

WORLD

Yuppies Swagger Along the Road to Rudery

Bob Holmes writes from Singapore

Singaporean show-offs have been warned before about crowing over their successes. But, as Gemini News Service discovered, not only have they pushed back the local frontiers of ostentatious vulgarity — now they're exporting it.

TYRES squeal, horns blare and fists are waved as the BMW shoots to the head of the queue in the crowded Southeast Asian airport carpark and is away in seconds. Other drivers who have been waiting for almost an hour to get out of the jam are left to ponder the sticker on the BMW's rear window: "Beware — kiasu driver".

Originating in Singapore, *kiasu* comes from a Chinese word meaning "scared to lose", and has evolved into a kind of outrageous "win at all costs" one-upmanship — the antithesis to chivalry.

Adherents to the less-than-noble art of *kiasu* do not merely keep up with the Joneses, they trip them up and overtake them. They take pride in doing so, and regard those who do not with contempt.

Kiasu has now spilled over into Malaysia, and is threatening Indonesia and Thailand, but it is in the tiny island state of Singapore that it has really taken root.

Singaporeans — particularly the yuppie types — have lots of money, thanks to the boom years of the "tiger" economy, but little space for expression. In short, they are all dressed up with nowhere to go, and this may explain why one-upmanship has become a favourite pastime.

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong referred to *kiasu* in his National Day address in 1992, urging people not to crow about being number one in any sense. But the normally influential politician's warning fell on deaf ears, and he has recently had to remind people not to tarnish their island's image by bragging when abroad.

Kiasu comes in many guises and varying degrees, from the relatively tame to downright cheating, theft and road bullying.

Classic behaviour includes the taking of plastic bin-liners to buffet meals and filling them with oysters and smoked salmon, and fashion-conscious young women acquiring "sugar daddies" merely to out-do wealthy friends.

Everyone has a *kiasu* story, whether it is drinking mineral water from a hotel minibar and refilling the bottle from the tap, or eating biscuits and resealing the box with sticky tape, to avoid paying.

Kiasu types like to show off by taking risks, from riding volatile bull runs at the stock exchange — often losing heavily — to reckless driving.

Typical *kiasu* driving would be to do a U-turn across the central reservation of a dual carriageway or to barge into a queue while using a mobile phone, or, better still, pretending to use it.

The worst types resort to bullying, deliberately crashing into a rival's car or assaulting the driver.

Kiasu is fast becoming not just a mentality but an industry. In Singapore, a range of *kiasu* merchandise is on sale. One big hamburger chain sells a *kiasu* special — a beefed up variety with all the trimmings — to make people feel they are getting their money's worth.

A comic strip character displays shocking new feats, while a bimonthly magazine *kiasu Max* sells about 24,000 copies to devotees.

Not all subscribers are seeking new ways to be obnoxious. Some of the magazine's features and characters are genuinely funny and even self-deprecatory. And many readers have been revealed to be pleasant people — the type who might give up their bus seats to old people, provided they are sure none of their acquaintances will find out about it.

Some *kiasu* business gimmicks have backfired.

An Australian hotel was naive enough to offer Singaporean guests an all-you-can-eat breakfast. The four-star establishment's restaurant soon looked more like a refugee camp, as shopping bags were stuffed with

A Time for Family Get-together

by A SM Nurunnabi

THESE are hard times. In the fast pace of modern life, the siblings who used to be so close to one another when young and living with their parents under one roof, tend to become distant under pressure of circumstances over which they have little control. When they grow up, they develop their own individualities, get married, rear their families, adopt different occupations. Thus each lives in a world of his or her own. In this way, the family ties get loosened, even though no-one is particularly responsible for creating such distance in personal relationships among brothers and sisters. This drift sometimes appears deplorable in the context of our growing isolation in the present-day social set-up.

We sometimes find exceptions to this state of affairs when some members of an enlarged group of families set themselves to remedy the situation by taking some positive steps.

I know of a family consisting of six brothers and three sisters. When the brothers grew up and completed their education, they were all well-placed in life. Their sisters

similarly had good marriages. All the siblings had happy relations with one another along with their respective families. But due to pressure of occupational circumstances, they lived at different places, far and near within the country. Inevitably, the distance thus created had its impact on the closeness of relationship among them. As they were a close-knit family under their parents, the resultant isolation under changed circumstances at their grown-up stage was a source of unhappiness with those siblings who were earnest in keeping together.

