

Remembering Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary

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MAS MOLLA

"SUN declined and beacon light of humanity declined too. Is it darkness then? Light and darkness, darkness and light; night comes after day and day chases the night." Tajuddin Ahmad, 1948.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, of whom the world knows much about, was born in Porbandar (otherwise called Sudampur) Gujarat, India, in 1869 to Karamchand (alias Kaba Gandhi) and his fourth wife Putlibai. The family was Vaishnava, having a very conservative attitude toward many things. M. K. Gandhi was a rare combination of a number of laudable characteristics like simplicity, frankness, truthfulness, firmness and perseverance.

He was instrumental in realising the freedom of the entire Indian subcontinent from about 190 years of British colonial rule. That is why he is regarded as the father of Indian nationhood. But an assassin killed this great man on January 30, 1948, while going for evening prayer.

I learned about M. K. Gandhi's autobiography, The story of my experiments with truth, in my adolescence, and the term "experiments with truth" attracted me much, but I could not find this book in Bangladesh. I have only

recently found this 505-page book, published in 1957 by Beacon Press, Boston, USA. It is a document of his candid expression of truth.

Although born to a state minister of India, Mohandas led a very simple life all through. He used to take bread and vegetables, even when studying for Matriculation and Law in England. He used to walk 8-10 miles daily, both for keeping spending to a minimum and for keeping his body fit. During the days of his social movement (called non-violent non-cooperation), he wore a dhoti, and was ready to have even a short one (of 30 inches width, if the weavers failed to make a required 45 inches Khadi cloth for him). One would be amazed to see most of the photos of this great leader bare-bodied!

As a member of Vaishnava family, Mohandas was a vegetarian. His school friends used to eat meat and even tried to convince him of the "goodness" of a carnivorous diet. Once in his high school days, he tried to reform one friend towards vegetarianism, but instead he and his elder brother themselves started eating meat. This event he termed a "tragedy," and could come out of this having the conviction that he should not tell a lie to his parents.

If eating meat was really essential to have enough strength

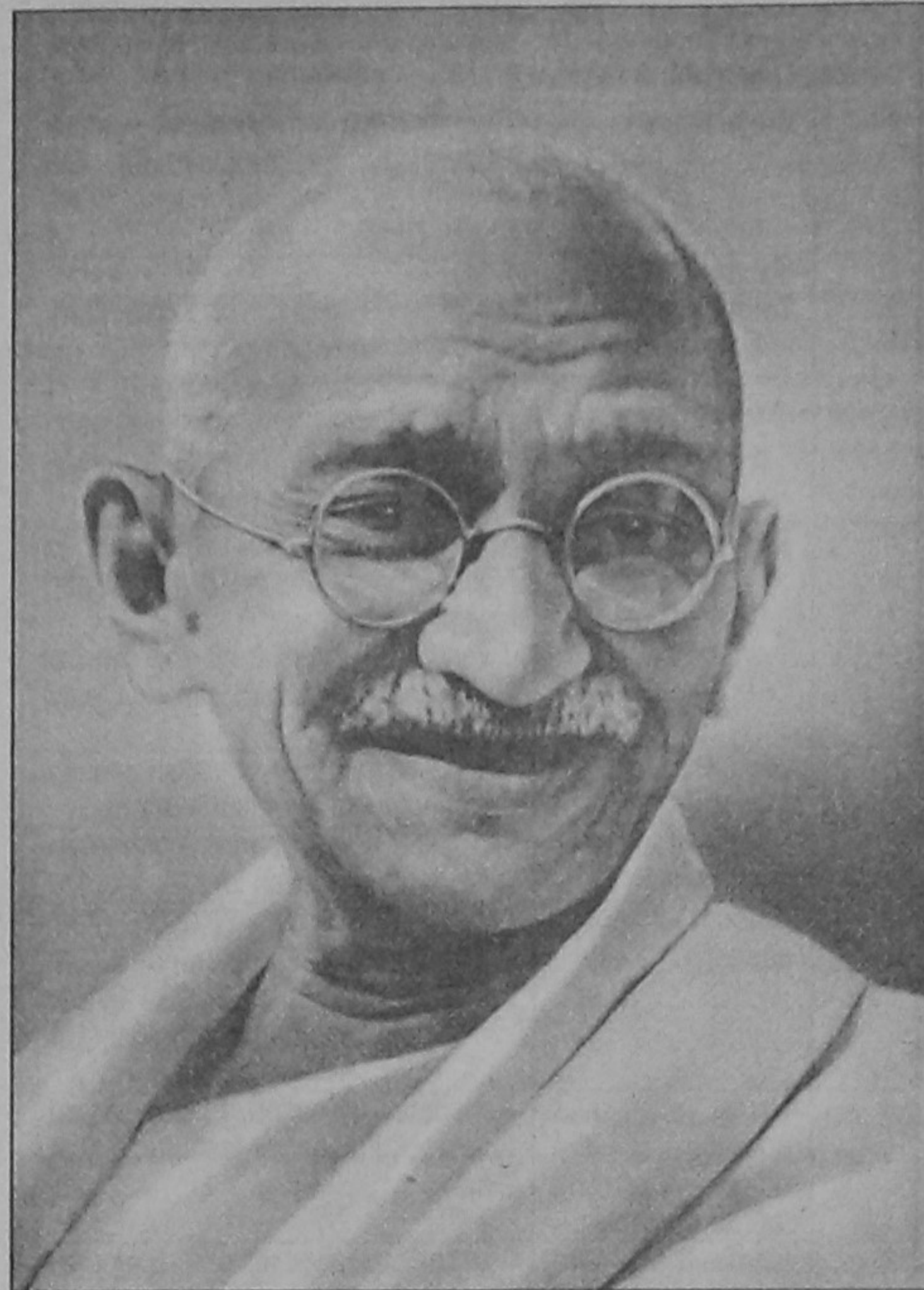
to fight the English to have Swaraj, he had to do it openly. Even in England, where most people around him (including his mother) thought that he could not avoid meat (and even wine), he not only lived without these but also organised a Vegetarian Society there and campaigned for vegetarianism. This was possible mostly because he felt that he could not break the vow he made to his mother.

