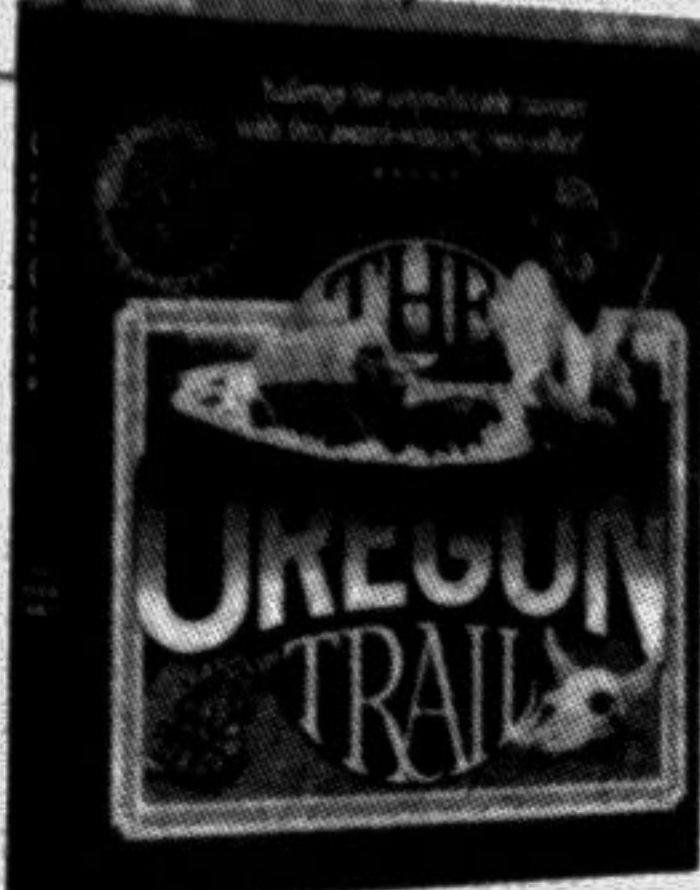


Edutainment for the Children: Learning Through Playing

by Sajid Rizwan Matin



HELPING children learn has always been a top priority for the parents, no matter how painstaking the process is.

The spirit of helping is undoubtedly needed, but what makes it harder for the children is the method and way of teaching. Usually school studies happen to be boring and dull for the young learners, especially for the impatient ones. Kids who are going to school have to spend most of the time preparing their homeworks and studying and learning the basic of grammar and language; whereas they should be playing more at this age.

The system of teaching compels them to learn, which they feel as an extra burden for them. Most of the kids, as a result, lose interest in learning.

The magic box on your desk top — the computer — if linked with multimedia can change this situation dramatically.

The best way for a child to learn is to learn through playing and in the broader sense, through entertainment. A child naturally loves games, and if some interesting educational teachings are included in such a game, the child will automatically absorb them while playing it. That is called 'edutainment', in the multimedia computer dictionary.

The concept of education wrapped in entertainment —

allows a child to acquire knowledge that would have been heavier and boring in the usual way.

So the MPC which is the short name for the Multimedia Personal Computer (usually loaded with multi session, multi function CD drive, sound card, speakers, mic) can now be declared as the best teacher at home. Whether it's for multimedia storybooks, interactive language guides or animated early learning software, computer is the perfect educational tool. (When it is affordable. And currently more and more exciting and entertaining educational discs are appearing on CD-ROM.)

For younger children there are some really delightful programmes almost similar to their coloring and picture books. And for older children there are plenty of other things on almost every popular topics — from dinosaurs to space travel — subjects guaranteed to widen their horizon of interests. The contents in the edutainment CD must be designed in an interesting way.

For many years now, the



general approach to a computer was to learn about it. But now the focus is more on using computers and not just learning about them. In the western world even a five-year old school going child is seen to use computer. This work wouldn't mean that they are using it for word processing or spreadsheet, they are actually playing, and thus even at the earliest stages they are developing computer skills. This may include learning how to work a keyboard and a mouse.