As a way out, it was decided by consensus among them they would all get together with their families including the husbands and families of their sisters at regular intervals of three months at the spacious house of one of their brothers at Dhaka. From there, the venue of the get-together would shift to a community centre which would be hired for the purpose. As most of the brothers and sisters lived in Dhaka, the agreed arrangement worked satisfactorily without any break.

The whole function took

on an atmosphere of a festival with the children enjoying the most. They created a playful chaos. After having a lavish lunch, they used to sit on a carpet, telling stories and jokes, singing songs and reciting poems. Even their fathers and mothers joined in the singing. All the time, a video camera wielded by a hired cameraman covered the entire proceedings. Pictures were also taken, the brothers and sisters standing by age, with their children sitting in front. Then there was distribution of prizes for all the participants. On the whole, the get-together turned out to be a renewal of their zest for life.

I also remember another family get-together on a more grand scale. The sponsor of this function was a retired army officer who was affluent enough to bear the entire cost himself on account of the function. At this get-together, all the members of families covering at least two generations with their spouses and children were invited. A big community centre was hired for the purpose. It provided opportunities for many of the invitees to meet one another after a long period of time.

A Pack of Wonders from Lotus

by SMS Joya

CALL it a fad or a type but when it comes to beauty-caring, modern women in Bangladesh are going herbal and the reason behind this are the differences between chemical and herbal beauty-care products. While the former causes side-effects, the later is less likely to trigger skin sensitivity. And which one offers the most efficient protection? Obviously, synthetic chemicals are threats to the eco-system but herbal cares are basically hypoallergenic. And with the view of making more beauty-conscious women to make the right choice, Lotus Herbals is finally here.

Lotus Herbals is purely Ayurvedic, it has no side-effects, it is free from any synthetic colour or perfume, it is against animal testing and it is eco-friendly. Although, Ayurveda is an ancient traditional science of medicine and it was used way in the past — even 5000 years ago — but now it has come back as the herbal retro.

According to Muniruzzaman Khan, the managing director of Little City Network Ltd (the sole agent of Lotus Herbals), the target of launching this pack of wonders is to make the users become conscious about using herbal products instead of synthetic ones which have long-run effects that inactivate the natural self-care mechanism of the body.

The launching programme of Lotus Herbals organised by the Little City Distributors Ltd was held at the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel recently and as an answer to the background story of the advent, Khan said that he was inspired by the global demand for the products and realised that Bangladesh, more woman are going green, needed to be updated with this up and coming herbal revolution.

Lotus Herbals is just another patent for the same course of items that was first introduced by the Prestige Household Products in new Delhi, India. "In 1990 Kamal Passi the president of Prestige Household Products started his venture with 14 items only and now the number extends to 32 items. The turn-up came out to be so successful that they became export-oriented only two years later in 1992 and the annual sale volume was Rs 4 crore that year," said Khan.

He also said that Prestige first launched its products to the Middle East and finding good market there, later it started exporting to the UK, France, Italy, Germany, South Africa and to the US. "In recognition to the growing popularity of the products throughout the world, Prestige was approached by dealers from Yemen to import the know-how in 1993. Since then, they are manufacturing it themselves. The business turned out to be so well that the annual sale volume in 1995 was Rs 11 crore in India alone," he added.

The programme at Sheraton started with a two-day-long array of the first 14 items but Khan assured that they are going to release the rest of the items gradually. He also said that the articles were going to be released on the very next-day and would be available at department and general stores and beauty parlours. Home services will also be available. Leading beauticians approve of the collection already and are willing to fill up their shelves with it.

One woman, presumably a beautician, bought items for Taka 6000 alone and she cannot be blamed with the exotic variety of collection. The collection comes into seven series, cleanse, moisturise, protect, rejuvenate,

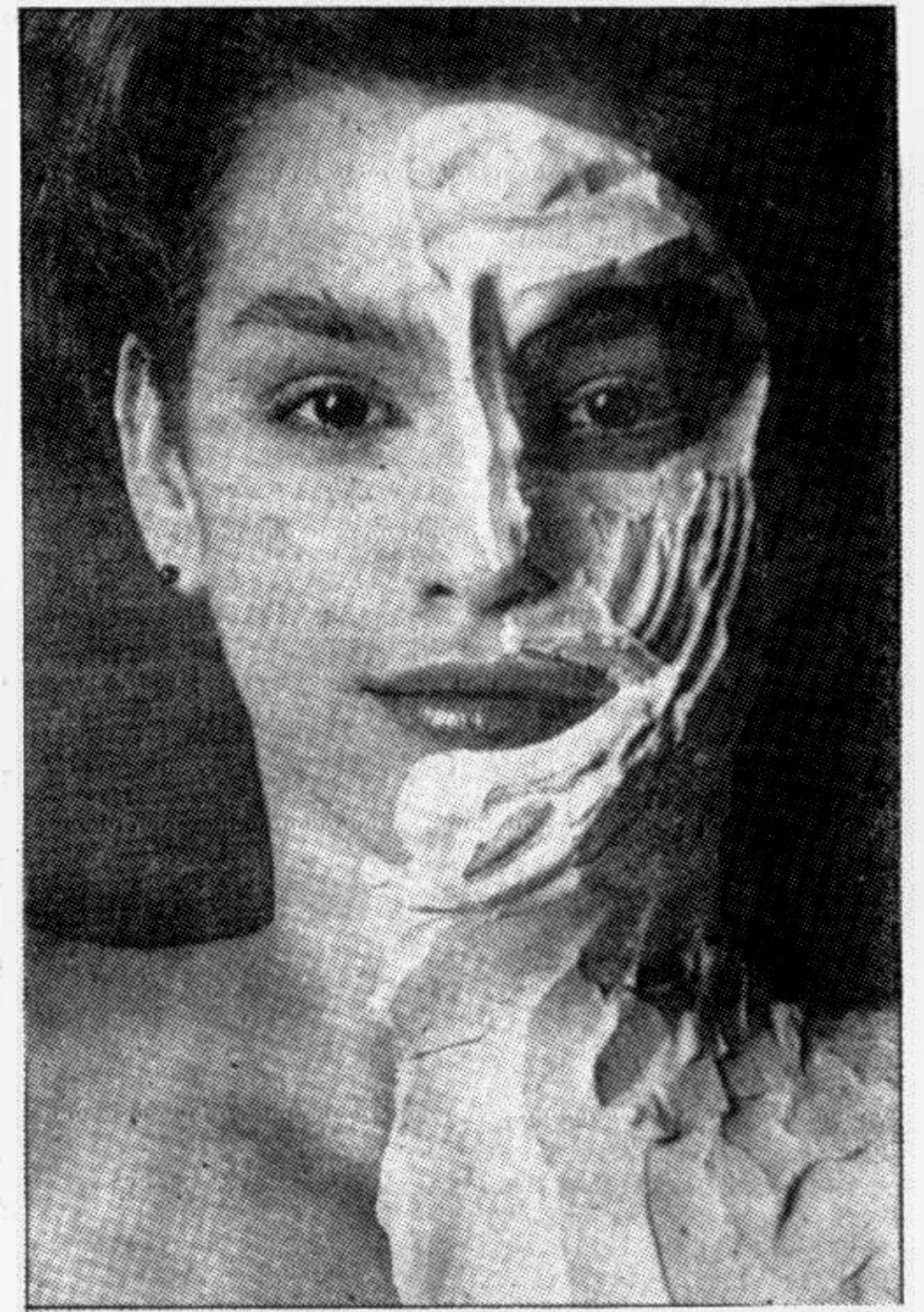
exfoliate, treatments and haircare.

The first series consists of LOTWIPES (a perfectly balanced combination of turmeric and lemon which cleanses and refreshes your skin at the same time) and LOTPURE-O (a lime blossom cleansing milk for all-skin type). The second series of a single item is LOT-BRIGHT-O (jojoba moisturizing lotion for all type of skin). The third series in another single item called LOTHIDE and this one is a sandalwood sun screen lotion for all type of skin. And another is the fourth series LOTGLOW (a vitaminised cream for youthful glow and an age-defying complex). The fifth series it yet another single item — LOTNEW (an oatmeal face scrub and this one is not for sensitive skins).

The next series comprises of five items for daily use: LOTSOFT (Kokam skin softening cream), LOTYOUTH (almond oil anti-wrinkle cream), LOTSHINE (Papaya-Saffron anti-blemishes cream — a real spot zapper), LOTSMOOTH (apricot cream for under-eye dark circles) and LOTCLEAR (neem and clove cream for acne and this one works in 10 days only).

The last series is the hair care and branded LOTAMLA (Shikakai and Amla herbal hair and scalp cleanser), LOTHENA (Hena conditioning cleanser for hair and scalp) and LOTGROW (stops hair loss). All the items come in two sizes, regular and mini, and the price range varies from Taka 75 to Taka 280. The prices may seem a bit high but not high enough it compared to other herbal products available in the market.

