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the borders to prevent East Germans from escaping from the repressive communist regime in massive numbers to the capitalist West Berlin. More than 100 people died trying to cross the Berlin Wall, one of whom was East German teen Peter Fechter. He was shot near Checkpoint Charlie in 1962 while trying to escape. He bled to death on a barbed wire fence, in front of the world media, too far inside the Soviet sector to be helped by the American soldiers, which eventually sparked a protest. Checkpoint Charlie was the most popular Berlin Wall crossing point between the East and the West side. I saw the whole shenanigan of eager tourists taking pictures with the 2001 replica of the original "You Are Now Leaving the American Sector" sign and the smiling fake soldiers guarding the checkpoint. It felt to me like a rather crude way to celebrate a historical location which had witnessed at least one tragic death.

A short walk away from the Checkpoint still stands a large section of the West Berlin wall. It's in a shambles, as is evident from the iron bars peeking through in the middle. However, most of its decay is due to tourists chipping away famous relics of the barrier that once divided a nation, depriving future generations of the opportunity to see them.

Nazi architecture such as the former Reich Air Ministry (now German Finance Ministry) still exists in Berlin. The then

largest office building in Europe survived the bombings nearly unscathed. Where the pillars were once decorated with myriad swastikas and Nazi flags flew proudly, now diplomatic decisions of German finances are made. The Germans cannot rewrite the Nazi history. I loved that instead of tearing down the Nazi architecture out of shame and remorse, they chose to utilise them as best as they could.

From there we went to the memorial dedicated to the crown jewel of the German tragedy, the Holocaust Memorial. Taking a walk between the rows of coffinlike concrete blocks evoked an unnerving melancholy in me. It made sense to then visit Hitler's bunker. There on April 30, 1945, Hitler had committed suicide along with Eva Braun, whom he had married less than 40 hours earlier. In what I thought was a brilliant move, the place which once sheltered a wicked mastermind is now simply a parking lot. There is just a patch of grass on the ground above the bunker, making it as drab and unceremonious as possible so as to prevent anyone from turning it into a shrine for the man who lived there.

The guided tour finally ended at the Brandenburg Gate, where non-violent, pacifist protests led by about a million people over time led to the historic fall of the Berlin wall in 1989.

My trip to Berlin would be incomplete without visiting the East Side Gallery, the longest surviving piece of



PHOTOS: SUSHMITA S PREETHA



Berlin Wall which has now been turned into an artists' canvas. Probably the most striking mural, out of the 101 in total, is the one of the former General Secretaries of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Unity Party kissing, a reproduction of a photograph of their actual 'fraternal kiss' from 1979. Its German title translates into "My God help me to survive this deadly love". The walls that caused death and destruction once, now serve as a powerful reminder to be kinder and united.

Memories of wars and walls hang in the air of Berlin. She has never had it

easy, but that has not stripped Berliners of their kindness. Berlin moves forward with strength and precision. One day is not nearly enough to understand her complicated history and people, but if you are willing to look, Berlin will embrace you with open arms, probably because she wasn't allowed to do it for so long. Berlin grows and changes and learns, staying true to the saying, "Paris is always Paris, Berlin is never Berlin".

Anupoma Joyeeta Joyee reached the word limit before she could write about everything she experienced in Berlin. Ask her more at anupomajoyee@gmail.com.

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Sheikh Shariful Amin, a leading campaigner of a multinational students' platform attempting to clear their names in the UK, similarly went to the UK through an agency. "I want to make young people coming to this country aware of fraudulent recruiters which give students false hopes of working part-time to help finance their studies," he says. Like Bobby, he came to the UK without knowing which university he was being enrolled in and had to make the best of the situation, once there.

As important, says Amin, is knowing and understanding the host country's immigration rules and regulations and not coming with a "fantasy" of what the UK is like. In the case of students such as himself and Bobby, after accusations of cheating, they were treated like illegal immigrants rather than legitimate fee-paying

students who were granted visas.

The UK is one of the top education destinations for Bangladeshi and other students worldwide. IELTS and TOEFL testing centres are ubiquitous in the country and the British Council regularly hosts programmes to attract students to higher education institutions in the UK.

"Bangladeshi students pour money into the UK but the way its institutions are promoted are not reflected in the way we [students] are treated here," says Amin. He urges students to be practical and aware of their rights.

While this happened to a small section of students, and while many young Bangladeshis now apply to UK colleges and universities with greater access to information about the quality of education available, considering the amount Bangladeshi students and guardians invest in a foreign degree, these students' case serves as a daunting example of how vulnerable

students are to visa restrictions, detention, and deportation in a foreign country.

The UK Home Office was investigated by the National Audit Office, a government watchdog, for this decision to revoke visas based on cheating allegations. In its report, it concluded that despite evidence of "cheating on a large scale", innocent students may have been deported.

Two years ago, while her case was still pending review, Bobby decided to return to Bangladesh. She still struggles with the memories of her time in the UK and the shame she felt being accused of something she insists she didn't do. "If you asked me to talk about what I went through when I just got back, I would have said no."

The coming home has not been smooth—she is still seen as a failure by her family, relatives and neighbours for not having completed her education abroad

despite being there for so long and the amount of money her parents paid for it.

Part of the problem explaining her situation to her parents, she says, was their belief that everything in a developed country such as the UK was systematic and what happened must have been her fault. "They thought I squandered their money and have nothing to show for it." While she initially took the legal route, challenging the UK Home Office's decision is not easy—with many students' cases still unresolved, five years on.

Bobby now works as a translator for a short-term research project by an INGO in Kamrangirchar. "No matter how skilled you are, you need a certificate to get a decent job." This is one of several low-paying jobs she's taken since coming back in Bangladesh and does not yet earn enough to be able to get a graduate degree. "I still hope that someday I will study again," she says.