However, it would be foolish to think that in the present economic conditions Bangladesh will be able to provide each student a computer in primary school level. But an MPC is affordable to at least half of the middle class family. And day by day computers are becoming cheaper and

cheaper. The educational software in the home are at their best when they are designed to teach preliminary skills, like reading, writing and counting, and even more diverse subjects like languages, history, physics and chemistry.

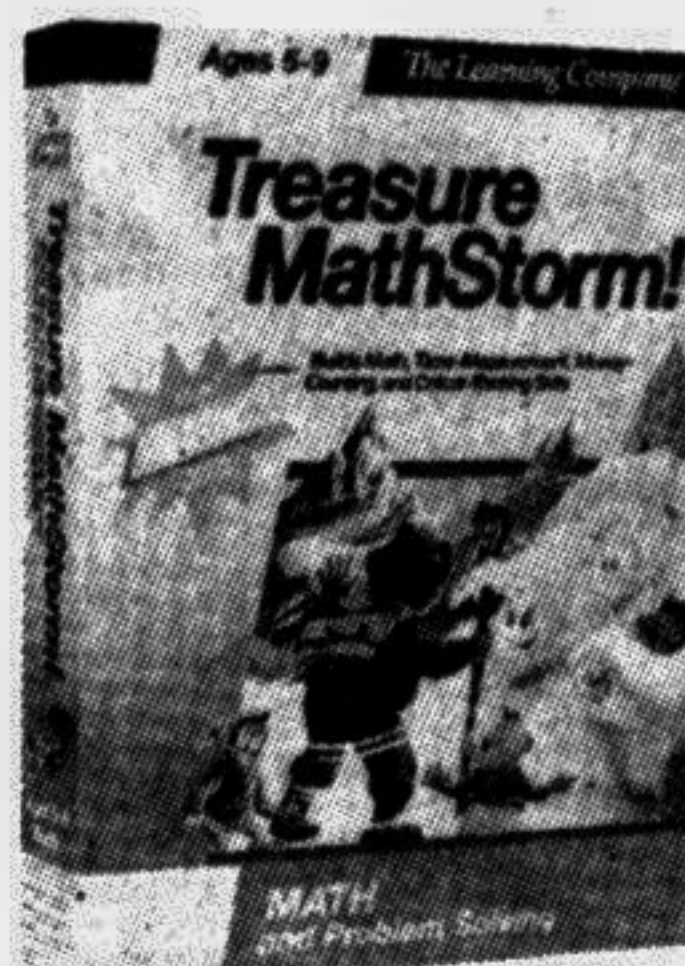
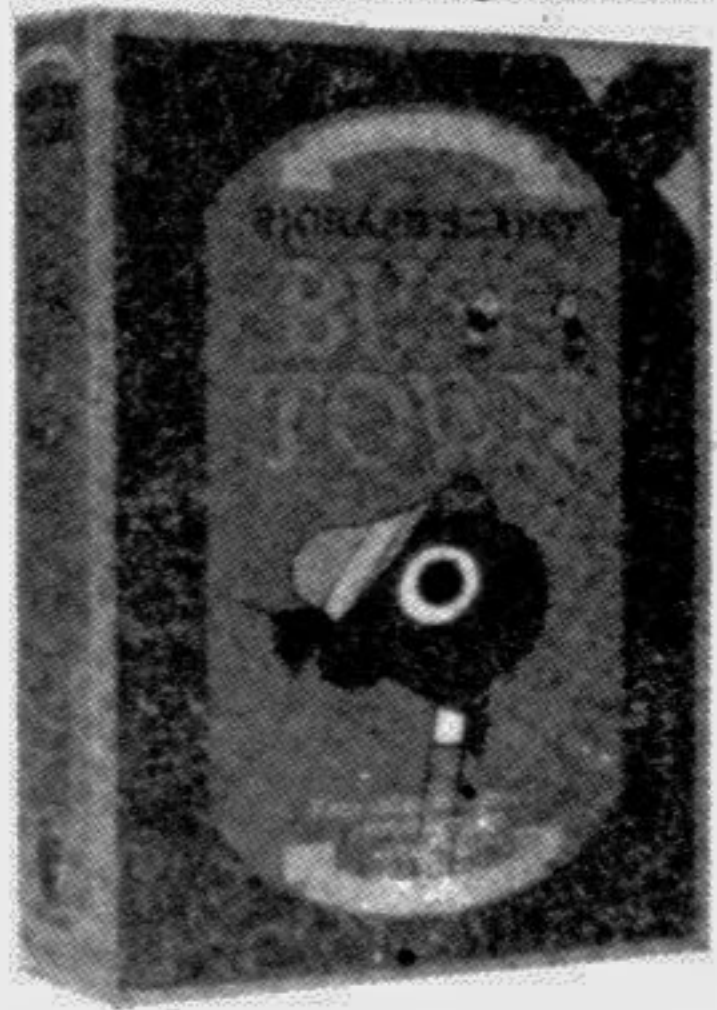
Lastly, it is a common misconception that young children will have problems operating complex 'multimedia' computers. In fact, there is no age limit, and children of three who can click a mouse can easily enter the exciting world of edutainment. However, there is no such edutainment software in Bangla language. So it could be pretty hard for a child to understand thoroughly. But I have observed that a child can overcome this barrier of language very easily. If the themes of the game is

