

# It's a good day to do nothing



AMITAVA KAR

I am amused and shocked to see kids, 10 or 11 years old, using all these trendy gadgets. Is their tech-mania so intense, not to mention their schedule, that they need iPads and notebooks and e-books for life management?

Given their schedule, it shouldn't come as a surprise. Herded from school to coaching centre, from there to the music class, weighed down, literally, with books and homework, these kids have hardly any time to breathe.

That's not healthy, according to several studies—such a driven lifestyle can predispose children for hypertension and heart troubles in the long run. Do we need studies to realise these things? I guess we do.

I, am, however, concerned with heart troubles of a different kind.

An overloaded heart simply cannot take its own measure, ear the whisper deep inside, the whisper of its own poetry, its passions and convictions. What will happen to these children with no down time, no time to daydream? How are they going to figure out who they are and what they believe in? How will they know what will make them happy, deep-down happy, not in a crowd—but solo, at rest? That's when you know.

That's what idleness is for—hearing your own voice, singing your own song. But all of us



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relation to other such matter, and second, telling other people to do so. The former is hard and ill paid while the latter, pleasant, easy and highly paid.

The second kind of work is also very interesting; there are those who give orders and there are those who give advice as to what orders should be given. And when two completely opposing kinds of advice are given by two organised claque at the same time, we call it politics. But let's not go there.

The idea that the ones who do the hard work should have leisure has always been unacceptable to the rich and the powerful. In nineteenth century England, the average man's workday was fifteen hours long, even children sometimes did as much. When the urban working class acquired the right to vote, public holidays were established by law, to the great dismay of the powerful. What are the workers going to do with holidays? Keep them working. Hopefully, someday they will stop thinking.

But idleness is the driving force behind civilisation. Only in moments when the mind is left free to roam can we produce thoughts larger than us. Only in moments like these, did humankind discover the sciences, cultivate the arts and define human relationships.

Therefore, this is my wish today: that we all be given the opportunity to idle a bit more. So that in the quietude of idleness, we can think, imagine and dream.

And then, of course, work some more.

The writer is an engineer-turned-journalist.

seem revved up to the max, trying to hustle between work and family, struggling to make a living, finding it even harder to live.

Welcome to the end of living and the beginning of survival.

We allow ourselves no respite even in our cars which used to be a grand refuge for drifting and daydreaming. They are now crammed with all the latest, smartest noisemakers, the CD

player and the cell phone and the GPS that talk to us. We cannot stand a quiet, idle moment, almost as if we need to keep upping the ante lest there's a moment of idleness, a moment to think.

That's an irony of our lives today—we are never alone, doing nothing, just being—always doing something, working.

But what is work, anyway? The benefits of

the hard work of the many go to a small minority of the population, many of whom do no work at all. They have all the leisure in the world. They preach the gospel of work so they can have leisure. In this technological age, it should be possible to distribute leisure more evenly.

Work is basically of two kinds: first, displacement of matter at or near the earth's surface in

## Rooftop Innovation: A potential growth industry

SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

HAVING had the occasion to be on the 12th floor of an apartment building in Dhaka, I was taken in by the panorama that was both breathtaking and dispiriting. Breathtaking because one can see the expansive growth of what is now regarded as a megacity. The extent of resources that must have gone into creating this sprawling city provokes the imagination of how well the country has done economically in recent times. There is just construction everywhere. The dispiriting part stems from the observation that much of this growth seems to have been mindless, disharmonious, and very ill-conceived.

The buildings are mostly in poor alignment—a veritable eyesore—reflecting the lackadaisical spirit of both builders and government agencies that authorise designs and building orientations. Standing next to each other, these buildings have no consistency of design relative to each other, either in shape or size, and their orienting angles are quite discordant, painting a pathetic and chaotic visual picture. It is as if structures were built merely to house people; no one seemed to care about aesthetics... or economics!

The colour combinations are also a free-for-all array of choices. The interplay of clashing colours can often repulse one's aesthetic sensitivities. Maintenance of these structures is another eyesore that screams a "third world" ethos. City planners, if there are any, need to be taken to task for the city they have helped configure. To me, personally, they deserve a failing (F) grade.

