

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Concert by the Dead Kennedys, San Francisco, 1984.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Streets of San Francisco

In 1983, upon completing my engineering education in the United States, I took a software engineering job in California's Silicon Valley. I immediately got myself a new five-speed Nissan Sentra that preferred going downhill rather than uphill but took me thirty miles on a gallon of petrol. Having gained freedom I had only dreamed of before, I spent my weekends exploring the region with my camera.

My interest in photography gravitated towards street photography and I quickly discovered that nearby San Francisco was a goldmine for that. The reason was simple. There was a different festival in the streets of San Francisco almost every month, organized by the city's ethnic and political groups. Mexicans, Japanese, Chinese and Italians all had their own festivals, colourful and exciting, with parades on the street, music, food and drinks and sparkling *joie de vivre*.

Of these, Cinco de Mayo (Fifth of May), a day to commemorate the Mexican Army's victory over French forces in Puebla in 1862, was the most colourful. Boys and men dressed in black cowboy suits complete with silver studs and large sombreros while and girls and women with elaborately coiffed hair wore long, flowing dresses. The Japanese Cherry Blossom Festival in Japantown was understated and refined, with elegant dance troupes, various Japanese performances and lots of kimonos. Chinese New Year's Day was raucously celebrated in Chinatown with ear-splitting fireworks and wall to wall people, often more tourists than locals. Columbus Day, celebrated in the North Beach neighbourhood, was all about hanging out in Italian cafes, champagne brunches *al fresco* and making merry. The only theme for the Delores Street Festival was to have a large street celebration.

The festivities attracted two distinct groups of participants.

Those who marched in the parades dressed formally for the occasion and performed with disciplined grace. Before their turn came in the parade, they practised their moves and fine-tuned their appearance in the side streets. The second group was the audience. Many came dressed in costumes for the occasion and ready to celebrate. They helped turn these events into gigantic open-air fancy dress parties.

While these street festivals were cultural, I also photographed another type of street action in San Francisco: political protests. In those days, against the backdrop of the Cold War and the Reagan presidency, non-violent protests by liberals were common in many parts of America.

In 1984, an event in San Francisco opened my eyes to such protests. It was the Democratic Party's national convention in preparation for upcoming presidential elections.

While the politicians delivered speeches and held debates inside air-conditioned convention halls, streets outside were filled with people engaged in peaceful protests against American interference in Central America, Cold War arms build-up, the apartheid regime of South Africa, gay rights, need for more research on AIDS, and even Mrs. Gandhi's rule in India. A punk band called the Dead Kennedys played concerts where audience members climbed up to the stage and dived violently into the crowd. Individuals openly smoked marijuana – illegal at the time – from massive joints. Ideals clashed in passionate but civil debate between conservatives and liberals.

Today those events on the streets of San Francisco seem far away. They evoke a certain American innocence for me – an innocence that was lost in recent years.

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'Never bought such small amounts of groceries before'

Karail slum dwellers living off Tk 10 packs of essentials amid pandemic

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Forty-year-old Tasmin Begum was seen buying a pack of lentils for Tk 10 from her local shop near Karail slum last Monday.

"I've never purchased such small quantities of groceries before," she said.

She usually bought larger quantities to feed her family of four before the pandemic began last year.

"I'll cook the lentils using a very small amount of oil and turmeric, and a litre of water," Tasmin explained.

"I've been living here for the last 25 years. My husband is a tea vendor. He used to make Tk 400-500 daily, but now he earns Tk 150 on average. So, we have to cut corners as best as we can," she said. "We'll have this lentil with rice for lunch and dinner."

"We had taken loan of Tk 60,000 from our relatives during the last lockdown in 2020. But we won't get any loans this year, because we couldn't pay back the earlier amount," Tasmin said.

Tasmin is among many residents of the slum who are relying on small packs of different essentials



PHOTO: STAR

Shopkeepers in and around the Karail Slum keep essentials such as lentils and turmeric individually packaged in quantities worth Tk 10.

at just Tk 10 to sustain themselves during the pandemic.

Noorjahan Begum (20) told this correspondent while on her way back from a shop, "I purchased a Tk 10 packet of sugar to make tea. I'll use the leftover sugar to make some juice."

At least 25 shops in and around the slum were seen selling these

packs.

Azizul Islam (50), a shopkeeper in the area, said his customers prefer to purchase essentials in these small packs instead of opting for the usual method of weight measurement.

"Sometimes, I even sell Tk 5 packets," said Azizul. He had opened his shop about five years

ago. "I made a good number of sales for the first four years. But sales dropped since the pandemic began last year," he explained.

Azizul had to take a loan of Tk 3 lakh from different people and NGOs to keep himself afloat. "I haven't been able to repay the loans at the desired rate so far," he expressed his frustration.

Multiple shopkeepers told this correspondent that slum dwellers do not have the same purchasing capacity anymore, and most are buying food items on a daily basis.

They said sales at shops have dropped to half, and shopkeepers are not making enough profit even after adapting to the daily packs worth Tk 10.

Abdus Sobhan, president of Korail Bosti Unnayan Committee (Bowbazar unit), said, "These Tk 10 packs were sold before the pandemic as well, but in very small quantities. But the packs have become really popular now, as the lower-income groups' purchasing power has decreased."

Around 30,000 families live in the Korail slum, according to Sobhan.



