



# Those Scientists!

by Sonia Sharmin

SCIENTISTS are an extraordinary breed of men. The lengths to which they will go in their pursuit of knowledge is still a matter of wonder to other lesser mortals. All scientists are motivated to some extent by the urge to find out something new, in their laboratories they chart unknown waters and are always on the look out for sight of land. As with the voyagers, some do find their unknown continent, some do not, while others are like Columbus, and never understand the true significance of their work. Among these scientists, there are again a group of half-crazed individuals. Without any thought for their own safety, they take the most amazing risks, most often quite knowingly. Like the French nuclear scientist, Frederic Joliot Curie, who insisted to his death that his liver disease was in no way connected to the large doses of radiation he had received throughout his life. As for him, it may be that it was not possible then to protect himself without abandoning all his efforts. Certainly, not for Sir Ronald Ross, who experimented on himself to discover the type of mosquito responsible for malaria. Some scientists are stubborn. An admirable quality in their work, perhaps, but sometimes it affects their judgement. Those who remained Aristotle's disciples for centuries without questioning the truth of any of his assumptions did incalculable damage to the progress of civilization. William Harvey, called the father of modern medicine, understood that blood is pumped by the heart into the arteries, and then returns via the veins. However,

WATCH IT MR SCIENTIST...YOU AIN'T DRIVING A CAR & I AIN'T YOUR STEERING WHEEL OR ACCELERATOR!



since he never discovered the connection between arteries and veins, namely the capillaries, the scientific community remained skeptical. It was only seven years after Harvey's death that Marcello Malpighi, with the help of a microscope, discovered those capillaries. What is unfortunate is that the microscope was available to Harvey, but he never used it in his work. There are tragedies. It was

made laser with a system of mirrors to treat people with holes in the retina. One day, as he was looking down the tube, the sun caught one of the mirrors and burned the central part of his own retina. The result was that he became blind in that eye. The Germans have a reputation for peculiar behaviour - it was a German who first made a catheter and promptly used it to probe his own body. Some scientists are like the famous painters. They live in obscurity, and are honoured only after death. Louis Braille, dying from consumption, could not know the reverence accorded to him by every blind person in the world a hundred years later. Mendel, who discovered the principles of genetics, passed his life as a monk and died unrecognized. Many important papers languish in insignificant journals. There are again other scientists who accomplish their work, but do not live to enjoy the fruits of their toils. But, to my mind, the most disgusting example of scientific obsession goes to Joseph Goldberger, an American doctor, who first understood that pellagra was not caused by a germ, but was caused by deficiency of a vitamin. This man, in 1916, came across some convicts suffering from this illness. To prove his theory, he took some blood from one of the convicts, and injected it into his arm. He ate the powdered skin rash of one of the others, and then swallowed some FAECES from another. Not satisfied even then, he carried out the experiment on his poor wife. Still, what would we do without them?

# For The Best Meat in Afirca

by Tony Seskus

A serving of monkey or python? Or how about the Christmas special- antelope? Gourmets in Cameroon are prepared to pay a premium for wild game meat, the caviar of Africa!

AS the ageing red-and-white passenger train pulls into the Cameroon capital, men carrying large sacks push their way to the exits. Some of the bags are smeared with blood. Before the train enters the station and into the view of customs officials, the sacks are jettisoned, to be snatched up by women and children waiting alongside the tracks. The business day has begun. Inside the ragged bags are dead monkeys, parrots, turtles, antelopes, maybe a gorilla. Hours before, they were probably roaming free in the South province's Dia reserve measuring the effect of hunters from three villages on a 600 square kilometre section of the park. When he arrived in May, the best hunters were catching about 20 animals every two weeks. But by November, they were catching three or four. The hunters had nearly picked the area clean. In tracking more than 1,260 snares, Nguemue found that 789 animals spanning 22 different species had been slaughtered. Most alarming

