

Metropolitan

Dhaka Day by Day

Undeterred a Slum Boy Carries on . . .

by Nikesh Das

Unlike most of the teenage school-going boys Akter Hossain, 15, has set himself the task of devoting his time to just two duties' calls. On the one hand, he is a student and on the other, he is a hawker of steaming tea. Various constraints notwithstanding, he nurtures a dream like most other students for the future.

Akter lives with the member of his family in Golapbagh, Demra in the south-eastern part of Dhaka city. Stark poverty is the way of life for Akter's family.

Only few years back Akter's family migrated to Dhaka from Comilla, some 97 kilometers from Dhaka for employment and a better life. Akter's father Md Kursheed

Alam started his life in Dhaka as a street hawker selling 'Muri'. But in 1990 he died due to liver complications survived by his wife, four sons and one daughter. His death only aggravated the suffering of the whole family. Akter then a student of class VI came forward to share some of the family burden. He started to sell tea in and around Gopibag bazar. From then on, he is a part-time tea-seller and a part-time student.

For his convenience Akter usually starts selling tea at 6:30 am and continues it till 1:00 pm. Then he retires to his shack eat whatever he gets and take rest.

Akter usually sells two flasks of tea (one flask contains 40/45 cups) and earns an average of Tk. 30 (US \$75). Though, Akter's investment is not big yet the most worrisome day for him is the one when his flask bursts. Purchasing a new flask means at least Tk. 400 (US \$10) which is an enormous sum for him.

Expressing his feeling when he gets his flask burst he says, 'I feel very shocked because this is directly related to my mother and sister's bread.'

In this age of competition Akter's job is not exception either. Here the competition is not for more luxury or sophistication but for sheer survival. Akter has many colleagues in this line to compete with. Akter says, 'Now-a-days competi-

tion is much more higher and tougher than when I started this trade. But in Gopibag bazar I am the oldest and very familiar with the vendors. They love me and favour me taking a cup of tea from me,' he added.

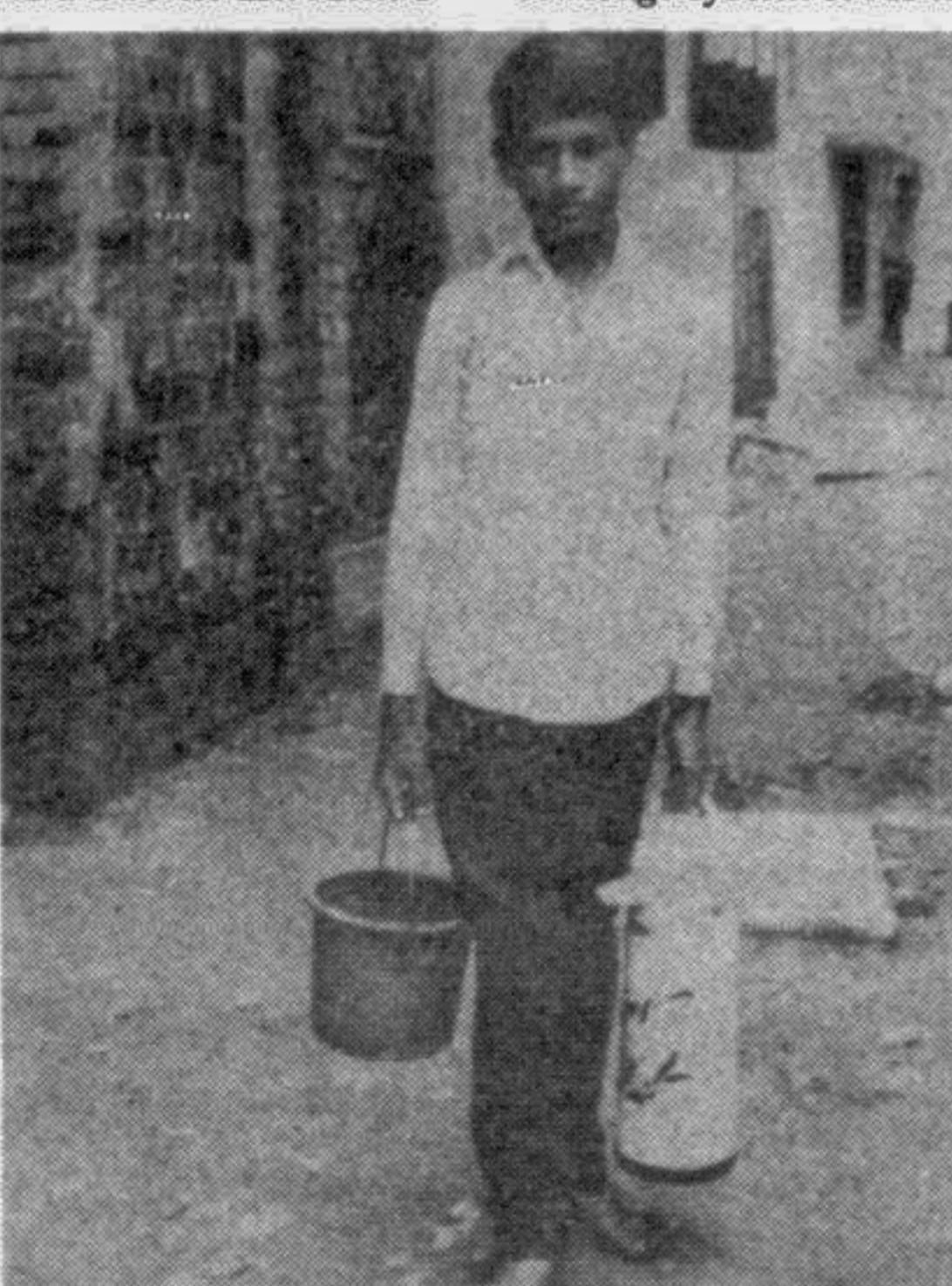
Except Akter, his elder brother Shaheed Alam, 17, works in a welding shop and earns about Tk 600 (US \$15) monthly to meet their daily needs including house rent Tk 800 (US \$20). Akter's living-cum-dining-cum-drawing room for six members is (15x12) sq. feet and they share one kitchen, latrine and tubewell with three other families. The environment, sanitation and sewerage system of his area are very poor.

