A Weekly Publication of The Daily Star

theSTAR

stories behind the news

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A Living Machine

HERITAGE
History Revisited

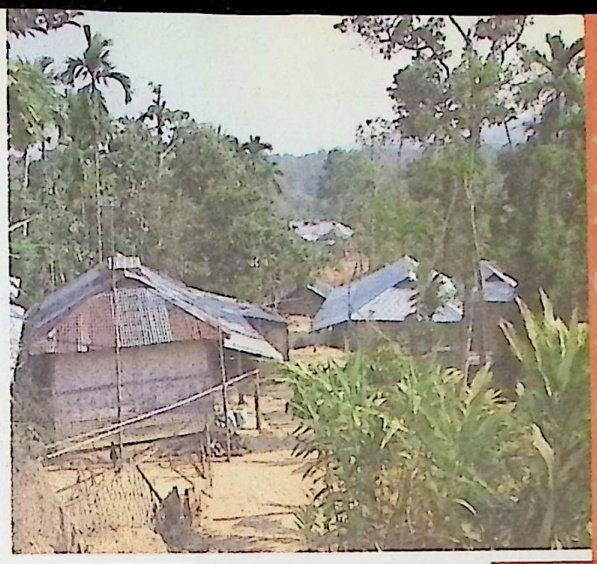
MEETING MOULVIBAZAR'S KHASIS

Cover Story 12-19

Adapting to the Future, Taking Strength from the Past

Moulvibazar's Khasis are striving to face the challenges of a modern Bangladeshi society. They are also gaining strength from reconnecting with their past.

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inside

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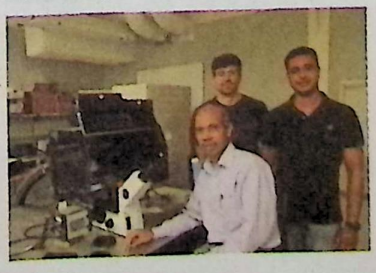
Dhaka is home to countless churches, many of which have a glorious history behind them. This week *the Star* brings you a brief history of three of the oldest churches in the city.



22-23 Science

A Living Machine

This may sound like a far-fetched Sci-fi story.



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An Intelligent Company

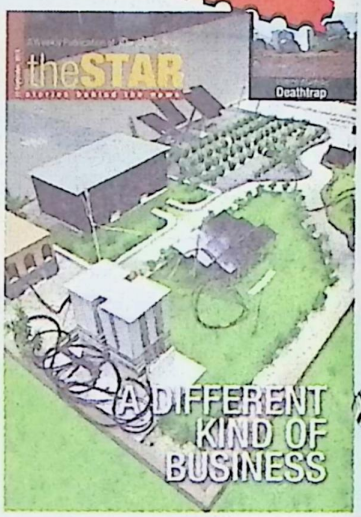
It seems that IDCOL has developed a very dynamic organisational culture since its establishment. The way IDCOL conducts business, treats employees and partner organisations and the wider community shows its commitment to the overall development of the country. We can say the culture of an organisation is rich when it enjoys freedom in decision making, developing new ideas and employees are committed towards collective objectives. By these measures, IDCOL is indeed a company from which a lot of other sectors can learn. We did not know such an efficient organisation exists in our country. The cover story addresses all the key factors that are important for increasing the productivity of an organisation, such as recruitment, motivation, training, performance appraisal and monitoring and evaluation. Although the article deals with serious and 'boring' issues like these, it reads well – without ever sounding like a text book.

Mir Shawkat
Shantinagar, Dhaka

* * *

The writer argues the importance of lean and efficient management in the running of an organisation. I am highly impressed by the fact that IDCOL does not have any peon. While I appreciate the need for poor, less educated people to have jobs, I am totally opposed to the idea of having peons in offices. Why can't employees carry their own bags or go to the office printer to get their own prints? How much lazier are we going to get? There are no such posts as peons in any developed country.

Lubna Khan
Dhanmondi, Dhaka



Fading Childhood

I usually skip the musings section of *the Star*. But this week's musings caught my attention for its lyrical style and thought provoking content. I was deeply moved by these lines: "These children will have no memory of collecting wild-flowers or chasing clouds, no idea of that special magical time before sunset when the world would transform into a huge playground and the sheer tragedy of the sunset that would signal the end of play-time." The writer is talking about children growing and living in Dhaka city. How true and equally sad it is! These children actually have no proper childhood! The reason behind this is we have too many people living in this city. In fact, Bangladesh now has the highest population density in the history of humankind anywhere in the world. Unless and until we can do something about that, it is going to get worse. That's the hard reality.

Anushka Mohsin
Uttara, Dhaka



The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views held by *the Star*.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINE:

Letters to the Editor, Star Diary and Write to Mita, with the writer's name and address, should be within 200 words. All articles should be within 1,200 words. A cover letter is not necessary, but every write-up should include the writer's name, phone number and email address (if any). While The Star welcomes unsolicited articles and photographs, it cannot accept the responsibility of their loss or damage. The Star does not return unsolicited articles and photos. Response time for unsolicited write-ups ranges from three weeks to two months. All articles submitted are subject to editing for reasons of space and clarity.

All materials should be sent to: The Star magazine, 64-65, Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215, Fax: 880-2-8125155 or emailed to: <thestarmagazine@gmail.com>
It is recommended that those submitting work for the first time to The Star take a look at a sample copy beforehand. Our website is: http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Bangladesh Cricket

Bangladesh cricket has again disappointed us. It is very sad when we see the entire batting line up collapse in less than 200 runs in a test match. Despite such repetition of poor performances, it seems that the management keeps on picking the same team. When the bowlers are performing well, the batsmen are performing miserably, and when the batsmen are scoring runs, the bowlers are playing badly. BCB should take immediate and proper steps so that the team as a whole performs better and puts a smile on the faces of the ardent supporters of Bangladesh Cricket.

S Amir Haque
IUB, Baridhara

Rapid Action Necessary

Eve teasing is prevalent almost everywhere in our society though there are laws against it. A few days ago a girl killed herself after being a victim of this heinous crime. We have to change our attitude towards females and have to respect them as human beings, not look at them as commodities. Families can play a vital role in this regard, by teaching the male children how to treat women with respect. And the victims must realise that suicide is not the solution to it, they have to protest. In schools, colleges and offices dialogues on eve teasing should be encouraged. It must be made clear to everyone that it is a crime punishable by law. Last but not the least; the government should create public awareness to make a woman-friendly environment everywhere and to ensure punishment without procrastination.

M Nur Islam
Carmichael College, Rangpur

Depression

[Re: It's Time to Talk, September 19, 2014]. In our country, depression is often misunderstood or not understood at all. Feeling blue, grief, sadness and depression are not the same. It is a disease just like diabetes or high blood pressure and requires treatment. You cannot will yourself out of it. Doctors often prescribe medication or/and therapy. In some cases it can be genetic. We need to understand that. If not treated, it can have serious consequences.

Zuabair Ahmed
Lamatia, Dhaka

Deathtrap

The photo feature once again reminds us how poor the infrastructures of this country are. However, people have accepted it as their fate accompli. We do not know what the government is doing to solve these problems. An independent commission should look into how much money is allocated every year for the repair and maintenance of roads and highways and how much of it is actually spent on this purpose. But then again, where can we find people to constitute such a commission that would be neutral and transparent? All our problems are the classic chicken-and-egg problem.

Mainul Hasan Shibli
On Email

You were in, Now you are Out

In a democracy, every individual has the right to express his or her political thoughts. Chintito's article, published on September 12, was disagreeable. It was, however, encouraging and appreciable to see the Star's apology in the September 19 issue.

M Haque, Dhaka

ALBERT EINSTEIN

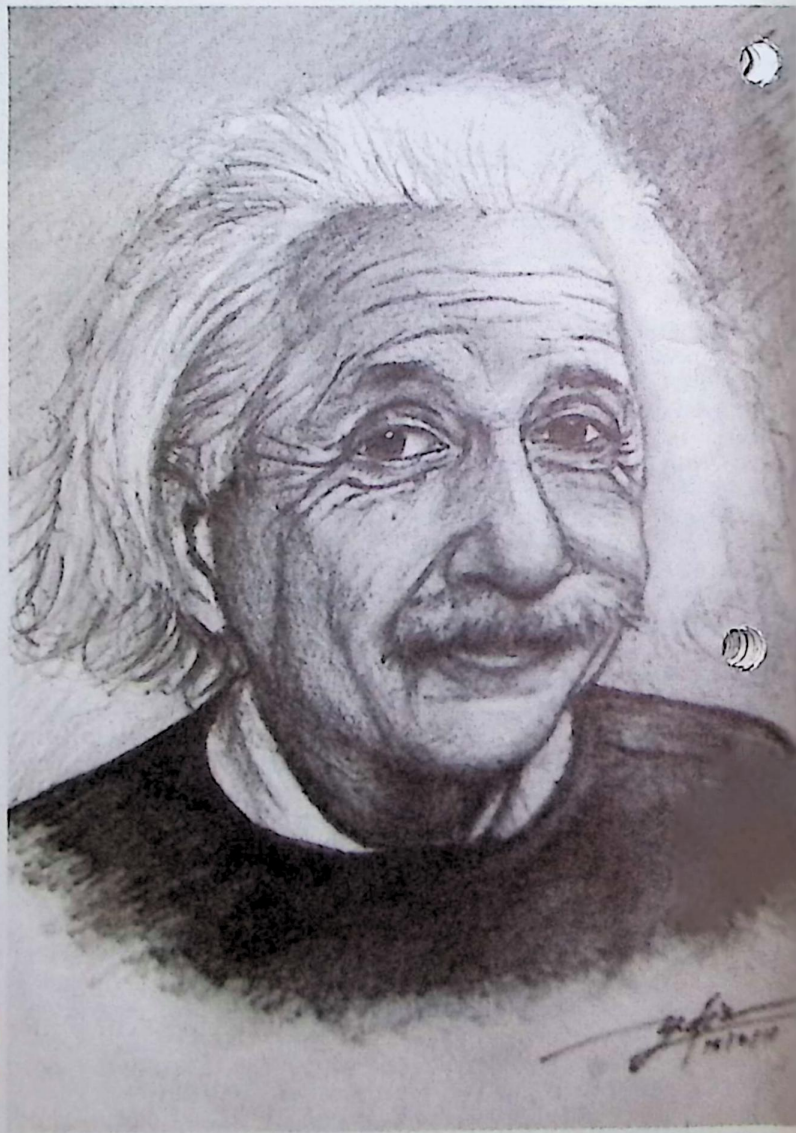
March 14, 1879 to April 18, 1955.
Albert Einstein was a German-born theoretical physicist and philosopher of science. He developed the general theory of relativity, one of the two pillars of modern physics. He received the 1921 Nobel Prize in Physics "for his services to theoretical physics, and especially for his discovery of the law of the photoelectric effect".

"The difference between stupidity and genius is that genius has its limits.

Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.

The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination.

Do not worry about your difficulties in Mathematics. I can assure you mine are still greater."



SKETCH: YAFIZ SIDDIQUI

LAST 11 YRS

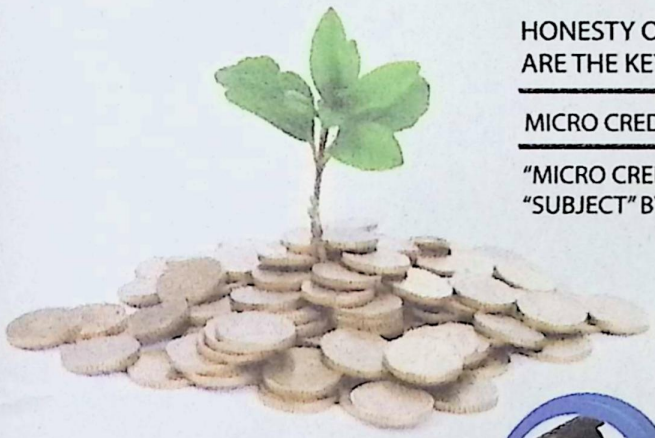
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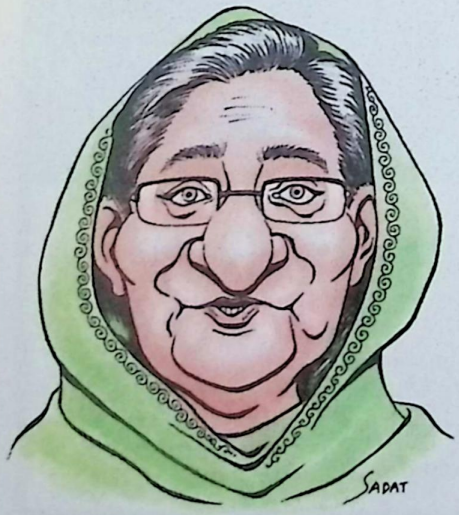
SNAPSHOT

Natural Highs

"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity..." — John Muir

PHOTO: SAURAV DE

voicebox



"Did Jamaat want Sayedee's death sentence? Is that why they called the hartal?"

SHEIKH HASINA
Prime Minister
Questioned the logic behind the hartal enforced by Jamaat-e-Islami

"I will take back Kashmir, all of it, and I will not leave behind a single inch of it because, like the other provinces, it belongs to Pakistan."

BILAWAL BHUTTO ZARDARI
The 'Gen Next' politician of Pakistan and scion of Bhutto family
Declared in a party conference that his Pakistan People's Party (PPP) would get back entire Kashmir from India at any cost



Md Danesh

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

His father wanted him to be a sportsman. But he had always dreamt of becoming a musician. His mother, however, was his anchor, as she bought him his first guitar. This is how Md Danesh began his musical journey with his underground alternative rock band Biborton in 2001. *The Star* speaks with the up and coming music star about the bands that he finds most inspiring, his dreams and much more.

PLEASE! 1 MINUTE

Childhood Dream
I have always wanted to be a professional musician and reach the top of the music industry by doing good music.

Inspiration
The leading musicians of our music industry and their music work as an inspiration for me.

If You Could Change One Thing about Dhaka
Dhaka has become a concrete jungle and we have almost forgotten that trees matter. If I could bring one change to this city, I would plant more and more trees to increase the size of our 'urban forest'.

Most Significant Achievement
Once we had to perform in Sylhet in front of a large crowd where we found the audience applauding, cheering and singing along with us. The fact that we could share our zeal for music with such a huge crowd is the biggest achievement of my life.

A Dream Yet to be Fulfilled
I want to create good music and work closely with a community that supports and promotes creativity.

The Bands that You Love to Cover the Most
Winning, Warfaze, Guns N Roses, Metallica, Creed.

— FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

chintito

There Can Be Only One No 1, But...

CHINTITO

There can be only one No 1. But everyone, well almost everyone, can be No 1 in something or the other.

When we do not realise the spirit of the above statement, frustration can seep in, and most often does. When parents especially cannot and do not accept that we are all born with certain limitations, a child more than another, our children can be put under pressure.

In a class of fifty, or in an exam of a few hundred, or in a selection process involving thousands, there will be only one person who will emerge as the best. But, that does not mean that the other forty-nine other students, or the hundreds who were beaten to second place or worse, or the thousands who were not selected can be written off.

In each of us there is a God-given talent. Honestly! Search in your heart and you will know. While in many the virtuosity begins to show in early life, in some of us the gift remains concealed even up until the middle age due to lack of opportunities. I did not say lethargy out of respect. Again, many among us have been able to cultivate small seeds into some of the most deep-rooted banyan trees. Sadly, in some the genius is lost because of leading a disorderly lifestyle.

If one is good at studies, another is great in kicking a ball. Someone sings Tagore numbers very well and another can recite from Nazrul extempore. *Ami bidrohiranoklanto...* One amongst us is the undisputed organiser of all our social events. *Cholonaghureaashi...*Another is just a good friend; okay, a very good friend. Someone can deliver a good speech. Another can stay up all night beside a patient. Someone... you could go on and on. And yes, some of us do have more than one gift, but one gift each of us has for sure.

Have you ever heard Pele singing any Brazilian hit song, or Maradona kicking up something in Cuban, or either of them worrying their head with the mathematics of what percentage of possession each team had? Did Hemanta Mukherjee ever kick a ball or hold a cricket bat? His relationship with soccer perhaps began with him singing for Bangladeshi footballers when they were hosted in Kolkata soon after our War of Liberation, and it ended there.

Picasso was no good in debating, or else he could have perhaps done better with women. The maestro shamefully called all women "goddesses or doormats" and "drove his lovers to despair and even suicide with his cruelty and betrayal". Maria Sharapova can hold a tennis racquet, but has not heard of SachinTendulkar.

