

# LIVING

## Herbal is Here ... But is It Hype ?

by Lamis Hossain

BEAUTY salons in Dhaka are no longer places to just trim your hair and tread your eyebrows. Gone are the days when a manicure was the height of pampering. Nowadays your cheeks can be massaged, your pores steamed and your skin soothed with mother nature's finest ingredients. For the last few years, salon signboards around town have been coupling the words "beauty parlour" with "herbal treatment", but is all this herbal hoopla merely hype?

Not so, according to the believers in the "herbal revolution." Bithi Chowdhury, manager and owner of Bithi's Herbal Skin Care Clinic and Beauty Parlour, says that "herbal has caught on ... the whole world has caught on." K Z Islam, the sole distributor of Shahnaz Hussein's herbal products in Bangladesh points out a global trend of "going back to nature."



Courtesy: Shahnaz

Both of them affirm that Bangladeshis are going green too. Islam says that he took the Shahnaz Hussein distributorship after realising the great demand for her products. Every time he went to India, he would have to return with armloads of herbal beauty care products for the family. When Shahnaz Hussein's wares were displayed at the Sherraton earlier this year, Islam was surprised by the turnout. 12,000 brochures printed for the occasion all ran out and Shahnaz fans brought ten bouquets to forward to India's beauty ambassador. A 48 year old woman reproached the businessman: "You finally came with Shahnaz products in Dhaka, but why so late?"

"People are very conscious now from TV and Indian magazines", Chowdhury believes. The advent of satellite TV with beauty programmes on Zee TV and ads of different products have raised awareness of not only herbal treatment but of the beauty regimen in general. Bithi's Clinic opened in 1989 with only a few clients trickling in. Nowadays, she has to turn away customers without appointments.

Apart from the influence of TV, why is there such a great demand for herbal treatment? First of all, the sheer variety and types of products may simply knock you over, at least where Shahnaz Hussein is concerned. There are 380 types of creams, shampoos, and fo-

tions for women, men and children sold under names as exotic as Himalayan herb, Honey health and the Neem collection, with ingredients as varied as sandalwood, rose petal, turmeric, lentils, nutmeg, neem, eucalyptus and cassia seeds.

Islam and Chowdhury also point out that herbal products have on side effects. A pimple problem, for example, can be cured by both herbal and other chemical products. It is up to the customer to decide which to believe in.

Islam does not think that herbal products can be made in Bangladesh. The distributor of Shahnaz, Indira has a vast herbal resource base encompassing mountains and deserts. Moreover, no one in Bangladesh would be willing to finance this kind of venture. "I've found people here making herbal products such as hair oils, but they are not making much money."

Not all products which carry the herbal label are actually 100 per cent "green" either. Apart from Shahnaz products, Islam says, no one in Bangladesh can make the 100 per cent claim. "When you read the label, you realise that it is not."

Chowdhury begs to differ. She points out that when even the famous Body Shop of UK is allegedly not 100 per cent herbal, who are we to insist on it? The definition of pure herbal products is tricky in any case. How far do you examine the process in-

ment. She feels that it is her responsibility to re-establish people's confidence in beauty salons and herbal treatment, considering that many have been bombarded with false information from places which offer advice without any requisite expertise.

In fact, the treatment offered by certain other parlours may work against the customer. Firstly, the customer may not even be tested for their skin hair type. Whereas the right facial can result in glowing skin, the same process can create pimple colonies on a client with oily skin. Likewise, the limited choice of herbal preparations in some salons (which may not even be purely herbal) defeats the point of treatment which is attuned to individual needs. It would seem that many of the parlours have indeed "gone back to nature," but a survey may reveal that not all have genuinely done so.

Although the herbal trend has managed to become popular here, the manager of Bithi's thinks that the concept of keeping to a beauty regime has a long way to go. Chowdhury points out that going to the clinic and using herbal products does not guarantee that your skin/hair condition will improve. Much depends on how people maintain this routine and change their lifestyles. Even the word "aesthetician," she feels, is not familiar here.