The array at the Sheraton was followed by a seminar on November 3. Leading beauti-



Packs work wonders for any type of skin. Courtesy: Elle.

cians (namely Shilu Abid and Kaniz Almas Khan), business women and celebrities were present at the occasion. Khan in his speech said, "The prices of the products may seem a bit high and it is due to the unavoidable scarcity of some of the raw-materials."

Shilu Abid who put emphasis on a healthy environment said, the products are eco-friendly and not tested on animals. The range of products has impressed me and I hope it will do well in the market.

At the end of the session, a video on instructions to use

the products was shown and later gift packs were given away.

Altogether, the occasion turned out to be gala and it seems that the company will do well in the market.

With the attraction of herbal treatment growing amply, the future of this exotic franchise seems to be an optimistic one. And it you do not have the time to go to a parlour, just relax at home, ask for a home service, treat yourself with the wonderful collection to make yourself look more beautiful and turn others green-eyed.

Excessively Adulterated Edibles

by Farah Ghuznavi

I should warn readers right away that this column is not meant for those with tender stomachs or sensibilities, since it deals with the awful extent to which food can be adulterated, and the consequences thereof. For myself, the worst thing that has happened to me yet (and I hope I am not tempting fate by saying this...) was the incident during my school days when I was watching TV and eating *doi* (yoghurt), and heard a sickening crunch shortly after I had placed what I thought was another spoonful of this innocuous substance in my mouth. As it happened, it turned out to be a dead bluebottle (not just any old fly, mind you!). Perhaps unsurprisingly, ever since then, I have regarded *doi* with an extremely suspicious (not to say jaundiced) eye.

Not that these things happen only in our fair city. A friend of mine related a similar incident which took place while her father was working in Libya. This gentleman never used to drink coke, because he didn't like sweet drinks. Anyway, one day, because of the tremendous heat, he succumbed and drank a bottle of the stuff. It was only when he had almost

reached the bottom of the bottle that an extra ingredient emerged..... a dead cockroach!

Nonetheless, the worst adulterated food story has to be one experienced by another friend's ayah. The ayah had been doing some work during lunchtime, so by the time she came to have her lunch, the other servants had all gone off for a siesta. She saw that the cook had left her lunch in her usual plate..... rice, dal, some shukna morich (dried red chillies) and vegetable curry. Since she was very hungry, she ate her delayed lunch with considerable relish, mixing things in thoroughly. When she later thanked the cook for leaving the dried chillies with her rice and dal, he looked at her, puzzled. It turned out that he had not done anything of the sort, and slowly enlightenment dawned. With the dim light in the kitchen, and in her hurry to eat, she had not noticed that those dried chillies were, in fact, a couple of cockroaches!

On a much less traumatic note, a South African friend of mine told me a story about growing up in that country, and how her mother regularly bought a brand of plum-filled chocolates for Siri and

her sister, Allie. Just as regularly, by the time they had finished half the box, the remaining chocolates would be found to contain small bugs. Her enraged mother would keep writing to the company about this, demanding replacement boxes (which they frequently got), but the chocolates were never totally free of the bugs, so the cycle kept being repeated. Being children, Siri and Allie couldn't have cared less, since as far as they were concerned, this minor flaw merely meant that they got a virtually endless supply of their favourite chocolates!

Finally, few people can handle such occurrences (as adults) with the panache displayed by a friend of mine who worked in Francophone West Africa for nine years. On one occasion, when he found a dead beetle in his French onion soup, he merely lifted the bug out, placed it by the side of his plate, pointed it out to the waiter, and ordered another bowl of soup!

