

Dhaka Day by Day

Bricks and Stones Won't Break My Bones

by Fayza Haq

Through the rain, heat and cold winds that assail Dhaka throughout the year, women, clad in only flimsy cotton "sari" and no blouse, work away at breaking bricks for a living.

Why do they choose such a hard labour? It is because no other is available to them, and they need the money that they earn to keep the hearth fires burning. Many of them are married to rickshawallas, who do not have a steady income of their own. Some are the sole earners of the family. They manage to skimp and make ends meet. There is no question of having a bank balance. Often they do not have enough to afford proper medical attention, when they have frequent fevers or gastric trouble. They cannot afford to send their children to school and in many cases bring them along, so that they lend a helping hand.

Walking along the Dhanmandi lanes I came across a group of women, hard at work, under makeshift corrugated tin sheds and umbrellas suspended from tree branches.

Rehana, 35, who has two children, has been breaking bricks for ten years. Coming from Barisal, she said, "They don't employ you as domestics when you have your children as hangers on. I live 'across the river' at Jhaokhar. I bring my meals of 'dal' and 'bhat' every-

day to save costs. Sometimes I even work on an empty stomach. My hands are stiff and swollen with work, as you can see for yourself. My gastric trouble has me laid up for days. I must save enough to come and go by boat for Tk 3 every day."

Her husband, Matlab, is a rickshawpuller and earns at most Tk 40 a day. That too, he is not regular about bringing home a steady income. "I cannot afford even the so-called free schools. I might send my children to study at the nearby mosque, if I can spare them," the lean and scrawny, weather-beaten Rehana added. All her periodic savings go on medicines. She has only two "saris" to her name.

Afroza, 30, is the leader of the gang of 25 women workers. She too is from Barisal. Whereas Rehana takes home Tk 500 a month, Afroza gets Tk 800 to Tk 900, as she organises the entire group work. She has four children to take care of, and lives in Jhikatola, paying Tk 300 as house rent alone. She spends about Tk 4 on "pan-sapat" every day. While she brings some of her children along with her to assist her, she carries one on her lap.

Her husband is reportedly an incurable vagabond, who takes no responsibility for the children. "He roams on the roads and somehow manages to eat off pavement cafes," Afroza recounted about her husband's doings. "I my-

self don't get a job all the year round, and live on 'alu bharta' and 'dal'. Sometimes 'panabhat' and chillies have to suffice," she added. She is proud of the fact that she can afford to send at least one of her children to the free school at Jhikatola.

Seven-year-old Rushia, the daughter of the worker Nasima, works with the group regularly. "How can I afford to educate her when there is not enough to eat in the house?" the mother asked petulantly. Are the children paid extra? No such luck! They simply help their parents in breaking the brick and the mothers are grateful for it. A group of six can break about 100 tiles a day.

Nasima, who has four children of her own, leaves the other three at home in Kapranchar, "across the river". Her husband Abdul Rashid is a rickshawpuller with erratic moods and fluctuating earnings. "He takes to violence when he cannot get enough for his drugs which he has got addicted to. Even his cigarettes alone are such an expense. He has other bad habits too, I must lament. When your husband drinks and takes to drugs you can only console yourself that he is not womanising. Wife-beating is a common phenomenon among the poor-classes like us and we just accept it as 'kismet'. We can't fight it," Nasima narrated.

She gets Tk 400 for her tools and said that she had not tasted fish or meat for years now. She was glad to have the chance to have vegetables. She said she paid Tk 200 for rent, and that left her little for herself and her children.

Working at easier jobs would bring in only about Tk 200 as maid-servant in Dhanmandi or Eskaton houses. The children would again be a hassle. The brick-breakers are not sure of how to contact NGOs to learn skills and get a steady income there. "You must have contacts to have inroads to better jobs. Even for posts at the garment factories you need influence and the ability to know the right people to give you the plum job," the woman said.

These brick breakers, who cannot afford proper clothes, meals or medical attention, and who do not dream of having bank accounts or sending their children to even a free school, work with a smile. They chat, laugh and talk while they work. They do not crib or complain much, and take life as it comes, facing the consequences boldly. There is no undue whining or whimpering. More women workers should have their guts and gumption. If you compare them with the domestics that you come across every day, these tile breakers work much harder, and complain much less. They are landless people, making the best of the circumstances.



