

DOWN TO EARTH

Lure of Sidewalk Eatables

By ASM Nurunnabi

There are numerous spots on the sidewalks of city thoroughfares where a variety of eatables are offered for sale from mobile and makeshift stalls. Such eatables range from seasonal fruits to basic diets like dal bhat and various kinds of beverages. The vendors of these eatables attract more business in those areas where people congregate in large numbers such as bus stations, steamer ghats, railway stations, shopping centres, etc. They constitute a conspicuous aspect of our city life.

A brief survey of this sidewalk business shows that seasonal fruits occupy a pre-dominant place in it. Now is the season of various kinds of fruits. We find in the bazaars an abundant supply of them. Yet the irony is that the majority of our people being poor, many of such fruits remain out of reach of many of them.

Though most of our people, by and large, are hard pressed to spend extra money beyond their essential needs, they seem to harbour a definite craving for the native seasonal fruits. This perhaps explains the existence of so many food vendors on sidewalks and their brisk business at all seasons.

The conspicuous areas in the city where such fruit vendors operate extend from one end of Baitul Mukarram to the old railway gate across Gulistan and Stadium areas. They also operate in front of some important office blocks in the Motijheel Commercial area. The hospitals in the Shahbagh area also provide suitable locations for these fruit vendors.

To make their wares easily accessible to customers with small means, the fruits with some size are cut into small pieces carrying low price tags. A cursory view of the business in some areas suggested that the current favourites are cucumber, water melons, pine apples, papaya, green coconut,

etc. One characteristic is noticeable: each fruit vendor specialises in selling one type of seasonal fruits although our different seasons produce a large variety of them. When temperature rises in summer, the items mainly offered are sugarcane juice, water melons, green coconut and iced sherbet. Ice cream vendors also do a brisk business. Black berries and sweet hog plum (Anra) when in season also draw a large number of customers.

Besides the seasonal fruits, the sidewalk eatables include some basic items of Bangalee diet such as rice, dal, curry, roti, etc. The vendors of these items may be seen mainly near large construction sites where large number of labourers work and also many other busy places like bus terminals, railway stations, launch ghats, etc. As with fruit items, such street foods are typical not only of Dhaka alone. In several cities in South East Asia, such as Bangkok, Singapore, their presence is also noticeable, but there a more hygienic and organised system operates.

We find another sight towards the evening at many important crossroads and in the vicinity of some bazaars. The vendors in this case deal in liquid milk, regarded generally as health food. A big cauldron contains the milk which is allowed to simmer over a smouldering fire from a kerosene stove. The vendor sits beside the sizzling cauldron on a low stool with a small pile of sliced bread on a platter. Most of the customers are rickshawpullers who tend to believe that a glass of hot milk with pieces of bread dipped in it will help them recoup their strength and energy lost in their physical labour. There are also customers from other walks of life imbued with the same attitude.

There are many undesirable aspects from the hygienic point of view in the whole trade of street foods. As regards the

fruits, most of them are offered for sale either peeled off or cut into pieces which are kept without any cover. As a result, flies and dust settle on them freely. The same condition afflicts other food items. The lack of control by the authorities and the vendors' lack of knowledge about safe food handling pose a potential health risk to consumers.

Street foods in Dhaka though lacking in proper standard and thus posing a health hazard have come to stay. They represent an important economic activity considering their necessity and importance in the day-to-day life of certain socio-economic strata. The ramifications of street foods constitute a vast industry that involves thousands of people. It provides employment to a large segment of the population, who might otherwise remain unemployed including women and city migrants.

But the ways this business is conducted in most cases at present need to be changed with a firm guidance. With a view to raising them to a healthy standard, the health authorities should initiate action including, among other things, provision of clean environment, supply of clean water and use of safe raw materials for preparation of such foods. It also behoves the City Corporation to be vigilant in the matter.

Bangladesh is experiencing one of the highest urban growth rates in the region. Commensurate with this trend, the urban people's dependence on street foods has been making a significant growth. In this perspective, by ensuring proper hygienic standard for street foods, it may be possible to convert the attending problems of the trade into opportunities for developing into dependable food retailing outlets.

Now DV-1 'surcharge'!

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Long queues snaked in the crowded GPO building with people struggling hard for hours to have their mails stamped.

With the visa aspirants, vendors and touts milling, the GPO has also become a haven for those who want to earn some easy bucks.

