

Feeling Stuffy in the City

by Rahnuma Muneer



The high rise apartments and commercial structures do give Dhaka the modern look but what does it do for the soul that is inside everybody and is always wanting to be free!

IF the last time you were in Gulshan was three years back, then this time you definitely will notice a striking difference in this very posh, very diplomatic section of the city. What with many of the diplomatic missions moving to Baridhara (the most expensive area at present) and all the commercial offices taking their place, the high rises of Gulshan are now the latest addition to Dhaka's skyline.

Keeping pace with the intrusion of the commercial offices are the restaurants popping up like mushrooms here and there in Gulshan. In the last few months I have had the opportunity to visit several restaurants and fast food centres, on invitation, in and around Gulshan. In terms of quality and price, these eateries definitely beat all others I have tried during my

student life (mostly small coffee shops in New Market). These expensive restaurants would be too expensive for students, I would think because never as a university going girl did I imagine going to one of these locations every day. To my surprise most of the places I have been to were packed with customers.

many of them of the college going age and at times it was difficult to find a table for two. This is not surprising as Dhaka has no place for young people to visit and hang out like the Spagetti Jazz, Hard Rock Cafe, Dominos Pizza and the like to pull the crowd. What is frightening, though, is that the kids of the present day are forgetting the old way of passing time. A walk in the garden is unthinkable now a days and is not even safe.

Except for the Boi Mela, Ekushey February recital programmes, Bashanta Utshab or Pahela Baishakh, Dhaka has no place for people with no money in the pocket to visit. Going to Ramna Park or Sahrawdy Uddyan is not really an idea that appeals to the mass. Crescent Lake is a good option but it is overcrowded.

I once lived in Bailey Road, which is a very secluded area in Dhaka. The walks that I would take with my friends are ever so memorable for me. We would walk on the street, interspersed with occasional trips to a nearby library or to Mahila Samity for a 5 Tk. per plate chatpati. Whenever we would come into possession of enough money we would go for a stage drama show or to the florists shop to get some flowers. Now

that I live in an apartment I am deprived of all these. There is no place to go out and walk, no roof safe enough for anybody to go to. The high rise apartments and commercial structures do give Dhaka the modern look but what does it do for the soul that is inside everybody and is always wanting to be free? Children are obliged to play within the boundaries of their flats, most of the time in the parking lot situated under the building.

I can only hope for the next generation that they have the same pleasures that we once did. That they don't have to go to expensive restaurants for an adda. That there is enough open space for them to move around, and that the city is safe enough for them to go walking on the streets as we once did and that there be an open roof for them to behold the sky from.

Hospital Waste : Potential Threat to Public Health

A study has found that because of lack of waste management hospitals, clinics and diagnostic laboratories in Bangladesh have ironically become places that could spread diseases, including HIV that causes fatal AIDS. *News Network's* Naseem Jahan Eva reports:

HOSPITALS are places where ailing people go for cure. Not always in Bangladesh. Hospitals, clinics and diagnostic laboratories dump tons of untreated waste that could become a major source of diseases such as AIDS.

The present practice in almost all cases is to have little or no scientific handling of the liquid and solid wastes often containing hazardous materials are simply dumped in the nearest drain or garbage heap," said a study report of Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) that was discussed at a recent workshop in Dhaka.

These wastes, according to the report, are "prone to contaminate the rag pickers sifting through the garbage dumps."

The chance of infection is extremely high, the report concluded.

Doctors as well as environmental experts are worried over the way the hospitals and clinics, especially in the private sector are failing to treat the hazardous wastes.

"Almost everyone agrees that the current practice of waste disposal is a big threat to public health. Unfortunately no one really cares," said Dr. Reaz Mobarak, who led the team of experts at Hospital Environmental Project of BCAS under which the study was conducted.

It was co-sponsored by the Asia Foundation.

The study found that private clinics and laboratories are mushrooming because health facilities at the state-run hospitals are still inadequate.

"Mushrooming of the clinics and laboratories are not well planned and designed and hence lack environmental aesthetics. The professionals lack interest in environmental health," according to the report.

