

SHUTTERSTORIES

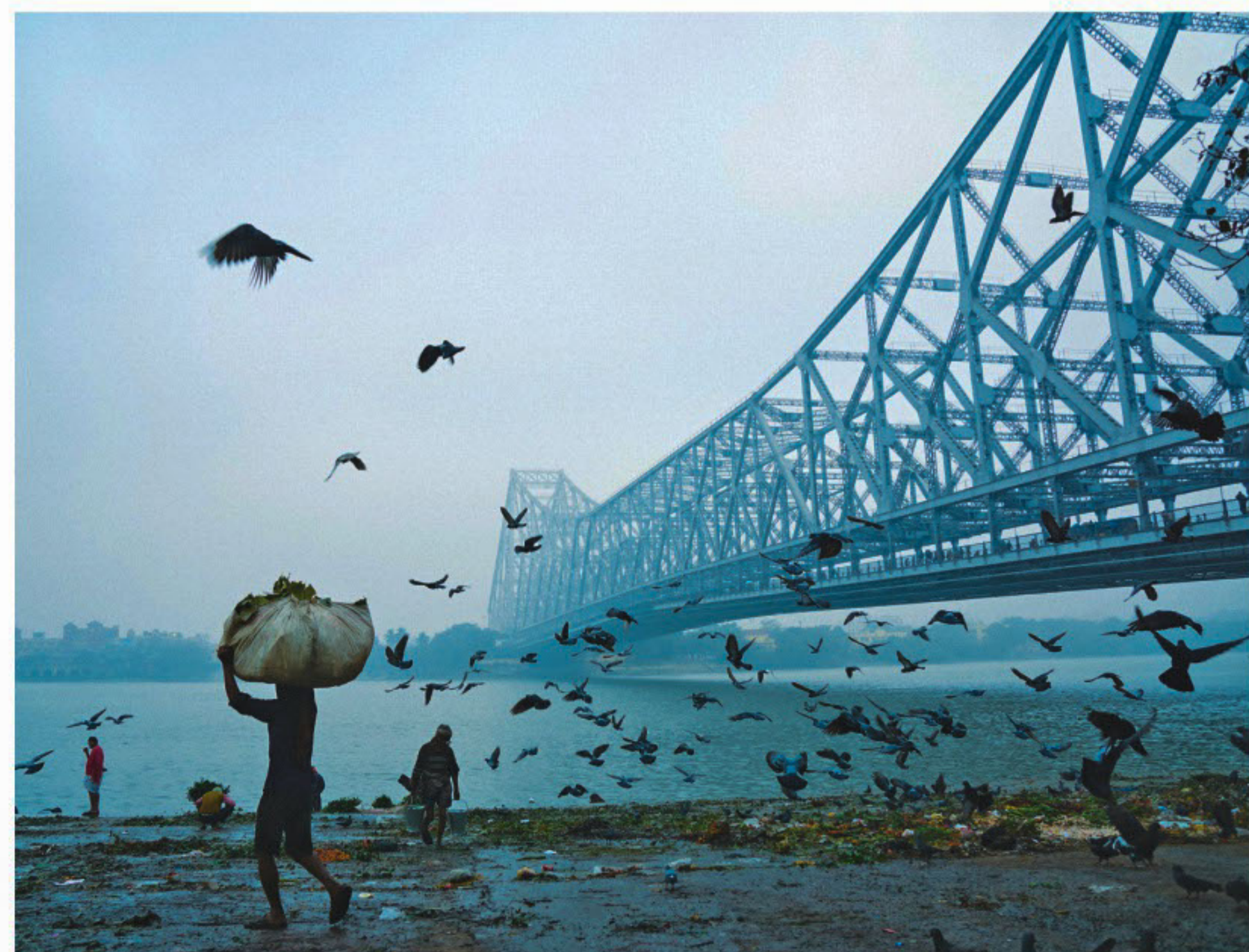


CITY OF MAGIC

PHOTOS: AMIR HAMJA

TEXT: NAZIBA BASHER

In Kolkata, the very air you breathe seeds culture into your soul. You can catch an early morning shave in an alley on your way to the infamous coffeehouse for the infamous 'adda', or you can discuss the day, the world, and anything under the sun with a random passerby. The bright yellow Ambassador cabs riding down the vintage streets, the gop gappas on every corner, the inspiring architecture, the history, and everything about Kolkata can seep romance and magic into your very veins.



