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Down to Earth

Growing craze for new status symbols

By A S M Nurunnabi

Most people like to show off. Some do it with subtlety, while some others do it crudely. The people who favour showing off don't like doing it subtly, because this may be lost on most of us. Hence the greater preference for display which takes on an overtone of crudity.

In a materialistic society like ours, one important means of showing off is to acquire some commodities which serve as status symbols. These commodities are purchasable with high price tags. The quality and beauty of such commodities are very much palpable.

In our urban society, some leading status symbols have lately appeared. One among them is the Pajero wagon. It is an oversized gas guzzler and hardly appropriate for a city like Dhaka with its narrow streets. But nobody cares about it. The important thing is that it attracts the attention that its owner wants and needs.

So anyone who has the money, and needs to boost his ego, buys a Pajero. There are so many Pajeros and they are such a common sight now that the term "Pajero culture" has come into use. Of course, now Pajeros face some competition from the Nissan and Toyota wagons which appear to be bigger and more ostentatious.

A recent status symbol is the mobile phone. The proud possessors carry them everywhere. The impact of their presence would have been lost if they were carried in bags or pockets. Hence they are found conspicu-

ously in the hands of their possessors. The beep of the phone can be heard in all the haunts of the rich including clubs and restaurants. Even in fish markets, their owners are often found exchanging messages with their households about the varieties of fish to be purchased.

However, after a certain company lost its monopoly, and the prices slid down to a level which is within the reach of the not-so-rich, the mobile can be seen in buses andrickshaws. Many now feel that the mobile phone has lost its exclusivity, it seems likely that the rich will leave their mobiles at home when they are not out on business.

There is another status symbol, namely, the suit and tie which are not suitable to our hot and humid climate. Yet, in order to maintain formal decorum in dress, bankers, bureaucrats and multinational companies executives wear suit and tie. The younger generation, however, prefer casual wear in the form of jeans trousers and sport shirts. The brand names of such clothes fascinate them, nonetheless.

The fascination with brand names goes to such a length that unscrupulous businessmen cash in by making almost exact replicas of the imported clothes and their labels and selling them as originals with a big margin of profit. The original brand items face stiff competition from designer items. Levi's and Wrangler jeans are gener-

ally in great demand. But anyone with an eye for fashion and a wish to establish sartorial superiority buys designer jeans at exorbitant prices. In the matter of watches also, today's men-about-town wear Cartier or Patek Phillips in place of Rolex or Omega preferred by the earlier generation.

Owning a car has always been a status symbol in our society. Lately the proliferation of Japanese re-conditioned cars on the Dhaka streets has given a wider dimension to that symbol.

One remarkable thing about our status symbols is that almost all of them need to be of foreign origin. Even saris, which our country produces in great abundance and variety, have to be foreign if one wants to impress. It is not the *Katans* or *Dhakat* saris which elicit envy and admiration but the French chiffons and Indian silks.

It is true that sometimes we carry xenophilia too far. But there is no denying that concepts of status symbols keep changing from time to time mainly affecting the affluent and the rich, while the mainstream of common people remains, more or less, immune from the fall-out of the novel fads and life styles.

Such changes in outlook seem to be inevitable in a developing society, especially in view of the staggering technological advances taking place in many spheres of life.

SAARC to set up investment fund soon

CHITTAGONG, Feb 5: Visiting president of SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) Kantikumar R. Podar said here today that a SAARC investment fund would be set up soon for the promotion of joint venture industries among the SAARC countries, reports BSS.

The first meeting of the investment fund will be held in Dhaka in June, Podar said while participating in a conference on "Economic Union by 2008", at the Chittagong Chamber auditorium.

Organised by Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the conference was presided over by Chamber president Kamaluddin Ahmed.

The SCCI president said a study report under the auspices of SAARC Chamber to identify 50 projects for the establishment of buy back arrangement and joint venture industries in the SAARC countries has already been prepared.

Podar, who was the keynote speaker at the conference, expressed the hope that the study reports from all the member countries will come in hand by March this year.

US team

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Study. b. Energy information systems: Based on the notion that better information can lead to better policy decisions, the Energy Information Administration will provide technical assistance to develop Bangladesh's energy statistics and analysis capabilities.

c. Hydrocarbon resource development and management: The US Minerals Management Service (MMS) may offer training and technical assistance in developing a strategy for safe and environmentally friendly exploration, production and distribution of oil and gas resources in the country.

The MMS may also offer technical assistance in data management, specially for proprietary data; management of revenue from oil and gas development; and evaluation of production-sharing contracts.

d. Gas Development Strategies to Promote Regional Energy Integration: A gas utilisation study, conducted by the US Trade Development Agency (TDA) is likely to be completed within a few months. The US DOE considers this report an important step in understanding Bangladesh's oil and gas potential and options and intends to make follow-up activities. In addition, the DOE will help Bangladesh develop regional energy systems.

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