Nobody could say how many US-bound mails were dropped at the GPO everyday as the DV-1 rush started late last month.

However, guesses ranged from 40 thousand to one lakh each day. Besides, post offices across the country also received thousands of DV-1 mails everyday.

On enquiry, the official concerned at the GPO said he had not received any allegation on illegal realisation of money by the postal department officials. He also declined to divulge any information on the volume of their daily receipt of DV-1 mails.

"We are stamping an average of 10 to 15 mails a minute," said one employee at the GPO counter in her frantic stamping activities.

"Nobody has the time to count," she said, declining to name herself.

The scene in the GPO was like this: people queued for hours, elbowing each other, reached the counters after long struggle, gave money to the teller and usually heard "don't worry about the change."

However, on insistence the GPO personnel were seen returning the change. "Won't you give us something when you are embarking on such a lucky venture?", the employees were heard saying.

Postal department officials said that due to the immense pressure from the public, the GPO employees have been working overtime with extended shifts everyday from 7 am until 8 pm non-stop, an effort that would bring an estimated Taka one crore to the national exchequer.

How much the GPO teller employees have been earning everyday?

According to a rough count, if 10 mails are stamped in one minute Taka two is realised per mail, the collection goes as high as Taka 15,600 a day.

Until June 15, the total realisation relating to the DV-1 mailing rose to about Taka two lakh and 34 thousand, according to the count.

Besides, a section of GPO employees were also seen realising money from people who wanted to avoid the mad rush

at the counters.

The employees reached the counters through the 'back door' to have mails stamped by the franking machines.

Hundreds of makeshift stalls have been set up at the GPO premises and its adjoining areas where vendors were selling printed visa forms.

A section of low-paid government employees also sold the forms, envelopes, pens and other materials after the office hours.

Muhammad Shamsul Islam, a small trader of Chwakh Bazar, came to the GPO to drop his mail.

When asked what will he do in America, he seemed confused. "I really don't know...let me see my luck first," he said.

Under the DV-1 programme, the US government will select by lottery 55,000 immigrant world-wide, with about 7,000 from Asia.

In 1991, some 6,000 Bangladesh nationals won visas for migrating to the US under the OP-1 visa lottery programme.

Sirajganj transport strikes called off

SIRAJGANJ, June 17: The indefinite truck and bus strikes that started from June 11 and 15 respectively, were withdrawn Thursday after a fruitful discussion between the transport union leaders and district administration, reports UNB.

Eleven arrested truck workers were released following the discussion of the transport union leaders with the Deputy Commissioner and Police Superintendent on Thursday.

The DC and the SP also assured the leaders of the transport union that 22 anti-social elements who were collecting tolls from transport workers illegally, will be arrested.

Thai FM

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Also present were Indonesian ambassador Hadi Wayarabi Athadar and Malaysian high commissioner A R Ahmed Fuzi to receive the foreign Minister of the fellow ASEAN country.

The meeting of the joint commission begins today and is followed by meeting of senior officials.

Saraj Chavanaviraj, deputy permanent secretary of the Thai Foreign Ministry, who led his country's delegation to the official level talks, was also present at the airport.

Torrential rain

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enced 112mm rainfall Thursday recorded 92mm yesterday while Patuakhali 90mm, Kutubdia 73mm, Chittagong 47 (87 mm in the previous 24 hours), Khepupara 45mm, Tangail 38mm, Sakthira 28mm, Rangamati 27mm, Sitakunda 25mm, Majdi Court 23mm, Feni, Hatia and Barisal 22mm each, Bogra 21mm and Sandwip, Khulna, Jessore, Ishardi, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Madaripur, Chuadanga and Rajshahi below 20mm of rainfall each.

The Met Office has forecast further heavy rainfall for the coming week adding that Chittagong, Barisal and Khulna division are likely to experience heavy downpours at places.

The regions of Dhaka and Faridpur may also experience heavy rainfall at places, it said. Meanwhile, our Staff Correspondent from Chittagong reports, torrential rainfall paralysed normal life in the port city yesterday.

It also triggered flash flood in most of the low-lying areas of the city.

The rainfall which has been continuing here for the last three days has intensified from this morning.

The city areas flooded by rainfall included Agrabad, Chawkbazar, Moghailoti, Katalgonj, Kapasgola, Chaktai and Bakalia. UNB adds: Most areas in 25 unions of five Cox's Bazar thanas have gone under water after continuous rain during the last two days.

