



Poring over a different chapter

SOHEL ISLAM

A buzzing sound of recitation pours out from a small room. Inside, a few children are reading a Bangla poem, trying to get the hang of it. Outside, a signboard reading *Non-formal Education for Street Children* is hung on the wall. A small room at a slum at Paribagh houses the school for 'the children of the dark'.

Sitting beside a small black-board with an amateur drawing on it, students take lessons from their teacher. The lady teacher, on a Tk 800 monthly payroll, teaches 30 students in each shift. The school has two shifts, one in the morning and the other in the evening. Each shift runs for two hours.

As many as 4,815 schools sponsored by different non-government organisations (NGOs) are spread across the divisional headquarters of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna.

ACLAB, an NGO, runs 15 such schools located at the different

parts of the city. The curriculum of the school covers Bangla, English, mathematics and social science. The students attend a drawing class once a week.

They have no dress code unlike other schools. Their ragged look and pale faces say it all -- many of their dreams have died.

But, they are starting to dream afresh.

Swapna, who is in the evening shift, spends early hours of the day in a house working as a domestic help. With her little earnings, she can help out her father to run their seven-member family.

Over the past few months in school, she has learnt multiplication, a bit of history of the nation's freedom struggle, poems in Bangla and a touch of English language. Her preferred lesson? Swapna starts reciting a very popular Bangla rhyme

*Aieyaiey chand mama
Tip dieyja
Chander kapaley chand
Tip dieyja...*

She went on until the rhyme ended.

Majibar, Asma, Nipu, Shariful and others also have their preferred lessons. When they express themselves or talk about their academic goal, they ooze confidence. And why not? Some of them are already making a living for themselves. For instance, Asma sells flowers on the street under the scorching sun.

Majibar's father, who sells pickles and ice cream, is now lying sick in a shanty at a corner of Shahbagh. Majibar used to help his father during the rush hour. But the scenario now is different. Earlier, his father would fetch the ice cream from the factory at Central Road.

Now Majibar is compelled to take the responsibility of bringing the supply of ice creams. After the day's work, he attends his school. He barely misses the roll call in the class.

Their stories have almost a similar start, but the end may not be so.

They have been thrown on a rough road and they will settle for it. But they don't want to live rough. Not even for a change.

CNG chaos drags on

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At Agargaon, Nurul Karim hailed and got on a CNG autorickshaw. He told the driver to go to Karwanbazaar. The smartly dressed driver, with navy blue pants and bush shirt tucked in under the belt, turned the meter on and started off to the destination. When he reached there, Karim was pleasantly surprised to note that the meter read only Tk 17.

He usually he has to churn out Tk 40 for the same distance. He happily paid the driver Tk 20 and happily sauntered in to his office humming a tune. The driver understandably was none too happy and accepted the money only grudgingly.

A resident of Green Road, Habibur Rahman has to go to Gopibagh frequently to do some business. He would usually take an autorickshaw and pay somewhere between Tk 50 to 60 depending on his haggling skills on that particular day. He thought with meters on, the fare would be considerably less.

However, much to his disappointment once he got down he saw that the meter read Tk 76. When he asked the driver about it, he made a laconic reply. "Look at the meter." Muttering an oath under his breath he paid the driver.

From the very first day that meter was incorporated into three wheelers, confusion reigned supreme. People in general were under the impression that the days of haggling and arguments -- and indeed occasional fistfights --

with drivers were over.

"I am really glad. Earlier I had to give in to the driver's whims. You see haggling in the streets is not considered a feminine quality," Selina, an executive at a bank, said.

But everyone was not that lucky.

Many vehicles had meters that gave faulty readings. The autorickshaw Habib got in had a Taiwanese meter called Watta. A deputy director of BRTA told Star City, "We have

their part the drivers said they were not informed of the uniform business but that if you believe the authorities should be taken with a pinch of salt. However police surveillance, expectedly, was lax after the first few days. The cabbies still simply refuse to go on meters. And the hapless passengers are forced to comply. Passengers believe if the police continued to be active as the first day things would be much better.

For their part the drivers say the owners have not reduced

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given permission for five brands of fare meters: Pricol, Standard, PIC, Eagle and Super. Use of any other meters is illegal."

To give the police its due they were seen busy taking actions against errant drivers. 81 autorickshaws without meters or with faulty ones were confiscated and 471 cases were lodged against drivers for myriad of offences ranging from not wearing designated uniforms, refusing to go on meters or... a new one... misbehaving with passengers. For

the rent. "Even after the introduction of the meter the owners insist on getting the payment they received earlier. If they reduce the amount in a realistic manner we won't have any problems in following the meter," said Rahim, a driver.

Meanwhile, many garages of the city are still full of autorickshaws yet to install meters. But

People complain it is very difficult to get a CNG autorickshaw these days.