When the infectious hospital waste is dumped in the city garbage they contaminate the whole mass of solid waste. Then the diseases can spread by vectors like mosquitoes, flies and dogs, cats, cockroaches and mice.

The wastes do not spare the professionals and hospital staffs. They too can get infected.

"One great danger is that the wastes can spread HIV among doctors and nurses and waste scavengers if any one of them happen to have an injury," warns Dr. Mobarak.

The workshop was told that the existing official rules regarding disposal of hospital waste have many drawbacks.

For example, there is no specific definition of hospital waste; no specific and separate regulation for proper disposal of hospital waste; the disposal is not a priority for the authorities and even the existing rules

are not fully enforced.

Another problem is the lack of coordination between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Environment, City Corporations and other local authorities who are responsible for the job.

The study discovered that none of the country's hospitals or clinics has incinerator to burn the waste or proper place for lime burial.

"In foreign countries they burn the hospital waste so it does not cause any health hazard. We need to have a system of burning the waste to ashes," suggested Dr. Salimul Huq, Executive Director at Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies.

The only incinerator in Bangladesh belongs to ICDDR,B. But it is a small one that serves only the institution's own needs.

According to an official estimate Dhaka, the capital city of more than nine million, produce nearly 3,000 tons of garbage and waste every day. Hospital waste accounts for 0.5 percent of the garbage.

On more occasions than not the clinical waste is just thrown on the streets from where it is carried to the city corporation's bigger waste dumping places.

A few years ago Dhaka Medical College Hospital installed an incinerator, but it did not operate for long, informed Je-

bannaher Ahmed, a researcher. That incinerator has now remained abandoned.

However, Dr. Mobarak is against small incinerator. Because, he said, small incinerator burns waste alright, but it pollutes the environment at the same time.

There is, however, a dispute over incinerator. Dr. Jahangir Alam, Treasurer at Clinic Owners Association, referred to the Malaysian practice.

In Malaysia, he said, there are region-wise incinerators in the private sectors.

The system works well in Malaysia. It's a good banking business there, he said. A.R. Khan, Director General at Environment Department, admitted that the laws relating to environment and pollution are still weak.

"As a result the authorities fail to take any proper action," he said.

Lack of public awareness is also responsible for this undesirable situation. The workshop focused on making the public as well as the authorities aware of the waste that cause health menace. With financial assistance from the Asia Foundation, Bangladesh Centre for Development Studies has been implementing the project since 1996 so far covering 10 hospitals and clinics, six of them in Dhaka city.

The Last Fetter

by Sagar Singh

The belief that modern humans emerged suddenly as the most evolved species is an indicator of the anthropocentrism of our times.

ARE scientists free from scientisation and cultural influence? Can they be completely objective? To be sure, scientists have acknowledged their personal limitations. Even great physicists like Newton and Einstein acknowledged it. But when it comes to placing our species in evolutionary terms, scientists along with the humanists have believed that modern humans stand out. Homo sapiens subspecies sapiens is "the best of the best," at the top of the evolutionary ladder. But recent anthropological studies suggest that there is a need to revise this opinion.

This comes as a surprise. Anthropologists in general have insisted that only modern humans can communicate intelligently through consistent production of sounds. Monkeys chatter, whales "speak" to each other in sounds inaudible to the human ear, and birds sing and whistle. But only humans, they have said, have speech. This is not to say that humans cannot whistle like birds.

In the Spanish Canary Islands — the coincidence is striking — the natives communicate over distances by whistling. But human speech is different from all other forms of animal communication in that human sounds — words — stand for conceptions, and communication is symbolic. Linguists and other scientists have agreed with this pronouncement.

Our predecessors the Neanderthals (Homo sapiens neanderthalensis), it was believed, had some form of speech. Around 30,000 years ago, the

Neanderthals competed with modern humans in the same ecological niches, were pushed to the margins and became extinct. Neanderthals were as tall as modern humans, had comparable brain capacities and a developed culture. So why did they become extinct? Going by what Nobel laureate William Golding believed, the Neanderthals, communicated by means of some visual symbols (which was disadvantageous). But anthropologists suggested that the Neanderthals simply had a less developed language.

