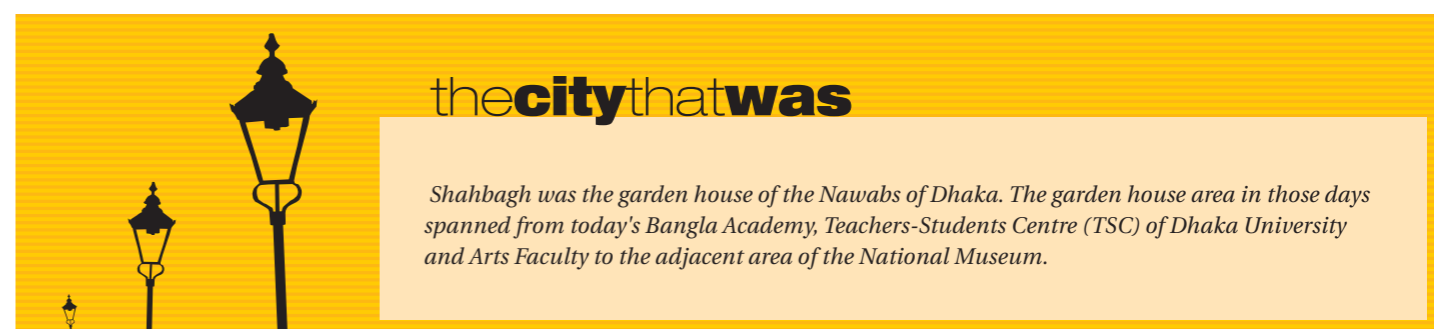


Star city

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thecitythatwas

Shahbagh was the garden house of the Nawabs of Dhaka. The garden house area in those days spanned from today's Bangla Academy, Teachers-Students Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University and Arts Faculty to the adjacent area of the National Museum.

Wading through exam worry

Stress creeps into students and parents alike when it comes to the "first crucial" test of their life. At times, the pressure proves too much for the students. Many get weighed down and fail to live up to expectations.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Exams always mean stress. Parents' expectations soar high, but anxiety and tension weigh examinees down. Despite all, they have to carry on, as the secondary school examinations are the first step towards higher education.

As for 2,72,577 Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinees under the Dhaka Education Board and their parents alike, the moment of extreme mental and physical stress started on March 27.

Most parents believe that SSC results will shape their wards' life and career. Which means they are extra alert to help the youngsters out in what is considered to be the 'first crucial exams'.

Nishat Sultana Anny, a student of Sher-e-Bangla Women's College, formerly Nari Shikkha Mandir at Hathkholia in the city, studied ten hours a day preparing for the SSC. She said the immense pressure kept mounting as the exams neared.

"I can't even move away from my table for a walk. My mother shouts at me, whenever I want to have a break," said Anny. "The tension is so intense that my heart

started beating faster on the first day of the exams."

Like Anny, most examinees are undergoing the same ordeal. "This is the first public examinations we are sitting for after ten years of school study. I have prepared well... still, I get nervous when I look at my parents," said Tabeen.

The parents are as busy as candidates. They keep a round-the-clock vigil on their children in a compelling situation. While the candidates attend private tutorials, parents are seen waiting outside on the streets for hours on end.

"Nowadays, money and parents' persistence can guarantee better results," said Mahbubul Alam, an industrialist. "My daughter studies at the Kamrunnesa Girls' School and attends private tutorials with teachers from the Viqarunnesa Noon School. Tutorial is more important than school."

For middle-class parents, sending a child to tutors means that the bulk of the family's income is drained out for education.

Huq, an engineer, engaged two house tutors for his son three months before the exams. He said monthly payment for the two

tutors was a burden on the family. But he did it, considering it an investment for the future. "I do what I have to do because I cannot let my son suffer for my neglect," said Huq.

The stress is sometimes much higher for parents than examinees. Rubina Anwar had shifted from her Postogola residence to a rented flat at Tikatuli because of her daughter's SSC exams. Rubina got married when she was an SSC candidate and could not finish the SSC.

She has no job, as she has no academic qualification. She said she realised the need for education and was doing everything possible to make her daughter's life easier. Her husband now living in Bahrain, is also determined to carry on with their daughter's education at any cost.

One way or other, parents and examinees are counting days for the end of the exams with great anxiety. "SSC is the basis for higher education. Its result can open many opportunities for children," said Bahar, an engineer and father of an examinee.



Anxious parents and guardians of examinees wait at the entrance of a city centre for their wards to come out.

God, help my kid!

Anxious parents try everything, from talisman to vows to memory pills, to see their wards fare well in the exams

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Tension has never been so intense for Bobby and her parents. Bobby leaves home with her father for the exams; and it's prayer time for her mother till she returns home.

"S.S.C (exams) is the most important exam for a student. With extreme competition everywhere parents are constantly worried about the results," Bobby's mother

explains.

This is a common sight during the SSC exams in thousands of families. Special prayers are offered in families having such an examinee. Parents take special care of their examinees. They make sure that their children get along with studies without the slightest of problems even without mosquito bites.