In his early days of practicing law in South Africa, he discovered that his client was hiding a truth; he expressed his firmness against this and lastly won the case, though he paid a minimal amount of fine for his client's misdeed.

If any type of illness attacked him, he used indigenous treatment like water therapy and fasting. Once in South Africa, he was attacked by diarrhea and was about to die. But no physician could convince him of the need for a carnivorous diet. He treated himself with fasting and vegetarianism.

During his London days, M. K. Gandhi tried to be a perfect Englishman in dressing. This habit he brought to South Africa as well. He used to wear an Indian turban that the white people there did not like. But he continued with that for more than a decade of his South African life.

Being a Barrister, he liked to



travel by train in the first class. But the white British rail officers did not let a "coolie Barrister" (the word "coolie" was used for Indians in South Africa because most of them worked as labourers there) travel by the first class. While traveling from Durban to Pretoria, he had a first class ticket, but the officer in-charge asked him to get out and board a van compartment. At one point, the officer tried to push him out of the train, but he firmly clung to the brass rails of the coachbox.

He was determined to keep the hold even at the risk of breaking his wrist bone.

He practiced perseverance throughout his life. But this virtue was more expressed in advising and practicing it during his movement against obligatory indigo cultivation and the less than adequate wages for mill workers. The downtrodden masses were on strike, and he put the condition that under no circumstances should they break strike before realisation of the legitimate

demands. But at one point, the strikers grew impatient. Then he went on a hunger strike until their firmness on the demand came back.

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Although he had firm belief in Hinduism, he always respected others' beliefs. At the time of the War Conference arranged by the Britishers, the Ali brothers (Maolana Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali) were in jail. He raised the question to the Viceroy several times for their release. Lastly, it was his greatness in convincing the Muslim community (about Hindu-Muslim brotherhood) that was said to be the alleged reason for the assassination of this great leader.

In short, Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence, his belief in truth, and the passion for independence began a drive for freedom that doomed British colonialism.

The quotation with which I started this write-up is from Bangladesh's first Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad's diary. Here our "star politician" termed Gandhi as the "Sun." The sun "declined," but day really chased the night in India through establishment of functional democracy and human rights.

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IN MEMORIAM Rose Bu

MD. ANISUR RAHMAN

THE passing away of Mrs. Shamsunna Rahman, everybody's "Rose Bu," is like a quiet but shining star suddenly disappearing from the sky.

The many who knew her personally will mourn her demise as a very personal loss, for she was "Rose Bu" to all of them, with everything this affectionate term implies. But she was also "Rose Bu" to the nation, in whose moment of struggle against its greatest adversary -- the Pak military -- she was a quietly relentless worker in association with her husband Mukhlisur Rahman Sidhu Bhai, constantly working to assist the resistance in so many ways.

She helped thousands of people cross the border, at the same time carrying messages to and from the Mujibnagar government -- journeying on foot, by bus, rickshaws and boats back and forth from Dhaka to Mujibnagar and Kolkata.

