

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Ruins at Monte Alban, Oaxaca, 1991

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Memories of Mexico

Details of our tour of Mexico in 1991 had started fading from my memory. A hazy outline remained: after a few days in Mexico City my wife and I had flown to the provincial town of Oaxaca and explored nearby ruins. Next we had gone to Cancun to swim in the warm Caribbean waters. At the end we had flown back to California which was our home at the time.

The blurry memories came into sharp focus when recently I came across a box of photographic slides from the trip.

After thirty years what dominates those memories is the stupendous history and archaeology of Mexico. Before the arrival of Columbus, several civilizations rose and fell in Mexico. Their legacy is seen in ruins dotted around the country.

The history lessons started in Mexico City. Templo Mayor, an erstwhile temple and now a tourist spot in the heart of the city, was discovered by electrical workers in 1978 during digging. Turns out that the Aztecs had their capital at the same place as Mexico City and this was their main temple. Artifacts included a monolith which showed a dismembered and decapitated woman, an Aztec goddess killed by her brother when she attempted to kill their mother.

A few hours north lies Teotihuacan where 125,000 people lived between 1 AD and 500 AD. The ancient city hosted several civilizations, the Aztecs being the last. We went there by bus and climbed 250 steps to the top of the Pyramid of the Sun for spectacular views.

Mexico City had other historical interests. We visited the house where Soviet revolutionary Leon Trotsky was assassinated in 1940 with an

ice-axe when he fell out with Stalin. His desk, where he was working when the assassin struck his head with the axe, is on display. Visitors can also see the house of painters Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera in the same neighbourhood.

Leaving behind the hustle and bustle of the city we flew to Oaxaca, a provincial capital. It is a picturesque town in the mountains where colourful colonial buildings dotted the streets. The region is famous for growing chocolate. But this is not candy; chocolate is used for cooking, including a dish called Mole Chicken. I remember the distinct taste, albeit not too fondly.

Near Oaxaca was the ruin of Monte Alban. This was the highlight of our trip. The city was founded in 500 B.C. by the Zapotecs. Today, several large structures remain on the flattened hilltop, including pyramids, a ball court, a city center and an observatory. The elite lived on the top while the poorer classes lived on the sides of the hills.

Like other pre-Columbian civilizations, builders and engineers of ancient Mexico did not use the wheel for transportation. Rather, the stones were carried up the hills by sheer human force. I still recall my amazement at the huge effort which became apparent when I observed the height of the city from the surroundings.

After the culture and history, the holiday resort of Cancun felt downright decadent with warm waters of the Caribbean and lively nightlife. This was our last stop before returning to reality.

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SURGE IN COVID CASES

Sylhet runs out of ICU beds

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

On June 20, Rafique Miah, an elderly resident of Sunamganj's Jagannathpur upazila, tested positive for Covid-19. He was treated at a private hospital's intensive care unit (ICU) for three days till his condition improved, and then he returned home.

But his condition deteriorated again. On Thursday, he was rushed to Sylhet Shahid Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital. However, this time the elderly patient is having to make do with a general bed, as there is no ICU-bed vacant at the hospital.

Rafique's situation shows the dire state of Sylhet division's healthcare system right now. With the surge of patients in the past weeks, there is no ICU-bed available at any public or private hospital in Sylhet.

Sylhet is now becoming another hotspot for Covid-19, as the high infection rate and patients' influx at hospitals indicate.

In 24 hours till yesterday morning, a record 442 new cases were detected in the division, and the infection rate was 43.12 percent, according to the divisional health office in Sylhet.

Meanwhile, 551 patients are currently admitted to different

hospitals in the division. Among them, 486 are in Sylhet district alone.

"Patients overwhelmed our facilities for the last couple of days. Around 50 percent of patients are from other districts in the division, as there are no dedicated facilities there," said Dr Md Mizanur Rahman, resident medical officer (RMO) of the Covid-19-dedicated Shamsuddin hospital.

Sylhet city and surrounding regions, there are 324 general beds for Covid-19 patients, but only 24 ICU beds.

There are 80 general beds at Shamsuddin hospital, while MAG Osmani hospital has 182, and Khadimpura Hospital and Dakshin Surma Hospital have 31 each.

MAG Osmani hospital is now planning to add 70 more general beds by dedicating another ward

The 10,000-litre oxygen plant is already at full capacity, with 100 patients being admitted today [Friday]. Admitting more patients and putting more pressure on the plant might cause serious damage."

Dr Himangshu said, "We are the last hope for patients, and we are now struggling to provide healthcare to all of them. But we are still planning to expand our support with new ICU beds."

"We have enough supply for oxygen at our plant, but we seriously need better equipment. If we get enough high-flow nasal cannula... ventilators, we will be able to facilitate more patients," he said.

Meanwhile, private facilities are also providing healthcare services for Covid-19 patients. There are 241 general beds and 56 ICU beds at the seven facilities, which are also occupied by patients.

