

**Dhaka Day by Day**

**The Nameless 'Pichchi'**

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

They are children but often work as hard as adults. They do not get salaries nor do they get regular off days. They are commonly called 'pichchi' because people do not think that they are important enough to be called by their real names. They are too small, after all, and too poor. Yet very few households, offices, shops or small time restaurants could run smoothly without the fast working and undemanding pichchi.

The pichchi is a miniature man (or girl), running around doing errands for everyone. Because there is no specific job description for the pichchi, he often does not get a proper wage — only sporadic handouts. Those too go to his parents who use the money for their own needs. Getting three meals a day, a place to sleep and the chance to watch a little TV once in a while is more than enough, thinks the employer, for a small person who does not have the power to speak out against the injustice meted out to him.

In exchange for such 'privileges' the pichchi is expected to do all kinds of things. In the office he makes and gives the tea to the 'saars' and runs to get their gold leafs and Benisons from the little shop on the street. In the shops they clean the floors dust the cupboards, count various items and take the groceries to the car of a regular customer. In the hotels he runs to and fro with the orders, puts on the huge kettle of water on the burners, cleans the greasy tables and does other odds and ends.

In the house, however, he (or she) is little more than a child slave, looking after the shahib's kid, running to the grocery and stationery to get biscuits bread or eggs, going up and down the stairs with messages to and from household members or massaging the Begum sahib's head and feet so she can take her afternoon nap in peace.

With her small hands the pichchi wipes the dust off the-knick knacks on the drawing room tables early in the morning when everyone is asleep. A slip of the hand and a glass vase smashes into tiny pieces on the floor making her tiny heart pound violently with apprehension. There is no question of what the consequences of such a crime will be. A vicious tug at her uncombed hair making her head reel, two light slaps across the face leaving it smarting

and bruised and a series of verbal abuse 'haram jadt, kuthi ato dami jinish bhangsish...' (bastard, dog, you've broken such a valuable thing...). But what about the value of the pichchi whose cries of agony, whose hollow eyes filled with sadness, reaches no one?

Hungry for love, she watches her Begum sahib shower kisses and hugs on her own child who is as old as the pichchi. How different people treated you if you were rich, ice-cream, new frocks, delicious food and all sorts of treats lay waiting for you. For the pichchi who can look forward to only the left-overs of such goodies, life seems inordinately hard and cruel. She thinks about her own mother left by her father for another woman, taking care of the younger children, working part time in two houses and living in a ramshackle hut, that too for a high rept. Would they ever come out of such a rut and live even just a little like these sahibs, the pichchi wonders wistfully.

Life is hard for the pichchi but not without a little fun once in a while. There is always the television to look forward to at the end of the day when most of the work has been done (except for the occasional 'oy pichchi ak glass pani de' (they pichchi get me a glass of water)) There is Phillip's Top Ten hits of Hindi films — roop suhana, me anari, tu khilari on Z TV, tunes that the pichchi knows by heart. the Bangla bot (movie) on Friday's and Ey shoptaher natok (this week's drama).

The pichchi fantasizes a day when he would be allowed to spend the whole day watching TV and munch on polao, korma and lots of bi-deshti chocolates, the kind the shahib's kid ate and sometimes left the remnants for the pichchi to sample.

Sometimes an employer is kind enough to the pichchi to let him go to a part time school or study at home, but of course only after all the chores are done. Surprisingly no matter how tired he is, he is never too tired to study his tattered text books. The torn khatha and crooked hand writing, are symbolic indeed. It is a sign that even in the smallest way, the pichchi has some control over his life. It gives him hope of a better days. The hope that someday he will be called by his own name and not just pichchi.



**Queen Margrethe greeted**

President Abdur Rahman Biswas has greeted Queen Margrethe II of the kingdom of Denmark on the occasion of her birthday today, reports UNB.

In a message sent to the Danish Queen President Biswas expressed his confidence that the existing friendly relations between the two countries would be further strengthened in future to the mutual benefit of the two peoples.

The President also wished for good health, happiness and long life of the Queen and for the people continued peace, progress and prosperity.

In a separate message, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has also greeted Queen Margrethe II on the occasion. Begum Zia hoped that bilateral relations between the two countries will continue to grow in the coming years to the mutual benefit of two peoples.

