

Dhaka Day by Day

An Old, Sickening Game

by Lisa Khan

Dhakaites' behaviour defies logic in many ways, but nothing is more incomprehensible than our insane addiction to bargaining. How on earth can you justify haggling in the midday sun with a rickshaw puller or a fruit vendor over a mere three taka?

Admittedly, shop merchants not only quote incredibly high prices, especially to women, they also attempt to flog off adulterated, cooking oil or diluted foreign shampoo to the unsuspecting customer.

But bargaining is not a mere matter of price. It seems to be a question of principle. Many customers assume that the seller is trying to screw them over any way, so why not deal the preemptive strike? The reasoning behind this *modus operandi* is similar to the logic which compels Dhaka drivers to rev up in front of other cars, inch their way past the traffic lights and zoom off a split second before the other contenders. It's every man for himself — it doesn't hurt to get ahead.

Thus the shopper assumes that it's okay to haggle over one taka. Every taka that he forces the seller to relinquish is proof of the customer's superiority.

Those who are new to the game are likely to be puzzled (like Brian in Monty Python's 'Life of Brian'). First of all, how do you know whether the price quoted is too high or not? Isn't the whole charade over once you ask him to lower the price and he doesn't?

The art of bargaining requires practice and skill. Certain rules apply which every novice should find handy. Always look shocked/disgusted/apalled etc when the shopkeeper tells you the price. If you are an old hand at bargaining, you may even throw in a speech on how merchants nowadays are only out to cheat. The "look" should then be followed by what you think is a fair price: quote half or even less of the asking price.

It is now the merchant's turn to look appropriately disgusted and shake/nod his head. He might roll off choice phrases like, "that will be less than what we bought this for," or "we have mouths to feed," or "you don't realise the quality of this product."

If and when your price is rejected outright, be prepared to look confused and then pretend to very reluctantly concede two taka to ten taka (depending on what you are buying). If all goes well, he will appear

disgusted, but not as much as before and unwillingly quote a price slightly lower than the original one. This cat and mouse operation may take ages so it is important to balance the importance of buying product to the fact that life is too short for such games.

If the entire process is overly painstaking then one can adopt the tactic of last resort: walk away, very slowly mustering as much righteous indignation as possible. Give the merchant enough time to change his mind and call back: "Ki dam diben?" (what price will you give?) Contain your desire to smile victoriously and proceed to drag your feet back to the shop, acting as if you may change your mind and stomp off any second.

But the bargaining ritual is never so smooth. Even for master-bargainers, the path is fraught with danger. The shopkeepers at Bangabazar, for example, are particularly alert. They usually bring their price down to half their original quote, but even they have their limits. This poor writer once fell in love with a pair of trousers she really wanted. After haggling for a good 15 minutes, the shopkeeper finally agreed to a price which was only taka 10 more than what I was willing to pay. Instead of agreeing however to the price, I strolled off and said I would look at some other shops first.

Of course, having found no other item which pleased me as much, I went back to the shop. My return signalled to the shopkeeper that I did indeed want these trousers very much and could not find them anywhere else. Obviously, he reneged on our earlier deal and the price shot up. I ended up taking part in an undignified shouting match in public and missing out on a chance to add to my wardrobe.

Lesson number one: if you really, really want something, don't bargain too much. Lesson number two: don't scour the city looking for shops with more competitive prices.

A shopkeeper's ultimate insult to his customer is straightforward. The seller will throw the merchandise towards the buyer with as much contempt as he can muster and declare: "Here! Just take it for free. If you want it so much, it's yours."

The bargainer has nothing to lose but his/her dignity.



YOU WILL GIVE ME ONLY 25% OF WHAT I ASKED FROM YOU 'CAUSE I AIN'T CARRYING ANY GUN? BOY YOU SURE KNOW BARGAINING!

SHARPER

What's on today . . .

English Department, DU: English Department of Dhaka University will hold a freshers' reception and farewell ceremony. Venue: British Council Auditorium. Time: 4 pm. Chief guest: Husniara Haq, a former teacher of the department.