The river Buriganga appears less polluted due to the ongoing lockdown. However, the years of waste dumping, commute of fuel-leaking vessels on the river and industrial discharge have taken such a toll that the river's water has permanently taken on a slate-black tint. This photo was taken around 1pm yesterday from Postogola Bridge.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'DEFAMING HASINA, MODI' Man arrested under DSA

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Police on Thursday arrested a man in Sylhet allegedly for putting up a Facebook post "defaming" Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Indian PM Narendra Modi.

The arrestee is Anhar Ali (30) of Bishwanath upazila. On Wednesday, Monohor Hossain, a Jubo League activist of Bishwanath Sadar union, filed a case accusing Anhar under Digital Security Act with Bishwanath Police Station, said OC Shamim Musa.

As per case statement, Anhar made a video and shared it in Facebook on April 27, defaming the PMs.



Selim Khan has been selling haalkhata for the last 25 years. This traditional ledger book is opened by shopkeepers and traders amid festivities surrounding the Bengali new year, but due to the last two Pahela Baishakhs taking place amid the pandemic, Selim hasn't been able to make much of a profit. But he hasn't given up, and was seen walking towards New Market from Bakshi Bazar to sell the ledger books nearly two weeks after Pahela Baishakh.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Stone-laden vessel capsizes near Ctg port

All crew members rescued

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A stone-laden vessel capsized at the outer anchorage of Chattogram port yesterday morning.

All five crew members were rescued, said Lt Abdur Rouf, media officer of Bangladesh Coast Guard East Zone.

The vessel named "MV Pinky" left for Noakhali around 3:30am after loading stone in the Karnaphuli Bridge Ghat area of the port city, the official said.

As the engine of the vessel went out of order around 6:30am, it collided with a merchant ship and started sinking, said Lt Abdur Rouf.

One of five crewmen jumped into the sea, and he was rescued by the crew of a nearby lighter vessel "MV Nafija Jahan".

The crew members of the lighter vessel informed about the accident to the Ctg Port Radio Control, which accordingly informed the coastguards.

The coastguards then sent a team to the spot, and they managed to rescue rest of the four crew members from the sinking vessel around 7:30am.

Rocket launcher, 2 more mortar shells found in RU pond



PHOTO: STAR

RU CORRESPONDENT

Two more mortar shells and a rocket launcher were recovered from a pond near the martyrs' memorial on the Rajshahi University (RU) campus yesterday morning.

An official of the Rajshahi University noticed a mortar shell in the pond and informed police, said Sub-Inspector (SI) Imran Hasan of Motihar Police Station.

On information, police personnel from Kazla checkpoint rushed to the spot and recovered two mortar shells and a rocket launcher from the pond, the SI said.

The police station's Officer-in-Charge Siddikur Rahman told The Daily Star, "We have informed the bomb disposal unit of Bangladesh Army about the recovery."

"They will come to the campus on Saturday [today] to defuse it," the OC added.

On April 27, another mortar shell was found in the same pond by members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab).

A bomb disposal unit of army deactivated the shell later.

Students' dormitory Shaheed Shamsuzzoha Hall is situated near the pond.

The shells can be from 1971 as the dormitory was used by Pakistan army as their camp during the Liberation War, Rab officials had said earlier.

Oxygen supply too low at Ctg health complexes

Many in upazilas lack high-flow nasal cannula facility, central system

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Most of the upazila health complexes in Chattogram have no high-flow nasal cannula (HFNC) facility, although all 14 of them have isolation wards to treat Covid-19 patients. Even many of the medical centres have no central oxygen system.

According to experts, central oxygen system and HFNC are highly required to treat moderate to severe Covid-19 patients.

"We face difficulties with such patients who need HFNC support," said a medical officer of Razoan Upazila Health Complex, which lacks the required facilities. "So, we have to refer them to city hospitals," he added.

"General patients also have to suffer due to the crisis," said the medical officer, preferring anonymity. "Although we give support to patients with cylinder oxygen, that does not guarantee uninterrupted supply," he further said.

Chattogram Civil Surgeon Office sources said only three out of 14 upazila health complexes have HFNC. Of those, Boalkhali Upazila Health Complex has one, and Chandanaish and Satkania health complexes have two each, said Deputy Civil Surgeon Dr Asif Khan.

Only eight such facilities have central oxygen system, while the rest six have neither HFNC nor central oxygen system.

According to the Civil Surgeon Office, around 47,861 Covid-19 cases have so far been detected in Chattogram and of those, 9,437 are from upazilas, which is 19.71 percent of total cases.

"We had a year to develop infrastructure and logistical support to combat coronavirus but we failed to utilise the time properly," said Dr Mahfuzur Rahman, convener of Public Health Rights Protection Committee, Chattogram.

"The city hospitals are struggling to accommodate increasing number of patients. The pressure could have been

minimised to some extent, if the required facilities in health complexes had been ensured."

Echoing the same, public health expert Prof Dr Shakeel Ahmed said it is unfortunate that central oxygen system could not be installed in all upazila health complexes in Chattogram in a year.

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DR MAHFUZUR RAHMAN, CONVENER OF PUBLIC HEALTH RIGHTS PROTECTION COMMITTEE, CHATTOGRAM

"When the number of positive cases started to decrease, we all became relaxed and lost our concentration on improving infrastructure and logistical facilities to tackle the pandemic," said Dr Shakeel, also head of Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID) laboratory.

"If a patient gets HFNC initially when oxygen saturation goes low, most of them do not need ICU support," he said.

Contacted, Chattogram Civil Surgeon Dr Sheikh Fazle Rabbi said skilled manpower should operate high-flow nasal cannula under guidance of anaesthetists. No upazila health complex has such staff.

About central oxygen system, he said most health complexes have the facility, and initiative will be taken to ensure it for the rest.