explained to the child for a few times he will eventually understand the whole game. This way the child's English vocabulary is likely to expand.

Things would be more simplified if I explain some edutainment CD which I myself have played. (That proves that there is no age limit for games. At my age I still play games. As long as one has a mere inquisitive mind he or she would enjoy it.)

Lets consider the game 'Busytown'. This game is set to teach more on language, equations and logic. The busytown has houses, shops, restaurant, a clinic, a fire station, and you are to travel around in an apple helicopter and descend to any part of the town you wish to. You don't have to face traffic jams like in Dhaka.

There are lots of places in the city where you can play. Each place has a 'mind game' or puzzle intended to enhance skills like reading, math, problem solving, logical deduction and critical reasoning. At every



place in the town the child takes up a personality in the game and helps to achieve a certain goal. Some activities are more demanding than the others, but as a whole, a good range of skills are tested. This means the game suits a wide cross section of talents as well as different age groups.

The storybooks are also very helpful in building a child's vocabulary. The story is read out page by page with pictures and animation, appearing on the screen. There are some pages left black and white for you to color them — so you can also take active part in it. The real fun begins when the whole page is read out; after that wherever or on whatever you click the mouse something funny happens.

For example, in the storybook, 'The Pirate Who Didn't Wash', if you click on the smelly pirate on the deck, a bunch of terrible looking lice will fly out from his hair and land to the bird besides him. And almost every object on the screen will do something similar when you click on them, these actions are bound to make you laugh.

All these games, or kids' edutainment software, to be precise, are non-violent, rich in color and animation, it is creative as well. It is the best thing you can give a child, to introduce him to the world of education and knowledge.

Once Upon A Time

by Uditia

IT must have been a long time now. Almost in another life. In another space of time. Looking back. The horizon seems Beyond the grasp of imagination. Those wonderful times Are gone. When Life in the arms of childhood Was A sky full of stars A beautiful dream A lazy summer Spent on the golden stretches of sand. It all seems far away now Like it happened Once upon a time....

Hide and seek

by Uditia

THEY say "You have to wait For love to alight upon you" So I sit in vain With a deep longing in my heart. To encounter This elusive being Called love. I think I can see It sometimes. Dancing freely among The golden corns or Flying up in the sky Sometimes fluttering into the butterfly Or splashing in the shimmering lake. With fearful glances I steal upon this Ethereal creature Unable to go near. Afraid that it may disappear And never return.

Music

by Faiza F Khan

9 years (USA)

When something you hear Catches your ear In a nice way What is it? When a bird sings or a bell rings what is it? When a song is sung And a string is strung what is it? It's all music.

Letting Go

by Uditia

I close my eyes Against the agonies of my heart I try to pretend That I don't care I play dead To the screams of my soul. It's so hard Letting go I toss and turn In a sleepless fit I've reached out for the phone Many times Yet I cannot bring myself To say Hello! Oh it's never easy Letting go Now those memories Come rushing back Now my tears drop shatter Against the hand of fate I know that I could Never have you back It's so painful letting go!

