

THE old saying "an idle mind is the devil's workshop" does not seem to apply to Ahad Bhai, Omar Bhai and Navidul Huq, the three administrators of Dhaka's latest internet craze, DhakaHotties.com.

Twins Ahad and Omar were back from college for only a few days before their parents grounded them. Navid, a loyal friend from their school days at the American International School/Dhaka, faithfully went to visit his imprisoned friends every day, but there was only so much entertainment the three of them could provide for themselves while they were stuck at home. One day out of sheer boredom they picked up a fashion magazine listing the 101 top models in Bangladesh, both men and women.

"We saw the top 100 models and just realised that none of them were really that good looking," says Ahad, while the other two grinned. "So we started wondering where all the good looking people in Dhaka were, and how we could find them. That's how we started Dhaka Hotties."

DhakaHotties.com, a website for the younger generation of Bangladesh allows its members to rate each other and themselves on a scale of one to ten. To be a member one just has to go to the website, fill out a profile, upload a picture and join the community.

"People shouldn't be afraid to be rated badly," says Navid. "I had a rating of 2.5 when I first started. And we approve every picture before it gets posted so there is no nudity or shady business."

Ok, so it all sounds a little superficial, right? After all, with all the other insecurities and problems that young men and women have, why should we subject ourselves to being rated by complete strangers just on the basis of our pictures and appearances?

"In the beginning, the superficial purpose was just to get rated, but the real purpose now is to be a part of the Dhaka Hotties community," says Ahad. "We don't know that many people our age in Dhaka, because we went to the American School so we are kind of not exposed to people outside our school. We wanted to get to know more people. And we want people to be a part of the revolution."

Dhaka Hottie Fever

SRABONTI NARMEEN ALI



From left to right: Omar Bhai, Navid Huq and Ahad Bhai.

Right now, Dhaka Hotties is serving as an interactive network for Bangalis everywhere. People are meeting through the site, and participating in forums on movies, music and even political and social issues. They are also planning on organising events, such as a five-a-side football tournament, a pool tournament, concerts and a big Dhaka Hotties party. The three young men are already promoting their website by manufacturing Dhaka Hotties pens, t-shirts and other such paraphernalia -- an indication that this is something that means more to them than the ratings they get.

The site, which is about a month old and took three days to put together, boasts of over 900 members from around the globe and had a 30 to 40% growth rate per day in the beginning. How did they manage to reach so many people in such a short time? By advertising in chat rooms and forums, but mostly, with the help of Bangladesh's national sport -- the word of mouth.

"Dhaka Hotties serves as a platform for the voice of the young people," says Omar. "There are so many interactive sites for *desis* but there is really nothing for Bangladeshis, it's more for Indians and Pakistanis. There have been so many people writing to us and telling us that this is great for boosting the confidence of Bangladeshis and that they have met a lot of people through our site."

"We didn't expect the website to develop the way it did," admits Navid. "Now that we see how good a response we have, we are planning to do even more with it. Right now we need sponsors to develop further. Now that Dhaka Hotties is becoming so big both locally and internationally, we want to make it even better. We are planning on adding a games section, events list. Because there are so many people meeting each other Dhaka's young community is becoming more close-knit."

What started out as an act of boredom soon turned into a fast growing community of young Bangladeshis from all over the world. So the next time you're on the net, click on www.dhakahotties.com, be it just for surfing or for signing up. Check out the latest internet revolution in Dhaka and find out once and for all -- "Are YOU a Dhaka Hottie?"