In my own memoirs on 1971, published by the Liberation War Museum, I have reproduced my diary and that of my wife, narrating how Rose Bu personally accompanied my wife and two minor daughters all the way to help them cross the border through hazardous routes when my wife was unsure how to make it otherwise. And she did this for many others while remaining constantly busy in helping the liberation struggle in many other ways. But she did not for a moment think of taking any

public credit for her quiet but invaluable contribution to our liberation struggle. Such was the true greatness of this lady, before whose completely selfless dedication so many of us who knew her intimately always had our heads bowed in the greatest reverence.

Rose Bu had many other contributions to the advancement of our society, by way of constant social and cultural service before and after our independence, including being a Founder Member of Chhayanaut as a cultural movement and as a school of music.

For me, she was a tower of support and encouragement in my pursuit of Rabindra sangeet as an art, holding innumerable soirees in her house over several years and inviting persons of taste to listen to whatever I was capable of delivering -- in a sense hers has been one of the two houses in Dhaka which have "nursed" my singing life, for whatever this has been worth, out of a deep love for the beauty of Tagore songs.

As I and my wife Dora mourn the physical loss of Rose Bu, along with hundreds of those who had come close to her and had been blessed with her affection and support in dire need or otherwise, we know at the same time that persons like Rose Bu are immortal as they keep shining in the memory of the nation, never to fade.

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A land with potential for tourism

Due to the under-developed sector of tourism, Bangladesh is missing out on colossal amounts of revenue every year. Maybe comparing our tourism sector with that of India, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Hong Kong would be unfair, but what about Nepal or the Maldives? Investment into developing and promoting tourism in these South Asian countries has reaped fantastic results. Over the years, the tourism sector in Bangladesh has not, comparatively, made enough progress. The reason is the lack of relevant infrastructure supporting the development and sustenance of tourism in Bangladesh. But, compared to the past ten years, money invested for the development of tourism by the government and private companies has been at an all time high in the recent years. Statistics prove the beneficial outcome.

SHAMS BIN QUADER

THE tourism sector of Bangladesh is pleading for attention. This is the country which has the largest mangrove forest in the world in Sundarbans, the beautiful hills in Rangamati, the exotic tea gardens in Sylhet, the wonderful sights and sounds surrounding the livelihood of the indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Bandarban, the centuries old mansions and villas belonging to the Maharajas of past civilisations, the brilliant natural scenery in Foy's Lake, and the longest natural beach in the whole planet in Cox's Bazaar. And this is just to name a few attractions. Bangladesh has tremendous potential for becoming a superb international tourist hotspot but, in reality, that is not exactly the case.

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Over the years, the tourism sector in Bangladesh has not, comparatively, made enough progress. The reason is the lack of relevant infrastructure supporting the development and sustenance of tourism in Bangladesh. But, compared to the past ten years, money invested for the development of tourism by the government and private companies has been at an all time high in the recent years. Statistics prove the beneficial outcome.

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) statistics show that a little over 11 thousand people came to Bangladesh for various reasons, tourism being one of them, in the year 1992. But by the year 2000, approximately 210 thousand people were coming to Bangladesh, accounting for about

Tk 2.65 billion (\$ 46 million) in foreign exchange ("Going to Bangladesh," thingsasian.com, 2003).

In the year 2007, the government of Bangladesh promised to spend around Tk 5.7 billion (\$ 81.1 million) for the tourism sector, which is 2.1% of the total government expenditure.

Choosing the case of Cox's Bazaar as an example, I will focus on its relevant issues in this article. In order to get the proper income from tourist related activities in and around Cox's Bazaar, it is clear that foreign tourists need to be attracted in great numbers. But when we search in popular tourism related websites like "travelsupermarket.com" or "venere.com," there is absolutely no mention of the longest natural beach in the world.

When we search "lonelyplanet.com," Cox's Bazaar is mentioned, and there are some rather interesting comments worth mentioning. The first of which states: "Discover how special this

country is before the tourist hordes catch on," and something like: "Beware of political instability." Both the comments are interesting because they are true, and I cannot disagree completely with the people responsible for writing them.

Cox's Bazaar definitely needs to be advertised properly on the popular tourist related web sites. There should be coordination of information and services between these websites and popular hotels, restaurants, shops and travel services of Cox's Bazaar and Bangladesh. At the moment, there are some local websites, which provide information and services to interested tourists.

There are some good hotels and restaurants in Cox's Bazaar, and some absolutely wonderful cafes. But all the leisure activities available at present are daytime activities, but what about after dark entertainment?

Foreign investors could be invited, who could work with the local entrepreneurs to develop new facilities. Rumours of such plans are heard here and there, but nothing has been implemented till date.

But what could the new and improved Cox's Bazaar have for us locals? The private entrepreneurs should definitely invest more money to develop tourist related infrastructure and businesses in and around Cox's Bazaar. I can imagine why they may be sceptical, since tourism is a seasonal business, and most of the tourists go to Cox's Bazaar during the two winter months of January and February only. But tourism is a seasonal

business in most parts of the globe anyways.