Toys

by Faiza F Khan

I like toys Everybody likes them Girls and boys. I like my doll I take it everywhere I go Even to a Fancy hall. My blankie is yellow Just like a bowl of jello. Toys, toys everywhere Wherever you look They are still there.

What is A Witch?

A witch is a woman believed to have secret magical powers. This belief was very rife during the Middle Ages and continued till 17th century A.D. In fact, there are no such women at all. Witches are only imaginary beings. The origin of the belief in witchcraft seems to have begun with ladies who were oppressed and who indulged in magical practices.

The Christian missionaries got such ladies persecuted at the hands of the people and the law as well. These missionaries felt frightened of these ladies who were crazy though quite innocent and harmless.

Such women were hunted and blamed for any and every misfortune that befell any family or the village to which such a woman belonged. They were given very unfair trials and sentenced to death. They were not given any chance to prove their innocence nor to express their troubles even.

What is A Dragon?

A dragon is an imaginary fearful beast often believed to be a cruel, evil and dangerous man-eater. It can rise into the air and breathe out fire on its enemy. Different people have different descriptions of how a dragon looks.

Greeks and Romans believed that dragons looked like very huge snakes with wings to fly. In some other lands, a dragon was considered to be a very, very large lizard that could stand on its hind legs raising its fearful head high and opening its mouth wide as if to devour its enemy.

Some dragons were believed to have more than one (often seven) heads and to possess wonderful magical powers too. This power could be used against the enemies.

The idea of dragons seems to have come from fearful dinosaurs. We know that some of these dinosaurs could fly while others could not.

What Are a Cyclop and a Vampire?

A cyclop is a fearsome giant often mentioned in Greek legends. It is an imaginary just like a monster or a dragon. But it differs from them in one major point. A cyclop has small horns on its head and has only one big eye in the middle of the forehead.

You must have read the story — Odysseus and Polyphamus. Polyphamus was a cyclop that lived in a cave and had a big single eye on his forehead.

A vampire is an imaginary being in horror stories and legends. It is a ghost that bites sleeping people and sucks their blood. Vampires do not exist anywhere but the idea seems to have come from vampire bats.

Vampire bats feed on the blood of sleeping animals. Not only this, they have been known to attack sleeping human beings as well without even waking them up.

What is A Giant?

A giant is an imaginary man-like creature very huge in size, height and build. It has a very frightening face with big teeth projecting out of the mouth. It may have horns on its head. Not only this, it may have more than one (five or seven) heads, long hair and fiery eyes.

We often read about giants in folk-tales just as we read about fairies. A giant is described to be an evil, cruel and man-eating creature that always acts as a villain in the story. Even kings are said to fear giants in spite of all their armies and power. Giants are mentioned mostly in the stories from the eastern lands — India, China etc.

It looks that the idea of giants sprang up from a gorilla or snowman. Some people saw the snowman on a snowy hill and named it a giant. In like manner, gorillas gave birth to the idea of forest giants.

What is Paradise?

THE word — paradise — means heaven. It is, in fact, the Europeanised form of the Persian word Pirdaus — the name given to the royal park in Persia. It had fruitful orchards, flower-plants and wild beasts for hunting even.

Later on, the Christians used this word for heaven — the place where human-beings or their spirits are led to after death. The Muslim world also started the use of the word Pirdaus in this very meaning. That was how the word paradise came to mean heaven.

But it must be remembered that many people continued to believe and still do believe that paradise or heaven is very much here on the earth. A Persian poet Alberuni, when he came to India with a Muslim invader about a thousand years ago, said about India —

If there is Pirdaus (heaven) anywhere on the earth, It is here, it is here, and here only.

For The Love of Country

by Sadia R Chowdhury

WE were much weaker this time around than we were when we first came to Dhikrupa. Abba wasn't sure if we could all manage to make it home the same way we got here. He rented a speedboat so that the journey would go much quicker.

As we were speeding through the river, I'm sure that everybody was thinking the same thing that I was thinking. What were we going back to? Was our house still there? Do we have anything left at all? What if we don't? Then, what will happen to us?

