

MORNING is yet to cross eight. I am deep into Morgan's Ancient Society. All of a sudden my door starts rocking from a series of urgent knocks. I am torn asunder. The knocks on my door knock me off Morgan. I rush to the door. A long skinny hand with all its withering fingers is extended before me. A beggar in his fifties. A man in dire want. I am urged to give him a taka or two. I entertain a queer habit of asking after the people we the privileged regard as nondescripts. I ask his name. He is Aziz. Abdul Aziz. Unable to withstand the ever-deepening bites of poverty back in Gaibandha, he has been, for last two years, in Dhaka. Finding no work to do in his 'city of dreams', he started to knock on doors, sabotaging our sleep, aesthetics and concentration. The usual story. From my pocket I draw a coin, get rid of him and return to my book. An hour passes by. I get dressed, get out and keep walking for the bus stand.

As I walk along, my train of thought races on at full pace. Myriad compartments are popping up from nowhere and getting added to the train. Ancient people, progress of civilisation, price of rice, brave Iraqi fighters, so on and so forth. The train keeps growing longer. Suddenly it jolts into a halt. It is the shriek of a vegetable vendor selling tomatoes and potatoes on his head. He is calling out, at the top of his lungs, the names of what are in his store. The impact sends me reeling. Before I can collect myself, there is yet another cry of a man buying scrap papers. A long, booming cry. The call for scrap papers is soon followed by another scream of an onion seller. As I take a turn, there is someone waiting for me to help him lift his vegetable basket onto his head. As I help him with his unusually heavy basket, I ask his name. Shona Mia. Faridpur. A disheveled bearded man in his forties. Shona Mia walks away yelling out the names of his vegetables.

The long queue under the blazing sun comes to an end. I rush into my commuter bus. A sigh of relief, a swarm of passengers and a wait of fifteen minutes. Our bus bursts into life. We are speeding ahead. Before long, the speed proves short-lived. While attempting to pass through Shahbag, our bus, along with the whole lot of vehicles, slows down to a stop. Fidgeting in my sit for about ten minutes I get down to see what is keeping us stuck. Before me I see almost nothing but rickshaws. Rows of rickshaws jostling with buses, private cars, and cabs. Rickshaws with hoods on. Rickshaws with hoods off. Rickshaws with sweating multitudes of pullers. A bird's-eye-view snapshot of the long trail of rickshaws would certainly make a nice 'formation' as the photogra

# Devoured by the Hungry

MINHAZ PARVEZ