The affected thanas are: Chakoria, Ramu, Ukhia, Teknaf and Cox's Bazar sadar.

Road communication between Cox's Bazar and Chittagong remained cut off from 4 pm yesterday as the Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway has gone under water at three places — Joarianala of Ramu thana, Khurulia and Bangla Bazar of Sadar thana.

Khurulia diversion bridge has been washed off by water.

The worst affected thanas are Ramu and Chakoria where about 30,000 people have become marooned.

The Bakkhali and Matamuhuri rivers are overflowing. About 50 houses on the banks of Bakkhali river were eroded yesterday.

Shops and houses in Bazarghata, Rice market, Temple road and Goldghirpar areas of Cox's Bazar town have gone under two feet water.

Erosion made 650 families homeless in Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, June 17:

Erosion of the river Jamuna has rendered some 650 families homeless during the last two days in Kazipur, Shahzadpur and Sadar thanas of the district, reports UNB.



The Emperor and Empress of Japan talk with Boutros Boutros-Ghali (C), the Secretary General of the United Nations. The royal couple toured the UN headquarters June 16 as part of their two-week visit to the United States. — AFP photo

Body to probe Pak banking scam

ISLAMABAD, June 17: The government today appointed a judicial commission to probe a multi-million dollar banking scandal allegedly involving top Pakistani politicians and generals, a minister said, reports AFP.

The panel headed by Supreme Court Judge Abdul Gader Chaudhury, will comprise five sitting and retired superior court judges, Interior Minister Naseerullah Babar told a news conference here.

The decision followed a vigorous campaign by the main opposition leader Nawaz Sharif against the leaders of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) including President Farooq Ahmed Leghari.

Sharif has accused Leghari of receiving kickbacks worth 500,000 dollars in a shady deal selling his farm land through the Mehran Bank Limited (MBL), a charge Leghari has denied.

Yunus Habib, chief of the private MBL, has been in jail since March on charges of misappropriating 2,100 rupees (70 million dollars) of deposits and 36.7 million dollars from the sales of foreign exchange bearers certificates.

The commission will probe the bank's "operation and the manner in which it provided illegal gratification, advances, or any other benefits to government officers, public servants or those holding high

Speaker

From Page 1 Col 8

he added.

The Speaker held talks with the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina on June 6 following a discussion with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia.

He reportedly had communicated the ruling party's position to the Opposition leader and later conveyed the outcome of the meeting with Hasina to Begum Zia.

The Opposition parties have been boycotting Parliament session in demand for constitutional provisions for caretaker government for holding general election.

The ruling party proposed strengthening the Election Commission (EC) to ensure free and fair polls.

The sources said that the Speaker might also discuss the latest initiative by the ruling party to amend the election rules to make the EC more powerful in conducting elections.

The ruling party leaders already informed the Speaker about the outline of a bill in this regard, likely to be placed before the House in the current session.

Meanwhile, Opposition sources alleged that the ruling party had no intention to resolve the present impasse.

Husband kills wife in city

By DMCH Correspondent

A 30-year-old woman, Farida Begum, was reportedly beaten to death by her husband in the city's Mohammadpur area yesterday.

Amanullah, husband of the woman, allegedly fled from the house early in the morning leaving Farida fatally wounded.

Relatives claimed that Amanullah, a construction worker severely beat his wife early in the morning following an altercation between the couple.

Farida was taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) by one of her cousins Siraj and died in the hospital around 6 pm, police said.

Later Siraj lodged a case with Mohammadpur police accusing his brother in law, Amanullah, of the murder.

Police said that Amanullah eluded police-arrest but they had interrogated several other persons. No arrest was made, they added.

Jamaat demands blasphemy law

Jamaat-e-Islami leader Ma-tur Rahman Nizami MP yesterday demanded enactment of a blasphemy law to punish the anti-Islamic elements, reports UNB.

"If there was a blasphemy law in the country, the anti-Islamic elements could not have dared to spread their vile activities here," he said.

Addressing a party rally at the north gate of the Baitul Mukarram Mosque, the Jamaat Secretary General said some vested quarters were engaged in deep conspiracy against Islam and tarnishing its image through their motivated writings and activities.

Dhaka city Jamaat arranged the rally after the Juma prayers demanding punishment to the anti-Islamic elements, enactment of blasphemy law, ban on NGO activities directed against the teachings of Islam and to declare the 'Kadianis' as non-Muslim.