Why is it so difficult for us to understand that not all of us can be No 1?

One of the greatest all-rounder cricketers of all times, Shakib Al-Hasan, has to some extent allowed success to get into his head. But, he may not oblige an audience by picking up a number from Artcell. Can you imagine Babita serving a shuttlecock with as much dexterity as she did as an actor in *"Golapi Ekhon Train-e"*? Usdtad Shahadat Hussain handles a *sarod* with as much ease as a mother nurses her baby.

The man who drives a bus from Dhaka to Chittagong with responsibility, may not be good at writing a novel. The fishermen who risk their lives in the deep sea may never have sat behind a wheel. The farmer who tills the soil was never seen a sitar.

It is important that we discover our potentialities as early as possible. It is more important that we do not try climbing up the wrong tree. If I am not good at acting, I should give it up. If I cannot sing, let me not use other means to land half-an-hour on television. If I cannot excel at school, let me not brood that I am useless. I am not. None of us are. We all have different abilities; in some it is only more hidden than in others. But, then who said that diamonds grew on trees?

Discovering the faculties of children is often the task of the parent, the teacher and the elders. It will



Maria Sharapova



Shakib Al-Hasan

then be the concern of the adult to guide the child along his gifted strengths, and by no means push the child in to dark rooms with the hope that the light will light up eventually.

Some of us understand our limitations in our mid-teens. The teenager left alone to hone his or her aptitude is the most fortunate, and potentially the most likely to succeed.

If we can accept, for example, that world cup footballers and cricketers, thanks to television, are a different breed, and be content with enjoying their prowess over snacks and drinks, why is it so difficult for us to understand that not all of us can be No 1? Otherwise the unique number loses its meaning.

Our individual task is to ascertain in what field or areas we are each better than those whom we know and think are better than us. The night sky will not look bleak any more, for each of us shall be twinkling along with the stars that we come to admire. You never know, they could become your fan too. ■



Durga Puja

Lalmonirhat. **A sculptor gives the finishing touches to the idols of Hindu goddess Durga.**



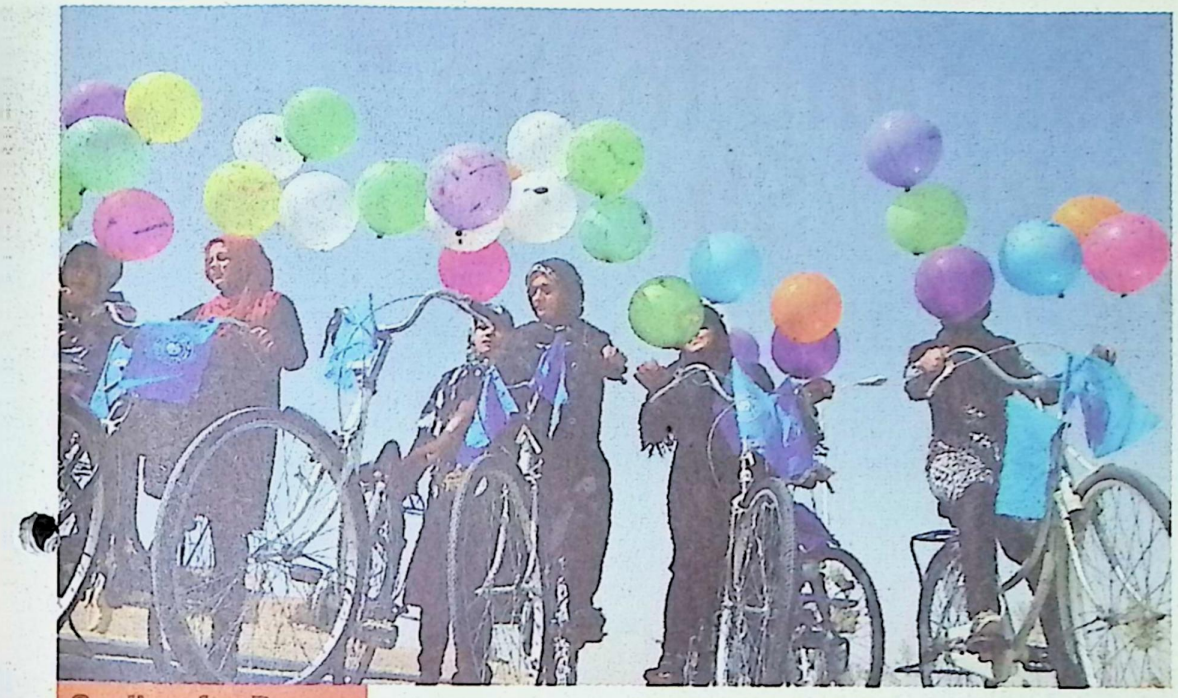
Heritage in Danger

Dhaka. **The hundred year old Boro Bari, which was renowned for its French rococo design, used to stand proud in the days gone by. However, due to negligence and improper maintenance, the heritage site is now in ruins. The owner of the building wants to lease the land to a commercial developer.**

6 Number of grandchildren a man killed in a mass shooting in the US state of Florida on Thursday. The shooter also killed his daughter before killing himself.

7 Number of young Iranians who have been given suspended jail and lashing sentences for dancing to Pharrell Williams' hit "Happy" in a video that has been watched more than a million times. The Iranian authorities said it was a "vulgar" breach of the Islamic Republic's values.

100,000 Tonnes of rice India, the world's top rice exporter, is preparing to import for the first time in nearly a quarter of a century to feed its remote and hilly northeastern region where rail freight is being disrupted due to a track overhaul.



Cycling for Peace

Kabul, Afghanistan. Afghans take part in cycling race during World Peace Day in Mazar-i-sharif.



Leaving Home

Suruc, Syria. A Syrian Kurdish girl looks at the Turkish police as she crosses the border between Turkey and Syria near the southeastern town of Suruc in Sanliurfa province.



Portrait of a Revolutionary

Jannusan, Bahrain. A Bahraini woman holds up a portrait of jailed photographer Ahmed Humaidan during an anti-government protest in the village of Jannusan, west of the capital Manama.

Adapting to the Future, Taking Strength from the Past

In part by circumstance, in part by design, from their betel gardens in the hills beyond Kulaura the wary Khasis have most often kept mainstream society at a distance. But increasingly they are discovering the need to engage, to protect their rights and build a better future. At the same time, the community's self-confidence is growing through a process of rediscovering their written language and history.

ANDREW EAGLE

PHOTOS: ANDREW EAGLE

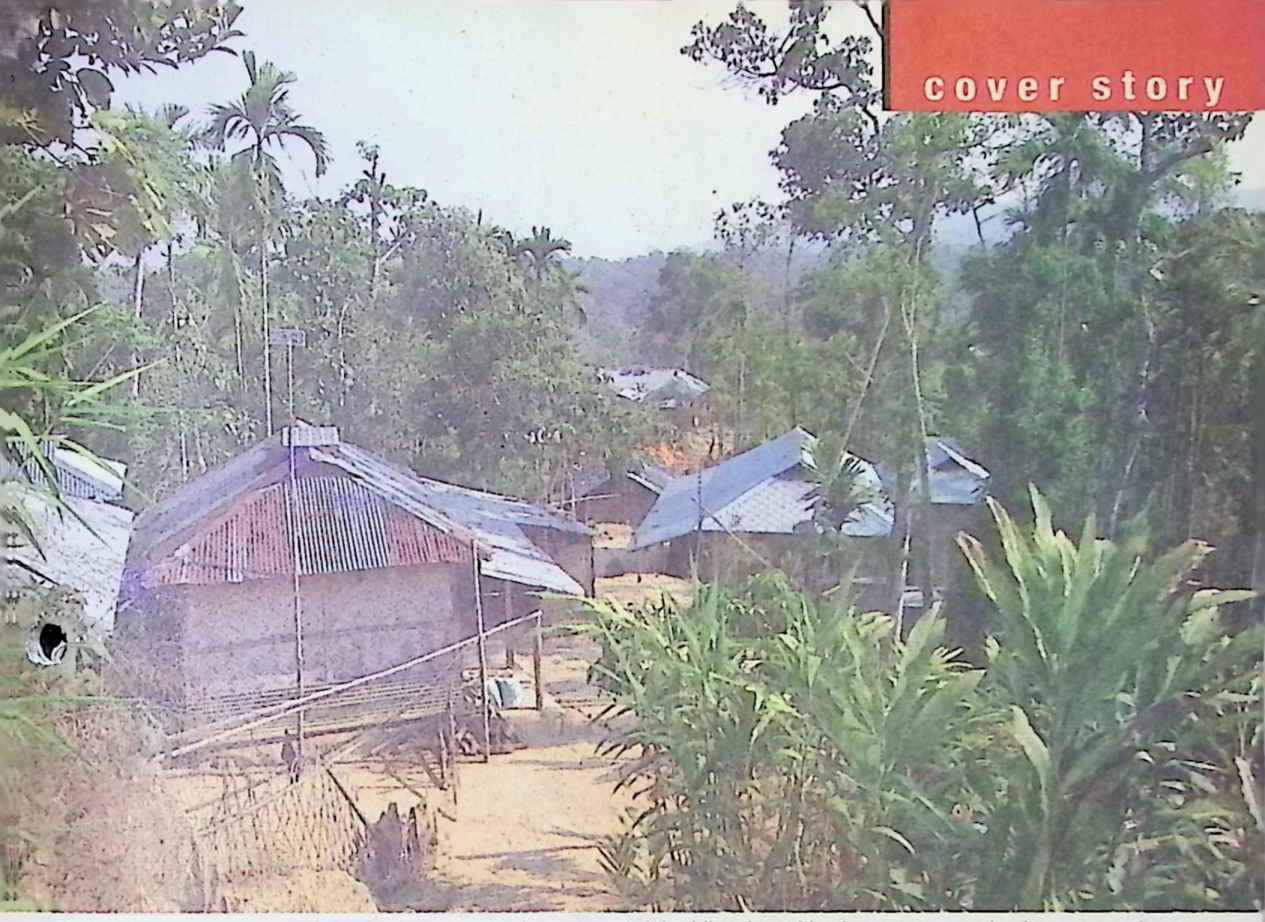
Apart from the stars, the night's leafy darkness had only been broken by a chain of orange-tinted lights and the glow of distant lower towns on the plains. The lights were spaced along the far hill and marked the Indian border. Which towns of Moulvibazar District were glowing was not certain: was that Robi Bazar or Kamalganj? Was that Kulaura? On the other side, the villagers said, one town-glow marked Tripura's Kailashahar, the other Dharmanagar. The oxygen was unadulterated, the silence almost magical in this land of the seven huts. It'd seemed a shame to sleep.

Eyes opened as the rooster crowed. Dawn had arrived in Kukijuri. In the village of the Khasis perched on jungle hilltop, as it should be, activity begins with first light. Yards are being swept, clothes washed and hung to dry. Henry Talang wanders over from the main house. I suspect there'll soon be tea.

Talang, 30, is the Montri's second son. Montri is the title for the leader of a Khasi village. By tradition he chooses his successor from among his sons – whichever he deems most capable; or in the case of no sons he might choose a son-in-law. But there's flexibility. A Montri can hold his title until death or retire. Villagers sometimes elect a new Montri and there are also punjees – what Khasi villages are called – run by committee. In Kukijuri though, it looks as though Talang is next in line. He's already responsible for much of the punjee's affairs, which is probably the reason he often carries a look of tension.



Betel vines growing in Belwa Punjee.



Belwa Punjee is very remote, but even there some houses are brick while others, like these ones, are simpler constructions.

Nothing in a punjee can happen without the Montri's approval. As a visitor it was natural to go to his house first. It's why I was invited to stay there. The Montri's house isn't hard to find. It's usually the highest house in the punjee.

"Bengali tourists don't come here," current Montri, Joseph Konglah, 65, said on the previous evening. "Only foreigners come. About eight years ago some Spaniards came. A French couple stayed here once."

Talang promised that after breakfast we could walk in the hills. The goal was to reach even more remote punjees. But before that, in first morning light it was as well to consider Kukijuri – the surprise of finding such a well-established village high on a hill was not diminished but refreshed. Most houses were brick – and every brick was carted in, through the tea gardens, along the muddy path that follows the gully and merges in narrow spaces with the stream. Every brick was hauled up the hillside by hand, along the same path I'd taken.

On the ridgeline is a basic iron gate to mark entry to the punjee. Inside, among the houses of the 47 families are two churches – Kukijuri is 80% Catholic and 20% Presbyterian – and a primary school. As is customary for the Khasis the surrounding areas are betel gardens: well-tended, semi-cleared areas of forest. The betel vines grow on taller trees and do best with a good dose of sunlight. Betel leaf and areca nut are the main cash crops.

At the back of the Montri's house the pigs have started shuffling about in their pens. They're hungry and grunting. Wood's been chopped and stacked high ready for winter. It's neat and orderly.

A few villagers are disappearing into the forest. They've set off along winding, rough paths that lead into the valleys. They've each got soap and a towel, ready to bathe in a stream.

But most prefer to wait for water to reach them. It's carried up in buckets, very often by tea garden labourers. The gardens are some miles off but the labourers are keen to earn extra, early morning cash. Each bucket will fetch ten taka on one of Kukijuri's verandas. Water fees: it's in the nature of a hilltop Khasi economy.

The day in Kukijuri began with the rooster crowing – as though he was inviting sunlight into the hills. Of course with each sunrise starts the way to the future. And yet that dawn also felt untarnished and ancient, as though finding inner strength requires a reconnection with the past.

When *U Blei* of the old belief first thought to create the world, did he plan for his Khasi to settle in these hills? He is *U Blei*, she is *Ka Blei* and they are *Ki Blei*: God belongs to every



Sorting betel leaves in Ishachora Punjee.

gender and number. God was known too as the designer-creator *U Blei Nongthaw Nogbuh*, before Christianity. He still is in parts of Meghalaya and by a few Khasis in Bangladesh who follow the old religion.

There's a myth of how Khasis came to the world. It was a time when the Earth was verdant and splendid – but empty. The Earth petitioned the creator to send a custodian. A heavenly assembly was called and it was decided that of the *Khyndai-trep*, the sixteen "huts" residing in heaven, seven should be sent to remain on Earth as guardians. That must've been the time when those hills first filled with that cheerful greeting "Khublei!" still to be encountered in abundance.



Tea and biscuits at the Dulukchura home – Rosebell Khasi (L) with Henry Talang (R).

The Khasis call themselves *Ki Hynñiew trep*: the seven huts. In Moulvibazar they also call themselves the Khasi – not Khasia as many Bengalis prefer.

Those first days were of peace and prosperity – God promised to stay with the seven huts; and he planted a giant tree to act as ladder between heaven and Earth. As long as this tree remained the people of the seven huts could go up and down as they pleased; but if it was felled sin and suffering would emerge. God gave three commandments: earn righteousness through labour, know mankind to know God, and know your maternal and paternal kin. While Khasi society has no caste, according to the last of these Khasi may not marry from the same clan.

Unfortunately the evil one persuaded brothers *U Sormok* and *U Sorphim* to cut down the giant tree –

convincing them it would block all sunlight and suffocate Earthly life. With the tree fallen the Earth became bright, ironically good for betel vines, but God's promise was broken.

There are over one million Khasis. Most live India's Meghalaya. Kukijuri is one of 38 punjees in Kulaura, of an estimated 94 in greater Sylhet. The Montri suggests the Khasi population of Bangladesh might reach 35,000.

It is thought the Khasi have been in the region for a long time – longer than most of the other ethnic minorities of Bangladesh. The Khasi language is of the Austroasiatic family thought to have originated in India, passed through the Brahmaputra Valley and into Southeast Asia. Khasi is related to Mon, Vietnamese and Khmer, and to the Munda languages of central India.

spread across a ridgeline. Home to 65 families, Belwa is much younger: a 25-year-old punjee that formerly fell within Konglah's jurisdiction.

But for the last 18 months Belwa has had its own 35-year-old Montri, chosen by the punjee committee. He takes advice from Kukijuri. He's invited us into his home. As is usual in a Khasi house we are offered tea and biscuits, and a little later, a sample of the rice wine called *kyat*. "The best thing about our punjee," says the young Montri, "are the betel gardens. In newer areas the betel grows well."

Yet betel cultivation often brings the Khasis in that area into conflict with mainstream society. There are attempts by influential locals to secure access to hillside land and resources. Forestry officials seek illegal payment. Instances of punjees being attacked and betel vines cut are not uncommon – and a betel vine takes three years to regrow.



