

inevitable Dhaka cross-connections, once related to us how a telephone romance that she had been listening into suddenly hit troubled waters. Things had been proceeding very well, when the boy suggested a meeting. Clearly he had made his move too quickly, because the girl became quite offended saying, "I thought you were looking for friendship, but in fact you simply want a room-date" and slammed down the phone!

Of course, worse things than that could happen. As in the case of a school-friend of mine, who became the victim of a rather cruel hoax. Initially, when she delightedly informed us that she had a "phone friend", nobody took it too seriously. But after she started giving us blow-by-blow accounts of her conversations with this boy, a few of us started to get suspicious. For one thing, he seemed to know way more than any of the other boys about what girls were really like (and what they liked to hear). Not that strange, as it turned out, since "he" was in fact another female classmate of ours, who thought that this would be a funny trick to play! As you can imagine, it did all end in tears...

The ubiquitous mobile phones of today, have of course taken the possibilities for romantic horseplay considerably further. And the potential of these has been adapted to the most hostile of circumstances. In Yemen, known to be extremely conservative on the issue of adolescent intermingling between the sexes, some rich boys have come up with an innovative solution. They cruise around in their cars, and upon spotting a pretty girl, drive alongside, attempting to make eye contact and determine her willingness to "play the game".

If they find that there is any cause for hope, they somehow pull up alongside and throw one of their own mobile phones to the girl in question, so that they can then call her on that phone, without the girl's parents ever finding out! Cash-strapped Bangladeshi teenagers have developed a variation of this through their endlessly-fluid mobile-phone ownership systems, whereby the same phone may be found in use by multiple teenagers depending on the complex internal systems in operation i.e., who owns the phone, who owes whom a favour, who has the money to buy a top-up card etc (an unemployed anthropologist may find this an entertaining subject for research...)

Finally, for those who advocate the tried and true systems for finding love (*ghatkali* etc), be warned that sometimes even those might fail you. As an Indian professional working in Bangladesh recently discovered, when he returned home to meet a bevy of "suitable girls" identified by his parents. Unfortunately for him, the week he was due to start meeting his potential mates, the serial bomb blasts in Bangladesh dominated the headlines. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a number of names disappeared from his list before he could even meet them! Oh well, nobody ever said love came easy...

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