The most glaring problem, however, is that the buildings that have replaced greenery, especially the resplendent trees and their glorious foliage, and have rooftops that are for the most part starkly bare. The concrete sea that meets the eye absorbs solar heat or moisture that most assuredly affects the quality of life within these structures. In addition, the concrete mass assuredly affects weather patterns over the city, the after-effects of which are by themselves a subject of research that has seemingly received scant attention.

It is these expansive, empty, drab, useless, and eye-displeasing spaces that suggest the need to give serious attention to rooftop innovations. It is to be noted that in some European countries such as Switzerland, there are laws that require new buildings to be designed such that the green space they occupy must be relocated to their roofs. For existing buildings, the laws require that at least 20% of the rooftops must be converted to green space. Clearly, Dhaka's rooftops represent a great

opportunity to bring significant change on a number of dimensions. As a collective enterprise, perhaps with the help of some legislation, it can improve the oxygen index, thereby contributing to human health. The kind of plants or foliage selected for nurture can contribute to visual beauty or even consumption needs, thereby reducing one's exposure to harmful injected chemicals that have disturbed the trust between consumers and the fruit or vegetable supply chain.

In addition, rooftop greens can lower air conditioning demand, thereby decreasing the production of greenhouse gas emissions and associated air pollution. They can also ameliorate the effects of air pollutants through carbon sequestration and storage.

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Rooftop greening can certainly develop into a new and vast industry of horticultural products, tools and implements, a container industry, and advisory services that ought to have a sizeable impact on the economy. In addition, it could provide employment to a vast number of aspiring horticulturalists and entrepreneurs to build/nurture fascinating and innovative rooftop enterprises.

The really imaginative entrepreneurs could organise contractual agreements with a block of residents whereby each participating building could earn 25-40% of the revenues which could go directly to the pockets of the owners to supplement a variety of needs and enterprises.

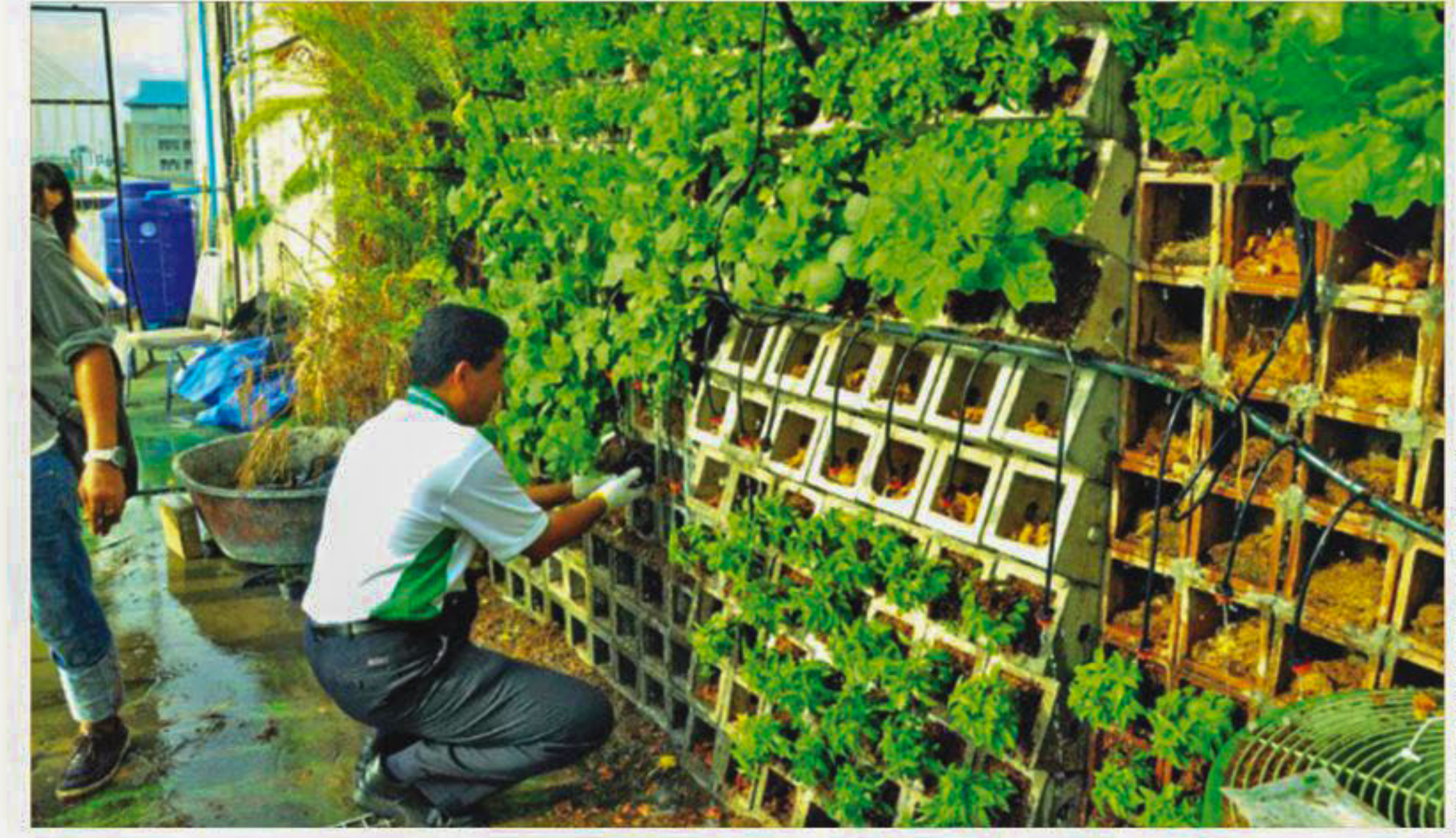
If the government really cared, it could offer innovation awards for rooftop solutions by having designated blocks of households compete with each other. Such rewards may not flow to individuals, but winning blocks could be provide many collective benefits such as upgrading of schools, fixing potholes in the areas, providing increased security or traffic management, assuring health services and a plethora of additional benefits that the blocks may choose from or even be allowed to propose within a budgetary framework.