Beauty parlours offering more than just hair cuts are also viewed with suspicion. Parlours offering massage, for example, are still seen as offering 'disrespectable' services on the side.

Nevertheless, Islam and Chowdhury have not lost hope in spreading the herbal beauty message. Islam has so much faith in the growing consciousness of beauty among women in the city, that he is opening a Shahnaz Hussein clinic in Gulshan offering skin and hair diagnosis and therapy. It will be the 20th clinic in the world to get Shahnaz's franchise and will be opened by the queen of beauty herself this November. He is even planning a Shahnaz factory in Bangladesh with raw materials from abroad.

Whether herbal products are merely hype or not, the prospect of pampering oneself in a clinic may well find converts among the middle class women. Herbal, it seems, is here to stay.

There have been witnessing an increase of interest on women's affairs especially their role in development activities. The just concluded Conference in Beijing has generated much enthusiasm amongst many and that may lead to the shared equality of women in all types of activities by the early quarter of the twenty-first century. I shall not dwell much on the generalised aspect of the topic; on the contrary make a humble

## A Woman's Individuality

by Helal Chowdhury

attempt to relate my experience of having a wife who is a career woman.

My wife began working for a private bank some 12 years back due to the necessity of earning, and not to accept the profession as a pastime. She joined her office exactly two months after our second child was born. Before the

baby saw the light of this planet, we two in, one evening, discussed about the expenses that would be required during her early maternity period and the subsequent cost for rearing up the newborn as I had very limited income as a government official. During the course of our budget discussion, it was clear enough that my meagre earning would not enable me even to buy the required Lactogen for the coming child, as a result of which she chose to go for a job.

My wife had the required academic achievement of having a masters degree in Sociology as her father, may be some 40 years ago, believed in investing in women and gave emphasis on gender equality. I was rightly benefited by his foresight, thanks to him.

She had all along a good performance in her office as I heard, from some of my friends who happen to be her colleagues. Within the span of eight years, she earned three promotions and reached the mid-management strata. She has the reputation of being one of the very few lady officers who could bear the workload as good as that of a male one (pampering a little).

I have thoroughly enjoyed her rise in her occupation and inspired to earn reputation but by not jeopardising the family life. It was observed by the members of my family (as we lived in a joint one for a good number of years) how she treated me following entering into a career. I should be honest in stating that they could hardly find a fault in her dealings with me or my children. Our shared contribution to the family make it run well and the children are growing up in an environment with undisturbed relationship between their parents.



Karen Mulder

Courtesy: Paris Match

One thing that I have seen in her is that she never discussed her official matters with me, maintained a tight lip regarding any incident relating to her office. At times, I wondered how by being a Bengalee woman she refrained from gossips.

Now the children are growing up and at the senior grades of their school, they are used to seeing what their mother does apart from being a housewife. The only thing that they miss is the full-time care during their indisposition. As a banker, she is under tremendous pressure but manages to get leave for a day or two when necessity demands. By no score is she an angel. She has her drawbacks.

Gender harassment faced by a woman at the place of work is endemic in the western world and its existence in our country cannot be totally ruled out. My wife's reaction to a question regarding this was one of ambivalence and said, "We are a strong group in our organisation where 23 per cent of the total employees belonging to our gender and really do not come across such occurrences. However, there can always be an exception."

Once she mentioned in a passing remark that she has a world of her own. I was not taken aback by her comment and I cannot exert possibly my influences on her always and be possessive. A sense of individuality seems to grow in case of most career women and that should not hurt the sentiments of the male.

The purpose of this short write up is just to give an inkling as to how a Bengalee woman is evaluated at her home. After the conclusion of the historic Beijing conference on women, where they have been so vocal about their shared equality, it leads one to be a sceptic as to how the mentolk in our still conservative society accept the changing wind.

ABOUT 18 months we were driving around town in a small Toyota Corona. I had just finished eating my fruit, opened the window, and threw out the banana skin. A colleague of mine watched in horror. "Do you do this at home as well?" he asked. I had previously been in India for some 10 months in total, and was used to feeding cows and goats. Quite obviously, my colleague was going to have more problems accepting local customs than I would.