While talking to authorities of the hospitals, this correspondent found that they are being forced to decline services to patients on a regular basis.

Dr Naseem Ahmed, president of Sylhet Private Hospital Owners' Association, said, "Besides public hospitals, we are also expanding our services for Covid-19 patients, but the situation is getting out of hand."

We are the last hope for patients, and we are now struggling to provide healthcare to all of them...

COVID-19 BEDS IN SYLHET

HOSPITALS	GENERAL	ICU
4 Public Hospitals	324	24
7 Private Hospitals	241	56
TOTAL	545	80

DR HIMANGSHU LAL ROY
DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF MAG
OSMANI HOSPITAL

Yesterday morning, 486 patients were admitted at different hospitals in Sylhet district. The number was 450, 444 and 426 in previous days.

The average number of daily admitted patients was 344 in the previous week till July 5, while it was 280, 216, and 212 respectively in weeks before that.

Moreover, the death toll is shooting up, as 32 patients died of Covid-19 since July 1 till Friday.

At government facilities in

for Covid-19 patients, said Dr Himangshu Lal Roy, deputy director of the hospital.

Of the 24 ICU beds, eight are at MAG Osmani hospital and 16 at Shamsuddin hospital.

But there is no possibility for increasing ICU beds in these public facilities immediately, said authorities.

RMO Dr Mizanur said, "The demand for oxygen per patient is way greater than it was last year.



PHOTO: SKEIKH NASIR

Failing to find any vacant ICU bed, son of Covid-19 patient Rabeya Khatun had to settle for a general bed at Shahid Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital in Sylhet, just to keep his mother alive. Inset, earlier, he was tending to Rabeya inside an ambulance in front of the hospital, hoping for an ICU bed to get vacant. The photos were taken on Wednesday.



Golam Mustafa no more

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent photographer Golam Mustafa passed away yesterday around 9:30am at his residence, due to age related complications.

He was 81 years old. He was the winner of Ekushey Padak 2018, and Shilpakala Padak 2016.

He served as Director of Photography in Bangladesh Television, and a guest lecturer in the Department of Architecture in North South University.

One of the most respected professionals in his field, Golam Mustafa was one of the first frontline photographers during the inception of Bangladesh Television (then Pakistan Television) in 1964.

BTV, in its early days, started its journey with only three newly groomed photographers, Mustafa being one of them. He served the channel for 30 years.

A key eye witness to the birth of television, Golam Mustafa's camera traced the cultural trajectory of the arts in Bangladesh.

Renowned photographer Shahidul Alam also gave his tribute to Mustafa following his passing.

Golam Mustafa is survived by his wife, son, daughter and two grandchildren. His namaz-e-janaza took place at his residence after Asr prayers. He was laid to rest at the Azimpur Graveyard (new), following Covid protocol.



NARAYANGANJ FACTORY FIRE

Conduct fair probe, compensate victims

Demand rights organisations

- Ensure safe workplace for workers
- Amend law for adequate compensation
- Financial aid for victims
- Punish those responsible

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) yesterday demanded a fair and impartial probe, exemplary punishment for authorities concerned, and compensation for victims of the massive fire at Hashem Food and Beverage Ltd in Rugganj, Narayanganj.

So far, the death toll stands at 52, while many were undergoing treatment, and many are still missing.

BLAST in a press statement mentioned that there were allegations that many people, including women workers, died after jumping off the building, as the factory's stairways were closed.

The organisation demanded immediate financial assistance from the Workers' Welfare Foundation, including adequate compensation for the deceased and injured, and arrangements for treating the injured.

BLAST also urged the government to ensure a safe workplace, and proper safety and security measures for all workers, along with urgent review and amendment of the inadequate amount of compensation for the deceased and injured mentioned in the labour law.

Bangladesh Trade Union Sangha (BTUS) also expressed serious concern over the death and injury of workers at the factory, and demanded compensation, mentioned a joint statement. BTUS Central Committee President Habibullah Bachchu and General Secretary Chowdhury Ashiqul Alam said although thousands of workers have been losing their lives in successive fire or building collapse incidents, there is a long way to go to establish a working environment.

Mentioning the incident is tantamount to murder, BTUS said the owners, as well as the government, cannot avoid their responsibility. BTUS leaders also condemned police's use of batons and tear gas on agitated relatives of workers after the blaze.

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), also in a press statement, mentioned many workers have been dying in such fire accidents, but authorities fail to ensure punishment for those responsible. ASK sought legal actions against those responsible and proper inquiry into the exact cause of the incident among other matters.



Charred remains now fill the Narayanganj factory, which went up in flames on Thursday evening. Outside, relatives of the workers were in a seemingly endless wait for any news of their loved ones. Bodies retrieved from the building kept filling ambulances, while firefighters slumped against anything they could find out of exhaustion, as they were battling the blaze for almost 24 hours. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