Not always a helping hand

STAR CITY CORRESPONDENT

The service of *Aminar ma* is at a premium these days with the garments industry employing so many potential domestic helps. The housewife will do agree to almost anything to have a helping hand around.

"I got myself a maid from my in laws' village. After working here for a couple of months she somehow managed a job at a nearby garments and left. She is the third one to do so in a year," said Manjula Karim, a housewife at Mirpur. She is not the only one complaining.

With their husbands rarely willing to share household duties and the children busy with school and homework, housewives in the city desperately need domestic helps. With more and more women no more content to be in charge of the home front and taking to professions once thought exclusively for men, demand for domestic helps grows is soaring high.

Modern gadgets like dish-washers or vacuum cleaners or washing machines are used only by the elite and are still beyond the reach of the middle class. So, steps the bua in your house. But it's not that easy, they don't come too easy. One needs to be one the lookout for them and even have to wait for months together.

Mostly they are brought from the house owner's ancestral

village. They are known as *bandha* (permanent staff). The *thika* (temporary) *buas* usually come from the nearby slums. Yet, so few of them are willing to work as domestic help. "When I work in a garments (factory) I am free to lead my life in my own way. I am not willing to work for hours on end in exchange for so little money," said Aklima, who was maid two years ago.

However most housewives beg to differ.

"The wages are quite reasonable these days. And if you consider food and shelter in no way does a *bua* earn less than a garments worker," said Mithila of Tajmahal Road, Mohammedpur. The so-called independence comes with a price, most housewives would say.

Girls of impressionable age are safer working within the confines of a home. Taslima scoffs at the idea, "What security are you talking about. I was repeatedly sexually abused by both the sons at a home I used to work in. I was beaten severely at any hint of protest." Incidentally it is alleged many a time the *buas* bring out accusations of sexual abuse to blackmail their employers. Bachelors living in messes are targeted specifically.

Perhaps the days of the devoted maid or servant, so glorified in Bangla cinema, are well and truly over. *Buas* are a dying breed.



important telephone numbers

EMERGENCY SERVICES

AMBULANCE SERVICE

Fire Brigade 9567734, 9556667, 9555555, 9556666. **Fire Services Siddique Bazar (HQ)** 9556667, **Mohammadpur** 9112078, **Tejgaon** 605272, **Khilgaon** 7218329, **Lalbagh** 505778, **Mirpur** 9001055, **Cantonment** 605168, **Tongi** 9801070, **Palassey** 509670, **Demra** 7400111, **Postagola** 7410771, **Narayanganj** 9715644, **Sadarhat** 7119759, **Mirpur 10 Circle** 9002269, 9001055, **Mirpur TVG Complex** 9001189, **Narayanganj Port** 9715365, **Hajiganj (N Ganj)** 9715531, **Mondalpara (N. Ganj River)** 9712015, **N. Gan Bander** 9712095, **Dhaka EPZ (Savar)** 7701444, **Dhaka Medical College Hospital** 8626812-

6, **Markajul Al Islami** 9127867, **Anjuman e-Mafidul Islam** 324067, 239808, 248166, **Child Hospital** 8116061-2, **Holy Family Hospital** 8311721-5.

BLOOD BANKS

Red Crescent Centre 9116563, 326320, **Sandhani (DMCH)** 8614040, **Sandhani (SMCH)** 7310061, 7319022, **Dhaka Medical College Hospital** 8626812-9, **Sandhani International Eye Bank** 8614040

AMBULANCES FOR DEAD BODY

Anzuman Mafidul Islam (Kakrail) 9336611, **Gandaria** 7319808, 7318166, **Al-Markajul Islam** 9127867, 324069.

FOR PATIENTS

Fire Service Civil Defence 9555555, 9556666-7.

TRANSPORT

Railway Enquiry 409686, **Railway Booking** 409341, **Railway Control Room** 409558, **BRTC Coach Service** 403803, 9333803, **Steamer Service** 9559779, 7315050, 8914771, **Biman (Sales)** 9880156, **Zia International Airport** 8914771-9.

ELECTRICITY

Electricity Complex- PDB (PABX) 9566061-5, 9560170-9, **Electricity Complex (DESA)** 8616737-42, 8617626, **DESCO (PABX)** 8123138-40, **Electric Complain (REB-Dhaka)** 8916424-8, **Elec-**

tric Complain (REB-Ctg.) 751721

TITAS GAS

Titas Gas Exchange (Emergency) 9563667-8, **Kawrnabazar** 8112135-42, **Mirpur** 8014132-3, **Mirpur** 8014132-3, **Mohammadpur** 9117215, 9113903, **Mohakhali** 9884741, 9885922, 8824993, **Motijheel** 9667612, **Golapbag** 239091, 234341.