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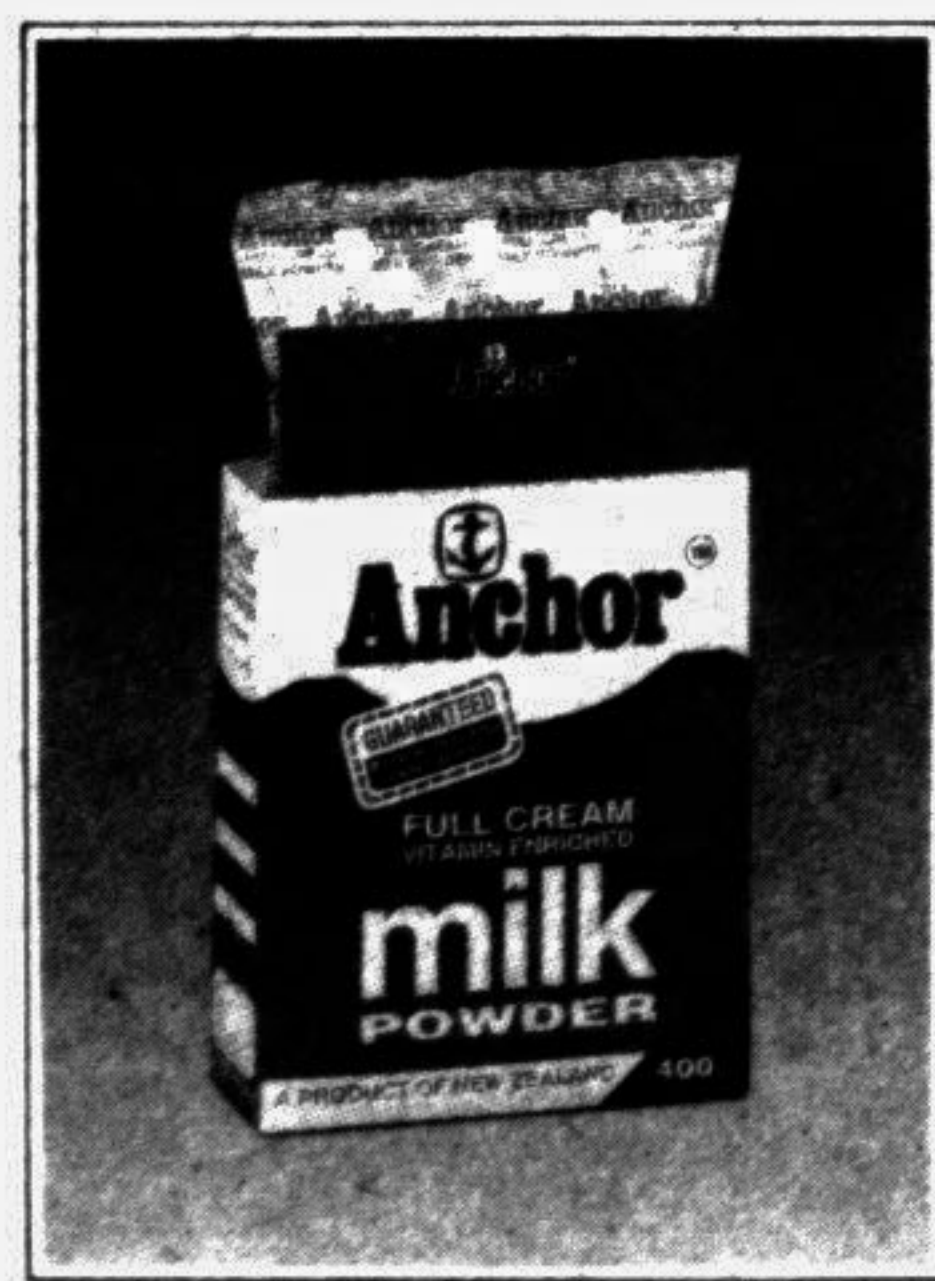
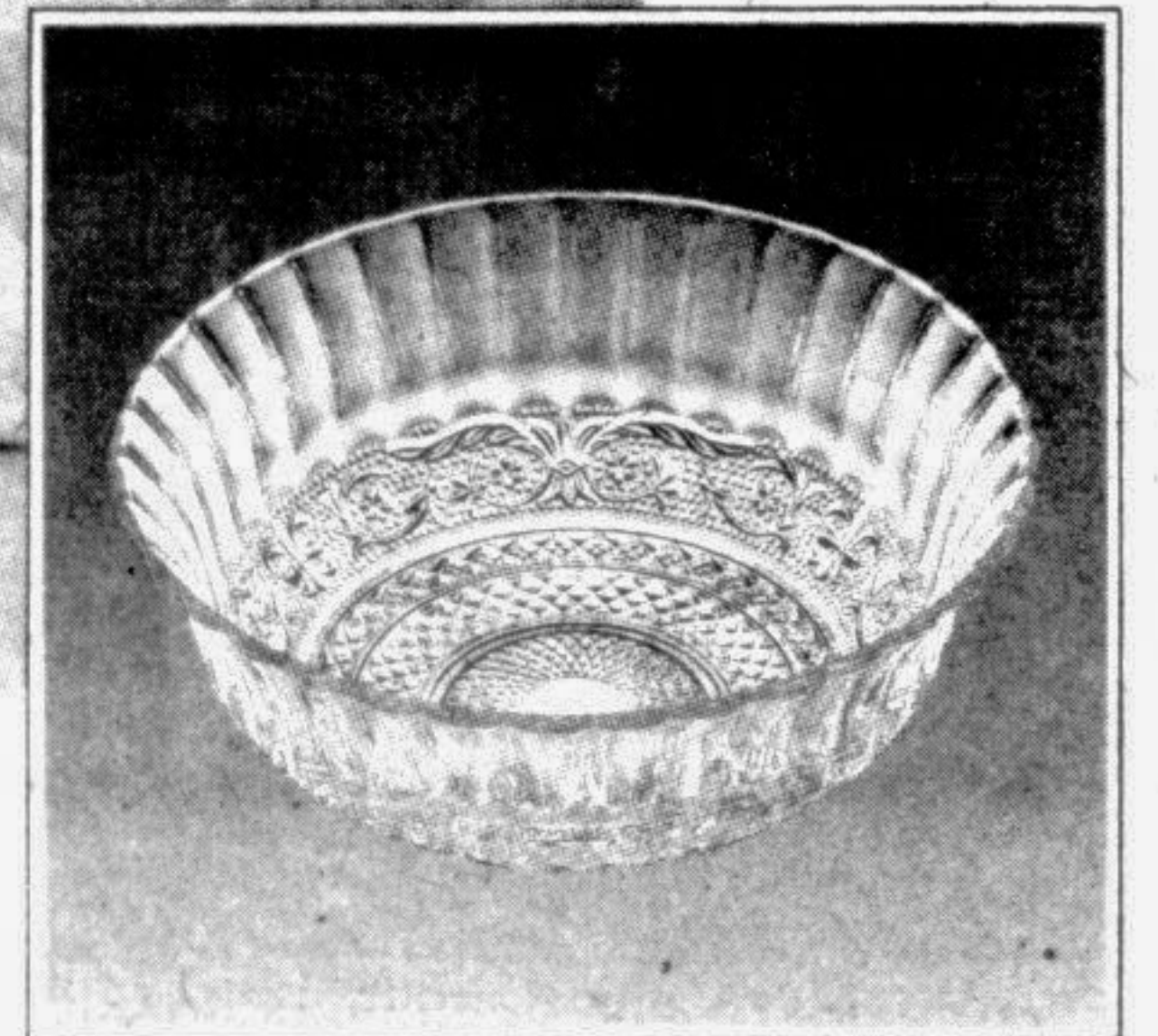
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**Kamal off to Harare**