Son of Kukijuri's Montri, Henry Talang crosses a bamboo bridge on the way to Belwa Punjee.

Downhill isn't difficult except that the knees start to shake. There's a half-hour walk and five bamboo bridges to cross to reach Belwa Punjee. At a much lower altitude, like Kukijuri it's

Part of the problem is that there is no clarity of land tenure. There is not even consensus among government officials. Local forest officers claim jurisdiction; the Deputy Commissioner says they



Kukijuri primary school has 46 students. Teacher Probin Areng, at the back, believes education is key to a better future.

have none. This does not help the Khasi when forest officers come knocking.

The Montri of Ishachora Punjee nearer to the tea gardens put it this way: "The Forest Department officials are very pleasant. We drink tea together... and then they want money or trees. If we refuse they make false cases." Honesty is highly prized in Khasi culture. They don't bargain. They don't lie. One wonders how much the cultural gap exacerbates these difficulties.

On behalf of Kukijuri, Talang says he is currently involved in seven cases – and the expense of pursuing justice involving lawyers and trips to Dhaka's High Court is a drain on punjee finances. In Belwa too, the new Montri singles out forestry cases. "The Montri's work is very tough," he says, "There's much to do – the cases are the worst."

Indeed a Montri's responsibilities are many. He mediates disputes, ensures the sick are attended to and maintains the punjee's accounts recording betel leaf sales. He also leases land to each family – Khasis traditionally practice collective property rights. According to the Bangladesh District Gazetteer, Sylhet, of 1970, the Montri "pokes his nose in every business."

Joyanto Lawrence Raksham, 38, is a Mandi (Garo) who, as project coordinator for local NGO, Indigenous People's Development Services (IPDS), has been working with the punjees of Kulaura for six years. As a student he had Khasi friends and assumed punjees would not be dissimilar to Mandi villages. "But I saw it was not like ours," he says, "The Khasis live in a tight community; Mandi villages are not like that. Khasis are united and uncompromising. Their sense of nationalism is strong. Whereas Mandis will readily speak Bangla, even to each other, Khasis don't – and I couldn't understand a word!"

While the Mandi once had a similar – *nokma* – governance system it has declined in importance and Raksham needed to adjust to the Montri way of getting things done. He noted that Khasi villages tended to be located in isolated areas away from Bengali villages and towns – and juxtaposed to their hospitality he soon understood Khasis are by nature reserved and wary of outsiders. "It took time to win their trust," he says.

Yet perhaps because of their isolation and self-sufficiency, Khasis have been able to preserve more of their self-identity through the conversion to Christianity and into the modern era. Punjees at their best are free of crime and serious internal conflict. While matrilineal traditions are changing – in Kukijuri males now commonly inherit an equal property share – women have a high status. "Though the eldest earning male member is the manager of the family" reads the Gazetteer, "his wife exercises

greater influence." Marriages and divorces are straightforward and common with no stigma attached. It's even possible for Khasi couples to raise a family without the formal acknowledgement of marriage.

It's unsurprising that such liberties and localised harmony invoke a sense of protectiveness. Nonetheless, nowadays Raksham can understand some Khasi language and he is often considered as an honorary Montri. Khasis share their problems with him.

funded by Norwegian missionary aid.

"Our punjee was really poor but for the last five years the betel grew well," says Rosebell.

By mid-afternoon Talang and I have completed the strenuous climb back to Kukijuri. In the meantime the bazaar has arrived. Shoes, clothes, utensils... every imaginable item is carted up the hill by Bengali traders to be sold door to door.

I am invited to the primary school a few hundred yards along the ridge from the Montri's house. It consists of one long room with a large blackboard at



Ishachora Punjee is at a much lower altitude, near to the tea gardens.

From Belwa, Talang and I backtrack some way before heading along a new path to reach 14-year-old Dulukchara Punjee. "We don't have a Montri," says Rosebell Khasi, inviting us into his home, "This is a committee punjee." Rosebell's father was the previous Montri before he retired; his son is a committee member.

Dulukchara is home to 25 families – 5 Catholic, 15 Presbyterian and the remainder followers of the old religion. There's a new church under construction and a primary school of 30 students

one end and a smaller one at the other. There are several long tables and benches, also mats to sit on.

Teacher Probin Areng, 56, is undoubtedly grateful for the two blackboards and seating options. As the only teacher, he instructs classes KG to 5 simultaneously, to cover the ages of the school's 46 students. Areng is Mandi – he decided to move to Kukijuri in recent years after buying a betel garden nearby, and has brought the teaching experience of a long career, including fourteen years at Laxmipur Mission High School in the plains.



Many of the homes in Kukijuri are brick.

It's hardly unusual for a Khasi punjee to have a resident Mandi teacher. Not too many years ago for lack of qualified Khasis all the local teachers were Mandi. It's a circumstance that hasn't changed much. "At first they didn't want to study," Areng says of his experience, "I had to drag them to school! They were scared."

Yet, he's a teacher with high hopes. "Education is the key to the future," he says, "Earlier people did not take care about education – things are changing but it will take time."

It's not only a matter of keeping students enthusiastic – each month in the presence of the Montri, Areng meets their guardians. "I tell parents to give love and support, to ask their children what they learnt and how school is going – to take an interest."

"I like to see my students succeed," he says. "Fourteen are at college, twenty-seven at high school. I have former students working with the church and NGOs. I'm really pleased."

But for Kukijuri's families enrolling children beyond class 5 isn't straightforward. The nearest schooling options for higher grades, Haiderganj and Laxmipur, are each several kilometres away, entailing the additional expense of boarding hostels. For university the most common choices are Sylhet or Dhaka. Of the few who complete university, most don't return.

The nearest schooling options for higher grades, Haiderganj and Laxmipur, are each several kilometres away, entailing the additional expense of boarding hostels.

Cecelia Lamarong 32, and Monica Khonglah, 30, are welcome exceptions. Khasis with tertiary qualifications from Dhaka, these two confident and articulate pioneers teach at the Laxmipur Mission High School – Areng's former stomping ground. Indeed, as former students they number among his successes.

"To go from one culture to another is difficult," says Khonglah of her university days in Dhaka a decade ago. "The adjustment is hard. Dhaka is a big city – the houses are different. Things move very quickly and everybody speaks Bangla. We come from the punjee!"

She mentions the shock of seeing women wearing burqas for the first time. "Women in Dhaka are also free," she says, "but we were used to the punjee where even at night there is no risk to women walking about."

"When we studied there," says Lamarong, "there were only thirteen Khasis living in Dhaka."

One advantage of having Khasi teachers is that when students have difficulties they are better placed to help. "If they don't understand in Bangla," says Khonglah, "we can explain in Khasi." "We understand what's different for them," adds Lamarong.



Tadpoles in a stream in the valley below Kukijuri.

Another innovation has been the inclusion of Khasi language classes. While previously the Khasi language, written in Latin script, was sometimes taught informally through churches, classes are now held for eighty students after their other classes are done. "At first they didn't like it," says Khonglah, "But I teach songs, poetry and rhymes and they perform them at school."

The Khasi language was once endangered but has experienced a revival. In particular the written form is not well-entrenched in Bangladesh, given that books needed to be imported from India. But last year Caritas started publishing texts for PG to class 2 locally.

A similar initiative has been running in Ishachora Punjee since 2008. With funding from Oxfam, IPDS opened a Khasi language centre that introduces 30 students to their native language, including its written form, each morning before school.

Like Areng, Khonglah and Lamarong believe education is a means to secure a better future. "Don't rely on the betel garden," Lamarong tells her students, "Do something else as well."

"Besides," says Khonglah, "there's climate change – less rain – a problem for betel cultivation."

In recent decades Christian attitudes have shifted towards recognising the inherent value of local cultures. The new approach has encouraged the Khasis, despite in many ways having maintained their separate identity, to re-engage with their past. And that is, of course, to know themselves better.

It's not only the written language and literature being revived. Since 2008 Bangladeshi Khasis have recommenced celebrating an important pre-Christian festival Shad Suk Mynsiem, which symbolises spring and thanksgiving for the land. This has generated renewed pride in Khasi clothes, song and dance. "We used to sing English and Bangla songs," says Khonglah, "We thought we didn't need our traditions. But now we understand it's our culture. We started Shad Suk Mynsiem again and now I really feel it."

Together with strengthened efforts in modern education and better attempts to connect with mainstream society – such as by pursuing their rights through the courts, renewed cultural awareness can only be an asset, allowing coming generations of Khasis to more fully and confidently contribute, to bring to the fore the wealth of their cultural experience and unique history. Despite the contemporary challenges it's easy to be optimistic that Khasis will be able to realise their full potential not only as Khasis but as Bangladeshis. In the process, the life of the nation is sure to be enriched.

There's another Khasi myth which says that brother and sister – the moon and sun – once danced together. Everybody said it was sinful, being from the same family. From shame the sun hid herself in a cave and the Earth descended into darkness. People tried every means to coax the sun out, and ultimately they deployed a rooster as messenger. It was with the rooster's crowing that the sunlight came again. ■

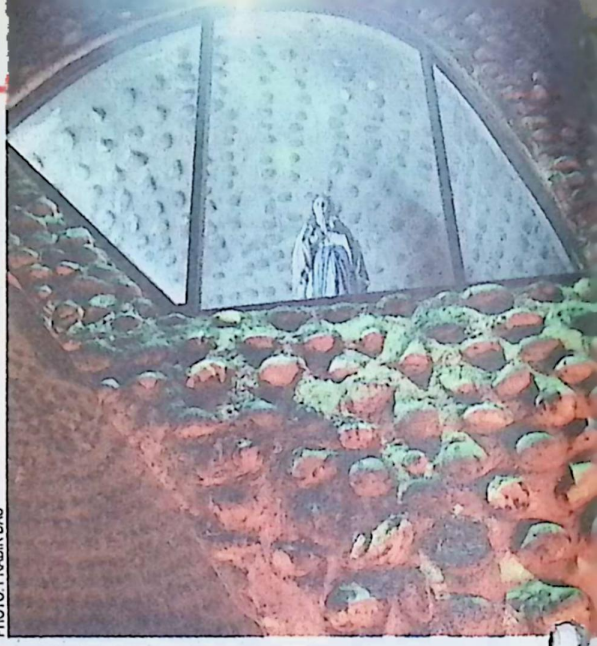


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

History Revisited

Dhaka is home to countless churches, many of which have a glorious history behind them. This week *the Star* brings you a brief history of three of the oldest churches in the city.

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

Do you know that our country, which has a predominantly Muslim population, owns a number of significant age-old structures built by the Catholic and Augustinian Missionaries and Portuguese traders? It is believed that Christianity arrived in Bangladesh during the 16th century holding the hands of the Portuguese traders and Catholic missionaries who built churches in various parts of the country including Dhaka. At present Bangladesh has a Christian population of around one million where the Roman Catholics are around 40 percent and the different Protestant denominations namely Baptists, Anglicans, Lutheran, Pentecostals and Prebyterians, etc. are 60 percent of the total number. The country has a number of churches; interestingly many of these churches are the oldest standing buildings of their respective areas, first opened to worshippers more than three to four centuries back.

Tejgaon boasts of having the city's oldest church, The Church of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. As the inscription on the west façade of the church suggests, it was built in 1677 by the Portuguese Augustinian missionaries. As the Mughal capital, Dhaka started flourishing in trade and commerce, which attracted many foreign traders. The city became the main centre for muslin trade that made Dutch, French, English, Armenian, and Greek traders flock to Dhaka for business purposes and for establishing their own trading houses. With the traders also came the Christian missionaries. Sixty-nine years after Dhaka was named as the Mughal capital by Subadar Islam Khan, a small chapel was set by the Portuguese Jesuit Missionary at Tejgaon, then a tiny suburb of Dhaka, to meet the increasing need of Christian community in 1677. With time and the growing need of the Christian community, the chapel was promoted as a church in 1714, and the structure was expanded to include an East wing in 1940.

After the Holy Rosary Church, the Armenian Church (also known as the Armenian Apostolic Church of the Holy Resurrection) is the oldest



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

church in Dhaka serving the large Armenian communities, who were engaged in different trade and commerce in the Armenitola area of Old Dhaka, for almost three centuries starting from the 18th till early 20th centuries, informs Andrew Jenkins, a regular worshipper in the church.

According to Jenkins, the church was built in 1781 on the site of an earlier chapel, which can still be found from some of the oldest tombstones situated in the church. The church was a result of the combined contribution of Agaminus Catachik, an Armenian who provided the land for the church and other Armenians who donated for its construction. The architecture has some Armenian features and also some contemporary Mughal features, such as the cusped arch between the sanctuary and the nave. The church has witnessed quite a few changes over the course of time, for example in the 50 years following the church's construction; a clock tower was founded on its western side which was destroyed by an earthquake in 1897. Armenians once played a prominent part in the jute trade in Dhaka, but very few reside in the country currently. Today one of the last Armenians in Dhaka, Michael Joseph Martin, has become the church warden and takes cares of the church, which, we must admit, is in very good condition.

Although there have been a number of baptisms and burials at the Armenian Church in recent decades, the church has seen only one marriage celebration which was of Andrew and Jan Jenkins, who were living at the church parsonage back then, on May 12, 1979, informs Jenkins himself via email.

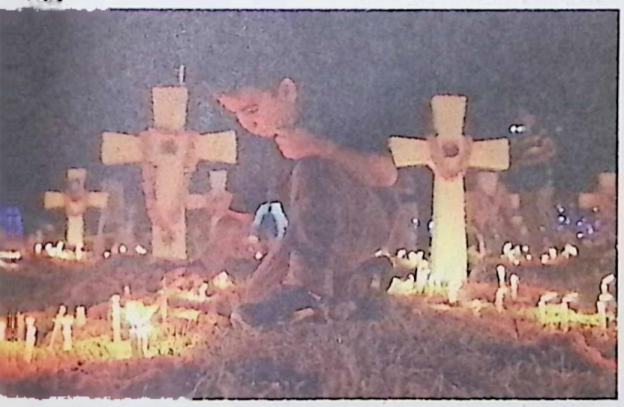
The Dhaka Baptist Church situated in Sadar Ghat shares a history of more than 150 years and is regarded as the oldest Baptist church in Dhaka.

"In 1816, when the church started with 22 members, it did not have any fancy looking church buildings," says Rev Martin Adhikary, former pastor of Dhaka Baptist Church.

"The first Baptist missionaries were sent to Dhaka by the BMS missionaries in Serampore, West Bengal where the famous missionary Dr William Carey and two of his colleagues, William Ward and Joshua Marshman lived and worked. After arriving in Dhaka, the early missionaries conducted quite a number of schools for both boys and girls. During that period the missionary Pastor was Rev. Owen Leonard," he continues.

Initially the missionaries used to live in different nooks of old Dhaka. Places like Choto Katara, Maya Katara, Chawk Bazar, and around the Ahsan Manzil by the river Buriganga were their home and worshipping grounds. They worshipped with local Christians in those places and also at the present Baptist Church site, as a proper church house was yet to be constructed. While the members were mostly the European missionaries working with the Baptist Missionary Society in England and other parts of the world, gradually a large number of local people also started showing interest in becoming baptised believers. Interestingly enough, one of the first groups to be baptized in Dhaka by these missionaries were a group of Jews.

Tejgaon boasts of having the city's oldest church, The Church of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary.





PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

"After conducting their activities in different scattered areas of Old Dhaka, the first church building was built at its present site (1-2, Liaquat Avenue, Sadar Ghat) on September 29, 1884. The original building was completely renovated by the present authorities of the church in 1995, thus giving it its present look while demolishing a few old buildings including the Regent's Park Hall and one of the old mission houses," Adhikary adds.

At present the church has around 254 baptised believers. The church stands within the old Baptist Mission compound which also holds the pastors' (Purohit) quarter, hostel for college and university students and some staff quarters occupying about 3.5 bighas of land. Rev Own Leonard and his family's tombs can still be found in the old Baptist cemetery in Rankin Street, Wari.