STRIKING A CHORD

It is disheartening and quite scary to find the government slightly tweaking the law, where under-aged girls are concerned. Although the minimum marriageable age of girls will remain unchanged at 18, a rule of the proposed Child Marriage Restraint Act would allow girls, aged 16 to 18, to get married under special circumstances, with permission from courts or their parents.

According to the authorities, people would not be able to use this clause at their whims. The rule will be applied in case of 'unwanted situation' such as pregnancy before marriage, or young girls eloping and 'undermining' their families in society. "The clause will be there in the rules. It would clearly state under what circumstances the clause could be applied," State Minister for Women and Children Affairs, Meher Afroze Chumki told a policy dialogue titled "Prevention of Child Marriage in Bangladesh".

Surprisingly enough, the introduction of the rule under special circumstances, sparked a debate amongst family members, thinkers and professionals at work places, clearly defining a divide amongst those who support this rule and those who do not think it is safe or logical for children to even consider marriage in the first place. "I agree with this rule. There are maybe thousands in the rural areas who get their daughters married off once they become teenagers," says 56-year-old Tasneem Hayat Shaju, a homemaker based in Mirpur. "They do this out of desperation. They do this to protect their daughters from sexual harassment, 'eve teasing' and also to survive in society. At the end of the day, if the marriage bureaus are okay with registering the under-aged girl as married, as it has been happening in our society, I think it's well and good that the government policy makers have introduced it as a rule."

Even at this day and age, a solution to every 'problem' faced by women, especially young women is to get her married off, sending her off to her 'real' home and doing what she is destined to do. Allowing 16-year-old girls to get married is not the solution to the problems of elopement and teenaged pregnancy.

According to a Unicef report, the Star of the World's Children, at least 65 percent girls are married off before they reach 18, in Bangladesh. In a society where 12 to 14-year-old girls are married off on a regular basis, despite having the bar at 18, this rule will unleash an absolute field day for many.

MOVING BACKWARDS

ELITA KARIM

According to a Daily Star report, Executive Director of Manusher Jonno Foundation Shaheen Anam questioned the exception to the proposed law. "If it is not in the law, how can it be put in the rules? The most important consideration should be the well-being of girls in the long term. We have to think whether marrying off a girl with someone she has had a relationship with would bring long-term

well-being for her or not," added the rights activist.

Sara Hossain, honorary executive director of Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust, said: "It's not clear how, if there is no discretion in the law itself, the exception could be permitted in the rules which have not been framed yet." She also observed that there should be a consistency in defining a child in the laws of the land.

This rule will bring nothing but mayhem in the lives of young women in Bangladesh, especially when several steps are taken every year to bring them in touch with the world, to make them more confident and also to be independent citizens of the country. This might help the country where statistics are concerned – child marriage will dramatically decrease on the graphs – but this will be moving backwards, another step closer to the dark ages.



Ninth grader Ayesha Khanam, 14, left, of Lohagora in Narail was set to be married yesterday. The Lohagora upazila nirbahi officer, centre, intervened and fined the families. PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

ABOUT TOWN

COCA COLA FOODIES BIG SATURDAY FEAST
March 5, 2016, International Convention City Bashundhara - ICCB
Kuril Bishwa Road, Next to 300 ft. Purbachal Express Highway

solo art exhibition
Time, Coincidence & History
Dhali Al Mamnoon
23 January 2016
The exhibition will remain open until 19 March 2016 daily from 12-8 pm

TIME, COINCIDENCE & HISTORY
January 23 to March 19, 2016, Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts