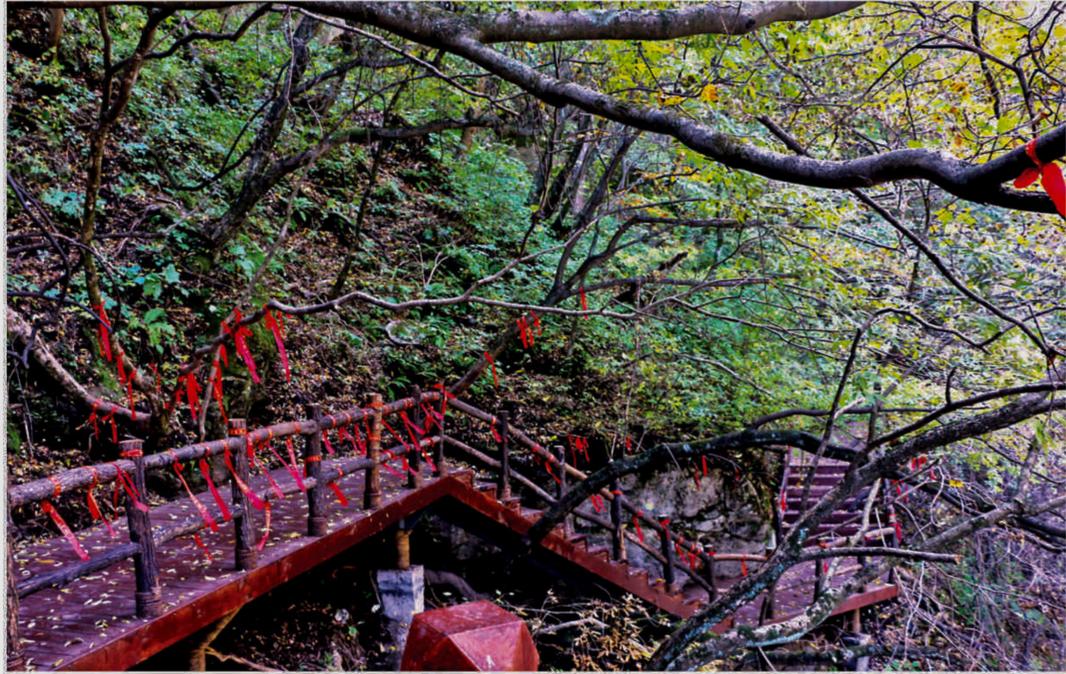


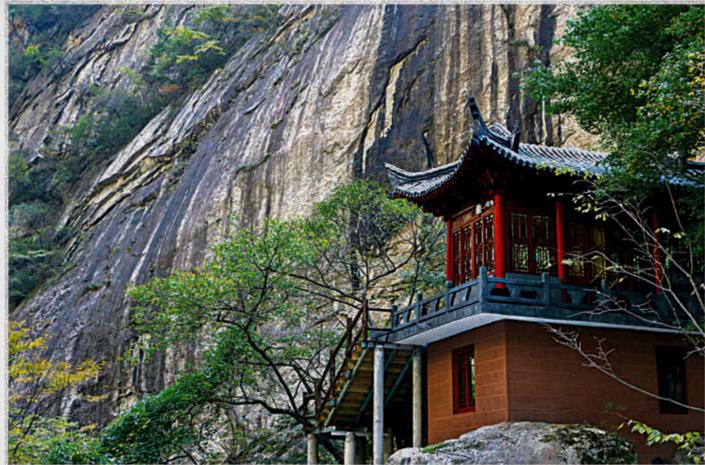
FROM THE MOUNTAINS OF SHAANXI

FAHMIM FERDOUS

PHOTOS: THE WRITER



During a recent trip to Xi'an (in Shaanxi province) on invitation from China Daily, the country's leading English newspaper – I came across something I never before associated with China – Giant mountains. The anticipation to the mountains was built up right at the official beginning of the trip, at the reception banquet. A snow-



capped mountain (constructed of cream made with egg whites) sat on the dinner table, with small fried scorpions placed all over it. As exciting as munching on the scorpions was, it set the tone for the trip in a way. The first mountain we visited was Mount Taibai, its highest peak, the Baxian tower rising to 12,300ft to claim bragging rights as the tallest mountain in Eastern

China. But it's not just for numbers that Mount Taibai stands out. The four seasons of China (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter) can all be experienced on the ascent to the mountain, as the climate changes with its elevation. At the base it did felt pleasant and windy. It was a little hard to imagine that in about an hour we would need bulky winter coats, which none of us carried and had to rent from a

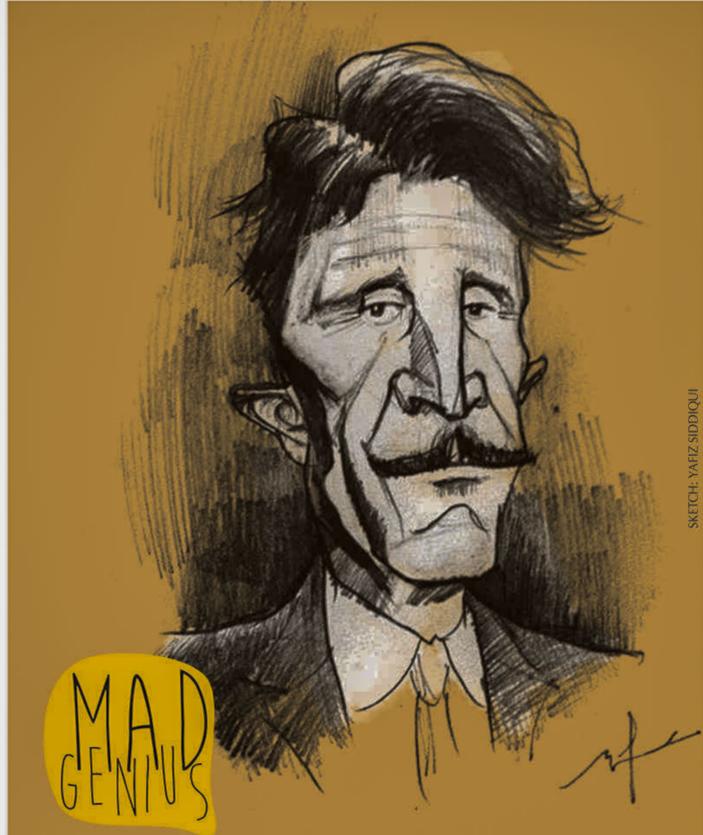
small shop before beginning our ascent. A minibus took us to our first stop through a winding but smooth road, to a small stream coming from a waterfall. A giant carving of a Buddhist deity (possibly the bodhisattva Manjushri) stood on a wall of the mountain, overlooking the stream, and the climate started to feel a little more warm and humid.

A little further down the road, and surprise, surprise! Fallen leaves were on the ground aplenty, the sunlight dimmer, and the weather significantly cooler. It is at that part of the mountain that there are a few small Buddhist temples, with tree branches and bridges adorned in ritualistic red laces.

The colossal size of the mountain began to emerge as we boarded the cable cars that would take us to a peak at about 11,800ft. Even through the glass walls the cold began to seep in, as we approached sub-zero temperatures, looking below to snaking frozen streams between fir trees. Although it was sunny at the peak and we didn't get to play with any snow, the view

to the distance was simultaneously calming and breathtaking.

The next day we started off on another long bus journey to Mount Hua. One of China's five great mountains, it is, on one hand of great religious significance, and on the other, one of the most perilous mountains of China, with its steep, bare cliffs. The landscape is strikingly different from the Mount Taibai, with almost-vertical walls mostly bare of greenery. The steepness of the mountain, despite being not the tallest at about 7000ft at its highest peak, makes it a more thrilling climb even on the cable car. The final climb from the cable car to the peak is through narrow, upright stairs, with the handrails covered in locks placed by lovers as a sign of undying commitment. The peak is more bustling with tourists, and unlike the serenity of Taibai, a sense of wonder and adventure fills the air. Many people hike up the mountain, and there are even accommodations available for staying a night, but unfortunately we did not have that luxury.



MAD GENIUS

SKETCH: YARIZ SIDDIQUI

GEORGE ORWELL

(25 June 1903 – 21 January 1950)

Eric Arthur Blair, popularly known by his pen name George Orwell was an English author and journalist. Born in Motihari, Bengal Presidency (present-day Bihar), in British India, Orwell's works are always remembered for his stand against social injustice written in a witty and intelligent style. For his contribution as a journalist, poet, fiction writer and literary critic Orwell is deemed to be the best chronicler of English culture of the twentieth century. His dystopian novel "Nineteen Eighty-Four" and the satire "Animal Farm" (1945) were sold together more copies than any two books by any other twentieth-century author.

