

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Azhar mosque, Cairo.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

CAIRO

Cairo, the capital of Egypt, has 20 million people spread over 600 square miles. Founded over a thousand years ago during the Fatimid dynasty, it is historically rich and strategically important. But for me Cairo is also the home of the grand storyteller Naguib Mahfouz who deftly weaved tales of this intricate city in his *Cairo Trilogy*.

On a short visit to Cairo with family, I alternate between the two facets of this great city: immersing myself in the present while marvelling at its history.

Walking through the older Cairo neighbourhoods, where neighbours smoke hookahs around a cafe table, children play on the narrow streets on their way to school and housewives negotiate the price of meat with the butcher, something seems very familiar. This could very well be one of the *mahallas* (neighbourhoods) of old Dhaka.

But only a short taxi ride away is a fort on top of a hill: the massive Citadel, build by none other than the great Salahuddin. We reach here in late afternoon and enjoy beautiful views of the city in the setting sun. Also on the hill is the Mosque of Mohammed Ali, which looks like the mosques of Istanbul from the outside. In the cavernous interior, stained glass filters the sun's rays into a multitude of colours.

If the Citadel is grand, Tahrir Square is anti-climatic. The scene of recent uprisings appears to be nothing more than a busy traffic roundabout. I am reminded of foreign visitors when I take them to Shahid Minar: they understand my words, but looking at their faces I can see them struggling to fathom its significance.

One afternoon my son leads us to another Cairo landmark: Koshary Abo Tarek. This low-profile restaurant serves *koshary*, a dish made of lentils,

rice and small elbow macaroni, flavoured by spices and topped off with browned shallots. The waiter is used to tourists. He shows us how to blend the sauces, lemon juice and garlic with the dish. Taking a cash advance from every table before the meal, he relies on a prodigious memory to calculate the total and return exact change afterwards. The *koshary* is delicious, filling and inexpensive (about BDT 40.)

Another time we visit the Naguib Mahfouz Cafe in the middle of Khan al Khalili, the great souk of Cairo. We sip tea, coffee and *sahleb* while well-heeled Cairenes – men and women – around us smoke hookahs and talk boisterously. I can't recall whether Mahfouz frequented this cafe, but his favourite hangouts included the Ali Baba Cafe and the Orabi Coffee Shop, both of which appear closed.

There are numerous references to birds and animals among the artefacts in the Egyptian Museum, but in today's Cairo, the cat is king. There are cats of every shape, size and stripe, often luxuriating in the attention showered upon them. Among birds I see Pied Crows, White Wagtails, Sparrows and the beautiful red Laughing Dove.

Cairenes are polite and smooth to a fault with the exception of a taxi driver we had the misfortune to hire. He "understands what he understands," taking us to the wrong hotel and losing his way again and again until, alarmed at the prospect of missing our flight, we release him and find another taxi.

I try to imagine life in this city whose air has a whiff of lost grandeur, whose people have unlimited charm and whose madness belies its method. Not my cup of tea, but I feel fortunate to have made its acquaintance.

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Safe water for Rohingyas

UNHCR, partners adopt green technology at refugee camps; 9 more solar-powered water networks to be installed at Kutupalong

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, and its partners have been turning to green and nonpolluting technology, including solar power, to help provide safe, clean water to Rohingya refugees living in the crowded settlements at Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.

Over the past six months, five new safe water networks funded by UNHCR have been completed in the Kutupalong-Balukhali refugee sites that are fully powered by solar energy. Solar panels generate enough energy to produce electricity to run motorised water pumps.

The pumping system draws water from newly-installed 70,000-litre chlorinated water tanks. Water is then pumped to tap stands, installed close to refugee households.

The aim is to provide 20 litres of potable water to every refugee daily for drinking and cooking, according to a press release of UNHCR yesterday.

More than 900,000 Rohingya refugees are living across 36 different locations in Bangladesh. Water is scarce in most locations. In the dry season, especially in areas like Nayapara, often the only solution is water trucking, which is very costly.

It has been challenging to secure adequate water sources for the entire refugee population, most of

whom fled to Bangladesh in late 2017. That is why UNHCR and its partners have stepped up their efforts throughout 2018 to address the massive water and sanitation needs.

"The improved water networks are completely solar powered in order to reduce energy costs and fuel

the household level," Wilson said. "Chlorinating helps in maintaining safe water and eliminates any risk of spread of disease," he added. "Previous water sources, mainly boreholes fitted with hand pumps were often highly contaminated by waste water penetrating the aquifer from which the wells

water networks across Kutupalong refugee camp in the coming year, at a cost of USD \$10 million.

Efforts to provide enough safe drinking water for refugees across all the heavily congested sites has been a massive challenge for humanitarian agencies, requiring the drilling of thousands of deep tube-wells and building water networks including the installation of pipes, dams, canals, filtering mechanisms and chlorination systems.