Does this explain why the predecessors of the Neanderthals, Homo erectus species like Java man, became extinct? Archaeologists, who depend on material evidence that they unearth, said that these species had a less developed culture — meaning that the tools and weapons made by Homo erectus were not as good or as efficient. The implication was that Homo erectus could not kill and trap animals, cut trees, dig up edible roots — and generally exploit natural resources — as well as later humans.

Palaentologists, studying the fossilised skulls of these species, had also concluded that they probably did not have language. Their brain capacity was far below what was considered necessary for development of the vocal apparatus and meaningful articulation of sound.

Now, barely a month after

archaeologists came up with evidence suggesting that Homo erectus built seaworthy craft 400,000 years ago involving use of symbolic communication, there is evidence that our ancestors could speak. Instead of measuring brain capacity, a team of anthropologists from Duke Medical Center at Durham, North Carolina, USA, took a different approach. They assumed that a long larynx, large pre-frontal brain lobes and a greater number of nerves leading to the tongue would be critical to the emergence of speech.

So they studied the hypoglossal canal, a hole at the bottom of the skull in the back, where the spinal cord meets the brain. Through this canal run nerve fibres from the brain to the muscles of the tongue. The wider the canal, the scientists assumed, the greater the number of nerve fibres that could pass through it; and the greater the number of nerves, the finer control a species could have over its tongue to make speech sounds. Comparing hypoglossal canals of modern humans, apes and several human ancestor fossils, they concluded that the canals of modern humans are almost twice as large as those of modern apes, which are incapable of speech. They also found that the canal size of australopithecines — earlier human relatives that died out about one million years ago — did not dif-

fer significantly from that of chimpanzees.

The results, the scientists said in a report published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, "suggest minimum and maximum dates for the appearance of the modern human pattern of tongue motor innervation and speech abilities." To narrow the range, they examined skeletons of Neanderthals and species of the Homo genus that lived up to 400,000 years ago. These included Kabwe specimens from Africa and Swanscombe fossils from Europe. The size of their hypoglossal canals fell within the range of those of modern Homo sapiens. This suggests that our ancestors were quite capable of speech.

Some scientists may not be convinced. The arguments, they may say, are tenuous. To be sure, interpretation alone is hardly science. But it has its place and is, to some extent, influenced by culture. Unlike animals, humans possess culture and something apparently beyond culture — science. But even Newton deferred to culture in dividing the spectrum into seven colours. A normal eye can easily distinguish more than seven shades in the spectrum — the overlapping areas. Newton did not choose the number arbitrarily: seven symbolised perfection in his time. The belief that modern humans emerged suddenly as the most evolved species is an indicator of the anthropocentrism of our times. It is reminiscent of the church's argument that all species were created simultaneously.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

Innovative Approach for Delivering Instructions

Web-Based Instruction by Badrul H Khan (Ed.). Educational Technology Publications, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1997. Pp 463+ xvi

Book Review by Nazmul Haq



EDUCATION is no longer a culture bound or area specific phenomenon. It is now more global and universal interactive process. Day by day new seat of learning is emerging with new wisdom and truths around the world. To live in this modern world one has to be acquainted with this explosive expansion of knowledge. Without the aid of modern electronic media it is an impossible task for an individual to remain updated with the external world. World Wide Web (widely known as web) is such an electronic intervention which provides an opportunity to develop new learning experiences for students and other interested individuals around the world, which was not possible in the past decades. By using this media, students from around the globe can enjoy equal access to the innumerable learning resources available on the Web.

This age is widely known as information age, where our society is undergoing a tremendous change with immense potential on our educational system. New discoveries in information technology, coupled with the changes in society, are creating new paradigms for education. Learners in this new educational paradigm require rich learning environments supported by well-designed resources. The current computer networking system, the web, provides that excellent source

of learning and instruction. Web-based instruction (WBI) is a new innovative approach for delivering instructions to the learners sitting at a distance place on the web medium. WBI is hypermedia-based instructional programme which utilizes the attributes and resources of the World Wide Web to create a meaningful learning environment where learning is fostered and supported. This system has been widely discussed in a recent compiled book on 'Web-Based Instruction' edited by Badrul H Khan.