Parents shuttle to mazar

(shrines) and offer prayers for their wards, sometimes doling out cash and kinds to the mazar assistants.

Nurjahan Ahmed, mother of an examinee in Kamalapur, visited Dewan Bag Mazar Sharif several times for blessing for her son, who is an SSC examinee. She managed to obtain a *tabiz* (talisman) and a bottle of divine water from the "saintly man" there. Her son Rubab Ahmed is confident of getting good grades, but she still worries.

"Everyone needs blessings with *daoui* (antique medicine)," she said. "It may sound superstitious but I hope that God will help my son to survive in the exam war," she said. Parents also make *manat* (vow) in these mazar.

The visitors see the assistants and promise that if the boy or the girl fares well in the exams they would offer a cow or a goat to the mazar. The *manat* could be anything from small cash to a free meal for a large of people.

About a dozen prominent mazar in the city reported that during the exams they receive bigger crowd than usual. It is also not unusual to find people travelling to Sylhet and Chittagong for brief prayers at the mazar there.

Some parents also reported having seen "memory pills" and "anti-sleeping pills" of "known and unknown companies" in the city. "I take both pills but I'm sure anti-sleeping pill works," said Rodela Nirupama, a student of Qumrunnesa Girl's High School at Dhanmondi. "I feel sleepy during exams," she said.

Caught in a war warp

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The Iraq war has changed not only the geopolitical outline of the world but life in general, and more in any metropolitan city.

When American soldiers sit at computer screens guiding e-bombs thousands of miles away to disable the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, urban people are also off to war much thanks to satellite television. People stay awake into midnight to update themselves on the war that started on March 20 with a 'theatrical spectacle'.

As Iraqis stay up all night for danger, people here in Dhaka stay awake to watch on television every move US-British soldiers make in their advance to the main target: Saddam.

Ferdous Ara Happy of Dhanmondi who stopped watching television programmes long ago now tunes in to BBC and CNN for the latest. Her 12-year-old son wakes up in the morning to the brutal reality that satellite broadcast has brought into their drawing room.

Her husband, a banker, waits for BBC correspondent Rageh Omaar to come up with his latest on Baghdad. "Since the start of attack, I have been late in going to bed. Each night I wait for breaking news," said Arfan Ali. He forces himself to go to bed because he has to rush to office next morning.

His day begins with consumption of news and switches on the television set to catch up with what happened after his short sleep. Much late for office last Sunday, he

headed out of his home for work.

Later in the day, he headed back home and sat before his television set, slightly frustrated that 'night vision is not clear' enough to watch the high-tech battle. He peered into sandstorms, straining to discern the outline of a country that is going to die before its 'liberation'.

Those who do not have access to BBC and CNN or do not understand English well enough switch to BBC Radio (Bangla Service). It has become a common sight in the city that news-hungry people gather in front of roadside shops to listen to the Bangla service that goes on air at 7:30pm.

"Fog" is beginning to be the watchword of the war, with the

lines between fact and propaganda blurring. People complain of conflicting reports relayed instantly to millions without confirmation or verification.

"I don't believe all reports BBC Radio is now airing. They (news readers) say something in the morning and change it in the evening," said Kashem, a fruit vendor at Karwan Bazar.

The news broadcast by BBC and CNN has also attracted flak from many, who questioned the authenticity of reports.

"The reports are biased. The two channels don't reflect what happens on the ground. It seems the channels are interested only in showing the defeat of Iraqi soldiers, especially the Republican

Army," says Imran Ali.

"When the war started, I spent hours on BBC and CNN. Now I watch on Ptv (Pakistan Television). I think PTV gives us true reports."

People are looking for alternatives. Interestingly, a Bangla daily has come up with a suggestion for unbiased news. Channel News Asia based in Singapore is more objective in reporting, says the daily.

The warfare has forced many non-resident Bangladeshis to return from Kuwait. So far, some 2,000 Bangladeshis have flown back home, according to the control room of the expatriates' welfare ministry at Zia International Airport.

Many Bangladeshis living in Kuwait, who returned home before the invasion attack, now crowd the office of Kuwait Airways to fly back to Kuwait.

"I have to get back to Kuwait City as soon as possible. I came here for treatment of my mother a month back. My wife and children are now staying over there in fear," said Dulal Hossain.

Abdul Hakim, a construction firm owner in Kuwait, has to go back to Kuwait as well. "Many construction labourers of my company called me here (Dhaka) the day after the war started. I need to pay them off. They don't want to stay over there. They fear the war may spread far beyond Iraq," said Dulal Hossain.



PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

hello
dhaka

Markets & museums closed

New Market- Tuesday
Gausia Market- Tuesday
Mouchak Market- Sunday
Dhanmondi Hawkers Market- Tuesday
Eastern Plaza- Monday
Farmview Super Market- Sunday
Muktijuddha Jadughar- Sunday
Dhaka Zoo- Sunday
Shishu Jadughar- Sunday

Call police if cab drivers try to play smart

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