Throughout 2018, UNHCR has stepped up efforts in water and sanitation by investing in green technologies that save energy and reduce pollution.

It has also expanded its team in Cox's Bazar, bringing in more experts and new partners, to build dams in water streams to create water reservoirs from which clean and chlorinated potable water will be produced.

By investing in new technologies that save energy, the agency is ensuring the provision of sustainable safe and clean water to every refugee.

UNHCR has been working closely with the government of Bangladesh to identify water sources and provide expert advice with permission to dig tube-wells and build other structures such as water reservoirs, water treatment plants, pipelines, water storage tanks, chlorination systems and boreholes fitted with hand pumps.

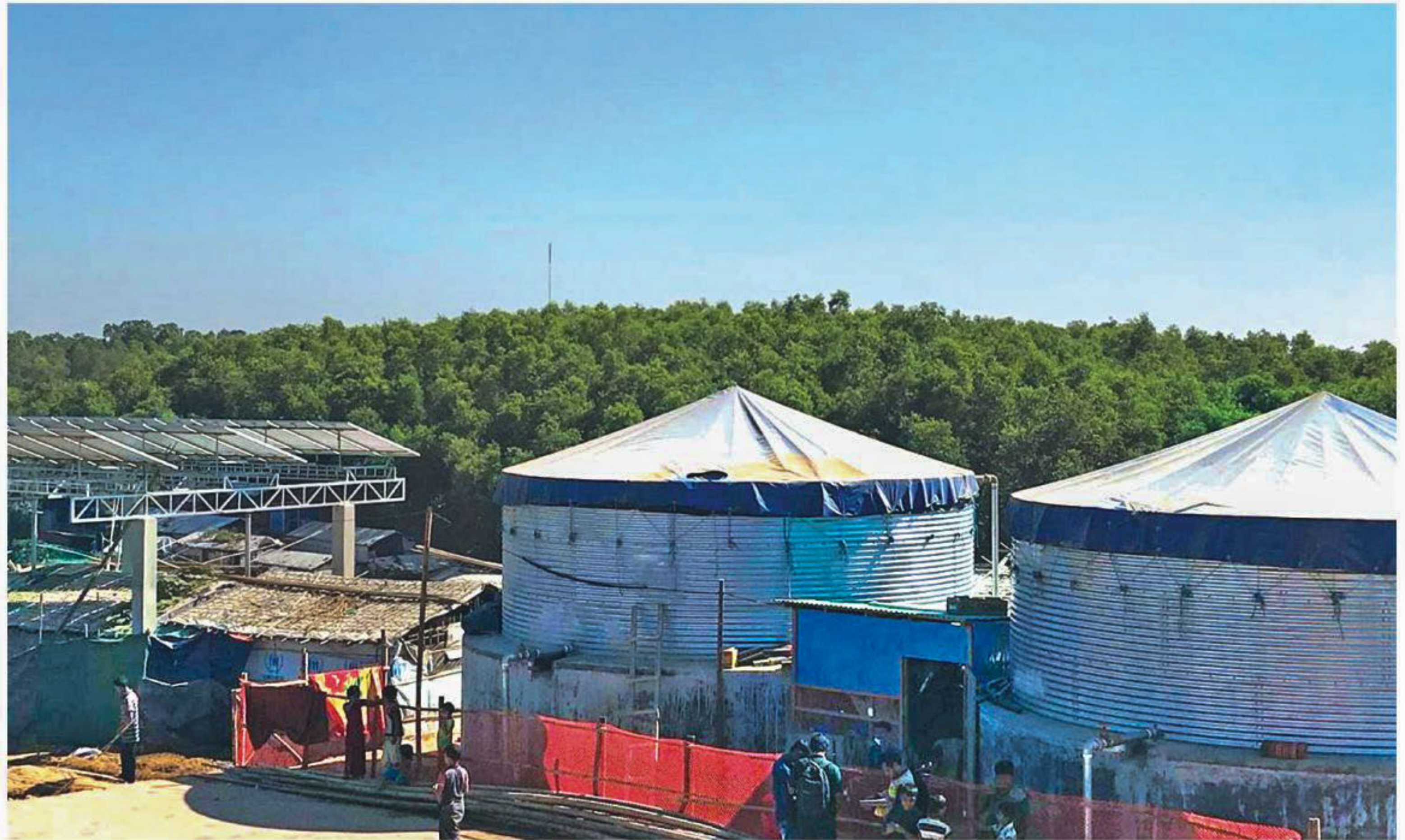


emissions," said Murray Wilson, head of UNHCR's water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programmes in Cox's Bazar.

"Chlorination is a life-saver in refugee settings as recent tests revealed that most contamination to drinking water occurs during collection, transport and storage at

drew water."

