

Rising Stars

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US VISA MANIA

By Munjulika Rahman



The alarm clock rang at four a.m. I heard my father getting ready, then he talked to our *danwan* and I heard the car drive away. Normally at this time even if the roof over my head broke down I wouldn't be aware of it. But today was different, today my sister would stand for her I-20 visa. The whole house was tense and nobody had had a good night's sleep. My father had planned everything carefully. Our driver and *danwan* would go to the US embassy at four o'clock in the morning and reserve a position. We would follow them at 6 a.m. We were all up by five, after a quick breakfast we started off for the embassy. We had everything that could possibly be required food, water, plates and spoons, umbrella, mats to sit on, towels. We were ready for the battle!

Since none of us ever stood for the US Visa before, the sight that greeted us was enough to make our legs tremble. There are so many people, of all sizes, colours and clothes, it makes one wonder how much chance he has to gain entrance into the land of his dreams. As soon as we got down from the car all eyes turned toward us. The people were staring at us as if trying to figure out the reason behind us going to the US. Some men came running to us and said "13 place, sir! 700 taka!" Another one said "Sir! 12 place! 800 taka!" We had no idea what they were talking about. We made our way through the crowd and my sister took her place in the line. We have been standing there for 2 and half-hours. My sister and my parents took turns to come to the car and eat or rest. I was given the responsibility to sit in the car and take care of the supplies. Just by observing what was going on I could learn a lot about the visa-obtaining process.

I understood what the men were saying when we first came. People from a gangster group occupy the first twenty positions in the line. The first six positions will cost anything between a thousand to five thousand. Once you bargain and pay for your position, men from the group will occupy that position from the evening of the day before you are supposed to stand. Meaning these men will spend the night lying on the road. And don't think the haughty guards of the embassy didn't know about all this. Maybe some of them are even involved with the group, who knows? That day

one man reserved the first six positions. Who knows how much money he paid to the gangster people!! He came in a huge black Pajero with his family. The man was wearing expensive clothes and shoes and had the inevitable *bhuri* that is characteristic of *ghush lenewala and denewala*. His wife was loaded with gold. The daughter wore baggy pants, a tight T-shirt and stylish sunglasses, lots of bangles and bracelets on her hand. She was tall and had a beautiful figure with a seal of arrogance that made her a complete picture of beauty and wealth.

Just by looking at people's faces, their behavior, confidence, clothes, the car (or any other vehicle) they got down from, I could tell the motive behind their going to the US. There were men wearing lungis, panjabis and plastic sandals. Some women wearing Johnny print sarees. They were the lucky winners of DV-2000. The worry-lines on the face of the young women revealed a common story. Young wives trying to get the Visa so that they can be with their husbands who have left them here, to try his luck in the land of dreams. The student population armed with mostly I-20s came in all ages! There were middle-aged men and young boys wearing either skin-tight jeans or very baggy pants. Most of the female students wore shalwar-kameez. But whatever their attire and appearances they were all nervous. Today is the day when their future will be decided by one very moody embassy official.

After a while it started to rain. We were well prepared with our umbrellas and we also had the safety of our car. Most of the other people were not moving from their places in fear of losing their positions. It was amusing! All the rich businessmen, the elite of the society huffing and puffing at this system of standing for hours in order to get a visa I overheard one rich lady exclaiming to her husband "they treat us like dirt!" Their less fortunate counterparts who did not have such high social standing were thinking nothing of the rain or the long wait! No matter how much we detest and complain about this system, I was glad all the people who wanted to go America had to sweat in the sun or get wet in the rain equally, no matter how much money they had!

the net of life

By Ehsanur Raza

Among my friends, there is a saying regarding friendship: "Friendship means food, favors and fortune". The 'fortune' stands for money because no one could think of a better word for money with the letter F. Anyway the point is that anyone offering one of the three F's is a friend.

Recently I met a friend chatting with a pretty girl. When he noticed me, he cut the conversation and approached me. I began to wonder what could be so important to cut a conversation with a beautiful girl. I thought of the three F's. I did not owe any favors and as usual, I was broke. Neither did I have any food on me. So I waited till he got near me. I noticed he had a three-day stubble on his chin and his eyes were red from non-stop staring at computer screens. His back was hunched from sitting stooped in front of a computer all day. Even his fingers were suffering from spasmodic reactions like he was typing on an imaginary keyboard. He looked very shifty as he shifted up to me and asked in a low voice if I had taken an Internet connection yet. As I replied in the affirmative he asked me in a mysterious voice, "That's great, so do you, like, you know, have any passwords?" For a moment, I started thinking of James Bond in relation with the word 'password'. I began to see myself driving an Aston Martin and surrounded by pretty women telling me secret passwords. I saw myself typing in secret passwords to unlock enemy files while drinking dry martini, shaken not stirred. Then my reverie was broken as my friend nudged me. I then realized he was asking for an Internet login password. When I said I do

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distorted guitar riffs.

(Epitaph)

not have one he just left me to restart the conversation with the girl. However, not before begging me to let him know if I found a password, as he had not been on the net for nearly two days. I could see he was showing signs of acute Internet withdrawal symptoms. Meet the new age beggar, also known as cyber beggar.

The Internet has undeniably changed the life styles of the present generation. Before the advent of the Net boys would get together and discuss sports, cars and girls. A typical conversation used to be something like this:

- ▶ Hey, my car accelerates up to 100 km/h in about 8 seconds. Now that is fast.
- ▶ Well, yesterday it took me only about 20 seconds to cross the Bijoy Sarani road with my car.
- ▶ I wish the government would reduce the price of petrol per liter.
- ▶ Forget cars guys. I met this girl in a market

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yesterday and later we chatted on the phone for about an hour.

- ▶ Aare dosto bolish ki, so how old is she? These days the same boys would converse in a distinctly different manner.
- ▶ Hey, my server gives me about 9kbps at peak hour. Now that is fast.
- ▶ Well, yesterday it took me only 20 minutes to download the new Bon Jovi song with my Internet connection.
- ▶ I wish the ISP would reduce the cost of Internet usage per minute.
- ▶ Forget browsing guys, I met this girl yesterday on ICQ and later we chatted for about an hour.
- ▶ Aare dosto bolish ki, so how old is she? Who knows? She says she is 18 and her I name is Tetul. For all I know she could be a 20 year old guy with a name like Ratul.

Chatting sessions are the rage of the new age. Everyone chats with each other on the Net by typing cryptic messages like "C U latr have 2 go, U go 2 hell!". The shorter the better. All this is beginning to spill into real life (as opposed to virtual life). Recently I told a joke to my friend who replied by saying "L-O-L." That is Net-speak for "Laughing Out Loud". Whatever happened to actually laughing aloud? The shorter the better? Too lazy perhaps.

Parents always confer with other parents how the Net is making people of the present

generation (that's us) spend all day in front of computers. But there IS one good thing that comes out of all this. We all more or less know how slow download speeds are in Bangladesh. Waiting for a web page to open usually feels like an eternity. To pass the time we lean back on the chair and look up in exasperation. That's when we notice all the cobwebs hanging from the ceiling. Looking around we notice further signs of domestic abuse like the layers of dirt on the furniture in our rooms. Further investigations reveal stacks of dirty clothes stacked in different corners. We begin to notice the ways in which our housekeeping duties are not being fulfilled thus making us more aware teenagers. Of course, all this is forgotten the moment the web page opens. At least we become momentarily aware of our surroundings. Without computers to make us look around out of boredom we would be playing outside and being too busy to notice the state of disrepair in our homes.

Say, does anyone have any passwords? Heh, heh.