When we got close to Dhaka, we got off the boat and hired a taxi. We gave the taxi our address and he took us there in about half an hour. The man was right. Everything seemed to be under control. Although the destruction was still evident, there was a feeling of peace and calm. As we took the familiar turn that led to our house, I closed my eyes and prayed that our wondrous house was still intact. When I opened my eyes, sure enough, the house was basking in all its glory.

When we entered through the front gate, my father turned around and locked the door from the outside. "This way, they'll think that nobody's home," he entered the house itself from the back door, so that nobody would see us. And so started our eight months in seclusion.

The first three weeks, we spent all of our time at home. We never opened the windows, or shades, nor did we answer the doorbell. We tried to make as little noise possible. Tarek, Kaya, and I learned how to play games without making any noise. This was quite an achievement since we were all big mouths.

Kamal Bhai spent most of his time studying. He said that he was falling behind with his college studies. I told him to relax, that all the schools were closed and nobody was really learning anything. Abba and Amma spent most of their time listening to the radio and the television.

During the third and fourth week, the radio and television broadcasts started to announce that everything was back to normal. They said that the schools and offices were open. Parents were encouraged to send their children back to school. Anybody who didn't go back to work would lose their job. Also, the Pakistani army would believe that you were against them, and they would kill you.

Amma and Abba agreed that it was still too early to send us to school. They wanted to make sure that it was absolutely safe. My father owned a jewelry shop in Baitul Mukarram, a large mall in downtown Dhaka. His workers started to call and ask whether or not they

should go back to work. He said that he wanted to keep the store closed. When his best friend, and manager of the store, Shamsun Alam, heard this, he disagreed.

"If the army sees that you are keeping your store closed, you are going to be in serious trouble. Keep it open, just to be on the safe side." And so he kept the store open. But, he didn't go to the store for the first three weeks. Shamsun Alam did most of the management work.

Soon afterwards, all the communication lines were fixed. We called Kaya's parents. They said to send her back. I had grown very close to Kaya in the last couple of weeks, and was very reluctant to see her go. We also tried to call Tarek's parents, but we couldn't reach them. Evidently, their telephone lines still hadn't been fixed.

After a while, we decided it was safe enough to keep the main gate unlocked. Kamal Bhai went out once in a while. However, Amma and I stayed at home almost all the time.

During our third month back in Dhaka, Amma decided to send us to school. Kamal Bhai and I were very excited. This was the first

time that we would be able to go out of the house in three months. It was almost like an excursion for us. We got dressed in our traditional white and blue uniforms and got ready to go to school.

The driver dropped me off first. I was bubbling with energy. However, when I entered the school building my enthusiasm dissipated. The school was basically empty except for about three teachers and a handful of students. No lesson was taught, but we were not allowed to talk to each other, either. I never realized how long a school day was before this.

When I got home, Kamal Bhai was already there. Much to my parents' disappointment, when he saw that the university was basically empty, he took a rickshaw home. The streets were still rather dangerous, and he took a big risk coming home by himself. Seeing how upset I was, my parents decided not to send me back to school.

Day after day, week after week, month after month passed with no solution to the guerrilla warfare that was going on. Luckily, nothing really happened to any members of our family members. However, during the sixth month of the war, the war-

fare came close to home.

The only reason that my father opened his jewelry store was to make sure that the Pakistani government wouldn't think that he was pro-independence. Most offices and businesses were open due to this fear.

However, this upset the supporters of Joy Bangla. They supported non-cooperative action and wanted everything to shut down until West Pakistan granted us our independence. To show their anger, they started a lot of guerrilla warfare. One of the places they attacked was Baitul Mukarram, the area where Abba worked.

One day, I was sitting on the patio playing Parcheesi with Tarek, Kamal Bhai, and Amma. As usual, we had the radio turned on. The familiar drone of the broadcaster was disturbed by the booming voice of another announcer.

"This is a special announcement. Baitul Mukarram is under siege by the Mukti Bahini. The area has become a war zone. Nobody is allowed to enter the area, and those who are already there are advised to stay in a safe, well-hidden area."