WASA

WASA (PABX) 8117829-31, **Mirpur** 9000519, **Mohammadpur** 8120192, 607530, **Mahakhali** 414513, **Fakirapool** 9115343, **Asad Gate** 8917492, **Uttara** 9559142, **Segunbagicha** 7316348, **Pagla** 8113900-39.

HOSPITALS IN DHAKA

Bangladesh Medical College & Hospital 8115443, 9118202, **Dhaka Medical College Hospital** 8626812-6, **Holy Family Hospital** 83111731-25, **CMH** 8114666-9, **Cancer Hospital** 8014914, 8826561-65, **Islamia Eye Hospital** 9110794, 9119315, **Dental College** 9002035, **Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University** 8612550-4,

8614545-9, **Pangu Hospital** 91114075, 9112150, **National Hospital** 233469, 237300, **Suhrawardy Hospital** 9130800, 9122560-69, **Diabetic Research Hospital (BIRDEM)** 9661551-5, 8616641-50, **Salimullah Medical College Hospital** 7310061-4, 7319002-6, **Cholera Research Hospital (ICDRB)** 8811751-60, **Infection**

Disease (I.D) Hospital 602429, 601835, **T.B. Hospital** 608031-34, 600211-5, **Shishu Hospital** 9119119, 8116061-62, **Azimpur Maternity Hospital** 503329, **Azimpur Mother & Child Health Training Institute** 8624827, 8624980, **Sromojibi Hospital** 240066-69, **Monowra Hospital** 8319802, 8318135

TAXI CAB

Yellow Cab **Comfort** 881710-4 **Navana** 9558065 **Salida** 9344477, **0171620881** **Cosmo** 9112959 and **8127191** **Cab One** 7113282-3 **Nihon** 8624741-2 **Orion** 9347277

Anudip 8125285 and 8127611 **Capital** 9352847 **Union** 8130485 **Kool** 0171826731 **Black Cab** **Cab Ex** 9358401 **Cabline** 8321162 **JBS Cab** 019364575 **Sajan** 018126036 **Anudip --** 8125285 and

8127611 **Cab One** 7113282-3 **Palaki** 0171052500 **Cab I** 7113282 **Jatiri** 0171540074 **Nipun** 9572277 **R-Cab** 8914782 **Star Cab** 9571919 **Shihab** 018202477 & 018228675 **KGK** 8620011

TRAIN TIME

Subarna Express

Leaves Chittagong at 7-00 am
Leaves Dhaka at 4-00 pm
Leaves Chittagong at 6-30 am
Leaves Dhaka at 7-30 am
Leaves Chittagong at 2-00 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 3-05 pm
Leaves Chittagong at 11-00 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 11-00 pm
Leaves Chittagong at 7-45 am
Leaves Sylhet at 10-15 am
Leaves Chittagong at 9-00 pm
Leaves Sylhet at 8-30 pm
Leaves Chittagong at 5-00 pm
Leaves Chanderpur at 5-00 am
Leaves Dhaka at 6-30 am
Leaves Sylhet at 3-00 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 12-30 pm
Leaves Sylhet at 7-30 am
Leaves Dhaka at 9-30 pm
Leaves Sylhet at 10-00 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 7-00 am
Leaves Bahadurabad at 2-00 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 5-00 pm

Mahanagar Prahati

Mahanagar Godhuli

Turna

Paharika Express

Udayan Express

Meghna Express

Parabat Express

Joyantika Express

Upaban Express

Tista Express

Ekata Express

Upakul Express

Padma Express

Reaches Dhaka at 1-10 pm
Reaches Chittagong at 10-15 pm
Reaches Dhaka at 2-25 pm
Reaches Chittagong at 2-55 pm
Reaches Dhaka at 10-55 pm
Reaches Chittagong at 9-11 pm
Reaches Dhaka at 6-50 am
Reaches Chittagong at 7-05 am
Reaches Sylhet at 5-30 pm
Reaches Chittagong at 7-55 pm
Reaches Sylhet at 7-20 am
Reaches Chittagong at 9-55 am
Reaches Chanderpur at 9-35 pm
Reaches Dhaka at 10-55 pm
Reaches Sylhet at 2-30 pm
Reaches Dhaka at 4-35 pm
Reaches Sylhet at 9-20 pm
Reaches Dhaka at 6-40 am
Reaches Dhaka at 7-20 am
Reaches Bahadurabad at 1-05 pm
Reaches Dhaka at 8-40 pm
Reaches Bahadurabad at 11-55

Reaches Dhaka at 7-50 am
Reaches Noakhali at 1-35 pm
Reaches Dhaka at 9-50 pm
Reaches Jagannath at 2-30 pm
Reaches Dhaka at 10-20 pm