

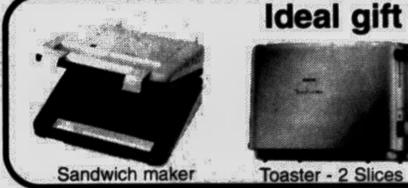


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Let's make things better



# Winter brings hawkers' heaven to the highstreet

By Mir A Zaman

"Seventy taka for one sweater, half or full... no more, no less... fixed price... made in Japan... come and get one," went on the man in a monotonous tone. The "marketing strategy" he uses is age-old and quite a familiar feature in the market he is in. In fact, each and every vendor in that market says similar things in a similar tone.

Some sell sweaters, some shirts, some T-shirts and just across the road some sell vegetables, too. Still, the man, perhaps in early 30s, and his collection of sweaters manage to attract attention.

Meandering through the maze created by the vendors on the walkways along the busy streets of Motijheel, the working middle- and lower-middle class, in the busy hours of the day, stop for a while and see whether there is something he can buy. If he finds one, the bargaining begins.

Fixed price makes way for intense negotiation.

"We don't usually sell a sweater for less than seventy taka," said Abu Osman. "Sometimes, some buyers would bargain and bargain, no matter how many times I tell them it's a fixed price shop."

Shop it was, indeed. Some used sweaters, a piece of cloth to spread them on and, of course, some space on the footpath — the business was on. Not only in Motijheel, they seem to be everywhere, wherever there is some space and they sell all kinds of winter clothes — sweaters, jackets, mufflers, flannel shirts and woolen gloves.

"We buy them in bales from Sadarghat. One hundred or 120 pieces in one bale. A bale costs us five to six thousand taka," said Osman. "We expect a profit of ten taka per piece."



Get smart, get warm: Unable to secure a pavement spot, these two hawkers of used winter clothes find their trade bit of a handful. —Star Photo: Zahedul I Khan

Not quite a great expectation, especially after the pain they take to run the business. They do have sort of an agreement among themselves and usually have little problem as far as distribution of open space is concerned. After all, the entire footpath is virtually under their control.

There are problems, though. Time and again, the law-enforcers, in a bid to ensure smooth movement for the pedestrians, drive them off the walkways. When things get a little cooler, they resume their normal routine and again the

footpaths become their realm. Again the law-enforcers fall back to the state of indifference. The indifference is, however, inspired by an agreement between the law-enforcers and the vendors.

"Each 'shop-owner' pays 'them' 25 taka per day to let us continue our business," said one young vendor. "But sometimes that is not enough. They still drive us away. Well, things get back to normal in a day or two."

There are some 'mobile units' as well. "I cannot afford to buy old or

rejected clothes in bales. I don't have that much money," Hassan Ali said, some used sweaters and flannel shirts placed one upon another on the shoulder and a few mufflers in his hands.

Mobility helps especially when there is a police drive to clear the footpaths. The 'shops' and their owners are forced off the footpaths, but the mobile vendors continue. All they have to do is keep out of the police's way. Not always do they sell 'inferior' clothes, they sometimes come up with 'foreign-made' blankets. In fact, the

blankets are really good and indeed 'foreign-made'. "Some of the poor, who got blankets as relief, sell them to us and we, in turn, sell them to whoever wants it," said Ismail, who had four or more blankets in his possession. In wait for a 'good' buyer.

There are plenty of 'good' buyers of used winter clothes. The upper and upper middle-class turn to the footpath markets for warm clothes for the people who help them in domestic chores. For the lower-middle and lower class the need is more immediate.

"I bought this sweater for my son," said Shahjahan Biswas, a Class IV employee at a government establishment. "I wish I could buy a new one, can't simply afford a new one."

There has been much debate on the streetside markets, the problems they create for the pedestrians, the ineptitude of the law-enforcers and so on. The buyers don't seem to find.

"It's a big relief for people like me that such markets exist. They do make moving around on the walkways difficult, but for them, I can give my little child a nice and warm sweater," said Abdul Huq, an orderly at a private company. "Even at Bangabazar, they are asking too high a price for me, nowadays."