She is uneducated and supports her two young children and extended family with her earnings. She says she has never thought about the environment, only about survival. "I sell meat for my family," she says shyly, her eyes fixed on her feet. "We need the money". The hunters, most of whom live in or near Cameroon's vast national parks, earn even less. According to Central African Ecosystems, a Cameroon conservation agency funded by the European Union, hunters earn typically very lean. The meat is considered a delicacy and can be bought from street pedlars or at five-star restaurants. La Porte Jaune (The Yellow Door), an upscale restaurant in the economic capital of Douala, boasts of its crocodile, python and porcupine dishes. Delicious or not, conservationists, say, the trade must be stopped. Nguemue argues that more laws will not help. Paching is already illegal and hunting of any kind on reserves is prohibited. Even the markets



one of the country's national parks. Soon they will be on sale in Yaounde markets and on the dinner tables of the middle-class. "It's frightening," says Dr Andrew Allo of the Cameroon bureau of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). "Hunting for survival is one thing, but killing indiscriminately for money is a practice that has got out of hand. The commercial bushmeat trade has become a serious threat to wildlife in this country." Allo's fears are based on a recent WWF survey. Researchers studying three bushmeat markets, two in Yaounde and another in the city of Yoko in central Cameroon, found that over an 11-month period more than 14,000 animals had been sold as meat. Fifty-nine per cent were monkeys or other primates, including one gorilla. Other animals included antelope, civets, snakes, birds and wild pigs. "The frightening thing is, this only tells us a part of the story," says Allo. "There are many markets in Cameroon. I don't think we can really appreciate the real impact of the trade because we don't know how big it is. But if this is any indication, we could be in a lot of trouble." Biologist Paul Robinson Nguemue says 'trouble' could be an understatement. for the scientist is the rate of destruction of cephalophus callipygus, a type of antelope. "In five months, they killed 235", Nguemue says. "It takes 10 years for these animals to become sexually mature. At this rate, they'll all be gone from this area within five years. It's tragic." But it is also tragic circumstances that have led to the present crisis. According to the WWF, the trade is on a dangerous upswing thanks to the country's downward economic spiral. Rampant unemployment has forced many city dwellers to return to the villages in search of work there. "People don't have jobs, they don't have money, and they don't have options," says the organisation. "They know how to hunt, so that's what they do. Unfortunately, once you start hunting for economic survival instead of subsistence, you're courting disaster." Dorothea, who did not want to be identified by her real name, is a typical link in the bushmeat trade. The 22-year-old woman lives in South province and buys meat from local hunters. On most days she can sell one monkey and one bush sheep to travellers for a daily profit of about CFA 5,000. Dorothea believes she has no other options. about CFA 16,400 per month, but the work is easy and the pay-off for hauling 40 kilograms of meat 20 kilometres through the bush is much better than for lugging 40 kilograms of cocoa. The real money is made by the more established middlemen, who buy from hunters and sell directly to restaurants or transport the meat to more lucrative markets. One of the country's richest market is Yaounde's Gare Centrale. There, the final price of primates ranges from CFA 3,500 for monkey to CFA 24,000 for gorilla. Python costs about CFA 28,000. But a good antelope caught during the Christmas season commands the best price: CFA 100,000. According to those who eat it, bushmeat's popularity is not based on religious or cultural tradition, but on flavour. For many, it is the caviar of the continent. "Culture? It has nothing to do with culture," gurgles a man at a roadside restaurant near the city of Mayville in central Cameroon. He is chewing on a monkey's rib cage covered with a sticky, brown sauce that has also painted his hands and cheeks. "It tastes better. This is the best meat in Africa. Much better than beef." In general, the meat is sweeter and more stringy than that of domestic animals. It is themselves are rarely patrolled. The problem, he says, is a lack of staffing. "In Dia, they have one man who controls hunting for the entire forest," he points out. The park is roughly 5,000 square kilometres. "Can you imagine one man patrolling the whole park? When he comes, the hunters just move. It's laughable." Nguemue believes that education is essential. "These people don't think they'll ever run out of animals, even when some of them start to disappear. If they understood the damage they were doing, they might stop," he explains. "Then we can give them agricultural options like crops and cattle. They need to learn that they have other choices. If they don't, they'll always find a way around the law to survive." Allo agrees that education is important, but says the wilderness cannot wait for people to change their bad habits. He wants the government to dedicate more funding for policing until the hunters learn to curb the killing spree. "A lot of these people are just lazy. They could be farming now, but it's easier to set a trap, go home, drink and come back the next day. It's laziness that's killing all these animals and it has to stop." Gemini News