Health and Family Welfare Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf left Dhaka for Harare, Zimbabwe yesterday to attend the first board meeting of 'Partners in Population and Development of Afro-Asian Countries' to be held from April 17-22, reports BSS.

**SELF's Free Friday clinic**

The Society for Emancipation of the Least Fortunate — SELF, Bangladesh, a voluntary organisation has opened a Free Friday clinic at its Maghbaraz office in the city on Friday, says a press release.

Justice A M Mahmudur Rahman inaugurated the clinic which will provide free treatment and medicine to the poor people every Friday from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon.



**Rizia Rahman gets Anannya award**

By Staff Correspondent  
Novelist Rizia Rahman wins the Anannya Literary Award 1402 (BSS).

The Tk 50 thousand award was announced in the city on Thursday to be presented formally on the 7th anniversary of Anannya in October this year.

Rizia Rahman, one of the top-ranking nobelists of the country, wrote 'Dhabal Jyoshna' 1981, 'Sudhu Tomar Jannya' 1988, 'Alikhuta Upakhyan' 1980, 'Shilaye Shilaye Agun' 1980, 'Bong Theke Bangla' 1978, 'Ekti Phuler Jannya' 1978, 'Rakter Akkhar' 1978, 'E-Kal Chirakal,' 'Prem Amar Prem.'

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