Additional innovations are certain to emerge—from solar solutions to rain water harvesting and groundwater recharging, since the rainwater runoff from the rooftops can be quite substantial. The innovators may be given special awards and may

to spur imagination and creativity. Barring few, most people have to struggle so hard within an overbearing system that their rooftops fail to emerge as opportunities to do benefit to self and society.

Decidedly, this is a brief note on the prospects of bringing alive a sea of dead space in a variety of inventive ways. Details of how such efforts can bear fruit is not the purpose of this write-up. Rather, its purpose is to provoke human imagination at various tiers and layers of society for visionary exploitation of an opportunity in waiting.

It would be interesting to see if rooftop innovations catch on in some form or another. For example, discussion groups may emerge to take the



A man builds an innovative rooftop garden on campus at Kasetsart University in Thailand.

even be provided technical assistance (perhaps in collaboration with technical universities, colleges, institutes and the like). In this matter, the involvement of educational institutions could be their differentiating mark of quality, adding realism, innovativeness, and practicum to their academic programs.

Dhaka City's rooftops also tell an interesting story about the City's residents. Either they are lazy, lack imagination, and don't really seem to care beyond their own sublime selves. Alternatively, the political-social system in which they are embedded—often mired in mean-spirited, corrupt, brutal, and insensitive pursuits—stunts and blunts the human spirit, thereby failing