A total of 59 contributions authored by different web-based internationally reputed experts are compiled in this book.

These articles cover the introductory aspects of WBI, its learning environment, course design, instructional procedure and case studies on current WBI courses.

The first section describes the evolution of the web as an instructional technology and its use in the distance mode of teaching. Web based media is a self-directed hypermedia learning environment, "it provides the idea of acquisition of knowledge from a system of structured source.

The second section of the book deals with a wide range of teaching-learning issues both in the traditional classroom as well as in web based learning

environment. Cross-cultural issues of the World Wide Web, motivational aspects entangled with web classroom and the role of web instructor have been discussed in the second section.

Designing web based instruction is a serious business because it needs to incorporate both men and machine together under one heading of web-based instruction. This is the longest section of the book and contains 18 articles on principles of web based design, higher order thinking, how children learn from the web, designing instruction for children and application of learning theories in the web site.

Details of using web based instruction is presented in the fourth section of the book. It covers the mechanism of information use and its dissemination, different tools of web search, such as search engines, training of teacher and legal implication of web are discussed in this section. Along with these four elaborate area of web ten case studies have been identified for new learners in the World Wide Web. The authors certainly did an appreciable job by producing a technical and elaborate book like this on web-based instruction. I hope all the internet users as well as high level students will find this book useful.

The writer is Professor, Institute of Education and Research (IER) Dhaka University

Potency Pills May Help Save One-horned Rhino

by Syed Zarir Hussain

THE potency pills that have hit the South Asian and Far Eastern markets of late is good news not just for men suffering from sexual dysfunctions. It is great news for rhinoceros too.

The pills could help save India's endangered one-horned rhinoceros, long poached for the aphrodisiac qualities its horn have been attributed with, wildlife experts here said.

The total world population of the one-horned rhino is estimated at about 2,500, with the Kaziranga sanctuary in the northeastern Indian state of Assam alone home to about 1,200 of the beasts. Apart from Kaziranga, the other high-concentration rhino pocket is the Chitwan National Park in Nepal.

The latest potency pills are said to spice up one's sex life. Anwaruddin Choudhury of the Rhino Foundation, a non-governmental rhino conservation group, told India Abroad News Service. "The new variety of sex pills are expected to act as a substitute and reduce the myth

that the rhino horn has aphrodisiac values."

The supposed sexual stimulants made of animal products like rhinoceros horns and tiger penises have been in great demand in these countries. Quacks, or even registered medical practitioners, and the manufacturers have made a killing, marketing these exotic formulations.

"Sex medicines made of rhino horns are sold in the streets of Taiwan and Vietnam and I found Asians evincing much interest in those wonder pills," said Robin Banerjee, a 90-year-old anti-poaching campaigner and wildlife cinematographer in Assam's eastern district of Golaghat.

The traditional pills are very costly. With the marketing of herbal and other potency tablets in the Asian markets, the demand for the traditional pills made of rhino horn will definitely decline.

The demand for rhinoceros horn in the Asian traditional medicine market is perhaps the

single largest factor in pushing the great Indian one-horned rhinoceros to the brink of extinction.

"Conservationists in South Asia and the Far East should build up a campaign against the use of rhino horn in traditional medicine. Then the rhino here will survive," S.K. Sen, a senior Assam Wildlife official said.

"One great epidemic has the potential to wipe out the entire rhino population from Kaziranga," Choudhury said. "It's time we devised concrete plans to protect the rhino from possible annihilation."

At least 600 rhinos were poached for their horns by organised gangs at the Kaziranga National Park in the past two decades. The horns then find their way to underground markets in South Asia and the Far East through Nepal or Bhutan. A kilogram of rhino horn fetches the smugglers anywhere between Rs 1 million and Rs 1.5 million, depending on the quality.

Rhino horns, apart from be-

ing a vital ingredient in oriental folkore medicine, are also in great demand in the Middle East for making trinkets, especially dagger handles much fancied by Arab buyers.

Poachers' gangs, mostly tribal Nagas, besides immigrant Bangladeshis and Nepalis, roam around the rhino park with silencer-fitted carbines to hunt the unsuspecting beast. Of late, they have been adopting ingenious methods to kill the rhinos — including electrocution.

