

# Dhaka: Home away from home



Patricia Coveney, voluntarily working for Families for Children, an orphanage, shared her feelings about the city that she has been visiting regularly

I have been living in Dhaka since January, 2006 but have been in and out regularly in the last few years. My first visit to Dhaka was around 9 years ago. I remember being so amazed by the volume of people. I was visiting as airline crew then and as soon as we stepped outside the door of the airport we were greeted by throngs of people till we reached the gate of our hotel. The genuine friendliness and inner strength from people was also something that stood out for me since the very beginning.

Earlier I did not have any preconceived notion about

Bangladesh, may be just a bit cautious in the beginning due to people mentioning that personal safety was an issue here with so much poverty and people around. But where is personal safety not an issue now a days anyway. I have always only had positive encounters with people here.

I was brought up in the outskirts of a small town in Ireland and would consider myself very much a country person. I really appreciate the fact of being able to, in a short time, escape from the city to enjoy the beautiful countryside that Bangladesh offers. I love to go for walks with the children amongst rice paddies and nature, at a vacation camp that we have close by, there is nothing more uplifting and calming for me. I come back to the city as a new person. In the evening it is nice to enjoy the view from the roof and the quietness

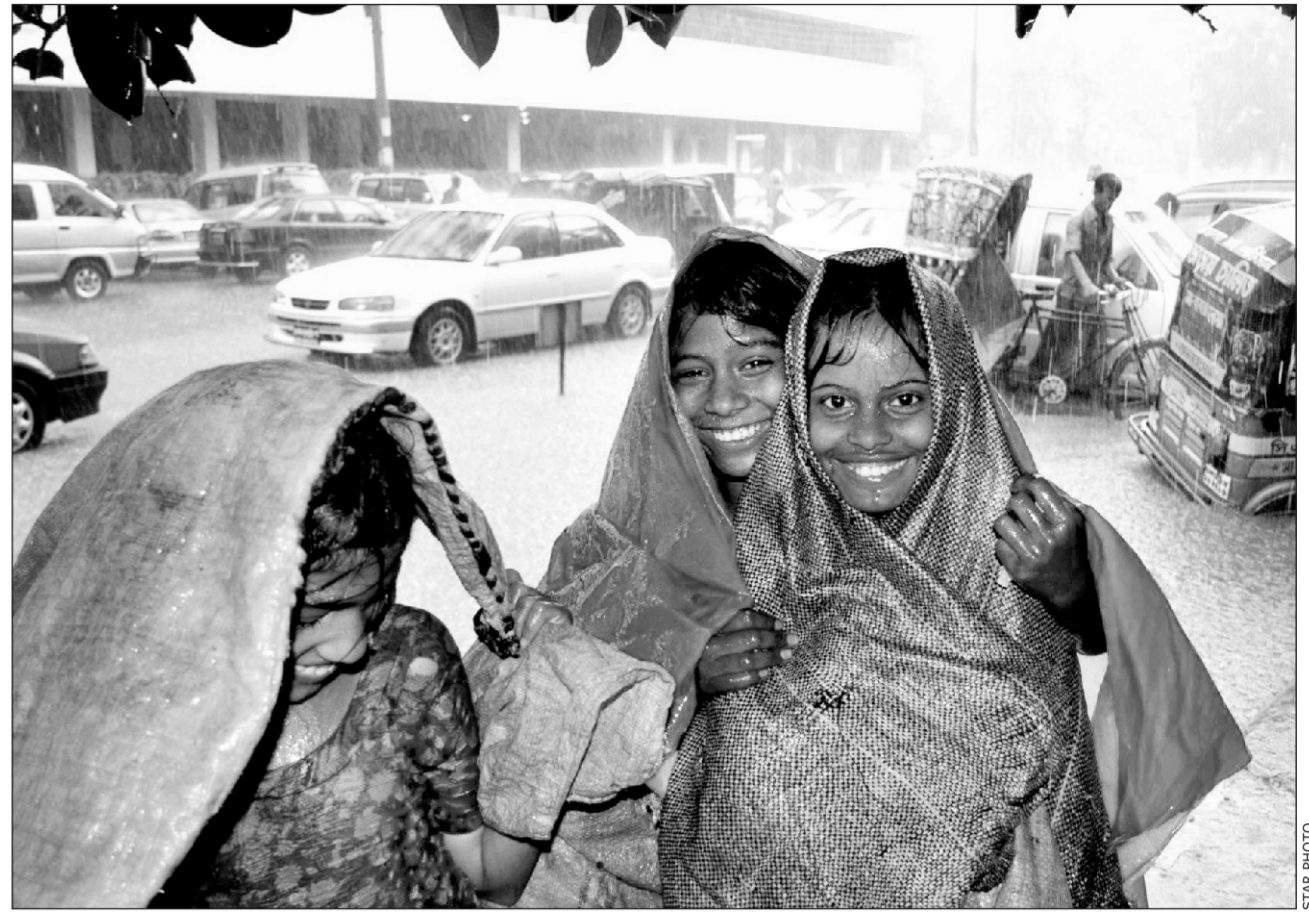
that night time brings to Dhaka.