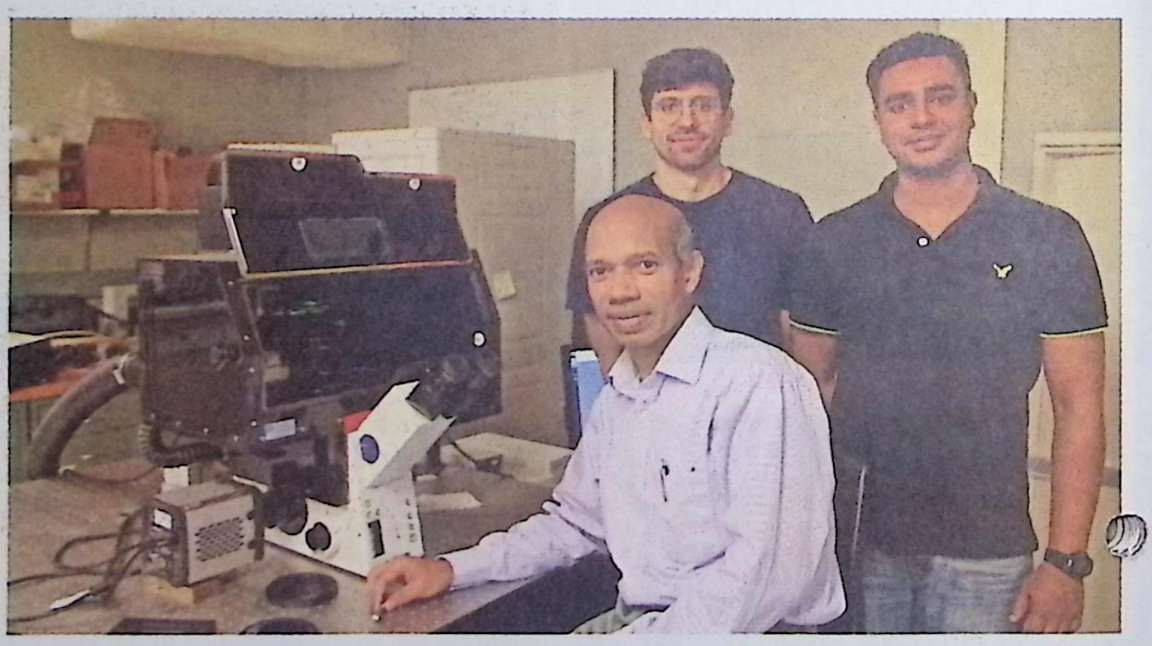
A Living Machine

This may sound like a far-fetched Sci-fi story

AMITAVA KAR

Not all engineers are busy trying to design wearable tech like the new Apple Watch or Jawbone Up. Some are intent on making living machines.

A team of engineers led by M Taher Saif, Gutgsell Professor of Mechanical Science and Engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, US, have created a class of tiny hybrid robots–part machine, part heart cells–that can swim like sperm. The research may someday lead to the development of devices that could travel within the body, targeting disease areas and delivering medication.



The research on the biobot swimmer can be carried out in Bangladesh, says Dr M Taher Saif.

The biological robot or biobot is a mechanism where engineering precision meets the exquisite power of life. "It is the smallest autonomous robot with living cells that can swim in a directed way," Dr Saif says on email. "It does not need any external power or guidance such as magnetic or electric fields."

Dr Saif was the principal investigator of the project which is part of a National Science Foundation Center, named EBICS (Emergent Behavior of Integrated Cellular Systems). The centre was jointly formed by Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Georgia Institute of Technology.

Not visible by the naked eye, the biobot, also called the swimmer, is living because it is powered by live heart cells. It is also engineered because the living cells are on a thin flexible wire which is manufactured. The wire is about 1/10th the diameter of human hair and 2 mm long. The end of the wire has a thicker region which is called the head. This part is rigid. The cells are on the flexible part of the wire close to the head. "The cells are extracted from a rat heart and are randomly plated on the wire."

The cells self-align and synchronise to beat together, sending a wave down the tail that propels the biobot forward.

With living machines like the biobot, humans now will have the capabilities to manipulate cells and their functionalities. Professor Saif says, "In simple terms, the idea is to take stem cells, differentiate them to the cells of your choice, bring them in contact with engineered structures, and let the cells interact with these structures and themselves."

Currently there is extensive research on packing drugs in nano particles. While there has been some progress, delivery still remains a major challenge. In the case of the swimmer, the cells and the structures together evolve into a functional machine that has the capability to deliver drugs to a specific disease area– cancer tumor, for example. "If intelligent biobots can do that autonomously, then we can imagine use of medicine with minimal side effects, since the drugs will be applied where it is needed and not spread all over the body. Since the swimmers have the muscle actuators, they might be able to perform microscopic surgeries as well."

They may also be employed in non-medical sectors like environmental cleaning and detoxification. Just like bacteria, biobots have the abilities to consume materials from their environment and chemically break them. "One of the applications of the biobots can be such degradation of unwanted materials in our environment, particularly in water."

He is envisioning a time, possibly just a couple of decades from now, when technology will effortlessly and elegantly meet the exquisite power of life.

It took more than three years for Dr Saif and his team–two PhD students– Brian Williams, Sandeep Anand and a post doctoral associate–Jagannathan Rajagopalan to achieve the desired results. Professor Saif's role was to envision the project, derive the necessary equations to predict what to expect from the biobot, and guide the students. And the graduate students played critical roles by implementing the ideas, solving the necessary equations, and carrying out the experiments to turn the concept of the swimmer into reality.

It wasn't, however, smooth sailing all along. "The main challenge was to find a way to make the living cells stick to the swimmer filament, as we were implanting heart cells from a live rat to a totally different environment. Once we found the right biochemistry, which took us the most time in the project, the rest fell into place."

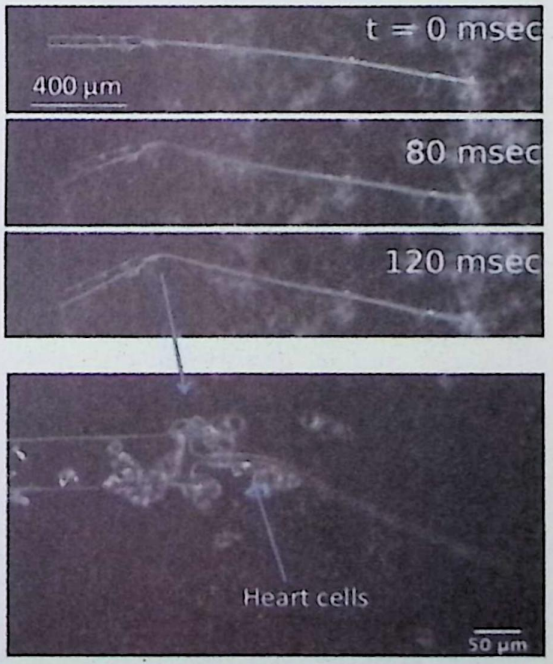
The swimmer is not yet ready for practical use. It may take 5-10 years to implement some of the initial biological machines with intelligence. "We are at the very early stages of this field. It took decades to implement commercial airlines from the early invention of Wright brothers."

A graduate in civil engineering from BUET, Bangladesh, Professor Taher went to the US in 1986 to pursue MS in Washington State University. In 1993, he completed his PhD in Theoretical and Applied Mechanics from Cornell University.

During a long distinguished academic career, he has taught and worked at top universities among them Cornell University and Max Planck Institute, Stuttgart, Germany. He was a Fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers in 2011 and a Member of the Scientific Advisory Board, Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology, 2010-12.

An ace student since childhood, Dr Saif was inspired to nurture a scientific worldview by his parents and uncles who bought him a lot books. He grew up close to the villages–in smaller towns, which helped him develop a deep connection with his country.

Biobot swimmer in a petri dish powered by cardiac cells



Williams et al., *Nature Communications*, Jan 17, 2014.

Dr Saif believes that biological machines will impact societies all around the world, including that of Bangladesh. "This new technology is not expensive. In fact, the research on the biobot swimmer can be carried out in Bangladesh now. It needs very little advanced instruments."

The visionary professor isn't just talking with techno-utopian bravado–he is envisioning a time, possibly just a couple of decades from now, when technology will effortlessly and elegantly meet the exquisite power of life, and life will take on an altered form which we can't predict or comprehend in our current, limited state. "The research is fundamental in nature at this stage. When developed, the drug industries may use these bio hybrid swimmers to treat cancer patients all over the world."

DON'T JUMP

UPASHANA SALAM

Around a week back, a report was published on two siblings committing suicide in their Uttara residence. Eventually, the reason behind their joint suicide was unveiled. They had seen posts and holiday pictures of their father, who had abandoned them seven years back, with his new wife on Facebook, and feeling deserted and betrayed, they decided to take the bold step of ending their lives.

We read increasing reports on suicide, and surprisingly most of these stories are about adolescents who, ideally, should not even be harbouring such thoughts. While the stories are heartbreaking and the rates alarming, such reports at least force us to focus on an issue that gets woefully little attention in our society.

The interaction patterns of adolescents have changed in the last 10 to 15 years, says social scientist Anis Pervez. "When I was growing up, we had more face to face social interactions. I, for example, grew up in a full house with five siblings in a joint family. That's the experience of most children growing up even 10 to 15 years ago, as they engaged in intimate clusters with a heightened level of interaction with friends and family."

With the advent of the internet and the dependence on social media, we obviously see a drastic shift in the way the youth interact with others. We joke about how the social media craze has stretched to an extent that people in the same house communicate with each other over Facebook. However, in today's world that often turns out to be an actual scene played out in a number of households "A young girl once told me that she usually communicates with her parents, who live in the same house, via Facebook. Their direct interactions are far and between," says Pervez.

The change in social interactions whereby people resort to different digital platforms to communicate with each other leads to a loss of human touch, explains Pervez. "Thus, young people in particular often feel alienated, leading them to feel withdrawn and frustrated. This feeling of complete isolation in the physical world can often incite thoughts of suicide in young people."

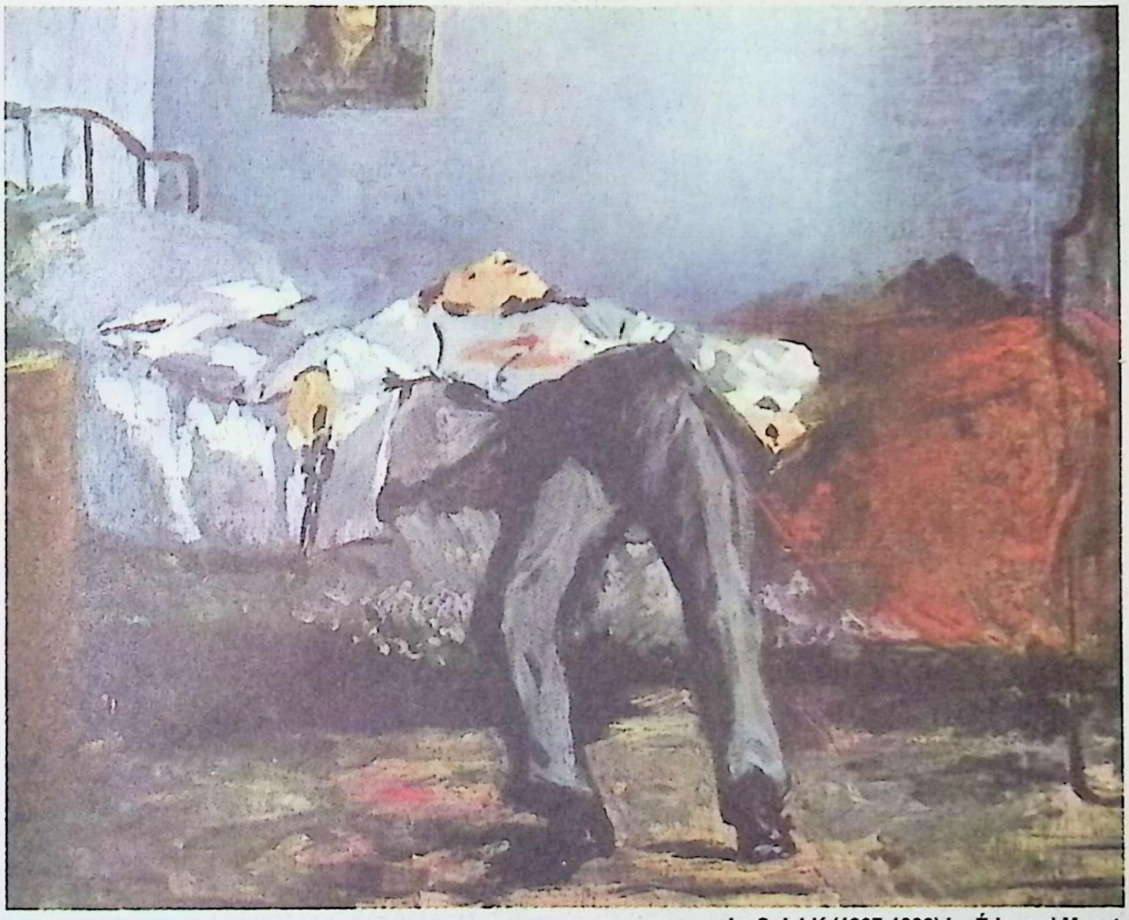
In a paper published by the University of Oxford, researchers claim that even though internet forums and social networking sites provide a support system for "socially isolated young people," the internet is definitely linked to an increased "risk of suicide and self-harm among vulnerable adolescents." On the internet, users, in particular young adolescents, feel a sense of anonymity, as they assume that their online behaviour has little if any impact on their actual lives. Thus, the social media and apps provide them with the illusion of fleeting and faceless interactions. Youngsters often create an imaginary world of their own which is very different from their real world. Hence, when they are forced to interact with the actual world, they face problems with balancing their social life and behaviour, explains Pervez.

He cites the example of 14-year-old Alim and 18-year-old Chirasree, the two siblings who killed themselves last week. "They saw their mother struggling to fulfil their desires, and then they saw the father who had abandoned them enjoying his new life. Through Facebook, they were forcefully reminded of the life that they had been deprived of. I think that this humiliation on a social platform was too much to take for such young minds," says Pervez.

Social media is not the only villain here. Recently we read a report about a girl committing suicide when she didn't get a dress that she wanted and about another girl who killed herself by taking her father's medicines after a quarrel with her mother who prevented her from watching a serial on an Indian channel. We can laugh at the foolishness of these two youngsters and moan about young lives lost too early because of their own recklessness. But these deaths and the subsequent reaction to them are a commentary on how little attention we give to the issues that affect our children, and how easily we disregard their anguish as immature and childish.

The media too has a tendency to glorify suicide cases.

The media too has a tendency to glorify suicide cases. After the tragic and widely publicised death of actress Marilyn Monroe, the headlines of the next day's newspaper screamed that she was "freed from the stresses of fame." A subsequent report in 1974 found that there was a 12 percent increase in suicide rates the month following Monroe's suicide. This blatant glorification of suicides tends to give a positive, glamorous spin to an act that is usually carried out in desperation. Thus, young people, who are often terribly informed, tend to perceive this as a means to hurt people who spurned them or as a way to garner social attention.



***Le Suicidé* (1887-1888) by Édouard Manet.**

There is no point denying that even confessing about having suicidal thoughts can lead to brutal bullying and stigmatisation in the hands of your peers and the society. When a young man turned to a widely popular Facebook page, posting a query to ways to end his life, people instantly thought that they had the upper hand in this situation, resorting to crude, judgmental statements and cruel jokes to drive home the point that his turmoil was not even worthy of attention. We need to acknowledge that many people use public forums in an effort to reach out, in hopes that some sympathetic stranger will tell them that all's not lost and that their lives are worth saving. Instead, they are usually ridiculed and shamed for suffering from depression and suicidal thoughts. In a country which has no active helpline or support group to help people in crisis, we need to have much more empathy when dealing with people who have such thoughts instead of leaving them to fend for themselves. It's no surprise that more and more youngsters resort to such a heartbreaking step instead of reaching out to someone, as to be honest, who is there to listen to them without judgment and bias?

Digital and online socialisation is not going away. If anything, with the growth of social avenues and platforms, young people will probably spend most of their time in front of a screen, building a virtual world of their own. We will continue to read and hear about youngsters taking their lives because of something they saw or read on the internet or the mass media. We, the parents, teachers, the media, and even the youth themselves, need to be more aware about the web of social and digital interactions. Guardians and teachers need to understand how the social media and the digital world work. They need to be easily approachable so that children who face depression or have suicidal thoughts can seek them and ask them for help. We don't need to state again that adolescents should spend more time away from the virtual world, and instead spend actual time having face to face conversations.