Mime show: NIRBAK — a pantomime group will perform in a special mime show titled 'Speechless Evening', followed by a certificate award programme. Venue: Russian Cultural Centre, Dhanmondi. Time: 8:30 pm.

Exhibition of bathroom cabinets: A four-day exhibition of illuminated bathroom cabinets will be held. Venue: Sheraton Hotel. Time: 9:30 am. Chief guest: Abdul Mannan, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism.

Rotary Club of Ramna: The regular weekly meeting will be held. Venue: Sonargaon Hotel. Time: 5:30 pm.

Prokrichi BCS Action Council: An emergency press conference will be held. Venue: BMA conference room. Time: 2 pm.

Rotary Club of Dhaka New city: The regular weekly meeting will be held. Venue: Sonargaon Hotel. Time: 5:30 pm.

CPB rally: The Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) will hold a rally. Venue: Purana Paltan crossing. Time: 5 pm.

Star VOA Fan Club: The regular monthly meeting will be held. Venue: 78/B Kakrail. Time: 11 am.

Goethe Institut: The first Shilpungshu Interschool Parliamentary Debate Competition will be held. Venue: Goethe Institut. Time: 11 am.

Rotary Club of Motijheel: The weekly regular meeting will be held. Venue: Purbani Hotel. Time: 5:30 pm.



'Statement in the name of APSU was JCD's'

By DU Correspondent

Some 18 leaders of the former All Party Student Unity (APSU) have expressed their surprise at the statement published Sunday in different dailies in the name of 21 leaders of APSU.

In a joint statement Sunday they said, the APSU does not exist now and the statement published in the name of 21 APSU leaders is actually a statement of some leaders of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD).

Earlier on Saturday the 18 leaders in a joint statement had demanded dissolution of the 'ineffective' parliament, immediate national elections under a neutral caretaker government, and repeal of black laws which was criticised in the statement issued in the name of 21 APSU leaders.

Death anniversary

By DU Correspondent

The sixth death anniversary of educationist Dr Najma Jesmin Chowdhury will be held today.

The Najma Jesmin Chowdhury Smriti Sangsad has arranged a lecture on the Women in Bengali Literature in the Middle Age on the occasion.

The lecture will be held at the Institute of Modern Languages at Dhaka University at 4 pm today.

Former pro-Vice Chancellor Prof Waki Ahmed will present the keynote paper on 'Madhya Juger Bangla Kalya Nari'.

FEMA workshop concludes

By Staff Correspondent

The third regional training workshop of the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA) concluded Sunday.

Thirty participants from greater Dinajpur and Rangpur districts took part in the workshop.

Certificate award ceremony at IUB

A certificate awarding ceremony was held at the Independent University, Bangladesh on Sunday upon completion of a four-week training course, says a press release.

The training course on Computer Appreciation for Senior Executives of Bangladesh Bank was conducted by the Extension and Continuing Education Centre (ECC) of Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

Workshop on forestry projects begins

A five-day in-country training workshop on monitoring and evaluation of forestry projects and programmes began yesterday at the Ban Bhaban auditorium at Mahakhali in the city yesterday, reports BSS.

Jointly organised by the FAO regional office for Asia and the Pacific and the Department of Forest, the objective of the workshop is to strengthen the broad spectrum of knowledge of the officials concerned for proper monitoring and evaluation of the forestry projects and programmes.

Painting show

The second solo painting exhibition by Solaiman Sarkar will begin at city's Alliance Francaise gallery on Friday, says a press release.

Xavier Bares, cultural counsellor, Embassy of France, will inaugurate.

Obituary

Muhammad Dalilur Rahman, a retired General Manager of Bangladesh Krishi Bank, died of cardiac arrest yesterday. He was 68, reports UNB.

Quikhwani of the deceased will be held at his 74/6 Green Road residence on Friday after Asr prayers.

DU exams shifted

The date for the M Phil first part written examination of 1992-93 session of Dhaka University Zoology Department has been shifted due to unavoidable circumstances, reports UNB.

The examination will now be held on October 1 instead of September 17. The schedule for the examination of September 24 will, however, remain unchanged.