Summer, winter or monsoon, they have clothes for all seasons. On paper, the winter has arrived, although heat and humidity of summer lingers. On the way to the office in Motijheel, one may not feel the chill but would surely be reminded that winter is here. Used sweaters spread on a piece of cloth on the walkway and familiar call, "Seventy taka for one sweater, half or full... no more, no less... fixed price... made in Japan... come and get one."

A HUSNAIN

# A Small Pleasure of Life

Flirt is human nature. Biologically, we all flirted our way through dawning adulthood, swaggering with a butterfly heart, and a head lighter than the fleeting clouds. As for the feet, break-dance was preferred to seeking root in the domestic soil. Maturity never dimmed or dampened the pleasant pastime, although the pleasure depended heavily on consensus — in short supply — these days — for bilateral arrangements better known as rendezvous.

Life was of the moment, when eternity stood still for hours, seeking cozy corners. First the fling in, then the fling, or get flung out. To a lucky few, the race was to the swift, while the rest "also ran". Some landings were soft, and some shattering. What's life without some juggling or juggling for effects or after-effects?

The flirtatious habit persists throughout one's career. Flirting with the secretary (or vice versa), a traditional form of non-confrontation, was unofficially overlooked. The biological attraction between woman and man (blades first?) never went out of fashion, and is independent of time, place, and motive and nativity — or the lack of it.

Two private individuals are not the only culprits in the private domain. Flirting now exists in the offices for higher stakes under many names and guises — money is round and made to roll and pass on to others. Flirting with the boss is more platonic; and not so dry but oily. Coffee (money) can be greased (or is it the palm?).

Bakhshish is another name of flirtation; with nepotism and cronyism lending a helping hand. Flirtation with power, influence and money are a well-established code of modern life played behind the scene, or practised behind the play. It is naked aggression, but invisible.

Corruption is non-romantic flirting. It is corrosive, but not so costly and damaging as the genuine and original campaign with the elusive partner of the heart. The difference between a business and a private affair is the mode of pay-

ment — in cash or kind. One is priceless, and not for sale, and the other is for trading and not for keeps.

Political flirtation is one of the spices of politics, tropical or otherwise. Politicians are not averse to flirting with non-issues. Perhaps it is much safer than playing with live issues and warm blood, and closer to hi-tech virtual reality (VR) as seen on the computer screen. The campus violence is another deadly form of flirtation with the future generation, based on the motto that a bird in hand is worth more than two in the bush.

Come to think of it, some critics classify harlots as a kind of flirting with reality. The interest rate is high, subjectively speaking, in spite of the low capital. Sometimes wooing is done using hockey sticks at one end, and with wooden batons at the other end. These romantic interludes pay high dividend to certain groups.

At the international level, diplomatic flirting is like the elephant's tusks. There is not much meat in the offer, and one has to pose like a vegetarian, and live the life of a brinjal; or, to that effect, the lady's finger. Super powers use carrot and stick; or the modern version, called Monica missiles.

It is a pity that a small pleasure of life has been internationalised into high profile hawking under intense media glare. The output of life is not digital, but the processing is much faster in the digital mode. The digital response to the eternal question "Do you love me?" is a boring and instant Yes or No, spelt out in microseconds (0.1), with no variations to linger the game. What is life without a chase, and if there is no time to stand and stare (don't ask me what).

But there is no option. What is flirting without the fourth dimension of time? But we are told that there is no time to lose. How do you flirt in a hurry? The price of small pleasures is going up. Flirting is now being traded at a high inflationary rate.

# Mannan demands re-polling in Dhaka-10

By Staff Correspondent

Former minister and BNP leader Major (Retd) Abdul Mannan yesterday appealed to the Election Commission to immediately arrange re-polling in 51 centres under Dhaka-10 constituency. The appeal came after an election tribunal on Nov 29 declared voting results at these centres in the last general elections null and void.

The tribunal cancelled the polls results in 51 out of 78 centres after hearing statements of 86 witnesses over the last two years.

Mannan had originally demanded cancellation of results in all 78 centres, saying that "massive rigging" also took place in the 27 centres not cancelled by the tribunal. Mannan lost the June 12, 1996 election by a margin of more than 10,000 votes to his AL rival Dr HBM Iqbal.