“ IN A TIME OF UNIVERSAL DECEIT- TELLING THE TRUTH IS A REVOLUTIONARY ACT.

Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals.

DOUBLETHINK MEANS THE POWER OF HOLDING TWO CONTRADICTION BELIEFS IN ONE'S MIND SIMULTANEOUSLY AND ACCEPTING BOTH OF THEM.”

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA AND BRAINY QUOTES

DISILLUSION

This year, my beloved younger sister has obtained GPA-5.00 in her HSC exam. As this year the number of GPA-5.00 holders is not satisfactory, I felt very proud of her. But now, when I look at her eye, I feel bad. She has assumed that she will not be able to get a chance in Dhaka University for what she dreamt for a long time. Now-a-days, students are desperately hankering for question papers before the admission test, but she will not make herself one of them. Question papers will be available at 9.00 pm at the night before the admission test, half the amount of money according to the contract must be paid then, and the rest of the amount will have be paid after the exam! The guardians are spending five to ten lac takas for the 'deal'! I tell her, "Read attentively, you can get your seat by your outstanding performances, like the intermediate." But with a very disheartening voice, she replied, "80 percent marks was regarded as A+ before, but when a student get 100 MCQ the night before the admission test, how can I compete with him/her? Just think once". I had onthing to say her. This is just a disillusion for the helpless students. They are really helpless and there is no one to preserve their dream. We heard that the authorities are working on this issue, but what is the result? Everything is unchanged till now.
Mukhtar Ibn Rafique
Jatrabari, Dhaka

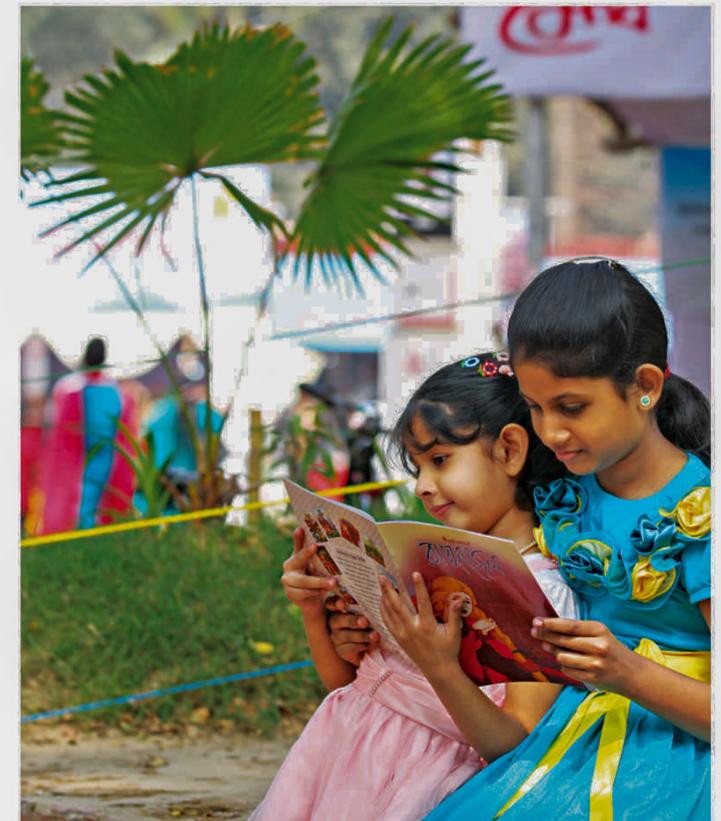


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BUYING GIFTS

Last week my son turned 3 year old and we arranged a small party for him. Everyone came with big flashy gifts and favourites from their own childhood. Only a few people presented him story books and colour pencils. While inviting I asked people not to bring any gifts, as it adds an extra pressure on the guests. On the other hand, we too are having hard time accommodating every piece of gift in our small house. I asked one of my colleagues regarding what could be done. She gave me an amazing idea. As an obsessive reader she always prefers giving books to kids. She believes it helps her to pick the gift quickly and at a reasonable price. Also after reading the books, the kids can always exchange them with their friends. We parents too love getting books as presents. I don't want to seem ungrateful, but I believe books are the best presents anyone could.
Sirajum Munira
Bashundhara Residential Area, Dhaka