If you want to help your children steer clear from such dangerous thoughts as suicide, you first need to address the issues that are affecting them. You need to be empathetic and understanding. If we put in the effort to be there for them and to regard their concerns with utmost respect and attention as they deserve, we may yet see them return to us instead of resorting to the final option of death. ■

Divine Love

SAJJAD HUSSAIN

Istanbul is one of the cities that I wanted to visit all my life. Rich in history, this old city straddles Asia and Europe. You can literally walk from Asia to Europe in 10 minutes! This was also the seat of a mighty empire which ruled over a big chunk of Europe, Asia and North Africa. The opportunity came when I was going to Canada to attend my youngest daughter's graduation. I spent four days in Istanbul visiting the Blue mosque, the Topkapi palace museum, the Grand Bazaar and taking the boat cruise in the Bosporus.

A lot has been written on Turkey. So I will write about something that is unique to Turkey and is oftentimes missed out by tourists. Yes, I am talking about the "whirling dervishes" and their famous dance. This is also described as the dance for divine love. I had read about it but had no idea about what it stood for or what this dance really meant. I made sure that an evening was set aside for the whirling dervish dance. Many restaurants and cafes have some kind of fake dervish dances for their clients but it is a far cry from the real thing. One evening, I went to the Hodjapasha Dance Theater where this art form is taught and performed. The Hodjapasha Dance Theater was originally a 550-year-old *hammam* which has been turned into the stage for the dance of the whirling dervish.

The origin of the whirling dervishes may be traced back to Mevlana (Maulana) Jalaluddin Rumi. Rumi was born in Balkh of Khorasan province which is now in Afghanistan around the beginning of the 13th century. Later his family migrated to Turkey. Rumi was a scholar who studied medicine, history and other subjects besides Islam and other religions. He was fluent in Turkish, Arabic, Persian, and Greek. In those days Persian was the language of literature and Arabic was the language of science. Hence his literary works like 'The Masnavi' is in Persian. He was a poet, philosopher and a religious leader. He had a big following and his madrasas were always full of scholars and students.

> The first whirling symbolises the creation of the world, its animals and plants. It continues for four salutes which are the means for the humans to reach divine reality intoxicating the soul.

Rumi died in 1273. After his death, one of his four sons, Sultan Veled started an order which came to be known as the Mevlevi order. Rumi's death is celebrated by the order as the "Sab i Arus" or "the wedding night" when he joined the Divine forever. The Mevlevi order is one of the most known around the world. The order is based on the mystical dimensions of Islam. Sufism may be roughly defined as a means by which a person frees himself from bad habits, cleanses his soul and attains maturity with love for God. In a way, it is a lifestyle.

This order continued its existence until 1923 when Ataturk banned all orders and closed all hermitages. The Mevlana Sema ceremony or the whirling dervish dance survived in the activities of various associations, foundations and educational institutions and the order continued to survive as a cultural heritage even though it was officially banned. In 2005, the UNESCO declared the Mevlana Sema ceremony as one of the "masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity".

The Sema ceremony or the whirling dervish dance is one of the richest Turkish cultural heritages. This is a ritual, a spiritual journey in which the soul meets God and becomes mature and attains unity with Him before its journey back to life to serve humanity. The dance is accompanied by a band of flutists, drummers and chanters. The whole episode is formally choreographed and is led by a sheikh or leader. The dancers wear special costumes. Their coats symbolise the tomb.

They begin with "Naat i Sharif" in praise of the prophet (Peace be Upon Him). The dancers numbering five, stand with their clenched hands folded cross ways, that is, the right hand touches the left shoulder

give, keeping nothing for ourselves. The whirling dervishes revolve around their own axis and around a circle just like the planet revolves in its own axis and around the sun. At this stage one dancer stands in the centre and the others dance around him. The first whirling symbolises the creation of the world, its animals and plants. This continues for four salutes which are the means for the humans to reach divine reality intoxicating the soul. The ritual continues as the Sheikh recites the verse 115 of the second chapter of the Holy Quran, which says, (interpretation of the meaning) " And to Allah belongs the east and the west. So wherever you [might] turn, there is the Face

There is a dress code for both men and women.



Whirling Dervishes perform in the Galata Mevlevihane (Mevlevi Lodge), Istanbul.

while the left hand touches the right shoulder with their bowed heads looking at the floor.

The dance starts slowly at first but gradually it picks up speed and towards the end, they complete a circle in just a second. While dancing with eyes shut, the hands are extended with the right palm pointed upward and the left palm pointing downward. This signifies that we receive from god and to men we of Allah. Indeed, Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.". The Sema ends with the first chapter of the holy book.

The performance is of about an hour and the small auditorium accommodates about 200 spectators. There is a dress code for both men and women. Men cannot wear shorts and women cannot show their legs. Photography is not allowed. ■



Lion's Paw Terrace, Sigiriya.

A Gem in the Ocean

(Part I)

NARMIN TARTILA BANU

We were ecstatic. Just the mention of Bangladesh had the ticket officer slash our entry fee by half. How awesome is it to belong to a SAARC country and gain discounted admission to one of UNESCO's listed World Heritage Sites?

We were at the foot of Sigiriya, an ancient palace near Dambulla in Sri Lanka. Remains of a palace and administrative center built by King Kassapa (473-491AD), son of King Dhatusena by a non-royal consort, lay sprawled atop a 660 feet high chunk of rock. Climbing this precipice proved to be more difficult than we expected. Flights of stairs weaved their way through a generously spread out Water Garden, Boulder Garden and Terraced Garden. A precarious climb up a column of stairs led to a cave with frescoes of women believed to be *apsaras* resembling the king's wives and concubines. We made it up to the Lion's Gate, halfway to the apex.

Our enthusiasm from early morning had worn thin. The drive from Bandaranaike International Airport to Kassapa Lion's Rock Resort the previous day took approximately four hours. The overnight stay at the beautiful resort was refreshing indeed but we had to start early for Sigiriya for the long climb. Moreover, the climb till the Lion's Gate challenged us up rickety stairs with howling wind threatening to blow us off. How six year old Chinese kids raced each other in between the legs of tall Asians and even taller Europeans was a mystery to an acrophobic myself. Moreover our guide wisely informed us of a wasp attack incident the day before. Swarms flew out from the several dozen hives that hung innocently from trees near the Sigiriya Rock and attacked tourists tackling the stairs hugging the steep slope. We decided not to proceed but spend a good hour catching our breath and gawking up at the colossal rock that served as the kingdom amidst clouds of god-king Kassapa. He created this illusion of paradise for himself after shifting his capital away from Anuradhapura after usurping his father.

Once well rested, we made our way back down the stairways and back to our car. Next destination was

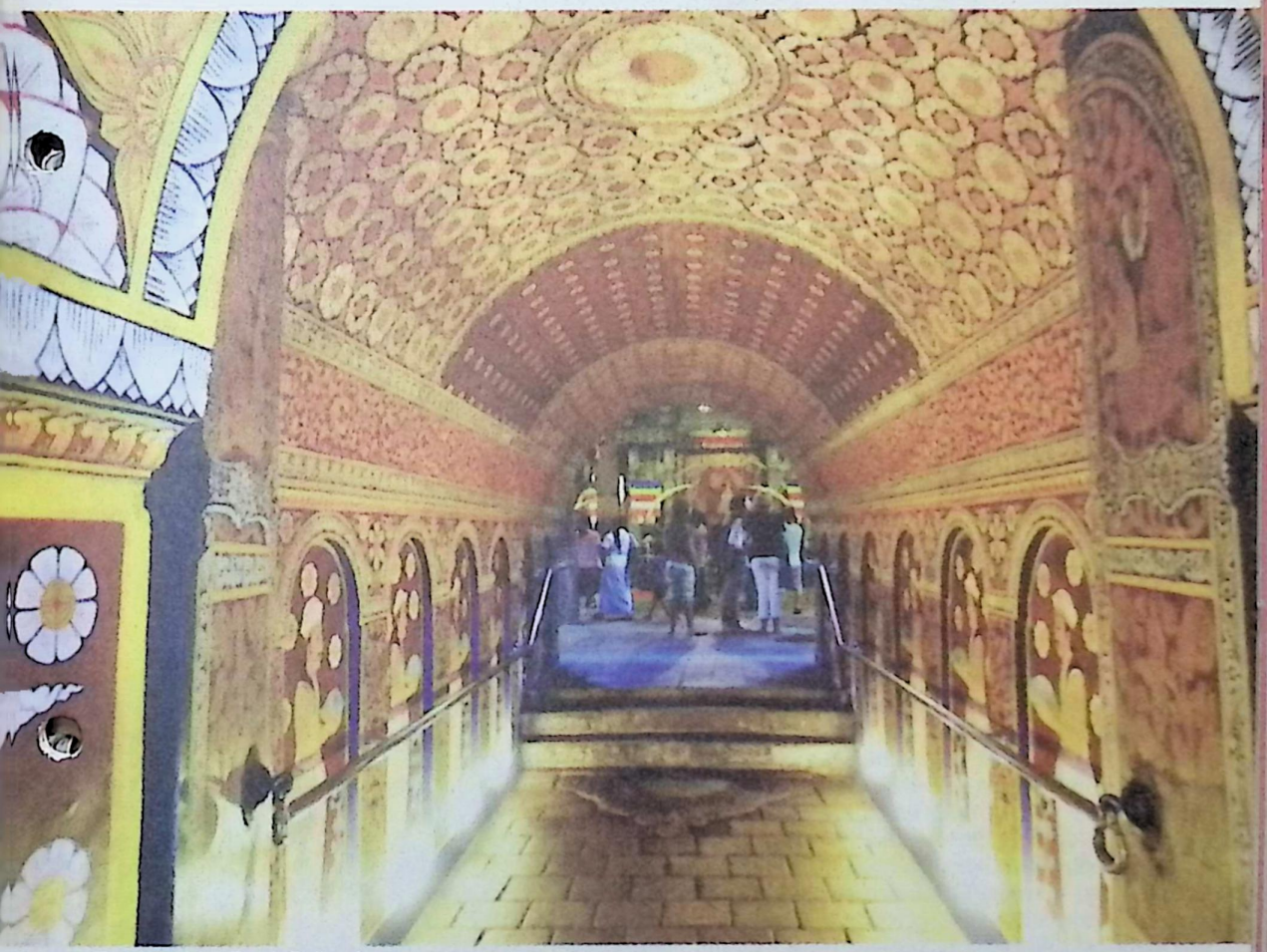
Kandy, the second largest city after Colombo and home to the Temple of the Tooth Relic (Sri Dalada Maligawa). Buddha's left canine tooth was collected from his funeral pyre in 543BC and given to King Brahmadatte who kept it in his kingdom (present day Orissa). The tooth became an object of political scrutiny, further fanned by the strong belief that whoever possessed the tooth had divine rights to rule the land. After changing many hands, the tooth was smuggled into Sri Lanka by Princess Hemamali and her husband Prince Dantha, who handed over the relic to King Kirthi Sri Meghavarna. He enshrined it at Anuradhapura. The relic changed custodianship a number of times in the next few centuries and even bear testament to the Portuguese invasion of Kandy in the 17th century. Currently housed at a temple in Kandy, the tooth is opened for public viewing only at certain times of the day.

Exiting the temple, we made a pit stop at a local eatery and requested short eats. The waiter presented us with a platter of savories and we munched on samosas and sipped rich milky tea while figuring out our next step.

We settled for gemstone shopping. After all, yet another name for the Pearl of the Indian Ocean is Ratna-dwip (Gem Island). Our guide took us to a flashy outlet named Handuni's Gem and Jewelry, where we were overwhelmed by a magnificent collection of glittering precious and semi-precious stones. Later on, we made a quick trip to Laksala as well, the government-owned gift and souvenir shop. Although the authenticity of the gems here was a sure shot the variety of jewelries was dismal compared to its privately-owned counterpart!

The following day, we made our way out of the Shady Grove lodging facilities where we halted at in Kandy and settled down for a couple of hours' drive to Nuwara Eliya. We feasted our eyes yet again on the numerous waterfalls dotting the roadsides, often hopping out of the car to take a picture or two. The hairpin turns were sharp enough to instigate nausea and we made a few more necessary stops to save the car from semi-digested breakfast!

As we approached Nuwara Eliya, we felt the elevation before our guide mentioned anything. Our ears popped and the temperature dropped several



Temple of the Tooth Relic, Kandy.



Waterfall viewed from roadside en route Nuwara Eliya.

degrees. Hills enveloped in neatly pruned tea bushes boasted placards declaring 'Mackwoods Labookellie'. Winding roads continued running parallel with tea gardens and eventually our guide pulled over at the Glenloch Tea Factory. We let ourselves be escorted by the tea guide who explained in detail the tea processing exercise. The sheer variety of tea produced by the nation left us gaping. The tea bud itself is processed to produce three different types of tea, the golden tips being the most premium! We helped ourselves to brownies and complimentary tea while strolling through the tea store with a flock of European, Middle Eastern and North Asian tourists.

Coined as Serendib by Arab traders who settled in the island between 8th and 15th centuries, Sri Lanka's popularity as a tourist destination amongst Middle-easterners even today is quite obvious. Add to that the Sri Lankan government's recent push to increase Saudi tourist visits from 19,500 to 40,000 in the next three years[1]. Currently, over a million tourists arrive at this island every year.

Satiated after seeing a tea factory at one of the world's best tea producing nations, we resumed our journey. If you want an uninterrupted view of mist-enshrouded mountains through ceiling-to-floor windows at every waking moment, you must check in at the Midky Hotel, which is where we arrived. The



Mist-enshrouded town, Nuwara Eliya.

window overlooked a neat little lawn with a coffee table. Right below this lush patch of greenery was a winding road leading all the way to the city center and beyond. Beyond the tarmac stood mysterious dark mountains sporadically enveloped by the unpredictable misty white clouds. The view was surreal.

To be continued...

Source: [1] http://www.arabnews.com/news/464245

Man and Superman

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

It was around 11:30 at night. The deserted streets of Dhanmondi take a ghostly look at this hour. Save for a group of mongrels curling up for some wink's sleep, there was not a single soul in the street. When the night-watchman saw a rickshaw at this time of the night he blew his whistle, the sharp sound which reminded Abdul Gafur, a rickshaw puller, that it was time to get back home.

Gafur was very worried about his passenger. He felt there was something wrong about him even when he hailed the rickshaw. After reaching his destination, when the man fell down from the rickshaw, Gafur and the guard rushed to hold him and at that time it dawned on Gafur that his passenger was drunk.

When the man got back to his feet he offered Gafur a note of Tk 500 instead of the fare – Tk 20. At first Gafur was startled, later he refused to take the money. Then the man threw a bundle of Tk 500 notes at Gafur. The guard and a few other men insisted him to take the money and leave the place quickly. Gafur says, "With almost Tk 50,000 in my hand, the face of my sons who are still studying came to my mind. It was more than my year's income. So I thought I would take it. But then suddenly I thought that it was not fair. I asked myself that if I took the money from this man what would my answer be to Allah in the day of judgement. So I refused to take the money."

Not only did Gafur refuse to take the notes, he gathered them all, put them into the man's pocket, and took the man to the entrance to his home.

Gafur says, "I have been pulling rickshaw in Dhaka for more than 10 years. I am happy with what I have. I am working hard so that my two sons get educated and can get a good job. My elder son is studying degree honours and my youngest son is in standard eight."

Originally he was a weaver in Boalmari, Pabna, which used to be a hub of the handloom industry. But some 15 years ago when electric handloom started to replace its traditional counterpart, hundreds of weavers like Gafur who could not afford to buy the expensive machine lost their job.

Gafur says, "My father thought that my skill as a weaver would be enough to run my family. So he never thought of sending me to school. I was taught to operate handlooms and knew a little bit of farming. When it became obsolete, I faced some real danger. A small chunk of land could hardly feed my big family. So upon the advice of my brother-in-law I came to Dhaka and started to pull rickshaw."