Addressing a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday noon, he said that soon after the parliamentary polls he had put forward at least 16 specific allegations, and filed a case in the Dhaka Division Election.

The BNP leader said that the EC had supplied him a voters' list of his constituency before the election. But another voters' list supplied to him by the Presiding Officer on the polling day contained an additional list of 20,000 voters, he claimed.

Mannan said that total voters in 1996 at Tejgaon-Ramna seat was 2.35 lakh as per the EC supplied list, but the number of voters in the Presiding Officer's list were 2.59,919.

In 1991, he said the total voters in this constituency were 1.60 lakh.

BNP leaders MK Anwar, Sadek Hossain Khoka, MA Mannan, Salahuddin Ahmed, Abu Sayed Khan Khokon and Nabullah Nabi were present on the occasion.

# Sonali gets new chairman

Star Report  
The government yesterday appointed A I Aminul Islam as the chairman of Sonali Bank. Islam is currently a director of the Bangladesh Bank (BB) and was the chief economist of the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Earlier the former chairman of Sonali Bank Dr Farahuddin was made the Governor of the Bangladesh Bank.

# Pabna by-polls Showcase on 2 ministers for 'violating' code of conduct

PABNA, Dec 3: Two ministers and a government official have been served with showcase notices by the electoral board on Pabna-2 bypolls for alleged violation of the election code of conduct, reports APB.

The board asked Post and Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim, State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed and Finance Ministry's Deputy Secretary Dr Mujibur Rahman to appear in person or through their representatives at the court of Senior Assistant District Judge Abdul Hye at 10 am tomorrow to explain their conduct.

The board issued the showcase after the opposition BNP filed a petition to the Chief Election Commissioner against them alleging that they have been engaged in electioneering in favour of a candidate of particular political party using all official facilities.

# Prof Yusuf Ali dead

Prof Yusuf Ali, first education minister of Bangladesh, died at Ibn-e-Sina clinic in the city yesterday at 6:30 am. He was 75, reports UNB.

The veteran politician was suffering from kidney and heart ailments. He left behind his wife, two sons and five daughters.

Prof Yusuf Ali, who was an important member of the post-independence Awami League cabinet, later shifted his allegiance to dissidents after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

On April 17, 1971, he read out the declaration of independence at Mujibnagar in Meherpur district when the Mujibnagar government was formed.

His *namaj-e-Janaza* was held at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque after Zohr prayers yesterday.

Later, Prof Yusuf Ali's body was taken to Dinajpur town.

# Clinton visit still on the cards

Dhaka can no longer carry Rohingya burden, Samad Azad says

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad yesterday gave an indication that US President Bill Clinton might visit Bangladesh sometime next year, reports UNB.

"There is a possibility," he told a correspondent at the weekly press briefing at the Foreign Office.

President Clinton was scheduled to visit three South Asian countries — Bangladesh, India and Pakistan — this weekend but held back following nuclear tests by India and Pakistan.

Azad said it takes time to complete security and other formalities before the American President's tour. "They are in the preparation, quietly."

Turning to other issues, Azad expressed the hope that Bangladesh would be in a better position to uphold the interests of the LDCs at the commencement of the next millennium.

He said Dhaka has been consistently playing a significant role in all international fora as the coordinator of LDCs to safeguard their interests.

Peace, not conflicts and increased economic cooperation will be the main thrust of

Bangladesh's foreign policy in the 21st century," the Foreign Minister said.

Replying to a question, the Foreign Minister said that the government is continuing its efforts to solve the remaining bilateral issues with India.

In this context, he referred to the process to implement SAFTA — South Asian Free Trade Area — under the SAARC umbrella.

The Foreign Minister said that the process was underway to give a concrete shape to the quadrangle comprising Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan, a sub-regional cooperative structure.

The Foreign Minister expressed the hope that repatriation of Rohingya refugees will pick up and the Myanmar nationals will soon go back to their homeland.