"They tap high tension cables that crisscross the park and lay it on the rhino's path. The instant shock kills the rhinos without being noticed by the forest guards," Choudhury said.

Though the danger to the one-horned rhino may considerably lessen now that the markets are flooded with alternative potency pills, the threat won't completely disappear as long as there is a belief that their horns can spice up sex.

—IANS

A royal battle is on between the former rulers of the erstwhile princely state of Mysore and the Karnataka state government for the control of two fabulous palaces popular with tourists.

The former princely household of Wodeyars that ruled the kingdom of Mysore for about 200 years is locked in a legal battle, with the state government over the latter's acquisition of the magnificent buildings in the state capital and adjoining Mysore city.

The palaces were acquired by the state government in the mid-eighties after much dithering. A decision to take over the properties was taken much earlier — in the early seventies soon after the Indian government abolished the titles and other perks of princely rulers.

While the Bangalore palace was bought by the Wodeyars in the 19th century, the one in Mysore was built by Maharaja Jayachamaraja Wodeyar in the early years of this century.

The Wodeyars successfully challenged the acquisition of the Mysore palace in the state High Court which ordered in April that the building be handed back. But the state government enacted legislation to

nullify the ruling. It had appealed unsuccessfully against the ruling in the Supreme Court.

The Wodeyars have since filed a contempt of court petition against the state government in the High Court accusing the government of defying the judiciary. Like other former princely rulers, the Wodeyars had joined the Indian Union after independence from British colonial rule through an instrument of Accession which guaranteed their titles and privileges. Under the 1950 agreement, both the palaces were considered private property of the Wodeyars. The document also contained an inalienability clause.

Among India's biggest palaces, the Mysore palace is situated in the heart of the city and spread over 60 acres. It has 21 temples, staff quarters, cattle and horse sheds. Completed in 1912, it is an example of Indo-Saracenic architecture. Its main attractions are a stained glass dome over a wedding hall designed by the famed Walter Mofarlane. Saragen family of Glasgow and a hall with gilded flower decorations on its walls and ceiling.

The Bangalore palace, also

in the city centre, has 480 acres of rolling parkland. It is a replica of the Windsor castle in Britain. The 62 room magnificent granite structure was built by a British officer in 1879 and bought by the Mysore Maharaja in 1882. Rare paintings, richly upholstered furniture and expensive chandeliers adorn the tastefully designed rooms.

The palaces were acquired under the Urban Land Ceiling Act that provided for a maximum compensation of Rs. 200,000 (\$4,760). Real estate prices in Bangalore have now touched Rs. 3,000 (\$71) per sq foot. As such, the Bangalore palace lands alone have a market value of between Rs. 46 and 69 billion (\$1.09-1.64 billion).

The act provides for acquisition of land in urban areas beyond a stipulated limit — another socialistic measure of Indira Gandhi. However Wodeyar tried to escape this provision by claiming that the Bangalore land was agricultural.

The erstwhile royal family is also involved in a legal battle with income tax authorities over the payment of estate duty after the death of the senior Wodeyar. The tax dues were stated to be Rs. 100 million (\$2.38 million) some 15 years

ago.

The department had issued a notification for attachment of both the palaces in 1986 to recover the tax arrears. The notification specifies that the family was prohibited from alienating the properties.

The properties are claimed by Srikanthadatta Narasimharaja Wodeyar, successor of Jayachamaraja Wodeyar who died in 1974. The Wodeyars lived in a part of the Mysore palace, the rest of which had been managed by the government since 1976.

The Instrument of Accession designated Srikanthadatta as a "prince" and the Wodeyars were entitled to an annual Rs. 2.6 million (about \$61,000) 'privy purse' — a kind of pension to the former princely rulers. However, like all former princely rulers, the Wodeyars lost their regal titles and privy purses in the seventies.

The Wodeyars ruled Mysore and briefly lost their kingdom in the 18th century during the rule of Hyder Ali, their general, and his son Tipu Sultan. When Tipu was killed in the Third Mysore War with the British, Mysore reverted to the Wodeyars.

—IANS