In Bangladesh today, so many people are travelling to neighbouring countries throughout the year for tourism. It may not be illogical to expect that many of them would prefer holidaying in the country, even out of the tourist season, if facilities could be developed.

My suggestions to the private entrepreneurs are: Focus should be on developing more fun activities for the tourists, alongside the existing boat rides and dune buggy rents. There should be more high quality non-alcoholic cafes, which would stay open till late.

Weekend parties and discos should be organised and held at some of the existing hotels, restaurants and cafes; these can only be held during January and February, which is the tourism period in Bangladesh. Similar parties are held at Cox's Bazaar on New Year's Eve, so why not carry on with that tradition for the whole tourism period. Furthermore, I believe opening a few more shopping centres would help tourism.

Efficient security services are another pre-requisite for development of tourism. We cannot say Bangladesh has a good reputation for that. Tourists do not feel safe. This is a distinct roadblock, which discourages not only foreign but also local tourists.

We may make new laws with provision to deal promptly with the law order situation at tourist places. This law could have special provisions for arranging protection of all tourists, with additional

emphasis on foreign nationals. So far it is known, Thailand has a special law to ensure the safety and security of non-local tourists. Special security forces may be raised for that purpose in Bangladesh. This would increase the confidence of the tourists, which would in turn facilitate development of tourism.

In conclusion, I believe that if money is invested properly to improve and organise the travel and residential infrastructure of Cox's Bazaar, if more leisure activities are developed -- some only for the foreign nationals and most for all the tourists, if foreign investors are invited to develop new businesses and facilities, and if Cox's Bazaar is advertised appropriately throughout the world, then it wouldn't be too long before we actually have hordes of tourists visiting the longest natural beach in the world.

Special attention should be given to preserving the environment so that the natural beauty and ecological stability of Cox's Bazaar are not impinged upon.

The biggest barriers standing in the way of Bangladesh developing into a buzzing international tourist location are political instability and insecurity. In view of tourism's vast potential to become a lucrative business, opening the door for enormous employment opportunities, is it too much to expect that we should be serious about crossing over the existing barriers?

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Bangladesh-Japan diplomatic ties

To mark this anniversary, the Bangladesh Embassy in Tokyo has taken a unique initiative to promote the image of the country by holding a week-long event focusing on trade, investment, tourism, culture, and culinary tradition of Bangladesh. Jointly organised by the Embassy of Bangladesh and the Tokyo City Club, the event under the theme Bangladesh Week: Eyes on the Nation is expected to provide, for the first time, the opportunity for the Japanese people to glimpse various aspects of our life and society at a time when the image of Bangladesh is badly in need of a face-lift overseas.

MOZURUL HUQ

THIS year marks the 35th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Bangladesh. Japan was the first among advanced nations of the Western camp to recognise Bangladesh, less than two months after our gallant freedom fighters along with the allied Indian troops had forced the occupation forces to a humiliating surrender. The two countries since then have been enjoying cordial relations based on mutual understanding and meaningful cooperation.

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The five-day program is to kick off on Monday, January 28, with a food festival where the London-based cuisine celebrity Tommy Miah will prepare special dishes for the dignitaries and guests. On the second day, the ambassador of Bangladesh to Japan, H. E. Ashraf ud Doula, will host a diplomatic dinner for Japanese dignitaries and parliamentarians, and ambassadors of different countries stationed in Tokyo.

On the third day of the Bangladesh Week, a Bangladesh investment seminar will be held for a target group of entrepreneurs, where the Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment of Bangladesh will make the main presentation. The fourth day has been designated to the promotion of tourism in Bangladesh.

A Bangladesh tourism seminar will focus on various aspects of tourist attractions and tourism related facilities in Bangladesh. The Chairman of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation will make the key presentation at the seminar, while a number of leading tour operators from Bangladesh will brief the guests on our rich tourist sites, much of which remain unknown to the vast majority of Japanese.

The event will conclude with a cultural program on April 1, the fifth and final day of the Bangladesh Week. A group of Tokyo based Bangladeshi artists will focus on our rich cultural tradition through performance of songs, music and dance. In addition, a number of works by prominent Bangladeshi painters, and Bangladesh made ceramic and handicraft items, will be on display throughout the week.

The idea of the Bangladesh Week, which has been initiated and planned by Ambassador Ashraf ud Doula, is being materialised with the support of the prestigious City Club of Tokyo, where elites of the Japanese society gather and interact on a regular basis. A number of Bangladeshi entrepreneurs living in Japan extended their valuable cooperation by sponsoring some of the events.

Mozurul Huq writes from Japan.