The resumption of the repatriation process is a vindication of the strong desire of the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar to strengthen bilateral and good neighbourly relations between the two countries. Referring to his recent visit to Myanmar, Azad said "I believe...

it was a positive step in this direction."

Repatriation of Rohingya refugees resumed on November 25, less than a fortnight of his return from Yangon. Since the resumption of the process, so far 71 persons went back to Myanmar in two installments, the last being on December 2 when 25 Rohingyas belonging to five families were repatriated. The resumption brought an end to the 16 months long deadlock in the process.

Replying to a question, Azad said he was not aware of the incident of refugees missing from camps as reported in some newspapers he said none is being sent forcibly and persons who have volunteered to go are being repatriated.

When asked about the reported move by some donors, NGOs and UNHCR to educate the refugee kids and also to impart training in different trades to others, the foreign minister said they (the donors and others) are free to do so after these (refugees) are taken back to their homeland Myanmar. He said already burdened with our own people we cannot carry any further load.

The foreign minister who touched on number of issues about Bangladesh's relations with other countries in politico-economic and other fields in his regular press briefing, said that the coming meeting of BIMSTEC will determine at which stage the leaders of the five nations will meet in future.

The second meeting to BIMSTEC will be held here from Dec 17 to 19, he said and added that senior level officials of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand will meet for first two days and state minister level meeting will be held on December 19.

Replying to a question on bringing back the killers of Bangabandhu, Azad said at different forums like OIC and UN "we were assured by both Libya and Pakistan of their cooperation in bringing back the fugitives." He admitted that the killers are staying in Pakistan and Libya.

Azad said "we are trying to bring back all the killers through the good offices of friendly countries. Besides there is Interpol, he added."

# Class IV Govt employees want more

By Special Correspondent

Bangladesh Sachivalaya Class Four employees have demanded a 30 per cent dearness allowance (DA) in view of what they said price hike of essentials and gas.

They are also demanding reversion to previous work hours, payment of Eid allowance under new pay scales and payment of dress allowance with salary.

The demands were raised at a rally they held yesterday inside the Secretariat, Mohammad Kuddus Ali and Mohammad Mahe Alam, president and general secretary of the association led the employees who brought out a procession after the meeting, a press release said.

Speakers at the rally said they would launch an agitation programme if the demands were not accepted.

The employees would meet the finance secretary on December 7.

At one stage, newly-elected president of Bangladesh Sachivalaya Karmakarta and Karmachari Sanjukta Parishad Nurul Alam and secretary general Abdul Khaleque joined them, who also urged the government to accept the employees' demand.

# Mayor admits

From Page 1  
as never done before. Another example of my non-partisan role is that all the 90 ward commissioners, irrespective of their party affiliation, have been given equal allotment of Tk 50 lakh each a year for road building, repair, drainage and construction of pavements."

His second pledge, Hanif recounted, was that holding tax would not be raised and he had kept it although Corporation officials did not like it.

His third pledge, eradication of mosquito menace, the mayor said he had succeeded to a large extent, but not fully.

His fourth important election commitment was to eradicate or control terrorism.

The mayor says, "This is a sector where much cannot be done without the help of the home ministry or police. Terrorism has decreased but the city has definitely not totally become terrorism-free."

He, however, pointed out that Terrorism Resistance Committees have been formed in all DCC wards, but admitted, "It is only on paper."

Once again, he emphasised the need for a unified metropolitan authority and felt that if Dhaka Metropolitan Police was placed under the mayor, the law and order in the capital could be improved greatly.

Hanif was asked who are his formidable contenders within his own party and in the Opposition in the next mayoral elections.

"There are many able contenders. It could be Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Mufazzal Hussain Maya from my party. From the BNP it could be Sadek Hossain Khoka, Mirza Abbas or even Abdul Hasnat. I think all of them are capable," he said.

# Dhaka's labour lost in gloomy KL

By Reaz Ahmad

Some 12,838 Bangladesh nationals returned home from Malaysia in the last three months after expiry of their work permits. However, 15,499 others were fortunate enough to find jobs elsewhere after being retrenched by the ailing service industry.

Officials here say Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia have been facing various problems for quite some time now and that these figures are a testimony to their plight.