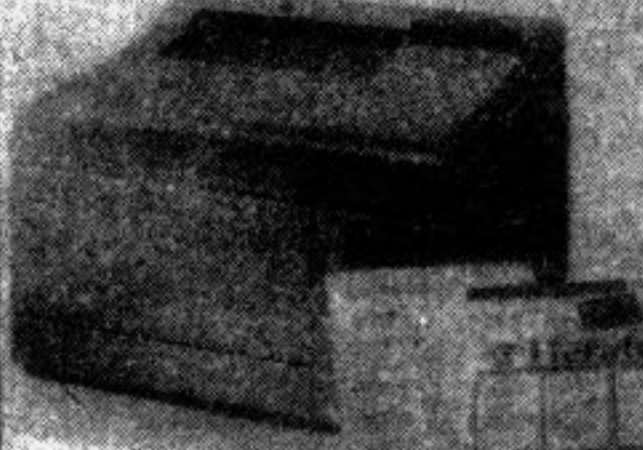
NOTRE DAME COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

The list of Candidates selected for admission personal interviews will be posted Saturday, Sept. 16 in "The Daily Janakantha" Newspaper. The interviews will be held Sept. 19-20.

N.B. If any student has not yet submitted his SSC total and math marks, please do so immediately. -Principal


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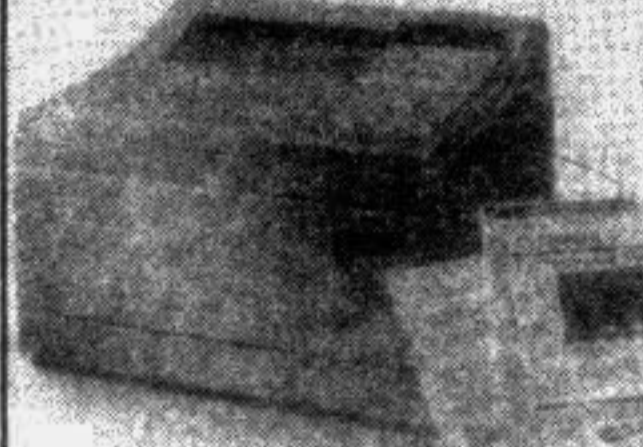
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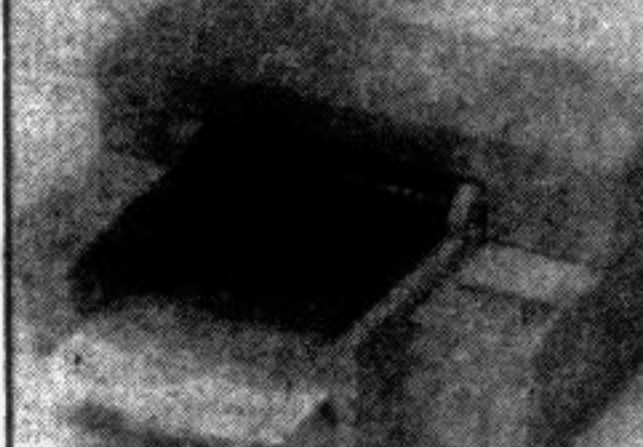
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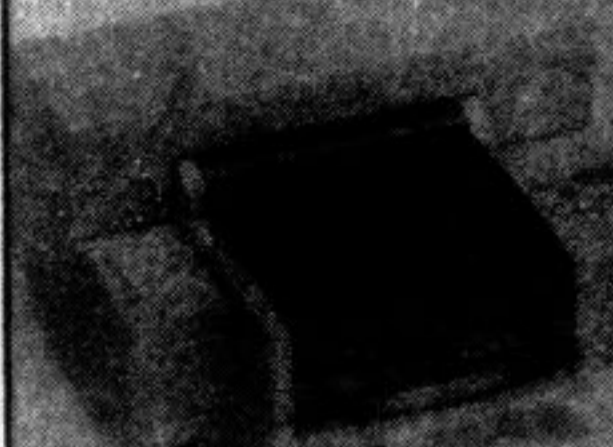
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Employees of different offices under the Ministry of Public Works brought out a procession in the city yesterday demanding abolition of 'mini PWD'. — Star photo

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ISSUE DATED SEPTEMBER 15, 1995

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