Akter is now a student of class IX in Fakirpool Naisha (night) High School. He regularly attends school at night coming all the way on foot. Riding rickshaw is a luxury for him. He is very obedient and attentive to his study. He usually stands first in class examinations. His struggle and performance have moved World Vision, an international humanitarian organization to provide him with educational assistance. This assistance includes books, tuition fees, uniform, examination fees, exercise books etc.

In replying to the question how he reacts when he meets his classmates, friends or other teenage affluent boys during hawking his drink, he says, 'I generally do not initiate conversation with classmates or friends unless they do.'

Akter wants, if possible, to have his graduation. Then he wishes to have a good job except in police department. Somehow he has developed the idea that there are many corrupt people in police department. Anyway he does not like to be a corrupt element in future.

There are thousands of young boys like Akter in our society, who are fighting an unequal battle against poverty and not-so-friendly a society but despite of all the adversities they nurture the dream to be good and to do something positive for themselves as well as society. But nobody knows what the future really holds for Akters !



Akter Hossain on way to his daily routine of selling tea. not initiate conversation with classmates or friends unless they do."



The Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association (FBUTA) observed a token hunger strike at the Dhaka University Club yesterday.

— Star photo

Home Minister tells JS Smuggled goods worth Tk 49cr seized

Smuggled goods worth Tk 49.14 crore had been seized by the authorities from border areas in Jessore and Satkhira districts in last two fiscal years (1991-92 and 1992-93), reports UNB.

Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury said this in parliament yesterday replying to a question from Prof. Mohamed Wallullah (AL).

The seized smuggled goods included saree, cow, buffalo, salt, sugar, dal, jute seeds, bicycle, wood, leather, machinery spares, fish, onion, phenisidyl syrup, imitation, Jewellery, yarn, drugs, crockeries and nylon nets.

Goods seized while being attempted to smuggle out of the country included polyester cloth, VCR, gold, old garments, brass and vehicles, the minister said.

He added that 1,568 cases were filed and 2,203 people arrested on smuggling charges.

Over 1 crore unemployed

Country's unemployed population now totals 1,22,76,000 including 40,74,000 educated people, Planning Minister A. M. Zahiruddin Khan informed parliament yesterday.

Of the educated unemployed, some 1,59,000 are graduates and above, the Planning Minister said replying to a question from Begum Rashida Khatun of Jamaat-e-Islami.

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