A chill ran down my spine. Did they say Baitul Mukarram had become a war zone? Abba was at Baitul Mukarram. Was he alright? Without saying a word, Amma went up to her room and started praying. Tarek, Kamal Bhai, and I did the same. However, I prayed downstairs so I would be able to tell if my father had come back. Around six o'clock, I heard the gate open. I turned my head and saw that my father had come back home.

I ran outside to greet him. His hair was a bit tousled, but otherwise he was alright. I smiled at him, and when he saw how worried I was, he responded with a huge bear hug.

*** I was reading a book and had lost track of time because I was late for lunch. I ran downstairs, but didn't enter the dining room because I could hear Kamal Bhai and Amma speaking together.

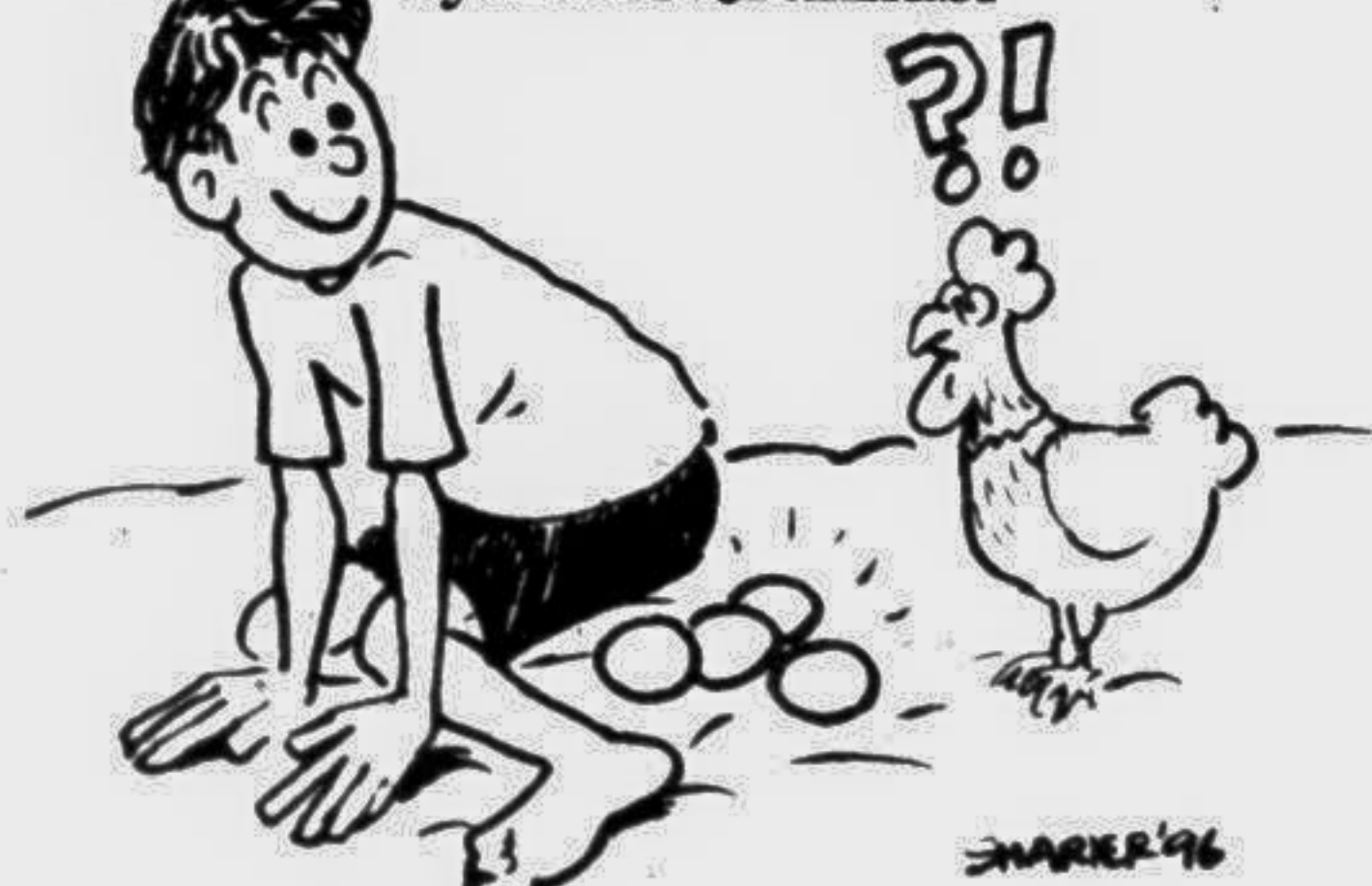
"Amma, I want to go to Mujib Nagar and join the Mukti Bahini. I could hear Kamal Bhai say, I caught my breath. He couldn't be serious."

