the rectification or evacuation of the occupants and materials. The pattern of initial cracks in the structural members - which are often monitored closely by installing sensitive instruments - may predict the mode of failure in the days ahead.

Singapore experienced a similar fate for the first time in its history in 1986, when the Hotel New World, a 6-storey building that stood for 15 years at Serangoon Road, suddenly collapsed. All 50 people trapped in the debris were rescued: 17 alive and 33 dead. Even narrow tunnels were dug in the rescue efforts to reach the victims trapped in the basement floor. A commission of inquiry

was then set up to investigate the cause of collapse. The finding stated the main reasons of the hotel building collapse were faulty design, shoddy workmanship, and slicing of the structural members by the renovation contractor. This brought a valuable message to the building authority who then introduced The Accredited Checker System to address the concern of the lack of independent check on the design by the professional engineer. Also for addition, alternation and renovation works of the existing structures, the owner by law is required to engage a licensed contractor and to get approval from the relevant authority.

For the Savar disaster case, a fact finding committee consisting of renowned practicing structural engineers, architects, academics from engineering institutions, building contractors, deep foundation experts, geotechnical specialists, lawyers, and foreign experts headed by a Supreme Court judge should be

set up to carry out the investigation and submit the finding to the government as to how the building has failed.

At the same time the committee should come up with recommendation for the protective procedures ensuring safe building construction as a fundamental importance and establishing a Professional Engineers Board as top priority. The building professionals can learn from the past lessons of building failures and practice their professions with conscience and dignity and exercise due diligence in their service to the clients with extreme importance to public safety and interest.

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4x3

5x3

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