Cookery

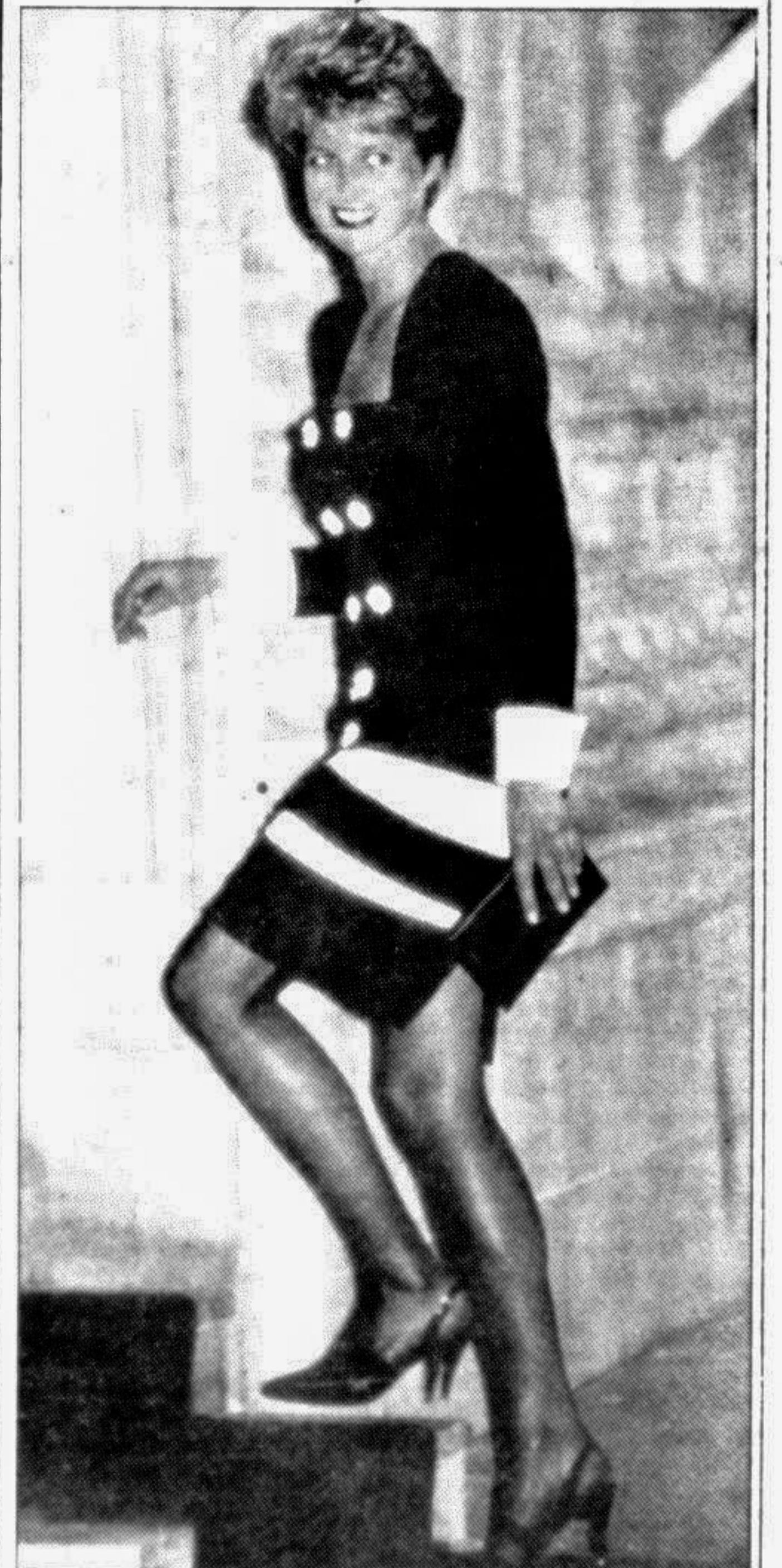
Butterscotch Cookies

12 oz. plain flour
4 oz. margarine or fat
1/2 teaspoonful salt
2 egg
4 teaspoonfuls baking powder
8 oz. brown sugar
1 teaspoonful vanilla essence

Chopped nuts (optional)
Beat the egg, then mix with it the sugar, vanilla and fat melted to an oily consistency. Mix thoroughly. Sift the dry ingredients together, stir into the sugar and egg mixture, and knead into a stiff, rather dry dough (no additional moisture must be added). Shape into a roll about 1 1/2 in. in diameter. Leave for at least 1 hour, then cut into slices about 1/2 in. thick and bake on a greased tray in a moderate oven for about 20 minutes. Space well out on the baking tray, as they tend to spread.



And, So...?



All in smiles, but the media won't let her: Princess Diana in her own style. Courtesy: Paris Match

Chocolate Cream Fingers

5 oz. flour
3 oz. margarine
3 oz. sugar
1 oz. cocoa
1 egg
A few drops vanilla essence
Pinch of salt
Milk or water to mix
Cream the fat and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in

the egg. Sieve dry ingredients into this and mix to a very stiff dropping consistency with liquid and vanilla essence. Using a vegetable star pipe in a forcing bag, pipe in lengths on to a greased baking sheet. Bake in a hot oven for 10-15 minutes. Leave to cool, then sandwich together with pink or white butter cream, dust with icing sugar or dip the ends in chocolate icing.