Whole country to be brought under REB

MOULVIBAZAR, June 17:

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman has said, the whole country would be brought under the rural electrification network in phases by the year 2000, reports BSS.

With this end in view allocation in the rural electrification sector will be increased to Taka 500 crore in the next budget, he said adding, this would be Taka 200 crore more than the current year's budget allocation.

The Finance Minister was inaugurating the rural electrification expansion programme of Moulvibazar "Palli Biddyt Samity" at Bhadgaon of the district yesterday. Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah-Al-Noman also spoke on the occasion.

The Rural Electrification Board (REB) has so far brought 14 thousand villages of the country into their network benefitting more than one crore people, he pointed out.

Russia signs peace accord with NATO Wednesday

BRUSSELS, June 17: Russian Foreign Minister Andrei

Kozyrev will sign a "Partnership for Peace" accord with NATO on Wednesday, an alliance source said Friday, reports AP.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the Russian foreign ministry confirmed that Kozyrev will sign the agreement at NATO headquarters. However, it was not immediately clear under what conditions Russia would

sign.

The Midnight File

Kashmiri leader killed

NEW DELHI, June 17: A leader of a Muslim militant group that is holding two Britons hostage in Kashmir was among 20 rebels killed by Indian troops, officials said Friday. It was not immediately known whether the killing of a deputy district leader of the Harkat ul-Ansar group in Sopore on Thursday night would set back efforts to free the hikers who were kidnapped last week, reports AP.

Rwandan truce talks stalled

KIGALI, June 17: UN-brokered ceasefire talks between rebels and the government army in Rwanda stalled today after a rebel grenade killed a peacekeeper and pro-government militia stormed a hotel housing refugees. The commander of UN forces in Rwanda, Major General Romeo Dallaire, said a date for the resumption of the talks would be announced later, reports Reuters.

Cerebral malaria claims more in Sunamganj

From Our Correspondent

SYLHET, June 17: The cerebral malaria epidemic in Sunamganj district remained unchanged with the killer disease claiming more lives during the last few weeks.

The total number of deaths since January now stands at 268, an official source informed. Of them, 178 died in Tahirpur, 83 in Dharmapasha and 7 in Biswamoharpur thanas. The disease in the meantime has spread to the adjoining villages under Dearabazar, Dharmapasha, and Sunamganj sadar thanas, the source said.

However, unofficial sources put the number of deaths at 1500. As most of the poor patients from the remote areas can not contact health workers or doctors at the thana headquarters due to lack of road communication facilities. A good number of deaths remained unreported.

A proposal for arranging boats was sent to the Health Directorate months ago by the district authorities, but fell on deaf ears, it is alleged. The medical team working in the areas have been suffering much for want of necessary trans-

PM: Students

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elections of the Dhaka College, Mirpur Government Bangla College, Tejgaon Government College, Homeopathic Medical College and Siddheshwari Degree College.

Welcoming the newly elected office-bearers, Begum Zia said the candidates of JCD have been winning student union elections in different colleges and universities, across the country as the student community and the people trust the BNP and the JCD most.

Begum Zia advised the JCD members to take part in politics side by side their studies but asked them to refrain from activities which are immoral and unethical.

The function was also addressed by Energy and Mineral Resource Minister Dr Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain, Education Minister Jamiruddin Sircar, Amanullah Aman MP, Barkatullah Bulu MP.

port.

Meanwhile Medical experts from WHO after visiting the affected areas suggested spraying of anti-malarial insecticide in the areas. But the Health Department raised objections on the plea of environment pollution.

Caretaker govt can't replace elected one: Huda

Information Minister Nazmul Huda said that democratically elected government was the real government of the people which could not be replaced by a caretaker government, reports BSS.

He was addressing as the chief guest at a discussion on "Parliamentary Democracy: Bangladesh Politics" arranged by the Doctors' Association of Bangladesh at the BIRDEM auditorium yesterday evening.

World Cup

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in the competition can be decisive under a new system awarding three points for a win in first-round games instead of two points as in the past.

At the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif., Colombia's status as tournament favourite will be put to an early test by Romania. The South Americans qualified for the World Cup without losing a game and its runup included a 5-0 victory over Argentina. But Romania are hardly a pushover.