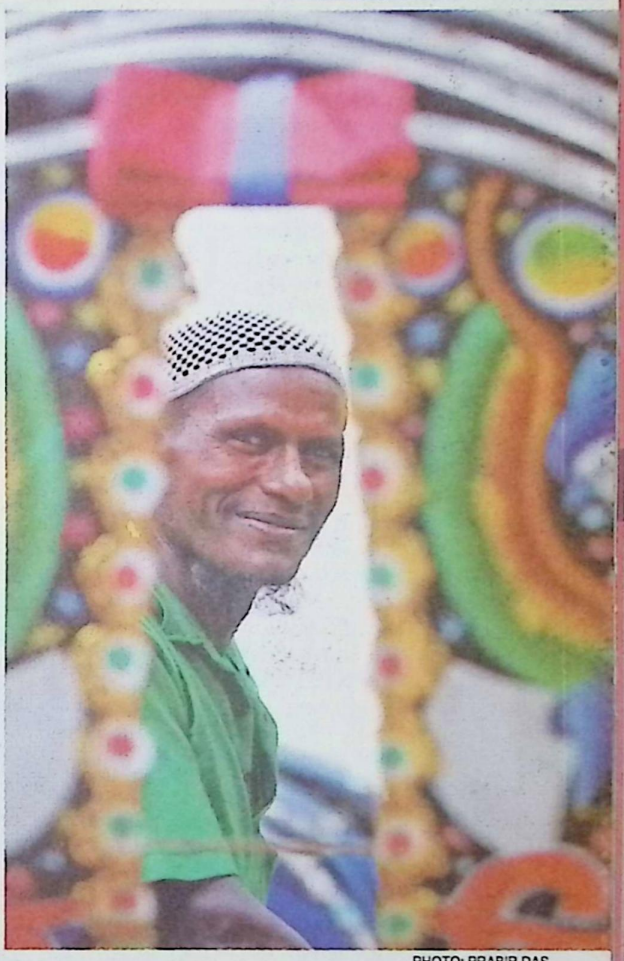


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Abdul Gafur epitomises the human values that are disappearing from our society.

The poor rickshaw-puller, with his hard earned money, has ensured his children's education. His eldest son Raihan is studying at Chatmohor Degree College. His only daughter has studied up to grade 12 and is now married to a young farmer. Gafur's youngest son is a student of class eight of a village high school.

At 47, Gafur sometimes wants to take some rest after a day's backbreaking work, but the thought of his sons' future makes him get ready for the next day's challenge. Amidst the reckless driving of luxurious cars, rushing buses and trucks of enormous size, Gafur's little rickshaw plies on the busy streets of Dhaka.

Abdul Gafur and his family can be contacted at 01799081551.

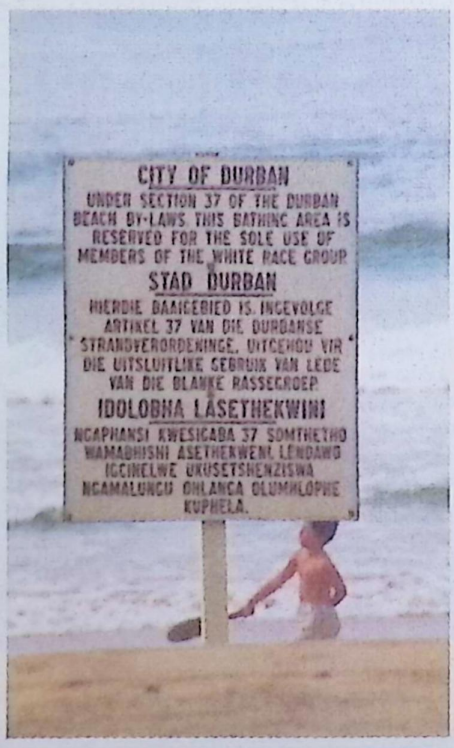
The writer can be contacted at shahnawaz.khan@thedailystar.net

Wearing the Dunce's Cap

FARAH GHUZNAVI

Some months ago, I came across an article featuring the experiences of non-white students at Oxford University, in the UK. Many of them had experienced racism in one form or another, and sometimes in a truly banal form. The degree of ignorance displayed by their peers, in what is widely considered to be one of the most prestigious educational establishments in the world, was striking. Thus, British students who were black were routinely asked which part of Africa they came from - and upon stating that they were British, were asked where they were really from! Clearly, even at places like Oxford, there are still some students who deserve to be standing in the corner wearing the dunce's cap.

Foreign students came in for even more patronising comments. Many were routinely told that their English was "surprisingly good". Something that I find surprising in itself, since English is hardly the most difficult language that most bilinguals speak! Bangla, for example, is a much more complex language. It got worse, of course. A student from Nigeria was even asked whether he spoke "Nigerian"! Not unlike the time that the then American Vice President Dan Quayle went to Latin America and said afterwards how sorry he was that he couldn't address them in their own language because he didn't speak Latin.



Some of the comments from the white Oxford students were incredibly offensive. Thus, students from ethnic minority backgrounds were asked if they sold cocaine (seriously?!) or whether their family reflected "the black stereotype" (presumably another reference to drug use, crime and/or domestic violence). Others were told that Oxford does not "see colour" - which led some of them to ask why that wasn't reflected in the admission statistics! One girl was even told that the only reason she was accepted into the University was because she was black, and fit the diversity criteria.

But of course, such attitudes are less surprising when considered within the wider context of institutional racism. For example, less than half a percent (0.4%) of University professors in the UK are black. If educational authorities can't be trusted to be "colour neutral", how can we expect any better from the students in the institutions that they run?

My own experience as a foreign student at a UK institution of higher learning - in my case, the London School of Economics - proved to me several years ago that a university education was no guarantee against ignorance or prejudice. In fact, when I was doing my undergraduate degree, I had the following conversation with an Australian student. Spoiler alert: I have to confess, I initially thought he was joking(which is why I responded as I did).

Guy: So you are Muslim. How many wives does your father have?

Me: Four, but my mother is the only one that lives in the capital city. The others live in the provinces.

Guy: Wow, so do they all get along? The wives, I mean?

Me: Well, it can get difficult at times - that's why he keeps them all in different places. Anyway, my mother is the only one he has children with. Of course, my brother is their only biological child. I'm adopted.

Guy: Wow, is that difficult for you? I mean, does your brother get treated differently because he's the biological child?

At this point, I couldn't keep a straight face any more, and burst out laughing. He was very offended, saying "Are you kidding me? I asked a perfectly reasonable question. If you are Muslim, your father might have four wives!"

"If my father was the type to have four wives," I responded, in between gasps of laughter, "do you really think he would send his only daughter away to study in London by herself?!"

I would like to believe that such ignorance can be explained away as some form of youthful folly. But even in the workplace, I have encountered similar instances. A German woman who was interning with my office in Bangladesh once complained bitterly

about ignorant Americans who had allegedly asked her if Germany had electricity! The idiocy of that comment actually took my breath away. Unfortunately, she rather ruined my subsequent attempt at sympathyby saying, "It's not like I'm from Bangladesh, where people live in trees"!

My friend Jayant Kripalani said (after I told him this story), that whenever I come across such morons I should respond by saying "We do live in trees. And we also go to schools on caparisoned elephants - but haps? Or just bonkers? A friend of mine once told me that the secretariat of the Queen of England had requested chefs not to put garlic in her food during a trip to Italy. If Queen Elizabeth doesn't have the good taste to appreciate garlic, then the less said about that the better. But while such a request from royalty might be accommodated despite the annoyance, coming from a random non-royal European in a Chinese restaurant, it's undoubtedly a lot worse.



Soviet postal stamp showing brotherhood among races.

always with our retinue of at least fifteen personal retainers." That, he feels, would put people like this in their place. But I fear he is too optimistic.

Anyway, more recently, I was at a rather upmarket Chinese restaurant, when the ubiquitous nature of this kind of casual racism was brought home to me yet again. A Frenchman sitting two tables down from us loudly insisted on having his dish made with basmati rice instead of jasmine rice. Demanding basmati rice in a Chinese restaurant would have been bad enough, but the guy then compounded his sins by sternly instructing the waiter not to serve him anything with soy sauce in it! How could anyone say this in a Chinese restaurant, I wondered. Was he culturally confused, per-

And while I didn't intervene to make the rude remark that was hovering on the tip of my tongue when I overheard this man's soy sauce/basmati rice demands, I was deeply impressed by the response of another friend after she encountered a similar level of obnoxiousness a while ago. Tahera was at a mall in Houston, Texas when an elderly white man – looking around at all the Latino shoppers - addressed a question to her. That particular mall is known to be frequented by rich South Americans who fly in to shop there, but the white gentleman clearly didn't approve. Instead, he asked Tahera, "Where are all the real Americans?" She looked him straight in the eye and responded, "Sir, they are in the reservations." Well said, Tahera!



Rhythmscape 4, acrylic on paper, 2013.

Small is Beautiful

FAYZA HAQ



Cityscape 5, watercolour on paper, 2014.

Azmeer Hossain likes the form of miniature art. When galley Tone was there, and he was not yet a student the Department of Fine Arts, DU, he used to like the exhibition of miniature paintings. In his youth, he had done some miniature type work, but they were still life type work. From 2012, he began doing the small scale paintings side by side with the large ones. When he had his solo at Bengal Gallery, discussing with Rumi, they had decided to do a small show side by side with the large paintings and that is how the miniatures took form.

Here at "Shilpangan", Azmeer had worked with the same style as the large pictures. He wanted to explore further in the mixed media. In a cityscape he has depicted what he could see in his mind's eye. He doesn't see any point in just bringing a realistic representational painting of the city. He saw the forms in



Cityscape 3, watercolour on paper, 2014.

the city for a long time. Carrying the memory of this, he worked from them. This year, towards the beginning, he had gone to Sylhet, to Lala Khal, where he worked on green variations for some time. The layers of green appear like waves in a hillock. He does not work in the traditional water-colour way. He applies various layers to each of his forms in his different drawings.

He creates his perspectives and then brings in his objects. When one sees through the window at the green, one sees the stems of the trees, and some objects, which unintentionally came to the paintings. In the cityscape, we see three basic forms: Cube, triangle and circle. Whatever architectural forms that you see in the city, stems from these shapes, he says. He then makes the compositions according to his own desires. There are many triangle forms to be seen outside. By applying the layers of colours, he prepares the background of the paintings.

The items he has portrayed are buildings, bridges, and sometimes he brings in lines and forms into a painting just to make it more interesting. If he leaves the part without any forms, the painting will look empty in part. For the sake of the composition he brings in the form to fill up the space. Some of the works have empty geometric designs.

What makes the painting stand out is the layered composition. Azmeer takes immense care while putting on the layers of paints. His water colour is



Rhythmscape 5, mixed media on paper, 2014.



Cityscape 1, watercolour on paper, 2013.

fluid: his mixed media is evocative. Sometimes they are like rings of timber. They help him know when the wash was put.

He does not draw what he sees directly. Last year he went to see the Jamuna Bridge, and it came out in his work this year. The bridge has different layers of colours on it and mixed media has been applied here, says Azmeer. Sometimes he sees a window and he applies its colour in his paintings. The small paintings go hand in hand with the large ones. They depict shapes, objects and colours and human emotions.

FOOT TROUBLE

DR MOHAMMED RASHIDUL ANWAR

Diabetes, a disease, which more or else everyone knows about. It is one of the major non-communicable diseases, everyone is concerned about. But does anyone know what serious effect it can have? Diabetes Mellitus (DM) is a disease where the blood glucose levels are high, and this high glucose levels over time can damage the nerves, kidneys, eyes and even blood vessels. It also decreases the immunity of the body, leading to a decrease in the body's ability to fight infection. In one sense it numbs the whole body, resulting in damage escaping notification.

Foot problems commonly develop in people with diabetes and can quickly become serious. According to CDC research, 'In 2008 alone, more than 70,000 people with diabetes had a leg or foot amputated. Amputations in people with diabetes account for more than 60 percent of the amputations of legs and feet not resulting from an injury, such as from a car crash. People with diabetes were eight times as likely to lose a leg or foot to amputation as people without diabetes'

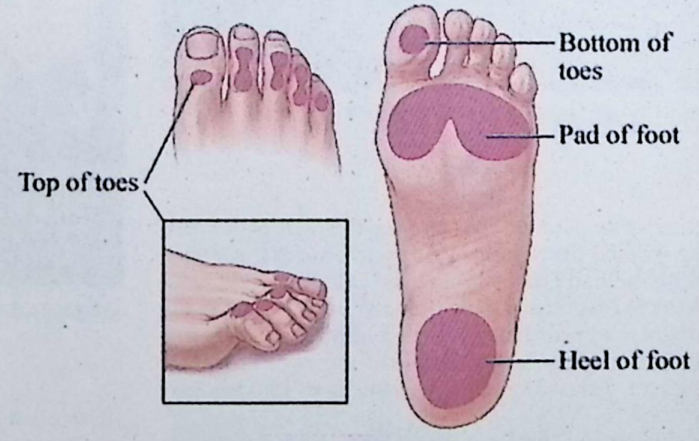
Diabetic foot problems are a major health concern and are a common cause of hospitalisation. The diabetic foot arises from two serious complications of long term diabetes- nerve damage and poor blood circulation. (You may have noticed, injuries in diabetic patients don't get healed easily, this is solely due to lack of blood supply to that area).

Hence it is obvious, that our foot being the most depended part of the body, and being prone to constant pressure, have a high risk of getting minor injuries. The lack of feeling and poor blood flow to the injuries in the foot can allow a minor cut to progress to a serious infection in a matter of days. Nerve damage can cause dry and cracked skin, which becomes a fertile ground for bacteria to enter and cause infection.

Risk Factors

People with diabetes have chances of developing diabetic foot due to the following causes-

- **Foot wear:** Poorly fitting shoes results in blisters, corns, sore spots, etc which may lead to diabetic foot.
- **Trauma:** Any sort of trauma, is a major risk factor for people with diabetes for developing diabetic foot.
- **Nerve damage:** Diabetes results in nerve damage, which sequentially leads to loss of sensation. Diabetic patients may be unable to feel their feet normally, making it more prone to trauma getting unnoticed.



In 2008 alone, more than 70,000 people with diabetes had a leg or foot amputated.



- **Infections:** Fungal infection of the skin or toenails are common from constant use of shoes. Ingrown toenails invariably result in traumas and infection. All these increase the chance of developing diabetic foot.
- **Smoking:** Undoubtedly, the root of all troubles, smoking accelerates blood vessel damages, hence superimposes the risk of developing diabetic foot.

When to Seek Medical Attention

If you have diabetes and if you experience any of these symptoms, contact your health care provider right away

- Not being able of feel hot or cold in your peripheries very well- loss of sensation
- Your feet tingles or hurts
- Change in color or temperature of your feet.
- Skin on your feet gets dry or cracked.
- Tingling, burning or Pain in your feet.
- Cramping in your thighs or calves whenever you do some physical activity
- Toenails turning thick and yellow
- Fungal infection between your toes, unusual itching
- Any sort of abnormality such as blisters, ulcers. Sores, corns, etc in your feet.

Self Care and Prevention

Diabetic patients should take the following steps to prevent losing their leg-

- **Hygiene:** Wash your feet everyday with mild soap and warm water, before going to bed. Pat dry them rather than rubbing vigorously.
- **Moisturiser:** Use lotion to keep feet soft and moist. Prevent dry skin and skin cracks.
- **Trimming nails:** Toe nails should be trimmed right across. Avoid the corners; this will prevent injuries from sharp nail corners. Use the nail file carefully and effectively.
- **Not walking barefoot:** Barefoot walking, increases chances of minor injuries. Always use slippers or shoes, to protect the feet.
- **Stop smoking:** Nothing to say about it. It's the cause of almost any disease you can get.
- **Foot examination:** Regularly examine your foot. Don't avoid the slightest of injuries. Seek immediate care.
- **Keep the floor clean:** Keep the floor off from sharp objects or from anything that you can get hurt from.
- **Exercise:** Regular exercise increases blood flow to all the organs. It also helps keeping the glucose level in check.
- **Diabetes control:** Lastly, get an appointment with a diabetes specialist. Keep your diabetes in control. Remember, diabetes is indifferent from AIDS, only that it can be controlled.

Treatment of diabetic foot is antibiotics and amputation. Save that leg of yours. Diabetes may be hereditary in some cases but diabetic foot is not. It is you who can prevent it.

The writer is a Research Physician of Centre for Child and Adolescent Health (CCAH), ICDDR,B.

Ayub's Diaries

AZIZUL JALIL

What better source to understand the West Pakistani mindset about East Pakistan than to delve into the remarks in Diaries of Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan, who ruled the country from 1958 to 1969? The diaries, published posthumously by the Oxford University Press in 2007, reveal his attitudes and thinking about Bengalis and the inter-wing issues. To him, East Pakistan's relatively slow rate of growth was because of lack of investment opportunities and availability of skilled labour and infrastructure. These were also the reasons why more foreign aid and investments went to West Pakistan.

