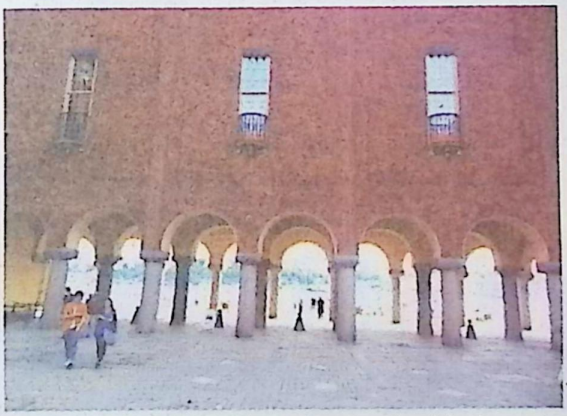
lanes with stony, uneven surface and old buildings, restaurants, cafes and shops. This is where Stockholm was founded in 1252. It is one of the largest and best preserved medieval city centres in Europe. The square was the scene of an important event known as the "Stockholm blood bath" when on November 8, 1520, the new Danish King of Sweden had executed en masse one hundred Swedish noblemen who were supporters of Swedish independence. Legend has it that blood flowed down from the square staining the sloping roads nearby.

We were fortunate in having one of our cousins living in Taby, 35 kilometres north of Stockholm. We took a ferry boat from the dock opposite the Grand Hotel, which, by the way, hosts the annual dinner for Nobel Prize recipients. It was an enjoyable fifty-minute journey with a magnificent view of the Baltic Sea and the islands dotting it here and there. In one such stop at Vaxholm Harbour, we got down to meet Kazi Ashraful Huq and his Swedish wife, Kajsa. I had some difficulty in recognising him, not having met him in the last half-a century. Ashraf resembled his father, Kazi Anwarul Huq, who was the first East Pakistani Chief Secretary, Central Public Service Commission Chairman and a cabinet minister in Pakistan and Bangladesh. They drove us-guess what, in their old Volvo-a proud, durable automobile of Sweden. The mil metre showed more than 200,000 Kilometres. Interestingly, in these days of globalization and the economic might of China, Volvo, first bought over by the Ford Motor Company in 1999, who after a year sold it to a Chinese company. Ashraf has been teaching at the Institute of Technology in Stockholm for long many years. He was very well-informed about what is going on, economically and politically, in Bangladesh and elsewhere. We enjoyed the conversation and their generous hospitality of home-cooked food in their fine house with a garden full of autumn flowers located in a kind of modern village. They drove us back through a forest at night to our hotel in Stockholm. Because of its rural atmosphere, yet not far from the capital, Vaxholm has attracted many rich, retired people to renovate old houses and settle there for peace and quiet.



Stockholm City Hall-Inner Courtyard and Arches.

We visited the Stockholm City Hall, locally called Stadshuset. Made of red bricks and of a distinct architectural style, the lovely building had an outer courtyard with columns joined by arches and a spacious, green garden, at whose feet is the Riddarfjarden Bay. Those inclined to walk around can enjoy the scenery and the playful pigeons dancing around. We met Ashraf and his wife there in the afternoon and all of us went by boat to Drottingholm Palace on Lake Malaren-a scenic journey of thirty minutes. It is the present residence of the royal family. In 1991, it became the first Swedish monument to be included in the UNESCO's World Heritage list. Built between 1662 and 1700, the large Versailles-like beautiful palace and an endless garden at the back with symmetrical flowering and decorative plants. There are many fountains and ponds and magnificent sculptures. Geese were walking in their own unhurried style, having a good time in the sun. For those like us who get tired of all the walking, there are benches to sit and a nice coffee-cum -gift shop near the entrance. We returned to the city by bus.

English is widely spoken in Sweden and there is no difficulty in getting helpful street directions or other advice in the streets and shops. We found Stockholm and we suspect the whole of Sweden would be the same, to be quite expensive in terms of cost of living, particularly when compared to the Washington area. Sweden was a liberal, welfare state but has recently moved towards a mixed economy. Taxes are high but the social facilities like education, health and communications are either free or provided at a nominal cost to its citizens. That helps the middle classes to cope with the high cost elsewhere. There is equity in the distribution of income, with the gap (now increasing) between the lowest and highest paid not too wide. Taxes at high income levels are high.

Interestingly, at the National History Museum, when I asked a Swedish staff member, a former school teacher, which one she thought was the better economic system-socialism or capitalism, she thoughtfully replied that both had merits but a judicious mixture would promote economic progress while ensuring equity, justice and economic well-being for all people. Most of the professional economists these days swear by the autonomous market economy as the only practical and efficient method of economic progress but they often neglect to consider welfare of the people and social and economic equity. Perhaps, the social business model of our Nobel Prize winner would provide a solution to the dilemma. Sweden seemed an appropriate place to cogitate over this important matter. ■