I speak some Bangla (olpo, olpo), walk around in a lungi (at home), and eat rice with my fingers (if necessary). I feel at home in Bangladesh. People over here simply do spit out of bus windows. They do walk around naked in Motijheel. And they do urinate in the middle of Elephant Road. That's Bangladesh. Take it or leave it.

Sometimes I do want to leave. The chaos, noise, and dirt on the streets: after a while I long for some modern comforts again. Some organised, ruly traffic and some cleanliness.

So I bought a plane ticket and said goodbye to the land of Bengali in April. But then I got my culture shock. At Singapore Airport I was at a loss when I wanted to get out. I saw no door or daroja. Sud-

## Back to the Future

by Nico den Tuinder

denly, the glass wall opened automatically. I had quite forgotten about infrared cells. Then I had to queue up and wait for a taxi. That's quite a nuisance when you are used to babytaxi drivers dragging the luggage out of your hand. In the first-class hotel I had no idea how I could put the light on. Oh yes, you should put the key-tag in the key-holder.

A computer woke me up next day. Once again at the

airport on my way to Indonesia, the toilets looked like an operation theatre with their cleanliness. I had to dig deep in my memory to understand the principles of blow-drying my hands.

In Jakarta I felt offended when a policeman did not allow me to just cross the street. If I want to get run over by a car, it's my business, isn't it? I had to take the pedestrian fly-over.

Later back again in Singa-

pore I tried to find out the way of buying stamps from a machine. The device defied all logic, and it defeated me. Is that why all the 'de-' words in the previous sentence sound so much like? In a bookshop I could not make any choice: there was too much literature for sale. Paying took an exasperating long time with all the machines involved.

I was glad to be back home in familiar Bangladesh.



## 'Breakthrough' in the Search for the Marcos Millions

Abby Tan writes from Manila

AFTER almost 10 years of investigations and court cases aimed at recouping some of the billions of dollars stashed away by Ferdinand Marcos during his years as president, the Philippine government has got back — \$2,000.

The sum recovered, says former Solicitor-General Frank Chavez, who filed most of the cases against the Marcos family here and in Switzerland, was a slightly more respectable — but still woefully inadequate — \$6 million. But almost all of it went straight into the pockets of American lawyers and on other costs.

Now a Swiss court has raised hopes that a more realistic haul may be bagged. It has approved the transfer to Manila of nearly \$500 million of Marcos' exported wealth.

President Fidel Ramos said the move "represents an unprecedented defining and shining moment in the odyssey of this administration to bring back the ill-gotten wealth for the benefit of our country and people."

Zurich magistrate Peter Cosandey's decision was possible because the court decided to relax the rigid rules it had imposed in response to the Philippine government's request for \$356 million — raised by interest to \$475 million — which Marcos deposited in Swiss accounts during his 20 years in power.

In 1990 the Swiss Federal Court said the Manila government had to prove the Marcos money had been obtained illegally: to do so Ferdinand's widow Imelda would have to be convicted in a fair trial, charges for which had to be filed within a year. The money was placed in a freeze order, to ensure that no claimant could touch it.

Three days before the deadline, the Philippine government filed 79 criminal charges against Mrs. Marcos. Although Imelda was subsequently convicted for graft, the charges were not related to the Swiss accounts, and the case therefore had no bearing on the \$475 million claim.

Solicitor-General Raul Goco attributes Cosandey's approval of the transfer before the original conditions have been met to changed circumstances in both Switzerland and the Philippines.

The Swiss judiciary, he says, is now convinced that Mrs. Marcos could get a fair trial in Manila.

In addition, he says domestic questions had been raised in Switzerland about the poverty of the use of the Swiss banking system as a repository for the dubious funds of dictators and drug smugglers.

Switzerland had also to extend help to the Philippine government by bringing the Marcos case under the ambit of legislation known as International Mutual Assistance Co-operation on Criminal matters. This forced Swiss banks to disclose documents vital to the filing of criminal charges by Manila against the Marcos heirs — Mrs Marcos and her three children.