The Mukti Bahini was a guerrilla force formed by Bengali men. These people fought the Pakistani army, and had attacked Baitul Mukarram. There were many Bengalis who, before the war, joined the Pakistani army. However, when the war started they ran off to India. Along with the soldiers, people from the gram and from the universities went to India. India, with the help of Indira Gandhi, supplied our force with a training base called Mujib Nagar. This base helped to prepare our forces to fight the Pakistanis. Gandhi also supplied us with weapons. She set up refugee camps to help those Bengalis who lost everything during the war.

— To be continued

A Futile Experiment

by ASM Nurunnabi



MINTU, a lad of ten, is curious almost about anything and everything. However his such curiosity craze does not always play a positive role in his life.

A boy endowed with natural gift such as his is normally regarded as very intelligent. Mintu is indeed so, but his curiosity is directed at so many directions that little energy is left in him for his academic purposes.

A few months back he dismantled his brother's new table clock and his elder sister's favourite transistor radio to find out how they functioned. After being frustrated, either rightly or otherwise in this direction, he failed to reassemble them, resulting in total damage to both the objects of his curiosity.

Lately, Mintu's curiosity took a peculiar turn. He had observed that chickens come out of eggs on which some hens sit for days. He asked his mother why this procedure works and how? His mother explained that a hen, with its feathery body provides warmth to the eggs by sitting continuously on them, and after some days the chickens hatch out of the eggs.

This information appeared very strange to Mintu. Few days later, his face took on a sombre appearance, indicating that a plan was taking shape in his ever curious mind.

With the advent of winter, Mintu suddenly had a mild attack of chicken pox. So, he was segregated from other members of the family to prevent the infection from spreading. For inexplicable reason, the separate arrangement seemed to make Mintu very happy. In the separate room, he had his own pillow and a quilt together with some of his favourite story books. In this solitary confinement however, he insisted that a calendar should be fixed on the wall. This was duly done.

The day he took to bed with his pillow and quilt was marked by him on the calendar. As each day passed, he put

a cross mark on that date in the calendar. The illness from which he suffered from was mild in nature and his body temperature did not fluctuate. Yet Mintu always lay down on the bed with the quilt over him.

As the days passed, he didn't leave his bed, and this made his parents worried. The family doctor was called in to examine him, but the doctor found nothing wrong with him. He might be suffering from weakness, he prescribed some tonics to boost up his energy. All this, however, brought about no change in the situation. A few more days passed this way.

Mintu, on the other hand, was found keen on counting the cross marks on the calendar. One day he calculated that the total number of cross marks on the calendar was about fourteen, indicating that he had been lying on the bed covered with the quilt for fourteen days.

By this time he had fully recovered from his illness and he was expected to come out of his seclusion life. That very day, he suddenly said to his mother: "Mom, how many days does it take for a hen to hatch eggs?"

His mother, surprised by the question, replied: "Three weeks and sometimes a little less than that."

A couple of days more passed and Mintu counted that his moments on the bed had approached the three-week mark with no visible result. Mintu, terribly frustrated, leapt out of his bed and said to his mother: "Mom, my experiment has failed."

He removed the quilt and there lay four eggs on the bed. In a sad voice, Mintu gave reasons for his peculiar conduct. He said to his mother: "You told me that warming the eggs for a period of three weeks turns eggs into chickens. I kept these eggs, under the warmth of my quilt for the specified period, and nothing has happened!"