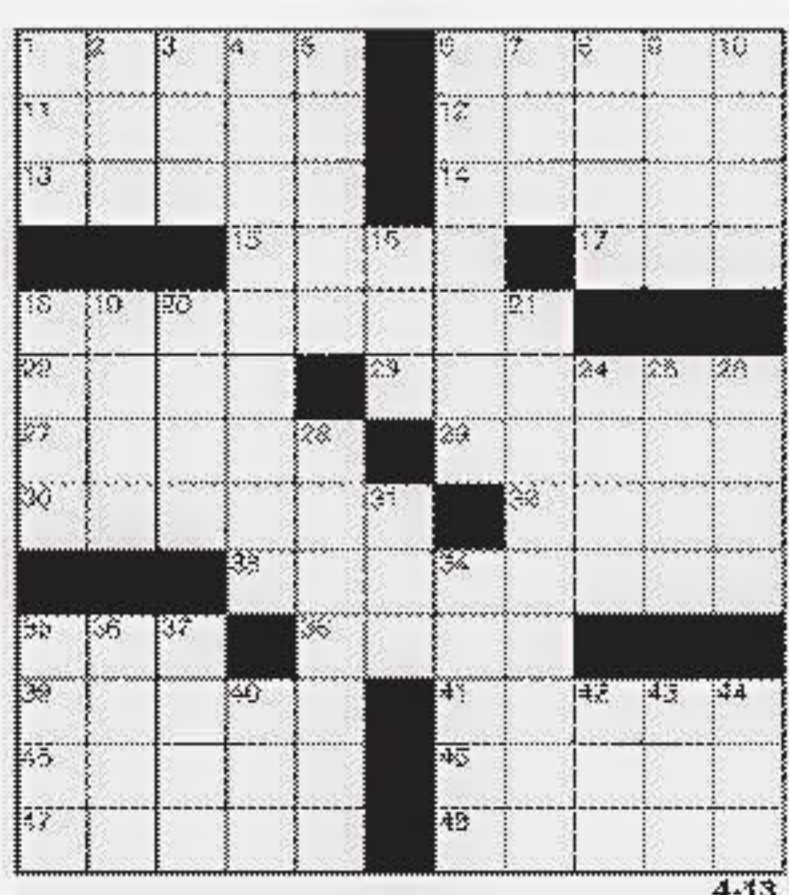
idea further along. The government may begin to explore the contours of a bold step, e.g. come up with legislation to make at least 25% of "all" rooftops green. A pilot project may be initiated in a given area by a think tank or innovation lab with funding from relevant sources. Research institutions may start a buzz and bring various components together. If the idea takes off, the benefits can be immense. Importantly, Dhaka City will have shown the way to other burgeoning cities of how enlightened thinking can add to the quality of life of its residents.

The writer is Vice Chancellor of BRAC University and Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Pennsylvania State University.

QUOTABLE Quote  
Beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance.  
George Bernard Shaw

### CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- 1 Refers to
  - 6 Dance of Brazil
  - 11 Foe
  - 12 Air fresher's targets
  - 13 To story
  - 14 Martial arts schools
  - 15 In a way
  - 17 Mamie's man
  - 18 Greek vowel
  - 19 Old Spanish money
  - 22 Sinking signal
  - 23 Space above a stable
  - 24 Senator Rubio
  - 25 Actor Richard
  - 27 Lawn coating
  - 30 Apparition
  - 31 Memorable time
  - 32 Back muscle, for short
  - 33 Alley prowler
  - 35 Had longings
  - 38 Job reward
  - 39 Do a fan's job
  - 40 Town official
  - 41 Ahead of time
- DOWN**
- 1 Stops
  - 2 Completely
  - 3 Aquarium fish
  - 4 Give off
  - 5 Fawning flatterer
  - 6 Lawn makeup
  - 7 Commotion
  - 8 Minty rum drink
  - 9 Former network anchor
  - 10 Block heads
  - 16 "Don't worry!"
  - 20 Graceful trees
  - 21 Punk rock offshoot
  - 24 Fellows
  - 25 Rhythmic dance
  - 26 Former network anchor
  - 27 Act the judge
  - 28 Made blank
  - 29 Damp
  - 30 Site
  - 34 Buck or bull
  - 36 Sushi choice
  - 37 Arid



### Yesterday's answer

CITES SAMBA  
ENEMY ODORS  
ATTIC DOJOS  
SORTOF IKE  
ETA PESETAS  
SOS HAYMOW  
MARCO  
CRENNA DEW  
PHANTOM ERA  
LAT TOMCAT  
ACHED RAISE  
CHEER ELDER  
EARLY SEEDY

### CRYPTOQUOTE

DXSRK HCCE SN DXSRK JCYW CMR NXEB, RCV FCSRK NCLXV GSRK VGIV NCLXCRX XENX SN VXEESRK JCYVC FC.

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE GOOD LIFE IS A PROCESS, NOT A STATE OF BEING. IT IS A DIRECTION, NOT A DESTINATION. -- CARL ROGERS

### A XYDLBAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

### BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



### HENRY by Don Trachte