The sole earner of a family

Internee doctors of SSMCH call off strike

Internee doctors of Sir Salmullah Medical College Hospital have withdrawn their strike Tuesday following a fruitful discussion with Director General of Health Services Professor Dr AT Siddique, reports BSS.

According to an official source, the internee doctors have resumed their duties after the discussion.

Air Force chief off to Pakistan

The Chief of Air Staff Air Vice Marshal Altaf Hossain Chowdhury left Dhaka Tuesday for Pakistan on a week-long good-will visit to Pakistan Air Force, an ISPR release said, reports BSS.

During the visit, Air Vice Marshal Chowdhury will call on his counterpart and discuss matters of mutual interest. He will also visit different air bases, training institutions and establishments of Pakistan Air Force.

The Chief of Air Staff is expected to back home September 3.

Hearing of Rab's bail petition continues

The hearing of the bail petition of former leader of the Opposition in Parliament ASM Abdur Rab continued Tuesday for the second day before a Division Bench of the High Court Division, reports BSS.

Sirajul Haq appeared on behalf of the petitioner and Alhaj M Shamsul Alam, Deputy Attorney General appeared for the state.

The hearing will resume today.

TV Wednesday

- 5.00 Opening announcement, Al Quran, Programme Summary
- 5.15 Reading from the Gecra
- 5.20 News in Bangla
- 5.30 Shaurabe Gaurabe
- 5.55 Sports programme
- 7.05 Programme of new artists
- 8.00 News in Bangla
- 8.30 Sangbad Parikarama
- 9.00 Film: MacGyver
- 10.00 News in English
- 10.30 Nibedan
- 11.30 Khabar/The News
- 11.45 Closing

'Artistes sing only 50 out of 900 Nazrul songs'

State Minister for Information M. Nurul Huda Tuesday said we should take lesson from the life and work of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam and implement them to reach the desired target of establishment of democracy, reports BSS.

He was speaking as the chief guest at a discussion on "Nazrul in the mass media" held at Nazrul Institute premises at Dhanmodi in Dhaka.

Organised by Nazrul Institute on the second day of the three-day programme in observance of Nazrul's 15th death anniversary and inauguration of 100th birth anniversary lecture series, the discussion was presided over by poet Mohammad Mahfujullah.

Poet Ataur Rahman, Fakuruzzaman Chowdhury and Abu Jafar Siddique of

Bangladesh Television and M. Mozakker of Radio Bangladesh participated in the discussion.

Paying rich tributes to late Poet Nazrul, the State Minister said Nazrul had revolted against autocracy, injustice, oppression and exploitation of the people.

Nurul Huda urged upon all concerned including singers, composers and producers in the media to take necessary steps so that more new songs of Nazrul could be broadcast and telecast through the media and make the people more familiar with the poet.

He pointed out that Nazrul had composed about 3,500 songs and musical notations of 900 of them were available. But only about 50 songs of Nazrul were being sung by the singers in the media again and again, he said.

He said as a national poet, the work of Nazrul including songs and drama should be widely publicised so that the people could extract more and more from his rich literary treasurers.

He said three could be difference of opinion regarding the musical notations of Nazrul. He said the researchers should discuss them and arrive at definitive conclusions.

In his presidential speech, poet Mahfujullah said Nazrul was associated with the media since he joined "Letur Dal" as a composer of song-tournament. Later, he edited a number of newspapers published from Calcutta and was also associated with the Gramophone Company and the radio as a singer and composer of musical notations of his songs.

Operation Doorbar

1145 arrested: Huge arms recovered

Staff Correspondent

Police under its 'Operation Doorbar' have arrested 1145 persons and recovered 38 firearms from different parts of the country during the last 24 hours.

The arms included one rifle, one revolver, one pistol, one shot-gun, 34 pipe-guns, 85 rounds of ammunitions, four bayonets and 64 explosives.

These were recovered from Dhaka, Chittagong, Mymensingh, Khulna, Gazipur, Munshigonj, Faridpur, Rajbari, Cox's Bazar, Chandpur, Feni, Comilla, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Jessore, Magura, Kushtia, Meherpur, Rangpur, Serajgonj and Bogra districts.

The arrested persons included absconding prisoners, mastans, illegal toll collectors, drug smugglers, and armed members of the Sarbojha Party.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrested 129 persons in connection with various crimes in the city during the last 24 hours ending on Tuesday and

recovered two pipe-guns, explosives and ammunition. Police also seized 30 grams of heroin from Begunbari Bastea under Tejgaon Thana.