I do not like the traffic at rush hour, which of course nobody likes as well as there not being too many places where you can go enjoy a walk.

The friendliness, hospitality and helpfulness of the people, the amazing green colour of the countryside, the joy of seeing Dhaka develop so much over the last number of years, the chaos of Old Dhaka on a rainy day and mainly the many beautiful children who I have encountered.

A vibrant and busy city with an authenticity of its own that offers tradition mixed with a newly developing city. Dhaka city has more life and character than I have seen anywhere else.

As told to Wahida Mitu



Patricia enjoys the playfulness and happy faces of street children on a rainy day in Dhaka.

## Toilets-on-wheels yet to start moving

IMRUL HASAN

Cleantech Limited, the private organisation that undertook the project of setting up 50 mobile toilets plans to stop work because of lack of financial support.

Although preparations were completed and the toilets were built, Cleantech is unable to run them as the sponsors are falling behind in their interest in the project.

Among the sponsors who had offered financial support were Grameen Phone, Rahimafrooz and the City Bank.

"It is disappointing that they

are not interested in supporting us anymore," said Cleantech's chairman, said Sufi Iqbal Ahmed.

"If we get sufficient assistance from these private companies and banking sectors, we would install and maintain the service and keep the environment clean," he said.

Cleantech undertook the initiative to set up mobile toilets at 50 points in the city in April 2004, in association with the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

According to the project plan, two models of toilets would be installed, designed and built by their own expertise using local material.

One is a 16-cubicle toilet-on-

wheels that can be moved from one place to another by a towing vehicle, with the wider sides holding a 20' x 6' space for sponsors' advertisements, and Cleantech's expectation is Tk five lakh from each sponsor.

The second type is a small portable model, consisting of two urinals and a commode. This particular model has advertising space on three sides of the trailer. The back -- facing the street, measures 9' x 8' and the two side panels measuring 4' x 8' each.

"Though it is not in our official agenda, we are now seeking sponsors for the project. Private companies, banks or cellular phone companies should come

forward to promote such projects in the name of public welfare," said Sohail Farouque, DCC's chief conservancy officer.

The companies that had earlier agreed to sponsor the project admitted that they had pledged their support but had to change their decision because of strategic reasons.

"Our advertising policies do not permit us to sponsor projects of this nature," said a high official of Rahimafrooz requesting anonymity.

When asked, why verbal assurance was given, he said: "According to our CRS (Corporate Social Responsibilities) we believe that it is our responsibility to do

something for the welfare of the society, but later revised the decision as sponsoring a public toilet project would give a negative impression of us."

In the meantime the DCC fixed rates for urinating and defecating at Tk 2 and Tk 5 respectively.

When Ahmed was asked why they require a sponsor if they are charging the users, he replied that maintaining mobile toilets is very expensive.

"We have to engage three to four people for cleaning and maintaining each toilet and require special vehicles to pump out extracts to keep the toilets clean," he said adding that supplying adequate water to

each toilet is also another costly item.

There are only 69 public toilets in Dhaka city for more than one crore city dwellers, which is not enough to cater to the need of such a large population, experts said.

These toilets are managed by the DCC and the toilet/citizen ratio stands at three lakh persons to each toilet.

Most of these toilets, under 10 zones of the DCC in 90 wards, are also located in inaccessible areas, said an official of the DCC.

However, city dwellers, especially the floating crowd, office goers, working women and students, garment workers,

educational institutions and public places have expressed high satisfaction over the plan of these mobile public toilets.

"Because of the acute inadequacy of public toilets many males tend to relieve themselves in any corner of the city creating public nuisance, and women suffer more leading to serious health complications," said Abdul Alim, a resident of Uttara.

"Perhaps this is an end to our sufferings. I feel bad when I use public toilets when I am out of office," Alim said.

Farjana Nipa, a government employee, from Mohammadpur was pleased at the idea of mobile public toilets and said: "I spend

long hours in my office. The mobile toilets facility will be of immense help. The DCC should set up more mobile public toilets within short distance in the entire city."

Razzak Ali, a government officer said, "As each day thousands of pedestrians, visitors and local community are using open drains or roadside walls to relieve themselves, this project needs to be started as early as possible."

"Proper utilisation of the mobile toilets will promote a healthy environment to city commuters and visitors," he added.

10x4

10x4