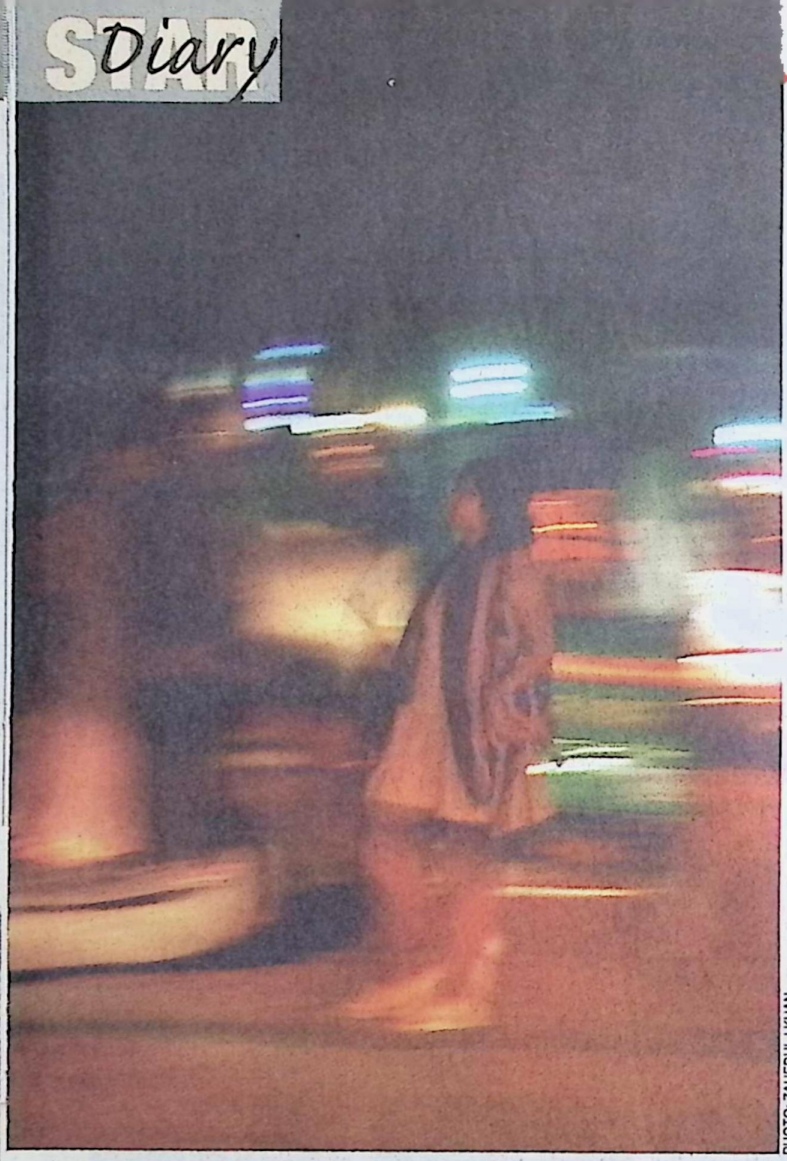


PHOTO: ZAHEDUL I KHAN

Self-defence

My working timings are quite erratic as I work for an ad agency and sometimes I have to return home late. On one of these late nights, I couldn't find a rickshaw in front of my workplace and so after a while started walking down the alleyway in search for an empty rickshaw to take me back home. After sometime, I could hear some voices behind me, making lewd comments and understood that I was being followed by some men. Instead of running or even walking faster, I took out my cell phone and called my brother and started speaking to him loudly. I informed him of my whereabouts and told him that he should call our uncle, who was a policeman if I didn't return in five minutes. While I spoke to my brother, I could hear the scampering of feet and cautiously looked back to see that the men had started walking the other way. Even though I was saved from a possibly terrible incident that day thanks to my wit, I now understand how important self-defence training is for women, especially when they are faced with such situations.

Samia Akthar
Banani, Dhaka

The Unwanted Daughter

I saw the beautiful baby girl in the arms of her grandmother standing in a corner of the makeshift delivery room. The baby's four year old sister was curiously trying to catch a glimpse at the tiny face. The scene made me feel happy but there was something wrong with this picture. The mother of the baby girl was not smiling, she didn't burst out in joy as I had expected; instead her eyes were wet with tears of sorrow. She went on to explain that her in-laws would be very angry because she gave birth to another daughter. The words did not reflect hatred towards the baby but echoed the fear of an uncertain future. Her eyes welled up with more tears as she started wondering about her in-laws and her husband's reaction to the baby, worrying all the time about her new born daughter's future. Women around her tried pacifying her by showing me as an example.

They explained how happy my mother was even though I am a girl. They talked about how her daughter could also bring happiness to everyone, but it made no difference. I just stood there looking back and forth from the sad mother to the 'unwanted' daughter and thought, is this really a developed society that we live in? Is THIS the picture of women today in this country?

Sanjana Islam
Via e-mail