Economic slump has forced companies to terminate workers ahead of time, according to officials at Labour and Employment Ministry in Dhaka and the Bangladesh mission in Kuala Lumpur.

Companies hit hard by the recession often cancel work permits unilaterally, cannot pay wages and overtime allowances in time and tend to violate employment contracts

leading to unfair dismissals and denials to repatriation benefits such as air tickets. Fake work permits are also a problem.

On January 8 this year, the Malaysian government decided not to renew the work permits of the foreign workers employed in the service sector to replace them by locals. The decision put at risk some 24,691 Bangladeshi workers in the service sector.

Many employers closed their factories and retrenched both local and foreign workers. Officials claim Dhaka's vigorous diplomatic efforts have ensured the 15,499 retrenched workers re-employment — mostly in manufacturing and plantations.

A general amnesty announced by the Malaysian authorities gave two and a half months to over-stayers, which ended on November 15. During this period starting August 31,

the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur issued travel permits to 12,838 workers enabling them to return home.

According to official statistics, some 3,816 Bangladeshi workers were repatriated from deportation camps and jails during Jan-Oct this year. The Malaysian government paid for their trips back home. However, there were still 306 Bangladeshi nationals detained in different camps and jails in Malaysia.

A worker would not be able to save much after deduction of 650 ringgit as annual levy, 180 ringgit medical examination fee per year and mandatory contribution of 11 per cent of the basic salary to the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), according to new rules in Malaysia. Moreover, the depreciation of the currency had reduced the real income in respect

of remittance.

There are many reasons why Bangladesh workers found their presence in Malaysia illegal. First, says an official, those who went legally with visas but who were not accepted by the employer as the demand for workers was exaggerated or false.

Second, workers whose work permits were not renewed by the employers despite the deduction of levy from the wages of the workers; third, those who did not get wages and benefits as per contract and ran away for better jobs elsewhere. And finally, many workers also fell prey to unscrupulous agents and employers who issued them fake work permits.

At present, there are 948,000 registered foreign workers in Malaysia including 327,000 Bangladeshi workers. After Indonesia, Bangladesh is the second largest exporter of manpower to Malaysia.

blame for 1998 weather disasters, but no previous El Nino has ever been this devastating, the report said.

Deforestation has left steep hills bare and unable to absorb rainfall, thus leading to landslides and floods. Growing populations have settled on "vulnerable" flood plains and hill-sides.

Some of 1998's most severe disasters included Hurricane Mitch, flooding in China and Bangladesh, and an ice storm affecting Canada and New England.

# US body sounds disaster alert for Bangladesh

Climate change and rising sea levels are likely to make Bangladesh even more vulnerable to future floods, said Worldwatch Institute in its report on weather-related disaster, reports UNB.

The US based non-profit environment organization said damage estimates for Bangladesh's "most extensive flood of the century" exceeded \$3.4 million.

It said the 1998 summer flood left 30 million homeless, damaged 10,000 miles of roads and reduced the rice harvest by

two million tons.

The report circulated by USIS today (Thursday) said worldwide economic loss due to weather-related disasters is at least \$89,000 million for the 11 months of 1998, according to preliminary estimates by the Worldwatch Institute.

This estimate exceeds the \$55,000 million in losses for the entire decade of the 1990s, and represents an increase of 48 per cent over the \$60,000 million in losses for 1996.

The US insurance industry, during the first three-quarters

of 1998, had more than \$8,000 million of weather related claims — three times the claims in 1997.

The report said that the direct human impact of this year's weather-related disasters has also been staggering.

As a partial result of humankind's interference with nature, an estimated 32,000 people died and at least 300 million were displaced or forced to rebuild their homes, according to Worldwatch.

The weather phenomenon known as El Nino is partly to

জাতীয় গ্রন্থকেন্দ্র আয়োজিত  
**৫ম ঢাকা বইমেলা**  
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(চন্দ্রিমা উদ্যানের উত্তর পাশে)  
— ১৫ ডিসেম্বর ১৯৯৮

বেলা ৩টা থেকে রাত ৯-০০মি:  
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