As government officers in Rawalpindi and Islamabad in the mid-to- late nineteen-sixties, a few of us watched and experienced at close quarters how East Pakistan's reasonable demands were suppressed on one flimsy ground or the other, usually on the ground of lack of its absorptive capacity. In 1969, towards the last phase of united Pakistan, the fourth Five Year Plan (FYP) was drawn up by the Pakistan Planning Commission with a larger share of the allocations going to West Pakistan. Some of us, the Bengali CSP officers in the central economic ministries and the Planning Commission, lobbied the East Pakistani central ministers verbally and through written notes briefing them to speak out in the cabinet deliberations of the plan for a more equitable distribution of investment funds, if necessary by reducing West Pakistan's plan allocations. They were successful in blocking the approval of the draft plan.

However, in view of the general elections in late 1970 and the subsequent constitutional impasse, the plan discussions became moot. After the breakdown of the talks between the East Pakistan's leaders and the Yahya regime in March 1971, murderous oppression and killings started in East Pakistan, which completely alienated the Bengali population. As a result of the activities of the Bengali freedom fighters, the intervention of the Indian Army and world opinion, Bangladesh was born before the end of the year.

The implications of the 1965 Indo-Pak war, the Agartala conspiracy case against Sheikh Mujib (1967-69) and others, the fiery political agitations of 1969 and the results of the 1970 elections were not fully appreciated by the government in Pakistan. They, particularly the army junta, were oblivious of the mood of the people of East Pakistan, who though not yet necessarily desirous of complete separation from Pakistan, wanted full provincial autonomy and the dignity and power of the majority wing in the state of Pakistan under a loose confederation.

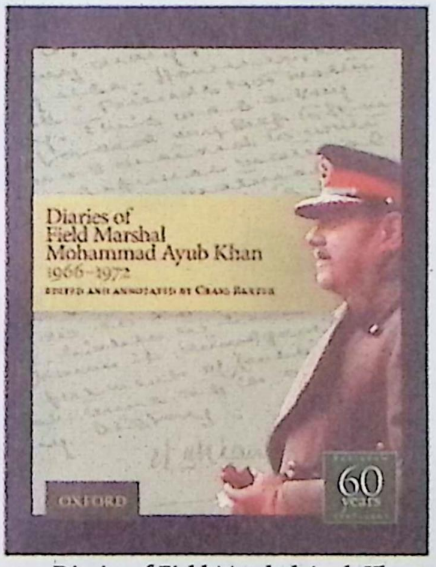
As amply demonstrated by the ignorant remarks of the Sandhurst trained Ayub, there was something fundamentally wrong in West Pakistani assessment of the Bengali faith and cultural tradition.

By this time, the Pakistani authorities may have written off East Pakistan from the state of Pakistan, particularly as they realised that East Pakistan's demands had to be fully conceded. It appears, however, that in some powerful section of the West Pakistani army there was still a belief that one last attempt at forcibly subjugating the Bengalis might be worthwhile. They did not take into account the will of the people, India's strength and extent to which it would get involved and the lack of determination of the US and the Chinese governments to intervene forcefully. They may have believed that Sheikh Mujib, who fought hard for the creation of Pakistan, would not in the end destroy Pakistan. Some of them even mistakenly believed that the prize of becoming the prime minister of Pakistan was great and Sheikh Mujib might in the end make some concessions in the Six-Points demands for the sake of keeping Pakistan together. From his diaries it seems Ayub also believed so.

Going back to the Ayub times, Zaker Hossain, then governor of East Pakistan, had in 1960 placed before Ayub the province's demands for economic resources. Ayub wondered if the governor had himself drafted those unacceptable proposals. The latter replied that it had come from the chief secretary (a West Pakistani CSP officer) who was present at the meeting. In late 1967, I had personally heard from Dr MN Huda, the then East Pakistan's Finance Minister, how Ayub rebuked him before others for merely pointing out that disparity between the East and West growth rates. Altaf Gauhar, when asked by Ayub to reply, said that the rate of growth in disparity had decreased but the overall disparity between the two wings had increased. It was a Machiavellian state-

ment, commonly practiced by West Pakistani civilians to avoid more substantive actions. From Justice Ibrahim's (then the Central Law minister) diaries published in 2012 by the Academic Press, one sees how for making a constitutional proposal of autonomy for East Pakistan in the 1962 draft constitution, he was considered a secessionist by Ayub.

According to Ayub, even his East Pakistani ministers and other appointees, instead of pacifying their compatriots, were adding fuel to the fire and behaving in a disloyal manner. To him Monem Khan, the governor in 1962-1969, was good in this respect but had limitations as he did not understand economic development. We do not have to go back to Ayub's first book giving his ideas of governance in Pakistan titled " Friends not Masters" to understand what lowly opinion he held about Bengalis and East Pakistan, where he started his career in Pakistan as the GOC of 14th division in a Dhaka. It was full of derogatory and disparaging remarks. The best is to see how his thinking had developed on that subject in 1966 and following years as recorded by him in the diaries. From the beginning to the end, it is full of his pride and arrogance, his dislike of the politicians and their kind, and his requirement of absolute, ridiculous loyalty, from his appointees. Naturally, he kept on changing his ministers and high civil servants based on what he heard about their disloyalty or whenever he thought that they were not delivering to his satisfaction, while all the time harbouring in his mind highly biased views of the Bengalis.



Diaries of Field Marshal Ayub Khan 1966-1972
By Craig Baxter (Editor)
The University Press Limited (UPL)
Pp 599; 1590.00 BDT

Below I quote verbatim from Ayub Khan's Diaries.

During a visit to East Pakistan in Dec. 1966, Ayub praising his Law minister, Zafar, states: "The law minister has come under criticism by the section of Bengalis of secessionist and parochial tendencies for having dubbed such people as traitors and enemies of the country. I am glad he let them have it, as this is the sort of language in which they should be spoken to. The time for mincing words has gone."

In May 1967, Ayub writes in his diary about the situation in East Pakistan:" They are consciously Hinduising the language and culture. Tagore has become their god. Everything has been Bengalised, even the plate numbers on vehicles are in Bengali. A man from West Pakistan feels like a foreigner in Dhaka. Consciously or unconsciously, they are moving towards separation and exposing themselves to absorption by Hinduism."

In August 1967, Ayub writes: "through emotional upsurge the East Pakistani had cut himself off from Urdu, the vehicle in which Muslim thought and philosophy is expressed. In consequence, he was now totally at sea, drifting. This will prove very dangerous for their future. Without meaning any unkindness, the fact of the matter is that a large majority of the Muslims in East Pakistan have an animist base which is a thick layer of Hinduism and top crust of Islam which is pierced by Hinduism from time to time."

In September 1967, Ayub tells Khwaja Shahabuddin:" God has been unkind to us in giving the sort of neighbours and compatriots we have. We could not think of a worst combination. If worse comes to the worst, we shall not hesitate to fight a relentless battle against the disruptionists in East Pakistan. Rivers of blood will flow if need be, unhappily. We will arise to save our crores of Muslims from Hindu slavery."

In December 1967, after attending a meeting in Dhaka of the Economic Council on the subject of growing disparity in GNP between the two wings, Ayub writes: "how do you deploy defence forces and split the central government to meet their needs of parity is not understood, and how will spending more money in the public sector do any good when the private sector, which produces goods and services, is not allowed to grow. East Pakistan was a bottomless pit. Both the centre and West Pakistan are suffering through trying to fill it."

In early 1968, on the subject of the reasons for lagging of the private sector in East Pakistan, Ayub wrote in his diary: "the real cause... was the antipathy and abhorrence of the government and people of East Pakistan to the intervention of West Pakistan and foreign capital, and through poor work performance and poor discipline... The whole object is to get whatever they can by blackmail. How long will this partnership last, I do not know."

Ayub Khan was quite right in wondering about the longevity of the union of East and West Pakistan. It did not last long-only about three more years of bloody conflicts till December 16, 1971. As amply demonstrated by the ignorant remarks of the Sandhurst trained Ayub, there was something fundamentally wrong in West Pakistani assessment of the Bengali faith and cultural tradition. They just did not get it and that was one of the reasons, along with economic disparity that led to the dissolution of Pakistan. ■

It Starts with Us

One of my cousins recently went abroad and is intending to settle there permanently. Before he left the country, I spoke to him, and asked him why he wanted to do so. He mentioned the various things that were wrong with Bangladesh – poverty, population, pollution, the traffic, being some of them. He further stated that the standard of living in Bangladesh is terrible. I agreed with him that the infrastructure of the country was not up to the mark but asked him how things would get better if the literate, talented youth of the country planned to permanently settle abroad.

We have a myriad of problems. And so it's on us to solve them instead of fleeing from them. It is our country and we need to make it better.

Ryana Imtiaz
Mohammadpur Preparatory School
Dhaka



PHOTO: STAR FILE

A Glimpse of Humanity

I witnessed an accident while being stuck in a traffic jam. A young boy, who broke into a run to cross the road, was hit by a motorcycle which severely injured his foot. But instead of being helpful, the passersby and onlookers were scolding him for being reckless. The motorcyclist was checking on his nephew, who seemed shaken but was otherwise fine, to ensure that he was alright. I thought that the cyclist was very inconsiderate as he seemed to be neglecting the injured boy who was probably the same age as his nephew. However, to my surprise, after reprimanding the boy for a while, he helped him to his motorbike, helping him to sit in front of his nephew. He informed the onlookers that he would take the boy to a nearby hospital. I was happy that he realised that it was his duty to save the child.

Raki Khan
University of Dhaka

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Politics



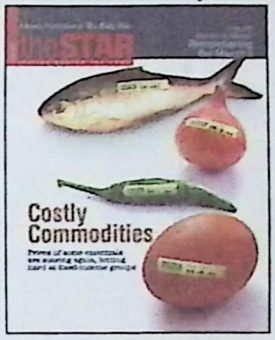
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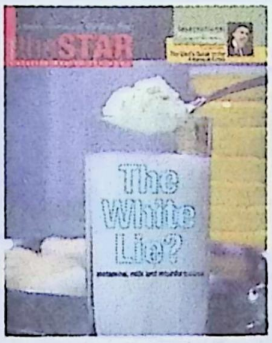
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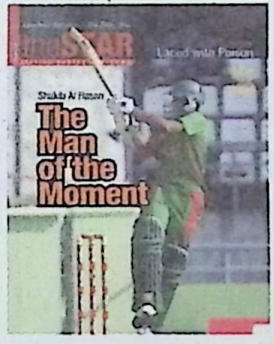
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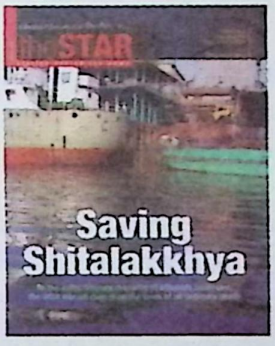
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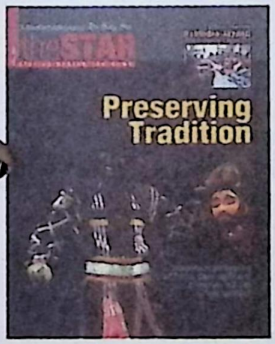
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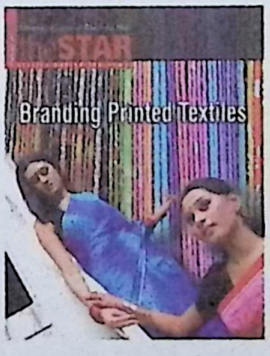
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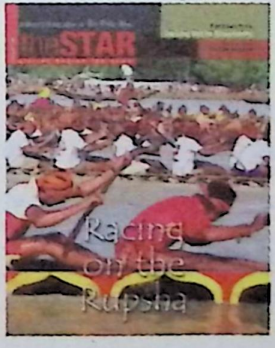
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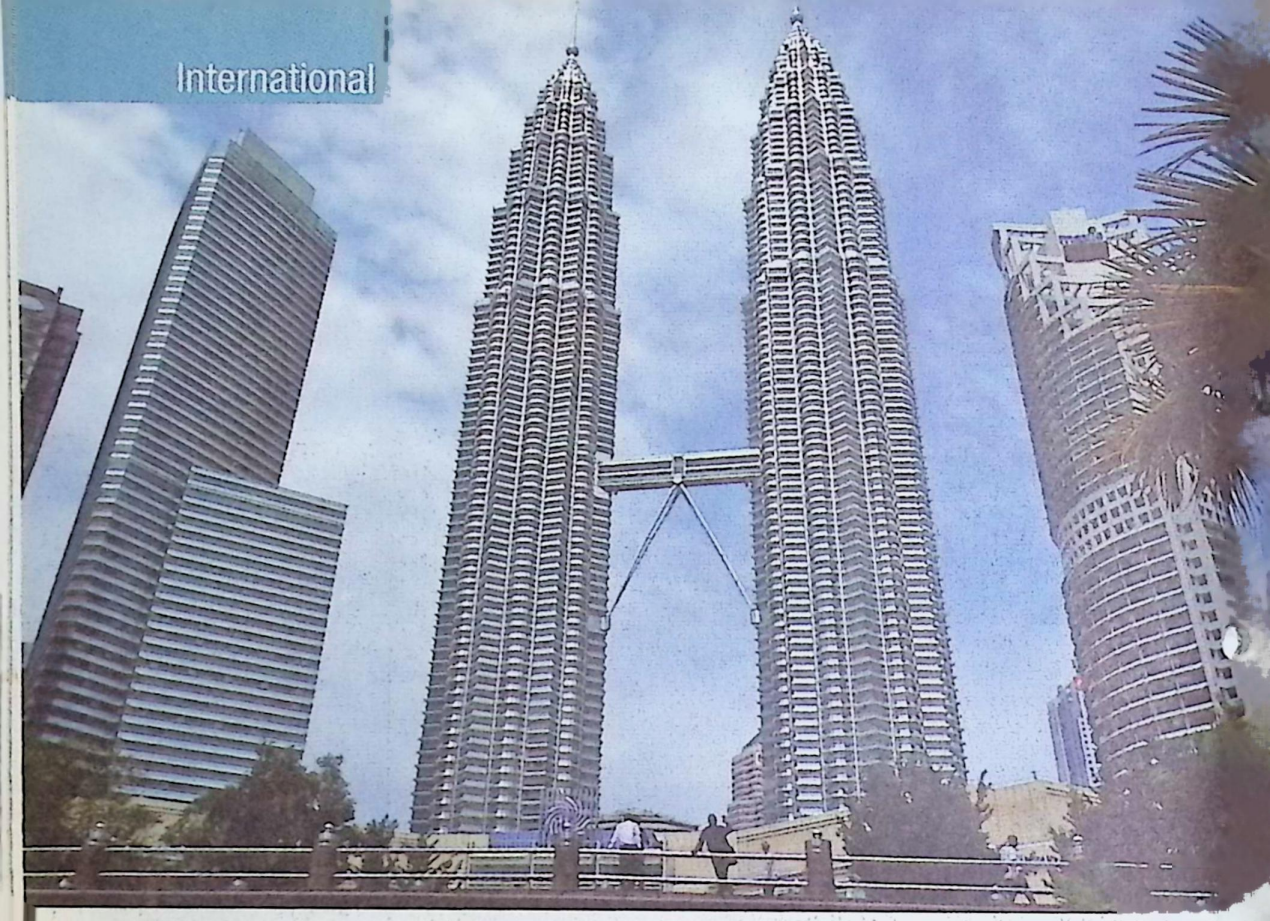
Personality



Heritage



stories behind the news



Great Expectations

The last time Malaysia was elected to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), it received an overwhelming 174 votes out of 176 cast. That was 16 years ago.

It was the highest votes among the five countries elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the 1999/2000 term. That was also the third time Malaysia won the seat. Previously, Malaysia sat on the non-permanent seat in 1989/90 and 1965.

As Prime Minister Najib Razak starts his working visit to the UN this week to help lobby and secure the non-permanent seat, it is worth remembering that Malaysia achieved its best record in 1998 at a time when the country was undergoing economic and political turmoil. Could Malaysia repeat the feat or perform even better than the last election nearly two decades ago?

It's a tall order. Expectations are high for the current team in New York to perform. At the last count, officials are confident of getting more than 180 votes out of the 193 voting countries.

There are six countries – Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain, Turkey and Venezuela – vying for five seats. The Security Council is the most important UN decision-making body. Five permanent members of the council – Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States – enjoy veto power over its decisions.

The 10 non-permanent seats are filled by members of the UN General Assembly, with five countries elected each year to two-year non-renewable mandates. A candidate nation has to win two-thirds of the votes cast in a secret ballot.

Malaysia's candidacy has already received the endorsement of the Asia-Pacific Group at the UN during its monthly meeting in New York in January. Within this group, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has also endorsed Malaysia's candidacy. And of course Malaysia received the full endorsement of Asean.