For the United States, their first appearance as hosts — against Switzerland — is immediately critical.

As Romania and Colombia loom later in the first round, Saturday's game at the indoor Pontiac Silverdome is likely to be the best shot for victory. Representing a country with little soccer tradition, the US players must reach the second round to avoid embarrassment.

The United States exited after the first round in 1990 but may get an early break this time: Adrian Knap, the Swiss team's high scorer is doubtful after aggravating an ankle injury in practice.



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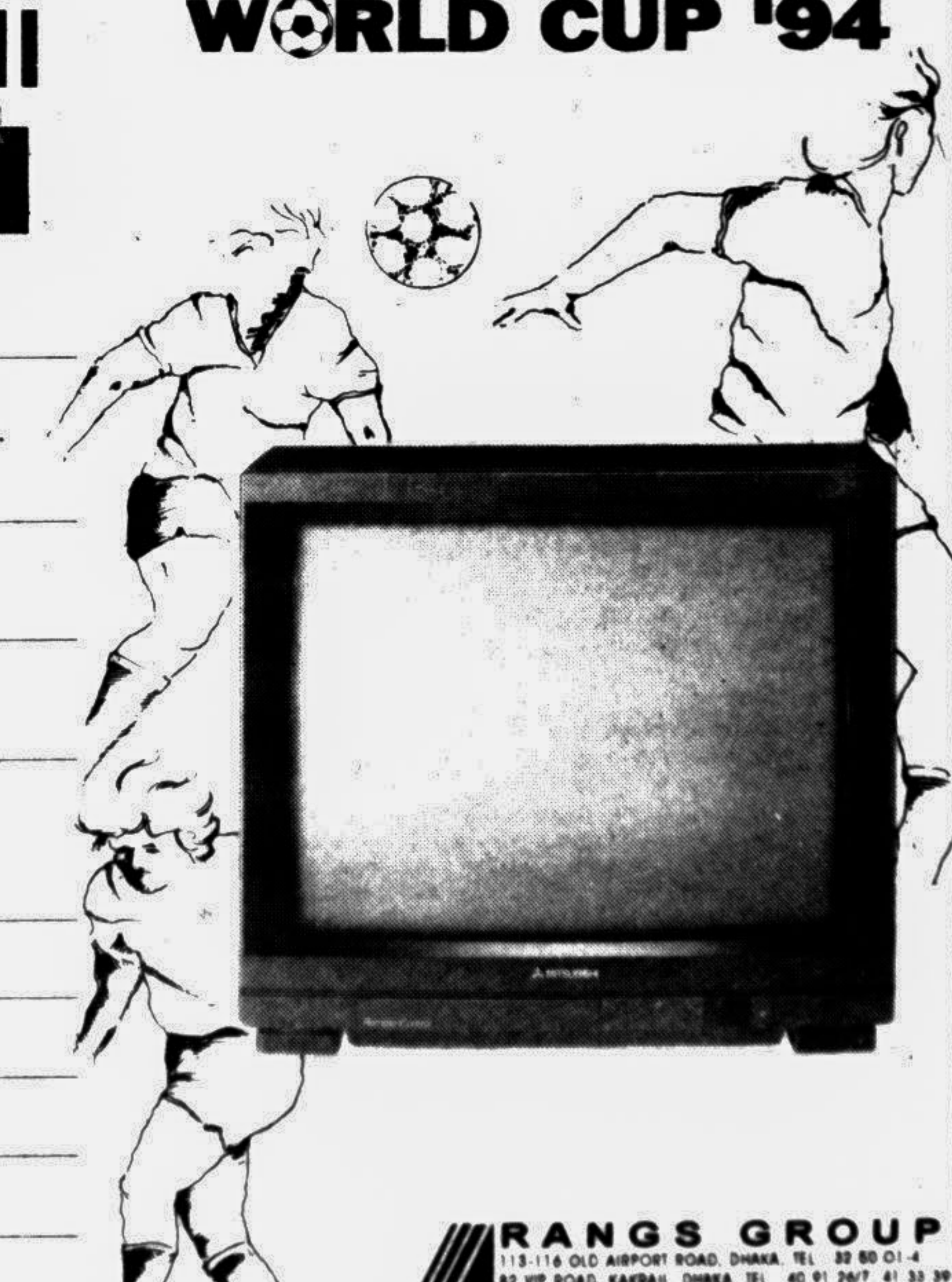
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