The five new water networks -- jointly completed by UNHCR, MSE, OXFAM and Brac -- are currently providing safe water to over 40,000 refugees. A further 55,000 refugees will benefit as UNHCR and its partner agencies are hoping to install nine more solar-powered



The solar-powered safe water system by UNHCR and its partner agencies at a Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar, providing safe, clean water to the refugees.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Conjoined

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Bangladesh will carry out the final operation, he said.

Dr Samanta said a Bangladeshi doctor is accompanying the parents to Hungary and a two-member team of the burn institute will also join them shortly.

Taslima, mother of the twins, said, "We know it is a risky operation. But we took the decision because we want to see them live normal lives." "Though conjoined, they share different personality traits. For example, if Rokeya cries, Rabeya doesn't," she said.

The father, Rafiqul Islam, said they were not informed of the condition before their birth even after conducting ultrasonography during pregnancy. All the radiological tests showed a single baby, he added. They became nervous after their birth and went to different hospitals for treatment. Finally, at DMCH, doctors advised them to wait for five years for their separation.

Rafiqul said the prime minister has been bearing all the costs of their treatment since she was informed about them through local lawmaker Makbul Hossain.

Yesterday, Health Minister Mohammad Nasim handed over air tickets to the parents during a press briefing at the burn institute.

An Emirates flight carrying them was scheduled to depart Dhaka airport at 1:30am today, said Dr Samanta Lal.

The couple also have an eight-year-old daughter.

Samson H Chowdhury's death anniversary today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Today is the seventh death anniversary of Samson H Chowdhury, the founder of Square Group.

On this day in 2012, the visionary entrepreneur and industrialist passed away at Raffles Hospital in Singapore at the age of 86.

Samson Chowdhury left behind an unmatched legacy of entrepreneurship and industrialisation.

He built up from scratch Square Group, one of the largest conglomerates in Bangladesh, and set an example of ethical business that is certain to inspire many others in the years to come.

Born on February 25, 1926 in Pabna, Samson H Chowdhury was the eldest child of Eakub H Chowdhury and Latika Chowdhury. Educated in Mymensingh and



Kolkata, he also obtained a diploma in management from a Harvard University school.

Samson Chowdhury, son of a medical officer in an outdoor dispensary, started a small pharmacy at Atakula in Pabna in 1952. It was beginning of the country's one of the leading pharmaceutical companies that eventually became the Square Group.

He was awarded the Best Entrepreneur of the Country for the year 2000-2001 by The Daily Star and DHL. The American Chamber in Bangladesh honoured him as Business Executive of the Year in 1998.

He was founder president of Bangladesh Association of Publicly Listed Companies and vice-president of International Chamber of Commerce, Bangladesh.

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CASES AGAINST KHALEDA Petitions may be moved next week: Lawyer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The two pending petitions filed with the High Court and Supreme Court in November last year, challenging BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's convictions and sentences in two corruption cases, maybe moved before the courts next week, Advocate Zainul Abedin, a lawyer for Khaleda, said yesterday.

The Election Commission did not allow her to run in the December 30 national polls, following her convictions and 17 years' jail sentences in the cases.

On November 18 last year, Khaleda filed an appeal with the HC, challenging the trial court verdict in Zia Charitable Trust graft

case that sentenced her to seven years' imprisonment, said Advocate Zainul.

In the appeal she also sought acquittal from all the charges.

"The November 18 petition is still pending with the HC. We will place it before the bench, and pray for its hearing. If the bench orders a hearing, we will move another petition, seeking bail of Khaleda in the case," the lawyer added.

ZIA ORPHANAGE TRUST GRAFT CASE

The BNP chief's participation in the parliamentary polls became uncertain after a special court in February last year sentenced her to five years in prison in Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

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PHOTO: TITU DAS

A consignment of blankets has arrived in Barishal city for free distribution among the cold-hit people. The Prime Minister's Office has funded the initiative to help the poor living in rural areas. The photo was taken on Fazlul Huq Avenue yesterday.

USAID project leads to 35pc increase in peanut yield

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Peanut was always a low productive crop to the family of Rezaul Karim from Chuadanga for the last 40 years.

But the introduction of improved seed varieties and cultivation method through USAID's agricultural value chains (AVC) has put a smile on the face of the 37-year-old farmer.

"My family has been engaged in peanut farming for the last 40 years. Never did I, or my ancestors, ever witness yield of such grand scale and quality of [peanuts]," said Rezaul.

AVC has led to a 35 percent increase in peanut yield, and a 25 percent increase in the income of the farmers, said a USAID press release yesterday.

Since 2014, USAID has been implementing AVC with the partnership of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) and Partex.

AVC is an initiative in the region to address the challenges of using poor quality seeds by farmers, and their poor technical know-how on productive cultivation practices.

As of August 2018, with AVC's support, Partex has increased production of quality seeds through three seed production hubs in Chuadanga, Barguna, and Patuakhali.

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