Still, Kuala Lumpur is not taking any chances. Unlike the last election when retired ambassadors were appointed as special envoys to lobby for votes,

Wisma Putra this time conducted high-level travels all over the world.

Wherever they could, whether at international conferences in Samoa or bilateral visits to countries like Kazakhstan, the team has been meeting their counterparts and lobbying to secure the votes. Malaysia formally submitted its candidacy for the 2015-2016 term on June 15, 2001, shortly after concluding its UNSC membership for the 1999-2000 term.

The 2015-2016 term was selected, among other reasons, because it was the earliest term to be uncontested for the Asia Pacific Group at that point in time. The last election Malaysia was vying for the seat to be vacated by Japan. This year Kuala Lumpur is vying for the seat to be vacated by South Korea.

So in the "campaigns" conducted by Malaysia, the team has been engaging with member states. "We are not just lobbying their support, but we are also taking the advantage by exchanging views with different countries on issues of concern on the UNSC's agenda," said an official.

It is something much appreciated by several African, eastern European and Latin American countries as Malaysia is willing to hear the diverse views from other regions on issues of peace and international security.

Malaysia believes moderation provides the best approach in resolving differences and conflicts peacefully and because of this, it decided to give the theme to the UNSC campaign of "Peace and Security Through Moderation".



Malaysia achieved its best record in 1998, at a time when the country was undergoing economic and political turmoil.

Officials believed that moderation, which has been successfully practised by Malaysia and other Asean neighbours, could be applied to other conflicts and situations in other parts of the world. While some issues around the world are getting to be more complex, other old issues are still on the table.

The situation in Syria, sectarian violence, the Sunni-Shia conflict or managing the territorial dispute in the South China Sea must be addressed. It will be interesting how Malaysia, when it is eventually elected to the seat, plays its role on the global stage.

Malaysia should not just be warming up the seat. There are many challenges and issues waiting ahead.

MERGAWATI ZULFAKAR
ANN/ The Star



PHOTO COURTESY: SCIENCE DAILY

A wife's happiness is more crucial than her husband's in keeping marriage on track

When it comes to a happy marriage, a new Rutgers study finds that the more content the wife is with the long-term union, the happier the husband is with his life no matter how he feels about their nuptials.

"I think it comes down to the fact that when a wife is satisfied with the marriage she tends to do a lot more for her husband, which has a positive effect on his life," said Deborah Carr, a professor in the Department of Sociology, School of Arts and Science. "Men tend to be less vocal about their relationships and their level of marital unhappiness might not be translated to their wives."

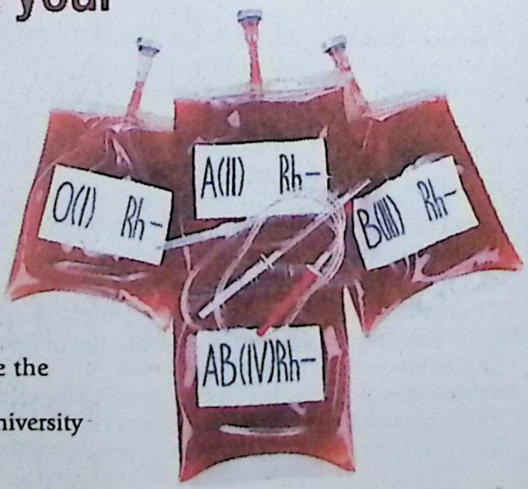
Carr and Vicki Freedman, a research professor at the University of Michigan, co-authored the study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family.*

Can your blood type affect your memory in later years?

People with blood type AB may be more likely to develop memory loss in later years than people with other blood types, according to a study published in the journal *Neurology.*

The study found that people with AB blood were 82 percent more likely to develop the thinking and memory problems that can lead to dementia than people with other blood types. Previous studies have shown that people with type O blood have a lower risk of heart disease and stroke, factors that can increase the risk of memory loss and dementia.

The study was authored by Mary Cushman, MD, of the University Of Vermont College Of Medicine in Burlington.



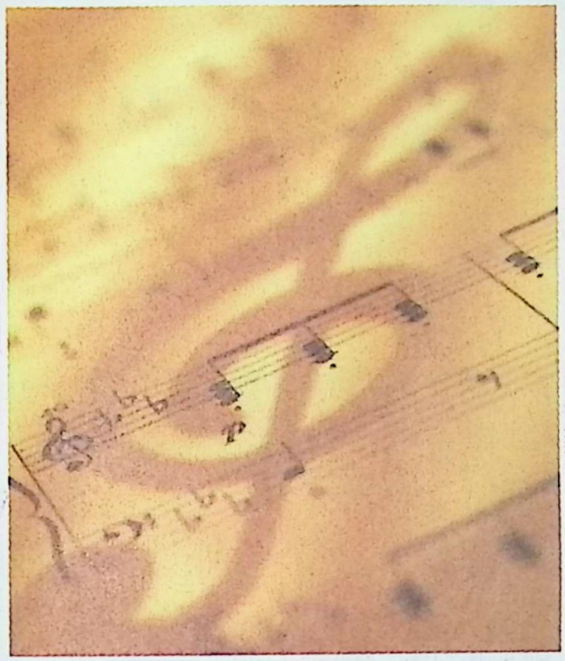


PHOTO COURTESY: SCIENCE DAILY

Creating simplicity
How music fools the ear

What makes music beautiful? The best compositions transcend culture and time -- but what is the commonality which underscores their appeal?

New research published in BioMed Central's open access journal *BMC Research Notes* suggests that the brain simplifies complex patterns, much in the same way that 'lossless' music compression formats reduce audio files, by removing redundant data and identifying patterns.

Dr Nicholas Hudson used 'lossless' music compression programs to mimic the brain's ability to condense audio information. Dr Nicholas Hudson writes, "Enduring musical masterpieces, despite apparent complexity, possess high compressibility" and that it is this compressibility that we respond to. So whether you are a diehard classicist or a pop diva it seems that we chose the music we prefer, not by simply listening to it, but by calculating its compressibility.

Babies are born to dance, new research shows

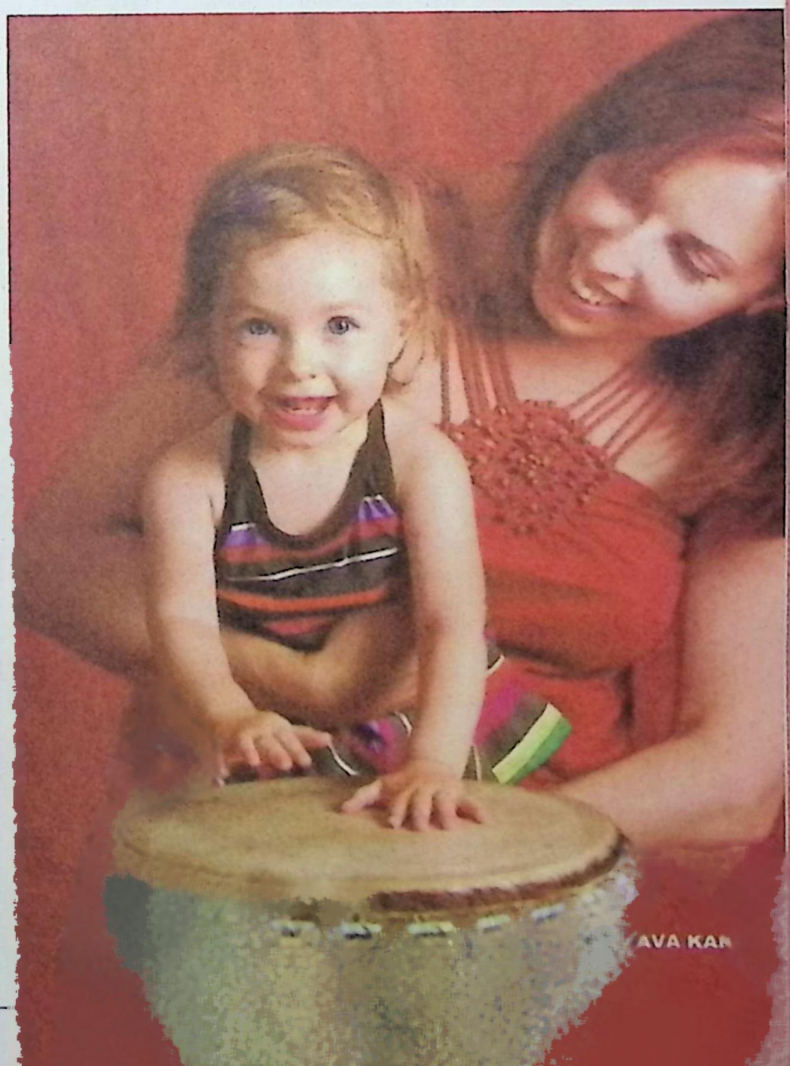
Researchers have discovered that infants respond to the rhythm and tempo of music and find it more engaging than speech.

The findings, based on the study of infants aged between five months and two years old, suggest that babies may be born with a predisposition to move rhythmically in response to music.

The research was conducted by Dr Marcel Zentner, from the University of York's Department of Psychology, and Dr Tuomas Eerola of the University of Jyvaskyla, Finland.

Dr Zentner writes, "Our research suggests that it is the beat rather than other features of the music, such as the melody, that produces the response in infants."

"We also found that the better the children were able to synchronize their movements with the music the more they smiled.

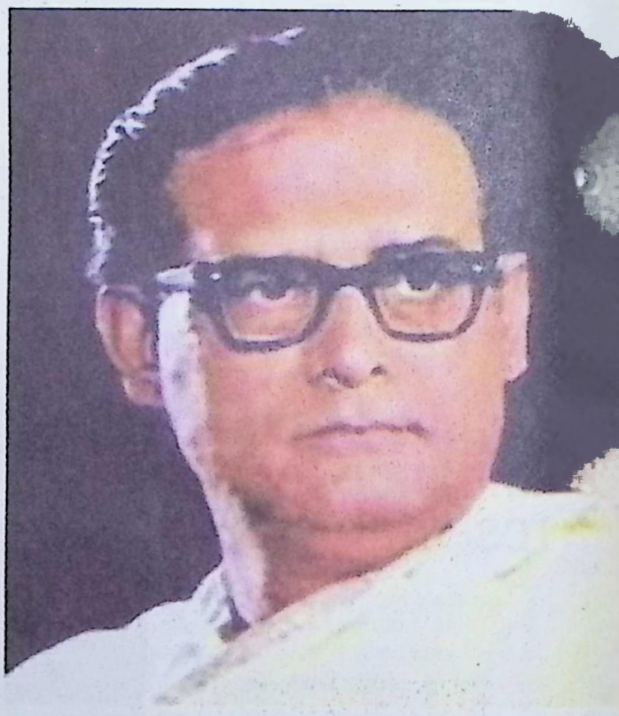


Remembering the Songbird

Hemanta Kumar Mukherjee is one of the most renowned singers and composers of the sub-continent. Many of his songs in Bengali and Hindi have conquered the heart of the music lovers around the world. Apart from hundreds of his evergreen playbacks, he is one the most heard singers of Tagore songs. He was also a renowned film producer. We remember this great personality on his 25th death anniversary.

- Hemanta was born in the city of Varanasi on June 16, 1920
- He grew up in Calcutta and studied at Mitra Institution
- Hemanta left engineering school to pursue a career in music despite the objection of his parents and relatives

- Before becoming entirely committed to music, Hemanta wrote several short stories which were published in a prestigious Bengali magazine called Desh
- As suggested by his friend Subhas, Hemanta recorded his first song for All India Radio in 1935
- Hemanta's first playback was in the Bengali film called Nimai Sanyas released in 1941



Hemanta Kumar Mukherjee

- Hemanta launched his first gramophone disc of non-film songs in 1937 and the songs were *Janite Jadi Go Tumi and Balo Go Balo More*
- He first launched his disc of Tagore songs in 1944 which included *Amar Aar Habe Na Deri and Keno Pantha E Chanchalata*
- His first film as a music director was in the Bengali film *Abhiyatri* in 1947

- By the mid-1950s, Hemanta became a prominent singer and composer both in Bengali and Hindi
- He composed music for a Hindi film called *Nagin* (1954) which became a major success owing largely to its music
- In the late 1950s, Hemanta ventured into movie production under his own banner Hemanta-Bela productions (later renamed as Geetanjali Productions)
- The first movie under this banner was a Bengali film directed by Mrinal Sen, titled *Neel Akasher Neechey* (1959) which won the Presidnet's Gold Medal

- Hemanta debuted as a film director in the Bengali movie titled *Anindita* (1971, which he himself had produced
- In 1987, he was nominated for the Padmabhushan which he politely refused, having already turned down the offer to receive the Padmashree in the 1970s
- In September 1989, he travelled to Dhaka to receive the Michael Madhusudan Award and performed in a concert as well
- On September 26, 1989 Hemanta suffered a major heart attack and died in a nursing home in South Calcutta

– MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

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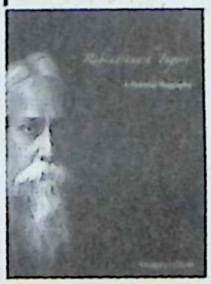
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Eye Contact

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

Boy sees girl on the verandah opposite his apartment. She is in white, her hair floats in the wind. His heart misses a beat. Then, the most magical thing happens. She sees him. Their eyes lock in a hypnotic, exhilarating trance. The rest, maybe history.

Eye contact is no doubt the most crucial stage of a possible romance. It is the prelude to all the silly, dizziness of being in love. Forget virtual kisses and hugs and amorous chatting on Skype. Nothing can compare with old-fashioned 'seeing each other for the first time'. It is the basis of such a ludicrous notion as love at first sight.



'Eye in Eye' (1894) by Edvard Munch.

Communication gurus keep emphasising the importance of eye contact in grabbing people's attention and creating a good impression. 'Look them in the eye' they insist when being interviewed, when someone is talking to you, when trying to argue a point or giving a talk.

But there are some situations where eye contact is best avoided.

At a roadside restaurant on the highway it would be detrimental to one's health to make eye contact with that curious character with the bloodshot eyes and rippling muscles and the expression of a temperamental Rottweiler. It is best that you make a quick exit from the place and run like the rabbit that would have been hunted down by the rabid Rottweiler.

Similarly, while sweating it out in some suffocating gridlock, making eye contact with beggars or mobile vendors selling pirated books and psychedelic light sticks is not a smart move. Not only will they swarm to you like bees to a honeycomb, they will stand in front of you and continue their refrain until you, in utter frustration, bring out the dough. And once you do that it will be an endless stream of unwanted visitors at your unenviable spot in the choking traffic. Try not to resentfully glare at the people around you who look highly amused by your predicament: You never know what nutjob you are locking eyes with.

Speaking of which, it is highly unlikely that making eye contact with the naked, dreadlocked 'pagla baba', will bring forth any positive results. Instead, you may appear threatening to him even though you are practically paralysed with fear. Looking into his eyes directly may provoke physical assault or embarrassing verbal abuse.

Making eye contact with animals that have sharp teeth and claws, which have the capability of tearing you into uncountable shreds, is also not wise. Thus looking directly at grizzly bears, Bengal tigers and Dingos is out. Vampires too, in case you come across them.

When approaching immigration officers, avoiding eye contact is almost a reflex action. For some inexplicable reason, no matter how foolproof your documents are, immigration officers know how to make you look and feel guilty. They seem suspicious of practically everything -- even your middle name. But sometimes it is better to just look them in the eye and answer the questions. Eye contact makes you seem less like a gold smuggler, drug trafficker, illegal immigrant or absconding terrorist.

Speaking of reflex actions, teenagers do not look their mother in the eye 90 percent of the time. Often this is because mothers have a sixth sense when it comes to telling if their sons and daughters are lying which is often 'necessary' during all the things they have been told not to do -- drinking, dating, smoking, chatting online at ungodly hours, driving without a license, bunking class etc.

Many boys and men avoid eye contact with most females who are not potential love interests because they are shy or mortally afraid of women, especially if they are middle-aged or older or are trying to hide something. Others may just be ill mannered.

Strangers in lifts will painstakingly avoid eye contact, taking an avid interest in people's shoes or texting and gaming on their phones. In a lift, making eye contact and continuing to stare may make you look creepy and a little insane.

Thus the power of eye contact or its avoidance should not be underestimated, which is why absent-mindedly staring into space may bring unwelcome results. You may find some ogling idiot staring right back at you and grinning expectantly assuming you are trying to make eye contact. ■