

## Dhaka Day by Day

## The Invading Little Hordes

by Fayza Haq

"I was reading in the small hours of night, as is my habit, thanks to insomnia, and lo and behold, what enters my half-lit room! A little rat that darts under the bed in between the old suitcases, and did I feel my skin crawl," said a lady in Dhanmondi. She has been putting poisoned baits for the rats in the garden but unfortunately it resulted in the death of her pet dog. As she is fond of cats and dogs, her garden is infested with black and brown rodents.

Rats are such a nuisance that someone living in Tikatoli had his entire living room cushions chewed up by rats and had to spend Tk 12,000 in renovating them. With the money he spent in setting up his home again, he moans that he could have bought himself a new cane set.

Cockroaches are another pest in the city that one cannot easily get rid of, no matter how much precaution one takes. They leap across the saucer full of water and get into the sugar pot. They will get their ugly legs and feelers into any dish, plate or cup left in the kitchen, pantry, dining room or any other place in the house.

In summer life is intolerable in the kitchen

closed and surrounded by water. These same ants eat up the leaves, flowers and fruits in the garden, along with the crows, bats, and monkeys too, if you happen to live in Old Dhaka.

Not only are your sweets and savouries under attack by the domestic pests but also your clothes and books. You dare not leave your clothes around, specially if they are soiled, for fear of finding large holes in them the next day.

White ants are another demon for attacking doors, windows, furniture and books. Despite all the pesticides being sold regularly in the Dhaka markets and the spraying of insecticides by the Dhaka Municipality authorities, and the use of kerosene, a gentleman in Purana Paltan complains of how his lifetime's collection of books were reduced to a heap of scrap by termites. Another lady leaving for USA has been delayed because the doors and windows of her property have been reduced to chips and she must stay back to renovate her house in Hatchhola before she migrates for greener pastures.

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A different kind of invasion

These cockroaches are such a menace that they even get into the meatsafe and refrigerator. They crawl under the lids of the bowls in some unearthy way, and get into the chopped fruit, meat, and any other dish. Covering bread or "samosas" and other left overs from the day in layers of paper and polythene is not enough. If you get up at midnight and if by some chance you have not covered the remaining rice or curry or even the "achar" securely in compact boxes, you will have these wretched insects having a feast on them. As for the vegetables and fruit, although they have a hard skin around them yet you feel revolted to see the pests licking and crawling through the food you will consume the next day. If by any chance you leave an opened half emptied bottle of "coke" or ketchup soon these detestable pests will be swimming in it," remarks a lady living in Mohakhali.

Ants, specially red ants, can be a frightful nuisance too. A young woman in Mogbazar took out her freshly baked birthday fruit cake from the oven to cool and went off for her "asai" prayers. When she returned, she found the gateau completely covered with red ants. She had to hurriedly place the cake on top of a covered "dekhchi" of hot water to get rid of the red menace.

These red ants, along with black ones will get into anything sweet, unless it is carefully

and the dining room because of the flies. The unbearable heat and sudden showers make life difficult during the hot season," comments one who has been forced to keep a fly swatter in her Naya Paltan office.

Similarly mosquitoes can be bothersome, specially at night, unless you use anti-mosquito electric tablets coils or a cumbersome mosquito net. I am often bitten by mosquitoes as I wear a short night-dress while reading before going to bed. Now gnats of a type attack me in my office, even though I wear billowy "shalwars". Dhaka is not Male but sometimes experiences with insects are similar. I must constantly dust my rooms at home or the spiders cover them up with cobwebs as if it were Miss Havisham's house. Despite the precautions I take I dread the insects at night as if they were predators in a jungle," says a young woman in Banani.

Lizards are there to rid us of insects but as they too dart about the walls, ceilings and floors, life for the Dhakaite is slightly unpleasant by nights. Sure, they do not look like iguanas but like rats, mice and other creeping creatures, they are a positive nuisance.

Despite the unpleasantness of pests in the city, and the fact that it is much more dirty than what it was say three decades back, it is better than some of the other cities of the subcontinent.

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