Office bearers of 2 JU halls installed

JU Correspondent

The newly elected office bearers of Fazilatunnessa hall and AFM Kamaluddin Hall students unions of Jahangirnagar University were installed formally in a colourful programme held at the 'Muktomoncho' (open stage) of the University Tuesday evening.

Shipping Minister, M. Keramat Ali attended the installation ceremony as the chief guest, while Mrs. Salcha Hossain, mother of late Dr. Milon was the special guest. JUCSU President and Vice-Chancellor Prof. Kazi Saleh Ahmed was in the chair.

The programme was followed by a musical show presented by 'Obscure'.

Discussion on Nazrul at Bangla Academy today

Bangla Academy will organise a discussion on Poet Nazrul at the Academy premises at 5 pm. today (Wednesday).

Dr Karunamoy Goswami will present a paper on Nazrul Songs. Muhammad Jahangir and Muhammad Nurul Huda will participate in the discussion. Professor Muhammad Maniruzzaman will preside over the discussion.

Reception

Mr Y Inagaki, President of Tokyo Hotels International and Mr Andrew Mcburnie General Manager, Sonargaon Hotel, hosted a reception here Tuesday night in celebration of the 10th founding anniversary of Hotel Sonargaon, reports BSS.

The reception was attended, among others, by senior officials, diplomats, journalists and elite of the city.

Body recovered

Police Tuesday recovered a decomposed body of a middle-aged man from Balljharti lake at Uttara Model Town, reports UNB.

The victim was identified as Abdul Haq (35), son of late Abdur Rashid of Monohardhi in Narshingdi district.

BDRCS condoles death of Alexandre Hay

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) Tuesday expressed "profound shock and great sorrow" at the death of Alexandre Hay, former President of the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, reports BSS.

Alexandre Hay, a Swiss national and President of the ICRC from 1976 to 1987 (three terms), died on Friday.

In a message sent to Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the ICRC, the Chairman of the BDRCS Major General (Retd) A F M Abdul Haq and Secretary-General Major (Retd) Ali Hassan Quoreshi recalled the contribution of Alexandre Hay to the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. "In his (Alexandre Hay) death our movement undoubtedly lost an outstanding leader, upholder of Red Cross principles and great advocate of world peace," the message said.

They also expressed their sympathy with Mrs Hay and the members of the bereaved family and prayed for their strength "to bear this irreparable loss."

Asia Foundation Consultant meets Hasina

Asia Foundation Consultant for Legislative Programme and Information Management Ms Jane Anne Lindley made a courtesy call on Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina Tuesday, reports UNB.

Deputy leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad, Zillur Rahman and Mafizur Rahman were present during the meeting at Bangabandhu Bhaban.

The discussed various aspects of legislative, research and information support services of the Jatiya Sangsad, party sources said.