Magtanggul Gunigunde, head of the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG), which is responsible for tracking the missing Marcos millions, cites the unfreezing of the accounts as recognition of the validity of other Philippine claims on the Marcos money.

"This may be the breakthrough that will shake loose all the other Marcos bank accounts and assets," he says, "including substantial real estate properties around the world."

But the court ruling is not even the end of the first chapter. The money will be held in escrow in a Manila bank pending another ruling by a Philippine court. If the court decides the money is ill-gotten, the booty goes to

Goco has suggested that Congress could pass a law enabling the government to pay out part of the Swiss loot to them.

Mrs Marcos, who is free pending an appeal on her jail sentence, issued a restrained statement to the Swiss ruling: "I'm happy if there is a decision to bring the so-called Marcos assets to the Philippines, because since the death of my husband I have been concerned about the implementation of his last will and testament to give his wealth to the Filipinos."

Her happiness was compounded in mid-September when the Supreme Court confirmed her election as a Congresswoman in the national election in May. The Election Commission had barred her from taking her

seat on a technicality.

The hunt for the Marcos wealth — which officials estimate at more than \$5 billion, much of it in Shell companies in Europe and the Caribbean — began the day after the dictator's overthrow in a peaceful "people power" revolt in 1986. He died in exile in Hawaii three years later. The government tried unsuccessfully to negotiate privately with Mrs Marcos to bring the money back and split it.

The long and tortuous hunt for the Marcos wealth was also wracked by incompetence and corruption. In addition, Philippine courts move glacially slowly, inundated by the volume of cases and sometimes hampered by ill-trained lawyers. The Swiss transfer represents more than just the money: it boosts the government's confidence that at last its quest is getting somewhere.

— Gemini News



Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos: Exported wealth

the government. If judged legitimate, it goes to the Marcos heirs.

To complicate matters, 10,000 Filipino human rights victims who won a class suit in a Honolulu court last year are also pressing for a share.

They were awarded \$1.9 billion damages against the Marcos estate. Lawyers acting for the victims — who suffered torture or had relatives kidnapped and killed for opposing the Marcos martial law regime — want the Ramos government to award some of the money to them first.

Ramos rejected this plea, on the grounds that the money belonged to the Filipino people, and that under a law passed after the restoration of democracy, all Marcos' ill-gotten wealth is to be put in a fund for land reform to benefit landless farmers.

However, he assured the human rights claimants that the administration would try to find a solution to their claims. Solicitor-General

## COOKERY

### Chocolate Drops

2 eggs  
2 oz. castor sugar  
Pinch of salt  
2 oz. plain flour  
1 oz. cocoa  
A few drops vanilla essence

1 teaspoonful milk  
Heat the oven to moderate, grease and lightly flour a baking sheet. Whisk the eggs and sugar until thick and creamy, add milk and vanilla, then fold in the sieved dry ingredients. Drop in small teaspoonfuls well apart on the tin. Bake until firm. Cool on a wire tray and, when cold, sandwich together in twos with whipped cream or butter cream (see icings). Dust the tops with icing sugar and decorate as desired.

### Chocolate Macaroons

4 oz. ground almonds  
1 oz. margarine  
4 oz. castor sugar  
2 1/2 oz. drinking chocolate

### 2 egg-whites

Blanched almonds  
Grease a baking sheet or line with rice paper. Whip the egg-whites until stiff, then fold in the dry ingredients and melted margarine. Place in small heaps on baking sheet, putting a blanched almond on each. Bake in a slow to moderate oven until firm (about 20 minutes). (These quantities make about 10 macaroons).

### Cheese Biscuits

3 oz. butter  
3 oz. grated cheese  
About 4 oz. flour  
Pinch of salt and pepper  
Cream the butter and cheese, add the salt, pepper and flour. Work in sufficient flour to make a firm dough. Then roll out on a floured board and cut into rounds. Prick before putting them in the oven. Bake on a baking sheet until pale brown (about 15 minutes).