# 16 ANNAS OF LIFE WASTED; A Modern Tale

by Sharier



## An Accident

by Ishna Neamatullah

THE high raised buildings beside the pavements displayed work going on inside. The firmament above was resplendent thought covered with an Afghan of smog, the street below was bearing under the heft of motor vehicles at one corner of the street lay a cluster of people and commotion. Under the scorching sun of the noon lay the dead body of a young boy appallingly transmogrified by a speeding truck. His skull crushed in a way that it was unrecognizable; lying in a pool of warm blood and beside the cadaver a sticky gray mass. The people around the dead body were just passerby mainly rickshaw-pullers, who maintained a distance from the dead body and stood dumbstruck. Their confounded voices and shouting about how the accident occurred, transcended the commotion of vehicles beside them. Some of the people went to a police sergeant to inquire him about this accident and to take proper care of the dead body, but was taken back by the sergeant's stringent comments. The men became furious at the police's trazen behavior and started a skirmish with him. The police, hoping to atone for his behaviour, went to the place of the accident. The ambulance was becoming heavy with the thick odour of young blood, flies, and the slowly retreating crowd. When the sergeant returned, the young boy's body lay neglected as a squirrel's cadaver by the ever busy people, the road, buildings and the scorching sky. Eventually an ambulance arrived and carried away the dead body, dropping blood and froth. The cadaver's destination to a morgue and then to a grave, while the sergeant returned to his duty, his visage solid and implacable. Away from everyone's notice, lay a mass of grey matter of a young boy whose dreams and hopes were transcending a greater, higher place than the busy streets; the sky above still held a torid gloom.

## With a silver lining

by Ishna Neamatullah

The human life is a congregation of bits of good and bad experiences which finally form a drama, either tragic or joyous, on the stage of reality. Strings of incidents follows relentlessly to lead us to the destination. Providence has set up for us. In this flood of constant happenings, it is not wise to be at a loss or to be hopeless about life during a grievous incident or a bereavement. While fate is taking away our loved things from us and shutting doors of opportunities, it is at the same time opening others.

# Rupaq and "Bhola-Maynar Byscope": A Bit About It

by Kazi K Arafat

AS we all know, Dr Dve wrote the national anthem, which is featured best with the dance of Madhuri Dixit, which was first released with our independence in the early nineties. I'm not taking about the independence of Bangladesh - I'm referring to the god of wisdom and the fountain of audio-visual youth - the advent of Saint satellite Dish. However, not all people have been blessed with global entertainment/enlightenment as we have been fortunate enough to be. Not everybody worships at the altar of the almighty Zee-us!!! As a matter of fact, there are a few iconoclasts who hold out against the Noble Eightfold Path (i.e. Star Plus, Star Movies, Channel V, Zee TV, Star Sports, Sony ET, ATN, DD7) and try to uphold the antiquated culture which is a couple of thousand years old, is not broadcast voluptuously twenty-four hours a day, and therefore is quite smelly - yes! There are some who actually like the society that gave birth to the world's first university (and therefore is to blame for all the violence there nowadays). One institution, which is the meeting-ground for a couple of dozens of these dogmatic pro-conformity anti-revolutionaries is Rupaq. Based in Rupnagar (near Mirpur), Rupaq is a cultural organisation whose members participate in performances of traditional Bangla songs, dances, recitals and dramas. Professor Montazuddin Ahmed, the well-known actor and literature presides over it. Rupaq stands for cultural impartiality, a characteristic

Rupaq's most recent performance to date is "Bhola-Maynar Byscope" (A Byscope is a kind of frame where still pictures can be moved around manually), written by Khasrul Kabir and directed by Erfanul Islam. In this play, we see two poor byscope players, Bhola and Mayna, earning a bare living by exhibiting their byscope acts to the general public. However, the serenity of their innocent lives is disturbed by the advent of a political leader who starts leading the country to ruin and driving the people to despair. One day these scenes start appearing on Bhola's and Mayna's Byscopes. The sad-but-true aspects of the war of independence, the ugly, sadistic smile of hypocritical politicians, and the overall unrest in a country crawling on its hands and knees - all these can be seen in their darkly realistic byscope shows. But even the fantasy world of entertainment proves unable to offer solutions to all the problems, and the two destitute artist keep suffering. Rupaq proves that there are still some people about who have to acquire the wisdom of the stars (i.e. the channel network), the manifestations of whose "ignorance" is their tendency to cling to their own culture.