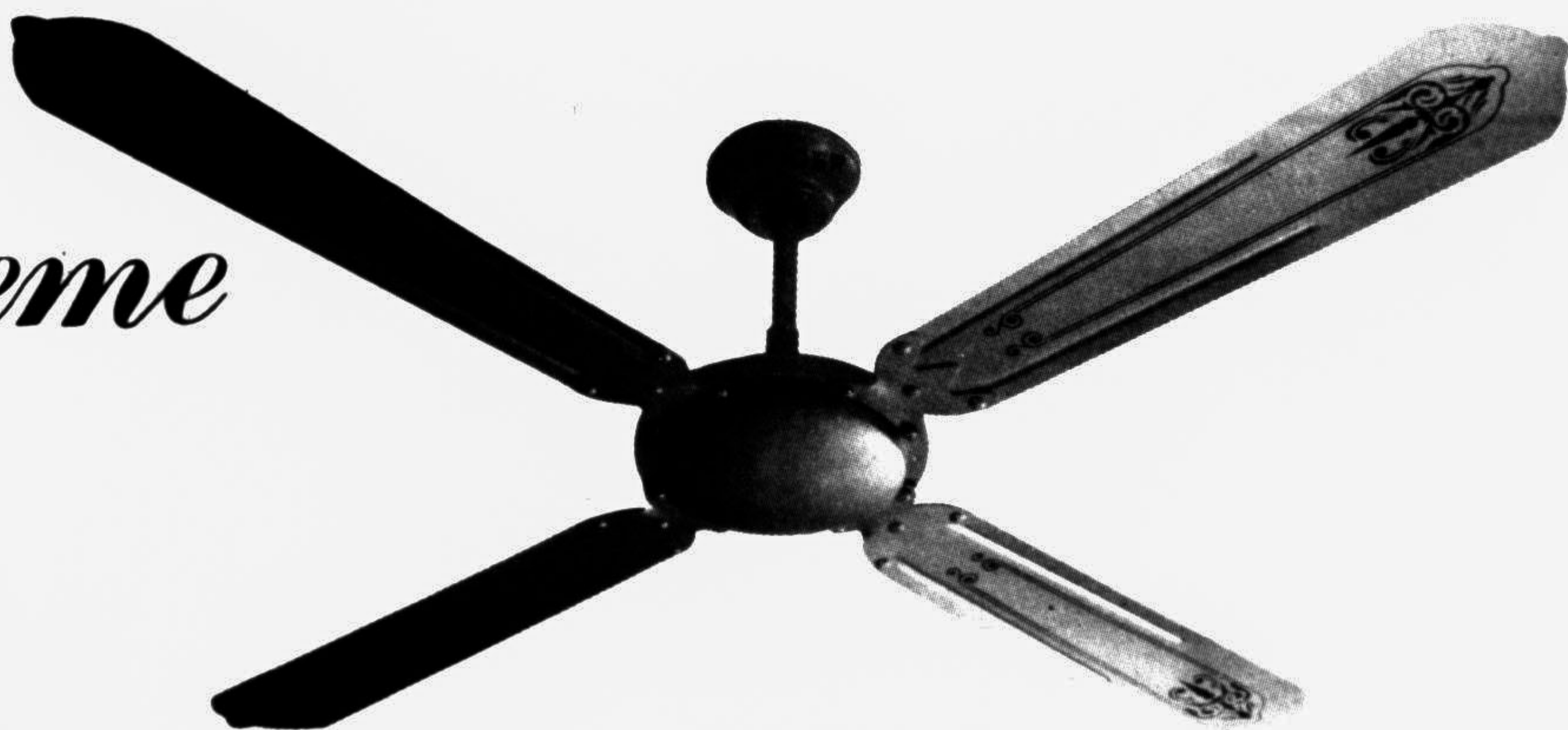
Qulkhwani

Qulkhwani of Rafiqur Rahman will be held tomorrow (Thursday) after Asr prayer at 44, Minto Road in the city, reports UNB.

Rafiqur Rahman, the eldest brother of Justice Latifur Rahman of the Supreme Court, died of heart attack on Monday in Dhaka. He was 69.

He is survived by two sons and two daughters, said a press release.

Not just a fan— expressions of poise and elegance

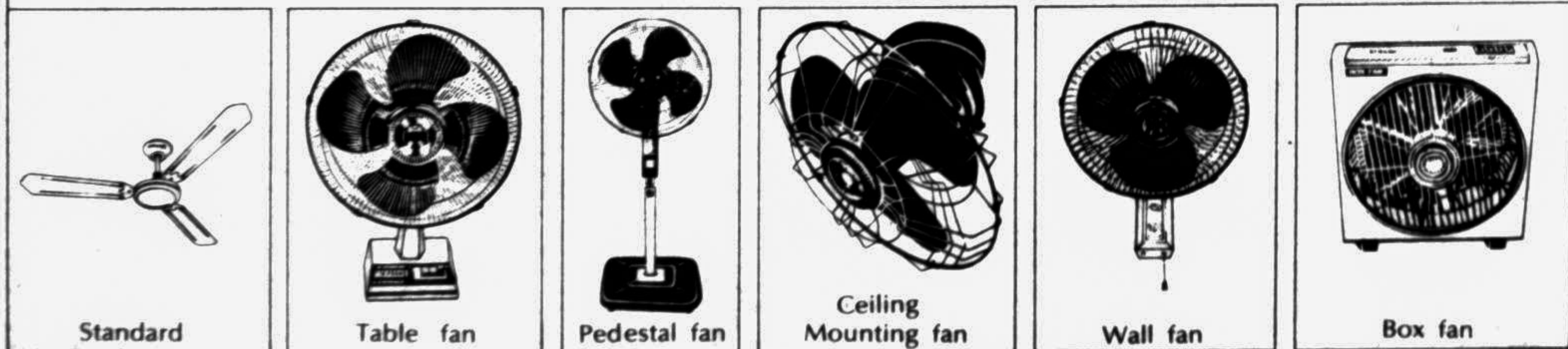


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